

WILLA CATHER AND GUSTAVE FLAUBERT:
PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS

by Sister Louis du Sacré-Coeur, s.g.c.

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INTRODUCTION

In her book of essays, Not Under Forty, Willa Cather recorded her admiration for the French master novelist, Gustave Flaubert. Since the name of Flaubert has often appeared in relation to Miss Cather, particularly in reviews of her books, it was almost inevitable that eventually questions should arise: Exactly what was the connection between Flaubert and Willa Cather? Did her admiration influence her as a person and as a writer? How does Willa Cather resemble Gustave Flaubert? How does she differ from him?

In an attempt to answer the above questions, the following information was gathered. Evidently, in a paper of this length, there can be no question of making a comprehensive study of both Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather. Rather, the problem is one of careful sifting, of organizing, comparing and contrasting relevant facts about the two authors.

Willa Cather was very popular with the public during the Twenties and Thirties. Although she never became a "popular" writer in the sense that Steinbeck and Hemingway were popular, her works have something of the "classic" in them, and thus it was not surprising to see them still enjoying their own type of popularity at the half-century mark, and even seven years after that.

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Were these "lasting" qualities inherent in Miss Cather herself, or did they spring from her early training in the French classics?

An attempt is made in this work to show the similarities and the differences between two authors of different background and training, one French nineteenth-century, the other American twentieth-century. It is hoped that from these premises, other more detailed studies might be inaugurated on the French-American relations in literature.

Willa Cather has been studied from many different points of view, and more particularly on the "pioneer" and "artist" aspects of her work. Theses on these topics were made available at the University of Ottawa and at Boston College, in particular:

Marguerite Ann Hern, "The pioneer spirit in the novels of Willa Cather," Boston College, August, 1948, M.A., vii-67 p.

James M. Kean, "A consideration of the source materials; their development and use in the novels of Willa Cather," Boston College, June, 1947, M.A., vi-105 p.

Helen Anne Lyons, "Autobiographical reflexes in Willa Cather's novels," Boston College, 1937, M.A., iv- 54 (1) p.

Anne B. Mullin, "The artistry of Willa Cather," Boston College, 1934, M.A., 95 p.

Rev. Killian Speckner, O.F.M.Conv., "The significance of the artist in the writings of Willa Cather," Ottawa, 1955, Ph.D. Eng., viii-214 p.

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Other theses on Miss Cather's works which were noted but were not available for use were:

Doctoral Dissertations

James R. Bash, "Willa Cather: A Study in Primitivism," Illinois, 1954.

Harry Finestone, "Willa Cather's Apprenticeship," Chicago, 1954.

Philip L. Gerber, "Willa Cather: A Novelist of Ideas," Iowa, 1952.

Nora V. Lewison, "Achievement of Willa Cather," Iowa, 1944.

Raymond Thorberg, "Willa Cather: A Critical Interpretation," Cornell, 1954.

Jean L. Throckmorton, "Willa Cather: Artistic Theory and Practice," Kansas, 1954.

Harold N. White, "Willa Cather's Apprenticeship: A collection of her writings in the Nebraska State Journal, 1891-1895," Texas, 1955.

Master's Thesis

Lorraine A. Laughlan, "European Immigrants in the Novels of Willa Cather," Toronto, 1942, 151 p.

As may be seen from the above, in all the research done on Willa Cather, there is no available evidence of any work dealing with the question presented in this thesis. Consequently, the topic is new, and as such, requires its own approach and mode of treatment.

In the field of comparative literature, to which

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this thesis may more properly belong, and in the comparison of two authors, as is done here, a certain amount of biographical data has to be given. As is mentioned in the third chapter, whenever biographical information is presented, the attempt is made to relate it to the general plan of the work, and only those facts which are considered relevant to the point being discussed are given. Some of these facts are noted in Chapter One, to place the problem in its proper "context". Chapters Two and Three are studies of the two authors, Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather, in preparation for the comparison and the contrast in Chapter Four, which will bring the two authors together for, it is hoped, a solution to the problem and an answer to the questions stated previously.

Conclusions are drawn and stated in Chapter Five, and are summarized for clearer understanding and better appreciation of the issues involved and new horizons opened for further study.

CHAPTER ONE

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Two of the most concise summaries of Willa Cather's life were presented by well-known critics of our day. Mr. Percy H. Boynton, in 1940, began a chapter on Willa Cather with:

If one were to speculate on the literary output likely from a woman born in Virginia, diploma'd from a western state university in the 1890's, schooled in an eastern newspaper office, and graduated from the staff of a popular monthly with metropolitan headquarters and a national circulation, it would be safe to look for some copiousness of material and some breadth of sympathy. These are the characteristics of Miss Cather's work.¹

In an article written shortly after Miss Cather's death, Mr. Charles Poore states simply:

Willa Cather was born a Virginian (December 7, 1873) and died a New Yorker (April 24, 1947) and wrote most memorably about Nebraska and the West.²

In a life as full and as rich as that of this writer, many incidents and circumstances stand out as being important factors in the formation of the artist. For the purpose at hand, it suffices to note those most directly concerned with

¹Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1940, p. 150.

²Charles Poore, "The Last Stories of Willa Cather," in The New York Times Book Review, issue of September 12, 1948, p. 3.

For discussion of Miss Cather's date of birth, see E.K. Brown, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, New York, Knopf, 1953, p. 17.

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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France, the French language and French authors.

After her early life in Virginia, migration to Nebraska, and during her life in Red Cloud, Willa Cather obtained her first education, then entered the University of Nebraska. In Lincoln, she began to read the French classics. She was often in the homes of interesting Lincoln families. In her relations with the family of James H. Canfield, she was helped by Mrs. Canfield, whose "cult of art, nourished by her association with French artists and her broad reading in French literature, was important to Willa Cather -- it strengthened her in the aesthetic attitude she was forming in her years at Lincoln."³

This interest in the French masters not only developed her aesthetic sense but changed her attitude towards learning. Her interest in her studies, particularly in the last two years at the university, declined; she became more and more impatient at conventional, exact scholarship. She cared only to explore those authors who had a special value to her for her personal life, and for the practice of fiction and poetry.

She is remembered in Lincoln as a devotee of Flaubert, and of Madame Bovary in particular: she often carried a copy of that novel.⁴

³E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 64

⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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After graduating, Willa Cather joined the staff of the Home Monthly in Pittsburgh. Here she was admitted to the homes of celebrated and scholarly friends, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. George Seibel, where she went regularly to improve her French. "She came once or twice a week to read the French classics," Mr. Seibel remembers.⁵

In the latter part of her stay in Pittsburgh, while she was teaching, Willa Cather was the guest of Isabelle McClung. The classics still fascinated her, and "evening after evening the two young women would forsake the McClung family group and spend their time reading Tolstoy, Turgenev, Balzac, and Flaubert."⁶

During the summer of 1902, Miss Cather went to Europe with Isabelle McClung. She kept, from that first voyage, a deep affection for France, and later said that

...it takes the right kind of American to go to France -- one with character and depth and a passion for the things that lie deep behind French history and French art. In a sense she was describing the qualifications of Claude Wheeler, her hero in One of Ours, and indeed her own. Grounded deeply in American soil, the novels of Willa Cather nevertheless are attached also by visible threads to roots in the Old World. The journey of 1902 was a landmark in the formation of the novelist.⁷

⁵ E.K. Brown, Op.cit., p. 84.

⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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From the first, Willa Cather's impressions of France were the most vivid, all of "light and color", of something elevated, and these warm impressions were to remain with her for many years, even to the end of her life. She went to Rouen, with all that spoke of Flaubert. Mr. Brown finds her report typical, and "sharply personal":

Late in the day we arrived at Rouen, the well-fed, self-satisfied town built upon the hills beside the Seine, the town where Gustave Flaubert was born and worked and which he so sharply satirized and bitterly cursed in his letters to his friends in Paris. In France it seems that a town will forgive the man who curses it if only he is great enough.⁸

From this time, many of Miss Cather's literary and personal friendships had, among other links, their common sympathy for the old masters. Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, to whom Miss Cather acknowledged a great debt and for whom she always had a sincere affection, had this in common with her young pupil, that both had had an early apprenticeship to writing and both greatly admired Gustave Flaubert. Miss Jewett had pinned to her desk a sentence of Flaubert's, which might well have been pinned to Miss Cather's: "Ce n'est pas de faire rire ni de faire pleurer, ni de vous mettre à fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est-à-dire de faire rêver." ⁹

⁸ E.K. Brown, *Op.cit.*, p. 102. See also, Willa Cather, *Willa Cather in Europe*, New York, Knopf, 1956, pp. 92.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139, 140.

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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Willa Cather returned to France in 1920 and again in 1930 where, after visiting Rouen, Barbizon and Avignon, she went to Aix-les-Bains and had the extraordinary encounter she describes in her essay, "A Chance Meeting." Here she met the niece of Flaubert, his beloved "Garo", and enjoyed the unique opportunity of discussing the "great master" with one who had lived with him, edited his Bouvard et Pecuchet, and who, in discussing his works, joined subtlety and justice to enthusiasm. Miss Cather felt that she had been "brought up against a mountain of memories," and that the world of which Mrs. Franklin Grout spoke held "most of one's mental past."¹⁰

This interest in the French masters, and in Flaubert, was not a passing fancy of youth, but a deep admiration and interest which was to last all Miss Cather's lifetime. Whereas it is not to be implied that Willa Cather was specifically the disciple of any particular European writer, it is evident from her own testimony as well as that of many critics and reviewers, that there was a certain affinity between Willa Cather and the European masters, and with Gustave Flaubert in particular. Edward Wagenknecht, Henry

¹⁰ Willa Sibert Cather, Not Under Forty, New York, Knopf, 1936, pp. 17 ff.

WILLA CATHER: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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Seidal Canby, Maxwell Geismar and Caroline Gordon, among others, make specific references to Flaubert in writing of Willa Cather, and, as will be shown later, her works as well as the dedication of her life to her art give ample testimony to the resemblances as well as obvious differences between Willa Cather and Gustave Flaubert. Although Mr. Wagenknecht merely states that "Flaubert and his contemporaries seem at one time to have meant much to her..."¹¹ Caroline Gordon's judgment that Miss Cather did not realize her aim in Death Comes for the Archbishop is translated into an expression of the high place Miss Cather occupies in literature by a comparison with Flaubert: "It is the same old trap into which Flaubert blundered in his Tentation de Saint-Antoine, but it is a trap in which only the noblest birds are taken."¹²

Maxwell Geismar also recognizes an affinity between Willa Cather and Gustave Flaubert who, he says, "almost becomes the later Cather's model of personal behavior as well as of aesthetic excellence..."¹³. And Henry Seidel Canby,

¹¹ Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century, New York, Holt, 1952, p. 334.

¹² Caroline Gordon, "A Virginian in Prairie Country," in The New York Times Book Review, issue of March 8, 1953, p. 31.

¹³ Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1947, p. 153.

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writing of Miss Cather shortly after her death, makes six direct references to Flaubert.¹⁴ Since these are to be used again, they will not be quoted here. Suffice it to say that these, and other references to be quoted later, serve as ample basis for the more detailed examination of these two authors which is to follow.

¹⁴ Henry Seidel Canby, "Willa Cather: 1876-1947", in The Saturday Review of Literature, issue of May 10, 1947, p. 22-24.

CHAPTER TWO

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

When Willa Cather was seven years old, and a little girl on her father's sheep farm in Virginia, a French gentleman of fifty-nine, at Croisset, near Rouen, died and left behind some half-dozen books, the product of more than thirty years of labor. This gentleman, later to be called the "Master of Realism," the "Precursor of Naturalism," and many other less interesting epithets, was Gustave Flaubert, a Rouennais, born in 1820, and author of Madame Bovary, Salamambo, L'Education sentimentale, La Tentation de Saint Antoine, Bouvard et Pécuchet, (published post-humously) Trois Contes, and Le Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues. He had not anticipated, nor was he responsible for the publication of his correspondence, which gave great insight into the man behind the works which have been, since their appearance, subject for lengthy discussions, admiration and condemnation, and which, regardless of individual opinions as to their moral value,¹ have nevertheless survived as classics, and have placed their author in the ranks of the world's greatest literary artists.

¹ Cf. George Saintsbury, Essays on French Novelists, New York, Scribner's, 1891, p. 336-337, and Henry James, Jr. French Poets and Novelists, London, MacMillan, 1878, p.256.

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Gustave Flaubert was the son of an eminent surgeon of Rouen. He studied law, which he detested, and finally gave himself over to his one love, "l'art d'écrire." Certain characteristics have made of Flaubert a man apart. Physically, he was attractive, well-built, strong. He had the physique of a Viking. Mr. Harris tells us that he was five feet eight in height, corpulent, hot-blooded and red-faced (rougeaude), that he had a thunderous voice and an aggressive personality, outbursts of anger at small meanesses, savage contempt for false valuations, a child-like frankness bred of long solitude, and an underlying kindness of nature, the "spring of human love and sympathy at the heart of him."²

But Flaubert was nervous, high-strung. From youth, he had watched his father in the dissecting room, had been impressed more or less morbidly by the scenes he had witnessed, by the indifferent crassness of both doctors and students towards human life and the human body.³ The tumultuous emotional upheavals which shook him at this

²Frank Harris, Latest Contemporary Portraits, New York, Macaulay, 1927, p. 202.

³Cf. Francis Steegmuller, Flaubert and Madame Bovary, New York, Viking, 1939, Chapter 1.

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time were unknown to his family and friends. Sensitive to an exaggerated degree, he enjoyed an active life, until about the age of twenty, when he suddenly and unaccountably fell prey to strange seizures which have since been diagnosed as some form of epilepsy.⁴

The fear of having seizures in public made Flaubert seek solitude more and more. He found refuge and solace in travel, in study, and in writing, pouring out the lyrical strains of Romanticism which captivated him and held him during the first period of his literary career. He loved splendor, color, extravagant places, people, words. The fever of the Romantics was strong upon him, as it had been upon his colleagues, although he confined himself to lyrical enthusiasm and did not go to the violent extremes of some of his fellow-students.

Expansions dernières du romantisme arrivant jusqu'à nous, et qui, comprimées par le milieu provincial, faisaient dans nos cervelles d'étranges bouillonnements... On n'était pas seulement troubadour, insurrectionnel et oriental, --on était, avant tout, artiste. Les pensums finis, la littérature commençait, et on se crevait les yeux à lire au dortoir des romans. On portait un poignard... On faisait plus: par dégoût de l'existence, Bar*** se cassa la tête d'un coup de pistolet; Aug*** se pendit avec sa cravate. Nous méritions peu d'éloges...mais quelle haine de toute platitude!...⁵

⁴ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 12.

⁵ Gustave Flaubert, Choisir: les meilleurs textes, Paris, Desclee, 1936, p. xxxi.

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Gustave Flaubert, the "master in the art of fiction,"⁶ was formed in a series of advances, and by various circumstances. Mr. René Dumesnil summarizes this formation into three parts: "années d'apprentissage et années de voyage, et puis années de maturité qui apportent les fruits lourds de toute l'expérience acquise."⁷

Friends, among whom were Alfred Le Poittevin, Louis Bouilhet and Maxime Du Camp, were influential in determining the methods and subjects of his works. Of these, Alfred Le Poittevin, the friend and tutor of his Romanticist college days, died young, but continued through his memory and the great love Flaubert had had for him, to exert an influence which Flaubert sometimes had great pains to overcome. About Flaubert's later life, Mr. Steegmuller says in reference to Alfred:

It might almost be said that Alfred Le Poittevin played a larger part than Max in Flaubert's later life. Not only did Alfred live again in Guy de Maupassant, but Flaubert frequently wrote long letters of reminiscence to Guy's mother, Alfred's sister Laure. 'There is not a day, I can almost say not an hour, when I do not think of him...I have never loved anyone (man or woman) as I loved him': that was his constant refrain.⁸

⁶ Henry Seidel Canby, "Willa Cather: 1876-1947", in The Saturday Review, issue of May 10, 1947, p. 23,24.

⁷ Gustave Flaubert, op.cit., p. xlvii.

⁸ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 410.

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To Maxime Du Camp, Flaubert owed the opportunity to see much of the world, and especially the East. Although he had visited Italy with his father, sister and brother-in-law on the latter's wedding voyage, it was with Maxime that he visited most of France, and with him that he spent two years in the Orient. Mr. G. Lanson says that Flaubert saw the Pyrenees, Provence and Corsica in 1840, Lyons, Gênes, Milan, Geneva in 1845 (with his father), Brittany with Du Camp in 1847, and in October, 1849, again with Du Camp, he visited Egypt: "...ils remontèrent le Nil jusqu'aux cataractes d'Assouan; ils revinrent par Jérusalem, la Syrie, Constantinople, la Grèce, l'Italie, et rentrèrent à Paris en mai, 1851."⁹

These extended voyages helped to give Flaubert a broader view of life, and steeped him in the color, splendor and romance of the Orient which he was to render later in Salamambo, La Tentation de Saint Antoine, and "Hérodias."

"His younger heart did not care to stay still, and his eyes and ears feasted on all that Eastern tumult of passion and movement and colour and life."¹⁰ Yet he realized too, how much more important to him were his immediate surroundings.

⁹(Gustave Flaubert, Pages choisies des grands écrivains, Paris, Armand Colin, 1927, p. x.

¹⁰ Gamaliel Bradford, Bare Souls, New York, Harper, 1924, p. 246.

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In the East, he enjoyed everything. Nature enchanted him, the wide spaces, the tropical colours, the monotony of the desert, the blaze of the unborken sun, the calm splendour of the stars... Yet he was well aware that the nature that really counts for us, is that we have grown up with. The picturesque of far countries is well enough to remember, but what enters into the tissue of our lives, is the woods and fields we have known in childhood, the simple flowers and sounds and lights of home. And he reminds us of the profound truth, 'It is only commonplaces and well-known countries that have inexhaustible beauty.' ¹¹

It was, however, to Louis Bouilhet that Flaubert owed much of the exactness, simplicity, clarity of style which has made him an outstanding artist in the literary field. Bouilhet it was who forced him to submit to the discipline of writing a novel on the theme contrary to his natural tastes, Madame Bovary.¹² It was this discipline which permitted him to re-draft his Tentation de Saint-Antoine three times, to give to Salammbô more "netteté et précision," to revise L'Éducation sentimentale, and finally to produce his Bouvard et Pécuchet and the Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues, a project he had first conceived when he was about nine years old.¹³

¹¹ Gamaliel Bradford, loc.cit.

