

# Alexander's Bridge

*Willa Cather*

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## Alexander's Bridge Willa Cather

*Alexander's Bridge*, Willa Cather's first novel, is a taut psychological drama about the fragility of human connections. Published in 1912, just a year before *O Pioneers!* made Cather's name, it features high society on an international stage rather than the immigrant prairie characters she later became known for. The successful and glamorous life of Bartley Alexander, a world-renowned engineer and bridge builder, begins to unravel when he encounters a former lover in London. As he shuttles among his wife in Boston, his old flame in London, and a massive bridge he is building in Canada, Alexander finds himself increasingly tormented. But the threatened collapse of his marriage presages a more fatal catastrophe, one he will risk his life to try to prevent.

BONUS: The edition includes an excerpt from *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*.

## Alexander's Bridge Details


Date : Published January 16th 2013 by Vintage (first published 1912)

ISBN : 9780307831965

Author : Willa Cather

Format : ebook 144 pages

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# From Reader Review Alexander's Bridge for online ebook

## Meredith Holley says

It is scientifically proven that Willa Cather is my favorite ever, so I took the opportunity over winter break to read this little gem. For a variety of reasons, I have stacks and stacks of books that I want to read because I think they will be terrible, or because someone recommended them to me so I feel an obligation. I often forget to read books I think I will love. And, you know, I think a lot of why I do that is because often I love the terrible books or the recommended books, and they are so much more social than books I'm drawn to on my own. So, this is not a social review, and it is one of those reviews cursed by unconditional love, and probably not very useful either for that reason.

The book itself is Cather's first. Like *O Pioneers*, it is more focused on plot than her later books, which are much more character driven. *Alexander's Bridge* is about two lovely women, who are both lovely in different ways, and it is about the way love works out for them. The book is so careful in its plotting that it gets pretty predictable, and there is a part about twenty pages before the pivotal moment where it's pretty obvious what will happen. But! The description of the pivotal moment is one of those confusing action scenes where you can't exactly tell where everyone's standing or not standing, so I wasn't totally sure that my prediction had come true for a little while. Those are probably faults of the book, though they didn't ruin anything for me. For me, the ending is more about whether the ending itself is extremely just or extremely unjust. I can't decide. Anyway, that probably won't mean anything to you because you probably have not, and won't, read this book. And you probably shouldn't because others are better. I do love it, though.

Now I am going to tell you my Cather rankings:

1. *O Pioneers*
2. *My Antonia*
3. The short story *Coming, Aphrodite!* (and all of *Youth* and the *Bright Medusa*, but that one is my favorite favorite)
4. *The Professor's House*
5. *My Mortal Enemy*
6. *One of Ours*
7. *Death Comes for the Archbishop*
8. *Alexander's Bridge*

9. *The Song of the Lark*

I have all of her last three novels left to read, as well as her poetry, essays, and the Hermione Lee biographies. Those rankings aren't totally fair, though, because I think that *The Song of the Lark* is **by far** the worst I've read of hers, and I really love all of the others, so I added a lot of spaces between them to make that clear. *Song of the Lark* has a wonderful story within the story, though, so it's good. It's just obviously the awkward transition from plot to character focus, and the character focus is not very balanced at that point. Protagonist is pretty ridiculous. But, it is the first that has a magical story within the story, and those

make my heart beat faster every time. Anyway, this is not supposed to be a review of that book.

So, *Alexander's Bridge* is about how the shadows of our youth can creep up behind us and ruin our lives if we let them – how we can't live as who we are now and who we used to be, even if we want to. I think that is beautiful. And this book is about seven pages long, so it takes that on in a short, sad way. It was my favorite I've read in a while.

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## Jane says

At the end of my first year at university, the day after the final exam, I paid my first visit to the literature shelves in the basement of the university library. There were only a few shelves, because I was at university that - at the time - had no arts faculty. Those shelves didn't look entirely promising, but there was a small run of green Virago Modern Classics. Half a dozen books by the same author; an author I hadn't heard of before.

