

# "The Paradox of Success" and the Division of Self in *Alexander's Bridge*: An Analysis from the Viewpoint of Time

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## SYNOPSIS

*Alexander's Bridge* (1912) is Willa Cather's first novel and a drama of consciousness. The protagonist is Bartley Alexander, a 43 year-old great bridge builder, and he is a prototype of Cather's pioneers. The story depicts Alexander's "paradox of success" and the division of his self, and pursues his inner conflicts of Eros [the life instinct] and Thanatos [the death instinct] until his tragic end. From the analysis of Sigmund Freud's "Theory of Instincts," we can say that Eros urges man toward *flowing time*, while Thanatos makes him turn back to *past time*. The purpose of this paper is to consider the "paradox of success" and the division of self in *Alexander's Bridge* from the viewpoint of time.

All of Cather's pioneers are Eros-characters who have great dreams to accomplish in their lives and who positively affirm time as the medium of creation. In other words, Cather's pioneers are 'Faustian people' possessed with the dream of success. To be specific, Alexander is originally what Henri Bergson calls "a man of *impulse*," or an extreme "man of action," who "live[s] only in the present," because of his strong Eros-force. However, it is not until Alexander is connected with his dream and his wife Winifred that he becomes a pioneer, that is, the "Faustian man" who regards time as the medium of creation and "lives in and for the moment" of *flowing time*. The pioneer Alexander can be said to be the self-loving Eros-character and Faustian "man of action." However, after having realized his dream, Alexander radically changes and becomes what Bergson calls "a *dreamer*" who "lives in the past," and he is divided into two selves: the middle-aged self and the "young self." Generally speaking, this is characteristic of Cather's pioneers.

My contention is: (1) Alexander's "paradox of success" is the paradox of time; (2) This "paradox of success" is the source of Alexander's divided self; (3) Alexander's "paradox of success" and the division of his self are closely linked with the qualities of Cather and her fiction, for he is Cather's alter ego.

First of all, because the pioneer Alexander is the Faustian "man of action" who realizes his long-desired dream of success by "work[ing] like the devil," his disillusionment with success leads to his disappointment and denial toward time which he has positively affirmed. This ironic evaluation toward time is his "paradox of success." Therefore, we can regard Alexander's "paradox of success" as the paradox of time. Secondly, because his "paradox of success" is the paradox of time, Alexander feels the vanity of success and comes to long for and admires his "young self." This yearning causes him to be charmed by his former love Hilda Burgoyne, a symbol of his youth, and in desperately pursuing the Eros of his youth, he is divided into two selves. Thirdly, because Alexander is the author's alter ego, his physical death

means the end of Cather as the managing editor of *McClure's*, and his spiritual rebirth signifies a new start as a novelist who depicts her past world, or the Western frontier and its pioneers. Considering these facts, it follows that we cannot have a full understanding of Cather and her fiction until we clearly grasp how the "paradox of success" and the division of self in *Alexander's Bridge* are related to each other and what they mean concretely.

## I

*Alexander's Bridge* (1912) is Willa Cather's first published novel. Nevertheless, later in her critical essay, "My First Novels [There Were Two]," Cather calls this book an "unnecessary and superficial" "studio picture,"<sup>1</sup> and regards *O Pioneers!* (1913) as what is worthy of her first novel. This quite different valuation of these two books is caused by the difference of material; in other words, "that which he [Cather] admires" or "what is his [her] own."<sup>2</sup> However, for Cather, the difference of the material is so great as to concern not only the characteristics, but also the value of each novel. For *O Pioneers!* is her first great work that Cather produced by ceasing imitating Henry James and evaluating and expressing her "own" material: the immigrant pioneers and the Nebraskan frontier Land where she herself moved from the South at the age of nine. It is by this novel that Cather secured her position and direction as a novelist.

There is no denying that Cather's own negative remarks about *Alexander's Bridge* set a standard judgment that the novel was a failure, and this dictated the direction of its criticism for a long time afterward. However, Cather's longtime friend, Edith Lewis, is one of the first to have found in this book "the mortal division in a man's nature,"<sup>3</sup> which dominates Cather's lifelong subject matter. Since Lewis' indication, *Alexander's Bridge*, as well as *The Professor's House* (1925) which deals with the same theme, has been recognized and appraised as a book which has an important element concerning Cather and her fiction. However, compared with the latter great work and Cather's other novels using her "own" material, it is a fact that *Alexander's Bridge* has not yet been given much attention. The purpose of this paper is to consider the "paradox of success"<sup>4</sup> and the division of self in *Alexander's Bridge* from the viewpoint of time.