¹² Dr. Georg Brandes, Eminent Authors of the Nineteenth Century, Literary Portraits, New York, Crowell, 1886, p. 273: "Friendship...was to him a religion, and among his friends there was no one who stood so near to him as that first and enduring friend, Bouilhet."

¹³ R. Shattuck, "Priest of Style," in The Saturday Review, Vol. XXVII, issue of February 20, 1954, p. 23,64.

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Flaubert never married, through necessity and choice. He felt, among other reasons, that he could not afford it, that he was not made to live like others (although his celibacy was not synonymous with continence: he had woman "friends" among whom was Louise Colet, his mistress during his twenties and thirties.)¹⁴ Above all, Flaubert believed that the artist was a dedicated man, and as such, that he had to give himself to his Art completely and unreservedly, if he were to produce as he should. When his friend Max Du Camp disapproved of his solitude and retirement, he was adamant. Mr. Steegmuller explains his point of view:

What Max did not understand, of course, was that it was precisely the retirement he so castigated and considered so perverse that would make possible for Flaubert the continuous composition indispensable to his project...It was true that the retirement had been originally entered into for reasons of necessity; but whether or not necessity now demanded the continuation of it, it had become through long habit a necessity in itself, and this Flaubert recognized very well. And he recognized too... that it was necessary not only to continue the life of retirement, but to organize it -- to adopt a schedule which would allow the writing... to be steadily pursued.¹⁵

He became a "hermit", living at Croisset with his mother and his niece, looking upon himself as a "priest of art." It

¹⁴Stuart Pratt Sherman, in Points of View, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1924, p. 341, refers to Flaubert as "In morals something of a libertine..." See also Steegmuller.

¹⁵ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 280.

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was his opinion that "The born poet is ... a priest; as soon as he puts on the priestly garment he should quit his family for ever."¹⁶ "I have in me," he wrote to ... Madame Sand, "a 'fond d'Ecclésiastique' that people don't know..."¹⁷ At another time, he referred with obvious sincerity to "the poignancy of solitude to which 'the radical absence of the feminine element' in his life had condemned him."¹⁸

Religion, as such, meant little to him, and in Madame Bovary he castigated the French clergy in the characterization of the "curé". However, his third revision of La Tentation de Saint-Antoine showed that in his later life he had a more respectful attitude towards the clergy, and towards religious sentiment, an attitude that had not been present in his previous drafts.¹⁹ To Victor Hugo, he wrote,

I believe that at the present time a thinker (and what is the artist if not a thinker in every possible sense of the word?) should have neither religion nor fatherland nor even any social conviction. Absolute scepticism seems to me now so clearly indicated that to want to formulate it would be almost an absurdity.²⁰

¹⁶ Gamaliel Bradford, op.cit., p. 252.

¹⁷ Henry James, Essays in London and Elsewhere, New York, Harper, 1893, p. 142.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ René Dumesnil, Gustave Flaubert: l'homme et l'oeuvre, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1947, p. 465.

²⁰ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 325.

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In the necessary relations which Flaubert had with the world and with society, he showed himself amiable, intelligent, though intolerant of little meannesses and the pettiness of the "bourgeois". In his middle life, relates Mr. Steegmuller,

He was never without a "pied-à-terre" in Paris, where he usually spent the winter; Sunday afternoons he was at home to his friends, and he moved about considerably in literary society, seeing particularly Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, Turgenev, the Goncourts, Zola, Taine, Renan, Daudet, Maupassant, and George Sand.²¹

Flaubert cherished his relatives with singular tenderness. Although they sometimes bothered him and interrupted him, he expended upon them the affection he could not give to a wife or child of his own. He loved his mother deeply, and the letters to his niece as well as her own homage to him reveal the tenderness he had for her.²²

Although Flaubert could recognize true worth and give praise where it was due, temperamentally, he was a hater of mankind. All the "petitesse" which he saw around him filled him with disgust for a world which was more pre-occupied with its own vulgar little interests than with the great, high, noble values of beauty and of art. As Mr.

²¹ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 407.

²² Willa Cather, Not Under Forty, New York, Knopf, 1936, p. 17-36.

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Bradford puts it,

But for humanity at large, he cannot be said to have had much regard. It is evident that he did not move easily among strangers, did not open himself to them, either to give or to receive... 'the contemplation of the greater part of my fellows grows more and more odious to me, nervously speaking... I detest my fellow men and do not admit that I am akin to them. I am sure that men are no more brothers than the leaves in the woods are alike: they suffer in common, that is all.'²³

Mr. Sherman speaks of Flaubert's "temperament dramatic, melancholic, observing, cynical, and satirical... he vents his splenetic contempt for the mob..." And further,

...he grimly concedes the greater part of humanity to the devil, and can see no escape for the remnant save in science and aristocratic organization... for him the literary art is the avenue of escape from the meaningless chaos of existence -- it is his implicitly critical condemnation of the world.²⁴

Allied to this disgust for his contemporaries was a love for the past, the ancients. Greece, the Athens of old, had for him all the charm of the centuries. He loved to bury himself in volumes of antiquity, to live in his imagination the rich, fabulous events of old. He regretted having been born in an age for which he felt so little sympathy, so little compatibility.²⁵ Mr. Van Wyck Brooks,

²³ Gamaliel Bradford, op.cit., p. 252, 253.
Cf. also, Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 265, 266.

²⁴ Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 329.

²⁵ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 12.

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in The Confident Years, makes an interesting parallel between George Sand and Gustave Flaubert, in which he points out:

...it might be said of these two types that one looked forward historically and the other backward, that for one the ideal society lay in the future while the least evil for the other lay in the past... for ... Gustave Flaubert was all for 'returning' to the 'great tradition...' (he) ... lost himself, as he said, in antiquity to escape from the baseness, the vulgarity, the horror of the present...²⁶

Gustave Flaubert has been called a pessimist. He had a "fond mélancolique" which colored his outlook on life and on people, a certain sadness which came from his feeling out of place in his world. As he himself admitted in a letter to George Sand, he had "never been able, like richer and more resourceful souls, to reconcile being an author with being a man."²⁷ From this pessimism, Malcolm Cowley finds that in Flaubert,

...people are always planning things that somehow fail to come off -- love affairs, assignations, revolutions, schemes for universal knowledge ... Flaubert already represents a deterioration of the romantic will...²⁸

Dr. Georg Brandes does not label this side of Flaubert's character in the conventional way. Rather he says

²⁶ Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years: 1885,-1915, New York, Dutton, 1952, p. 582, 583.

²⁷ Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 349.

²⁸ Malcolm Cowley, ed., After the Genteel Tradition, New York, Norton, 1937, p. 198.

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that if we wish "to stamp him with one of those popular, but to him so detestable, words ending with 'ist', it could not with full justice be pessimist, nor yet nihilist; imbecillist would be the word."²⁹ Dr. Brandes bases his qualification on Flaubert's "burning hatred of stupidity," and says further that "a long chain of petty disappointments, intermingled with a few great ones, is to Flaubert the definition of life."³⁰

To George Sand, who urged more optimism, he wrote:

Moi, pauvre bougre, je suis collé sur la terre comme par des semelles de plomb; tout m'émue, me déchire, me ravage et je fais des efforts pour monter.³¹

This natural pessimism was, however, coupled with a unique type of optimism. This was due, according to Mr. Dumesnil, to Flaubert's high ideals of art.

Entre son pessimisme et son enthousiasme, il n'y avait point de contradiction. De ses livres se dégage cette haute leçon... la notion de l'échec fécond, c'est-à-dire de la seule victoire qui compte en définitive -- celle qu'on remporte sur soi-même... Non, le pessimisme de Flaubert ne semble plus démodé... la vanité des ambitions trop orgueilleuses... à savoir que le seul bonheur, tout relatif et tout mesuré, qui soit permis aux hommes, ne peut résider dans la possession d'un résultat, mais dans la poursuite d'un idéal.³²

²⁹ Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 266.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 294.

³¹ René Dumesnil, op.cit., p. 388.

³² Ibid., p. 474.

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Moreover, Flaubert's morbid hatred of humanity never carried him so far as to have no hope whatever. Unlike his disciple Maupassant, he at least believed that there was hope for salvation in beauty and art. Pierre Martino refers to Flaubert's "angoisse intellectuelle," and says that it nevertheless had its limits:

...le maître croyait à l'Art, qui console de vivre; il ne désespérait pas de la science; il ne niait pas le progrès. Maupassant, qui écoutait volontiers ses négations, ne put jamais admettre les raisons qui invitaient à avoir un peu de confiance dans la vie... la pensée de Flaubert, au contraire, malgré ses noires conclusions, fut toujours droite et saine.³³

Gustave Flaubert began his literary career as a confirmed Romanticist. On his return from the Orient, however, he turned from the extravagant phrasing and languishing moods of the Romantics to a more serious, more sedate form of work.

The two years in the East had been a purge, so to speak, of Flaubert's romantic longings; of his lusts after exoticism in all its forms, of his need for brilliant colour, heat, violence, grandeur, and filth. Now, with those boiling desires drawn off -- at least for the moment -- he had for the first time in his life the courage to concern himself with the details of daily existence in a small French town, which he saw with new eyes. Never before could he have endured the company of the Bovarys.³⁴

Louis Bouilhet, his friend and severest critic, had succeeded in persuading him to write a story of provincial

³³ Pierre Martino, *Le naturalisme français, 1870-1895*, Paris, Colin, 1930, p. 138, 139.

³⁴ Francis Steegmuller, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

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life. Flaubert retired to Croisset, a "shy, proud, grumpy, toiling hermit..."³⁵ and began his exercise in discipline, the long, hard struggle for the correct phrasing, "le mot juste." Realist, he was; although he hated above all else to be associated with any "school." Van Wyck Brooks calls him a "diagnostic" writer,³⁶ Joseph Warren Beach finds "no situation so fully rendered and with such authority of realistic art as that of ... Emma Bovary on the last day of her life,"³⁷ And Stuart Pratt Sherman states that all Flaubert's books "are essentially constructed on the same theory: all are just as 'realistic' as Flaubert could make them."³⁸

Although John Drinkwater labels Madame Bovary "the first example... certainly the finest, of absolute French realistic fiction..."³⁹ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly condemns it:

...Je sais bien que les Réalistes, dont Flaubert est la main droite, disent que le grand mérite de Flaubert est de "faire vulgaire," puisque la vulgarité existe. Mais c'est là l'erreur du Réalisme... que de prendre perpétuellement 'l'exactitude dans le rendu' pour le but de l'art, qui ne doit en avoir qu'un: la Beauté, avec tous ses genres de beauté...⁴⁰

³⁵ Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 328.

³⁶ Van Wyck Brooks, The Writer in America, New York, Dutton, 1953, p. 184.

³⁷ Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, Studies in Technique, New York, Century, 1932, p. 257.

³⁸ Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 344.

³⁹ John Drinkwater, The Outline of Literature, London, Newnes, 1950, p. 602.

⁴⁰ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly, Le Roman contemporain, Paris, Lemerre, 1902, p. 96-97.

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However, Georges-Emile Bertrand feels that before all, Flaubert is "physiologiste, artiste; il veut le vrai, le réel, la nature humaine telle qu'elle est, instinctive, et tâche d'en tirer de grands effets pittoresques ou dramatiques."⁴¹

The Naturalists too, have claimed Flaubert as their precursor, particularly because of his insistence on the scientific approach to the writing of fiction. And although Flaubert did not like the "naturalism" of Zola,⁴² he himself had made use of this form which, according to Mr. Hartwick, "had begun with Balzac and Stendhal, passed to Flaubert, and been perfected by Zola."⁴³ Finally, J. Donald Adams, in discussing Naturalism, notes that "Flaubert's Madame Bovary had opened the way for the full-fledged scientific approach to the art of fiction which Zola was soon to make."⁴⁴ And speaking of the characteristics of the Naturalists in general, Mr. Adams adds, "From Flaubert and Zola down, they are rarely

⁴¹ Georges-Emile Bertrand, Les jours de Flaubert, Paris, Editions du Myrte, 1947, p. 93.

⁴² Gustave Flaubert, Choisir: les meilleurs textes, p. lxxv.

⁴³ H. Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction, New York, American Book, 1934, p. 49, 50.

⁴⁴ J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, New York, Viking, 1944, p. 45.

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capable of humor... Nor can we look to them for beauty, or aspiration, or more than a limited measure of truth."⁴⁵

It is not possible definitely to classify Flaubert as belonging to one or the other of these "schools" for, as Mr. Pelham Edgar puts it,

A novelist like Balzac or Flaubert whom we label realist or naturalist is in certain aspects of his work disconcertingly romantic, and a romantic like Hugo has a capacity for amassing realistic detail that the most documentary novelist might envy.⁴⁶

Mr. Rene Descharmes and Mr. Rene Dumesnil, in an early book on Flaubert,⁴⁷ said that many critics saw in him two men: a romanticist and a realist, and Mr. Dumesnil quotes M. Emile Faguet, another authority:

Flaubert aimait voir avec précision, netteté, relief, minutieusement et surement; et il aimait à imaginer des choses vastes, immenses, colossales, effrayantes et un peu monstrueuses. Son esprit était ainsi partagé entre le besoin de la réalité et le besoin aussi d'une imagination déchaînée et puissamment féconde. Et c'est ainsi que s'est formé ce singulier réaliste-romantique qu'a été Flaubert...⁴⁸

Whether Flaubert was Realist, Romanticist, or Naturalist, he was unquestionably an artist, a lover of beauty,

⁴⁵J. Donald Adams, op.cit., p. 68.

⁴⁶ Pelham Edgar, The Art of the Novel from 1700 to the Present Time, New York, MacMillan, 1933, p. 229.

Cf.: see Edouard Maynial, La Jeunesse de Flaubert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1913, 345 p.

⁴⁷ Cf. René desCharmes et René Dumesnil, Autour de Flaubert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1912, Vol. 2.

⁴⁸ Rene Dumesnil, op.cit., p. 303.

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a "priest of style."⁴⁹ Seated in his study at Croisset, he pored over documents and books, reading whole libraries. During the last eight years of his life, when he worked on Bouvard et Pécuchet, he read over fifteen hundred volumes for his research.⁵⁰ He was indefatigable, and when at work, would write for hours at a time, often all night, revising, re-writing, searching for the correct word, which would not only render his thought most accurately, but also have the proper cadence and sonority. He drove himself mercilessly, neglected his rest, took no exercise, moved only when it was necessary, traveled only on business or for purposes of research. G. Lanson, in the introduction to Flaubert: Pages choisies des grands écrivains, gives a picture of this man, devoted entirely to his art:

Après son grand voyage,...Flaubert se fait casanier; son oeuvre d'artiste l'absorbe et le fixe. Ses déplacements sont des recherches... courses rapides, où l'écrivain ramasse en hâte des matériaux et s'empresse de retourner à son cabinet de travail... Pour Salammbô, il va en Tunisie; en deux mois il est revenu... Il ne pouvait plus quitter sa tâche.⁵¹

⁴⁹ R. Shattuck, "Priest of Style," in The Saturday Review, Vol. XXXVII, issue of February 20, 1954, p. 23.

⁵⁰ "French Mutt and Jeff, Bouvard et Pécuchet," in Time, Vol. LXIII, issue of March 22, 1954, p. 120.

Also: H.C. Bauer, "Seasoned to taste: Bouvard et Pécuchet," in the Wilson Library Bulletin, issue of October, 1955, p. 102.

⁵¹ G. Flaubert, Pages choisies des grands écrivains, p. x.

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To Flaubert, style was everything. Art was worth producing for its own sake: "l'Art pour l'Art." He never let himself be hurried, never cared to receive literary honors if they could not be earned by the highest quality of writing. When his friend, Max Du Camp urged him to come forward and publish, to make a name for himself, he replied:

Etre connu n'est pas ma principale affaire, cela ne satisfait entièrement que les très médiocres vanités... Je vise à mieux, à me plaire. Le succès me paraît être un résultat et non pas le but... J'ai en tête une manière d'écrire et gentillesse de langage à quoi je veux atteindre. Quand je croirai avoir cueilli l'abricot, je ne refuse pas de le vendre, ni qu'on batte des mains, s'il est bon. D'ici-là, je ne veux pas flouer le public, voilà tout.⁵²

Flaubert never would lower his standards to cater to publishers or to please his friends. He had a deep-seated hatred for mediocrity which made him unsparing in his efforts to obtain the highest possible results. René Dumesnil gives to Flaubert his own description of Docteur Lariviere in Madame Bovary, "chérissant son art d'un amour fanatique, l'exerçant avec exaltation et sagacité; dédaigneux des croix, des titres et des académies ..." ⁵³

⁵² Gustave Flaubert, Lettres choisies de Gustave Flaubert, Paris, Wittman, 1947, p. 3.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 4.

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Flaubert's themes were all based upon Life as he saw it, whether his subjects were men or women, and though they varied with his outlook, they were consistent in the general impression they left, one of hatred and disgust for the mass, for the "bourgeois," for the populace unable to appreciate the higher, nobler life of art. He saw ugliness around him, and he depicted this ugliness. His characters were often repulsive, and he described them with a minute exactness which was as merciless as it was clear. Despite his efforts to use only the quality and number of words and expressions which could best convey his meaning, he often described in much detail certain characters or scenes, (for example, the death of Madame Bovary) which some of his critics would have preferred shorter or left out altogether.⁵⁴

Flaubert had very definite criteria to which he tried to adhere in writing. Among these was his theory of "impersonality," the complete objectivity which he felt had to be maintained in the writing of any work of art. The writer, he felt, should be as an onlooker, and had no right to impose his views or opinions on his characters. Of Madame Bovary, Dr. Brandes says that "the author seemed thoroughly cold..."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Cf. Henry James, Essays in London and Elsewhere, p. 256. See also, Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p.336,337.

