

**THE IMMIGRANT WOMEN
IN THE FICTION OF WILLA CATHER**

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ROSY L. MENEZES

Under the guidance of

Dr. F. A. FERNANDES

FORMER DIRECTOR

UGC-ACADEMIC STATE COLLEGE

GOA UNIVERSITY

TALEIGAO PLATEAU

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Dr. F. A. Fernandes

(Research Guide)

Former Director

Academic Staff College

Goa University.



March 2008

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the Thesis entitled, "**The Immigrant Women in the Fiction of Willa Cather**" has been written exclusively by me and that no part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for any award of this University or any other University.

March 2008



R. Menezes

Smt. Rosy L. Menezes
Department of English
Goa University
Taleigao Plateau

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Mrs. Rosy Menezes.

DEDICATED

FOR

MY LOVING PARENTS

Shri. Joaquim Anthony Menezes

Smt. Elma Perpetua Menezes

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CHAPTER-1

UNDERSTANDING WILLA CATHER

I

INTRODUCTION

Willia Cather was the embodiment of America. She was one of the finest women and artists of the first decades of the twentieth century who best illustrates the contribution of women to American fiction at the end of the literary era. Cather as an American novelist, short story writer, essayist, journalist and poet portrayed the lives of Old World immigrants on the American Midwest frontier in a manner that is both realistic and romantic.

Willia Cather's reputation as one of the most distinguished American novelists rests on her novels about Nebraska and American Southwest. These novels express her deep love of the land and her distaste for the materialism and conformism of modern life.

As observed by Susan J. Rosowski,

Cather's fiction once assumed to be transparent and artless is now recognized for its depth and complexity. Cather is known to be the one of the most prolific of major U.S. Writers, with eighteen volumes and seven hundred periodical pieces to her credit. A writer once dismissed as regional is now included in the Encyclopedia Britannica Great Books of Western World.¹

Cather was fascinated by Europe and European history, art, and literature from a very early age. There is a sense in which she felt a connection with

Europe, probably as a result of growing up in a town largely populated with recent immigrant people of European descent.

The novels of Willa Cather have been described as “classic”² by Katherine Porter. She was one of the writers selected for inclusion in *Sixteen Modern American authors* (1973) a volume that generally establishes the canon of America’s most important writers of the first half of twentieth century and in that work she was the only woman represented. Recent biographers and critics have manifested a renewed surge of interest in Willa Cather as an important writer with a wide range of psychological, social, literary and metaphysical themes.

Cather has never been widely read or much studied in the UK, like other great women American writers of the twentieth century such as Ellen Glasgow, Flannery O’ Connor or Eudora Welty. However she has been praised for her evocation of pioneer Mid-Western life. As Lorna Sage wrote “Cather’s work spans that period of American history in which the frontier closed and generations of new immigrants sought to establish a new hybrid identity within a shifting unstable society.”³

The portrayal of heroic women and their struggle in life is a central theme in many of Cather’s narratives. Particularly the idea of being a “Woman in a man’s world” and the consequences of women choices-in term of career, love and friendship is well worth focusing on.

II

IMMIGRANT CULTURE

Immigration has given to America a new exotic background and a new source of local color. Many of Cather’s main characters are immigrants or of immigrant

descent- and this fact is often the dominant force shaping their life and directing their destiny. The idea of being transplanted from old to new soil- the sacrifices, hopes and conflicts connected with such a fundamental change in life is almost ever-present theme in Cather's narratives.

Cather's interest in this theme most likely originates in experience as child growing up in a town primarily populated by more or less recent immigrants- primarily Scandinavian, Bohemian and French. All her life, Cather was preoccupied with the immigrant experience, and many of her stories revolve around the contrast between the Old World in Europe and the New World in America. American immigrant writers writing in the early twentieth century also choose to look back and recapture the strenuous, yet inspired, pioneer life. Among the most well known of these works are: O. E. Rolvaag's depiction of Norwegians in Minnesota, *Giants in the Earth*, Conrad Richter's three- part work, *The Awakening Land*, about pioneers in Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley; and the series of frontier memoirs for young people by Laura Ingalls Wilder, whose second volume, *Little House on the Prairie*, was the inspiration for popular television series.

Today America has got its own distinctive identity. This is due to the entry of the immigrants. Many Americans value their immigrant heritage as an important part of their identity. America has got the image of the mosaic. Immigrants have contributed a lot to this image. Immigration is a world wide phenomenon. From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, millions of Europeans migrated to North and South America, eastern and southern Africa, Australia and Asia.

Like the colonist of the past, most modern immigrants are motivated to relocate far from their original homes by the desire to improve their economic situation. The greatest influx of immigrants to the United States occurred between the

1840s and the 1920s. United States has been shaped by successive waves of immigrants. Established Americans often look down on new immigrants. The cultural habits of immigrants are frequently targets of criticism, especially when the new arrivals come from a different country than those in the established community. Despite such tensions, economic needs have always forced Americans to seek immigrants as laborers and settlers, and economic opportunities have beckoned foreigners. The vast majority of immigrants to the United States have come in search of jobs, farmland, or business opportunities, and the chance to create a better life for themselves and their families. They generally bring people from less developed or poorer countries. Industrialization in Europe caused the relocation of most of these immigrants. By the late 1870s, America witnessed the great changes mainly due to industrialization. It attracted the attention of Scandinavians, sending waves of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish immigrants to the United States.

By the early twentieth century, as the United States became an international power, its cultural self-identity became more complex. The United States was becoming more diverse as immigrants streamed into the country, settling especially in America's growing urban areas. At this time, America's social diversity began to find significant expressions in the arts and culture.

The people were as mixed as the languages they spoke. From the Atlantic coastal islands to the Mississippi and beyond, many cultures met and produced generations that blended different races and ethnic groups- English Dutch, German, French, Spanish, African Americans and scores of native American tribes. The resulting ethnic stew was one of the most enduring legacies of westward expansion.

Colonizers and conquerors, wanderers and settlers have long been attracted to America's abundant resources. The vast majority of Americans trace their ancestry to

one or more of these immigrant groups. The various ethnic and racial origins of the residents and immigrants remain important sources of personal identity.

During the 1860s and 1870s the Nebraska State Board of Immigration had employed an agent in Europe whose business was to attract the immigrants. The handbill campaigns of the Burlington brought in a large number of foreigners. Majority were from Germany, followed by Sweden and other Scandinavian countries than Bohemia, Prussia and the British Isles. Like the young Willa, who migrated to Nebraska these immigrants were totally unprepared for their new land.

During 1890s the so-called new immigration brought a great variety of new ethnic groups: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Croats, Slovenes, Poles, and Jews. As aptly observed by Henry Bamford Parkes, “the new immigrants came from the more backward parts of Europe. Many of the immigrants were illiterate and accustomed to extremely low living standards; they had no previous experience with any form of democracy and knew government only as an alien and oppressive force.”⁴

In the words of Roger Daniel: “Improvements in transportation not only quickened the pace of immigration but also, with the invention of the prepaid ticket and the development of cheap and reliable facilities for transferring funds abroad, it became easier for immigrant families to stagger, and pay for, their own migration.”⁵ The immigrants were practical in their day to day affairs. They had a little interest in philosophical questions. According to Everett S. Lee, “Migration has been phenomenally successful for Americans. The immigrants from abroad did find superior economic opportunities and if they were fleeing oppression they found freedom.”⁶ The historian Fredrick Turner aptly opined that “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development”⁷ The opportunity for self-improvement

provided by cheap land, the unimportance of hereditary status distinctions, all this led to generate the democratic spirit in its most American sense.

In order to get an insight into Cather's work it is necessary to know history of the Westward Movement. Since the formal creation of the United States, men and women have been searching the lands of this country. Exploration, encounter, and expansion constitute intricate pieces of American history. In the early nineteenth century, immigrants from multitudes of countries began to fill the ever-growing ports of American cities and towns, and the time came to move, to push further into the wilderness. Along with coming into closer contact with the cultures of the Native Americans, frontier settlers began to redefine their own roles and norms in society as they settled previously undeveloped land.

The Westward Movement in America did not begin on a certain date; indeed it encompassed a mass-migration of newly arrived Americans and those who had already begun to build families in America. Reasons for moving west were as varied as the people who forged the trails to arrive there. For people who desired to seek out a new life or better health for a family member, the west indeed was an ideal setting.

The kinds of people who journeyed west varied in ethnicity, social status and gender. Families explored the westward trails in covered wagons and comprised a significant portion of those headed west. However, the culture of the frontier society gained the reputation of being 'male-centered'⁸ because men primarily crossed the frontier in search of gold, jobs in the mine, or a land claim for their families. During the early nineteenth century, men were in the majority on the frontier though women and children were soon to follow. People of all ages crossed the frontier – young and old, single and married, rich and poor. Therefore, the frontier provided a common

ground for all people to come together to form their own communities and to decide individual roles of gender and age.

The roles of men on the frontier were not wildly different from general gender roles of the time period. Men, who worked on the farms, participated in farming the fields, planting and growing crops, heading the family if married, being responsible for the care of animals and the general welfare of the family. Men did not come to the West solely in the interest of farming; they may have come due to the gold rush, work with the railroad, mining interests, or various other reasons.

The roles of women on the frontier varied from those of their eastern counterparts or counterparts from other countries. In general, women took on many new roles in their participation in the western life. Women, specifically mothers, adopted new jobs and incorporated them into their everyday life on the frontier. The powerful mother is a common pivotal figure in immigrant fiction. However, traditionally “feminine” roles still existed on the frontier. In this agrarian economy mothers were their daughters’ educators and mentors training them to fulfil the farm wife’s role by transmitting essential household norms. In the year of Willa Cather’s birth-these strong mother daughter bonds still existed: Caroline Cather, Willa’s paternal grandmother wrote several letters of advice to her newly married daughter Jennie, in which she assumes the roles of mother and mentor, passing on both household and marital wisdom.

In his analysis of the roles of women in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Richard Bartlett writes, “... the doing of the man’s work was never interpreted as belonging to her by nature, nor was her doing it in any sense a part of the accepted mores of the time. Neither were women registers or receivers of land offices, nor surveyors or assayers, nor did they ride with the cowboys. While men

held various positions in town and belonged to various orders, such as the masons, women did not have such freedom.”⁹ However, Bartlett does write:

The new countrywoman held her head high, and her bright eyes searched the horizon for what lay ahead. She shared with her husband a faith in their future, in the “great day a-coming” whom they would live to see... she was a builder, along with her husband; she knew her value. If her life was hard, and it was, so was that of her husband. Yet both found life rewarding, and that is a most important ingredient of mental well- being.¹⁰

Though living in a male dominated society, for the most part, women managed to attain their own voice. Many women became active in church affairs and created their own relational societies. In the occupational sphere, the number of women schoolteachers increased during this time. The role of women continued to be alerted with the passage of suffrage laws of women in the late 1880s in states such as Wyoming and Utah. Though societal changes continued in support of women, “the new women’s primary task, however, was to create her family.” Whatever kind of family this involved whether a husband, children, grandparents or even the larger community, women were accepted to take this role. Wives and mothers specifically were involved in much “toil”. According to Bartlett, “they cooked and baked, sewed and knitted, milked cows, tended gardens, and raised children.”¹¹ The role of daughters was essentially to imitate the tasks of their mothers while sons were called to imitate their fathers. Life on the frontier was certainly not easy for any members of the family or community.

American literature, a reflection of both our past and present things, has recorded and transmitted the Western experience to the modern audience. Within the

last twenty years specifically, many efforts have been made to look at women both during their journey over the frontier of the United States and their eventual settlement of the land. One woman's portrait of the soul and spirit of pioneer women through her fiction has caused a new generation of scholars to look more closely at the roles of the frontier women. This woman, twentieth century novelist Willa Sibert Cather correlated experiences of her own frontier background with fictional characters to communicate the lives of frontier women in literature.

IMMIGRANT FICTION

As perceptively observed by Philip Lopate:

Strictly speaking, all American novels (with the exception of those written by Native Americans) are in one way or another immigrant fiction. But we usually think of immigrant fiction more narrowly as the encounter of the foreign-born with a presumably dominant Anglo-American culture. Thematically, this fiction is the site where self-invention encounters its limits, where compromise and accommodation wrestle with the unappeasable. Linguistically, it is a fertile estuary infusing the Puritans' English with the dialect seasonings, syntactical corkscrews and passionate utterances of the other.¹²

In Cather's immigrant novels, the immigrant experience often begins in a spirit of wild open-ended adventure, as their protagonists fling themselves halfway around the world, breaking dramatically with past lives to settle in a big country full of promise, though soon enough the sphere contracts to an urban ghetto or small town, where they are thrown into an introverted, claustrophobic self-protectiveness amidst

their own kind. “The immigrating family distills the tensions from within and without. On the one hand, it shields its members against a hostile or indifferent environment; on the other hand, it entraps them in a prison where siblings rivalries, oedipal struggles, and marital discords have little opportunity for diffusion.”¹³

The movement for immigration restriction was slowly gaining strength in the late nineteenth century. The most affirmative of later American writers were those who had seen the immigrant make good of the present scenario or were themselves immigrants who had made good. Abraham Canan in *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) has the highly successful David recall his justified ecstasy at his first sight of New York. According to him the “immigrant never forgets his entry into a country which is to him, a new world in the profoundest sense of the term.”¹⁴

According to Sepp L. Tiefenthaler,

One of the inevitable, concomitant experiences of the immigrant to America has been that of the transcultural dilemma, the conflict of two cultures, and the ensuing often painful search for cultural identity: the struggle to accommodate two selves and two cultural spaces into one integral identity. The majority of immigrants and their offspring have resolved this conflict through a gradual process of assimilation and acculturation to the dominant mainstream culture of the receiving country, thereby transforming themselves into something like a palimpsest...the transformation from outsider to insider, from immigrant to American or narrate the story of an immigrant who is forever kept out of the dominant culture of the host country for reasons of class, ethnicity or race.¹⁵

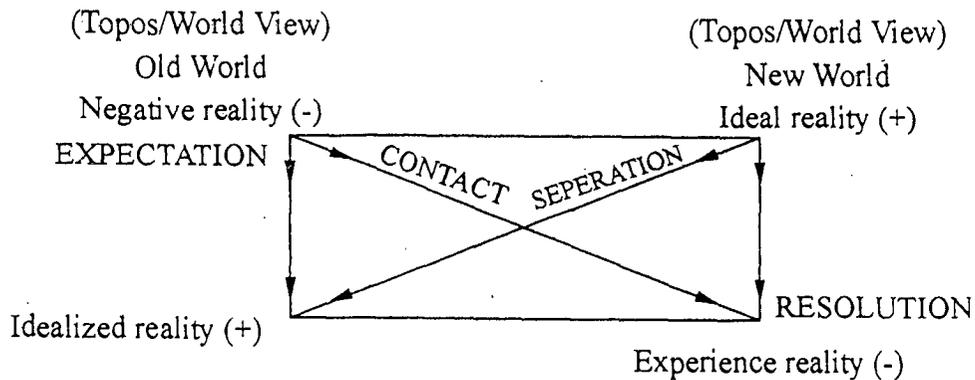
Other immigrants have tried to fight or resist such positive confirmation of the dominant culture either by negating the standard norms, values, and codes of the dominant culture or by substituting for the dominant culture a cultural alternative. They tried to accommodate to the two cultures, they to themselves and their culture to the alien. The immigrants' awareness of their ethnicity- their cultural distinctiveness against the culturally dominant group- originated from and was sharpened by this transcultural conflict. The immigrants' quest for cultural and geographical displacement, oppression, marginality and alienation is expressed most directly in the genre of the immigrant novels.

I have followed the concept of immigrant novels given by William Q. Boelhower to analyse the immigrant novels of Willa Cather.

At the thematic level, the specific topic of immigration defines the text's macroproposition, which in turn underlies the text's macrostructure. This topic is paradigmatic in that it explains the presence of a series of deep elements common to all the works pertaining to this genre. Thus, the topic is a principal of inclusion and exclusion and provides a closed fictional reality. The macroproposition can be stated in the following way:

An immigrant protagonist(s),
representing an ethnic world view,
comes to America with great expectations,
and through a series of trials
is led to reconsider them
in terms of his final status.¹⁶

The macrostructure of this proposition can be formulated in this fabula diagram:



The poles of tension that ground the structuring of the fabula are OW (Old World) and NW (New World), both as locations and as sets of mental categories. Its three major moments are EXPECTATION (project, dream, possible world), CONTACT (experience, trials, contrasts), and RESOLUTION (assimilation, hyphenation, alienation). At the moment of EXPECTATION, which may already be set in the NW, the RESOLUTION is considered an ideal reality, while the OW is viewed as a negative reality. As the protagonist moves along the CONTACT axis, a descending movement, the process of reconsideration begins and, through OW-NW contrasts, implies the de-idealization of the NW. At the same time, as the protagonist discovers America first hand, he is separated from the OW. Ultimately, this leads the protagonist to idealize the OW - either through an attempt to preserve his OW culture, even though he may be assimilated into the

NW, or through a stiff criticism of an alienating set of experiences in America.