## II

The novel consists of ten chapters and an epilogue. The story is a drama of consciousness, which depicts a love triangle between its protagonist middle-aged engineer and two women and pursues his inner conflicts of Eros and Thanatos until his tragic end. The main characters are Bartley Alexander, a 43 year-old Westerner and prominent bridge builder, Winifred, his wife and fashionable lady of Boston, Hilda Burgoyne, an Irish actress and his love while he was a student in Europe, and Lucius Wilson, Professor of Philosophy and Alexander's former teacher. Professor Wilson is an introspective and intellectual man who interprets the main characters in the novel. He can be said to be a prototype of Jim Burden in *My Ántonia* (1918) or Niel Herbert in *A Lost Lady* (1923).

As symbolized by their names, Alexander, Alexandra, Antonia and Napoleon, Cather's pioneers are heroic people who succeed in attaining great achievements in their lives. The protagonist of *Alexander's Bridge* is an outstanding self-made man who has won worldwide fame as a bridge builder, and he is a prototype of her pioneers. Cather concretely states in her novels what a pioneer is: (1) He has "the courage to say to himself, 'I will do this dazzling, this beautiful, this utterly impossible thing!'"<sup>5</sup>; (2) His "philosophy is that what you think of and plan for day by day, in spite of yourself, so to speak—you will get. . . you will accomplish what you dream of most"<sup>6</sup>; (3) "Desire is creation"<sup>7</sup> is his motto. Therefore, according to Cather, the pioneer is an energetic Eros-character who has a great dream to accomplish in his life and strongly affirms time as the medium of creation. The beauty Cather values highly is not created until the pioneer's dream and Eros unite positively with time. The formula of <"desire [dream + Eros]"="creation" of beauty> clearly proves that time is the very medium of creation. Henri Bergson, whom Cather admired, states that "The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new."<sup>8</sup> It follows that the pioneer is an active type of person who lives positively in *flowing time* [time which is ceaselessly flowing into the future through the present from the past] in order to accomplish his dream. He can never be a retrospective character, that is, one who is lost in *past time*.

However, generally speaking, it is characteristic of Cather's pioneers that they are Eros-people who actively live in *flowing time* until they realize their dreams. However, after having succeeded in actualizing them, they turn their backs on *flowing time* and are obsessed by *past time* and they long to revert to that earlier state. Bartley Alexander, as well as Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor's House*, is a pioneer who typically conforms to this pattern of life. Alexander is stated as follows:

To a man who was so little given to reflection, whose dreams always took the form of definite ideas, reaching into the future, there was a seductive excitement in renewing old experiences in imagination. (p. 40)<sup>9</sup>

*Flowing time* and *past time* are different from each other. When we think about Alexander's character which is deeply connected with these two times, Bergson's "Theory of Memory" and Sigmund Freud's "Theory of Instincts" provide us with helpful indicators. First, I would like to look at the "Theory of Memory." According to Bergson, there are two forms of memory: "the one *imagines* and the other *repeats*."<sup>10</sup> The first is the memory to imagine the past, that is, to "call up the past in the form of an image,"<sup>11</sup> while the second is the memory to repeat [act] the past which is "always bent upon action, seated in the present and looking only to the future."<sup>12</sup> From the analysis of these two systems of memory and their mutual relationship, Bergson explains that the person whose consciousness is seized with only the first memory is "a *dreamer*" who "lives in the past for the mere pleasure of living there,"<sup>13</sup> while the person who depends on only the second memory is "a man of *impulse*" who "live[s] only in the present, to respond to a stimulus by the immediate reaction."<sup>14</sup> In other words, "a man of *impulse*" is an extreme "man of action." For the more a person turns his back on the first memory and relies on the second memory, the more rapid his response to stimuli is, and the person becomes an extraordinary "man of action" who lives in the present devoid of introspec-

tion. Both are extreme examples, but we can define an active type of person as one who lives in the present and on the other hand, a "dreamer"-type of person as one who lives in the past. These two different types of people coincide with Cather's pioneers who change radically between the early and later stages of their lives.

