

# Challenge, Despair, and Salvation

## — The Meaning of Tom Outland's Story —

Shunji Tsunoda

Key Words: salvation, despair, religion, art, Indian Civilization

One of the reasons why *The Professor's House* is such a controversial book among Willa Cather's novels is that it sets the protagonist, the Professor St. Peter, as a person whose state of mind is mysterious and recondite to interpret. Tom Outland is another reason. He dies almost a decade before the story opens but controls the lives and fortunes and even personalities of all the characters. *The Professor's House* is not merely the Professor's story but, as Daiches says, "it is also Tom Outland's story,"<sup>1)</sup> because all characters are "haunted by the memory of Tom Outland."<sup>2)</sup> For almost two decades, Tom occupies the central part of the Professor's mind. In this paper we will focus our attention on Tom Outland "about whom the novel is built," and through whom is shown the author's fundamental principle concerning art, religion and science.

Tom Outland makes two discoveries of entirely different category in his short life. The first one is the relics of Indian civilization in the Blue Mesa in the south-west of New Mexico<sup>3)</sup>: he acts like a historian or an archeologist. Within ten years after that, he discovers the principle of "Outland vacuum" that is to revolutionize aviation; he acts as a scientist. Examining in detail these two different sides of one person, historical and scientific, gives us the clue to the interpretation of Tom Outland.

*The Professor's House* consists of three parts, namely, Book I: "The Family", Book II: "Tom Outland's Story", Book III: "The Professor". Among the three, Book II: "Tom Outland's Story", which covers one-fourth of the novel, has caused great controversy in critics. This is a first-person narrative by Tom Outland himself, a kind of a story-within-a-story that depicts an event which happened almost two decades earlier than the age when the plot of the *The Professor's House* itself concerning the Professor and his family is going on. Therefore, so far as the Professor and his family are concerned, it has no relation to the story of Book I and Book III. However, it has a vital meaning in the interpretation of the whole novel.

---

1) David Daiches, *Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), p. 92

2) John J. Murphy, *Critical Essays on Willa Cather* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984), p. 91

3) According to Willa Cather's notion, New Mexico in the Southwest is part of "the West", as is generally considered. In this paper "the West" includes the Southwest, as a matter of course. Note the following remark by her. "To me the real West begins with the Missouri. Colorado, Nebraska, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada do not seem like separate states to me, but are linked together in my mind like one big country."

This unusual insertion of Tom Outland's Story has been criticized by such critics as Alfred Kazin, who, even though he admits the value of the novel, said :

... the violence which she broke the book ... was a technical mistake that has damned the book.<sup>4)</sup>

On the other hand, other critics like Rene Rapin give the opposite, favorable, viewpoint :

... while seemingly breaking the structural unity of the book, in fact strengthened it.<sup>5)</sup>

As is well known, this seemingly unbalanced structure is explained by the author herself, though this explanation was made many years after the publication of the novel. She says she tried an experiment of inserting the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*, and that by getting the idea from a Dutch painting, she wanted to open a square window through which one can see the blue sea with a light wind :

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things ; Ameican proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies — until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour.<sup>6)</sup>

If Tom Outland's Story had been only an adventure story as it appears at a first glance, major critics would have agreed that it was a "faulty kind of structure." But it is not. Our purpose is that, illustrating how firm an attitude she assumes toward such essentials as art, religion and science, we look into the reason why Willa Cather interlaid "Tom Outland's Story" into *The Professor's House* even though there might be a danger of "breaking the structural unity." In doing this we will show Tom Outland's Story is truly "a square window, open" in a stuffy room.

Book II : "Tom Outland's Story" is the story Tom narrates to the Professor about the unusual experience he had in New Mexico a year before he appears to his house for the first time. As Willa Cather remarked in *On Writing*, the story is based on a real story she heard from a brother of a man who discovered the ancient Indian relics on the cliff of the Mesa Verdu (the Blue Mesa).<sup>7)</sup> But as a matter of course "the real story" is dramatized according to her own imagination for expressing her bent to art, history and religion. Now that nearly a decade has

---

4) James Schroeter (ed.), *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (Ithaca, New York : Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 168

5) Rene Rapin, *Willa Cather* (New York : Robert M. McBride & Company), p. 76

6) Willa Cather, *On Writing* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949), p. 31

passed since Tom was killed in the war, Tom Outland's Story is supposed to have happened almost two decades before the present time (in the middle of 1920s) in which Book I and Book III are situated. It is interlaid in the scene where the Professor, who is in dejection with the gradual domination of the materialistic world that has caused spiritual deterioration to his family, gets a transient repose after his family left for Europe for a vacation. He indulges himself in reminiscence of the past : That means the readers listen to Tom's narration reflected on the Professor's mind.