In the immigrant macrotext there is a distinct set of characters (actants) who perform a number of stock functions which are intertextual constants. Besides having proper names that are a conventional indication of their OW provenance (Jurgis Rudkis, Count Brogmar, David Schearl, the Shimerdas, the Bergsons, David Levinsky, Joe Stecher), the protagonists of this genre are modeled on the basis of a series of common senses. They are foreigners (aliens) and immigrants (uprooted) they are naïve, ignorant of American life in all its facets, have a language barrier, are unassimilated, and, crucially, hopeful (initiates). Furthermore, their actions are still motivated by an OW view characteristically immigrant frames, divided into OW coherence and NW contact, can be elaborated under the following categories:¹⁷

The journey [J].

Folklore [FK]: figures (fg); wisdom (fw); superstition (fs); practises (fp).

Religion [R]: belief (rb); ritual-birth (ri); marriage (rm); death (rd).

Gatherings and feasts [C]: food and drink (cf); songs (cf); songs (cs); music (cm); dance (cd).

Speech [S]: dialogue (sd); lexemes (sl); jokes and puns (sj).

Memory [M]: cultural objects (mo); recollections (mr).

Multiple character [MC]: ethnic homogeneity (mce); ethnic conflict (mct); generational homogeneity (mcg); generational conflict (mcf).

Customs [G].

Contact [T]: work (tr); politics (tp); inter-ethnic contact (ts); judicial institutions (ti).

Acquisition and loss [AL]: land (ald); house (allh); business (alb).

Upton Sinclair's **The Jungle** can serve as a demonstration of what is meant here, given its ambiguous position with respect to the immigrant macrotext. The reader witnesses a process of assimilation by which OW protagonists are reduced to culturally indistinguishable members of a mass society.

The immigrant novel introduces into American literary history a new pluricultural world view and this world view, which is strictly related to the collective consciousness of immigrant groups. A world view is, above all, a social and historical fact. William Q. Bohelhover reflects:

The extraction of this new *vraisemblance* through a descriptive analysis of the paradigmatic elements of the immigrant novel genre and its relation to a particular construction of American history should help one to identify the narrative constants that structure individual immigrant novels. According to this presentation, then, and contrary to myth criticism, one can "rediscover" the essential newness of Cather's novels **O Pioneers!** and **My Antonia** by placing them alongside Rolvaag's **Giants in the Earth**, William's trilogy and other immigrant novels.

There is never acculturation pure and simple but rather the presentation of a pluriculture reality depicting minority cultures with specific languages, world views, customs, and memories. In all instances, the immigrant protagonists are presented as unique historical subjects responding to a dominant culture. In the light of genre expectations, the reader is led primarily to familiarize himself an integral part of the American experience.¹⁸

CATHER'S INTEREST IN IMMIGRANT CULTURE

The world of Willa Cather, encountered at the age of nine, was called "The Divide" is almost too appropriate as she was taken to Nebraska and spent the years of her childhood among the immigrants of a pioneer environment. After a year of Cather moving to Red Cloud, where her grandfather had settled having migrated from Ireland; Cather had developed a fierce passion for the land that remains at the core of her writing. By 1890 immigrants in Nebraska made up forty-three percent of the state population. Cather found herself surrounded by foreign language and customs. Speaking about her impulse that took her to writing Cather in one of her interviews stated:

When I was about nine, ... father took me from our place near Winchester, Virginia, to a ranch in Nebraska. Few of our neighbors were Americans--most of them were Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and Bohemians. I grew fond of some of these immigrants--particularly the old women, who used to tell me of their home country. I used to think them underrated, and wanted to explain them to their neighbors. Their stories used to go round and round in my head at night. This was with me, the initial impulse. I didn't know any writing people. I had an enthusiasm for a kind of country and a kind of people, rather than ambition.¹⁹

The ability of Willa Cather to provide such a stirring and complete picture of frontier women and their relationship with the land lies in reasons she herself stated in multiple interviews during her life. She always said that the old immigrant women of

Nebraska gave her the first 'real feeling of an older world across the sea'. It is through her own words that one can begin to realize the connection Cather had with her own culture and the women she represented in her writings. Cather once stated: my grandfather and grandmother had moved to Nebraska eight years before we left Virginia; they were among the real pioneers."²⁰ The immigrants hard struggle and determination and their unwavering belief that they could overcome, inspired Cather.

III

WILLA CATHER'S LIFE

Willa Cather lived a life that spanned two centuries, a time when the world and a women's role in it would change radically. Well known for her literary portraits of frontier life, a literary star Willa Sibert Cather was born in Back Creek Valley, in the Gore community of Fredrick County, Virginia on December 7 1873. It was an exciting period in American history when the Middle West was settled by courageous pioneers some from the east, some form Europe. Born to Mary Virginia Boak Cather and Charles Cather they named their first-born Willella after Charles younger sister who died in childhood of diphtheria. Cather eldest among Roscoe, Douglas, Jessica, Jim, Elsie and Jack, spent her first nine years in the east living in a lovely Virginia house where her father raised sheep on his father's farm.

Willa Cather's mother, a vigorous woman dominated the family backed up by Cather's maternal grandmother Rachel Seibert Boak who made her home with them. Willa's maternal grand father, served in the house of Delegates of Virginia from 1845 to 1846 at the same time that James Cather Willa's great grand father, represented Frederick County.²¹ Cather was enormously attracted to such families as Hermione

Lee observes, “which was a rich storehouse of native history and its powerful personalities influenced her whole life.”²²

As perceptively observed by Mildred Bennett,

Willa found her mother of different temperament from her gentle father ... Willa, even as a child, sensed that some of the neighbors thought her mother haughty, and perhaps Willa as an adult took on some of the characteristics that casual acquaintances had found a little upsetting in her mother. She was well aware that her mother was behaving in the southern genteel tradition and throughout her life shared something of her mother the desire to champion the underprivileged or the misunderstood.²³

Life in the lush Shenandoah Valley in Western Virginia near Winchester had a smoothness and a sense of permanency where Cather found life full and fascinating. Even since Willa was born; Charles Cather had been toying with the idea of coming west. The Cathers' were susceptible to tuberculosis and hoped the dry Nebraska climate would be more favorable than that of humid Virginia. Further more stories about the farming opportunities in the central Nebraska region and from earlier homesteaders, including his father and close relatives, whetted his interest still more. When in 1883 his four storied sheep barn burned, Cather and her family journeyed by rail to join their extended family in the small settlement west of Red Cloud that was already known as Catherton and lives for a year and a half on grand parents farm. Having passed her earliest years amidst a settled landscape and established traditions where the land grants had been passing from father to son where life was ordered and settled where the people in good families were born good and the poor mountain people were not expected to amount too much, the move to the rough frontier in April

1883, to the open plains of Red Cloud Nebraska was a shock to a sensitive child like Willa Cather. As Cather drove further in the country she felt a good deal. Cather compared coming to Nebraska of being “thrown onto a land as bare as piece of sheet iron.”²⁴

Willa Cather, daughter of a gentleman sheep-rancher was pretty nine-year old with reddish brown-curls, fine skin and dark blue eyes. Her positive personality was apparent even at this age. Willa as a child was surrounded by older women whose arduous tasks-tending the vegetable garden, raising animals, sewing and quilting, preparing and preserving food, managing the household, childbearing and rearing-were as vital to the family’s survival as their husbands’ farming duties.

Willa’s first playmates were the neighbor’s children. The Lambrechts whose parents came from Germany, “Leedy” Lambrecht was of the same age as Willa.²⁵ Cather soon adapts to the prairie. Briefly attends school during winter and riding on the pony, she chose to explore the thinly settled country, a cosmopolitan community the homesteads of immigrant settlers. As she was growing up she observed first hand development of a civilization, knew intimately the day-to-day struggles of the pioneers with the land. Cather later reflected that two experiences of that move shaped her within: being gripped with a passion for the “shaggy grass country” that was “the happiness and curse of my life.”²⁶

After eighteen months on a ranch her family moved into small house in ‘Red Cloud’, a “scrappy western town” sixteen miles southeast rich with possibility for a child with an eager mind. During the trip from her birthplace in Virginia, Cather imagined that, “I had left even their spirits (her grand parents) behind me. The wagon jolted on, caring me I knew not whither... between that earth and sky I felt erased, blotted out.”²⁷ The land of Nebraska was the great fact; it was wild and barren and

awesome. The move from the restrictive social order in Virginia to the open pioneering life on the plains forms the backdrop for much of Willa Cather's fiction.

As observed by Anne Lindhard,

The settlers who inhabited the town were mainly Scandinavian, Bohemian, French immigrants trying to cultivate the obstinate land. "Americans" were a minority. This childhood environment greatly influenced Cather's life as an artist and became one of the main resources from which she extracted her vivid depictions of character and setting. It oriented her toward the land, the immigrants and Europe in short, toward the essence of American pioneer experience.²⁸

Drawing from her childhood in Nebraska, Cather brought to national consciousness, the beauty and vastness of the western plains. She was able to evoke this sense of place for other regions as well, including the Southwest, Virginia, France and Quebec.

Ahearn Amy writes,

Willa Cather established a reputation for giving breath to the landscape of her fiction. Sensitive to the mannerisms and phrases of the people who inhabited her spaces, she brought American regions to life through her loving portrayals of individuals within local cultures. Drawn together in their homesickness, Cather felt a certain kinship to the immigrant women of the plains.²⁹

Cather was an unusual girl in Red Cloud who liked the older people with intellectual taste. Cather's childhood was a great and a well-sorted harvest, winnowed and refined, that memories from youth would provide the material for page upon page of her writing. Cather had met these immigrant people in the childhood who appear in her novels. Many of the experiences and people that played significant role in Willa

Cather's past more importantly her childhood friends, helped pave the road that led to her writing of *My Ántonia*. Cather did not realize that so much of this story was based on her memories. She thought that she had created these characters, this story in her mind. But through lots of digging into her past, the similarities between the two are remarkably obvious.

Willa Cather's first playmate in Red Cloud was Mary Miner daughter of a local storekeeper. Cather became friends with all of the Miner children, but especially Carrie. She wrote to Carrie regularly throughout her life and her book *My Ántonia* is dedicated "To Carrie and Irene Miner, in memory of affections old and true."³⁰

Of Mrs. Miner Cather wrote:

I have never drawn but one portrait of an actual person. That was the mother of neighbor family in *My Ántonia*. She was the mother of my childhood chums in Red Cloud. I used her for this reason: While I was getting under way with the book in the White Mountains, I received the word of her death. One clings to one's friends so-I don't know why it was- but the resolve came over me that I would put her into that book as nearly drawn from the life as I could do it.³¹

Through her friendship with the Miner children Willa came to know Annie a hired immigrant who worked for them. Miss Cather said in 1921: One of the people who interested me most as a child was the Bohemian hired girl of one of our neighbors, who was so good to me. She was one of truest artist I ever knew in the keenness and the sensitiveness of her enjoyment, in her love of people and in her willingness to take pains. I did not realize all this as a child but Annie fascinated one and I always had in mind to write a story about her.

Another friend of Willa's early days was hired girl, Margie, who appears as "Mahailey" in **One of Ours** as "Mandy" in "**Old Mrs. Harris**" and as "Poor Marty" in **April Twilights**³². Margie's mother had worked for Mrs. Cather in Virginia, and when the poor woman, mother of fifteen, heard that the Cather's were moving to Nebraska, she begged them to take the girl along. Willa Cather was a long personal friend of the Garber's and eventually used them as prototypes for Captain and Mrs. Forrester in '**A Lost Lady**' of which Miss Cather later said:

A Lost Lady was a woman I loved very much in my childhood.

Now the problem was to get her not like a standardized heroine in fiction, but as she really was not to care about anything else in the story except that one character. And there is nothing but that portrait. Everything else is subordinate...³³

As Hermione Lee observes:

"The model for the not-so-lovable Myra Henshawe in **My Mortal Enemy** is somebody Cather knew well and whose friends all recognized her when the novella was published. 'Lucy Gayheart' is Sadie Becker, a girl she remembered vividly from childhood."³⁴

While researching articles, hunting for talented contributors in Europe and at home, and meeting people in the publishing world, Cather still found to write her own stories. Still, at nearly forty she had not yet written a novel. Some people have called this journalistic period a "literary detour"³⁵ which delayed her career as a novelist until the second half of her life. She herself called it her "apprenticeship" she evidently learned her trade well, because in the next thirty years she produced a dozen novels, several of which have become classics of American literature. **My Ántonia** is probably the most famous.

Despite her continuing success with popular reviewers and the general reading public, Cather's last years were far from serene. Having maintained many close and enduring friendships, some of these as with the Miner sisters dating from her early life, Ferris Greenslet, at Houghton Mifflin; her publisher, Alfred Knopf she also enjoyed new ones, most importantly with the Yehudi Menuhin children, that lasted all her life.³⁶ Willa Cather enjoyed public notice yet she loved anonymity. She sought fame but disliked attention. She felt fame became a kind of thief stealing time. Aware of so much still to be done she often said, "The end is nothing; the road is all."

Although she suffered from bouts of poor health, writing remained her passion. But unlike the sunny themes of her early novels drawn from childhood memories, in her last novels are Gothic stories in which dark passions breakthrough the apparent calm of everyday lives. For during her final years Cather felt the horror of events leading to another world war, the pain over deaths of family and friends, and the frustration from an inflammation of her hand. However she continued to write, publishing short stories and working on an Avignon novel that remained unfinished at the time of her death. From the first passionate essays to the more reserved manuscripts of later years, her work is filled with a personal intensity characterized by a quality of voice that is hers alone.

Cather was not interested in any analysis of art and artist neither did she have a high opinion of the feminists of her day, such as the suffragettes. Her life and art were so intertwined, indeed, that at times not even she could tell them apart. Her stubborn devotion to her art created a body of work that has enduring value. A revival of interest in Cather and her work began with the publication of several biographies in the early 1950s and accelerated as the women's movement gained momentum in the late 1960s and 1970s. New scholars, attuned to issues of women's abilities and

contributions, became aware that Cather's life was an exceptional one for a woman of her times.

WORKS OF WILLA CATHER

Willa Cather was a prolific writer whatever she has written has got universal appeal and as such her workmanship is exquisite. Her novels were popular when she was alive, and are now considered among the century's finest examples of the form. Cather published her first literary work **April Twilights** (1903), a book of poetry and a collection of short stories, **The Troll Garden** (1905). Throughout a long productive career she produced twelve novels, more than sixty stories and several volumes of critical essays that focused on her Nebraska experience and her early years in Virginia, her life in New York and Pittsburgh and her travels to New Mexico, Canada and Europe. However, it is for the series of novels focusing on her beloved Nebraska that Cather will be remembered.

Cather's first novel, was **Alexander's Bridge** (1912), appeared serially in McClure's as *Alexander's Masquerade*. This novella is a charming period piece, a love story of an engineer, and a fatalistic fable about a doomed love affair and the lives it destroys. Bartley Alexander's accidental meeting with the Irish actress he loved as a young man seems full of promise but leads instead to dishonesty and betrayal. With **O Pioneers!** (1913) she turned to the Nebraska prairies to tell of the heroic and creative qualities of the passing frontier. **O' Pioneers!** is the story of Alexander Bergson, the daughter of Swedish Immigrant farmers, whose devotion to the land sustains her against the hardships and suffering of prairie life. No other work of fiction so faithfully conveys both the sharp physical realities and the mythic sweep of the land. Willa Cather wrote her longest novel **The Song of the Lark** (1915). Beautiful and lyrical this third novel by Willa Cather follows the life of an immigrant

woman's character. Thea Kronborg, a minister's daughter in a provincial Colorado town, seems destined from childhood for a place in the wider world. She portrays the awakening and struggle of the self-making of an artist to maintain personal integrity in materialistic culture.

Cather continued in her autobiographical frames as she wrote **My Ántonia** (1918) her masterpiece episodic in construction like her other novels, she tells of a Bohemian immigrant girl's life on the frontier, and the pioneer strength that preserves her through numerous adversities. Infused with gracious passion for the land, this classic work embraces its uncommon subject- 'the hard life of the pioneer woman on the prairie'- with poetic certitude, rendering a moving portrait of an entire community.

As perceptively observed by H.L. Mencken – "No romantic novel ever written in America, by man or woman, is one half so beautiful as **My Ántonia**".³⁷ The book consists of the loosely structured memories of Jim Burden, who recounts tales of his Nebraska farm upbringing, and especially of the beautiful immigrant girl from Bohemia, Ántonia Shimerda, whom he loves with a pure innocence.

Cather won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for her novel **One of Ours** (1922), which depicted a boy from the Western plains, who leaves home to fight in World War I and is killed in France. Her judgment of contemporary society was seen in her mid career novel, **A Lost Lady** (1923) depicting the conflict between heroic builders of the west and cruel men of the present.³⁸ A portrait of a woman who reflects the conventions of her age as she defies them and whose transformation embodies the decline and coarsening of the American frontier. **The Professor's House** (1925) deals with spiritual and cultural crisis for the main characters. Later Cather published a short novella **My Mortal Enemy** (1926) where love for money goes unrequited and the heroine is seen dying alone in a squalid shabby Los Angeles suburb.