That was my introduction to Willa Cather.

I picked up the smallest book first - 'My Mortal Enemy' - just to see if I liked her. I loved her, I read all of those green books, I tracked down all of the others .....

That was a long time ago, and I've been thinking that maybe I should re-read Willa Cather's novels in chronological order for quite some time. Willa Cather Reading Week was just the push I needed.

I must confess that I didn't really remember 'Alexander's Bridge', Willa Cather's first novel, from 1912; but I did remember that she hadn't written a book that she didn't like.

Now that I've read it again I have to say that it isn't her finest work. The story is a little underdeveloped, a little contrived; the writing, though lovely, is sometimes a little less than subtle. But it is a very accomplished and very readable first novel. Her understanding of character, her skill in evoking places was there; I could see so many signs of the fine novelist she would quickly become.

I'm so pleased that I have begun to re-read Willa Cather's novels in order, but I do have to say that if you haven't read her before I don't think it's the best place to start.

The story is set not in the American west that she is most associated with, but in Boston, in New York, and in London. She catches those places very well, and she sets up her story beautifully.

Professor Lucius Wilson arrives in Boston to visit a former pupil. His hostess, Mrs Winifred Alexander, arrives home just before him and he pauses to observe her:

*"Always an interested observer of women, Wilson would have slackened his pace anywhere to follow this one with his impersonal, appreciative glance. She was a person of distinction he saw at once, and, moreover, very handsome. She was tall, carried her beautiful head proudly, and moved with ease and certainty. One immediately took for granted the costly privileges and fine spaces that must lie in the background from which such a figure could emerge with this rapid gait."*

Mrs. Alexander explains that her husband is working late, and she is so hospitable, so warm, so charming,

that Wilson is almost disappointed when her husband arrives and she leaves the two men alone to talk.

Bartley Alexander has been working on a major bridge in Canada. The bridge has the greatest span of its type, it will be an extraordinary achievement, it will place him at the pinnacle of his profession. But he is unsettled:

*"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 alive into a social structure you don't care a rap about. I sometimes wonder what sort of chap I'd have been if I hadn't been this sort; I want to go and live out his potentialities, too."*

It's understandable: Bartley feels that pressure of responsibilities, he misses the energy and vitality of his youth, and he is aware that he is ageing and that his life is finite.

When he visits London he catches a glimpse of Hilda Burgoyne, an Irish actress who he had loved years earlier, and he starts to walk the streets near her home:

*"He started out upon these walks half guiltily, with a curious longing and expectancy which were wholly gratified by solitude. Solitude, but not solitariness; for he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy companion – not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but someone vastly dearer to him that she had ever been – his own young self ....."*

Inevitably, the two meet. Their relationship is resumed and Bartley finds himself emotionally torn between his perfect wife and his great lost love.

Willa Cather draws the love triangle so well, and with such subtlety. I understood Bartley's emotions and I appreciated that both women - one aware of the other and one not - loved him and wanted the best for him.

They understand and accept the realities of life and their situation, in a way he can't quite.

That side of the story was brilliantly executed; the way that the older side of the story played out though, the story of the bridge-builder- was a little contrived and a little predictable.

But the telling of the tale was lovely; the depth and detail of the characterisation, and the way that it was woven , made it a joy to read; and I am so, so pleased that I have started my second journey through Willa Cather's novels.

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## Debbie says

I could not WAIT to put down some thoughts and comments about this book. I listened to this audiobook while working and the first thing I'm doing upon hitting the door is this review. To simply say I enjoyed it is an understatement. I was into this book like the latest episode of a much loved series or soap opera. I was "tuned in". Who knew? I sure didn't. Who knew that in 1912 (re-released in 1922 says Wiki) they were getting down and scandalous like this! I thought it was all prim and proper or they were shunned. I wondered if this was a banned book or something. I'm sure this is my first Willa Cather. I have always seen