Quoting the protagonist's words, James Woodress calls Tom Outland's Story "a story of youthful idealism and defeat." Indeed, Tom Outland goes through both the fulfillment and frustration of his challenge, and is almost irrecoverably defeated. However, the central theme of Tom Outland's Story is, as a matter of fact, not Tom Outland's defeat but his salvation, as we will see in this paper. Here we will survey the course of stories that proceeds from his challenge for the unknown and unconquered, his achievement, his frustration and despair, and to his final salvation. In that process we will see that, though the Professor calls it "a story of youthful defeat," what Willa Cather had in mind was Tom Outland's salvation from despair.

Before writing *The Professor's House* Willa Cather had written a series of novels which are generally called "Frontier Novels." Tom Outland's Story can be regarded to be part of them. Tom is a character of typical pioneer background. Besides Tom and Rodney Blake, who is Tom's friend that excavates the Indian relics together, almost all the characters who appear in Tom Outland's Story have the characteristics of typical pioneers of the West. A foreman of the ranch Tom and Blake are working for is kind enough to sell them horses at a very reasonable price, showing great interest in Tom's plan of excavation. A livery man does everything they needed "at a bottom price." Even innocent, old Henry, who used to be alcoholic and living like a beggar, asks nothing better than to "share their fortunes" in cooperating the excavation. They all reflect Willa Cather's idealized notion of the Western pioneers. They are disinterested and impractical, which traits are no longer seen in the money-oriented society where the Professor, as well as the author, is living.

They aren't trained by success to a sort of systematic selfishness. (181)<sup>8)</sup>

Among these men Rodney Blake is the person who embodies the romanticized image of the man of the West. He is probably more heroic and more sympathetic to readers than Tom Outland. He is, as he says himself, "no hog of money," and is "the sort of fellow who can do anything for somebody else and nothing for himself." His indifference to money is emphasized

---

7) Actually Mesa Verdu is located in Colorado.

8) Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (Kyoto : Rinsen Book Company, 1973), p.185. This edition was reprinted from the original type of the Riverside Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The page references in the parentheses throughout are to this edition.

in the scene where the golds earned by a poker game fall out of his pockets but he, being drunk, doesn't care at all. Tom's indifference to money is also stressed by the author in the same scene where he asks only for breakfast in return for picking up all the golds, refusing Blake's offer of "going halves." With this as a momentum Tom Outland who used to be working for a railroad, becomes close friends with Rodney Blake, a fire man. When Tom, an orphan, catches pneumonia they both quit the railroad for Tom's recuperation and take up a job as a cowboy. At the winter camp where they graze, Tom and Blake and old Henry, the cook, live in a kind of Utopia. It is "the sort of place a man would like to stay in forever," Tom says. Actually it appears to be unrealistic to readers that the three men, namely, teen-age boy, a man of late twenties and an old man, live together and make "a happy family" in a cabin which is so remote and isolated from human society. This seemingly curious situation will be accounted for when we see Willa Cather's well-known remark about human relationship. It shows how strong a doubt she harbored for a man-and-wife relationship.

... In those relationships of loving husband and wife, affectionate sisters, children and grandmother, there are innumerable shades of sweetness and anguish which make up the pattern of our lives day by day. . .<sup>9)</sup>

For Willa Cather these three men's living together in a cabin is considered to be one type of ideal relationship because there is no woman in this camp and "no question of money" between them. Willa Cather had such a bias to the relationship between man and woman. In this connection we are reminded of one scene where the Professor, depressed in the chaotic circumstances in his family, says to his wife to whom he feels increasing alienation. He refers to Euripides :

... When he was an old man, he went and lived in a cave by the sea, and it was thought queer at the time. I wonder whether it was because he had observed woman so closely all his life. (152)

Willa Cather believed friendship is one type of the ideal human relations. In *The Professor's House* she freely and frankly expresses her idea though it sometimes seems lacking in reality.