⁵⁵ Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 275.

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And further, he praises the "supreme self-control he (Flaubert) had exercised while engaged in the work" which concealed "how deeply the author was affected, body and soul... even in the description of the hour of her (Madame Bovary's) death."⁵⁶

Other critics, however, do not concede victory so quickly. Despite Flaubert's claims to objectivity, Malcolm Cowley feels that "Flaubert describing an incident, despite his pretending to be aloof, or even absent throughout, is continually intent on keeping his emotions implicit within the scene."⁵⁷ and David Daiches finds that

Flaubert himself... is emotionally involved in Madame Bovary: the life of the frustrated romantic bourgeoisie concerns him because it is frustrated and it is bourgeois, and he has a definite emotional attitude toward these qualities.⁵⁸

Flaubert also felt that didacticism was out of place in a novel, which, he claimed, was not a pulpit; consequently, the author had no right to preach. The lesson, if any, which might be derived from a book must be present of itself, must

⁵⁶ Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 275.

⁵⁷ Malcolm Cowley, After the Genteel Tradition, p. 197.

⁵⁸ David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, Chicago, University Press, 1939, p. 55.
Cf. also, Bradford, op.cit., p. 257.

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be intrinsic to the characters or the action, but must never be inserted by the author, or even implied indirectly.⁵⁹

Gustave Flaubert, as has been mentioned before, was, above all else, the "high priest of style."⁶⁰ To him, "creation" was synonymous with perfection of style. A well-polished phrase, a complete paragraph in which not one word, not one sentence was superfluous, but rather where each word, each sound was in exactly the proper place, with the proper intonation and cadence, where the whole was as completely and perfectly harmonized as the part, this was Creation, this was Art in its highest, its noblest form. Whether or not Flaubert succeeded in attaining the high degree of perfection at which he aimed, he has become a model for the "artistic" school of writers, and his name has always been synonymous with the highest standards of art. Annie Russell Marble refers to his "finesse and structural technique,"⁶¹ Hippolyte Taine, in a letter, refers to Flaubert's style in the most favorable manner; and Jules Lemaitre, who records Taine's admiration, adds his own:

⁵⁹ Cf. Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 342.

⁶⁰ R. Shattuck, loc.cit.

⁶¹ Annie Russell Marble, A Study of the Modern Novel, New York, Appleton, 1928, p. 254.

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Le style aussi est fait de patience et de volonté froide. Je n'en sais pas qui soit d'un pittoresque plus bref et plus net. A part quelques légères incorrections, peut-être volontaires, il est de ceux, bien rares, qui satisfont complètement parce qu'on s'aperçoit que l'auteur a écrit exactement comme il voulait. Ce style est Un; il n'a jamais, même par accident, quelqu'une des qualités qu'il ne devrait pas avoir: la fluidité, l'indécision aimable, la douceur ou la fougue. Plastique avec une concision travaillée dans un sujet vulgaire, il sculpte en marbre des platitudes.

Ces qualités de styliste froid et d'observateur impeccable, toujours détaché de son objet, ont pour complément une singulière puissance d'ironie...⁶²

This was Gustave Flaubert, man and artist, whose personality, despite his reticence, became subject for discussion in Europe and America, whose works have become standard reading in any course in the French classics, and whose Madame Bovary went with Willa Cather across the campus of a relatively new university in the midwestern "pioneer" state of Nebraska of the 1890's.⁶³

⁶²Jules Lemaitre, Les contemporains, Paris, V.Boivin, 1915, p. 79,80.

⁶³E.K. Brown, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, p. 61.

CHAPTER THREE

WILLA CATHER

Mr. Leon Edel, in the introduction to the critical biography of Willa Cather which he completed for the late E.K. Brown, stated that "Willa Cather was so recently in our midst, that the portrait (drawn by E.K. Brown) has still the aspect of contemporaneity."¹ It was with this same impression of writing of a living person, rather than of one who has been dead these ten years, that this chapter was set down.

It was inevitable that, in preparing the material for a comparison of Willa Cather with Gustave Flaubert, much of the information should have biographical implications. However, a thesis is not a biography -- and the data presented were carefully chosen in reference to what had been done thus far, and what was to be done in the following chapters.

The name Willa Cather, to anyone familiar with her through her works, her pictures, and the various testimonials written soon after her death on April 24, 1947, has always evoked a pleasant-faced, motherly looking woman in her fifties. Although she was past seventy at the time of her death, in the general impression she gave to people, two

¹ E.K. Brown and Leon Edel, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, New York, Knopf, 1953, p. xxiv.

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things almost invariably stood out: the comfortable simplicity of her appearance and the directness of her gaze. Elizabeth Moorhead, writing of her first meeting with Miss Cather, described her as:

Short, rather stocky in build, she had a marked directness of aspect. You saw at once that here was a person who couldn't easily be diverted from her chosen course. 'Pretty' would indeed be a trivial word to describe a face that showed so much strength of character as hers, yet she was distinctly good-looking, with a clear rosy skin, eyes of light grey and hair a dark brown brushed back from a low forehead -- an odd and charming contrast in color. They were observant eyes, nothing escaped them... She looked me straight in the face as she greeted me, and I felt her absolute frankness and honesty. She would never say anything she didn't mean... ²

This woman of Virginian stock transplanted into pioneer country, later to be termed one of the outstanding woman novelists of the first half of the twentieth century,³ was tutored at home by her grandmothers and educated much more by her contact with the various cultures about her, (German, Bohemian, French, Russian, etc.) than by the few years she spent in the high school at Red Cloud, Nebraska.

² E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 98.

³ Cf. Harold J. Gardiner, S.J., "Willa Cather's Spirit" in America, issue of May 10, 1947, p. 158; also James Gray, On Second Thought, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1946, p. 144, 153; and "Willa Cather receives medal," in Publishers' Weekly, issue of February 5, 1944, p. 688,689,

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It was, however, when she attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln that the wide horizons of the world of culture and art were opened to her.⁴

As a young girl, Willa Cather had wanted to become a doctor. Years later, she wrote,

But I didn't want to be an author. I wanted to be a surgeon! Thank goodness, I had a youth uncorrupted by literary ambitions. I mean it! I think it's too bad for a child to feel that it must be a writer, for then instead of looking at life naturally, it is hunting for cheap effects. I have never ceased to be thankful that I loved those people out in the Republican Valley for themselves first, not because I could get 'copy' out of them.⁵

When she attended the University, where she had intended to take the scientific course and later specialize in medicine, she tasted the joy of fine literature and the 'hypnotic' effect of seeing her work in print, and formed the ideal of producing in her own way, something great yet distinctive.⁶ Her themes were far from determined as yet, and for the time being, she was limited to writing articles of dramatic criticism, which, while providing good discipline, were nevertheless produced according to the standards and limitations of newspaper writing.

⁴E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 98.

⁵ Mildred R. Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, New York, Dodd, Mead, 1951, p. 109.

⁶ E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 51,52.

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Willa Cather had a period of apprenticeship, during which she absorbed knowledge, impressions, experiences, and during which, through necessity, she submitted to the discipline of journalism, teaching, and editorial work. She could produce good writing at all times, yet her earlier, journalistic experiences show the strain of writing to meet a deadline and striving to attain economic security.

Fortunately, there were compensations, for these early experiences in teaching and newspaper work also procured to Miss Cather the opportunity to travel. After her first year of teaching, she went to Europe, and she again visited the Continent a few years later, more mature, knowing more of her own country and continent, and better able to appreciate both similarities and differences. During all her lifetime, Miss Cather traveled all over her own state of Nebraska, to all parts of midwestern and southwestern United States and to Canada. She did not, could not write in Europe, except for her travel notes recently republished in Willa Cather in Europe,⁷ but she absorbed everything she saw and heard, gathering in impressions and pictures which she was later to reproduce so vividly and sympathetically.

⁷ Willa Sibert Cather, Willa Cather in Europe, New York, Knopf, 1956, 178 p.

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Miss Cather had strong likes and dislikes. She had many real friends, and although she herself did not feel drawn to everyone, nor could she give her confidence to all, there was in her such candid frankness and obvious sincerity, that those to whom she did give friendship were devoted to her and to her ideals, as she was to remain faithful to all the friends of her childhood and her country as well as those of her later literary life. Among these early friendships were those formed with her teachers from Red Cloud and Lincoln: Mrs. Eva J. Case, teacher of literature and foreign languages, Mr. and Mrs. A.K. Goudy, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wiener, who opened their library to Willa, taught her to read French and made her wish to know German. Miss Cather used them as models for Mr. and Mrs. Rosen in "Old Mrs. Harris."⁸ William Ducker, a storekeeper in Red Cloud, made Greek and Latin literature come alive for her.⁹

At the University, Herbert Bates and Will Owen Jones inspired and helped her, as did Professor Ebenezer Hunt, her instructor in English, who was greatly responsible for her change of goal from medicine to literature, by having her

⁸ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 119,120.

⁹ E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 32-34.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 50,51.

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theme on Thomas Carlyle published without her knowledge.¹⁰

Later, Miss Cather was to enjoy the strong and lasting friendship of Miss Edith, with whom she read the proofs of all her books, ¹¹ of Sarah Orne Jewett ¹² and of many cultured and artistic persons of her day. Olive Fremstad, among others, had made a strong impression upon her, and she used the singer as the model for Thea in The Song of the Lark.¹³

Of Miss Cather's reaction to people, Miss Bennett says:

...hers was a positive and joyous nature, and her reaction to people was violent -- stormy as the tempests she so much enjoyed at sea or the winds that swept the Nebraska plains. For those she loved, her feeling was so intense that she would tremble at parting. She did not want people to come physically close to her unless she willed it, but she could be impulsive and capricious, as when at a meeting of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, she saw her old friend and employer Samuel McClure helped to the platform to receive a special award and rushed forward to kiss him.¹⁴

Despite her natural warmth, Miss Cather had a certain air of aloofness which did not encourage undue freedom

¹¹ Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living, New York, Knopf, 1953, 197 p.

¹² Willa Cather, Not Under Forty, New York, Knopf, 1936, p. 76-95.

¹³ E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 32-34.

¹⁴ M.R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 221.

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or familiarity. Her friends were devoted to her, but always felt impelled to respect her privacy, the innermost thoughts and feelings which she revealed but seldom and to a few chosen intimates. Moreover, continues Miss Bennett,

If she met people with whom she had no sympathy she was revolted and she made no pretense to the contrary. Stories are told of her vitriolic treatment of those who annoyed her. As one newspaper reporter said, she built a battery of guns around her and it was rough going until you got inside the battlements, then everything was lovely. But some people could never get inside, and if a person Willa disliked were in the vicinity, she could scarcely endure it--pacing the floor, stamping her foot, and repeating the offender's name with bitterness.¹⁵

Willa Cather never married, and since she prohibited the publication of her correspondence and never permitted any intrusion into her private life, the only inference possible from this fact and from the knowledge of her attitude towards writing is that, having given herself over to her art early in life, she felt that she could not have done justice both to her writing and to other obligations if she had married. Her works show her great admiration for the joys of family ties, for married life, and for the privilege of motherhood.¹⁶ But they also show her belief in total dedication to an ideal.¹⁷ It was not in the make-up of

¹⁵ M. R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 221,222.

¹⁶ Cf. Willa Cather, My Antonia, O Pioneers!, "Old Mrs. Harris," "Neighbour Rosicky," etc.

¹⁷ Cf. The Song of the Lark, One of Ours, Death Comes for the Archbishop, etc.

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Willa Cather's temperament to give herself partly to one calling, partly to another. She had to give herself wholeheartedly to whatever she chose to do. The first call she heard was that of Art. She answered it willingly, entirely, and for it, sacrificed all other pleasures not compatible to the fulfillment of her ideal. Miss Bennett quotes her:

No man can give himself heart and soul to one thing while in the back of his mind he cherishes a desire, a secret hope for something different.

The further the world advances the more it becomes evident that an author's only safe course is to cling to the skirts of his art, forsaking all others, and keep unto her as long as they two shall live. An artist should not be vexed by human hobbies or human follies, he should be able to lift himself into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and believe and argue, but he must create.¹⁸

All Miss Cather's friends as well as her enemies, if she had any real enemies, though some did not agree that such retirement was necessary nor even desirable and termed it "escape", have nevertheless always spoken of her with the utmost respect for her ideals and testified to her complete integrity as a person and as an artist. Mr. J. Donald Adams, writing in the New York Times Book Review, expressed the general opinion:

¹⁸ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 213-215.

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Long before she died, Willa Cather's place in American literature was secure. No American novelist was more purely an artist. This, the most obvious fact about her, was not sufficiently understood by the rigidly social-minded critics who, in her later years, reproached her for her retreat from the contemporary world. They praised her art, and yet they were unable to see that her choice of material was dictated by the fact that she was so completely an artist. Because of that fact, she simply gave expression to what she had most deeply felt and experienced.

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Miss Cather's was a fine career, distinguished by steady growth and an uncompromising integrity. As much as any of her heroines, she realized her own potentialities.¹⁹

There was, in Willa Cather, a deep faith in the spiritual values and in the ultimate triumph of the ideal. Religion, for her, was one of the needs of human nature. She recognized its importance, even emphasized it as a stronger force than the material in many of her books, particularly in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, but also in My Mortal Enemy, O Pioneers! and others. Witness Jim Burden's grandfather in My Antonia telling him, "The prayers of all good people are good."²⁰ This statement was typical of Miss Cather, who had a deep

¹⁹ J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," in The New York Times Book Review, issue of May 11, 1947, p. 2.

²⁰ Willa Cather, My Antonia, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1918, p. 88.

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respect for the faith of others, whether or not she shared it. Practical as she was, she recognized the dual nature and consequently the dual needs of men, and knew that some of these needs could be satisfied only by something not of the material world, not even of the intellectual or of the aesthetic, but only of the essentially spiritual.

Contrary to the belief of many, Miss Cather never was received into the Catholic Church. In early years a Baptist, she later was confirmed, with her family, in the Episcopalian Church, mainly because she wanted to worship with them.

Miss Cather's attitude towards religion, sympathetic and broadminded, allied to a certain sense of the infinite, was an underlying current in all her stories, a feeling of melancholy, an awareness of the shortness of life, of the vanity of perishable things, sadness even in the midst of rejoicing, and a constant awareness of the presence of Death everywhere. She has been called a pessimist, and there was, in her writings, a sense of the futility of man's uneven struggle with the elements. Many of her chief characters were preoccupied with the ultimate destiny of the individual, a feeling no doubt associated with the wide country and broad spaces of the West. Archbishop Latour,²¹ Anton

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Rosicky,²² Mrs. Harris,²³ and Alexandra Bergson,²⁴ among others, often thought of the present only in terms of the future, when they should be gone and the world left to others. To one not inspired by faith these reflexions would seem fatalistic.

But this sadness, if it may be called pessimism by some, never eliminated the possibility of something better. Miss Cather showed a distinctive optimism, without laughter or lightness, to be sure, but an optimism based on the faith she had in the ultimate triumph of the good, the ultimate reward for effort, though this reward be so often coupled with tragedy. She showed Myra Henshawe²⁵ and Ambrosch Shimerda²⁶ giving much-needed money to have Masses said for the repose of the souls of loved ones. Myra states her faith simply: "But that is money I keep for unearthly purposes: the needs of this world don't touch it."²⁷ Impractical, perhaps, but it was this sense of the infinite, the sense of life, of the continuous flow of humanity, of the birth of a new man to replace and console for the death of

²¹⁻²⁴ Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, "Neighbour Rosicky," "Old Mrs. Harris," O Pioneers!

²⁵ Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 102.

²⁶ Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 133.

²⁷ Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, loc.cit.

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another, of the beginning of a new, happier life to compensate for the loss of this shorter, harder life, that permeates Miss Cather's novels. Witness the beauty and joy in the birth of Amédée's son in O Pioneers! to be followed so closely by the death of the young father himself.²⁸ Witness also the peace and contentment underlying Miss Cather's descriptions of graveyards, the evident sympathy, understanding, warmth, and perhaps even longing which transpired in her books whenever she spoke of someone long since gone. Mr. Adams finds it,

...noteworthy, perhaps, that in the period when the dominant mood among our men writers was one of bitterness and negation, an affirmative tone was more often heard in the work of the women. They were more likely to find the themes in the triumph of the individual over circumstances than in his frustration and defeat. And I am ... thinking ... of serious and conscientious artists like Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Pearl Buck. Is it that women are more schooled in the commonplace practice of faith and fortitude, whereas men are more generally tested only in the hours of exceptional crisis? Whatever the reason, they have held more consistently to the literature of courage.²⁹

Some critics have accused Willa Cather of not writing enough about life and actuality as we know it, and

²⁸ Willa Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 242-250.

²⁹ J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, New York, Viking, 1944, p. 116.

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"reproach her with having lost contact with the world in which she lives."³⁰ Yet it is this combination of joy and tragedy which is truly Life, not particularly the life of this man or this woman, but of Man, of Woman. Miss Cather wrote of individuals, but her individuals with all their personal characteristics had the living, the universal qualities of true witnesses to life and to the great, real values of life. Miss Cather knew her materials, knew her ability, and knew what she wanted to do. Just as Gustave Flaubert said of his Emma Bovary, "Ma pauvre Bovary souffre et pleure dans vingt villages de France à cette heure même,"³¹ so Miss Cather might have said, "There are hundreds of Marian Forresters, of Myra Henshawes, of Bartley Alexanders, even of Alexandra Bergsons and Antonia Shimerdas and Thea Kronborgs and Lucy Gayhearts living in this country and in this world, struggling and dreaming as they did." The surroundings and conditions may be different, but human nature, whether of man or of woman, whether of pioneer or city-dweller, is basically the same.