Secondly, let us look at Freud's "Theory of Instincts." He insists that man has two great instincts, the "life instinct" and the "death instinct," or Eros and Thanatos, and that "all the organic instincts ... tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things."<sup>15</sup> It follows that Eros and Thanatos are closely connected with time. However, both have quite different modes of action. To be specific, Eros "tend[s] to reinstate earlier forms of being and must therefore form part of the "death instinct," but "through creating ever new life,"<sup>16</sup> it resists the "death insticnt." However, Thanatos endeavors to reduce "a living organism to a pre-vital state, that of inorganic matter"<sup>17</sup> in order to get free of the "tension"<sup>18</sup> which the generation of life has aroused. In other words, Thanatos is the self-denying and self-destructive instinct which "seek[s] to return life to the peace of death"<sup>19</sup> of the past. Accordingly, we can say that Eros, which affirms life and resists death, urges man toward *flowing time*, while Thanatos, which denies present life and aspires to revert to "an earlier state" in quest of death, makes him turn back to *past time*.

Taking the above into account, I would like to look at Alexander whose way of life changes radically between before and after his success. The story begins in Alexander's later life and depicts (1) disappointment in life, (2) regression into the past by denying the present self and (3) tragic death. First, let us review Alexander's life until he has attained the summit of success as a pioneer through his uncommon Eros.

### III

Through the dialogue between Professor Wilson and Winifred, it is evident that Alexander is by nature "a man of *impulse*" who is indifferent to recollection and introspection. We already saw that the more rapid a person's response to stimuli is, the more an extraordinary "man of action" the person becomes.

[Mrs. Winifred]: I should like to know what he [Alexander] was really like when he was a boy. I don't believe he remembers ...

[Professor Wilson]: No, I don't suppose he does. He was never introspective. He was simply the most tremendous response to stimuli I have ever known. We didn't know exactly what to do with him. (pp. 7-8)

Here, let it be emphatically stated that like Cather's other pioneers, a young Alexander's impulse comes from his strong Eros-force. He is essentially an outstanding Eros-character who is compared to a "natural force" (p. 15) and "powerfully equipped nature" (p. 17). Professor Wilson concretely expresses Alexander's remarkable feature as "a man of *impulse*" as follows:

His old pupil always stimulated him at first, and then vastly wearied him. The machinery was always pounding away in this man, and Wilson preferred companions of a more reflective habit of mind. He could not help feeling that there were un-reasoning and unreasonable activities going on in Alexander all the while. (p. 13)

As he is compared to machinery which is actively pounding on, Alexander is originally an extreme "man of action" who is characteristic of ceaseless activities and therefore, he is certainly a man who "live[s] only in the present" of *flowing time*. The intensive Eros-living of "the strong work horse" (p. 38) is Alexander's consistent characteristic in his early life before success. However, it is his dream as a pioneer and Winifred, his wife, that give his extreme Eros-living a significance and a guiding principle. It is not until he is connected with his dream and Winifred that Alexander becomes a pioneer, that is, a positive advocate of time who does his best to realize his dream. It follows that Alexander as a pioneer is no doubt the "Faustian man."<sup>20</sup> In other words, he is "the busiest man in the world" (p. 43) who endeavors to accomplish his desire by his "ceaseless striving and activity." Because the pioneer Alexander is the "Faustian man," he "lives in and for the moment"<sup>21</sup> of *flowing time*. Professor Wilson's following words prove this fact explicitly and at the same time, show Alexander's living in his early life:

No past, no future for Bartley; just the fiery moment. The only moment that ever was or will be in the world! (p. 8)

Here I would like to point out that "The ceaseless striving and activity characteristic of the 'Faustian man' (Spengler) is a way of forgetting time"<sup>22</sup> which ultimately leads to death. This causes him to "live in and for the moment" of *flowing time*, for by immersing himself in the pursuit of desire ceaselessly, the "Faustian man" can forget "the inexorable and undeniable progression of time toward death,"<sup>23</sup> and live in "a permanent 'now,' without past and future."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we can say that the "Faustian man" is a "man of action" who affirms life and resists death to the last. In other words, he is a "self-loving"<sup>25</sup> Eros-character. For, even if he is impressed through others with the fact that the ultimate goal of time is death, the "Faustian man" affirms his own time and burns with the pursuit of desire all the more.

Let us now look at Alexander more concretely. He is one of Cather's pioneers who fully realize the burden of time. It is impressed upon a young Alexander by his love Hilda. She is a backward-looking woman who turns her back on *flowing time* and is obsessed by *past time*, for she was born of parents that were poor itinerant players and she was left most of the time in the care of an old sick aunt. The "mummy room" (p. 33) of the British Museum ["the ultimate repository of mortality" (p. 33)] was one of the chief delight of her childhood. To express Hilda, her room, furniture, supper, etc., the adjective "little" is used many times. Because Hilda likes to go to the Museum, she and Alexander often meet there. These visits make Alexander feel keenly aware of the horrible fact that the ultimate goal of time is death and how precious his hour of youth is.