"My Antonia" and assumed it was like a Polly Anna book and passed poor Willa's books by. But I'm glad I gave this one a chance. I was so shocked and astonished by how modern and..no other word fits.. scandalous it was. It was passionate and I thought many a time as I laughed aloud at my own astonishment that it could very easily be a Period Film. It should be a Period Film. Why isn't it a Period film? I can picture tall prim but kind Winifred. I could vividly picture the silent lust and then clawing passion of Bartley and Hilda. How Bartley felt guilt over the affair and wanted to stop but was drawn to Hilda like a fiend. How Hilda needed him like her next breath and begged him not to stop. Gasp! It's so made for the big screen! I don't care who makes it. I'll read subtitles if necessary but this wonderful little novel needs brought out of the confines of our readers imagination and into screen view. Even the tragic ending (for of course they committed adultery they must end tragically it's still 1912) is cinema worthy.

I think this would be even better in written form, however I did listen. I have two gripes and they're not very significant. #1. My audiobook had two readers. The first was great. The second an old woman slightly lisping. She took away from it and I had to focus harder. They should of had her read some Dickens or something less romantic. (Just had to complain about that because I was annoyed.) #2 There was some sort of poem at the end after the story finished. I could have done without that. I forwarded through it.

I do recommend this! I will definitely try other books by this author.

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## Sandy says

In 2014, I enjoyed O Pioneers! (the first book of Willa Cather's The Great Plains Trilogy) so much that this year I decided to read Alexander's Bridge in honour of her December birthday. This remarkable story is an impressive first novel which exhibits, for a young author, a surprisingly mature understanding of human psychology.

The story revolves around Bartley Alexander, a stellar civil engineer with an international reputation as a bridge-builder. Alexander is introduced to the reader as a confident and robust man, the picture of health, success, and dependability --

*. . . [he] stood six feet and more in the archway, glowing with strength and cordiality and rugged, blond good looks. There were other bridge-builders in the world, certainly, but it was always Alexander's picture that the Sunday Supplement men wanted, because he looked as a tamer of rivers ought to look. . . . his shoulders looked strong enough in themselves to support a span of any one of his ten great bridges that cut the air above as many rivers.*

Looks can be deceiving.

Early in the story, it appears from comments made by Winifred Alexander (Bartley's wife of 12 years) and by Professor Lucius Wilson (his college professor 20 years earlier) that there is something unusual about Bartley Alexander - a quirk of personality or perhaps even a fatal flaw. What reader could resist the bait?

Through the compelling - if circuitous - narrative, the reader accompanies Bartley through present and past experiences in Paris, New York City, Boston, London, and Quebec (Canada). A chance encounter in London with his "first love" leads to a rekindling of the relationship, even though it is against Bartley's better judgment.

By all appearances, this is a classic story of mid-life crisis - a lament for the loss of youth and carefree love; the guilt of secret injury to a dedicated spouse; and the strain of the schizophrenic dual existence resulting

from the inability to resolve the dilemma. However, in my opinion, Cather's take on this classic theme seems unique and unusual. In a historical period where the norm would have been for a married woman to have been subsumed by the identity and social status of her husband, we find that the reverse is true. By his own admission, the strength of Bartley Alexander's professional and social stature rests upon the pedigree of his wife.

In conversation with Alexander, Professor Wilson admits to having, in the past, doubted Alexander's staying power --

*" . . . The more dazzling the front you presented, the higher your facade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom, . . . then a crash and clouds of dust. . . . I don't feel it any longer. I am sure of you."*

Bartley Alexander's response is surprising --

*Alexander laughed. "Nonsense! It's not I you feel sure of; it's Winifred. People often make that mistake."*

Bartley Alexander seesaws between relationships with his wife in New York City and his lover in London and the reader watches helplessly as he struggles to regain his internal equilibrium. He zigzags between reclaiming, while in London, the lost consciousness of his original unique identity and attempting, while in New York City, to regain a sense of satisfaction with his professional and social success.