Willa Cather liked to write of the past, and because, at a time when most of her contemporaries were giving

³⁰ J. Donald Adams, op.cit., p. 121.

³¹ Gustave Flaubert, Choisir les meilleurs textes, Paris, Desclee de Brouwer, 1936, p. xvi.

the public large doses of "post-war realism" she produced her two historical novels Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she was called an "escapist." To this Mr. Adams replies that a writer who chooses to write of the past is not necessarily getting away from actuality.

When they penetrate beyond the externals of living, when they deal creatively with the spirit of man, with its tests and triumphs, its defects and aspirations, its interminable march toward self-realization, they speak to us here and now...³²

Miss Cather herself replied well enough to this charge in letters to the Commonweal, where she explained her reasons for writing Death Comes for the Archbishop,³³ and answered a question concerning her opinion of "Escapism." Of this last she says, quoting Mary Colum in the Yale Review: "The people who talk about the art of escape simply know nothing about art at all."³⁴ The fact was that Miss Cather saw no real reason to write of the present as some were doing. She admitted that she was not of her time, she felt disillusioned at the turn of affairs about her and in the country

³² J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," p. 123.

³³ Willa Cather, "A Letter from Willa Cather," in The Commonweal, Vol. 7, No. 9, issue of November 23, 1927, p. 713.

³⁴ Willa Cather, "Escapism," in The Commonweal, Vol. 23, No. 25, issue of April 17, 1936, p. 677-679.

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she had known as so vibrant and awake and which was now overrun with small-town, mediocre "little men" of the variety which had surrounded Alexandra,³⁵ and which Flaubert would have called "bourgeois." She felt, like Gabrielle Longstreet in "The Old Beauty" that "one should go out with one's time."³⁶

Yet there was more than love for the past and disgust for the materialistic world surrounding her in Miss Cather's choice of subjects and treatment. She found out early that she could write best in a certain medium, that she could not write something she did not believe, any more than she could "say anything she did not mean."³⁷ She could not write about life in the cynical, totally discontented way some of her contemporaries were doing. It was in her nature to be sympathetic, and despite all the ugliness, mediocrity and pettiness she saw, as she had made Anton Rosicky see and describe so well to his children,

³⁵ Willa Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 181.

³⁶ Willa Cather, The Old Beauty and Others, p. 46.

³⁷ Elizabeth Moorhead, quoted in E. K. Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

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In the country, if you had a mean neighbour, you could keep off his land and make him keep off yours. But in the city, all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbours was part of your life. The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human, -- depraved and poisonous specimens of man. To this day, he could recall certain terrible faces in the London streets. There were mean people everywhere, to be sure, even in their own country town here. But they weren't tempered, hardened, sharpened like the treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poisoning their fellow men.³⁸

Miss Cather nevertheless knew that man is more than just a depraved animal reduced to material and sexual instincts, and her works breathed a warmth and a wholesome understanding of man's weakness and folly rather than a secret, sinister pleasure in discovering his baseness. Mr. Howard Mumford Jones finds that it is in this way, "by maintaining a just balance between the two sides of a character (private and social) in a novel that writers like Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather succeed as artists..."³⁹

Willa Cather wrote some twenty books,⁴⁰ three of which were published posthumously,⁴¹ the last as late as 1956, almost ten years after her death. All her books

³⁸ Willa Cather, Obscure Destinies, p. 59.

³⁹ Howard M. Jones, "The American Malady," in The Saturday Review of Literature, issue of August 6, 1949, p.26.

⁴⁰ See bibliography. These include 12 novels, 4 volumes of short stories, 2 books of critical essays, 1 volume of poems, and 1 "travel" book.

⁴¹ The Old Beauty and Others, On Writing, and Willa Cather in Europe.

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showed her interest in landscape, in color, life, beauty, and although they might be unequal in literary value, they all had the same full, rich atmosphere which could not but come from the author.

It is interesting to note that Miss Cather has been mentioned in discussions dealing with almost every "school" of literature in the twentieth century, with the exception of that of the ultra-realists, or of those writers who were more naturalistic than the naturalists themselves. The fact was that she did not care to be associated with one school or another.

Mr. Henry Steele Commager places Willa Cather with "a distinguished group who may be called, for want of a better name, the traditionalists..." And he goes on to explain,

They were those who, in the great line of Wordsworth, had left the weight of too much liberty. Philosophically, and artistically as well, they seemed more at home with the Victorians than with the modernists. They shared with the Victorians not so much particular philosophical doctrines as the conviction that there were such doctrines, not so much particular standards and values as acquiescence in the existence of values, not so much an orthodox literary style as a respect for style ... and it is their anxious concern for moral values that gives them their special distinction in twentieth-century America...⁴²

⁴² Henry Steele Commager, "Traditionalism in American Literature," in Nineteenth Century, issue of November, 1949, p. 312.

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Mr. Commager, elaborating further on the characteristics of the Traditionalists says that

They were not obsessed with sociological descriptions... They were aloof from rather than immune to politics, fastidious rather than genuinely independent.

They were prepared to agree with the naturalists and the irrationalists that life itself was a desperate business, but the reasons for which they found life desperate were not those which inspired the Faulkner-Jeffers school, for where these asserted that life was without meaning, they were all too sure that its meaning was tragic...⁴³

Whether Miss Cather was really "traditionalist" or not, and there seems to be no reason to deny it, her subjects, varied as they were, were basically romantic. It was this very tendency towards the "ideal" in her people which provided contrast in their conflict with their environment, and which formed the essential element of many of her stories. Again quoting Mr. Commager:

To Willa Cather the past was significant for its moral qualities, and only gradually did romanticism triumph over morality. Throughout her long literary life she was engaged in an elaborate remembrance of things past ... And all her novels and stories ... were animated by a single great theme as they were graced by a single felicitous style... 'Ideals,' she wrote, 'were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men.'⁴⁴

⁴³Henry Steele Commager, op.cit., p. 313.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 318, 319.

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However, in her treatment of her subject-matter, Willa Cather was often quite realistic. There was realism in her pioneer stories; she wrote realistic short stories, and even her first novel, Alexander's Bridge, though in a realism more restrained and more dignified than that of some of her contemporaries, was realistic in treatment. The presentation of the early Church in southwestern United States, and of the abuses that had sprung up among the Spanish clergy there (in Death Comes for the Archbishop), of the misunderstandings between Bishop Loyal, Bishop de Saint-Vallier and the Count de Frontenac in Shadows on the Rock, of the love affair in "Coming Aphrodite!"⁴⁵ and in Alexander's Bridge, of the 'incident' in "The Old Beauty"⁴⁶ or of Emil Bergson's love for Marie Shabata,⁴⁷ of Nancy Till's peculiar situation,⁴⁸ surely these are realistic in subject-matter as well as in presentation and show no shirking of the basic issues involved in human relationships. The great difference between these and some other "realistic" novels of the time was in the fact that Miss Cather realized that there are other values in life

⁴⁵ Willa Cather, Youth and the Bright Medusa, p.3-63.

⁴⁶ Willa Cather, The Old Beauty and Others, p. 51-57.

⁴⁷ Willa Cather, O Pioneers!

⁴⁸ Willa Cather, Sapphira and the Slave Girl.

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just as important as sex, and that it is not in "cataloguing physical sensations"⁴⁹ that a book is made good or great.

In some of her letters to literary periodicals and in her book On Writing, Willa Cather gave her theories of art, her conception of what makes a good book, in particular a good novel.⁵⁰ She did not approve of detail for the sake of detail; she felt that every word in a story should be significant, that there was no need to amass useless "furniture" which distracts from the story. She was a strong believer in revision, in exactness, in the correct word, "le mot juste." Miss Bennett notes that her book The Song of the Lark did not exactly suit her. "She said that she had included too much material -- had not stripped it thoroughly."⁵¹ And further, Miss Bennett concludes, "A precise and sparse style of writing -- Willa called it the 'novel démeublé' or 'unfurnished novel' -- later became the most easily identifiable trade mark of Cather prose."⁵²

An example of this attention which Miss Cather gave to the correct choice of words, -- Miss Bennett calls it her

⁴⁹ Willa Cather, Not Under Forty, p. 45, 50.

⁵⁰ Willa Cather, On Writing, New York, Knopf, 1949, 126 p.

⁵¹ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 201.

⁵² Ibid., p. 202.

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"economical artistry in the choice of her words" -- is given in The World of Willa Cather, and is quite typical, for "she would search for months for the proper word, would never accept an unfamiliar one, and her final choice could seldom be bettered."⁵³

Willa Cather believed that a writer should treat of subjects with which he is familiar, and should not go beyond his depth. In this, she followed the teaching of Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, who had told her, "Of course, one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime get all you can. One must know the world so well before one can know the parish."⁵⁴ She was extremely strict with her own work, could not tolerate vagueness. She took no account of what others felt, believed or preached, if she was sure that she was producing according to her aim and her ability. She abhorred mediocrity, and would never lower or change her standards to cater to the public taste.⁵⁵ She led a regular life, in the wholesome atmosphere which she found in the West or which she made for herself in New York, New England, or

⁵³ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 166.

⁵⁴ Sarah Orne Jewett, quoted by Willa Cather, requoted by George Snell in The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947, New York, Dutton, 1947, p. 151.

⁵⁵ Latrobe Carroll, "Willa Sibert Cather," in Bookman, Vol. 53, No. 3, issue of May, 1921, p. 212-216.

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Canada, and devoted herself primarily to producing not just "stories" to be read and forgotten, but life reproduced in literature. In her own words,

I work from two and a half to three hours a day. I don't hold myself to longer hours; if I did, I wouldn't gain by it. The only reason I write is because it interests me more than any other activity I've ever found. I like riding, going to operas and concerts, travel in the west; but on the whole writing interests me more than anything else. If I made a chore of it, my enthusiasm would die. I make it an adventure every day. I get more entertainment from it than any I could buy, except the privilege of hearing a few great musicians and singers.⁵⁶

Among her other theories of writing, Willa Cather maintained that a writer could not obtain information or material by going out "note book" in hand,⁵⁷ taking down everything he saw and heard. Rather she believed that a writer's real material was that which had become "one" with him, that which he had assimilated and with which he had become so familiar that it must be expressed, as an overflowing of the writer's personality. "The thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper -- whether little or great, it belongs to literature."⁵⁸ She did not believe that words

⁵⁶ Latrobe Carroll, op.cit., p. 216.

⁵⁷ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 210.

⁵⁸ Willa Cather, ed., The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1925, p. ix.

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alone were creation; rather, "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there, that is created."⁵⁹

It might be inferred from the above that Willa Cather was the most subjective of writers. Actually, very little of the writer's personality really transpired in her works. Certainly, there was the inevitable "tone" which an author will always give to a work of art, regardless of how objective and distant he tries to be. But apart from this, Miss Cather let her characters live out their story. She often used a narrator, either as an active protagonist or as a bystander, and this narrator was more or less affected by the turn of effective events, as Niel Herbert in A Lost Lady, or Jim Burden in My Antonia, or again the narrator in Sapphira and the Slave Girl. Yet even here, there was aloofness and objectivity in presentation. The narrator might be hurt by the actions of the characters, but the story had the detachment of events which transpired long ago and could no longer affect one; moreover, the author was not really there, since the reactions of the narrator were not necessarily those of the author.

As in the distinction between Romanticism and Realism, so with Subjectivity and Objectivity. Insofar as Miss

⁵⁹ Willa Cather, Not Under Forty, p. 50.

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Cather dealt with people and events which had had for her deep significance, insofar as she reproduced in her stories people whom she had known, or "combinations" of these people, insofar as she was naturally sympathetic towards people in general and some of her characters in particular, she was subjective.

But as to presentation, technique, methods, exactness and the very definite restraint which were evident in all her works, and perhaps more particularly in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she was objective. Of the former, she wrote in a letter to the Commonweal:

I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment. 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. I felt that such writing would be a delightful kind of discipline in these days when the "situation" is made to count for so much in writing, when the general tendency is to force things up. In this kind of writing the mood is the thing -- all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it. To attempt to convey this hardihood of spirit one must use language a little stiff, a little formal, one must not be afraid of the old trite phraseology of the frontier. Some of the time worn phrases I used are the note from the piano by which the violinist tunes his instrument...⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Willa Cather, "A Letter from Willa Cather," in The Commonweal, issue of November 23, 1923, p. 714.

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The most important characteristic of Willa Cather was her dedication to her Art. Mr. Francis Wagenknecht has called her the "High Priestess of Art,"⁶¹ and Mr. J. Donald Adams, in The Shape of Books to Come and his article "Speaking of Books" says:

Willa Cather has pursued the art of fiction with a single-minded devotion, and with as much interest in her method as in her material. She has written always on a note of high seriousness... and yet, such is the delicacy of her perceptions, the power of her imaginative sympathy, and the easy flow and crystal clarity of her prose, that she is never leaden...⁶²

There is a passage in The Song of the Lark which gives the key to Miss Cather's attitude toward her work: "What was any art," she wrote, "but an effort to make a sheath, a mold in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself -- life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose?"⁶³

Miss Cather never hesitated to discard any amount of material, to cut down her work, to eliminate entire passages, or even to order a re-setting of type all ready for the printing presses if there was the least inaccuracy or possible lowering of her standards.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Francis Wagenknecht, "High Priestess of Art," in The Saturday Review, Vol. 36, issue of September 12, 1953, p. 40.

⁶² J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, p. 120.

⁶³ J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," p. 2.

⁶⁴ Edith Lewis, op.cit., p. 161, 162.

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Willa Cather's style was "calm, pure,"⁶⁵ of the highest quality, crystal clear, fluent, "her metal ... silver, cool and beautifully wrought."⁶⁶ She could show a whole world in a few well-chosen words, one or two well-constructed sentences. The waving red grasslands of Nebraska almost became human under her masterful strokes. She painted, sketched, but never daubed nor smeared. A few bold strokes, the description of a voice, a sentence, a look, on one of her pages, could do more to make a character known than ten pages of narration. Notice how well two men are characterized by Miss Cather's able description of their voices:

But on the whole it was Mr. Dillon who did the talking; he had a wide-awake voice with much variety in it. Trueman's was thick and low, -- his speech was rather indistinct and never changed in pitch or tempo. Even when he swore wickedly at the hands who were loading his cattle into freight cars, it was a mutter, a low, even growl ... Dillon had such a clear, crisp enunciation, and he could say things so neatly... His voice was never warm or soft -- it had a cool, sparkling quality, but it could be very humorous, very kind and considerate, very teasing and stimulating. Every sentence he uttered was alive, never languid, perfunctory, slovenly, unaccented. When he made a remark, it not only meant something, but sounded like something, sounded like the thing he meant.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Katherine Anne Porter, "The Calm, Pure Art of Willa Cather," in Highlights of Modern Literature, New York, New American Library, (Mentor), 1954, p. 138-140.

⁶⁶J. D. Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, p. 120.

⁶⁷Willa Cather, "Two Friends," in Obscure Destinies, p. 205.

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Further, Miss Cather says of Mr. Dillon's voice that it could be "interested, encouraging, deliberative, humorous, satisfied, admiring, cold, critical, haughty, contemptuous, according to the deserts and pretensions of his listener."⁶⁸

Mr. H. S. Canby, speaking of the novel of the Twenties and the Thirties as "technically proficient, concise and organized," asks, "What has happened to the successors of Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, Sinclair Lewis (of Babbitt)?"⁶⁹

Many critics have given various opinions as to the relative merit of each of Miss Cather's books. Some found that Death Comes for the Archbishop was her greatest,⁷⁰ others gave that distinction to A Lost Lady,⁷¹ and still others to My Antonia.⁷² Of this last, Willa Cather herself

⁶⁸ Willa Cather, "Two Friends," loc. cit.

⁶⁹ H. S. Canby, "Footnotes to 1949," in The Saturday Review of Literature, issue of August 6, 1949, p. 175.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pelham Edgar, The Art of the Novel from 1700 to the Present Time, p. 256, 258.

⁷¹ Cf. Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 263; Malcolm Cowley, After the Genteel Tradition, p. 55; Lloyd Morris, "Willa Cather," p. 651, 652; L. Kronenberger, "Willa Cather," p. 136; E.S. Sergeant, Fire Under the Andes, p. 279; and George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction, p. 154, 156.

⁷² Cf. Latrobe Carroll, "Willa Sibert Cather," p. 215, and Harlam Hatcher, Creating the Modern American Novel, p. 69.

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said that she felt that she had "made a contribution to American letters with that book,"⁷³ and that it was the best thing she had done. All critics, however, have always agreed on one point: that Willa Cather was one of the outstanding artists of the twentieth century novel, and worthy to be ranked with the best writers in the English language.

Miss Bennett concludes her book by applying to Miss Cather a paraphrase of her own estimate of Carlyle:

Throughout life ... she dreamed always -- great, wild, maddening dreams; perhaps she sleeps quietly now -- perhaps she wakes! ⁷⁴

⁷³ Mildred R. Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, p. 203.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

What links existed between Willa Cather and Gustave Flaubert? They never met, and Flaubert was never even to hear of Willa Cather. Yet these two novelists were as alike as a common ideal could make them, and as different as it was possible for age, country, environment and circumstances to affect them.

Personal life

Gustave Flaubert wrote to his boyhood friend, Ernest Chevalier, "Te rappelles-tu notre pauvre théâtre, et celle (his sister) qui jouait avec nous..."¹

In his Souvenirs littéraires, Maxime Du Camp wrote of Flaubert, "Il éprouvait le regret ... de n'être pas acteur pour jouer le rôle de Triboulet du 'Roi s'amuse'. Le théâtre l'appelait ..." ²

In Nebraska, some fifty years later, a German woman asked who had played the role of the father in a local play. To the reply, "That was Willie Cather," she exclaimed: "Dat

¹Edouard Maynial, La Jeunesse de Flaubert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1913, p. 21.

²Maxime Du Camp, Souvenirs littéraires, Paris, Hachette, Vol. 2, 1906, p. 164.