Now, Tom Outland's Story belongs to the category of the author's "Frontier Novels." Tom and Blake are the men of the pioneer background, and like other traditional pioneer heroes they have a thing to challenge, an object to struggle at. Tom Outland's challenge is the huge, solid, apparently inaccessible Blue Mesa which overhangs on their winter camp "like the base of monument" all the way round.

---

9) Willa Cather, *On Writing* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949), pp. 109-110

The mesa was our only neighbor, and the closer we got to it, the more tantalizing it was.  
(188)

Tom succeeds in getting into this “tantalizing” mesa one day and discovers the ancient Indian relics which they call Cliff City. Her description of the Blue Mesa is filled with beauty, serenity, sublimity and awe, as T. K Whipple says :

I know nothing that surpasses the account of Blue Mesa.<sup>10)</sup>

After the discovery, Tom and Blake began excavation of the Cliff City that had been built and inhabited many centuries before Columbus landed the New World. Digging up innumerable pieces of antique articles, imagining how those ancient people had artistic and religious aspiration, Tom increasingly feels wonder and admiration for the cliff dwellers who had attained such a higher level of civilization. On many of the artifacts there are decorations and geometrical patterns, showing they had natural tendency to art. This is depicted by Father Duchene who is practically Tom's preceptor in intellectual field :

I am inclined to think that your tribe were a superior people. There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter. (217)

These passages remind us of the passages in *On Writing* in which she maintained her idea about art, answering back to the criticism of escapism :

Hundred of years ago, before European civilization had touched this continent, the Indian women in the old rockperched pueblos of the Southwest were painting geometrical patterns on the jars. The major arts . . . have a pedigree of their own. . . They sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man.<sup>11)</sup>

One important thing is Tom's emphasis on how well both their dwellings and lives were fitted to the whole environment :

. . . the really splendid thing about our city, the thing that made it delightful to work there, and must have made it delightful to live there, was the setting. (210)

The author thus stresses the environmental harmony of the Cliff City, which shows the strong sarcasm to Louie and Rosamond's “Norwegian manor house” on the lake of Michigan or the

---

10) James Schroeter (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 45

11) Willa Cather, *On Writing*, p. 19

apartments of the Washingtonians.

But what is the central theme, what is the author's point, in Tom Outland's Story?

The theme is gradually revealed when Tom goes up to Washington D. C. to ask for some specialists to be sent to the mesa. Washingtonians don't show any interest in the "dead" Indians' relics. During Tom's absence, Rodney Blake, knowing Tom's effort in Washington was in vain, sells out all the excavated objects to a German collector by a sizable sum by their standard. Rodney Blake, who does "nothing for himself," puts all the money into a saving account in Tom's name for him to go to college. Tom denounces Blake in such rage that they break apart forever: In their dispute, however, Blake's words are to the point, at least to the readers:

"Motives don't count, eh?" (245)

To readers, motives do count. Even so, Blake's reasonable refutation never melts Tom's heart. His answer to Blake is, seemingly, never convincing enough.

"If it was my money you'd lost gambling, or my girl you'd made free with, we could fight it out, and maybe be friends again. But this is different." (245)

In spite of feeling intense qualms, Tom is unable to detain him walking out of the mesa. The next passage is important because it manifests the essential part of his value judgment.

There was an ache in my arms to reach out and detain him, but there was something else that made me absolutely powerless to do so. (246)

Why does the author let Tom behave in such an uncompromising and almost cruel manner? Blake is a romantic hero, characteristic of a traditional image of a Western pioneer. As McFarland points out, Roddy's assumptions "reflect the assumptions of a society as a whole."<sup>12</sup> For him Indian relics is a gold mine. Tom sets about the excavation out of his adventurous spirit at first, and also out of his interests and curiosity for the American past. Doubtlessly, he thought it his duty to dig up this ancient cliff dwellings and let American people know about their own history that has no relation with Europe. In the process of digging, however, his curiosity had changed to his aspiration to art and history. He is struck with admiration for these remarkable people who lived in this magnificent environment. Only when he has lost the excavations, he fully realizes how he cared about them more than anything else in the world. He fails in his mission of preserving them that were handed on "through the ages by a miracle." He is aware of the eternal, sheer value of art for the first time. The following, rather