As a backdrop to this personal drama, Cather deftly weaves into the narrative the story of Alexander's current engineering project - the longest cantilevered bridge ever to be built. Ultimately, it becomes obvious that this bridge symbolizes the internal bridge which Bartley Alexander is also attempting to construct. As Alexander makes his way to the construction site in Quebec, the connection between the real bridge and the symbolic bridge tightens. The tension in the story is heightened. The outcome is dramatic - and inevitable.

Not only was I gripped by this story itself during the days that I listened to it, but it has dominated my waking hours for the past week. While there is much in the tale which could be analyzed (and no doubt criticized), the story also roused in me great curiosity. As a Canadian, I wondered how it came to be that a young author from Nebraska had been moved to set part of her novel in Canada and what had inspired the story of the bridge construction. So off to the internet I went.

I did find answers to my questions and I learned some things that I hadn't known about the history of my homeland. I discovered that there were French-Canadian pioneers from Quebec living in the Nebraska community where Willa Cather lived and that later she had owned a cottage in Canada - on Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick (just across the Bay of Fundy from my present home) - where for about 20 years she spent the summers. The cottage still stands, and is available for summer rentals through a local company. This blog of a Willa Cather scholar features numerous photos of the island and Cather's cottage, as well as links to other blog posts on the subject.

I also learned that the longest cantilevered bridge in the world was built across the St. Lawrence River near Quebec City. Although the first stone was laid by the Canadian Prime Minister in 1900 and construction began in 1905, the bridge was not completed until 1917. The bridge is still in use and is considered to be an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark and a National Historic Site of Canada. The very interesting story of its construction is detailed here. It was very likely that Willa Cather had learned from the French-Canadians who lived in Red Cloud, Nebraska of the construction project in their homeland and apparently was inspired to work the story into her fiction.

So this magnificent book, which for me was intended as a quick read for an author birthday challenge, turned out to be a treasure, the perfect book for me - one which both entertains and educates.

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### **Cynthia says**

Even though this book is sad I loved it. I forget just how good Cather is until I read or reread something she wrote.

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### **Richard Derus says**

Rating: 2\* of five

It's vintage romantic fiction with a definite twist of Cather. That's not enough, I'm afraid, to overcome the mundane mid-life crisis/affair plot's unimaginative development. Strictly formulaic, and the characters were stock characters, and the settings...Canada? London?...weren't of any great interest to Cather so therefore fail to engross the reader as well.

But Cather. Yes indeed, she was already headed down the Prose Turnpike to Lapidaryland. It's to one's taste or it isn't, but I can't imagine anyone making a serious case against Cather's giftedness based on her writing style. I wouldn't consider this book a must-read unless one is a Cather completist. It's instructive to read for Catherites mostly because it's proof that her years at McClure's magazine were clearly crucial to her prose style's development. It's compact enough to be an afternoon's entertainment. But don't shuffle something you're excited to read off the TBR for it.

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### **Nicole says**

I absolutely love the way Willa Cather writes. Her descriptions people and places are so vivid, it makes it easy for me to put myself back in the time period she was writing in. In this case, the 1910's. This book is a short novel about American bridge-builder Bartley Alexander and his relationships with two women. One his wife, Winifred, and the other a stage actress in London he'd known in his younger days named Hilda. Without wanting to give too much away, confident & powerful Bartley ends up fairly tormented and unable to choose between the two women after he re-kindles his relationship with Hilda. The tragic events at the end of the story surprised me but in hindsight it almost seems like that was the only way the story could end. Another good Willa story I'm glad I read!

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### **Moonlight Reader says**

Barely more than a novella, Alexander's Bridge is Cather's first novel. It is always interesting to see the seeds of genius in an author's early work, and this book is primarily interesting for that reason. The story itself is a bit of wish-fulfillment: set internationally, in London, Canada and New York, the main character Bartley Alexander is a man of accomplishment.