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not Villie Cader. He valk like boy. He talk like boy. Dat not Villie Cader."³

Young Gustave Flaubert climbed a tree and spent hours, fascinated, looking through the window at his father's class in dissection and anatomy.⁴

Willa Cather wanted to become a doctor, and in the album of a friend where she recorded her likes and dislikes, "Sliceing toads" was her "occupation during a Summer's vacation," and her "ideal of perfect happiness " was "amputating limbs." Miss Bennett records that she really did cut up toads to investigate their nervous systems and blood streams, though there is no evidence that she ever removed anyone's limb.⁵

Mr. James Shively, in a review of Miss Bennett's book says that as a young girl, Willa Cather's interests "ranged from the folk tales of immigrant settlers to amateur vivisection."⁶

³ Mildred R. Bennett, TheWorld of Willa Cather, p.175, 176.

⁴ Francis Steegmuller, Gustave Flaubert and Madame Bovary, Chapter 1.

⁵ M.R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 112,113.

⁶ James R. Shively, "Pioneers and the Ladies Aid," in The Saturday Review, issue of March 17, 1951, p. 18.

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In a school in Paris, the youth Gustave Flaubert hurried through his law themes then spent hours with his friend Alfred Le Poittevin, reading romantic novels.⁷

In Lincoln, Nebraska, Willa Cather had to do a certain number of supplementary exercises in French during the summer recess in order to get her credits for the assignments she had not completed: she had preferred to read the French classics, including Madame Bovary and L'Education sentimentale.⁸

Flaubert studied law to please his father, but when circumstances prevented him from continuing, he gave it up quite willingly to devote himself to writing.⁹

Willa Cather entered the University to study science and medicine, but after seeing her work in print and tasting of the French and German classics, she decided to devote herself to the art of writing.¹⁰

⁷ Gustave Flaubert, Choisir, les meilleurs textes, p. xxxi.

⁸ E. K. Brown, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, p. 61.

⁹ Francis Steegmüller, op.cit., Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living, p. 31,32.

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Flaubert could have married, and at one time, Louise Colet was very much interested in becoming his wife.¹¹ He could not tolerate the idea, felt that he had no right to take a wife and become a father, that he was not made for domestic life, that he must devote himself entirely to his art.

Willa Cather, despite the fact that she had many admirers at the university, never consented to enter matrimonial life, and refused a young Pittsburgh doctor.¹²

In later life, however, both Flaubert and Miss Cather seem to have regretted, at least momentarily, their decision not to marry. Writing to Madame Sand, Flaubert said:

Ce que vous me dites de vos chères petites m'a remué jusqu'au fond du coeur. Pourquoi n'ai-je cela? J'étais né avec toutes les tendresses pourtant, mais on ne fait pas sa destinée, on la subit. J'ai été lâche dans ma jeunesse.¹³

Neither did Miss Cather hold up her own decision as one to be followed by all who wish to pursue a career in business or in art:

¹¹ Helene Frejlich, Flaubert d'après sa correspondance, Paris, Société française, 1933, p. 192.

¹² Mildred R. Bennett, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

¹³ Andre Goyon de Beauvillier, "Le pessimisme de Gustave Flaubert", unpublished Master's thesis presented at Boston College, 1944, (iii-37 p.) p. 7.

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As for the choice between a woman's home and her career, is there any reason why she cannot have both? In France the business is regarded as a family affair. It is taken for granted that Madame will be the business partner of her husband; his bookkeeper, cashier, or whatever she fits best. Yet the French women are famous housekeepers and their children do not suffer for lack of care.

The situation is similar if the woman's business is art. Her family life will be a help rather than a hindrance to her; and if she has a quarter of the vitality of her prototype on the farm she will be able to fulfill the claims of both.¹⁴

Mr. Percy Boynton, in America in Contemporary Fiction, commenting on My Antonia, reports that "Miss Cather, with all her zest for studio life, retained an imaginative regard for four walls and a hearthstone and the vital experience of mothering a family."¹⁵

But whether or not they regretted it, the fact remained that neither Flaubert nor Willa Cather married, and this primarily to devote themselves entirely to their art.

Religion

Religion, as a part of life, meant little to Flaubert, if not another manifestation of the "bourgeois" cult

¹⁴Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 220.

¹⁵Percy Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction, Chicago, University Press, 1940, p. 156.

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for the little insignificant, superstitious things. In "Un Coeur Simple" he made of Félicité's faith a thing of simplicity, naïveté, ignorance and the child's love for candles, incense, and a white dress.¹⁶ He had neither love nor respect for the "curés" who were just as "bourgeois" as their parishioners, whose piety was all external, and who had no insight into the needs of their flocks. All, to him, seemed a service of the "surface", which was adorned to hide the emptiness of the interior. However, Mr. Bradford felt that

Flaubert was never a mocking sceptic, never could have been. Life in all its aspects was too earnest, too serious. You must find the key to it, even if it never could be found ... 'You cannot live without religion ...' ¹⁷

Yet Flaubert's religion was not one of dogma, of convention. It was even, in a sense, a religion of denial:

Yet with religion as with other things there is always the dread of fixation, of dogmatism, and the feeling that dogmatism means death. Make your belief as you go, then let your belief make you, and so sweep on into the infinite in a perpetual joyous process of evolution and growth.¹⁸

¹⁶ Gustave Flaubert, "Un Coeur Simple," in Trois Contes, Paris, Fayard, 1931, p. 22-24.

¹⁷ Gamaliel Bradford, Bare Souls, p. 261.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 262.

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Mr. Van Wyck Brooks says that Flaubert "exemplified the religion of art,"¹⁹ and G. Lanson, in his introduction to Pages choisies des grands écrivains,

Il était Voltairien, Renan n'ayant pas fait encore son oeuvre; c'est-à-dire que sans admirer les irrévérendieuses bouffonneries de Voltaire, et comprenant bien le grand fait psychologique, le grand sens métaphysique des religions, il apercevait l'équivoque et la fragilité de la restauration du sentiment chrétien qu'avait opérée Chateaubriand. "Entre Sainte Thérèse et Voltaire il n'y a pas de milieu," pensait-il; il faut croire absolument, ou nier franchement. Et il niait, c'est-à-dire il affirmait n'y avoir aucune raison de vouloir croire.²⁰

Mr. René Dumesnil sees faith even in this denial, a religion in the absence of faith:

...si Flaubert n'eut point la foi, il eut cependant une religion, et ce fut celle de l'Art. Il parle le langage mystique quand il se tourne vers son Art. Et en certaines pages il s'élève par l'amour, par la charité, (dissimulés sous sa pudeur farouche) si haut que le Père Didon, écrivant à Mme Commanville, a pu dire ces mots "C'est une âme de haut vol; il est impossible que ce regard si grandement ouvert sur l'idéal n'ait pas entrevu l'Infini, et je crois que ces êtres-là sont de la race des immortels que le Christ recueille...Son grand oeil regardait plus loin et plus haut que le visible: évidemment, il y avait le divin au bout de son regard. J'aime à ne point juger vulgairement des natures hors lignes et à les remettre à l'Eternelle Bonté qui les a créées et qui les garde pour les améliorer encore au delà de la mort."²¹

¹⁹ Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years, p. 562.

²⁰ G. Flaubert, Pages choisies des grands écrivains, p. xxviii.

²¹ G. Flaubert, Choisir les meilleurs textes, p. lxxx.

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Willa Cather, however, steeped as she was from her youth in the faith of her immigrant neighbors, raised in a family of practising Baptists, learned early the meaning of the spiritual inner values. She learned to see beneath the externals, to understand and appreciate the strength which these people found in their faith. Religion was a part of life, not just a Sunday ceremony. Faith was something within one, not on the outside. The simple, ordinary people were made great, were ennobled by the elevating principles in which they believed, perhaps without being able to define them, or explain them. It was this faith which inspired Fathers Latour and Vaillant in Death Comes for the Archbishop, which strengthened the pioneers on the rock of Quebec,²² which was an integral part of the lives of the French and Bohemian settlers in O Pioneers! Even Professor St. Peter, who no longer practices the faith of his ancestors, recognizes the importance of some religious creed:

I don't think you help people by making their conduct of no importance -- you impoverish them. As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing...Art and religion, (they are the same thing, in the end, of course,) have given man the only happiness he has ever had.²³

²²Willia Cather, Shadows on the Rock.

²³Willia Cather, The Professor's House, p. 68,69.

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As these authors saw and believed, so they wrote. Flaubert, in his books, made of faith a shallow thing, almost a mockery in the face of human needs. Willa Cather made religion an essential part of human life, a deep force which supports the edifice of life against the raging seas of passion and the winds of events. In Death Comes for the Archbishop, for example,

Always, whether she treats the religious faith of the Mexicans or the mysterious ceremonies of the Indians, Miss Cather succeeds in creating an atmosphere of religious continuity which can be stifled only temporarily but never destroyed. She creates, in short, a sense of spiritual timelessness rooted in the unrecorded past and extending to an unfathomable future.²⁴

Yet Miss Cather could detect religious hypocrisy, and she was pitiless in her portrayal of Enid in One of Ours. Some of the religious of the days of the pioneering West, like Brother Weldon in One of Ours, were "soft-muscled young fellows who tried to make a living in an easy way, or they were fanatics who drove men to madness or self-destruction." Three of Willa Cather's early stories ("Lou, the Prophet" "On the Divide," and "Eric Hermannson's Soul,") show her bitterness toward religious proselytizing. Later

²⁴ E.A. and L.D. Bloom, "Genesis of Death Comes for the Archbishop," in American Literature, Vol. 26, issue of January, 1955, p. 503.

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she said, "Those who make being good unattractive do more harm than those who strive to make evil attractive."²⁵

Social Life

In their social life, both Flaubert and Cather were somewhat paradoxical. Both had warm personalities, and with their friends they were extremely amiable. They were tender, devoted, faithful, generous. Flaubert never refused to lend or give money to a friend in distress. He even gave most of his fortune to his niece Caroline when her husband fell into financial difficulties and was threatened with ruin; and this at a time when, no longer young, he might have been compromising his own security.²⁶

Willa Cather never forgot the friends and relatives she had left in Nebraska. She corresponded with them regularly, and sent them gifts, always chosen with particular reference to their individual tastes. She returned often to visit her family. A friend once told Marion King that Willa Cather had paid many of the mortgages on her friends' farms back home.²⁷

²⁵ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 134,135.

²⁶ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit. Chapter 7.

²⁷ Marion King, "Willa Cather - the Sunlit Peak," in The Saturday Review, issue of May 8, 1954, p. 11.

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Yet this spontaneous generosity, the warm devotedness to those they loved were but one side of the characters of these two authors. Flaubert, once retired at Croisset, detested social life, and except for the dinners with his literary friends, where he could be at ease and relaxed, he could not tolerate having to be in society. When he was in evening clothes he felt like another man, a stranger whom he did not know, and he could not be at ease until he was once more in his beloved solitude.

Neither did Miss Cather like to mingle in society, not even the "literary" circles of her time. She had her own friends among writers, musicians and other artists. She visited them occasionally, more often received them in her own apartment, at certain specified times. She read a great deal, attended many concerts, but did not like to mix with people.²⁸ To reporters she could be acid, caustic, to people she did not like, unflinchingly cold. She had her crotchets, as had Flaubert. In both cases, the authors could afford to indulge in their "caprices"; they were great enough to ignore public opinion, but more important still, they were high and noble enough in the belief in the relative worth of things and the fickleness of human opinions not to let

²⁸ Cf. Edith Lewis, *op.cit.*, and E.K. Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 329.

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themselves be influenced by "what people will say." If in Flaubert it was more a matter of disdain and in Miss Cather one of aloofness, they were nevertheless unpreoccupied with the "qu'en dira-t-on."

Travels

Another point of similarity between these two authors is the importance which their travels had for their lives and their works. Neither really began to write until after some long trip to new unknown places, Flaubert through Europe and the Orient, Miss Cather through her own United States and Europe. These travels provided them with inspiration, color, themes, beauty, picturesque descriptions, tones and moods, the exotic, passionate spirit of the Orient for the one, the calm, eternal spirit of the Church in the Southwest and the culture of the Old World for the other, the sounds, faces, places which were to whirl around in their memory, to "tease" them until at last they had to be set down. Later travels were to furnish additional material for themes already decided upon, as Flaubert's trip to Carthage for Salammbô,²⁹ (1858) and Miss Cather's return to the Southwest and to

²⁹ Gustave Flaubert, Voyages, Paris, Societe les Belles Lettres, 1948, Vol. 2, p. 537.

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Quebec for her scenes in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock.³⁰

Dislike for materialistic world
and love for past

Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather ignored many of the events which transpired during their lifetime. They were not interested in "a world concerned with insignificant matters."³¹ The reason for this attitude was principally one of temperament. Both had an instinctive dislike for materialism, for the world of gain, of fame, of the stock market, of the petty material things. Consequently, Flaubert hated the little bourgeois who spent their lives trying to accumulate a few pieces of furniture or a few thousand francs, Willa Cather deplored the industrialization of the West, the change in young people from stalwart, wholesome children of the working pioneer, of the soil, to the go-getting ambitious, small-town, hard-shelled young men of the beginning of the century. A fellow-graduate of Miss Cather's from the Red Cloud High School, class of 1890, in his graduation speech, typifies precisely the kind of person Miss Cather was to

³⁰ Cf. E. Lewis, op.cit., M.R. Bennett, op.cit., and E.K. Brown, op.cit.

³¹ David Daiches, Willa Cather, A Critical Introduction, Ithaca, Cornell, 1951, p. 183.

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detest all her life.

A man should blow his own trumpet and the louder and longer he can blow the deeper impression he will make, the trumpet he uses should be made of brass and the more brass it contains and the more vigorously it is blown the louder it will sound ... Taking "by any means" as a motto, a shrewd man will succeed in any business. Take a man who has failed, he has failed simply because he is too honest and generous, he attends church more than he attends to his business, he gives to the churches and other institutions when he needs all his capital in his business .. To puff yourself up is the advice practically given by everyone (moralists excluded) ... Now and then you find a man who likes to do his work well, but this is decidedly a mistake on his part for while he is taking so much pains he might be doing something more beneficial to him and in this billsticking world, it would never do to be idle...³²

In One of Ours, Miss Cather, after the pleasure of recalling memories that were full of life and charm, turns "to the comparatively dreary task of rendering a world as humdrum as that of Madame Bovary".³³ "Indeed," Mr. Leon Edel feels, "Miss Cather's novel proffers a critique of American life only a little less sharp than the Menckonian blasts against the "booboisie" or the satire of Sinclair Lewis in 'Babbitt'."³⁴

³² M.R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 178.

³³ E.K. Brown, op.cit., p. 223.

³⁴ Leon Edel, "The Fulgent Age of Flux," in The Saturday Review, Vol. 38, issue of March 26, 1955, p. 17.

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The following condemnation of the modern world, taken from Youth and the Bright Medusa, might almost seem to come from Flaubert's pen: "custom-made prejudice, our sneaking moralities, our cowardices, and our modern life, 'adulterated, sterilized, with the sting taken out.'"³⁵

In The Song of the Lark, Thea "had seen it when she was at home ... -- the hostility of comfortable, self-satisfied people toward any serious effort,"³⁶ and Mr. H. S. Commager finds that after publishing The Professor's House, "Miss Cather seemed to give up even the pretence of finding something worthwhile in contemporary life."³⁷

It was inevitable that feeling as they did about their contemporary surroundings, both Flaubert and Willa Cather should cherish the past. Flaubert was happy in his books of antiquity, admired the Greeks especially. He "lost himself, as he said, in antiquity to escape from the baseness, the vulgarity, the horror of the present,"³⁸ and he professed an "unshaken fidelity to the ideals of the past."³⁹

³⁵Willa Cather, Youth and the Bright Medusa, p. 162.

³⁶David Daiches, Willa Cather, p. 38.

³⁷Henry Steele Commager, op.cit., p. 322.

³⁸Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years, p. 583.

³⁹Dr. Georg Brandes, Eminent Authors of the Nineteenth Century, Literary Portraits, p. 264.

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Willa Cather said of Flaubert, "I like him in those great reconstructions of the remote and cruel past," ⁴⁰ and further, "The things of her uncle that were valuable to me I already had, and had had for years... It was the Flaubert in her mind and heart that was to give me a beautiful memory."⁴¹

Mr. Cowley finds in this love for the past, this "turn to the ideals of a vanished time"⁴² which she describes in The Professor's House,

...a weariness which comes... from an exacerbated sense of personal isolation and from the narrowing of all life to the individual's sensibilities... an admirer of Virgil, she is content with the "lacrimae rerum," the tears of things.⁴³

Mr. Louis Kronenberger also finds Virgilian echoes in Miss Cather's work, particularly in My Antonia.

And this memory of full, happy youth regarded in the perspective of a life-time gives to these books, at the close, a sunset haze. There is something Virgilian about them (it is not for nothing that Miss Cather's fiction is full of Virgilian tags and echoes); Miss Cather, like Virgil, has treated essentially Homeric material, not with straightforward vigour, but with a peculiar nostalgia and humaneness and sense of retrospection, the very overtone of "forsan et haec olim" and "optima dies ... prima fugit." ⁴⁴

⁴⁰Willia Cather, Not Under Forty, p. 22.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 33.

⁴²Malcolm Cowley, op.cit., p. 61.

⁴³Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁴L. Kronenberger, "Willa Cather," in Bookman, issue of October, 1931, p. 135.

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Writing of Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, Mr. H. S. Canby states that Miss Cather

...sought in history for subject matter less personal and more difficult. And so, (influenced perhaps again by Flaubert) she left the present, left her own Middle West, and absorbed herself in the austere, ascetic, intractable beauty of New Mexico, and the Catholic culture of Quebec.⁴⁵

And so, Miss Cather "chooses scenes and times which banish the shrillness of modern civilization"⁴⁶ and she is "happiest with her memories of the past and better in praise than in blame, and she almost persuades us that not to be born after 1890 was the best of fortunes."⁴⁷ "As she grew older," Mr. Daiches finds, "she wanted less and less of anything the modern world could offer..."⁴⁸ simply because for her, the happy things, people, and really worthwhile happenings were past; she had lived them and enjoyed them, and knew that they could not return in the present world.