The narcissistic Eros-man Alexander eventually leaves Hilda for Winifred, a Bostonian lady of distinction. This is because Hilda ceaselessly has the "Faustian man" Alexander conscious of the time of Cronus, while Winifred frees him of the burden of time. As shown by her name which derives from Guinevere, King Arthur's Queen, Winifred has "such high confidence and fearless pride" (p. 71) that she "demand[s] a great deal of herself and of the people she love[s]; and she never fail[s] herself" (p. 113). That is to say, Winifred is a forward-looking and active woman, who affirms people's Eros and incessantly urges not only herself but also Alexander toward *flowing time*. Professor Wilson, "always an interested observer of women"

(p. 3), sees at a glance that she is "a person of distinction" (p. 3). Winifred is quite different from Hilda in her way of life as well as in her personal background. It is symbolic that the Thanatos-character Hilda is from the Old World and is a little woman, while the Eros-character Winifred comes from the New World and is an impressive woman of tall ["the tallest woman" (p. 130)] stature.

Because Alexander marries Winifred after having kept company with Hilda, he develops his characteristics as the "Faustian man" and by "work[ing] like the devil" (p. 12), he attains success and fame as a bridge builder. Both Professor Wilson and Winifred call the bridges which Alexander, "whose dreams<sup>26</sup> always took the form of definite ideas, reaching into the future" (p. 40), design "the bridges into the future" (p.17). The image of these bridges precisely symbolizes Alexander during his early life.

#### IV

Now, let us look at his later life after success. Alexander, 43 years old, has attained a great success as a pioneer, and lives in comfort with his beautiful and intelligent wife in a high-class district of Boston. He has built ten great bridges in various parts of the world, and is now occupied in building a bridge at Moorlock in Canada. This is the most important piece of bridgebuilding going on in the world. There is no doubt that upon accomplishing this feat, he will be known as the engineer who designed the longest cantilever bridge in existence. However, what Leon Edel calls "the paradox of success," which can be seen in many of Cather's other novels, also appears here. In spite of the brilliance of his worldly success, Alexander is greatly disillusioned spiritually. Like in his earlier years, here too he is symbolized by the bridge he designs. Although the Moorlock bridge is spectacular in appearance, it is poor and dangerous in construction, as, because of the inordinately low commission, Alexander is forced to use lighter structural materials than he thinks proper.

Now, I would like to look at Alexander's "paradox of success" more specifically. Alexander says to Professor Wilson, whom he meets after a long separation:

After all, life doesn't offer a man much. You work like the devil and think you're getting on, and suddenly you discover that you've only been getting yourself tied up. A million details drink you dry. Your life keeps going for things you don't want, and all the while you are being built into a social structure you don't care a rap about. (pp. 12-13)

Cather's pioneers are, in brief, the 'Faustian people' possessed with the dream of success. Because the pioneer Alexander expects that "success would bring him freedom and power" (p. 38), he is the Faustian "man of action" who actively lives in *flowing time*. Nevertheless, as made clear by his own words: "it was like being buried alive" (p. 38) or "you've only been getting yourself tied up," success brings Alexander only disappointment. To be specific, although he realizes his long-cherished desire, Alexander keenly feels the vanity of success. For his great achievements eventually lead to a secular success and the result is that he is involved in a commitment to a social life which completely disillusiones him. This is his "paradox of success." This "paradox of success" is, in other words, *the paradox of time* and the

source of Alexander's divided [second] self. First, let us consider that his "paradox of success" is the paradox of time.

It is by "work [ing] like the devil" that Alexander wins his long-desired success. Therefore, his success can be said to be the fruit of his years' "ceaseless striving and activity," or the result of time for which Alexander has lived as the "Faustian man." However, success is contrary to his expectations. It follows that Alexander's disillusionment with success leads to his disappointment and denial toward time which he has positively affirmed. In this ironic evaluation toward time, which is reversed with success as the boundary, is Alexander's "paradox of success." Accordingly, we can regard his "paradox of success" as the paradox of time. In this paradox of time is the root of the division of Alexander into two selves; in other words, the solution to the question of why Cather's pioneers become "dreamer [s]" and regress to the past in pursuit of their younger selves after they have realized their dreams.