The preface to my edition was written by Willa Cather herself, in 1922, and begins:

*It is difficult to comply with the publisher's request that I write a preface for this new edition of an early book. Alexander's Bridge was my first novel, and does not deal with the kind of subject matter in which I now find myself most at home. The people and the places of the story interested me intensely at the time when it was written, because they were new to me and were in themselves attractive. Alexander's Bridge was written in 1911, and O Pioneers! the following year. The difference in quality in the two books is an illustration of the fact that it is not always easy for the inexperienced writer to distinguish between his own material and that which he would like to make his own.*

The preface goes on from there, in the same insightful vein. Two things jump out at me in this passage. First, Cather herself is able to acknowledge that this book is qualitatively less as compared to her next book. I've not read O Pioneers!, although I plan to and soon, but having read My Antonia, One of Ours and Death Comes for the Archbishop, all later, and very different, works, I am in total agreement with her assessment. She did grow as a writer, and a great deal. I'm also fascinated by the fact that she referred to the writer in the masculine, when she herself is a woman, and is more or less talking about herself.

With respect to this book, it is worth reading because it was written by Willa Cather and Willa Cather is always worth reading. Having said that, she is at her best when she is writing about the prairie and men and women who are eking out a hardscrabble life on it. She is able to imbue their struggle with a nobility and beauty that is unique to Cather.

This book is ordinary, by comparison. It tells a story that, in essence, has been told hundreds of times before by dozens of skilled writers – a story of a wealthy man who builds great things in great cities, and who finds himself undergoing a rather trite and somewhat embarrassing midlife crisis that is inconsistent with his greatness. The middle aged man with feet of clay is a story that has been told before, and Cather brings little new or fresh to it. Bartley Alexander's struggles with his penis and where he wants to put it, and his commonplace experience of being *torn between two lovers, feeling like a fool*, are as yawningly boring as the 1976 pop song that tells the same story, or the guy that you know on Facebook who just dumped his wife of twenty years for the girl he knew in high school because his wife just doesn't understand him.

Conclusion: It's Cather, so, yeah, it's good. But her other stuff is so much better.

And, as an aside, these Vintage Classics editions are completely gorgeous!

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## **booklady says**

As it was Cather, I wanted so much to like this more than I did. The writing was alright and given it was her first novel, she undoubtedly learned much and honed her skill evident in later writings. It is worth reading. It is quick as it is very short; a novella really. Not difficult, but also not particularly inspiring. Maybe I would like it better if I could forget, My Ántonia, or, Death Comes for the Archbishop, but who can?

Having recently read and enjoyed the first novels of two other authors, Zora Neale Hurston, and, Sarah Orne Jewett, I found Cather's surprisingly disappointing. However, I am willing to concede my love for her later novels is prejudicing my opinion of this one. 2.75 stars

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## **Chris Wolak says**

This was my second reading of Alexander's Bridge. When I first read this novel I was in my mid-20s and saw Alexander as a tragic hero. Now, in my mid-40s, it speaks to me as a cautionary tale of what can happen when you lead a life of action without reflection. It seems that Alexander has lost touch with who he is and what he wants. I see him as a victim of his inability to be true to himself.

In some ways, Alexander's plight made me think of a recent cartoon making the rounds on Facebook: "Inside every middle aged person is a teenager wondering what the hell happened." I can relate.

Alexander has been a man of action, but he's also been on autopilot. Underneath his hyper-masculine frame and worldly success, his foundation is weak. At one point Professor Wilson even says he thought he saw cracks in Alexander's foundation (and ironically declares him "sound" just before the cracks start growing). At home Alexander follows his wife's interests and at work he's gotten to the point where he consents to using improper materials and accepts the minimum safety standards for his latest and largest bridge project. With Hilda he can pretend he's young and free. He latches on to the loss of his youthful idealism and laments on how he feels trapped by demands. He doesn't dig deeper and reflect on how he can achieve what he desires--feeling free and powerful.

Up until the end, Alexander doesn't make a decision or take decisive action. The last time he and Hilda meet it's implied that he's going to leave his wife. He writes a letter to his wife, but then doesn't send it the next morning. Alexander never squares things with himself. The strain becomes overwhelming and, as they say, something's gotta give.