Pessimism and Death

Both Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather have been called pessimists. Flaubert's was a pessimistic disgust

⁴⁵ H.S. Canby, "Willa Cather," p. 24.

⁴⁶ Josephine L. Jessup, Faith of Our Feminists, New York, Smith, 1950, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Peter Monroe Jack, "The Sense of the Past," in New Republic, issue of February 10, 1937, p. 26.

⁴⁸ David Daiches, Willa Cather, p. 187, 188.

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and utter lack of faith in the future of the world, while Willa Cather's was more melancholic sadness before the tragic realities of life. To Flaubert and Willa Cather both, great people and great things were gone with the past.

"Giants lived yesterday: pygmies rule today."⁴⁹ The new era was cheap and sordid. The future seemed to promise only more cheapness and sordidness. However, Flaubert saw only one redeeming factor in this picture, and that was that Art goes on, and that the world's redemption lay only in a return to the principles of true Art. Miss Cather, on the other hand, was able to detect in the pettiness of human life a more lasting spiritual ideology which would persist in a few individuals, the "artists" fighting against the "philistines"; a small minority, but fighting always, and succeeding occasionally. Mr. J. Donald Adams says of Miss Cather that

...she had watched, with painful regret, the inevitable changes that come to the ways of life that we know and love. She could record those, too, in A Lost Lady and The Professor's House. But life goes on, a flowing and indivisible stream; and now, or a little while since, or long ago, one catches the gleam of the values which give it meaning, and, if one is an artist, tries to transfix the shining moment.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Charles Poore, "The Last Stories of Willa Cather," in The New York Times Book Review, issue of Sep. 12, 1948, p. 3.

⁵⁰ J.D. Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, p. 123, 124.

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To both Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather, life was tragic; to Flaubert, (except perhaps in "La Légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier") death was silence, even sometimes a mockery of superstitious external signs of worship, simply the end of a miserable life, perhaps the beginning of a more miserable one. To Miss Cather, death was more than this. She saw in the symbols of faith a promise of repose, of peace and contentment and reward for the faith upheld, the courage manifested, the struggle carried to the end. Anton Rosicky had given his life to the land he loved; he rested.⁵¹ Mr. Shimerda, unable to face his inadequateness before the demands of a new life so utterly foreign to his refined and cultured tastes, sought in death not only forgetfulness, but forgiveness and fulfillment.⁵² Such were tones of Willa Cather in the face of death. How different this was from Flaubert's presentation of death in Madame Bovary, death as the ultimate punishment of a life of frivolity; or even in "Un Coeur Simple," where death was emptiness, nothingness. Or again, in "La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier," the glory of being taken to his reward by his Saviour whom he received in the guise of a leprous beggar was over-shadowed

⁵¹Willa Cather, "Neighbour Rosicky," in Obscure Destinies.

⁵²Willa Cather, My Antonia.

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by the vivid descriptions of the repulsive services demanded by the beggar. The glory was there, but the descriptions left a bad taste.

Characterization and Themes

Gustave Flaubert has sometimes been credited with having a deeper understanding of women than of men. Mr. Harris felt that "his men are nearly all thin and slight, studied from the outside with the indifference of maturity."⁵³ His *Emma Bovary*, however, "one knows intimately, profoundly."⁵⁴ To the complaint that *Salammbô* was not human, Flaubert replied:

...il en est ainsi dans l'Orient, ... maintes fois les têtes et surtout les costumes sont magnifiques, mais que la tête est vide. C'est pour cela qu'il a fait de *Salammbô* une simple statue, avec des commencements d'hystérie. Selon lui, les femmes antiques n'avaient que des dehors, point de "dedans..."⁵⁵

In both Flaubert and Miss Cather, whenever the characterization has had impact and forcefulness, the author was dealing with a woman. Both have made their women

⁵³Frank Harris, Latest Contemporary Portraits, p. 203.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Georges-Émile Bertrand, Les jours de Flaubert, p. 94.

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memorable, their men more or less vague, complementary, more like witnesses than actual protagonists, as in the case of Jim Burden in My Antonia, Niel Herbert in A Lost Lady, Carl Lindstrum in O Pioneers!, Fred Ottenburg in The Song of the Lark, or again, Charles Bovary or Monsieur Homais in Madame Bovary, Hamilcar in Salammbô, and even Frédéric Moreau, the hero of L'Education sentimentale. Possible exceptions to this were Fathers Latour and Vaillant in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Bartley Alexander in Alexander's Bridge and Anton Rosicky in "Neighbour Rosicky" and, in Flaubert, the persons of Saint-Antoine and Saint Julien.

In the case of Miss Cather, at any rate, the general impression left by her books, apart from Death Comes for the Archbishop was one of strong, full-blooded women and weak, anaemic men. Yet, Mr. Daiches finds that Miss Cather displays "an almost masculine sensibility... (which) is an important clue to her quality as a writer."⁵⁶ Miss Jessup, while agreeing that Miss Cather has drawn weak men, most lacking in virility, that she fails to depict a complete male, nevertheless pays tribute to her power of observation.

⁵⁶David Daiches, Willa Cather, p. 187.

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(Miss Cather) seems to know the look of the place where a man works. She follows him behind the riveting hammer and the thresher, into the timberland, the corral, the mill, the caboose; she observes the work he is doing, and why. Critics who sneer at her mystical preoccupation with pots and pans have forgotten the degree to which bridge-building, excavation, the rougher phases of rail-roading, ranching, and farming have interested her. Willa Cather knows the size of a man's job, and writes of it as convincingly as if she had held it herself.⁵⁷

The principal theme with which Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather dealt in their novels was Life, the struggle against Life, as it was, to attain some desired betterment. Both are authors of "frustration," of the bitterness of life in a "milieu" which is incompatible and restricted. Willa Cather felt, as a young girl, very much as Flaubert did about Rouen, "that the conventionalism of Red Cloud was a denial of life itself, a network of caution, evasion and negation."⁵⁸ Jim Burden in My Antonia recalls his town, again in terms that remind one of Flaubert:

...They were flimsy shelters, most of them poorly built of light wood, with spindle porch-posts horribly mutilated by the turning-lathe. Yet for all their frailness, how much jealousy and envy and unhappiness some of them managed to contain! The life that went on in them seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Josephine L. Jessup, op.cit., p. 78,79.

⁵⁸ Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 47.

⁵⁹ Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 204.

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Typical of Miss Cather's opinion, and, one might say, of Flaubert's, is Jim's thought as he continues,

This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark. The growing piles of ashes and cinders in the back yards were the only evidence that the wasteful, consuming process of life went on at all.⁶⁰

Where Flaubert saw only disgust, where he could find sympathy for his heroes and heroines only when they were struggling against the stupidity he detested, Willa Cather felt close to hers, was never disdainful of sincere effort, even in the face of failure -- except for the Wick Cutters and the Larry Donovans⁶¹ -- and somehow always gave her people some redeeming quality. Mr. Commager says of this quality of hers,

...She thought the traditional themes of love and despair, truth and beauty, the struggle with the soil and the struggle for artistic honesty, far from exhausted; ... "Ideals," she wrote, "were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men," ... Sarah Orne Jewett had admonished her ... that 'you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up...' and she wrote life itself...⁶²

⁶⁰Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 204.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Henry Steele Commager, op.cit., p. 319.

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In Flaubert, the outstanding quality, redeeming or condemning, was native stupidity. Henry James Jr., in discussing Madame Bovary says that "everyone in the book is either stupid or mean... Charles Bovary... is the only good person of the book, but he is stupidly, helplessly good..."⁶³ Of l'Education sentimentale, Mr. James continues,

...Here the form and method are the same as in Madame Bovary; the studied skill, the science, the accumulation of material are even more striking; but the book is, in a single word, a dead one. Madame Bovary was spontaneous and sincere but to read its successor is, to the finer sense, like masticating ashes and sawdust... That a novel should have a certain charm seems to us the most rudimentary of principles, and there is no more charm in this laborious monument to a treacherous ideal than there is perfume in a gravel heap...⁶⁴

Of Flaubert's masterpiece, Stuart Pratt Sherman wrote:

...As a work of fiction and recreation the book lacks one quite indispensable quality: it lacks charm. Well, there are momentary flashes of beauty and grace, dazzling bits of color, haunting melancholic cadences in every chapter of Flaubert; but a charming book he never wrote. A total impression of charm he never gave -- he never could give; because his total impression of life was not charming but atrocious.⁶⁵

⁶³Henry James, Jr., French Poets and Novelists, London, MacMillan, 1878, p. 263.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 267.

⁶⁵Stuart Pratt Sherman, op.cit., p. 348.

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The outstanding critic of Flaubert's time, Sainte-Beuve, gave high praise to the author for his style, his literary achievement, but even he found objection to the absence of goodness in Madame Bovary. Mr. Steegmuller quotes Sainte-Beuve:

There is no goodness in the book. Not a character represents it. In these provincial existences, which abound in bickering, minor persecutions, mean ambitions, and pin-pricks of all kinds, there are also to be found good and beautiful souls... why not indicate them as well?⁶⁶

Marian Forrester never was so utterly hopeless as Emma Bovary, though they had much in common: their dissatisfaction with their "milieu", their search for excitement elsewhere, their need for luxury and their corresponding relative poverty, their falling into debt simultaneously with their final acquiescing to promiscuity, their ultimate degradation. Even the 'famous' (or infamous) ride in the closed carriage in Madame Bovary, of which the critics made so much during Flaubert's day, had its relative counterpart in Marian Forrester's ride in the country with Frank Ellinger. Although Marian Forrester did not, like Emma Bovary, commit suicide -- her husband died and she was able to escape at least in part from the monotony of her existence --

⁶⁶ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 389.

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it might be interesting to speculate on what Emma Bovary would have done in like circumstances, or how Marian Forrester might have reacted -- she had culture and intelligence, was not so fully "bourgeoise" in Flaubert's sense of the word, as was Emma Bovary -- had she found herself in Rouen, married to a dull doctor, with no hope for the future.

A short story of Miss Cather's, "Paul's Case"⁶⁷ brings back the theme, perhaps in a minor key, of Madame Bovary. Paul also lives in a dream world of his own, and when deprived of the opportunity to lose himself in the theatre or the concert hall, he steals from his employer, runs off to New York, enjoys the luxury and beauty he craves, After a week, knowing that his father is coming for him, that his theft will not be prosecuted and that he must return to the same drab environment he so loathes, he commits suicide by throwing himself in the path of a train. The only essential difference in theme between this story and Madame Bovary is that in "Paul's Case" there is no sexual escapade. Paul is satisfied with beautiful things, clothes, food, flowers, music and the theatre.

Another interesting parallel could be made between Flaubert's book of short stories, Trois Contes and Willa

⁶⁷Willia Cather, "Paul's Case," in Youth and the Bright Medusa.

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Cather's Obscure Destinies, particularly between "Un Coeur Simple"⁶⁸ and "Old Mrs. Harris;"⁶⁹ the wholehearted devotion and service for the sake of those loved, the attachment to traditional beliefs, or again the service of love which Mandy gave Mrs. Harris, so like Félicité's simple devotion to her young mistress and the "madame."

Flaubert's travel book, "Par les champs et par les grèves," published after his death, Louis Bouilhet praised for its simple, spontaneous style. Willa Cather also wrote about her travels, and these writings, collected and posthumously published in book form, contain the original freshness and simplicity characteristic of her appreciation for people and places. Both authors could be completely charming and amiable in their unpretentious directness of comment and description. These works were the "overflow" of their reactions to the world of nature, and to the people around them during their travels.

Gustave Flaubert wrote a long, deeply philosophical book, heavily ornamented, La Tentation de Saint Antoine. This book was inspired by a painting by Breughel, which Flaubert saw in an art gallery in Genoa on his trip to Italy.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Willa Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris", in Obscure Destinies.

⁶⁸ Gustave Flaubert, "Un Coeur Simple," in Trois Contes.

⁶⁹ ⁷⁰ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 12.

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The painting itself was ugly and revolting enough in theme, and Flaubert's sister could well wonder at his fascination for it; but he had found the theme for a book.

Willa Cather's first deeply religious book, about two missionaries and their love for God was also based on paintings, the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes on the Life of Saint Genevieve.⁷¹ The frescoes were done in peaceful, cool tones, and the finished prose product had these same qualities, just as Flaubert's Saint-Antoine had reflected the struggle, the desperate inner conflict he had seen in the Breughel painting.

Miss Cather also reported that it was in a visit to the Chicago Art Museum that a "rather second-rate French painting" suggested the title for The Song of the Lark.⁷²

Description and Themes

Both Flaubert and Willa Cather used description to good effect, "little things" to bring out major issues. Hands were used to advantage by both, especially in the following descriptions:

...her long hands with their knotted joints, which had been coated by the dust of the barn, the grease of wool-picking, and the potash of the wash-tub, with so hard a crust that, although they had been washed in pure spring water, they still seemed dirty...⁷³

⁷¹Willa Cather, "A Letter from Willa Cather," p.713.

⁷²Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, p.211.

⁷³Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 269.

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Nils Ericson's impressions of the grandmothers' dark-veined hands in "The Bohemian Girl" carry the usual tone of Miss Cather's works,

In reality he fell into amazement when he thought of the Herculean labors those fifteen pairs of hands had performed; of the cows they had milked, the butter they had churned, the gardens they had planted, the children and grandchildren they had tended...⁷⁴

In Miss Cather, description is not, as Mr. Edgar says, "an idle accessory but of the essence of her art" and her "visual sense" is so vivid, "so wingedly light her energy of phrase" that familiarity with the scene could not more "intensify the truth and beauty of her presentation."⁷⁵

Mr. Edgar quotes a passage from Death Comes for the Archbishop to show the "subtle touches by which ... description is humanized and dramatized":

All at once Father Latour thought he felt a change in the body of his mare. She lifted her head for the first time in a long while, and seemed to redistribute her weight upon her legs. The pack mule behaved in a similar way, and both quickened their pace. Was it possible they scented water?

Nearly an hour went by, and then... Below them, in the midst of that wavy ocean of sand, was a green thread of verdure and a running stream... But for the quivering of the hide on his mare's neck and shoulders, he might have thought this a vision, a delusion of thirst.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Willa Cather, "The Bohemian Girl", in McClure's Magazine, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1912, p. 438.

⁷⁵Pelham Edgar, op.cit., p. 256.

⁷⁶Ibid.

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Helen Anne Lyons, giving the specific qualities of Miss Cather's work, mentions her "artistic ability in scenic descriptions" and her "strong, realistic character delineation."⁷⁷

Of Flaubert's power of description, Emile Zola wrote:

...He is temperate, which is a rare quality; he gives the salient traits, the main lines, the peculiarities which paint, and that is sufficient to make the picture a never to be forgotten one. I would counsel anyone to study Gustave Flaubert for description or for the necessary painting of surroundings, each time they complete or explain a character.⁷⁸

Dr. Brandes finds that Flaubert "sometimes... condenses an entire description into one powerful poetic phrase".⁷⁹

Very often, Gustave Flaubert simply threw into some drawer of his desk some manuscript which he had done as a sort of respite from his major work. Because of the amount of time which he took to produce (six years for Madame Bovary, five years for the third version of La Tentation de Saint-Antoine, five years for Salamambo, seven years for L'Education sentimentale and over six years for Bouvard et Pécuchet) and because of his own limited contact with the world, the subjects at his command were necessarily few in number. The

⁷⁷Helen Anne Lyons, Autobiographical reflexes in Willa Cather's novels, unpublished Master's thesis presented at Boston College, 1937, p. 48, 49.

⁷⁸Emile Zola, The experimental novel and other essays, New York, Cassell, 1893, p. 235.

⁷⁹Dr. Georg Brandes, op.cit., p. 268.

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point has often been made that his "Trois Contes" merely contained his Madame Bovary, Salammbô, and Saint-Antoine in miniature: the first in "Un Coeur Simple" (same boring bourgeois life), the second in "Hérodias" (same oriental exoticism) and the third in "La Légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier" (same religious mysticism, temptation, suffering, repentance and ultimate heavenly reward.) Mr. George Saintsbury records it thus:

In 1877, Flaubert published, under the title of "Trois Contes," a volume which has the curious spirit and merit of giving in little examples, and very perfect examples, of all the styles which have made him famous. "Un Coeur Simple" displays exactly the same qualities of minute and exact observation, the same unlimited fidelity of draughtsmanship, which distinguish Madame Bovary and l'Education sentimentale. "La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier" shows the same power over the mystical and the vague, which is shown in La Tentation de Saint Antoine. "Herodias" has the gorgeousness, the barbaric colours, and the horror of Salammbô.⁸⁰

It has likewise been said of Miss Wether, that the principal themes of her novels are reproduced in her short stories: the lives of "artists" and of "pioneers", the theme of peace found through faith, the final destiny of man and the worth of the struggle to attain a better life.

As a matter of fact, both authors had a certain limited number of themes which they could treat, and when these

⁸⁰ George Saintsbury, op.cit., p. 365.

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had been covered, anything else was merely a variation of the same subject, a combination or elevation of something already mentioned elsewhere, presented under another name, in different guise, and with certain basic variances to prevent them from being mere repetition.

All of a piece throughout, then, Miss Cather's stories return again and again to her themes: youth lost and fortitude maintained, daring and art and valor...⁸¹

Miss Cather herself "contended that she had only a certain number of stories to write, a certain amount of cremated youth, and when she had done these, she would be written out."⁸²

Another striking resemblance between Gustave Flaubert's major works and those of Willa Cather is the almost complete absence of humor. As Mr. Adams said, "I do not suppose there is a page in all of Miss Cather's writing to cause a flicker of amusement...One may go through Willa Cather from end to end... without a smile."⁸³ And of Flaubert, Mr. Adams, in the same book, The Shape of Books to Come says, "From Flaubert and Zola down, they (the

⁸¹Charles Poore, "The Last Stories of Willa Cather," p. 3.

