Women in the West: American Idealism in Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady*. (Under the direction of Professor Anne Baker.)

This article compares Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady* within the context of the West as it is represented historically and culturally. Historically the West has been a land of prosperity, hope, trials and tribulations. Culturally, however, the land has often been misrepresented as a place full of adventure and prosperity, without mention of the possibility of failure. This article discusses the significance of the West in Cather’s works, concluding that she felt the ideals represented by the West could not withstand the passage of time, which brought with it modern technology and modern ideas that conflict with Western ideals. Jim and Niel, in *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady* respectively, admire the women in their lives because those women embody the values and qualities of the past. Jim looks on the West with unrealistic expectations, but admires the real Western qualities in Ántonia. She remains grounded in the past, and so Jim is forever drawn to her, though he works for modern companies. Niel values Marian because she lives on an idyllic Western landscape and she is married to a true Western hero in Captain Forrester. Niel admires her greatly, because she represents the noble class of pioneers who first developed the West. Eventually, however, Jim misguided attempts to recapture the West of his childhood, and Ivy, the embodiment of modern progress, mars all that Niel appreciates. Both Jim and Niel ultimately face the loss of their idyllic Western past because Cather is suggesting that such loss is inevitable.