---

12) Dorothy Tuck McFarland, *Willa Cather* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), p. 81

unrealistic remark comes from his belief in that :

I'd as soon have sold my own grandmother as Mother Eve—I'd have sold any living woman first. (243)

Blake's viewpoint, on the other hand, is that of a gold miner, which is quite natural in those days when very few people in the West were aware of the supremacy of art. He is not a materialist, of course, but rather "an unsuspecting victim of his society's false values."<sup>13)</sup> According to him, everything would come to money in the end. To this, Tom refutes :

"...There never was any question of money with me, where this mesa and its people were concerned ... ." (243)

When money is involved, all values come to nothing. It should be kept in mind that one of the themes of *The Professor's House* is its sharp criticism of materialism.

In this connection we should remember the same words the Professor says to Rosamond in Book I. The scene appears in a very early stage, but, actually, it is supposed to happen two decades after the events in *Tom Outland's Story*. Rosamond, the Professor's daughter who is married to Louie Marsellus, comes to offer to her father some money made by commercializing the principle of Outland vacuum which had been bequeathed to her by Tom. He refuses it saying :

"There can be no question of money between me and Tom Out land. ... It would somehow damage my recollections of him, would make that episode in my life commonplace like everything else. And that would be a great loss to me ... ." (57)

Just as the Professor, Tom never compromises with money being involved in the values which he believes are essential. And this is the reason why Tom could not show mercy for what Blake had done. At this stage, it seems his despair can never been redressed by any means.

His attachment to the relics partly comes from the fact that he realized they had had the ancient civilization of their own in the New World. Through the former frontier novels, the author's interest rested on "a successful graft of her native experience on to the roots and trunk of European culture," as James Woodress so aptly says.<sup>14)</sup> The West had been described to be a chaotic place where the people of European background were struggling to establish order. But Willa Cather, through *Tom Outland*, turned her eyes to their own past to which very few Americans had given attention.

---

13) David Stouk, *Willa Cather's Imagination* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 105

14) Bernice Slote & Virginia Faulkner (ed.), *The Art of Willa Cather* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 47

The theme of the New World vs. the Old World is symbolized in the title of the eight-volume work the Professor is supposed to have written: "The Spanish Adventurers in North America." Willa Cather for the first time dealt with the old Indian civilization as her material of art and showed the readers that they have their own tradition that is totally American. It is imaginable what a great sensation the discovery was to Tom Outland, a cowboy of imagination and aspiration. The Southwest is so far from the East Coast and from Europe where there were civilization. This is one reason for Tom's rage against Blake: Blake sold the excavations to the person from Europe where there are history and, therefore, there are "plenty of relics."

"... relics weren't mine to sell—nor yours! They belong to this country, to the State, and to all people. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own..." (241)

The author's poignant, obstinate description of the officials and directors in Washington is due to the fact that, besides their ineffectiveness and irresponsibility, their interest is always directed to Europe. The people in Washington, including scientists, ambassadors and the Director of the Smithsonian Institute whom Tom wanted to see, are the kind of people who are more interested in Shoreham<sup>15)</sup> pottery than the Indian potteries Tom has brought from New Mexico. This Washington scene, covering as many as ten pages of Tom Outland's Story, is full of satirical tone and it appears totally unfit to the impressionable description about Blue Mesa.

There are two reasons why Willa Cather depicted the Washington scene in such a persistent, acrimonious manner. One reason is, as we have seen, her criticism of the people who shows no interest in the relics of their own country while they care so much about the things "that came from Crete or Egypt." (144) That is to say, their indifference is partly responsible for the loss of the excavations.

Another, more important reason is that the author contrasts the lives of the Washingtonians with those of the Mesa. As to the Washingtonians working at offices, Tom says:

They seemed to me like people in slavery, who ought to be free. (232)

When he leaves the city realizing his stay proved totally fruitless, he uses the word "free" again.

I wanted nothing but to get back to the mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings. (235)

Utterly disillusioned he returns home to Blue Mesa yearning for the "free air" which is plenty

---

15) Shoreham is supposed to be the name of a hotel in Washington.



here, only to find the bitter, fatal reality that all his excavations are gone. He loses both his excavations and his irreplaceable friend. He is in total desolation.