Let us now think about it. As I pointed out, Alexander's "paradox of success" is the paradox of time. Therefore, it causes him to deny all of time that he has devoted to realizing his dream of success, and he is forced to deny the self who has lived as a pioneer. This reversal of evaluation toward time causes Alexander to become disillusioned with real life, and makes him long for and admire his young [youth] self who was not yet a pioneer. As a result, he is taken with the regressive desire to return to his youth. This self-denial and yearning for his past self, namely Thanatos, changes Alexander into "a dreamer" who has a death wish in his subconscious.<sup>27</sup>

However, the pioneer Alexander is originally a great Eros-man worthy of his name who is able to build "the bridges into the future, over which the feet of every one of us will go" (p. 17). Therefore, even if Thanatos changes Alexander into "a dreamer" who "lives in the past", his heart still pursues Eros, or the Eros of his youth desperately. As a result, Alexander psychologically becomes divided into two selves. In other words, because he struggles to pursue "freedom" in spite of being a "man of action" "buried alive," Alexander is divided into the constricted middle-aged self and the free young self. It follows that (1) the more desperately he seeks after the Eros of his youth, the more Alexander falls into the trap of Thanatos<sup>28</sup> and (2) the disintegration of his self which occurs as a result proves how violent and dangerous his self-denial and yearning for the past are.

This is the first phase of the division in the pioneer's self. In *The Professor's House*, which treats more serious problems, the divided self develops from the young self [who affirms life only] to the child self [who accepts life and death as they are].<sup>29</sup> As symbolized by a tall building, the greater the fruit of Eros is, the bigger the self-destructive power [Thanatos] concealed in it becomes. This is the reason why Professor Wilson, who entertains strong apprehensions about the great bridge builder Alexander, says to him figuratively:

I'm sure I did you justice in the matter of ability. Yet I always used to feel that there was a weak spot where some day strain would tell. ... The more dazzling the front you presented, the higher your façade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom ... then a crash and clouds of dust. (pp. 11-12)

## V

Let us look at Alexander's regression into the past. After having told Professor Wilson about his "paradox of success" at his home in Boston, Alexander goes to London on business, and renews his acquaintance with Hilda, who has by now attained success as an actress. It is April, the season of youth. London is a place where Alexander spent his romantic days of youth with Hilda as his love. Therefore, it is Hilda who possesses together his precious past [youth] and symbolizes it. To Alexander who keenly feels the vanity of success and "dead calm of middle life" (p. 38), his younger days, of which Hilda reminds him, is the very object of his admiration and yearning:

... he thought of how glorious it [his youth] had been, and how quickly it had passed; and, when it had passed, how little worth while anything was. None of the things he had gained in the least compensated. (p. 36)

This violent aspiration for the past makes Alexander divide into two selves. It is stated as follows:

Solitude, but not solitariness; for he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy companion—not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but some one vastly dearer to him than she had ever been—his own young self . . . .

It was not until long afterward that Alexander learned that for him this youth was the most dangerous of companions. (pp. 40-41)

As I pointed out, this "shadowy" youth is a young Alexander who is not yet a pioneer. It is reinforced by the fact that book II of *The Professor's House*, "Tom Outland's Story," which depicts the first phase of the divided self,<sup>30</sup> ends at the point of time of the youth who is moved to find an ideal way of life in which to attain his dream. That granted, it is needless to say that "this youth" is far dearer to Alexander, a "self-loving" man, than Hilda is. Alexander has found himself "buried alive" because of his "paradox of success," but he can free himself again through his "young self" who is full of Eros, and regain his balance of mind.

It is true that this "young self" is attractive to Alexander, who sets "an absolute value" (pp. 39-40) on the Eros of his youth. But, ironically, it is brought about by the intensity of Thanatos. Therefore, it is self-evident that "this youth" is to be "the most dangerous of companions" for Alexander. But it is not until about nine months later that he realizes it, when the relationship between himself and Hilda is in a fix and the division of his self enters a critical phase similar to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Even now when she has become a success as an actress, Hilda is essentially the same woman as in the old days; she adheres to *past time* and turns her back on *flowing time*. It is obvious from the fact that Hilda is still single because she cannot forget the happy past she spent with Alexander or from criticism about Hilda as an actress: "There's everything in seeing Hilda while she's fresh in a part. She's apt to grow a bit stale after a time" (p. 22).