Had he lived, would he have taken control of his life? He does say to Philip that anything he does can be made public, which up until now we know isn't true, but would he have eventually spoken his truth? Or would he never have given his wife that letter? And if he did, was the letter another garbled message like the one he'd once sent Hilda? Was leaving his wife necessarily what he really wanted? We'll never know. He died in his prime, his marriage intact, but he took down a whole bunch of people with him.

Read again for Willa Cather Novel Reading Challenge 2012 <http://wildmoobooks.blogspot.com/2012...>

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## **Casey says**

This is a light and easy read, but certainly not up to standards as *O Pioneers!* or *My Antonia*. The characters were not developed in depth and I didn't have emotional connection to Bartley by the end. I'm not sure if I truly understood his character. Perhaps if the story was longer, and there was actual conflict between Bartley and Winifred, some stronger characters would have been created. More time was spent on the relationship between Bartley and Hilda, and their relationship seemed far simpler than his marriage. I didn't feel the truth in this story like I did with other Cather's novels.

All in all, an underdeveloped story. Read if you are a diehard Cather fan, but otherwise, you are not missing much by skipping it.

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## **Marts (Thinker) says**

The case of Bartley Alexander, an engineer who per chance meets his former lover Hilda, renewing their past love affairs. But Alexander is now married to Winifred who has helped throughout his professional life and is a devoted wife.

In this story we are reminded that sometimes in life we need to break the bridges down and just start all over again!!!

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## **Barry Pierce says**

In the preface to this edition Willa Cather writes, "*Alexander's Bridge* was my first novel, and does not deal with the kind of subject-matter in which I now find myself most at home." She spends the rest of the preface apologising for its existence. I feel Cather is far too tough on herself for this novel, because I rather enjoyed it.

The plot is very simple. A man has an affair and can't live with it. That's basically it. This novel has the unique claim of the main character being a bridge-maker, can't say I've come across that before. However what this novel lacks in plot, it makes up for in sheer enjoyability. Many reviewers overlook the basic experience of enjoying a book. When I sat down and read this novel it flowed before me. I was enthralled for the whole journey. I must give props to Cather for constructing such a smooth narrative and for creating such a crazy ending, that was great. Altogether this is a fine novel that overcomes its plot problems and leaves you rather content.

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## **Baran ????? says**

Cather belongs to the great American voices who by their talent get us truly through the inner void of their characters with all ups and downs, conundrums, dead-ends and the like. Instead of telling us what they have been through, she just gives us some strong description of the environment where the characters root in, and also a wide range of emotions that might be underlying behind their unreasonable deeds.

The first piece I had read by her was "Paul's Case", a small masterpiece of human depth, loneliness, and escape from the dark swamp of family institution. So after that I made a decision to read everything by her to catch more glimpses about what I call "the human tragedy". However, this book to me has been a kind of disappointment compared to the previous short story which led me to feed high expectations for her. On the other hand, I don't want to treat her works unfairly, because she is honestly talented and deserves the best.

This is the story of an American engineer, split between two continents (Old World and New World), two countries (the US, the UK), two women (his wife and ex-sweet heart left behind in the UK). He constructs great bridges all around the world, which brings him a tremendous fame, so he becomes blessed with prizes and honors, but despite this blinding success of his business life, he all falls apart in the private, individual sphere, swaying between desire, fidelity, belonging, annihilation, self love and hatred. One of his great work is a bridge under the construction in Canada, while the story unfolds, the maze of emotional escape built by his wife, and Hilda, his ex girlfriend gets more and more complicated and over time he too loses the resilience of youth and feels entrapped within that maze. That is, eventually the tragic end of the bridge in

Canada becomes a figurative tragic end of his personal struggle. In fact that is exactly what makes the book part of "the human tragedy" as I like to call the literary works with a focus within but not on outside.

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### **Katherine says**

A powerful portrait of a man in crisis - midlife crisis - and his attempts to feel young again while still holding on to his present life and responsibilities. As he gets further caught in his desires, he loses control of things he worked hard for, amongst other things.