Then, what was the greatest intention with which she decided to insert the Book II : "Tom Outland's Story" into *The Professor's House* ? To answer this question is the main object of this paper.

In *On Writing* published ten years after *The Professor's House*, she still stands firm for her own idea about art and religion.

Religion and art spring from the same root and are close kin.<sup>16)</sup>

The greatest motif she intended in Tom Outland's Story is to illustrate her belief in the superiority of art and religion which, as she insists, "have given men the only happiness he has ever had."

The Professor calls it "a story of youthful defeat," but as a matter of fact Willa Cather's intention in Tom Outland' Story is not in his defeat but in his salvation, as is said before.

Incidentally, as J. Woodress points out, the story of Tom Outland had been written before she conceived the rest of the novel and it is thinkable that she was going to write Tom Outland's Story as an independent short story. And also, in an interview in 1925 when she was writing *The Professor's House*, she said :

There is little of the West in *The Professor's House*, the book I am working on now.<sup>17)</sup>

But there is much of the west. Seeing that all of the Book II is situated mainly in new Mexico, and seeing how great a part the South-west occupies in the Professor's mind, the significance of the West is undeniable. Presumably, there was certain period of time before she thought of inserting Book II into the novel of the Professor St. Peter, which is said to be "the most personal" of her novels, and of which she had already set about writing.

Curiously enough, Tom Outland, who was in despair by losing both the excavations and friendship, feels supreme happiness on the Blue Mesa on that same night. The mesa had possessed the power. The author's description is centralized in that.

Her depiction of the Blue Mesa suggests that Tom intuitionally felt a kind of divinity to this place. He goes into the mesa for the first time in hundreds of years of human history, and happens to see a city of stone, asleep in a great cavern in the face of the cliff, a thousand feet up above him :

Such silence and stillness and repose—immortal repose. That village sat looking down into

---

16) Willa Cather, *On Writing*, p. 27

17) L. Brent. Bohlke (ed.) *Willa Cather in Person* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 76

the canyon with the calmness of eternity. The falling snow-flakes, sprinkling the piñons, gave it a kind of solemnity. (198-199)

Such words as “immortal repose,” “the calmness of eternity,” “special kind of solemnity” suggest that the place is not merely a historical relic but is a serene, consecrated place. And the author’s intention of correlating religion with art is shown in the word “sculpture.” During the process of digging up, Tom or the author often tells readers in many ways how great an aspiration the cliff dwellers had to religion and art. The mountain sheep, with its trumpet horns, have “something noble about them” and “look like a priest.” They name a dried human body “Mother Eve.” They find many religious implements and buried wall of an amphitheater where religious exercises were held. Father Duchene conveys the authors conjecture :

I see them here, isolated . . . working out their destiny, making their mesa more and more worthy to be a home for man, purifying life by religious ceremonies and observances. . . (218)

The author tells us her definition of happiness at two places of *The Professor’s House*. In a very early stage of Book I : “The Professor”, there is a well known scene where we can peep into the Professor’s class. The Professor, namely Willa Cather herself, expresses his idea about art and religion and science. Practically it is about a decade after he heard the Tom’s story from Tom himself, that he gives this lecture in Book I . He denies the importance of science as a phase of human development and then he resumes :

“ . . . And that’s what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their little individual lives. It makes us happy to surround our creature needs and bodily instincts with as much pomp and circumstance as possible. Art and religion (they are the same thing, in the end, of course) have given men the only happiness he has ever had.

“ . . . When [Moses] wanted to make a population of slaves into an independent people in the shortest possible time, he invented elaborate ceremonies to give them a feeling of dignity and purpose. Every act had some imaginative end . . .” (67)

When we compare the Professor’s idea shown in this lecture with the lives of the cliff dwellers, we are soon aware that theirs were the very lives that embodied what he insists on here. They had consecrated the place, just as Moses did, many centuries before Tom and Blake come to the mesa. The following remark by Father Duchene sums up Willa Cather’s motif in Tom Outland’s Story.

