Abstract
Re-viewing Willa Cather's Novels

Re-vision would imply, after Adrienne Rich, "the act of looking back and seeing with fresh eyes". In a similar vein the focus of this dissertation is to "re-view Willa Cather's novels" from the perspective of gender and sexuality.

Willa Cather (1873-1947), a noted American novelist, achieved critical acclaim with the publication of novels dealing with the lives of strong and independent farm women and artists based in the Nebraskan Prairie region.

Though her novels dealing with immigrant settlers in the Prairie region in Nebraska present men and women, it is noticed that she (Cather) avoids writing of the great family romance of courtship, marriage and maternity. So in this avoidance of the narrative of "compulsory heterosexuality" feminist discourse located an incipient lesbian alternative. Feminist critics like Sharon O'Brien, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick later appropriated her as a lesbian writer. They forwarded the view that in her historical context lesbian and gay love was 'brutally suppressed' so Cather had to use covert methods to present her sexual 'alterity'.

This study took into account her avoidance of normative heterosexuality but in her presentation of the androgynised women and effete men did not find the presence of an alternative sexuality. What my study concluded was that Cather was not only avoiding heterosexuality but all sexuality per se. This is borne out by the many textual evidences of sex and violence that are indissolubly linked together and the way erotica is banished from the pages of her novels. All the protagonists are made to channelise the erotic instinct into something 'greater'—love for land, art or spirituality. Sexuality whether hetero/homo or self-erota is unambiguously linked to 'ruin', death and destruction.

Cather through her interviews, speeches, critical essays and reminiscences has foregrounded the importance of memory and autobiography in the creation of her fictional world. So in this avoidance of sexuality, in this 'repression' of the erotic, one can read an undercurrent of the past which may have had a significant impact on Cather which prompted her to create her asexual world where all can be 'safe'.