

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### Willa Cather's "The Professor's House"

by [Donald Lyons](#)

*For there to be a humanitas and for this to build up a "world" around itself, a habitable "cosmos" on earth, this classical common sense posited a natural and divine "cosmos" as an original and prior ontological model, independent of all human manipulation.*

—Marc Fumaroli (1999)

Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's House* (1925) is an inquiry into the nature of civilization, of man's impulse to civilize and create. The book holds in majestic and mournful equipoise both the nobility of the civilizing instinct and the certainty of its frustration.

The book is divided into three books of unequal length and kind. The first (and longest, taking up almost two-thirds of the novel), called "The Family," tells of Godfrey St. Peter, aged fifty-two, a history professor at an unnamed college on a Great Lake, a man wi ...

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