“ . . . Like you [Tom], I feel a reverence for this place. Wherever humanity has made that hardest of all starts and lifted itself out of mere brutality, is a sacred spot. Your people

were cut off here . . .with no incentive but some natural yearning for order and security. They built themselves into this mesa and humanized it.” (219)

For Tom, the mesa was at first a “tantalizing” thing to be challenged, and the excavation was done through his adventurous spirit and from his interest in history, to say the least. However when he has become conscious of the religious atmosphere of this place and imagined how sacred and harmonious life they must have led, the Blue Mesa has become, what Jim Burden called in *My Antonia*, “something entire and great” which far transcends human existence and into which he should “be dissolved,” as cliff dwellers were. He is entirely alone, feeling “being on the mesa.” The arc of sky over the canyon is silvery blue, “with its pale yellow moon,” and stars shivers into it, “like crystals dropped into perfectly clear water.” It is at this celestial moment that “something” happens in him that endows him supreme bliss. Tom articulates as follows :

For me the mesa was no longer an adventure but religious emotion. (249)

This is the crucial passage which illustrates the key point of this paper that Tom Outland's Story is not “a story of youthful defeat” but actually a story of salvation and rebirth. He finds himself “built” into the mesa just as the cliff dwellers “built themselves into this mesa.”

Something happened in me that made it possible for me to coordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. . . I had my happiness unalloyed. (249)

The mesa is the eternal, absolute, and divine. This is really “something entire”. It becomes the salvation of Tom Outland, who was once thrown into despair. He says he never went up to the Eagle's Nest<sup>18)</sup> to get his diary he had sealed in, in which he had noted down the details of each day's work among the ruins.

I didn't feel the need of the record. It would have been going backward. . . Perhaps I was afraid that I would lose the whole in the parts. (250)

Being immersed in the sanctity of the Blue Mesa, feeling what he called “filial piety,” he gets a kind of religious exultation.

The author, who believes in the supremacy of art and religion, believed that these two are detached from materialistic desire of man. As is repeatedly said, the central theme of Tom Outland's Story is the salvation of Tom Outland who is inspired by “religious emotion” on the

---

18) Eagle's Nest is a cave Tom found and named in the Mesa.

Blue Mesa, "in a world above the world," consecrated by the people who had religious and artistic aspiration. That is the greatest reason for the fact that Willa Cather interposed Tom Outland's Story in *The Professor's House*.

Now, before concluding this paper, we should discuss what Tom Outland meant to the Professor St. Peter, the protagonist. What were the greatest effects "Tom Outland" had on the Professor?

David Daiches was completely right when he said :

... in a sense the characters are all judged by their relation to the dead Tom Outland.<sup>19)</sup>

As is well known Willa Cather once said that *The Professor's House* is "the only book she tried to be ironic." There are a variety of ironical plots and episodes underlying in this novel, among which the major irony is concerned with Tom Outland. He goes into scientific world of which, ironically, the professor doesn't think much. His second discovery, a scientific one, becomes the source of the disruption of the Professor's family whom Tom loved. Commercialized by Louie Marsellus, the patent for "Outland vacuum" produces huge fortune and it devastates the Professor's family relationship. Having seen the chaotic circumstances of his family and the people around him who have become a victim of money worship, the Professor feels the situation "insupportable, as the boat on which he is imprisoned seems to a sea-sick man."

Curiously enough Will Cather tells us so little about how Tom spent the days as a scientist. Obviously she avoids to tell about another Tom Outland, the scientist. She could not write, or she had not found the persuasive ground for the fact that Tom, who apparently has tendency to art and history, has gone into the world of science which she doesn't respect much. The only imaginable reason, at any rate, is that she needed a character who leaves some scientific legacy which produces money.

As is repeatedly said, Tom Outland appears only in the Professor's recollections. But even after he enters the university to major in science or even after he becomes a scientist, the recollection of Tom, or the author's description of him, is limited to the Tom Outland as a historian. The readers cannot see him, who is supposed to have been a rising scientist, except as a romantic hero of the West filled with historical aspiration. The Professor and Tom travel to New Mexico together, go up to the Mesa together, cross the river with ancient Spanish documents in their hands together. They even read Lucretius in the night together.