I didn't relate to Alexander's choices, but he didn't really frustrate me either. I understand why people say he's selfish - but I think Cather really showed a realistic portrayal of a human in earnest conflict, as well as the consequences of rampant indecision and inner turmoil. Alexander gets eaten away by his own vacillation, and while he sucks others into his despair (some unknowingly) the reader will certainly see what's about to happen during the climax. Alexander grows to have a weak foundation, and we see what this can do to a person, as well as all involved in their plight. Alexander may well be plainly selfish if one were to explain his predicament quickly (as I basically did by using the term 'midlife crisis,' bringing to mind new cars and ill-planned extravagances), but to read Cather's portrait I saw someone miserably grasping at the few crucial choices they presented for themselves, and the very real despair of time passed all too soon.

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### **Francisca Viegas says**

Alexander's Bridge foi o primeiro romance publicado pela escritora Willa Cather.

Devo confessar que quando comecei a ler este livro, não achei que conseguiria lê-lo até ao fim. Não sei, ao certo, a partir de que momento fiquei presa na história.

Alexander's Bridge conta-nos a história de Bartley Alexander, um engenheiro civil, cuja especialidade é a construção de pontes. Bartley é casado com uma adorável senhora de nome Winifred. Tendo em conta a sua profissão, Bartley tem que se submeter a viagens constantes de negócios a Londres. Numa dessas viagens, reencontra Hilda Burgoyne, o seu amor dos tempos de estudante.

Ao longo da história, testemunhamos a incapacidade de Bartley de escolher entre a sua amada esposa, e a rapariga que se tornou sua amante e que consegue sempre fazê-lo sentir-se novo.

A história acaba tragicamente, tendo Bartley finalmente decidido deixar Winifred (ou pelo menos é o que é dado a entender) e escrito uma longa carta à mesma.

Não se sabe o que teria acontecido caso a morte de Bartley não tivesse acontecido, mas sabemos que todas as pessoas que conheceram Bartley não foram indiferentes à sua personalidade, tendo-se modificado bastante com ele e com a sua morte. Como Hilda diz no final do livro "Nothing can happen to one after Bartley".

Foi um livro tocante que me deu uma perspectiva diferente do adultério, e me fez ver que realmente as coisas não são a preto e branco. Existem vários tons de cinzento que precisam de ser analisados, e que causam dúvidas e obrigam a tomar decisões.

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### **Dave says**

"Alexander's Bridge", published in 1912 is the first novel by Willa Cather, though it should probably be considered a novella. It is a fairly quick read, but unfortunately it lacks depth and is overly simplistic. The title character is Bartley Alexander an engineer of bridges. He is married to Winifried Alexander, a loving

and supportive wife who would appear to be a sufficient companion for any man. But Bartley hits a mid-life crisis, and finds himself in an affair with Hilda Burgoyne, a woman he knew in his youth, and who is now a successful actress in London. The Alexander's live in the U.S., but Barley's renown has him visiting London enough to maintain the affair.

The obvious metaphor in this novel is the bridges. Bartley not only builds them, but he bridges his two lives, as well as maintains a bridge between himself and his wife and creates a bridge between himself and Hilda. But as he has to conceal his second life from his wife, the foundation of that bridge becomes weak, as does the foundation of a bridge he is building in Canada.

The characters are not fully developed, and the conflict which Bartley feels never seems to come across as real or sincere. The story doesn't really resolve in a satisfactory manner, and overall it fails to deliver much. On the positive side, it is a quick and easy read, and it does give the reader a look at a writer developing her skills. Amazingly enough, Willa Cather published "O Pioneers!" just one year later and the differences, in terms of quality, are quite large. "Alexander's Bridge" is a step back from "The Troll Garden", a collection of short fiction, and "O Pioneers!" would be a large step forward.

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### **Eh?Eh! says**

A man is caught between the marriage of his adulthood and the love affair from his youth, loving both and realizing having both is not possible. The bridge can be an obvious metaphor but instead of the usual symbol overshadowed by the divisions it joins or the obstacles it crosses, there was some actual engineering speak. I approve.