Willa Cather's writings entered into its third stage. The period was initiated by the novel **Death Comes for the Archbishop** (1927) in which she reveals a new found theme the vanished past of the American southwest where nature and Christianity is opposed to modern urban life and society. It is a chronicle of the early missions of Bishop Jean Latour and Vicar Father Joseph Valliant in Santa Fé as they organize the new Roman Catholic Diocese of New Mexico. A glow of grandeur suffuses in her writings and the details of layout made this the most handsomely produced book of her career.

Shadows on the Rock (1931) this time centering on seventeenth –century Canada, an evocation of North American origins highlights the men and women who struggled to adapt to the new world as they clung to the one they left behind. **Lucy Gayheart** (1935) is the story of Midwestern girl who gives up an early love affair to study music, then abandons her career to become the mistress of an egotistical concert singer, and meets an accidental death after he deserts her. **Sapphira and SalveGirl** (1940) is her last complete novel based on a story recalled from her Virginia childhood.

Cather received honorary degrees from numerous universities: The University of Michigan, the University of California, and from Columbia, Yale, and Princeton. Several prestigious awards came to Cather. America's highest literary prize, the Pulitzer was awarded for her novel **One of Ours** in 1923. Following her death, her reputation has grown steadily and, in the last fifteen years, exploded with activity, with over a hundred articles and several books appearing each year on her. Willa Cather's novels have never gone out of print, for her popularity has remained strong. Willa Cather left as her legacy some of the finest works of American literature; through her writings she also gave us a personal

chronicle of artistic development. Her artistic integrity or her literary skill of her novels makes it clear that Cather's works will go on attracting enthusiastic readers into the indefinite future.³⁹

LITERARY INFLUENCES ON CATHER'S WRITING

In early childhood, the young Willa was read to by her grandparents. The Bible was fundamental. It was toned for many hours. Cather's early training enabled her to conceive the language as sound. Some of her central text also included the Classics and Shakespeare.⁴⁰ Cather was lucky to have a talented Harvard graduate, Herbet Bates, teaching her, whose modesty and sensitivity, she always admired. The classical writers who influenced her, Theocritus and Virgil, were neither of them actually down on the farm when they were writing about crops and shepherds though Virgil, like Cather, carried the rural memories.⁴¹ She had read Robert Louis Stevenson and gave the landmarks along the Republican River such names as "Robber's Cave."⁴²

Cather devoured the novels of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Balzac, Daudet, Dumas Flaubert, and Hugo. She was an admirer of Proust, Maupassant, Mann, Stravinsky Merrimee, Musset, Verlaine, and Zola. George Sand, whose portrait hung over her mantel, was one of her heroines.⁴³ It was during her college years that she learned to admire William Jennings Bryan then at Lincoln, whose influence on her latter political thinking is to be seen in many of her novels and short stories. And during this period she met a living inspiration in the person of Stephen Crane.⁴⁴

Cather had intense admiration for the work of Flaubert as she tells us in her delightful essay "A chance Meeting" in the collection entitled "Not Under forty". She set Flaubert's objectivity restraint and rhythmic sense far above the unmeasured

outpourings of Balzac. She was deeply impressed by the Great Russian realists. While Willa Cather was attending the University of Nebraska, she read and admired the great masters of prose style, particularly Henry James, whom she considered “the most interesting writer of that time.”⁴⁵ She began by imitating James, and it was not until she wrote **O Pioneers!** that she stepped out into a style admittedly her own.

As noted by Ann M. Begley, “the observation has repeatedly been made with considerable justification, which **Alexander’s Bridge** is heavily indebted to Henry James both in form and in choice of an upper class, cosmopolitan milieu, but it is even more indebted to Carl Jung.”⁴⁶ Cather admired his language, style, plotting; his influence is also apparent in some of the stories in **The Troll Garden**.

Henry James wrote, in reference to a Cather’s novel he hadn’t yet read:

I find it the hardest thing in the world to read almost any new novel.

And is hard enough, but the hardest from the innocent hands of young females, young American females perhaps above all.⁴⁷

Cather also admired Walt Whitman for his nation building and his respect for the “common” people who were doing that building. There were other great ones Cather liked best like Mark Twain, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Jewett influenced Cather in her writings.

Cather’s response to Jewett,

She told Jewett that McClure told her over and over that she would never be able to do much in writing stories, but she could be a good magazine executive and had better let it go at that; she lacked the originality and power to be a really original literary talent.⁴⁸

As aptly remarked by Woodress “But she thought that one had a right to live and reflect and feel a little, that whether or not McClure was

right in thinking she would never be a writer, she thought perhaps she ought to consider her immortal soul.”⁴⁹

Cather often read the Bible which was a source of inspiration for her writings. Cather’s sensibility, her high regard for the artist and European culture, and the emphasis on the technique in her later novels link her with Gustave, Flaubert and Henry James.

IV

CATHER AND OTHER MODERNIST WOMEN WRITERS

It is very useful to study Cather as a modernist writer, as she shared many of her preoccupations with other modernist writers – both the expatriate and the ones who stayed in America. The first generation of modernist women writers were born during the crisis times leading up to the Civil War and came of age during the American awakening in the cultural tumult of reconstruction. It included Harriet Tubman, Carry Nation, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Pauline Hopkins, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Emma D. Kelley Hawkins.

The second generation of modernist women writers was born during a period of American economic dominance and came of age in America’s Gilded Age, where Populists and Suffragists took center stage from war hawks and doves, and where discussions of black enfranchisement entered into political debates. It included: Ida B. Wells Barnett, Edith Wharton, Sui Sin Far, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Onoto Watanna, Natalie Barney, Angelina Weld Grimke, and Jessie Fauset.

This generation witnessed waves of immigration and new forms of racism in the years before the turn of the century, as well as America's culture of institutional racism in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), and the reification of the doctrine of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).⁵⁰ Her prominent contemporaries were Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow. They were long considered regional writers, though not all their work is set in the desert Southwest or Nebraska, as not all Glasgow's is set in Virginia. Recent Feminist Scholarship emphasizes these authors concern with sex roles and their problematic self-concepts as women writers.

Willa Cather displayed an extraordinary understanding of a central facet of regionalism like Mary Austin. Like Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather is one of the finest women writers who wanted to express the truth for human life embracing both the world within and the world of external appearances. Miss Cather was younger than Sarah Orne Jewett, James and Henry Adams. She was still more than a literary generation away from F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Faulkner. Cather's real contemporaries in prose fiction were Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Dos Passos, John Steinbeck and William Saroyan. She admired Edith Wharton and Ellen Glasgow.

Edith Wharton

Wharton's work, historically, is rooted not only in the tradition of social and psychological realism commonly associated with Howells and James the writers she admired, but also in the realism and social criticism of women writers publishing before and contemporary. They were concerned with many of the same issues that engaged Wharton, particularly issues centered on experiences of women's and their problems. Personally, Wharton treated many of the issues of her own life in her fiction: her estrangement from and anger at her mother; her frustration with the

limitations placed on women, and especially woman of the upper class; her miserable marriage and the stigma against divorce, again particularly in her class but also generally, her fear of the ways in which cautiousness and selfishness can corrupt one's soul; her knowledge that female sexuality, despite society's repression of it, was a potent source of creativity.⁵¹

Ellen Glasgow

Glasgow considered herself something of a philosopher. With a brilliant and increasingly ironic treatment, Glasgow examined the decay of Southern aristocracy and the trauma of the encroachment of modern industrial civilization. She began to tap the full measure of her talent for depicting strong women caught by or struggling against, their expected roles.

Mary Austin

Austin reflects the growing feminist awareness stemming from Austin's participation in the Woman's Suffrage movement. Mary Austin's literary development reflects new interest in social issues-man's adjustment to society, rather than his adjustment to nature. Most of her novels reveal Austin's concern with how men and women work out of their individual and mutual roles in society. Austin however developed a regional philosophy, which reflected this new balance when she added society to the equation she had created between men and nature.⁵² Cather's work is very interesting to compare and contrast with Jewett's. As a regionalist – a writer engaged in trying to capture in detail with great accuracy and sensitivity to life as it was experienced in a particular region, rather than attempting to fill in a huge and more diffuse canvas.

CATHER'S ART

Cather "did not as a rule discuss her art, however from time to time, Miss Cather would express some of her ideas on writing in interviews". In these, she readily admitted that writing was hard work, but work, which she enjoyed as a tennis player, might enjoy working his game from the common place into the smooth and expert. If one loved the work it wasn't really work. Not that there wasn't a struggle in attempting perfection, but the struggle was one which stimulated. She compared the writer to the musician, writing being to the author what music is to the violinist.⁵³

On another occasion, Cather expresses that the artist's chief concern is not in his life, but rather his work: "Life in itself is a great task and to live it well or even decently is an art...."⁵⁴

As perceptively observed by Mildred Bennett,

Miss Cather held that artistic appreciation should include all the activities of life, from the enjoyment of the morning bath to cooking a roast just right, "so that it is brown and dripping and odorous and *saignant*." With the young authors she found the results "invariably false and hollow.... Art must spring out of the very stuff that life is made of." Cather didn't believe in "collecting ideas to build a story." What the "born artist" gets is an emotion that he wants to put into a design.⁵⁵

She loved her freedom- her liberty to do exactly as she pleased. She wanted nothing closer than friendship. As she said in her essay on Carlyle:

Art of every kind is an exacting master, more so even than Jehovah- He says only, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Art, Science and Letters

cry, 'Thou shalt have no other gods at all.' They accept only human sacrifices.⁵⁶

In Cather's opinion: "A book is made with one's own flesh and blood of years. It is cremated youth. It is all yours- no one gave it to you."⁵⁷ She didn't invent or contrive. "You can't write imaginary things. To have universal appeal, they must be true!"⁵⁸ Miss Cather held no brief for schools and courses in short - story writing. She felt that they could only teach what others had already done, and if one wished to be original, he would have to find the way by himself.⁵⁹

Cather also accepts that an artist must live in solitude to create good work, "...if an artist does any good work he must do it alone...There is much to suffer, much to undergo; the awful loneliness the longing for humans fellowship and for human love... It is a hard thing to endure."⁶⁰ Thus, in Cather's philosophy, a person must abandon most human needs in order to totally commit himself to realizing his artistic potential. It is at such high levels of devotion and perseverance that a person is reborn an artist.

Cather disapproved of realism and naturalism; she considered it cluttered, deterministic, overtly reform minded that took away from art. The best art Cather felt, focused not on reality but on "something else", some ineffable emotional truth plying between the mind and the world, and invoked it by subtle, indirect means Cather wrote from her heart about things she heard and saw as a child growing up in a multicultural setting where the realities of life on the prairies loomed over all realms.

As perceptively observed by Bernice Slote, "with Willa Cather, the imagination, was a way of being. What came to her of experience, in any form,

became a part of her. And in truth she became an actress creating and recreating for herself. The person, who is also the artist, becomes the instrument by which experience is absorbed and translated.⁶¹ Cather, in fact, describes her own writing as a penetration of the bottom of consciousness in a way that Kronborg's singing brings her deeper into the inner zone where discovery lies. She expresses her dissatisfaction with her first novel, *Alexander's bridge*, with those following by distinguishing between "the building of external stories and a story that formed itself.

Cather's preference is for organic form which is Kronborg's discovery applied to Cather's own fictive art. The "essential matter" of a story, she comes to realize, arises "in flashes that are unreasoning, often as unreasonable, as life itself". Only a form that momentarily arrests these flashes without giving a falsifying finality will do.⁶²

CATHER AND FEMINISM

Since the mid-1980s, there has been an increasing feminist emphasis in Cather studies, with principal focus upon three basic gender issues in her life and work:

1. Her depiction of man woman relationships, especially within marriage,
2. Her critical re-examination of traditional male (creative) and female (domestic) role stereotypes;
3. The nature of Cather's own sexuality, and its relationship to her fiction.

Willa Cather was not a radical feminist writer but she had the love for women, and in a male oriented society Cather was fascinated by the toil and forbearance of women. She has sympathy for the women folk, though she was male oriented. The feminism of Willa Cather is more subtle than that of Edith Wharton or Ellen Glasgow.

Cather comes to her heroes as friend. Cather's first work, the story of a man in disintegration and defeat could hardly be presented than these three succeeding

novels, **O' Pioneers!** , **The Song of the Lark** and **My Antonia** which sing of triumph of a woman. Willa Cather's trio of heroic women can bear any amount of strain. Firmly coordinated, stress-sustaining in every member, the personality of Alexandra Bergson, of *Antonia* Shimerda remains a unit, regardless of live load or dead.⁶³

The men of these books are neither literary accessories, after the fashion of Edith Wharton's masculine characters, nor enemies to be hunted down with the weapons of Ellen Glasgow; they are likeable young men and well individualized. Matched in mediocrity with women characters, they might show some force: but against the vigor of Miss Cather's feminine protagonists, these pleasant mannered, smooth-faced youths appear emasculate. Through the relationship of Carl Linstrum and Alexandra the emotional pattern may be traced not only of **O Pioneers!** but of every significant novel by Willa Cather. It is not a sexual pattern; it is the attitude of an older sister compassionately viewing all men as juniors.

Throughout Willa Cather's novels, no circumstance is as variously detailed as the plight of a superior man in the marriage trap.⁶⁴ Willa Cather's novels contain an integrating feminine personality. The relationship of a protective attitude of Alexandra toward young Emil in **O Pioneers!** of Thea toward Thor in **The Song of the Lark** , in **My Antonia** , the immigrant girl Antonia finds almost a brother in Jim Burden much of what he is to learn about the world. Woman as conservator of civilization, woman as counselor, one function blends well with the other; and in the novels of Willa Cather, there is always a "more or less pliant male over whom woman's tutelage shows effect."⁶⁵

In the course of twelve novels, Willa Cather has exhibited feminism both varied and subtle. Almost non-existent in her first novel **Alexander's Bridge**, which she herself practically disavowed within a decade after publication, the desire to exalt

her own sex has provided the essential strength of succeeding works. The pioneer trilogy, on which her reputation will perhaps continue to rest, makes no pretense of sharing the heroic role between the sexes; that part belongs in turn to Alexandra, to Thea and to Antonia and no man may venture near, except to magnify it by his own homage.⁶⁶

Struggling with the growing awareness of her sexual nature and wishing desperately to be accepted by the male literary establishment, she denigrated women artists in her early newspaper writing and fiction. Like her sister feminists, Edith Wharton and Ellen Glasgow, Miss Cather achieves her literary purpose most effectively in prairie of her own sex. The men on the jobs, of bridge-building to excavation, the rougher phases of railroading, ranching and farming, that Miss Cather describes are the most lacking in virility. The contemporary American novel is broadly speaking, a product of humanism. Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather have shown woman struggling neither to be man's peer nor his master but to exist as an independent entity. Waiving her maternal function, the feminist heroine has sought absolute achievement, exclusive of sex.

V

CRITICS ON WILLA CATHER

There is a critical controversy surrounding Willa Cather. Her position among American novelists is unique; no other has brought to bear quite her kind of perception on the American scene. Here are some of the critical evaluations of the critics of Willa Cather's fiction. David Daiches, in his biography opines:

Where to place Willa Cather will always puzzle the literary historians.

But the reader of her best novels is not likely to worry about that.

These novels have strength and an individuality that it is not easy for the critic formally to describe, virtues, which can be experienced even if they cannot easily be talked about. Her work transcends national problems to illuminate one of the great questions about civilization. To put the matter briefly, Miss Cather's novels are civilized; and if we interpret that term too narrowly, that is because we have not read Willa Cather carefully enough.⁶⁷

Willa Cather has been mentioned to be able to touch every generation. The critic Leonard Unger said that her work would touch the generation before and after her. She writes from the past but will deal with everyone. Her writing was based on things before her time and that is how she is reaching people in the next generation. Her writings help the people of the time now understand things back before Willa's time. Unger also states that she writes out of wisdom.⁶⁸

Elizabeth Sergeant which was a friend of hers, also a critic, said:

I saw that her intimacy with nature lay at the very root... of her power to work at all. She was a writer that came from deep down, her root, and not from the surface. Willa would always take things from deep down to write about. She really thought about all that she was writing about. Willa would get the deep down grip about everything. As I see it, all critics had nice and meaningful things to say about Willa Cather. Her work was such a positive impact that everyone thought about how creative and positive her work was. So as I see it, everyone would and does see her as a good writer.⁶⁹

Willa Cather has got very good remarks from critics of both time periods. It is obvious that she was, and still is, an extremely well respected writer. Critic Rebecca

West said: “Miss Cather builds her imagined world almost as solidly as our five senses build the universe around us.”⁷⁰

That proves that Willa could create a visual picture with her stories, and get people interested in her work. Another critic, Edmund Wilson, stated that Willa was “one of the only writers who were able to bring any real distinction to the life of the Middle West.” She did something that other writers could not by bringing the Middle West to life. As you can see, Willa Cather will forever be remembered as someone the critics loved.⁷¹

Dorothy Van Ghent, expresses,

It is customary to speak of Willa Cather as an “elegist” of the American pioneer tradition. “Elegy” suggests celebration and lament for a lost and irrevocable past; but the boldest and most beautiful of Willa Cather’s fictions are characterized by a sense of the past not as an irrevocable quality of events, wasted in history, but as persistent human truth repossessed-salvaged, redeemed by virtue of memory and art...