Tom is a genius of science, for, though it seems a little unrealistic, a boy who "never had any mathematics or science" becomes a scientist making an epoch-making discovery in several years. He must have been assiduous in his scientific research. But Tom's effect on the Professor is wholly that of a historically imaginative young men. Among the two kinds of

---

19) David Daiches, *op. cit.*, p. 92

aptitudes, historical and scientific, Willa Cather says nothing as to his scientific aptitude, the Professor shows no interest in it. In that classroom scene in Book I, the Professor articulates his doubt as to the role of science on human life :

“... I don't myself think much of science as a phase of human development. It has given us a lot of ingenious toys... Science hasn't given us any new amazement, except of the superficial kind we get from witnessing dexterity and sleight-of-hand. It hasn't given us any richer pleasures, as the Renaissance did...” (62)

“The only remarkable young man” the Professor have seen in his life, becomes a scientist. But the only thing we are told is the results ; he made a discovery that is to revolutionize aviation, and, after his death, it brought about a ruinous situation to the family. Ten years after that the story opens.

After his wife is gone to Europe with Rosamond and Louie, the Professor enjoys a temporary repose. He finds a delightful work of annotating Tom's diary for publication. Tom must have left huge amount of documents and notebooks on his research, which might be far more important to the world than a notebook about the Blue Mesa. But he has no interest in them. Actually they are kept in Louie's “Outland,”<sup>20)</sup> the place of a man symbolizing the money-oriented world. For the Professor the only book that has any value is the one Tom left as a discoverer of Cliff City.

It is possible to say that she could not acknowledge the significance of science as a means of elucidating the truth of the whole creation, or, to say the least, it might be that she mixed up science with technology or engineering. One drawback of the novel is that she could not, or avoided to, tell what the Professor thought of Tom Outland as a scientist.

Then, what was the greatest effect Tom had on the Professor ? The Professor thinks the last four volumes of “The Spanish Adventurers in North America” have become more “inevitable” than the earlier ones because of Tom Outland, “a boy with imagination.” That is, Tom Outland is the source of the Professor's creativity.

This is symbolized in the following scene where, two years after graduation from college, he and the Professor go to the Southwest, to the Outland country, with a copy of the manuscript of Fray Garces who is supposed to be one of the Professor's Spanish Adventurers. Having returned to the Southwest where he belonged, Tom plays the role which no one but he can do :

Tom could take a sentence from Garces' diary and find the exact spot at which the missionary crossed the Rio Colorado on a certain Sunday in 1775. Given one pueblo, he could always find the route by which the priest had reached the next. (257)

---

20) “Outland” here is Louie's gorgeous house he named himself.

Louie Marsellus calls the Spanish adventurers in the Professor's book as "Your sons, your splendid Spanish Adventurer sons." Thus, it is imaginable that the Professor, when he travels around the Southwest with Tom, identifies him with his Spanish Adventurers.

One of the greatest themes through the "Frontier Novels" is "the happy marriage of the Old World with the New."<sup>21</sup> The very title of "the Spanish Adventurers in North America," to which the Professor is supposed to have devoted fifteen years, suggests that no doubt this book is centralized in the fusing of Europe and America, as Willa Cather had tried to do.

In writing the volumes, he had realized that his disadvantage is "the lack of association" coming from the fact that he has not spent his youth in "the great dazzling South-west country." Just then, a boy appears to his house "with imagination, with the training and insight resulting from a very curious experience." The greatest contribution Tom had to him is that he helped fulfill the Professor's "dazzling beautiful, utterly impossible" dream of integrating the Old World and the New. By the encounter with Tom Outland, the Professor, to put in Virginia Faulkner's words, could make "a successful graft" of his "native experience on to the roots and trunk of European culture." The Professor regrets "to this day" that he could not get the vacation in Paris with Tom because of war. He wanted to visit certain spots with him. But this feeling suggests that, interestingly enough, Tom Outland, a young man coming from the far American West, was the very person who held the key to the difficult task of linking America to Europe against which the Professor had so long measured himself.

Tom Outland discovers two things before he dies at the age of thirty, one is historical and another scientific. But scientific discovery brought nothing but the family disintegration. This is definitely the way Willa Cather delineates him. In her notion, the historical discovery is one of eternity, aesthetic and religious. It has the supreme value. Through the creation of Tom Outland she thus makes clear her attitude about art, religion and science.

---

21) Bernice Slote & Virginia Faulkner (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 47