⁸²Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 225.

⁸³J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, p. 120, 141.

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naturalists) are rarely capable of humor, and when they are, it is humor of a grotesque kind..."⁸⁴ There is no room, in these novels, either of Flaubert's or of Miss Cather's, for the light-hearted "humour" one occasionally finds even in the serious writers of fiction. Life is too serious, too tragic for the protagonists in these novels to indulge in the facile or witty remark. There are, particularly in Miss Cather, many profound and stirring reflexions, even some teasing camaraderie, but no real contagious laughter of the type which communicates itself to the reader. The laugh itself is often a means of characterization, as in the case of *Myra Henshawe*:

She had an angry laugh, for instance, that I still shiver to remember. Any stupidity made Myra laugh -- I was destined to hear that one very often. Untoward circumstances, accidents, even disasters, provoked her mirth.⁸⁵

In both Cather and Flaubert, what laughter there is is often bitter, ironic, angry, but seldom gay or contagious except, as has been mentioned, for purposes of characterization.

Flaubert's attitude towards life and his generation left a lasting impression on his works. His books breathe

⁸⁴J. D. Adams, op.cit., p. 120, 141.

⁸⁵Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 17.

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disgust and contempt, a hatred for mankind, a burning anger at the pettiness of the human populace. Flaubert was "convinced that men were innately depraved... (he) felt nothing but contempt for the masses and consigned them to the devil, caring to save only the mandarins, the remnant, the elite."⁸⁶ He vented his anger against everyone, especially in his correspondence, a

...rage against convential opinion, against contemporary intellectuals, against all the political ideas of the day, against the shoddy writing passed off as a real thing; against the materialism of the working class, the brutality and smugness of the middle class, the emptiness of the aristocracy. He thought them all "bourgeois," a being whose mode of evil, of feeling is low.⁸⁷

Flaubert could not accept what he considered the general indifference to the higher, nobler realm of art. Yet his *Bovary* was pathetic and tragic. Despite his deep pessimism, he nevertheless believed in the possibility of something better, in the promise of "l'échec fecond," the failure which goads a man onto further and more energetic efforts to attain success. Claude Roy, in Le Commerce des Classiques

⁸⁶Van Wyck Brooks, "Faith Versus Doubt," in The Saturday Review, Vol. 35, No. 12, issue of February 2, 1952, p. 11.

⁸⁷A. Kazin, "Books, anger of Flaubert," in the New Yorker, Vol. 30, issue of September 11, 1954, p. 146.

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finds generosity in this denunciation:

Il entre un peu d'orgueil et beaucoup de bonté dans la haine dont Flaubert poursuit la bêtise tout le long de sa vie. Dénoncer la bêtise des autres, c'est toujours risquer un peu vaniteusement d'affirmer son intelligence à soi. Un mépris "altier" des sots fait de celui qui l'affiche un "autre," le définit comme étant d'une essence supérieure et plus pure que la tourbe des niais. Il y a chez Flaubert un peu de hauteur aristocratique quand il pourfend les idiots. Mais il y a aussi une grande générosité exaspérée, et c'est, finalement, ce qui domine dans son (oeuvre).⁸⁸

Willa Cather's books contain an atmosphere of calm, peace, burning ardor (not anger) and faith. She too sees the futile struggle of many for the better things in life, against overwhelming odds. Yet for her the struggle is worthwhile, and the real sin against life is the failure to realize and to live up to one's potentialities. Marian Forrester is a "lost lady" because she had in her the possibility of ennobling herself through and because of the circumstances in which she was placed. She failed to fulfill her destiny, and the punishment was degradation. So, in My Mortal Enemy, Myra Henshawe refused to recognize until too late that her struggle was primarily one against herself, and because she fought everyone and everything else without attempting to see her own potentialities for great

⁸⁸Claude Roy, Le Commerce des Classiques, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 239-240.

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things, she was a failure in life. Toward the end of her life, she admitted to Nellie, "I was always a grasping, wordly woman; I was never satisfied."⁸⁹

Mr. J. Donald Adams speaks of this characteristic of Miss Cather's work:

In spite of her cool tones... there was at the heart of all she wrote a burning affirmation. In book after book she implied again and again that the chief sin against life lies in the failure to realize one's potentialities. Antonia, and Alexandra of O Pioneers!, with their simple, deeply rooted natures, moved almost unconsciously in that direction; Thea Kronborg, in The Song of the Lark, reacted to life with the fully conscious and unbending purpose of the artist; Marian Forrester, of A Lost Lady, held to her love of life even though she cheapened herself; Lucy Gayheart, in Miss Cather's last novel, came to her tragic death because "When she caught fire, she went like an arrow, toward whatever end."⁹⁰

But always, Miss Cather saw "the goodness that often predominates in the nature of men..."⁹¹ She showed Myra Henshawe, a few weeks before her death, gazing at the horizon from the edge of a cliff and saying:

I'd love to see this place at dawn... That is always such a forgiving time. When that first, cold, bright streak comes over the water, it's as if all our sins were pardoned; as if the sky...gave absolution.⁹²

⁸⁹Willia Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 164.

⁹⁰J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," p. 2.

⁹¹Van Wyck Brooks, The Writer in America, New York, Dutton, 1953, p. 167.

⁹²Willia Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 89.

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As has been mentioned before, neither Flaubert nor Miss Cather published anything of great value during their first years of writing. Although Miss Cather's first book of short stories, The Troll Garden appeared in 1905, her first novel, Alexander's Bridge was published in 1912, when she was thirty-nine years of age, more than fifteen years after her graduation from the University of Nebraska.

When Flaubert's Madame Bovary first appeared in serial form in Maxime Du Camp's Revue de Paris, the author was already thirty-five years old. Mr. Bradford says that Flaubert belongs "to the group of writers who are unwilling to let anything leave their hands till it is absolutely perfect..."⁹³ and Mr. Saintsbury calls Flaubert "not merely a little-writing but a late-writing novelist."⁹⁴

Both Flaubert and Willa Cather had a period of apprenticeship, when the former wrote, destroyed, wrote, put into drawers first and second copies of his "Saint-Antoine" and of other works he did not print, and Miss Cather tried her hand at various types of short stories for publication in magazines while she achieved economic security first as a teacher, and then as editor of McClure's Magazine.

⁹³ Gamaliel Bradford, Bare Souls, p. 88.

⁹⁴ George Saintsbury, Essays on French Novelists, p. 337.

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For a time, Flaubert imitated Chateaubriand, Miss Cather imitated Henry James. Alexander's Bridge is the novel of this period. Of it, in a preface to a later edition of the book, Miss Cather wrote:

Alexander's Bridge was my first novel, and does not deal with the kind of subject-matter in which I now feel myself most at home...⁹⁵

In an article she once referred to Alexander's Bridge as a "studio picture" and of the impressions she had tried to communicate as "genuine, but very shallow."⁹⁶

Flaubert had dozens of manuscripts in his drawers, early works which he never agreed to release for publication because they were his first "essais", which he might have called, as did Willa Cather, "genuine, but very shallow."

Schools, Art and Theories

Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather were indifferent to the popular literary styles of their day. They did not care to be associated with one or another "school." Flaubert "always suffered at hearing himself called the 'head of the Realistic school'..."⁹⁷ Miss Cather, hearing that

⁹⁵ Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living, p. 77.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 401.

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some critics felt that Death Comes for the Archbishop was difficult to classify, answered simply, "Then why bother? Many more assert vehemently that it is not a novel... I prefer to call it a narrative."⁹⁸

Of Flaubert, Mr. Dumesnil says,

Ses methodes de travail, et, pour ainsi dire, ses instruments, restent personnels. Il a créé le style qui convenait exactement à l'expression de sa personnalité... Il a suivi sa route, et souvent, cette route, il l'a tracée où nul n'avait passé avant lui. L'exemple qu'il a donné, c'est celui-ci, et ce n'est pas de suivre les sentiers battus...⁹⁹

Both were "individual" writers, who combined the romantic with the realistic, and even the naturalistic, (Flaubert) or the "traditional" (Willa Cather) when necessary. Both wrote according to their own particular beliefs. They wrote because they had something to say, and a certain way in which they wanted to say it. For these reasons, they have been included in the discussions on almost every "school" of their respective centuries, without being proved as definitely of one category or another. This was well, and a proof of their high standards and of their degree of achievement, that they have transcended all specific classifications to become universally recognized novelists of stature.

⁹⁸ Willa Cather, "A Letter from Willa Cather," p. 714.

⁹⁹ G. Flaubert, Choisir, les meilleurs textes, p. xi.

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Mr. Walter Havighurst discusses Willa Cather in terms of her "reality."

If the social and political novelists wrote from the realities of the twentieth century, she wrote from another reality. She was aware of the solitude of the human spirit. The yearning was in herself, and even in a world of crushing interdependence it is the spirit of man.

She wrote about the individual's endeavor, regardless of how the world changes, to master his surroundings. What matters in her fiction is the human person and what he can make of experience.¹⁰⁰

This was Miss Cather's "realism"... her own, compounded of various combinations based on experience, not on some arbitrary classification. The same held for Flaubert, with the exception that he tended more toward "naturalism" while Miss Cather has more of a "traditionalist."

Flaubert was impatient that his book Madame Bovary should be prosecuted on moral grounds. He felt that the question was beside the point, that he had simply written the "truth", and he was interested in writing for the sake of art: a book is a work of art and therefore subject only to artistic censorship. Mr. Drinkwater found that the book

was ruthlessly moral in its insistence that men must live their lives in the circle of their destiny. It is only the fool who runs away from reality to a world of lath and plaster theatricalism that calls itself romance.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Walter Havighurst, "Willa Cather's High Mesa," p. 64.

¹⁰¹ John Drinkwater, op.cit., p. 602.

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Of the outcry against Madame Bovary, Flaubert wrote:

...Everyone thinks I am in love with reality, whereas I actually detest it. It was in hatred of realism that I undertook this book. But I equally despise that false brand of idealism which is such a hollow mockery in the present age...

Only the ladies consider me a 'dreadful man.' They think I am too true to life. I think I am very moral, and that I deserve the Montyon prize for virtue. My novel teaches a very clear lesson, and if 'no mother could think of allowing her daughter to read it' -- as I have heard stated -- I think that husbands would do very well to give it to their wives. But all this leaves me completely indifferent. The morality of art consists in its beauty, and I value style even above truth. I think that into my picture of bourgeois life and my exposition of the character of a woman who is naturally corrupt, I have put as much literature and as much decorum as the subject allows...¹⁰²

Sainte-Beuve, the most important critic in France, praised Madame Bovary for its artistic value, but in a letter to a lady, wrote:

...Nevertheless, I do not advise you to read the book; it is too crude for most women, and would offend you. As I said, the fault of the author lies in being hard and a trifle cruel. That does not keep him from being a great and truthful observer -- on the contrary; and he is a very great landscapist besides. But once again: do not read it. You have preserved too fine a soul.¹⁰³

Despite Flaubert's artistry, and his insistence that he had written a "moral" book, both Madame Bovary and

¹⁰²Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 376,377.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 390.

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Salammbô were placed on the Index by the Church, and of the criticisms mentioned, Sainte-Beuve's seems to be that which best expresses the Church's concern for those who "have preserved too fine a soul"¹⁰⁴ to be exposed to Flaubert's crudeness.

Willa Cather shared Flaubert's attitude toward art, but she also felt that a good work of art need not sacrifice its dignity and its respect for principles of propriety simply for the purpose of being artistic. She believed that both art and restraint were possible, and that neither lost from the other. A "catalogue of physical sensations" was no less a catalogue and had no more place in a novel than a detailed description of the stock exchange.¹⁰⁵ She felt that to reproduce on paper an actual house or street or town was perhaps a large ambition but unworthy of an artist, and having no faith in the value of the literal, she would have sacrificed gladly the strength that often accompanied the realism of the novel, particularly when it came to "realistic" descriptions of physical sensations or matters of sex.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Francis Steegmuller, loc.cit.

¹⁰⁵Willa Cather, Not Under Forty, p. 50,51.

¹⁰⁶Cf. Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years, p.535.

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Perhaps the best expression of the difference between literalness for its own sake and literalness for a purpose is given by Miss Cather in her book of essays On Writing:

...Tolstoi was almost as great a lover of material things as Balzac... 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...¹⁰⁷

Neither Flaubert nor Miss Cather was interested in popularity, neither would write to please the public taste, neither would sacrifice the least artistic principle merely for the sake of catering to some popular demand. For them, Art was more than success, and to please themselves, to be personally satisfied that their work was of the highest quality was more important to them than any other consideration.

In The Song of the Lark Miss Cather gives her own interpretation of real worth when she makes Thea realize that the chief reward of success "is less in gold or plaudits than in a sense of fidelity to her own high purpose."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Willia Cather, On Writing, p. 39,40.

¹⁰⁸Percy Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction, Chicago, University Press, 1940, p. 154.

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In the same way, "Flaubert never took any account of popularity; he wrote for himself and was his own severest critic, intent solely on getting the best out of himself at any cost."¹⁰⁹

As a consequence of this high measure which they exacted of themselves, Flaubert and Miss Cather detested mediocrity, either in art or in life. They could not tolerate half-way measures. They preferred either a great saint or a downright sinner to one of those self-satisfied, mediocre, small-town, bourgeois young men or even older men and women, who considered themselves quite virtuous and holy because they committed no scandalous acts, but who were satisfied with their effortless and meaningless life of platitude and ignorance. Of Miss Cather, Edward Wagenknecht writes:

...But nobody who had read Jim Laird's bitter denunciation in "The Sculptor's Funeral" can accuse her of idealizing the frontier, and it is evident from the general tone of her work that she does not idealize America. She hates the passion for uniformity which has settled down upon us... She fears the possibility of 'a coming generation which tries to cheat its aesthetic sense by buying things instead of making anything.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Frank Harris, op.cit., p. 200.

¹¹⁰ Edward Wagenknecht, "Willa Cather," p. 226.

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Flaubert suffered extremely from having to describe mediocrity in Madame Bovary:

It is true; mediocrity loves order and rule; I hate it, I am against it... The hardest thing in the world is to describe a common situation, and to render perfectly an ordinary trivial conversation. For an artist, it is diabolically difficult to give a picture of mediocrity.¹¹¹

Consequently, neither could accept mediocrity in a work of art. They would search for hours, even days, for the correct expression, for one word which rendered exactly the thought they were trying to express. Flaubert always pored over volumes before starting to write. Even for Madame Bovary, a theme with which he was familiar, he studied to get the correct detail, visited hospitals for medical information:

When it came to the scene of the operation of the club-foot, Flaubert read all available books on the subject, consulted with Achille (his brother, who succeeded his father as chief surgeon of Rouen) and went to Paris to do the same with Bouilhet. And Louis sent him a long letter full of details concerning eye maladies and preposterous means of curing them which might be proposed by Homais.¹¹²

Compare the following requests by the two authors; the first from Flaubert to Bouilhet, for a term to be used by the apothecary Homais, the second from Willa Cather to

¹¹¹Frank Harris, op.cit., p. 208.

¹¹²Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 354, 355.

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a friend with whom she was travelling:

What is the medical term for 'nightmare'? I absolutely insist on a fine-sounding Greek word...¹¹³

I want you to look out on the cornfields and get me one word to describe the color of the corn. One word -- not a hyphenated one. I've always called it blonde.¹¹⁴

Both Flaubert and Miss Cather were strict revisers of their work, throwing away entire passages, rather than have anything that did not belong. Mr. Turnell says that we find "Flaubert... spending five days writing one page, or turning out thirteen pages in seven weeks and burning them because he was dissatisfied with them."¹¹⁵

Mr. Henry S. Canby calls Miss Cather's economy that "delicate yet powerful art of brief and significant narrative, where all that is needed is included, and all that is needless is left out... It is the French art of the 'nouvelle'... Miss Cather has triumphed in it."¹¹⁶

In "Genesis of Death Comes for the Archbishop", E.A. and L.D. Bloom attribute to Willa Cather, Mérimée's

¹¹³Francis Steegmuller, oplocit., p. 354,355.

¹¹⁴Mildred R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 166.

¹¹⁵M. Turnell, "Flaubert as letter-writer," in The Commonweal, Vol. 61, issue of November 19, 1954, p. 191.

¹¹⁶Henry S. Canby, "Conversation Piece," in The Saturday Review, issue of December 14, 1940, p. 5.

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estimate of Gogol:

'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.'

Thus, Miss Cather never introduced any facts as such or for their own sake. And rather than linger over them she mentions them briefly and without pedantry.¹¹⁷

Although Willa Cather did not, like Flaubert, read all her books aloud to test the sound and cadence, the rhythm and sonority of each sentence, nevertheless she revised her own work carefully, and read all proofs of her books up to the final printing, and even, when she felt it necessary, ordered corrections after the type had been locked. She had a natural talent for assonance, and her work is fluent, musical, and well-balanced.

Flaubert and Willa Cather differed in their work habits. Flaubert worked periodically though fairly steadily, sometimes for twelve hours or more, and more often at night and all night. He raged, fumed, perspired, even wept at the effort to find exactly what he wanted for a certain passage; to him Art was a hard task-master, one he adored, but nevertheless a slave-driver:

¹¹⁷E.A. and L.D. Bloom, op.cit., p. 489.

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I'm tormenting myself, scratching myself,...
 My novel is having a frightful time getting started.
 I have abscesses of style, I itch with sentences
 that never appear. What a heavy oar the pen is, and
 what a difficult current ideas are to row in! I'm
 so disconsolate about the whole thing that I greatly
 enjoy it...¹¹⁸

Willa Cather, on the other hand, had a definite
 schedule for writing, usually two and a half to three hours
 in the forenoon, during the winter months, and sometimes in
 the summer when she was not travelling. She reserved her
 time and strength for other occupations, which she felt
 essential if she was to do her best work. She wrote because
 she enjoyed it; she vented no anger on her pages. She knew
 that if once her writing became a task, if she felt she
 "had" to write, all the enjoyment would go out of it, and
 the work itself would not be at its high standard. Writing,
 she said, was the occupation she enjoyed most of all.¹¹⁹

Objectivity and Subjectivity

Although Willa Cather and Gustave Flaubert both
 believed in exactness and truth, their idea of the truth,
 and even of artistic truth, was not always the same; and

¹¹⁸ Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 278,279.