Her art is a singular one. The prose style is suave, candid, transparent, a style shaped and sophisticated in the great European tradition; her teachers were Homer and Virgil, Tolstoy and Flaubert. But the creative vision that is particularly hers is deeply primitive, psychologically archaic in an exact sense. In that primitivism was her great strength, for it allowed the back door of her mind to keep open, as it were, to the rumor and movement of ancestral powers and instinctive agencies.⁷²

As aptly put forth by Henry Steel Commager, in his *The American Mind*,

She thought the traditional themes of love and despair, truth and beauty, the struggle for artistic honesty, far from exhausted, indeed she held, with Henry James and Ellen Glasgow, that these were the only themes capable of inspiring great art, “ideals,” she wrote, “were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men,” and unlike so many of her contemporaries Hemingway, for example she was not embarrassed by this vocabulary. Sarah Orne Jewett had admonished her, when she was scarcely more than a girl that “you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up Otherwise what might be strength.... Is only crudeness, and what might be insight is only observation, sentiment falls to sentimentality – you can write about life but never write life itself.” ... [She] wrote life itself, wrote it so passionately that the characters she created seem to us more authentic than the characters of history.⁷³

VI

Cather readers are still drawn to the depth and beauty of her works. Many critical works have been published on Willa Cather. Many critics have been fascinated by her works, and scholars have turned their attention to her works to study the varied facets of her fiction. In the last twenty years there has also been an academic explosion of interest in Cather.

Cather studies has been revitalized and almost wholly transformed in the last thirty years. She is no longer merely Nebraska's first lady of letters, whose well-

wrought paeans to the “American Dream” earned the modestly respectful attention of myth and symbol critics and new critics throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Here are a few recent studies on Cather: **Willa Cather Remembered** (1995) edited by Sharon Hoover comprises reminiscences of the author written between the 1920s and 1980s by people ranging from close friends to journalistic observers and acquaintances. The materials are drawn from newspapers and journals, portions of books, and a few previously unpublished personal letters or reflections.

Willa Cather, (1995) by Philip L. Gerber provides an overview of Cather’s life. He examines the early, middle, and final novels; discusses her contributions to short fiction; and reveals criticism of Cather’s past and present biographies.

The Stuff of our Forebears: Willa Cather’s Southern Heritage. (1998) by Joyce McDonald, begins by examining Cather’s childhood in Virginia and the Southern influences that follow her through her literary career. McDonald continues to analyze the works of Cather, suggesting a more political stance in her writing.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

In this thesis I propose to show with reference to selected novels of Willa Cather how her works depict immigrant women’s activities. My main thrust is on portrayal of Immigrant Women characters. The thesis also argues that though Cather always remained faithful to Nebraska, this did not mean that she was a regionalist. Her works possess much more than local colour. Cather transcends her native context by making it a symbolic background for universal aspirations of her women characters. I have examined the following select immigrant novels of Cather to study the portrayals of immigrant women: **O Pioneers!**, **My Ántonia**, **The Song of the**

Lark, Lucy Gayheart in the light of the concept of immigrant novels discussed earlier in the chapter.

This section also presents the plan of study. The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter entitled 'Understanding Willa Cather' is introductory in nature. 'The Pioneering Women' is the second chapter. It deals with **O Pioneers!** 'Unusual Endurance in the Feminine spirit' is the third chapter. It discusses **My Ántonia**. The fourth chapter entitled 'Creative Power of the Artist' presents the analysis of the novel **The Song of the Lark**. 'The Woman who would be an Artist' is the fifth chapter. It deals with the novel **Lucy Gayheart** and the sixth chapter presents conclusions.

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CHAPTER-2

THE PIONEERING WOMEN

I

O Pioneers! the first Nebraska novel of the prairies published in 1913, tells the story of taming the 'wild' prairie land. It is based on Cather's Nebraska childhood memories. She uses her memories to create the portrait of life on the frontier. Alexandra Bergson's portrait is based on Cather's childhood friend Hilda Kron who is immigrated from Sweden to Catherton and married to lazy Swedish pioneer E.J.Peterson.

Alexandra Bergson, a young Swedish immigrant is the dominating figure which exemplifies the American pioneering experience. Alexandra is a 'tall', 'strong' girl. Her admiringly pleasant personality reveals her unique appearance. She had a serious thoughtful face, and her 'clear, deep blue eyes' were fixed intently on the distance without seeming to see anything, as if she were in trouble. She wore a man's "long ulster and a round plush cap" tied down with a thick veil not as if it were an affliction, but as if it were very comfortable and belonged to her. She walked "rapidly and resolutely" like a young soldier as if she knew exactly where she was going and what she was going to do next (140).

The immigrant Alexandra Bergson with a 'glance of Amazonian fierceness,' a 'striding hero', wearing a man's coat and woman's veil with a severe look as Hermione Lee remarks, combines "masculine and female qualities the attributes of a strong pioneer figure."¹The traveler's passing by would admire her "shining mass of hair", as she like to dress it up with 'two thick braids, pinned about her head in the German way with a fringe of reddish yellow curls' (140).

Having great passion for reading during the week Alexandra read only the newspapers, but on Sunday, and in the long evenings of winter, she read a good deal; read a few things over a great many times. She knew long portions of the “Frithj of Saga” by heart, and like most Swedes who read at all; she was fond of Longfellow’s verse, - the ballads and the “Golden Legends” and “The Spanish Student.” Alexandra also loved to read the ‘Swedish Bible’ (167).

A crayon portrait of John Bergson hung on the wall. Alexandra ‘had it made from a little photograph taken for his friends just before he left Sweden; a slender man of thirty-five, with soft hair curling about his high forehead drooping mustache, and wondering, sad eyes that looked forward into the distance, as if they already beheld the New world’ (188). Alexandra admired plain things herself. She did not like pomp or show. She said frankly that she knew nothing about such things, and she was willing to be governed by the general conviction that the “more useless and utterly unusable objects were, the greater their virtue as ornament” (185).

She always appreciated the universal beauty, to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she could forget her body aches. She could watch the changing nature and with it, Alexandra ‘felt a sense of personal security’ (173). There was one fancy indeed, which persisted throughout her girlhood. It most often came to her on Sunday mornings, the one day in the week when she lay late a bed listening to the familiar morning sounds The country meant to Alexandra a good deal the “chirping of their insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music” (173).

The Swedish tradition that runs in the family is depicted as Alexandra has love for antiques and puts them carefully, which depicts the traditional customs and values.

Alexandra has brought together the old homely furniture that the Bergsons used in their first log house, the family portraits and the few things her mother brought from Sweden Alexandra loved the nature, and feels the need for the 'order and fine arrangement' (178).

As rightly perceived by Philip Gerber:

Alexandra Bergson is equated with the artists who seek the Bright Medusa because, in Cather's expanding approach to the term, an artist may express himself in any medium. Cressida Garnet sings, Harvey Merrick Sculpts, and Don Hedger paints; but for Alexandra, daughter of the Middle Border, it is in the soil that she expresses herself best.²

The Swedish immigrant Alexandra Bergson has a unique physique. Her figure is fuller and she 'has more color'. She seems 'sunnier' and more 'vigorous' than she did as a young girl. Her 'skin was smooth and white' as none but Swedish women ever possess 'skin with the freshness of the snow' itself. Her father always admired her. "In his daughter, John Bergson recognized the strength of will, and the simple direct way of thinking things out, that had characterized his father (149). As stated by Willa Cather John Bergson "felt her youth and strength" (150).

The Bergsons are typical of the immigrant families Cather had known in Red Cloud Nebraska. The mother and father are first-generation Americans who settled with the hope of owning land and of securing better lives of their children. These immigrants were generally unsuccessful at crop production because they lacked the rural background and skills of a previous generation being manual tradesmen themselves. Alexandra's father John Bergson's represents brave pioneer family moving onto the "virgin" land, breaking the sod, and fighting the hardships of the climate. Father of Oscar, Lou and Emil, had been a shipwright in Sweden, but became

a farmer in the untamed, hardscrabble prairie lands of Nebraska who had its “ Old – World belief that land, in itself is desirable.” Human effort seems inconsequential for even after seasons of striving:

The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings’. It was this land pieces, John Bergson has fought so hard to cultivate out of the stubborn wilderness.” (148)

For weeks, John Bergson on his death bed, all depressed thinks of an idea how to make the land productive. His bed stood in the sitting- room, next to the kitchen. Through the day, while the baking and washing and ironing were going on: he lay and looked up at the roof beams that he himself had hewn, or out at the cattle in the corral. He counted the cattle over and over. It diverted him to speculate as to how much weight each of the steers would probably put on by spring. He often called his daughter in to talk about this.

Having faith in the eldest child of the Bergson family; Alexandra is given charge as John Bergson, succumbs to his battle with death, of the family. Alexandra the eldest, of the four children is chosen to accept the role of head of the family. The Bergson family also includes three sons: Oscar, Lou and Emil. However Alexandra is the child chosen to take control of the Bergson land. John Bergson, in fact, begins to recognize the wisdom of his eldest child and leaves her as the caretaker of the farm at a young age.

Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment. His boys were willing

enough to work, but when he talked with them they usually irritated him. (148)

The image of Alexandra as a child is realistically depicted as:

The eyes of the girl who seemed to be looking with such anguished perplexity into the future, upon the somber eyes ...who seemed already to be looking into the past... there is often a good deal of the child left in the people who have had to grow up too soon. (146)

As a young girl Alexandra had the ability of a creative mind, it was she who read the papers and followed the market, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than John Bergson himself (149). The young Swedish Bergson was 'intelligent' like her grandfather, who had been a 'ship builder', a man of considerable force and of some fortune (149).

The pioneering Alexandra Bergson struggles in the fields taming the 'tough prairie sod'. As perceptively observed by Susan J. Rosowski; as a privileged noble peasant Alexandra is protected from labor by her father,³ as such John Bergson suggest that 'Alexandra must not work in the fields any more'. He further says "Hire a man when you need help. She can make much more with her eggs and butter than the wages of a man. It was one of my mistakes that I did not find that out sooner. Try to break a little more land every year; sod corn is good for fodder. Keeping turning the land and always put up more hay than you need" to keep it fertile. (151)

It was Alexandra's shrewdness that has saved the family from squandering its money in crops, which failed when, put to the test on neighboring farms. Their personal philosophy is a huge limiting factor in their development.

Then came the hard times that brought every one on the Divide to the brink of despair; three years of drought and failure, the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching plowshare. The first of these fruitless summers the Bergson boys bore courageously. The failure of the corn crop made labor cheap. Lou and Oscar hired two men and put in bigger crops than ever before. They lost everything they spent. (161)

Burdened with family crisis, Alexandra often would get lost in her own thoughts, thinking over and over imaginatively as Cather quotes "She was standing lost in thought, leaning upon her pitchfork, her sun bonnet lying beside her on the ground" (161). Having deep faith in her land, that it could yield a bountiful harvest she faces the challenges single handedly. The land was not easily controlled and willing to cooperate at first, as it was subjected to draughts and stormy winds, but Alexandra was determined to save the land.

Alexandra doesn't get discouraged and she exhorts Emil to take a chance and further says that's we must have faith in the land.

There's nothing in it for us down there, Emil. There are a few fine farms, but they are owned by the rich men in town, and couldn't be bought. Most of the land is rough and hilly. They can always scrape along down there, but they can never do anything big. Down there they have a little certainty, but up with us there is a big chance. We must have faith in the high land, Emil. I want to hold on harder than ever, and when you're a man you'll thank me (170).

She went to examine the situation in their neighboring village and came back with much more confidence. On her way back she was more radiant. This made her to

hum an old Swedish hymn, and she looked gay for the first time and she climbed the long swells of the Divide which surprised even her younger brother, who was closest to her. Alexandra with a deep sigh of relief expresses her emotions: “The Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman” (170).

The first woman on the Divide was Alexandra, who had “determination and strength” of character whereby she adopts innovative farming techniques like that of her new ‘pig corral’ and the ‘silos’ (160). The major plantations were of sweet potatoes and the vines seemed to be drying out and a variety of fruits like yellow seed- cucumbers and pumpkins and citrons were among of them. Along to the feathery asparagus, were red berries and rhubarb at one end. Growing in the middle of the garden were gooseberries and currant bushes. Zinnias, marigolds and scarlet sage were amidst them (161). It thus becomes clear that Alexandra is stronger and more resolute than her brothers. Many families, including Carl Linstrum’s sell their farms and move away. But Alexandra believes in the promise of the untamed country, To Alexandra ‘alfalfa has been the salvation of her country’. She did not try to conquer the land, as her brothers may have desired; instead she chose to work with it.

Having all faith that the land was eager to produce, Alexandra comments “You all laughed at me when I said land here was ready for wheat, and I had to raise three big wheat crops before the neighbors quit” (221). James Seaton notes: “The narrator encourages the reader to see in Alexandra’s triumph the fruit of a new relation to the land, a relation of love rather than conflict.”⁴ Not only Barney Flinn, red – headed Irishman who was her foreman, showed a bad temperament when Alexandra put up her new ‘silo’ on the Divide also Alexandra’s neighbors and her

men questioned her accepted belief. This shows her tenacity as Barney remarks: "To be sure, if the thing don't work we'll have plenty of feed without it" (180).

Having drawn inspiration from her father the pioneering immigrant Alexandra had the knowledge of land, her intelligence makes the land, 'wake up out from its sleep', 'so big so rich'. Though she had lack of capital she borrowed from the people and invested in the land, then people were ready to lend her money "when she did not need it" (194).

The Swedish Alexandra Bergson is proud of owing the great farm:

There was something individual about the great farm a most unusual trimness and care for detail. On either side of the road, for a mile before you reached the foot of the hill, stood tall orange hedges, their glossy green marking off the yellow fields. South of the hill, in a low, sheltered swale, surrounded by a mulberry hedge, was the orchard, its fruit trees knee- deep in timothy grass. (178)

Cather redefines the American Dream as she writes. This was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, "Alexandra Bergson." Alexandra whose name hails from a Greek word meaning "to defend"; she did not bother what the people had to say; she went ahead with work in her farms. As she believes in independent nature Alexandra wisely manages the farm. The industrious and moral nature of female immigrants is revealed as Mrs. Bergson prefers logs to sod houses as such the family works hard for it.

As Oscar comments:

Oh, now, Alexandra, you always took it pretty easy! Of course we wanted you to. You liked to manage round, and we always humored you. We realize you were a great deal of help to us. There's no

woman anywhere around that knows as much about business as you do, and we've always been proud of that. (220)

As the brothers wanted to sell the land Alexandra was firm not to sell it. She is able to dissuade her brothers from selling out their farms explaining how a local land dealer is capitalizing on the discouragement of their neighbourhood. And there by takes right decision for her family.

Land sells for three times as much as this, but in five years, we will double it. The rich men down there own all the best land, and they are buying all they can get. The thing to do is to sell our cattle and what little old corn we have, and buy the Linstrum place. Then the next thing to do is to take out two loans on our half-sections, and buy Peter Crow's place; raise every dollar we can, and buy every acre we can. (171)

The immigrant pioneer Alexandra Bergson with her keen insight and imagination thinks of the future and ways of clearing the family debt .She convinces her brothers to re-mortgage their farm and buy more land.

We borrow the money for six years. Well, with the money we buy a half-section from Linstrum and a half from Crow, and a quarter from Struble, maybe. That will give us upwards of fourteen hundred acres, wont it? You wont have to pay off your mortgages for six years. By that time, any of this land will be worth thirty dollars an acre- it will be worth fifty, but we'll say thirty, then you can sell a garden patch anywhere, and pay off a debt of sixteen hundred dollars. It's not the principal I'm worried about; it's the interest and taxes. We'll have to strain to meet the payments. But as sure as we are sitting here to-

night, we can sit down here ten years from now independent landowners, not struggling farmers any longer. The chance that father was always looking for has come. (171)

Unlike many women of the period, in Cather's novel **O Pioneers!** Alexandra Bergson does not rely on a man for her success though her brothers seem to feel her achievements are aberration due more to luck than skill. She is ready to go ahead with farming even though Lou and Oscar back out. Alexandra takes charge at the age of twenty of the family farm and proceeds to transform a struggling homestead into a thriving business.

Alexandra is proud of her Swedish heritage. She further comments; we are better fixed than any of our neighbors because father had more brains. Alexandra finds that the Swedish were better people than these in the old country. She insists to her brothers "we ought to do more than they do, and see further ahead." Alexandra is methodical enough to complete her task, yet free from slavery to repetitious routine, being alert to change, she is not erratic but imaginative.

In the absence of her father, Alexandra plays a dual role of sister and that of mother and comforts Oscar that he will not have to work hard to tame the land. Alexandra tells her brother "You poor boy, you won't have to work it. The men in town who are buying up other people's land don't try to farm it. They are the men to watch, in a new country. Let's try to do like the shrewd ones, and no like these stupid fellows." I don't want you boys always to have to work like this. I want you to be independent, and prefer Emil to go to school. Alexandra shows ardent desire for the boys to be independent and Emil 'to go to school'. She did not appreciate Lou and Oscar because they were 'bigoted and self-satisfied, whereas she had all praise for

Emil. It's mainly because of Alexandra's encouragement that Emil received good education. Although her brothers talk vague things, she shows tolerance.