I haven't read much of Willa Cather's works so I'm not sure how it compares to her other writings, or to that of other authors. I guess I could say she does paint her scenery well. There is that tasteful, older style of fading to black for delicacy.

Her characterizations are crafted, as in made with skill. But it's the kind of skill that is a little off, that finely carved sculpture of something that doesn't quite work. All that's coming to mind is crass stuff but this wasn't crass. More like...incomplete. A Venus de Milo. The two female vertices of the love triangle were flat. They had no flaws, at least this book wasn't long enough to describe them, except that they lived for this man. Maybe I'm viewing this through a modern lens, but they don't read like actual, feeling, thinking women to me. It's likely that the characters are just fine, and just happen to grate on my shoulder chips of the moment.

Reading about this bridge engineer, reflecting on my own career, my "it's not fair!" nerve got tripped. Reading about this disaster of relationships, reflecting on my own, my "glad that's not me!" smugness was slightly inflated. Normally this would lead to a dear-diary splaying of my reflections. However, I find I no longer enjoy sharing the minutia of my despair. You're welcome.

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### **Steven Walle says**

This was a thought provoking read.  
More later.

Enjoy and Be Blessed.

Diamond

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## Ali says

Willa Cather is one of the authors who I am determined to read a lot more of this year. I already have several waiting to be read, I feel she is a writer that I have so far neglected a little bit.

Alexander's Bridge was Willa Cather's first novel, published in 1912, it is quite different to O! Pioneers – her second novel and the first of her Prairie trilogy that she is perhaps best known for and depicts Pioneer life in Nebraska.

In 1907 the great new cantilever bridge that was being built over the St. Lawrence River in Quebec collapsed with terrible loss of life, including the chief engineer. At this time Willa Cather was working for a magazine in New York, but she was obviously later inspired to use this dramatic real life story in her first novel.

Bartley Alexander is a middle aged engineer, famous for the increasingly ambitious bridges that he has designed. Married to Winifred, a beautiful, elegant woman, whom he loves and who thoroughly adores him, he has an enviable home in Boston. As the novel opens the Alexanders are visited by Professor Wilson, Bartley's one time teacher who has watched his career with pride and in Winifred finds a wonderfully warm and considerate hostess. Soon after on a trip to London, Bartley comes across Hilda Burgoyne an Irish actress who he had loved years earlier. At first Bartley is nervous of approaching her, and having watched her perform on stage takes to walking in the streets around her house.

“He started out upon these walks half guiltily, with a curious longing and expectancy which were wholly gratified by solitude. Solitude, but not solitariness; for he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy companion – not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but someone vastly dearer to him that she had ever been – his own young self, the youth who had waited for him upon the steps of the British Museum that night, and who, though he had tried to pass so quietly, had known him and came down and linked an arm in his

It was not until long afterwards that Alexander learned that for him this youth was the most dangerous of companions”

Of course the two do meet, and Bartley Alexander is delighted to find her so little changed. The relationship is resumed and Bartley finds himself emotionally torn between his beautiful, faultless wife and the excitement of a re-kindled love affair.

Winifred is the woman who has supported him throughout his career, who he met whilst building his very first bridge – their shared history is that of his success. Hilda is impulsive, passionate and generous, and with her Bartley is brought back to his youth. As he struggles with the two sides of himself – the cracks begin to show in his professional life. In the construction of his latest bridge in Canada, a bridge everyone is already taking about – Bartley Alexander has been forced to cut costs on his most audacious structure yet.

Willa Cather's short first novel is beautifully and sympathetically written, and this struggle with differing sides of the self is a theme she comes back to in later work. Not a word is wasted in this novel, which combines extraordinary drama with real compassion. Cather's characters are wonderfully real, their humanness and vulnerabilities are brilliantly explored. Apparently in later years, Cather was rather

disparaging about her first novel, but I loved it. It is a simple story in many ways but it is so well written, it perfectly shows the brilliance that was to come.

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