¹¹⁹ Walter Tittle, "Glimpses of Interesting Americans," in Century, issue of July, 1925, p. 312.

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Miss Cather did not go so far as Flaubert did from the point of view of documentation.¹²⁰ Miss Cather wrote mainly of people and events she remembered from the past, from her youth, and much of her research was merely a matter of verification of facts. When she wrote Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she revisited the Southwest and Quebec, obtained and studied the necessary facts, but by the time she wrote, the idea had so "teased" her mind that she had to set it down, and her subject-matter had been assimilated to the point of becoming "one" with her thoughts.¹²¹

One point upon which Flaubert was very dogmatic in his theories of writing was the "principe d'impassibilite,"¹²² the conviction that an author had no right to insert or inject himself into his writings. To what extent he succeeded in living up to his own theories is a matter for debate, yet the fact remains that he always advocated complete objectivity in writing, and whatever of "himself" appears in his

¹²⁰ Cf. Francis Steegmuller, op.cit., p. 351, John Tarver, op.cit., p. xv, and M.R. Bennett, op.cit., p. 211.

¹²¹ Willa Cather, "A Letter from Willa Cather," and Willa Cather on Writing, p. 3-13.

¹²² Marianne Bonwit, Gustave Flaubert et le principe d'impassibilite, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1950, 263-419 p.

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works is the inevitable "tone" which any artist projects over his works, whether on paper or on canvas, no matter how much he may try to do otherwise. A work of art is the product of a man's "sweat and blood and tears;" it is humanly impossible for it to be produced without its reflecting in some way the artist behind it.

Mr. Edouard Maynial, in Jeunesse de Flaubert, states:

Si la mode romantique des épigraphes s'était maintenue jusqu'aux premiers temps du naturalisme, volontiers Flaubert eut choisi, pour mettre en tête de tout son oeuvre, ce précepte de la sagesse antique: "Cache ta vie;" l'impersonnalité de l'écrivain était pour lui plus d'un dogme; c'était l'essence même de son art. Et certes il se fût indigné si d'aventure quelque indiscret critique s'était avisé, de son vivant, de chercher ce qu'il avait pu mettre de lui-même dans son oeuvre. Cette impersonnalité est-elle aussi rigoureuse qu'il l'aurait voulu?...¹²³

Mr. Maynial answers his own question, by quoting one of the De Gourmont brothers, a friend of Flaubert:

Dès que l'oeuvre littéraire est pénétrée par le sentiment, c'est-à-dire par ce qu'il y a de plus personnel en nous, de plus irréductible, elle en prend, quoi que veuille l'auteur, le caractère même, et tous les efforts de Flaubert pour se retirer de ses livres n'ont pu faire qu'il n'apparaisse embusqué derrière chaque mot, chaque phrase, chaque épisode.¹²⁴

¹²³Edouard Maynial, op.cit., p. 9.

¹²⁴R. De Gourmont, "Promenades littéraires," IV-191, quoted in E. Maynial, op.cit., p. 7.

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Whether or not Flaubert succeeded in practicing what he advocated, his theories nevertheless contributed to the art of novel-writing, as Mr. Pelham Edgar remarked:

Flaubert proclaimed a serene independence from the world of his own creation. As an artist he must love it, as a man he was permitted to despise it. His contention was extravagant, but it has borne some fruit in the effort of the best succeeding novelists to refrain from personal comment, and to allow the book to operate directly on the mind of the reader. Flaubert was the first man to theorize on the subject and to make a self-conscious effort toward impassivity...¹²⁵

Miss Cather is one of these "best succeeding novelists" who wanted to make her story speak for itself, communicate itself directly to the reader without any interference on her part:

What I always want to do is to make the writing count for less and less and the people for more. In this new novel I'm trying to cut out all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality, in order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition, without any persuasion or explanation on my part.¹²⁶

Miss Marguerite Ann Hern, in discussing this detachment of Miss Cather's from her work, fears that in "gaining objectivity, she loses a warmly human atmosphere"¹²⁷ but

¹²⁵Pelham Edgar, op.cit., p. 75.76.

¹²⁶Latrobe Carroll, op.cit., p. 216.

¹²⁷Marguerite Ann Hern, "The Pioneer Spirit in the Novels of Willa Cather," unpublished Master's Thesis presented at Boston College, August, 1948, p.57.

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N. Elizabeth Monroe, in Novel and Society, feels that

Her method of characterization and of conducting the narrative resembles Turgenev's except that she withdraws completely from the story, while Turgenev allows himself the privilege of commenting. In spite of this her attitude is not aloof, because the story is moved by very deep sympathy for humble people. Her conception of character is sound, based as it is on a conception of man as a whole being and on a moving tenderness for his struggles and aspirations. She has the vision to read the eternal story of man in lives that would be passed over by other novelists, or used merely to explain the defect of economic or social systems.¹²⁸

Consequently, Miss Cather lost nothing in being objective; she pursued the attempt "to make the writing count for less and less and the people for more and more" and it was this which transformed her books from merely great works of "art" to great artistic records of human lives, struggles, and loves.

Estimates

It would seem to be more than a coincidence that these two writers, at first glance so different and so far apart, should have been given almost identical epithets, "The High Priest of Style" ¹²⁹ and "The High Priestess of Art."¹³⁰ That Art was their major concern, transcending all

¹²⁸N. Elizabeth Monroe, op.cit., p. 235, 236.

¹²⁹R. Shattuck, "Priest of Style" loc. cit.

¹³⁰Francis Wagenknecht, "High Priestess of Art," and J. Hinz, "A Lost Lady and the Professor's House," in the Virginia Quarterly Review, issue of January, 1953, p. 71.

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thought of fame or personal gain, has been sufficiently discussed. That their art was of the finest quality, the most consummate perfection, has been attested by critics of many countries. The fact that Flaubert has remained one of the "masters" in French literature and in the art of the novel for almost a hundred years testifies to his stature. Miss Cather's books have been translated into French, Russian, and almost all the Scandinavian and Slav languages, and her name appears in all the major anthologies of American prose literature.

In all discussions of either Gustave Flaubert or Willa Cather, regardless of the objections given to certain aspects of their works, whether moral (Flaubert) or from the point of view of form (W.Cather) by far the most numerous conclusions are words of praise similar to the following:

Flaubert is probably the greatest technical innovator that the novel has ever known. For no later novelist seems to have discovered any important technical device which cannot be found, at any rate in embryo, in Flaubert. Yet the more we study him, the more apparent it becomes... that there was a gap between art and life, that the extraordinarily subtle technical apparatus was not matched by any corresponding subtlety of experience.¹³¹

Flaubert has had an immense effect on the development of the art of fiction in France. The De Goncourts, Zola, and Daudet were his disciples, and there is hardly a considerable writer of modern fiction who has not looked to him as a master.¹³²

¹³¹ M. Turnell, op.cit., p. 190

¹³² John Drinkwater, op.cit., p. 603.

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In style of the less spontaneous and more studied kind, Flaubert has few if any superiors; in satirical contemplation of what is not the joy of living he has even fewer, perhaps none; in maintaining, in spite of his own realist rummaging of the "document", the absolute prerogative, and what is more the absolute duty of art to idealise and transcend, he stands alone among writers of recent days. With a happier temperament and milieu he might (it is not certain that he would) have done things even better; with what he had he did great things...¹³³

The difference in the epithets given to Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather may be significant. Flaubert was called the "High Priest of Style," Miss Cather the "High Priestess of Art." Flaubert was a perfectionist and a master of style, but due to the all-encompassing pessimism of the man, his work was usually cold, often bitter, lacked humaneness. Mr. Henry James thought that Flaubert "should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul. This would have floated him on a deeper tide; above all it would have calmed his nerves."¹³⁴

Willa Cather had the same concern for perfection of style that Flaubert had, but she also had something more, a certain warmth, a deeper understanding of human beings and of the true values of life, from having "listened at the chamber of the soul,"¹³⁵ which made her style more completely,

¹³³John Drinkwater, op.cit., p. 603;Saintsbury,p. 380.

¹³⁴Henry James, op.cit., p. 150.

¹³⁵Ibid.

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more authentically "Art" in the full sense of the word.

Mr. David Daiches gives his final estimate of Willa Cather with these words:

Her position among American novelists is unique; no other has brought to bear quite her kind of perception on the American scene. Yet the subject she handles most successfully and most characteristically-- the subtilizing of courage by vision and discrimination and the search for a culture that combines all three qualities -- is more than an American theme. It transcends national problems to illuminate one of the great questions about civilization. To put the matter briefly, Miss Cather's novels are civilized; and if we interpret that term too narrowly that is because we have not read Willa Cather carefully enough.¹³⁶

Finally, a complete picture of Willa Cather is given in this precis by Miss Helen Anne Lyons:

She is synonymous with perfected art, regularity of form, beauty of outline and symmetry of structure. Endowed with acute powers of perception, sharpened, stimulated and nourished by lively, accurate observation, heightened by kindly sympathy and human understanding, furthered by actual experience and colored by a vivid imagination, she has written novels especially significant in modern literature. Willa Cather stands apart from many of her contemporaries, both American and European, in subject-matter, characterization and style. She portrays life as she sees it, realistically but not sordidly. She has realized and recognized the many foibles and weaknesses of human nature, but does not dwell on them alone to the exclusion of the spiritual in man. Her clear, unflinching vision sees the ... panorama (of life)... like Arnold -- 'Who saw life steadily and saw it whole.'¹³⁷

¹³⁶David Daiches, Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, p. 189.

¹³⁷Helen Anne Lyons, op.cit., p. 1,2.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although no attempt was made in the preceding chapters to show a direct influence of Gustave Flaubert on Willa Cather, many of the facts presented have shown that definite resemblances and differences, parallels and contrasts do exist between the two authors.

Among the obvious differences between Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather are those seen in the discussions of their work habits, of their attitude towards religion, morality in writing, and the description of physical sensations.

It would seem, however, that basically there is one major contrasting factor in the works of these two authors, a factor which is a natural outcome of the outstanding traits of their respective personalities. That factor is their essential philosophy of life, a philosophy transmuted to the important themes of which they treated: life, death, morality, and consequently, human beings and their struggle for existence and expression in an unsympathetic world.

As has been mentioned before, the flame which kindled Gustave Flaubert's imaginative and creative faculties was a burning anger at the world in general, and at

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the ordinary man, the "bourgeois" in particular. It is this anger which was at the root of his pessimism, which removed all goodness, all redeeming quality from his books and from his characters, and which left an impression of disgust, an atmosphere of disillusionment, one might almost say a character of evil, or at least of sordid vulgarity in his works.

Willa Cather, on the other hand, in treating of the same basic issues as those of Flaubert, infused her characters with her own generous, warm, wholesome breath of hope, of confidence. Hers was a burning ardor, a perpetual restating of the ultimate glorious destiny of those who realize to the full their own potentialities. Even when she treated of evil, the atmosphere in which she moved and made her readers move was one of goodness, of the hope or the possibility for betterment, or at least for repentance and retribution.

Resemblances

Apart from this basic difference, however, many more resemblances between the two authors were noted. There were the resemblances in their youth and in their personal life: interest in acting and the theatre, in medicine; change from another career to that of writing; the adoption of Art

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as an ideal; the choice of celibacy, and the subordinating of all else to literature.

In their social life, both displayed great generosity, kindness, affection, faithfulness to their family and friends, a warm, eager personality which made them ~~very~~ attractive. On the other hand, neither could suffer any interference with their work, and neither had much patience with the "public" as a whole. This dualism in their character also manifested itself in their common dislike for a materialistic world which had no great interest in the arts, and a love for the past, for the ancients, and for the "classics."

From their dislike for their present surroundings was bred an innate pessimism and a preoccupation with death, an undisguised hatred for mediocrity in any form.

Both Miss Cather and Flaubert traveled extensively, and both found themes for a book in paintings: Flaubert from the Breughel painting of Saint-Antoine in Genoa, and Miss Cather from the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes on the life of Saint-Genevieve.

An apprenticeship, during which they imitated, the one Chateaubriand, the other Henry James, and after which each found the themes and technique proper to his or her genius, made of them relatively "late-writers" in the sense that no major work of theirs was published before they were

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past thirty-five years of age.

In their technical aspects, Flaubert and Miss Cather were masters in the art of¹¹ description and of characterization, one striking point of which was that they drew strong women with outstanding personalities, and relatively weak, colorless men. They were adept at finding the "mot juste", in presenting the truth as they saw it, in taking numberless pains to be properly documented, precise. They advocated strict economy in the choice of words and expressions, and were ruthless revisers of their own work.

From the point of view of presentation, neither encouraged "undue familiarity" with their characters, and both were adamant in their attempt to be as objective and impersonal in their writings as it is possible for any writer to be.

Both Miss Cather and Flaubert have been tentatively associated with the Realistic school of writing, but they were so individual and their works showed so many traits not in the "realistic" tradition that neither has ever been definitely classified; they have been universally recognized for their individual ability rather than for their association with any specific group.

An outstanding characteristic in Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather was their complete devotion to their art,

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and to the high standards which they had set for themselves, to the point where neither friend nor enemy, neither fame nor gain, could induce them to present to the public, work which they felt was not of the highest artistic quality. It may be because of this high seriousness of purpose that there was such a complete absence of humor in their writings, and regardless of how relatively "light" might be their subject, none of their books breathed of gaiety or of laughter.

Because of their complete devotion to their Art, and because of their extraordinary achievement in artistic expression, Flaubert and Willa Cather have been, apparently through coincidence, given similar epithets: "Priest of Style" and "High Priestess of Art," with the distinction made in the previous chapter, that because of her more fully rounded personality, Miss Cather gave to the world not merely perfection of style, but perfection of Art.

Conclusions

That there was basis for a comparison between Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather has been, it is hoped, sufficiently proved. The parallels outnumber the contrasts, in quantity as well as in quality. However, the preceding study can not be considered as conclusive, in the sense that the subject has been exhausted, since, in the process of

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research and presentation, many avenues were opened for further study not within the scope of this paper.

It might prove particularly interesting, among other topics, to extend the necessarily brief comparisons between Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Willa Cather's A Lost Lady, or My Mortal Enemy; or again, to make a more detailed study and analysis of the individual style of each writer.

Moreover, it is hoped that this paper may prove as a stimulus for further comparison and "rapprochements" between the European masters and American prose writers, who have so often been considered as outside the scope of the study of great literature, as a group apart, or again as young "upstart" theoreticians when compared with the "classics" of the Old World. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Willa Cather could not have been compared so favorably with Gustave Flaubert, and would not have been the great novelist she was, had she not had the natural genius to combine the French art of writing with the spontaneous, wholesome, "melting-pot" individuality of pioneering and artistic America.

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AN ABSTRACT OF

Willa Cather and Gustave Flaubert: Parallels and Contrasts

by Sister Louis du Sacre-Coeur, s.g.c.

As a result of the many references to Gustave Flaubert found in articles on Willa Cather, and of the questions raised as to the connection between these two, an attempt has been made in this work to show the similarities and the differences between these two authors of different background and training, Gustave Flaubert of the French nineteenth-century, and Willa Cather of the American twentieth-century.

Since this topic has never been treated before, it requires its own approach and treatment. The problem is stated in the Introduction, and the point is made that in a paper of this type, which may more properly belong to the field of comparative literature, some biographical data is essential to the point discussed.

Some of this data, concerning Willa Cather, in reference to France, is presented in Chapter One, to place the problem in its proper context. Chapters Two and Three are studies of the two authors, Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather, in preparation for Chapter Four, which brings the two authors together for comparison and contrast of their personal life, religion, social life, travels, dislike for their materialistic surroundings and love for the past, their pessimism and treatment of Death, their characterization, description,

themes, schools, art and theories, objectivity and subjectivity and estimates.

Chapter Five, which summarizes and gives the conclusion of the thesis, points out contrasts in work habits, in attitude towards religion, morality in writing, and the description of physical sensation, but especially in the tone of the respective works, a tone which is the outcome of the authors' essential philosophy of life, a philosophy transmuted to the important themes of which they treated: life, death, morality, and consequently, human beings and their struggle for existence and expression in an unsympathetic world. The essential contrast here is one of burning anger and hatred for humanity in Flaubert, and burning ardor, sympathy and understanding in Willa Cather.

More resemblances than contrasts were noted, however, and these are also summarized in Chapter Five: resemblances in youth and personal life, interest in acting and the theatre, in medicine, change from another career to that of writing, the adoption of Art as an ideal, the choice of celibacy, and the subordinating of all else to literature. Parallels are also found in the two authors' social life, in their pessimism and preoccupation with death, with their undisguised hatred for mediocrity in any form, their disgust with their contemporary world and love for the past. Both authors are found to have traveled extensively, to have had an apprenticeship, and to be relatively "late writers."

Both Gustave Flaubert and Willa Cather are masters in the art of description and of characterization, and both drew strong women and weak men. They are adept at finding the "mot juste", practice strict economy as much objectivity as possible. Both have been tentatively associated with the Realistic school of writing, but neither has ever been definitely classified, since their greatness resides in being individual, strictly "artists." Because of their complete devotion to their Art, and their extraordinary achievement in artistic expression, they have been called, respectively, "Priest of Style," and "High Priestess of Art."

An Annotated Bibliography notes the works studied in reference to this paper, and includes books, periodicals, and unpublished manuscripts.

Presented in 1957 to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa, in Ottawa, Canada, this thesis, submitted in the Department of English in view of obtaining a degree of Master of Arts, contains 131 pages.