Swedish Immigrant Alexandra Bergson on gaining prosperity moves on to "her new house on the hill, that has several rooms, that are papered, carpeted, and furnished". Alexandra's dining room is filled with varnished wood, bright glass and china; guest rooms contain fancy candlesticks and jars. As such Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors (83-84). As Squire notes: "Swedish heirlooms gracing the sitting room are a reminder that immigrants brought their cultural heritage with them and that women perpetuate their heritage."⁵ Alexandra accommodates her guests tastes who were probably immigrants themselves, As Beth Rundstrom opines "When they saw tokens of prosperity in Alexandra's house, they were reassured that they could be productive, successful citizens, and that her home incorporates and maintains the old Scandinavian pioneer culture."⁶

Alexandra may present a model of an independent woman, however she does not attempt to influence others around her to view life in the same manner she does. She is a quiet observer of those around her. While dining with her hired men and her family Alexandra did not talk much at the table, but she encouraged her men to talk, and she always listened attentively, even when they seemed to be talking foolishly (180).

After the marriage of Lou and Oscar, land was equally divided. They liked their own ways of doing things, and did not altogether like Alexandra's ways.

Now that Alexandra's farm has proven to be the best, the brothers are afraid they will lose any claim they might have over it. As such Alexandra confronts with her brothers patriarchal opinion when they claim that 'the farm is truly theirs'. When

Carl puts up with Alexandra for a fortnight stay Lou and Oscar try to get hold of her property. In her defense Alexandra speaks of her solitary achievements:

I've made more on my farms since I've been alone than when we all worked together ... I've built it up myself, and it has nothing to do with you." Oscar sat up suddenly and Lou clutched at his bristly hair. "Give him?" And Lou shouted. "Our property, our homestead? (220)

As Lou and Oscar always expected that it would be left to their children, Alexandra replies in an even quiet tone "I'll do exactly as I please with the rest of my land."

Although Alexandra is a spinster, she has maintained relationship with her brothers and their children. She further remarks "I have had to think for myself a good many years and am not likely to change... On the whole, we take as much comfort in each other as most brothers and sisters do. And I am very fond towards Lou's oldest daughter" (195). Lou's oldest daughter Milly was no so much at ease with her mother as she was with aunt Alexandra, owing her generous nature. Alexandra thinks of gifting a piano for Milly for her appreciation and liking for music:

Alexandra replies firmly, "I think Milly deserves a piano. All the girls around here have been taking lessons for years, but Milly is the only one of them who can ever play anything when you ask her. she further explains: I'll tell you when I first thought I would like to give you a piano, Milly, and that was when you learned that book of old Swedish songs that your grandfather used to sing (188).

Alexandra had no personal gain, cultivation of the land, seeking others cooperation for cultivation and thus to provide help for her family was her main aim.

Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields (273).

As her emotional life remained subconscious, that vitality she channels into her enterprises and succeeds. Alexandra chooses to sacrifice her own love and happiness to a single-minded pursuit- it is the education and unrealized potential of her brother, Emil. Oscar comments on Carl and Alexandra's relationship as he puts up with her for a short stay. Oscar rose. "Yes," he broke in, "everybody's laughing to see youat your age, with him. Everybody knows he's nearly five years younger than you, and is after your money. And further reminds her saying, Alexandra you are forty years old!"(221). Alexandra's autonomous nature is revealed as she responds:

All that doesn't concern anybody but Carl and me. Go to town and ask your lawyers what you can do to restrain me from disposing of my own property. And I advise you to do what they tell you; for the authority you can exert by law is the only influence you will ever have over me again (221).

Most of Alexandra's happy memories were impersonal; yet to her they were very personal. "Her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather and beasts and growing things. Not many people would have cared to read it; only a happy few, she had never been in love, she had never indulged in sentimental reveries. Even as a girl she had looked upon men as work-fellows" (238). Alexandra loved freedom but never misused it or shirked from her responsibilities. Willa Cather symbolically depicts this aspect when she sees a wild duck on a lake when she is with her brother Emil.

Under the overhanging willows of the opposite bank there was an inlet where the water was deeper and flowed so slowly that it seemed to sleep in the sun. In this little bay a single wild duck was swimming and diving and preening her feathers, disporting herself very happily in the flickering light and shade. They sat for a long time, watching the solitary bird take its pleasure. No living thing had ever seemed to Alexandra as beautiful as that wild duck (237).

She somehow compares herself to the duck, and longs for freedom. Alexandra also envy's Carl's freedom, thereby she remarks: "But you show it yourself, Carl. I'd rather have had your freedom than my land" (197). When Alexandra felt tired after a hard day's work, she went to the bathhouse that was partitioned off the kitchen shed. "There she would stand in a tin tub and prosecute her bath with vigor, finishing it by pouring buckets of cold well-water over her gleaming white body which no man on the Divide could have carried very far" (238).

Emil graduates from college, sees the world and welcomes opportunity and freedom, the dreams of every immigrant. Emil 'on the outside is just like an American boy...but underneath he is more Swedish than any of us (195). Alexandra's brother Emil even after undergoing studies at the University has retained the old cultures and she is proud of him. Alexandra feels that by sending him to the state university, she has given him the opportunity he needs to find fulfillment-"a chance, a whole chance."

Alexandra was well satisfied with her brother Emil ...out of her father's children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plow, and who had a personality apart from the soil. And that, she reflected, was what she had worked for. She felt satisfied with her life (241). Having a strong belief

for the change in culture Alexandra encourages Emil to go and present himself to the society. She was so proud of him that she decided at once to take him up to the church supper, and to make him wear the Mexican costume he had brought home in his trunk (240). Cather wanted to show changes in the society, thereby she reveals this by portraying changes in Emil's personality and having got the talent of playing the guitar.

Emil felt a new thrill of admiration for his friend, Amédée Chevalier, a French immigrant and with it the old pang of envy at the way in which he could do with his might what his hand found to do, and feel that, whatever it was, it was the most important thing in the world. "I'll have to bring Alexandra up to see this thing work." Emil thought, "it's splendid!" (257).

Although Alexandra never married, but she always saw that her girls married at the right time. Alexandra gave words of good courses and two milk cows as a wedding gift. Alexandra would like to extend her helping hand to old-fashioned people like old Mrs.Lee! Alexandra is desperate on loss of her friend and her brother Emil. Alexandra feels tormented when she learns about the tragic death of the couple, Marie and Emil. Later when Frank gets imprisoned Alexandra's heart grieved towards Frank and wants to reach out to him to set him free.

Alexandra thought of how she and Frank had been wrecked by the same storm and of how, although she could come out into the sunlight, she had not much more left in her life than he. She remembered some lines from a poem she had liked in her schooldays:

Henceforth the world will only be

A wider prison-house to me,- (284)

And sighs, as a disgust of life weighed upon her heart.

Alexandra finds faults in Emil and Marie and thereby consoles Frank in prison. She wants to will the land to the future generation. Alexandra gives a stirring statement about the land and its importance to her. She openly acknowledges the ability of the land to triumph and to triumph continually in the future through the hands of the right people. She states:

Suppose I do will my land to their children, what difference will that make? The land belongs to the future, Carl; that's the way it seems to me. How many of the names on the county clerk's plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brothers' children. We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it – for a little while (284).

Alexandra shows concern for Crazy Ivar who is deeply religious and slightly imbalanced elderly man who distrusts civilization and behaves bizarrely around people. Lou insists Alexandra to file a complaint against Ivar and get rid of him, as the doctor who treated him, has the notion that he's likely to set fire to the barn any night, and take after you and the girls with an axe. To that Alexandra, realizes that there is great potential even in crazy people like Ivar, "Ivar's queer, certainly, but he has more sense than half the hands I hire" (186) And in spite of getting him locked up, Alexandra wants to render all the help, "Well, Lou, if any of the neighbors try that, I'll have myself appointed Ivar's guardian and take the case to court, that's all I am perfectly satisfied with him." Alexandra is intelligent thinking helps her to protect the dignity of lay people like Ivar. "In my opinion, Ivar has just as much right to his

own way of dressing and thinking as we have. But I'll see that he doesn't bother other people. I'll keep him at home" (187).

As she grew older, this fancy more often came to her when she was tired than when she was fresh and strong. Sometimes, after she had been in the open all day, overseeing the branding of the cattle or the loading of the pigs, she would come in chilled; take a concoction of spices and warm home-made wine, and go to bed with her body aching with fatigue. Then, just before she went to sleep, she had the old sensation of being lifted and carried by a strong being who took from her all her bodily weariness (238-239).

As Alexandra grew older, the illusion of being lifted and carried by a strong being who took from her all her bodily weariness came to her more often. Alexandra longed for companionship. Sometimes, as she lay thus luxuriously idle, her eyes closed, she used to have an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by some one very strong. It was a man, certainly, who carried her, but he was like no man he knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow with the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being carried swiftly off across the fields. Alexandra did not take pride in her business matters. When speaking of the success of her farm, she takes absolutely no responsibility for she feels that:

The land did it. It had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so

big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still (194).

As Susan J. Rosowski notes: “Alexandra has released the sleeping country from darkness.”⁷ She further remarks “the old country “has vanished forever,” and nature, freed from chaos, revels in its new life.

The shaggy coat of the prairie, which they lifted to make him [John Bergson] a bed, has vanished forever. From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checker-board, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light...the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. The wheat cutting sometimes goes all night as well as day, and in good seasons there are scarcely men and horses enough to do the harvesting. The grain is so heavy that it bends toward the blade and cuts like velvet (174).

Alexandra’s feelings toward the land read like a love story, with the land personified as the beloved: “For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her” (170).

Cather thinks that the characters must submit to, rather than conquer the land. She tends to personify “the land “and makes it one of the main protagonists in her story. It is more true to say that the land “owns” Alexandra than the opposite.

Because of this she is naturally a conspicuous local figure, made more so by her forward thinking adaptive approach to the business of farming. Alexandra's represents the beginning of a new woman. She defies gender stereotypes she conquers, but in the extension of love that she transmits to the land.⁸ Once she has established her "new relation to it", she almost loses herself in the land: "She [feels] as if her heart was hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring" (173).

The omniscient narrator concludes with the blessing of timeless truths:

'They went into the house together, leaving the Divide behind them, under the evening sun. Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth! (290)

Alexandra's peculiarity and her tremendous ability, which reveals her latent talent winds up in Cather words, as admiration to Alexandra:

Isn't it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years (196).

Cather remarks about pioneers, which is also an indirect compliment to Alexandra, "Pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (161). As John Randall observes that Alexandra's brothers Oscar and Lou have strength, but strength alone is not enough. and as John Bergson was imaginative, 'he wore himself and died' in an attempt to

retrieve his fortune. He opines that ‘A pioneer must have both imagination and strength’. He further comments on the clear superiority of Alexandra over her father and brothers, for what they possess separately, she is able to combine.⁹

It is customary that Alexandra has certain weaknesses as a normal human being. Unlike Lou and Oscar she is aware of her own and theirs. She confides to Carl that she has little to do with her brothers and that her independent ways alienate them. Alexandra fails to protest where Carl says he liked the old Lou and Oscar better and she admits to the limiting effects of life on the land: as she states, “and our minds get stiff.” (124). John J. Murphy opines: confessing a preference for Carl’s freedom from the land she equates purpose and survival with a sense of the larger world: “If the world were no wider than my cornfields if there were not something beside this, I would” not feel that it was much worth while to work.¹⁰

Alexandra treats her European hired hands, Barney Flinn and Nelse Jensen, as trusted family members’ (39). She keeps three pretty young Swedish girls in her house not because she needs that much help but “to hear them giggle” (186). She takes the young girls into the flower garden; and keeps Ivar, who is “too old to work in the fields,” and sometimes “calls him into the sitting-room to read the Bible aloud to her” (187). She is an important force in her neighbours lives and draws them into her community: she depends on young Marie Shabata’s companionship; she attends Sunday services with Marie in the neighbouring French Catholic community. As Sally Peltier Harvey notes: Alexandra values the Old World ways and finds more satisfaction in their traditions and customs.¹¹

Alexandra’s relationship with Carl Linstrum brings out distinct qualities of Alexandra. Carl Linstrum, a tall boy of fifteen, was lonely. He was thin frail boy with brooding dark eyes, very quiet in all his movements. There was a delicate pallor in his

face, and his mouth was too sensitive for a boy's. He needs Alexandra now and then. Her brothers dislike their relationship. Whenever Alexandra meets him, she watches him with curiosity and sympathy. He meets Alexandra in the drug store; sometimes they are together walking down the streets. Alexandra seeks Carl's assistance and as childhood, friends there by he renders to help Emil to come out of his problem.

Alexandra has soft corner for Carl. Alexandra did not like Carl wasting his time. You are able to do much better things. You are nearly nineteen now, and I wouldn't have you stay. I've always hoped you would get away... She brushed the tears from her cheeks, not trying to hide them (163). Both liked the same things without anybody else knowing. Carl all considerate and caring for Alexandra, he said sadly and thoughtfully, "I've never been any real help to you, beyond sometimes trying to keep the boys in a good humor."

Alexandra consoles herself saying:

Nothing like that. It's by understanding me, and the boys and mother, that you've helped me. I expect that is the only way one person ever really can help another, I think you are about the only one that ever helped me. Somehow it will take more courage to bear your going than everything that has happened before. (163)

When Carl wants to leave the Divide, she says:

And we've had good times, hunting for Christmas trees and going for ducks and making our plum wine together every year. We've never either of us had any other close friend... "And now I must remember that you will find the work you were meant to do. But you'll write to me, Carl? That will mean a great deal to me here." "

I'll write as long as I live, " cried the boy impetuously". And I'll be working for you as much as for myself, Alexandra. (163)

Alexandra did not like many people leaving the country. She felt they make them low- spirited. I'm afraid they are beginning to feel hard toward me because I won't listen to any talk about going." Sometimes I feel like I'm getting tired of standing up for this country (164). When Carl expresses his desire to leave the country the pioneering woman Alexandra's accepts the role not only as a sister but as protective mother to Emil she says: "Now I shall have nobody but Emil. But he is my boy and he is tender-hearted."

It's in Hanover with Alexandra that Carl prefers to stay only a few days, as he is on his way to the coast. Later Alexandra welcomes Carl for a weeklong stay when he is on his way to Alaska in search of gold mines. Carl had changed, Alexandra felt, much less than one might have expected. He had not become a trim, self-satisfied city man. Alexandra's curiosity is depicted as she inquires with Carl earnestly. " Why are you dissatisfied with yourself?" Carl replies "well, you see, for one thing, there's nothing to look forward to in my profession. Wood engraving is the only thing I care about, and that had gone out before I begun. Everything's cheap metal work nowadays, touching up miserable photographs, forcing up poor drawings, and spoiling good ones. I am absolutely sick of it all" (196).

He further consoles himself, Carl says, "Yes, I am going there to get rich. Engraving's a very interesting profession, but a man never makes any money at it. So I am going to try the gold fields." Alexandra envy's Carl freedom, which makes her to remark "I'd rather have had your freedom than my land." She further remarks 'people living on the Nebraska "grow hard and heavy." This observation holds true for

Alexandra; her life seems to have been composed of endless observations of the world around her. As such Carl comments:

Freedom so often means that one isn't needed anywhere. Here you are an individual you have a background of your own, you would be missed. But off there in the cities there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody we own nothing. When one of us dies, they scarcely know (197).

She has a latent desire of enjoying Carl's freedom Alexandra felt the need to live in a world that big and interesting and she further goes to say that is what goes on in the world that reconciles me. Alexandra seems incapable of strong emotional attachments. For Alexandra love is memory. In them she appears as sunshiny, vigorous and youthful. After Emil's murder, when she might be expected to cling intensely to those she cares about, she is still at a distant although she seeks comfort from Carl. "She put her hands on his arm" I needed you terribly when it happened. Carl, I cried at night. Then everything seemed to get hard inside of me. Alexandra thought perhaps she should never care for Carl again. But further she comments: when I got your telegram yesterday, then – then it was just as it used to be. You are all I have in the world, you know" (287).

Alexandra "feels at peace with the world" When discussing their impending nuptials, Alexandra speaks of safety, not of love: "I think we shall be very happy. I haven't any fears. I think when friends marry, they are safe"(290). There is no sense of intimacy merely comfortable complacency. When Carl and Alexandra finally kiss, it is 'softly'. It reveals a quite companionship, not passionate love of men and women.

Ending of the novel predicts a conventional union as friends, Alexandra and Carl will marry, but in doing so they pledge their faith not to each other but to a far more important bond: Carl compliments his future wife not that she belongs to him, but that she belongs “to the land... now more than ever.”¹² Alexandra “had never been in love, she had never indulged in sentimental reveries. Even as a girl she had looked upon men as work-fellows. Alexandra has no time for finding a partner as all her energies are directed towards making the farm a success. As Alexandra at an early age had to shoulder the responsibilities of her own age in this sparsely settled area contribute to her delayed sexual awakening and sublimation of sexual vitality.