When Alexander is the Faustian "man of action," the object of his affirmation is Winifred, who incessantly urges him to *flowing time*, and Hilda, obsessed by *past time*, is only the object of his negation. Nevertheless, for the "dreamer," a middle-aged Alexander, who turns his back on *flowing time* and is charmed by his past "young self," the position of both is reversed. For



in contrast with his early life, Winifred makes Alexander aware of the burden of time, while Hilda lets him give himself to his happy past and forget time and its ultimate goal, death. Hilda lets Alexander enjoy the Eros of his youth, or "that original impulse, that internal heat, that feeling of one's self in one's own breast" (p. 40) which he has lost. Because Hilda gets Alexander back after eleven long years' interval and turns her back on *flowing time* more intensely than ever, ironically she says to Alexander:

Life seems the strongest and most indestructible thing in the world. Do you really believe that all those people rushing about down there, going to good dinners and clubs and theatres, will be dead some day, and not care about anything? I don't believe it, and I know I shan't die, ever! You see, I feel too—too powerful! (p. 95)

Figuratively speaking by classical myths,<sup>31</sup> Hilda is Artemis, the moon-goddess, and Alexander is Actaeon as well as Narcissus. It is not until he sees Hilda again in London that he *truly* realizes his "paradox of success" and the burden of time. First of all, because Alexander sees Hilda [Artemis], he is turned from man [Eros-character] into stag [Thanatos-character] and time [Actaeon's dogs] changes from the medium of creation to destruction. Secondly, because the moon-goddess is also the object of man's yearning and Alexander is a "self-loving" man, he is charmed by her. Hilda is "the prettiest brook" which reflects the "young self" of Alexander [Narcissus] and enslaves him. On the other hand, Winifred always makes Alexander [the stag Actaeon] confront time [dogs] as destruction, and makes him tired of and disillusioned with real life. We can be convinced of this relationship between Alexander and Hilda from his following words:

The little boy drank of the prettiest brook in the forest and became a stag. (p. 102)

It follows that it is no doubt from Hilda, not Winifred, that Alexander, not only as a Narcissus but also as a poor Actaeon, can get his peace of mind. However, Alexander is "not a man who can live two lives" (p. 82) and in addition, Winifred is "not a woman who could [can] bear any disappointment" (p. 113). Therefore, the more Alexander's love triangle deepens, the more desperate his escape from reality and self-denial become. This invites the critical division of his self similar to Jekyll and Hyde. This is the reason why Alexander finally makes up his mind to divorce Winifred. Nevertheless, his resolution is in turmoil to the very last. His reason tells him that to abandon his wife is to "lose the thing he value[s] most in the world" (p. 113) and to live real life in pursuit of his "young self," which Hilda reflects, is "a mere folly, a masquerade"<sup>32</sup> (p. 114).

As if the Moorlock bridge under construction in Canada symbolized its builder whose heart is torn and broken between two women, some serious defects arise in it. However, the telegram which informs Alexander of this crisis reaches him too late, as he is with Hilda in New York where she is to perform a play. Alexander manages to arrive at the bridge, only to find that it is hopelessly disabled. He tries to evacuate the laborers from the dangerous bridge, but it collapses with many people on it, himself as well. In the depths of the river, Alexander hears in his heart his wife encourage him and again he becomes a "man of action." When he is in the light and air, he recovers his conviction that "life was [is not to adhere to *past time* vainly, but] activity [in *flowing time*]" (p. 126). However, he drowns with many people hold-

ing on to him. After his death, Winifred lives in *flowing time* with him as "a fixed star" (p. 136), while Hilda only lives with her face to *past time* with Professor Wilson as her friend, who holds the memory of Alexander in common with her.

## VI

*Alexander's Bridge* is the story of a male bridge builder, and its scenes are Boston and London, not Nebraska. However, this man is Cather's alter ego.<sup>33</sup> We can never consider Cather and her fiction without mentioning her own "paradox of success,"<sup>34</sup> which she experienced in the East before she became a professional writer. Like Alexander, Cather, who came from the West, was such an outstanding Eros-person possessed with the dream of success that eventually she became the managing editor of *McClure's*, a leading magazine in New York. It was a "dazzling"<sup>35</sup> success for her, a Nebraskan. Nevertheless, because of her "paradox of success," Cather had a divided second self, which caused her to change her way of living. *Alexander's Bridge* was the novel written with this experience of Cather's as its background. After having published this book, she left *McClure's* and stood alone as a writer. Judging from the above facts, we can say: (1) The spiritual rebirth of Cather's alter ego in *Alexander's Bridge* signifies her declaration of resolve to show a new start as a novelist who depicts her past world, or the Western frontier and its pioneers; (2) His physical death means the end of Cather as a staff member at *McClure's*.

