

Willa Sibert Cather was an early twentieth century writer. She wrote about the qualities of courage, sensitivity, and perseverance. Most often, her novels and short stories took place in rural townships. She was born sometime in 1873, in her grandmother's house. She was named after an Aunt Willela who had died; however, she chose to believe that her name was derived from her grandparent's names. She was the first child of Charles Fectigue and Mary Cather. Willa was the oldest of the seven children.

In 1877, Willa and her family moved out of Virginia to Nebraska. The Cather family had been living in Virginia for four generations. When she was nine, her father bought a ranch near Red Cloud, Nebraska. Willa was excited with this change, because she was free to roam outdoors. Willa would often listen to old ladies, and hear of their immigration from Bosnia and Sweden. There were no schools near the ranch, so Willa studied at home. A neighbor taught her Latin, and Willa would practice English skills by reading the classics to her grandmother. When Willa was in her teens, the family moved out of the ranch and into the village, where she attended Red Cloud High School. She attended the University of Nebraska, and graduated in 1895. As a student she worked as a journalist, copy editor, critic, and fiction writer. When she graduated, she moved back east to Pennsylvania. It was here where she worked on a Pittsburgh newspaper named The Library. She also taught English in a high school. Willa published "The Dance at Chevalier's," and four other short stories under a pen name of Henry Nicklemann. Another major publication for her was in April 1900, when "Eric Hermannson's Soul," was published in Cosmopolitan magazines. In 1903, The April Twilights, a collection of poems was published. In the Spring of 1905, publisher's Melbourne and Phillips brought out the Troll Garden, a collection of short stories.

Willa then took time off from her writing. She took a month off to go home and visit her family in Nebraska. In 1907, Willa Cather sent Sara Jewett a letter that contained a story. This story would later appear in the April issue of Harper's. The story was entitled, "The Treasure of Car Island." It was a story of a man who comes home after an absence of 12 years, and the emotions and feelings he deals with upon returning home. Willa also continued to publish stories in McClure's magazine. In 1908 she became the magazine's managing editor. However, she resigned in 1912, because editing left her little free time for creative writing. Consequently, she resigned to devote her full attention to writing stories.

Willa also wrote other novels such as: Alexander's Bridge in 1912, O Pioneers in 1913, The Song of the Lark in 1915, and My Antonia in 1918. Willa was thought of as a "chronicler of the pioneer American West." The Song of The Lark discusses the story of a singer and their rise to success. Her themes are focused on the drama of the immigrant in a new land, views of personal interaction with artwork, and the rise of civilizations in history. She never married; however, she lived with friend and companion Edith Lewis for many years. She later published other collections of short stories. These works helped her popularity as well, works such as, "Youth of the Bright Medusa," and, "Obscure Destinies." It was these stories that helped her win awards. In 1923, Willa won the Academy's Howells Medal and a Pulitzer Prize. Willa received the Pulitzer Prize for One of Ours, a story of a young man who is repressed by the plains and describes his need for freedom. In May of 1944, she won the Institute and Academy's award.

Willa Cather was influenced and loved works such as: The Count of Monte Cristo (Dumas), The Prisoner of Zenda (Hope), and Trilbus by George du Marier. On April 24, 1947, Willa died of a cerebral hemorrhage in her apartment in Park Avenue, however, her works still live on in the short stories and novels that she wrote. Willa described her writing as clean, meticulous, and she called it "demeuble," meaning unfurnished. Willa has achieved a reputation as a consummate artist who probed deeply into universal realities.