I agree with John Randall who says “One must remember the peculiar light in which [Willa Cather] viewed the fact of human conflict and struggle. For her, struggle had to lead to the absolute triumph of the will... and the putting down of all opposition.”¹³ She is unlike all of the other female characters depicted in the course of narrative- in particular lacking Marie’s emotional spontaneity, and the Swedish helping hands ‘need’ to settle quickly and raise a family.

The obvious similarities between Cather’s own life and that of her heroine Alexandra Bergson cannot be overlooked. Alexandra is 40 years old, like that of Cather, in 1913 when she published **O Pioneers!** her second novel. Both women, had devoted their lives to a single pursuit, sacrificing personal relationships-or, at least those of a romantic nature for the cause, as such Cather never married, as so does Alexandra Bergson, until the end of the novel. Alexandra like Cather is felt to be creator and writer as well as pioneer. She is also attentive to detail-she identifies with the insects and the ‘small wild things’ hidden in the grass. She describes herself as part of nature, “If you take even a vine and cut it back again and again, it grows hard like a tree” (171).

Through Alexandra Bergson, Cather has communicated her love of the land and her concern for the well-being and dignity of her fellow creatures. The novel draws the endurance, vitality, and optimism of the pioneers. Alexandra Bergson remains “uncorrupted” by the materialism of success. “Alexandra isn’t much like other women folks.” In **O Pioneers!** Cather initiated a different relationship between a woman and the land than the one generally espoused by the patriarchal American culture. Joyce Mc Donald observes and rightly opines: “Immigrant Alexandra Bergson capably achieves financial success and aristocratic status and therefore no longer needs to engage in working the land herself.”¹⁴

The creation of strong female protagonist in **O Pioneers!** has given feminist critics a novel to admire. As rightly observed by Susan J. Rosowski, “Cather avoids sexist roles in her pioneer women, for Alexandra combines the attributes of both sexes on the frontier.”¹⁵ She has the vision and energy to game the wild land, a role usually assigned to male pioneers, and the stabilizing nurturing traits traditionally belonging to pioneer women. As such Cather believed that immigrants would persevere and advance in status.

Pioneering had traditionally been viewed as a kind of a battle between the land and its conquerors, who were invariably male. Instead, **O Pioneers!** takes a deep, almost mythological approach to the subject. Here is no conquering hero, battling savages and subduing nature, but a woman who tames the beast through her love and intelligence. Cather’s heroine, Alexandra Bergson, has one great passion, and it is not another human, but the great, unconquered prairie. Alexandra is a perfect example of one who submits to both her heritage and to the land. She prospers because she honors her father’s wishes and respects the land and has his strength. The other family

members being subdued and ineffectual Alexandra plays the role of mother, father, sister and wife.

In the words of John Murphy: Alexandra Bergson remains “uncorrupted by the materialism of success” as evident in Lou and Oscar.¹⁶ Alexandra the Swedish immigrant heroine is the embodiment of intrinsic beauty and wisdom. Alexandra’s intelligence is not of the showy type. She is honest, and sometimes a bit slow like the country girl. But she has more brains more pursuits, than her neighbors and her two brothers. This quality distinguishes her from her neighbors who cling to tradition, and enables her to be always a step ahead of others. Alexandra has prophetic faith and the shrewd business acumen to hang on to and to invest in the land. This is the quality of pioneers. Providing for Emil her younger brother gives her purpose to carry out her task. His education and opportunities satisfy her need for a larger world. She denigrates her pioneering efforts exclusively to his future. Alexandra’s unique brother sister relationship with Emil when he leaves for Michigan to study law is revealed as she appreciates the western culture.

She wins respect and esteem from her neighbors by her successful enterprises and generosity. All her decisions arose from a sense of duty as opposed to personal gain. First she worked hard to fulfill her father’s dream and so Emil could have opportunities she never had. In the life of Alexandra Bergson the novel measures the potency of the remarkable individual against universal human desires and the forces of natural history. In a land that celebrates individualism and the pioneering spirit, the pull of conventional opinion is irresistibly strong. Alexandra defying the public attitudes proves herself as a true individualist. Her life long fight to survive and succeed Cather relates an important chapter in history. Being stronger and more creative than the men around her she has established herself as a capable woman.

II

Secondary Characters

Marie Shabata

Marie Tovesky is a pretty vivacious Bohemian girl; she was a stranger in the country who came from Omaha. “ She is a dark child, with brown curly hair, like a brunette doll’s, a coaxing little red mouth, and round, yellow brown eyes that sparkled like gold stone or in softer lights like that Colorado called tiger-eye”(143). Marie “pretty and carefully nurtured” child, walked graciously and was admired by the country children for her elegant way of dressing, which was referred to the “Kate Greenaway” manner. With her ‘charming’ grace, the boys wanted her for a sweetheart (143).

Marie had ‘her ears pierced by her great aunt’ when she was seven. She had worn ‘bits of broom-straw, plucked from the common sweeping-broom, in the lobes until the holes were healed and ready for little gold rings’ (242). Marie was interested in ‘sewing or crocheting’ but more than that she was involved in fieldwork (236). Marie the youngest child by a ‘second wife’ of Albert Tovesky and was the ‘apple of his eye’. Her father was one the more intelligent Bohemians who came West, “settled in Omaha’ and ‘became a leader and adviser among his people’. She had her graduation in the Omaha High School, at sixteen (208). With the arrival of Frank Shabata from Bohemian, Frank set all the Bohemian girls in a flutter. Marie after her graduation was engaged to Frank at a Bohemian picnic ‘when they went rowing down the river’ Having missed Frank Shabata for a year, she longs for him, and on meeting him at ‘Union Station in St. Louis’, she flees away with him to get married.

Marie's father disliked Frank because he is not from good family background. Frank being jobless, her father purchased them a farmyard that 'took her fancy' and set them up (196). Even after marriage, she doesn't take her relationship with Frank seriously. Alexandra introduces her to Emil. Marie was delighted to see Emil come from Mexico in his 'conspicuous attire'. There are many admirers of Marie and Carl is one of them. Carl admires Marie for her charming nature and feels that her husband is envious of her nature and Alexandra too, believes that there aren't many 'like her anywhere' (205). Marie does not find Frank compatible and yet times he behaves like one of these 'wild fellows'. Marie is a very lively person, all excited and gay' laughing and shaking hands with people whom she encounters at the church meetings (196). Marie could make people laugh for a while by creating a light irony at 'fortune telling' (244).

The farm boys would always do anything for Marie, as such Frank was 'jealous' about his pretty wife. Frank looked out for an opportunity to make 'Marie thoroughly unhappy', but 'She, never humbled herself'. Cather hereby portrays the liberation of woman from inequalities and lower status in relation to man.

The distance between them had widened and hardened. It no longer contracted and brought them suddenly together. The spark of her life went somewhere else, and he was always watching to surprise it. (245)

Marie in her orchard under her white mulberry tree, with pail full of cherries, talks to Emil about the religion the Swedes had way back and goes further to say that "The Bohemians were tree worshipers before the missionaries came... they believe that trees bring good or bad luck", and that trees like 'lindens purify the forest, and do away with the spells'(212). Marie's workaholic temperament is seen as Alexandra's comments:

She has it hard enough, anyway. She's too young and pretty for this sort of life. We're all ever so much older and slower. But she is the kind that won't be downed easily. She'll work all day and go to a Bohemian wedding and dance all night, and drive the hay wagon for a cross man next morning (197).

The Bohemian Marie is dissatisfied with Frank in their marital relationship, so she turns to Emil. Marie's marriage has turned out to be a 'mistake'. She gave the suggestion for Emil to run away to Mexico. She had her own ways of living. Marie receives Emil's letters more than that of Alexandra, which are 'more personal', full of descriptions of the gay life in the old Mexican capital in the days when the strong hand of Porfirio Diaz was still strong...they were the kind of letters a young man writes to a woman when he wishes himself and his life to seem interesting to her, when he wishes to enlist her imagination in his behalf (235). In absence of Emil, Marie feels tired of everybody around her, as she feels she is being deprived of love. In so far as she was concerned, Emil was already gone. They could not meet anymore. There was nothing for them to say. They had spent the last penny of their small change; there was nothing left but gold.

Cather wanted to show the changes in the society, thereby she reveals this by portraying changes in Emil's personality on his return from Mexico and having got the talent of playing the 'guitar' (240). Marie could not live without love, in Emil she found a perfect match. The pretty vivacious young Bohemian wife of Frank Shabata becomes Emil Bergsons love interest. Alexandra speaks to Marie about Emil when he returns. In fact Alexandra has brought them together so that Emil could learn good manners from Marie. Marie realizes she is not the right match for Frank. Frank feels that he should get all the attention from Marie, but due to her friendly nature, she

couldn't resist staying aloof, she remarks: "Frank's wife ought to be timid, and she ought not to care about another living thing in the world but just Frank" (250). Emil follows Marie to comfort her in times of loneliness. Marie reflects on her own life and her relation with Emil.

How terrible it was to love people when you would not really share their lives! When a girl had loved one man, and then loved another while that man was still alive, everybody knew what to think of her. What happened to her was little consequence, so long as she did not drag other people down with her. Emil once away, she could let everything else go and live a new life of perfect love (260).

Marie thought that he might come over again. She left the path and went across the pasture. She had scarcely thought about where she was going when the ponds glittered before her where Emil had shot the ducks. But she did not want to die. She wanted to live and dream-a hundred years, forever! As long as this sweetness welled up in her heart, as long as her breast could hold this treasure of pain! She felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it encircled and swelled with that image of gold (261). Frank feels dejected when he sees Marie with Emil, Frank gets tormented, and one night the two forget discretion and are found in the orchard by the infuriated husband, who wreaks prompts vengeance and thus puts an end to both Marie and Emil using his gun.

The gun sprang to his shoulder; he sighted mechanically and fired three times without stopping, stopped without knowing why. He peered again through the hedge, the two dark figures under the tree. They had fallen a little apart from each other (268).

When Alexandra learns of Emil's and Marie's murder she felt 'benumbed' and consoles Frank inspite of murder and thinks they were more to blame. Her sympathy for Frank is described in Naturalistic terms: "Being what he was she felt, Frank could not have acted otherwise (278). Marie seemed to be carefully crafted, as individual. Her flirting with Emil was a fatalistic decision. Her moving with Emil was not in conformity according to the social and ecclesiastical tradition of that period and did not let Marie and Frank Shabata admit their mistake and end their mutually destructive marriage. Being a good Catholic Marie takes her religion seriously She encourages Emil to pray as he is adamant about it. She at first takes comfort in religion herself as seen in this episode; 'She struck the ground with her little foot fiercely'. "That won't last. It will go away, and things will be just as they used to. I wish you were Catholic. The Church helps people, indeed it does. I pray for you, but that's not the same as if you prayed for yourself" (214).

Divorce was not an option for a Catholic couple in that setting. There was no physical or any other verifiable abuse that would merit a socially acceptable separation of the two. And yet the marriage was slowing killing them. John Randall observes: "It is the ability to throw herself wholeheartedly into emotional situations that makes Marie so humanly attractive and so successful in dealing with people."¹⁷

Randall further opines :

Maries's instincts are those of a happy child; although she has herself suffered in her unhappy marriage she has no conception that suffering may be an inescapable part of human existence. To her, life means happiness, and the very measure of a person's vitality is the amount of joy he can draw from existence... She has all the good qualities which belong to Alexandra, including the drive and

the enthusiasm with which she throws herself into her work, and she also has those qualities which Alexandra knows herself to lack: an understanding of people, a keen zest for the enjoyment of living, and a vivaciousness which reflects itself on everyone. Marie completes Alexandra by taking up where Alexandra left off; she is the new generation for which the pioneers were struggling when they came to America so that their children could have a fuller and richer life.¹⁸

Signa :

Signa is one of the youngest pretty Swedish girls who did Alexandra's housework. She is 'loyal' maid experienced in 'cutting pies refilling coffee-cups, placing platters of bread and meat and potatoes upon the red tablecloth, and continually getting in each other's way between the table and the stove'. Signa, who has a pretty figure, mottled pink cheeks, and yellow hair, Alexandra is very fond though she keeps a sharp eye upon her. Signa is apt to be skittish at mealtime, when the men arc about, and to spill the coffee or upset the cream. It is supposed that Nelse Jensen, one of the six men at the dinner table, is courting Signa, (179).

A lot of humility is seen in Swedish girls like that of Signa. As Alexandra remarks, "There is a good deal of 'cow' in them. Alexandra assures her maid with words of good counsel after their marriage and gifted her with two milk cows. As such she has respect for her mistress. In time of trouble she stayed with her mistress, for she was the only one of the maids from whom Alexandra would accept much personal service.

When Alexandra is in distress, Signa assists her, especially after Emil and Marie's death telling her 'when to eat and when to go to bed' (274). Even after Emil's death as Alexandra is tired of life and Signa and Ivar look after her. Signa had a fire burning in the sitting-room stove. She assisted Alexandra in undressing, and gave her a hot footbath. Signa shows boundless sympathy as she prefers to sleep on the slat lounge outside her door. Alexandra has trust in Signa, Cather in the words of Ivar, tries to convey the message of 'peace' and that is only possible to experience "when the eyes of flesh are shut the eyes of the spirit are open" (274). Cather further says that it clearly indicates that the two are always with each other and there we have to surrender over one of them. Alexandra 'endured' their service patiently (276).

Alexandra takes interest in arranging the marriage however Signa's marriage to Nelse Jensen seems 'ill-fated'. Girls on the Divide, the wealthy farmers' daughter no longer went out into service, so Alexandra got her girls from Sweden, by paying their fare over. They stayed with her until they married, and were replaced by sisters or cousins from the old country. More than the work they performed she wants them to keep her company. The few scenes that take place indoors involve several people. They are the origins of feminine connections.

Annie Lee:

Lou Bergson's wife of Swedish heritage has sharp, aggressive looks. She is a petty woman, who is obsessed with her dress and Swedish language but is much afraid of being caught at it. Annie with her 'aggressive' looks is more curious like her husband. She is particular about her lifestyle, as "she wears her yellow hair in a high pompadour, and is bedecked with rings and chains and "beauty pin." Her tight, high-heeled shoes give her an awkward walk and she is always more or less preoccupied

with her clothes. As she sat at the table, she kept telling her youngest daughter to “be careful now, and not drop anything on mother” (186). Annie with her dominating nature speaks to her husband Lou in a warning tone. “Pass the preserves, Lou”. She had reasons for not wishing her husband to cross Alexandra too openly. Annie too disregards Ivar, as she considers him disgraceful object.

Annie is fond of gossiping and indirectly trying to get the news of Alexandra’s secret of success through her prattling maids than from Alexandra herself and what she discovered she used to her own advantage with Lou. Annie thinks of shifting to town as girls grow old enough, and as also Lou loves to go into business (192). Annie is as intent as her husband on securing Alexandra’s farm as an inheritance for their children.

Milly:

Milly is a charming and decent young girl. Alexandra is very much ‘fond’ of the little girls and loves to move into the flower garden with them especially of Milly. Alexandra’s favorite niece is the ‘musician’ of the family, she was interested in singing and that she had learned Old Swedish songs and works wonders with burnt wood. She loves to portray pictures with charcoal right from childhood. Annie and Oscar the parents of Milly has a family of four, the youngest being the boy (191). Milly is intelligent and friendly in contrast to her small minded and devious parents. Annie’s materialistic nature is seen as Oscar objects Alexandra to gift a piano to Milly as she has an organ. Annie defends him by saying, “Milly can play in church just the same, and she’ll play on the organ. But practicing on it so much spoils her touch. Her teacher says so,” Annie brought out with spirit.

Mrs. Bergson:

Mrs. Bergson the matriarch of the Bergson's clan, wife of John Bergson, and mother of Alexandra, Oscar, Lou and Emil. She is old fashioned, Swedish woman who finds her happiness in her family life when the boys wanted to leave the place. She is far unimaginative. Mrs. Bergson is a pious, God fearing woman loved to go to 'church' especially on Sundays'(167). The Swedish culture of Mrs. Bergson is well worth focusing on.

John Bergson had married beneath him, but he had married a good housewife. Mrs. Bergson was a fair-skinned, corpulent woman, heavy and placid like her son, Oscar, but there was something comfortable about her; perhaps it was her own love of comfort. For eleven years she had worthily striven to maintain some semblance of household order amid conditions that made order very difficult. As Cather quotes "Habit was very strong with Mrs. Bergson, and her unremitting efforts to repeat the routine of her old life among new surroundings had done a great deal to keep the family from disintegrating morally and getting careless in their ways"(151).

The Bergsons had a log house, for instance, only because Mrs. Bergson would not live in a sod house. She missed the fish diet of her own country, and twice every summer she sent the boys to the river, twenty miles to the southward, to fish for channel cat. When the children were little she used to go fishing herself. Mrs. Bergson has been a good mother to her children and 'she has always missed the old country'. She enjoyed household chores. She was glad when her children were old enough not to be in her way in the kitchen. She had never quite forgiven John Bergson for bringing her to the end of the earth; but, now that she was there, she wanted to be let alone to reconstruct her old life in so far as that was possible.