In the first phase, Cather is the "Faustian [wo] man," or an awfully busy "[wo] man of action" who "lives in and for the moment" of *flowing time*, and in the second stage, she changes into "a dreamer" who "lives in the past" and is divided into two selves. However, it is not until in the third phase that Cather can become a happy creator, or a writer who reflects on the past and creates its beauty into a work of art. This way of life also essentially comes up to Bergson's teaching. For he states that "a 'well-balanced' mind"<sup>36</sup> does not belong to an extreme "man of action" or "a dreamer," but to one just between these two.

Considering her career and material, we can say that, first of all, Cather is a novelist who is deeply concerned with time.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that she "read carefully"<sup>38</sup> Bergson, a famous 'philosopher of time and life,' and was much influenced by him. Secondly, because Cather's "paradox of success" is the paradox of time, this reverses her sense of value, and her childhood, which she spent in the frontier of Nebraska, becomes the object of her admiration. She desires to return to those days so fervently<sup>39</sup> that she sets her primary values on the world in the Western frontier and its pioneers, and calls both of these her "own" material. Cather had been impressed with immigrant Europeans' way of life and their culture, for she had a deep affinity and sympathy for them as a child of settlers. However, her dream of success caused her to forget them for many years.<sup>40</sup>

After having depicted her alter ego's spiritual rebirth and physical death in *Alexander's Bridge*, it is no wonder that Cather proceeds to write novels with the Western world in her memory as material. However, no matter how ardently Cather admires the Eros and beauty of the frontier land and its pioneers in her books, it is the praise of time by a writer who was captured by Thanatos in the Eastern society of America. In addition, it is an accepted fact

that the pioneering of the West was doomed to turn to ruin at the point of time when it was achieved; fatal to its ruin was the radical changes of American society after the First World War. Accordingly, before ten years pass since Cather published *O Pioneers!* in which she praises the future of the Western world, her disillusionment and denial toward time becomes decisive.<sup>41</sup> After having depicted the defeat and ruin of the pioneer world with indignation and grief, Cather seeks after the salvation of her mind in the world not obsessed by time, and proceeds to search for her material in Catholicism or a distant past.

At all events, Cather depicts the final victory of Eros in *Alexander's Bridge*. However, after *The Professor's House*, another drama of consciousness which depicts her alter ego's inner conflicts of Eros and Thanatos, she does not affirm man's Eros any longer in the present world. *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) comes to an end with the heroine's death as a Catholic in the present time and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) terminates with the death of a great man of religion in the historical past. In spite of its important subject matter and content,<sup>42</sup> *Alexander's Bridge* has not been given due consideration or analysis. However, we cannot have a full understanding of the essential qualities of Cather and her fiction until we have not only read the "paradox of success" and the division of self in this novel, but also clearly grasp how these two are related to each other and what they mean concretely.

This is a modified version of a paper read in Japanese at the 29th General Meeting of the American Literary Society of Japan held on October, 20-21, 1990, at Konan Women's University, Kobe.

#### NOTES

- 1 . Willa Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art*, (1920: Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 91-92.
- 2 . *Willa Cather in Person*, selected and edited by L. Brent Bohlke (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 21.
- 3 . Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (1953; Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 78.
- 4 . Leon Edel, "Willa Cather: The Paradox of Success," ed. by James Schroeter, *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976), p. 249.
- 5 . Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 25.
- 6 . Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady* (1923; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 54-55.
- 7 . Cather, *The Professor's House*, p. 29.
- 8 . Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (Boston: Univ. Press of America, 1983), p. 11. In "The Music of Time: Henri Bergson and Willa Cather" (*American Literature* vol. 57, 1985), p. 227, Loretta Wasserman contends that "Bergson was an important influence on Cather's thinking, and that his philosophical speculations concerning the nature of time and the dynamics of memory are given strikingly parallel expression in Cather's fiction." On the concrete relationship between Cather and Bergson, also see Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture: The World of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of

