

ABSTRACT

WRITING THE LAND: THE GEOCENTRIC WORLD OF WILLA CATHER

This study will examine Willa Cather's portrayal of the relationship between the human characters and the landscapes in four of her novels. I discuss how she imbues her landscapes with the agency of character because they play an inherent and powerful part of the story. Cather's use of language provides the reader with an almost visceral experience of the places she invokes, whether they are the high deserts of the American Southwest or the vast prairies of Nebraska. As a central theme, this study explores the challenge Cather's works pose to Western philosophic thought that insists upon an inherent separation between humanity and nature. Criticized by her literary contemporaries for her Romantic sensitivities as being old-fashioned, Cather's fiction was in a sense ahead of its time in that her works seek to establish both an ecological and a moral basis for respecting the land. From reading Willa Cather, we begin to understand that how we treat the land reflects how we treat one another.

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