Mrs. Bergson has a 'deep attachment' for the place she has been living in. When the family decided to move from the Divide, Mrs. Bergson was weeping quietly. She 'weeps bitterly' as she is reluctant to move and is being consoled by her daughter Alexandra. In her she finds solace and strength when Alexandra puts a 'soothing hand' on her shoulder she, assures her, "A third of the place belongs to you by American law, and we can't sell without your consent."

Mrs. Bergson recalls the early years spent on the wild prairie, which was so 'depressing' and 'disheartening'. In Cather's mind her writing about the prairie years, became away to show approval of the victory of traditional values against countless difficulties. "Oh worse! Much worse," moaned Mrs. Bergson. "Drouth, chinch-bugs, hail, everything! My garden all cut to pieces like sauerkraut. No grapes on the creek, no nothing. The people all lived just kike coyotes" (167). The fight to remain human and in love with life, inspite of all hardships gives the people in Cather's stories purpose and calm.

Old Mrs. Hiller:

The Bohemians like old Mrs. Hiller could bake seven kinds of fancy bread'. Cather suggests in her portrayal that "The Bohemians," certainly know how to make more kinds of breads than any other people in the world (232). Old Mrs. Hiller is crippled with rheumatism and 'has only her lame boy, the shoemaker to help her'. Mrs. Hiller is sympathetic in nature and very enthusiastic of cross-stitch and has a 'garden' around (286). Old Mrs. Hiller went to the 'French church' whatever the weather and got helping hand from Alexandra whenever needed as she loved to pay visit to the old people and gift them.

Old Mrs. Lee

Old Mrs. Lee liked to walk ‘barefoot’ (152). And Alexandra ‘love to see her maintain her old tradition as Alexandra narrates to Ivar:

Oh, never mind about your feet, Ivar. We can remember when half our neighbors went barefoot in summer. I expect old Mrs. Lee would love to slip her shoes off now sometimes, if she dared. (183)

Old Mrs. Lee resists to use the ‘great white tub, ‘to’ wash herself in as she feels it was impossible to wash herself clean in it, instead “when they are all asleep, she washes herself in a little wooden tub she keeps under her bed”. Mrs. Lee’s comment about hot water baths is that ‘she cannot clean herself’, cannot “make strong suds”, so she pretends to be conventional. There is no tolerance for the traditional ways. This disharmony within the society is a greater division for Cather: it is a division between those who can only think within the constraints of the past and the present: there is no evidence of a hunger for progress, only for the rapid accumulation of wealth. Alexandra feels sorry as she is deprived to follow her old ways of living. “Poor old Mrs. Lee! They wont let her wear nightcaps, either ... she can do all the old things in the old way and have as much beer as she wants” (184).

Despite Alexandra’s dislike for her sister-in-law, Annie Lee, has great affection for Annie’s elderly mother. Old Mrs. Lee loved to see Alexandra and spends a long yearly visit as she ‘enjoyed the liberty’ which prevailed over. She could ‘wear her night cap’ and ‘sleep with all windows shut’. She could ‘run about among the stables’ and was interested in reading of the Bible in her old ways (230).

Old Mrs. Lee had been afraid that family misunderstandings might deprive her of her yearly visit to Alexandra. But the next day the old lady arrived with her bundles. For twelve years Mrs. Lee had always entered Alexandra’s sitting room with

the same exclamation, "Now we jyst-a like old times! (229). She enjoyed the liberty Alexandra gave her, and hearing her own language about her all day long. She could talk incessantly about stocks she need in the Swedish papers, she would narrate her life on dairy farm in Gottland when she was a teenager. She would enjoy a little brandy in hot water and sugar before she could go off to bed. "It sends good dreams" she would say with a twinkle in her eye (230). Although Old Mrs. Lee was 'bent' almost twice she was as 'spry as a gopher.' She likes her 'old times'. Her face was as brown as if it had been varnished, and is full of wrinkles as a washerwoman's hands. She had three jolly old teeth left in the front of her mouth, and when she grinned she looked very knowing, as if when you find out how to take it. Life wasn't half bad.

She read in a Swedish family paper, 'telling the plots in great detail; or about her life on a dairy farm in Gottland' when she was a girl. Sometimes she forgot which were the printed stories and which were the real stories, it all seemed so far away. (230) She appreciates the reverence shown by Alexandra for the old Swedish tradition and relishes the delicacies prepared by Marie Shabata. Old Mrs. Lee very fond of dressing in style as she put on her 'best black satin dress' – she abominated woolen clothes, even in winter. And she was very conscious of her garments she stitched, and was very selective in choosing the best of the thread for sewing (231). Cather has precisely depicted the language of Mrs. Lee: " No, just las' night I ma-ake. See dis tread; verra strong, no wa-ash out, no fade , My sister send from Sweden. I just-a tank you like dis" (231).

All the secondary women characters reveal the traits of their own traditional ways and manner. As these events unfold, the European backgrounds are developed and displayed. We get a sense of the Old World being absorbed in the New, though some elements like the nostalgic Mrs. Lee is kept from her Old-World habits.

III

The character of Alexandra Bergson represents author's search for the meaning of the text. The principal one being contained in the quotation "We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it - for a little while" (289). In Alexandra's face "There was that exalted serenity that sometime came to her at moments of deep feeling"(289). She has clear eyes' with the inference being that she sees clearly now above all other times of realization. It follows from her life and story that the land is a metaphor for nature, which is intrinsically bound up in the experience of human life.

'Alexandra has left child bearing so late as to not be an issue'. One feels that she all the time intended simply to will her land to the brothers children. The threat of Alexandra as feminist icon is almost negated both by [this] and because "her work may be seen as an act of loyalty to her departed father" (x). To achieve the relationship with the land, which she does, Alexandra is forced to forgo the making of a personal life; though she has many close friendships within her household and the neighboring farms, in Carl's absence she has no one close to her who would rise to the status of confidante.

Alexandra assumes a masculine role; the land is anthropomorphically represented as being female, welcoming the genuine attempts by another to stimulate and seed it. Alexandra is the supreme artist. Her selfless passion for the land contrasts sharply with the merits of hostility. Her success in reading order and beauty in the natural world takes place against the failure and defeat of the men.

John Randall rightly acclaims:

Alexandra has more controversial ideas. It is this which marks her out as something special; she was born with the fiery imagination of the true pioneer, born to prosper in “The struggle in which [she] was destined to succeed while so many men broke their hearts and died”. Alexandra is not merely a forward thinker; she also occupies the rather unusual position of a woman farmer in an overwhelmingly male dominated rural society. Alexandra sees that a new world requires new way of thinking. She knows the land can be made to yield its riches if only she can discern its secrets.¹⁹

Alexandra by cultivating the land, she breaks gender codes. She is also characterized as appearing rebellious to social convention. Once she has established her “new relation to it”. Alexandra almost loses herself in the land: Alexandra triumphs over the intractable prairie amassing a fortune and stabilizing the future for her three brothers.

Alexandra symbolizes self-sufficiency order, attractiveness, culture, morality stability and permanence. Alexandra’s finely arranged and comfortable homestead celebrates women’s sense of order and independence. Cather depicts a symmetrically laid out form. Alexandra’s combines both power and beauty, authority and submission. Alexandra succeeds by the traditionally female virtue of loving, but she does so in untraditional ways by turning her feeling to the land rather than to a man.

Cather has a remarkable ability to create memorable characters, both major and minor. Although Alexandra is bigger than life early in the novel, a monumental figure of myth, by the end she is an ordinary woman who has achieved much, though at the expense of friendships and happiness. The steady hard working, innovative,

competent, skillful, self-confident forward going qualities of Alexandra are perhaps the contributions brought to America by the immigrants of various nationalities to make up the land.

Cather's narratives have a progressive structure, with the hardship of the frontier and personal tragedies requiring sacrifice and suffering, but ultimately leading to prosperity, persistence on the land, or success, and highlight the centrality of these women in this process. Willa Cather achieved more than a portrayal of American frontier women in a fictional sense. She provided an accurate impression of the stamina, passion, and vivacity which actual frontier women possessed and utilized. The pioneers of America worked a great labor of love, and Willa Cather recaptures their passion in a tribute worthy of their sacrifice.

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CHAPTER- 3

UNUSUAL ENDURANCE IN THE FEMINIE SPIRIT

I

My Ántonia may well turn out to be Willa Cather's most fondly remembered and best loved novel.¹ Willa Cather wrote **My Ántonia** while living in New Hampshire. The novel takes place in rural and small town Nebraska. While living in the town Willa met Annie Sadilek, a close friend of her whom she knew and admired and maintained a lifelong, affectionate relationship in Red Cloud later used for the Ántonia's character.

As perceptively observed by Rene Rapin: "**My Ántonia**": is a life like portrait of a pioneer girl."² The novel depicts, Ántonia the spirited daughter of Bohemian immigrant family. The Shimerdas are the first Bohemian family to move to this area. Cather tells us from the first how to pronounce the name Ántonia: Án-ton-ee-ah, with the stress on the first syllable. That European detail finally sets the tone for the story of the immigrants from Bohemia. The novel written with great craftsmanship opens on a train in the early 1880s. On the same train are the Shimerdas, who are emigrating from Bohemia and will be the Burdens' nearest neighbours; Jim is too shy to meet Ántonia the only member of the family who barely speaks English. Jake, the farmhand of the Burden family tells him that a Bohemian immigrant family "can't speak English, except one little girl, and all she can say is "We go Black Hawk, Nebraska" (4).

The European family arrives with little money to seek the fortune. Jim is very much eager to see Ántonia, as Jake comments: "She's not much older than you, twelve or thirteen, may be, and she's as bright as a new dollar" (5). Her wild-looking

hair, her eyes like the sun shining on brown pools, her spontaneity, make her seem nature's child, and is able to direct Jim's awakening to beauty.

The Shimerda have come to America at Mrs. Shimerda's insistence so that their eldest son, Ambrosch can find success. Like his mother, Ambrosch is shrewd and greedy looks arrogant and like he has a bad temper. His father is a cultured man, a weaver and fiddler who enjoyed playing the violin in the old country. But in the American Midwest he was extremely homesick because he spoke no English and was unaccustomed to living in a strange land and to working in the fields. Shimerdas have had a streak of bad luck from the moment they arrived in America. Upon their arrival in America the Shimerdas had no 'cellar in which to store food, had no chicken coop,' and because of that, they were living on rotten potatoes. The girls slept in 'hole dug' in order to keep them warm during the cold nights in their small sod houses. As Mr. Shimerda whispers:

In the rear wall was another little cave, a round hole than an oil barrel, scooped out in the Back earth... I saw some quilts and a pile of straw. The old man held the lantern. "Yulka" he said in a low, dispraising voice, 'Yulka; **My Ántonia!** ...

As Ántonia slipped under his arm she cried:

It is very cold on the floor, and this is warm like the badger hole. I like for sleep there,' she insisted eagerly. 'My *mamenka* have nice bed, with pillows from our own geese in Bohemie. (75)

Ántonia's father wanted to make sure the Burdens knew they were 'not beggars in the old country; he made good wages, and his family were respected there'. However in America, they were struggling just to obtain the basic needs and had trouble just fulfilling those (76).

Ántonia Shimerda indeed has a hard and difficult life. Her family is pitiable and the Shimerdas are disheartened. She must sacrifice her own happiness to help her family survive the tough seasons on the wild Nebraska prairie. The harsh conditions have made her experience more than other girls of her age. “Ambrosch and Ántonia were both old enough to work in the fields; and they were willing to work. But the snow and the bitter weather had disheartened them all” (76). She has left a country where her family had been ‘respected and successful,’ for a new place unfamiliar to her. Ántonia continues to hold on to the Bohemian traditions she learned from her father. Her family brings ‘token of their country, but her other family members are quick to integrate modern American ways’ with their own.

The Shimerdas have been badly cheated in their move out to the land and they are in great need. Jim is impressed with Mr. Shimerda, a gentleman who is respectful of children, but Mrs. Shimerda’s importunate manners and, his eldest son, Ambrosch rudeness bother him. As the Shimerdas arrive they are Jim’s Burden nearest neighbours and one of the early immigrants and the first Bohemian family to America. The immigrants badly survive their first winter. “They could not speak enough English to ask for advice, or even to make their most pressing wants known.”

Ántonia announces: ‘My papa find friends up north, with Russian mans. Last night he take me for see, and I can understand very much talk. Nice mans, Mrs. Burden. One is fat and all the time laugh. Everybody laugh .The first time I see my papa laugh in this kawn-tree. Oh, very nice!’(33).

The Shimerdas bought their homestead and farm from a fellow Bohemian, Peter Krajiek. He was able to manipulate his prices without the Shimerdas knowing and without a chance of getting caught. He has overcharged them for inferior land,

worn-out work animals and poor quality household items. So Mr. Shimerdas ardent desire of *Ántonia* learning English is reflected:

He took a book out of his pocket, opened it, and showed me a page with two alphabets, one English and the other Bohemian. He placed this book in my grandmother's hands, looked at her entreatingly and said, with an earnestness which I shall never forget, 'Te-e-ach, te-e-ach **My *Án-tonia!*** (27)

Ántonia had opinions about everything, so Mr. Shimerda admires her. He has faith, confidence in his daughter rather than in his sons. It is he who refers to her first as **My *Ántonia!*** Every day she runs 'barefooted' to the Burdens home to pick up a few English phrases. Jim teaches English and about America to *Ántonia* and they have the great adventure roaming about the prairie. *Ántonia* and Jim instantly become friends. After the first snowfall, they take a long ride over the transformed landscape in Jim's new sleigh, pulled by his pony. The Shimerdas are not doing very well in their new country, but they do become friends with two Russian men, Peter and Pavel as they speak a similar dialect. Jim's grandparents try to help the Shimerda's through the winter by taking them supplies as "by the time they paid Krajiek for the land, and bought his horses and oxen and some old farm machinery, they had very little money left." But the hardships are too much for the homesick Mr. Shimerda, who ultimately commits suicide.

And so on a poor plot of land, neighboring Jim's grandparents flourishing farm, a family of Bohemian immigrants struggles to survive. *Ántonia* the oldest daughter, a 'cheerful, resourceful' young woman shoulders much of the responsibilities for the family and the farm. Jim asks *Ántonia* to attend school with him, but *Ántonia* cannot make the time to go. She has to help thresh wheat crops for

her family. Her ardent desire is to turn the wild land into one good farm. Owing great love for the family she takes pride that she can handle men's work. *Ántonia* somewhat enters the men's sphere by doing heavy farm work. The Bohemian immigrant, a brave and hardy creature doing 'a man's work, breaking sod with the oxen', is thus seen growing coarser everyday:

Her outgrown cotton dress switched about her calves, over the boot and tops. She kept her sleeves rolled up all day, and her arms and throat were burned as brown as a sailor. Her neck came up strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf. (122)

She boasts that she can work just as much as her older brother, *Ambrosch*. *Ántonia* partakes in the household chores, being devoted to the family despite its unhealthy environment as *Jim* narrates:

Ántonia was washing pans and dishes in a dark corner. The crazy boy lay under the only window, stretched on a grainy-sack stuffed with straw. As soon as we entered, he threw a grain sack over the crack at the bottom of the door. The air in the cave was stifling, and it was very dark, too. A lighted lantern, hung over the stove, threw out a feeble yellow glimmer. (73)

Misery plaques and inevitable overcomes *Ántonia's* father, in contrast to *Ántonia's* remarkable perseverance. He eventually gives in to his despair leaving his family to fend for themselves. With the passing away of *Ántonia's* father, there is a great sense of unease and apprehension that can almost be unbearable to a little girl. As any child, the loss of a parents is probably the most substantial event in her life and equally difficult to get over. Although *Ántonia* never forgets her father, she uses her strength to move on.

Ántonia does not love the rest of her family the way she loved her father. Her life is full of disappointment and frustration. After the death of her father Ántonia and Jim spends a few moments of togetherness and when Ántonia saw Jim she ran out of her dark corner and threw her arms around him. Jim is all sympathetic towards, Ántonia could “feel her heart breaking as she clung to him!” and Oh, Jimmy’, she sobbed,’ what you think for my lovely papa! (115). As a ‘beautiful young girl’ Ántonia had the most trusting responsive eyes in the world, ‘love and credulousness seemed to look out of them with open faces’.

Mrs. Burden regrets that Mr. Shimerda has left Ántonia alone and alienated in a hard world with his suicide. Ántonia faces yet another terrible heartache and struggle, but Mrs. Burden’s words ring true. Mrs. Burden says in dismay and sadness, “He’s left her alone in a hard world”. After her father’s death, Ántonia must work in the fields, help to herd the cattle and tend the crops. She does not have time for English lessons anymore. It was the first major hardship the immigrant Shimerda’s faced when her father shot himself in the mouth and committed suicide.