- North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 124-126.
9. All quotations from *Alexander's Bridge* are taken from the Bison Book edition with an "Introduction" by Bernice Slote (1912; Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1977).
  10. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 82.
  11. Bergson, *Matter*, pp. 82-83.
  12. Bergson, *Matter*, p. 82.
  13. Bergson, *Matter*, p. 153.
  14. *Loc. cit.*
  15. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James (1961; New York, Norton, 1989), p. 45.
  16. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus (1953; New York: Basic Books, 1961), p. 406.
  17. Jones, *The Life*, p. 405.
  18. Freud, *Beyond*, p. 46.
  19. Norman Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meeting of History* (1959; Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1985), p. 80.
  20. Hans Meyerhoff, *Time in Literature* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955), p. 70. Cather regards her pioneers as the 'Faustian people.' It is reinforced by the ironic fact that in *The Professor's House*, p. 13, she connects the defeated pioneer St. Peter with Mephistopheles, 'the spirit that denies.'
  21. *Loc. cit.*
  22. *Loc. cit.*
  23. *Loc. cit.*
  24. *Loc. cit.*
  25. In *Life*, p. 45, Brown states that "Eros is fundamentally narcissistic, self-loving."
  26. Alexander's dream as a pioneer is to win success as a bridge builder. He attains it by building ten great bridges, each of which is also the object of his dream.
  27. It is evident that Alexander's regressive desire is linked with his death wish that he should have died at the point of time of the youth who only had an unrealized dream because the movement of time is irreversible. As regards St. Peter, see *The Professor's House*, pp. 94-95 and pp. 105-106.
  28. In "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather" (1965; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1984), p. 19, Sister Peter Damian Charles states that "Ironically, it is in an effort to rescue himself from this 'dead calm' that Bartley attempts to recapture the Eros of his youth and falls instead into the arms of Thanatos."
  29. See *The Professor's House*, pp. 265-266.
  30. The second self of Alexander, who keenly feels the vanity of his own success, is his own young self. On the other hand, St. Peter, who is driven to despair by not only his own paradox of time but also his alter ego's one, reverts to the past of his young alter ego: a youth who was killed by the first world war because he believed in man's future and partook in that war. It is no wonder that the division of St. Peter's self is more serious and complex than that of Alexander's self. In "Introduction" of *Alexander's Bridge*, p. xxiii, Slote

- states that "The concept of the second self in *The Professor's House* is much more complex than in *Alexander's Bridge* and, in some ways, different," though "the two are so close as to suggest that the second book is something like a retrieval of the first."
31. On Cather and classical myth, Slote states that "One personal source of material for Willa Cather is always myth" [see "Introduction," pp. xvii-xviii]. Also see my paper: "O *Pioneers!*: Willa Cather's Use of Classical Myths," *Studies in American Literature* No. 21 (1984).
  32. The original title of *Alexander's Bridge* was *Alexander's Masquerade*. See E. K. Brown, completed by Leon Edel, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (1953; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 153.
  33. See James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 219-220 and Slote, "Introduction," p. xii and p. xxvi.
  34. See Woodress, *Willa*, pp. 219-220; Lewis, *Willa*, p. xv and p. xvii; Edel, *Willa*, pp. 255-256.
  35. Lewis, *Willa*, p. xv.
  36. Bergson, *Matter*, p. 153.
  37. On my contention that Cather is a novelist who is deeply concerned with time, see my papers: "A Study of *My Ántonia*: On its Content and Form as a Drama of Time" [Japanese], *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1 (1987), and "A Study of *A Lost Lady*: its Content and Form as a Drama of Time" [Japanese], *The English Literature in Hokkaido* No. 34 (1989).
  38. Woodress, *Cather*, p. 232. Also see p. 535.
  39. Cf. Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (1918; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), p. 322: "I [Jim Burden as Cather's alter ego] wished I could be a little boy again, and that my way could end there."
  40. In *Willa Cather on Writing*, pp. 93-94, Cather states that "*O Pioneers!* interested me tremendously, because it had to do with a kind of country I loved, because it was about old neighbours, once very dear, whom I had almost forgotten in the hurry and excitement of growing up and finding out what the world was like and trying to get on in it."
  41. In "Prefatory Note" of *Not Under Forty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), Cather states that "The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts. ..." It is suggestive that Cather "joined the Episcopal Church" in 1922, though she grew up a Baptist [Woodress, *Willa*, p. 337].
  42. *Alexander's Bridge* is linked with Cather's later main novels in the following points: (1) An introspective and intelligent person is used as an interpreter of the main characters; (2) Her alter ego is a man; (3) The protagonist or a main character from the West is a person obsessed by time; (4) Classical myths, which have an important meaning in the novel, are used unobtrusively; (5) The protagonist's spiritual rebirth occurs after symbolically undergoing the experience of death in water; (6) The novel consists of 'life' and 'death.'

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