Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case” Biographical and Historical Backgrounds
T. M. Fowler’s and James Moyer’s 1902 lithograph of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
Cather lived in Pittsburgh from 1896 until 1906. Between her arrival in the city and 1901, she lived in three different boarding houses. This is one of them, photographed in the 1970s.
Cather’s first job in the city was as the editor of *The Home Monthly*, a women’s magazine for which she did not have a great deal of respect. But she gained a lot of experience, writing fiction, poems, and articles under a number of pseudonyms.
Ethelbert Nevin was a popular composer who lived in Pittsburgh. Cather became friends with him and included a portrait of him in her story “A Death in the Desert.”

She met many artists and musicians during her time in Pittsburgh.
In 1899, Cather met Isabelle McClung, the daughter of an important Pittsburgh judge, and the two became close friends.
In March 1901, Cather moved into the McClung household, where she had a small space to concentrate on her writing.
In 1901, she also began teaching at Central High School. Her subjects were Latin, Composition, and English.

Pittsburgh’s Central High School perches on the hilltop above Pennsylvania Railroad Union Station.
In 1903, Cather began a new job as the head of the English Department at Allegheny High School, which was located in a better neighborhood and paid her a better salary.
Willa Cather during her Pittsburgh teaching career.
In 1902, Pittsburgh papers were filled with news about how two young men, Harold Orr and James J. Wilson, had robbed the Denny estate and fled to Chicago with the money. One newspaper reported that “Millionaires could not have spent their money with more reckless extravagance.” The final newspaper article reporting on the theft stated that Wilson had “a longing to know how it would feel to have enough money to have just as good a time as any boy would care about having.”
“Paul’s Case: A Study in Temperament” was published in *The Troll Garden* (1905), Cather’s first book of short stories.
The collection featured two opening quotations, or epigraphs: one describes the wonders of art, and the other describes its dangers.

“We must not look at Goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits;
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?”

GOBLIN MARKET.
In the time period, it was common for stories to be published in magazines first, and then in books.

“Paul’s Case” was an exception, being published in *McClure’s Magazine* in May 1905, after it was published in *The Troll Garden*. 
“Paul’s Case” was also included in a slightly revised version in Cather’s later collection of stories, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, published in 1920.

The story has remained one of Cather’s most anthologized and most popular stories.
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