As perceptively remarked by Philip L. Gerber:

Ántonia is trapped in the worst possible conditions on the Nebraska Divide: in denture to a town family, uneducated bereft of special talents yet maintaining a steel like equanimity.³

Ántonia being not a scholar, for there is no time for school; Jim notices that Ántonia still wishes she could go to school for she wants to be as intelligent and educated as her father had been. But Ántonia sacrifices the opportunity to become educated to help her family’s farm survive. She does not have the freedom to take time off from framing. More over she gives up school in favour of her brother she says:

I aren't got time to learn. I can work like mans now. My mother can't say no more how Ambrosch do all and nobody to help him. I can work as much as him. School is all right for little boys. (123)

The summer season lifts *Ántonia's* depressed and sadness spirits. After the death of her father last winter, the land reworking itself for the threshing of crops cheers *Ántonia*.

Ántonia's life is distorted by her father's death. At the age of fifteen,

She was a tall, strong young girl... She brought her horses up to the windmill to water them. She wore her father's boots, his old fur cap... One sees that draught-horse neck among the peasant women in all old countries (122).

Ántonia takes a man's place behind the plow. On the prairie the elements, the sky and the land impose a communal harmony in all the meager human organizations.

Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house! She used to sing joyfully. 'I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man.' She would toss her head and ask me to feel the muscles swell in her brown arm. (138)

Ántonia out like a man, hired by Ambrosch, "all through the wheat season, she went from farm to farm, binding sheaves or working with the threshers" (147).

Ántonia had lost her feminine nature as being observed:

Ántonia ate so noisily, like a man, and she yawned often like a man, and kept stretching her arms over head as if they ached... *Ántonia* was out in the fields from sunup until sundown. "On Sundays she helped her mother make garden or sewed all day... *Ántonia* was proud of her strength. Her brother put upon her some chores a girl

ought not to do"... She worked "sunburned", sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda, who could say so little, yet managed to say so much, when he exclaimed, '**My Ántonia !**' (126)

Jim is annoyed and dismayed at Ántonia's manners, and at the same time, however, in the physical descriptions of her, he greatly admires and eroticizes her physical strength and masculine vitality. Jim and his grandmother are concerned about Ántonia, for she seems not to care much about anything other than farming and ploughing.

Jim's household was glad to have her in the house. 'She was so gay and responsive that one did not mind her heavy, running step, or her clattery way with pans' (138). Grandmother was in high spirits during the weeks when Ántonia worked for the Burden's family. Ántonia loved to help Jim's grandmother in the kitchen and to learn about cooking and housekeeping. She would stand besides her, watching her every movement. 'Tony' as Jim calls her, is spontaneous generous, eager to emphasize and admire the best in others. As Jim narrates "She liked me better from that time on, and she never took a supercilious air with me again. I had killed a big snake –I was now a big fellow" (50).

Antonia life out in the fields with those rough threshers is working the land. Despite the many hardships, Ántonia remains cheerful and optimistic. She knows that she and her family must sacrifice much of their happiness to make up in a new unfamiliar country. Jim's Grandmother acknowledges that Ántonia was a pretty girl ever seen by her. When Ántonia first came to this country, and had that gentle old man to watch over her, she was a pretty a girl as ever I saw (153). Though Tiny and Lena and the Marshall Norwegian Anna the hired girls were growing prettier

everyday, *Ántonia*, like Snow-White in the fairy tale, was still fairest of them all! During the few weeks after the death of Mr. Shimerda, The Burdens enjoy *Ántonia*'s cheerful personality, and Jims' grandmother begins to take a protective interest in her. Mainly because of this grandmother recommends *Ántonia* for a domestic position with the neighbors, the Harlings. The Burdens move into the town of Black Hawk and grandmother gets *Ántonia* a job with their next-door neighbor, the Harlings.

The Norwegian Mrs. Harlings is a 'bundle of productive energy.' Decisive and enthusiastic she creates a home, which Jim likes to visit as a change from the sedate life of his grandparents. On Mrs. Burden's recommendation, Mrs. Harlings hires *Ántonia* to work for her, and teaches her how to manage a bustling household. Her 'violent like and dislikes' affirmed themselves in all the everyday occupations of life. Mrs. Harlings' liked *Ántonia* from her first glimpse. She felt they knew exactly what kind of girl she was. After grandmother's introduction "Mrs. Harlings finally agreed to pay three dollars a week for *Ántonia*'s services" good wages in those days. Seventeen-year-old *Ántonia*, though 'barefooted', 'ragged' and 'sunburned', Mrs. Harlings finds her beautiful and talented and realizes, she will learn quickly to be helpful: "She has such fine brown legs and arms, and splendid colour in her cheeks-like those big dark red plums" (153).

Mrs. Harlings was a good housewife she have a good audience to her husband who was a grain merchant and cattle buyer. "In his absence his wife was the head of the household. She was charged with the energy' she was quick to anger, quick to laughter, jolly from the depth of her soul" (148). After *Ántonia* comes "into service" at the Harlings, Jim's pride in her harmony with her cultured mistress is unmistakable and under Mrs. Harling's guidance, he sees her growing into a fulfilled young woman.

Describing their vigorous characters, he says: They had strong, independent nature, both of them. They knew what they liked, and were not... (180).

The Harlings had children of *Ántonia's* age. According to Mrs. Harlings the greatest fault of *Ántonia* was that "she so often stopped her work and fell to playing with the children" (155). Mrs. Harlings is being dedicated to her family and is responsible for running her household very efficiently. Being very systematic in upbringing her family, these qualities impress *Ántonia* and finds in Mrs. Harlings model for her own life. Jim frequently spends time with the Harlings and *Ántonia*. *Ántonia* had been looked upon more as a ward of the Harlings than as one the hired girls. At the Harlings she loved to put up "lunches, mend ball-gloves and sew buttons, bake the kind of cakes they liked."

Ántonia enjoyed social life; she gained reputation as a good dancer.

The young men began to joke with each other about 'the Harlings' Tony' as they did about 'the Marshalls' 'Anna' or 'Gardeners' Tiny'. The moment the lighted tent comes into view she would break into a run, like a boy. There were always partners waiting for her; she began to dance before she got her breath (205).

Though dancing was considered as a sign of moral lassitude. *Ántonia* considers it the sole source of fun and pleasure. She enjoyed music too .As her father was a musician in his native Bohemia. Dancing provides a connection to her musical past. She excels in dancing and becomes very popular. As a result stern Mr. Harlings forces her to choose between the dances or his employment. For *Ántonia* the dancing pavilion become irresistible, and her success there brings a stream of admirers to the Harlings back door.

Against the town stands *Ántonia*, unconcerned about gossip and social standing, not dependent upon accomplishments associated with worldly prestige.⁴ The manner of subsistence of life on the prairie is depicted:

The life that went on in them seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip. This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark. The growing piles of ashes and cinders in the back yards were the only evidence that the wasteful, consuming process of life went on at all (219).

The fullness of life that *Ántonia* embodies is thus symbolically cast out of the homes of respectable families, when she rebels for the first time. She prefers her dances against the desire of the Harlings and *Ántonia* herself is exposed to attempted rape by the unsavory Cutter and finally to seduction and abandonment by the handsome ne'er-do-well Larry Donovan.⁵ *Ántonia* leaves the Harlings to take up job in the home of the lecherous Wick Cutter. Wick Cutter was the money-lender and a notorious philanderer who had fleeced poor Russian Peter. Though he had pious up bringing, he followed the crooked ways of the world. He knew little Swedish, which gave him a great advantage with the early Scandinavian settlers.

After *Ántonia* went to live with the Cutters, she seemed to care about nothing but picnics and parties and having a good time. Dancing has been the one of the

positive outlet that she has found in all her time in America. It is the sole source of fun and pleasure that has entered her life. Since her father was a musician in his native Bohemia, dancing provides a connection to her musical past.

When she was not going to a dance, she sewed until midnight.

Her new clothes were the subjects of caustic comment under Lena's direction she copied Mrs. Gardener's new party dresses and Mrs. Smith's street costume so ingeniously in cheap materials that those ladies were greatly annoyed, and Mrs. Cutter, who was jealous of them, was secretly pleased (214).

This shows Antonia was talented and also industrious.

Wick Cutter who likes to gamble and has evil desire. The Cutters fight about the question of inheritance and each blames the other for remaining childless. At the end of the summer after the Cutters left Black Hawk on a business trip Antonia comes to the Burdens. Grandmother noticed that she seemed troubled and distracted. Antonia informed grandmother that Mr. Cutter had told her not to sleep away from the house and be out late in the evening while he was gone. Cutters prohibition is expressed:

Mr. Cutter had put all the silver and important documents under Antonia's bed and told her that she had to sleep there in order to keep them safe. He strictly forbade her to ask any of the girls she knew to stay with her at night she would be perfectly safe, he said as he had just put a new vale lock on the front door (246).

Worried that Mr. Cutter is playing some sort of tricks, she gets Jim to sleep at the Cutters in her bed, while she stays with grandmother. On the third night, Jim awakes to find Mr. Cutter trying to grope him. They get into a fight, with Mr. Cutter

beating Jim fiercely about the face. Jim runs back home and in the morning feels disgusted, ashamed, and angry with Antonia. He refuses to see her or a doctor and is worried about word getting around town.

When Antonia and Grandmother go over to the Cutters' house to pack up Antonia's belongings, they find her room in disarray. They also find Mrs. Cutter, who is indignant because her husband intentionally put her on the wrong train so that he could come back to Black Hawk for an intended rendezvous with Antonia. When Cutter returns from Omaha he finds Jim instead of Antonia. In the fight Jim gets hurt and Cutter gets ashamed, as such Antonia escapes a near rape.

As rightly remarked by Anthony Millspaugh:

Antonia escapes this squalor, moves to town a place of white fences and good green yards.... wide, dusty streets and shapely little trees growing long the wooden side walls" – to become "hired girls" for a prosperous family.⁶

Having pushed all thoughts of Wick Cutter from her mind Antonia meets Larry Donovan an arrogant young train conductor, who was a kind of professional ladies' man, "and falls in love with him." Antonia often went to the dances with Larry Donovan. She wore dresses made like Mrs. Gardener's black velvet. She was lovely to see, with her eyes shining, and her lips always a little parted when she danced that constant, dark colour in her cheeks never changed (223). Larry Donovan, was usually cold and distant with men, but with "women he had a silent, grave familiarity, a special handshake, accompanied by a significant, deliberate look" His peculiarity is depicted:

He took women married or single, into his confidence, walked them up and down in the moonlight. Telling them what a mistake he had

made by not entering the office branch of the service, and how much better fitted he was to fill the post of General Passenger Agent in Denver than the roughshod man who then bore that title (305).

Her suitor for many years, Larry finally proposes to her. Things go great between the two and *Ántonia* soon moves out to be with her fiancé. It is assumed that everything is fine. However this is not the case. Prepared to marry him, she follows Larry to Denver, where he stays with her as long as her dowry lasts. Then he disappears, leaving *Ántonia* pregnant.

Ántonia eventually comes home carrying two burdens. In fact, one of them is literally weighing her down. Larry does not receive the job he was intimating and proceeds leaving *Ántonia* alone with his baby. The prejudice before mentioned comes back with tremendous vindictiveness as news of *Ántonia*'s situation spreads around town. The townspeople wait to see what *Ántonia*'s next step will be. They soon learn that her supposed shame is actually pride, and she is soon backing to her spirited self once again. The town expects her to hide her baby from the world, but ironically, she goes to the town photographer and has a picture taken and framed extravagantly.

Only widow Steavens knew how *Ántonia* got ready to be married and how she came back. During the spring and summers the pregnant girl worked in the fields for Ambrosch. *Ántonia* never went to town because she didn't want to see anyone. She knew she had toothaches, but wouldn't go to dentist. Mrs. Steavens was the only one who went to see her. Once the widow suggested to Ambrosch that, by working so hard the girl would lose her self-respect. *Ántonia* was annoyed when Larry Donovan runs away from her. As she told to Mrs. Steavens, Larry had no job. He was fired, blacklisted for knocking down, fares. He lived with her till her money gave out. He

was not hunting for job at all. She feels he has gone to Old Mexico, to make his fortune.

This episode reveals that *Ántonia's* deepest need was to love someone and to be a mother. She wanted this so much that she was blind to Larry Donovan's unsuitability, and became pregnant. The next time Jim saw *Ántonia*, she was out in the field ploughing corn. All that spring and summer she did the work of a man on the farm; it seemed to be an implicit affair:

She was quiet and steady. Folks respected her industry and tried to treat her as if nothing had happened. They talked, to be sure; but not like they would if she'd put on airs. She was so crushed and quiet that nobody seemed to want to humble her. .. She talked about the grain and the weather as if she'd never had another interest, she always looked dead weary (314).

After being disgraced in her marriage, *Antonia* shuts herself off from outside society and tries to regain her independence by working the land as she used to. *Ántonia* worked on through harvest and threshing, though she was too modest to go out threshing for the neighbours, like when she was young and free. She has begun to herd *Ambrosch's* cattle in the open ground. Sometimes she used to bring them over the west hill, ... she had thirty cattle in her bunch, it had been dry, and the pasture was short, or she wouldn't have brought them so far. *Ántonia* worked on through *Ambrosch* responded angrily that the widow should keep those ideas to herself. *Ambrosch* was obviously the boss so she stayed away after that. In the fall when *Ántonia* was herding cattle, Mrs. Steavens would sometimes meet her on the prairie and talk to *Ántonia*. She reminisced to the widow about her father and the old days of

playing with Jim on the prairie. Though her father is dead she draws the inspiration from the past memories. *Ántonia* recalls her father:

Look at my papa here; he's been dead all these years, and yet he is more real to me than almost anybody else. He never goes out of my life. I talk to him and consult him all the time. The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him (320).

As a young girl she discovered masculine independence and strength by plowing the ground, and after her marriage scandal she works industriously. In winter *Ántonia* was seen dressed in heavy men's clothes. As Jim narrates: she wore a man's long overcoat and boots and a man's felt hat with a wide brim....her steps getting heavier' (316). After herding her cattle in the snow *Antonia* went into her room, closed her door. She was in a terrible pain. She got her cattle home, turned them into the corral, and went into the house, into her room behind the kitchen, and shut the door. There, without calling to anybody, without a groan, she lay down on the bed and bore her child. Her mother came to fetch the widow, who took care of the newborn. When the widow Steavens showed it to Ambrosch his response was to "put it out in the rain-barrel". Since Mrs. Steavens took care of her when the baby was born *Ántonia* was not frightened in fact she was proud of her baby.

Ántonia got on fine. She loved it from the first as dearly as if she'd had a ring on her finger, and was never ashamed of it. It's a year and eight months old now, and no baby was ever better cared-for.

Ántonia is a natural-born mother (318).

Ántonia raises the baby very dearly without hesitation and loves it tenderly. Any other girl would have kept her baby out of sight, but Tony, of course, must have its picture on exhibition at the town photographer's in a great gilt frame" (303).

She further comments:

Father Kelly says everybody's put into this world for something, and I know what I've got to do. I'm going to see that my little girl has a better chance than ever I had. I'm going to take care of that girl, Jim (321).

Ántonia married a Bohemian named Anton Cuzak short, with curly black hair. He looked like 'humorous philosopher' who had hitched up one shoulder under the burdens of life. 'Trained as a furrier, he is not used to farming, and would have become discouraged without Ántonia's strength'. He is gentle and accepting and somewhat amused to be the father of ten children. Even though he misses city life, he's devoted to Ántonia. Jim finds him 'a most companionable fellow'. When Jim returns to black Hawk, he finds Ántonia completely changed:

Ántonia came in and stood before me; a stalwart, brown woman, flat chested, her curly brown hair a little grizzled... The eyes that peered anxiously at me were simply Ántonia eyes. I had seen no others like them since I looked into them last, though I had looked at so many thousand of human faces. As I confronted her, the changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger. She was there in the full vigour of her personality, battered but not diminished; looking at me, speaking to me in the husky, breathy voice I remembered so well (332).

Ántonia's did not recognize Jim at the first glance. When she meets Jim she was thinner than I had ever seen her, and looked... 'worked down,' but there was a new kind of strength in the gravity of her face, and her color still gave her that look of deep-seated health and ardour (319). Jim had remained young, but though Ántonia

had become old, 'she had not lost the fire of life'. "Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away" (336).

Ántonia's informs Jim how "she and her husband had come out to this new country when the farm-land was cheap and could be had on easy payments. Antonia seems very much a part of the land, even though people keep leaving and she is left alone. She wants to live and die in the country, which she knows and loves. The land has nurtured and strengthened her in the past, and she hopes it will do the same. Her tenacity is here by revealed:

I'd always be miserable in a city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree and where all the road is friendly. I want to live and die here (320).

As perceived by James Seaton: Ántonia's own marriage to Anton Cuzak is secure; because the two are not romantic lovers but live together on "terms of easy friendliness, touched with humor."⁷ The first ten years were a hard struggle. Her husband knew very little about farming and often grew discouraged.

We'd never have got through if I hadn't been so strong. I've always had good health, thank God and I was able to help him in the fields until right up to the time before my babies came. Our children were good about taking care of each other (343).

Ántonia is among her brood of children yet full of life and energetic, in the plethora of fruit and trees surrounding her house; in the myriad of farm animals running around, her children are very sympathetic that portrays her genuine qualities:

Two of them are seen bending over a dead dog, with one of them not more than four or five was on his knees his hands folded and

his bare head drooping forward in deep dejection and the other comforting him in his language (329).

Two of the girls helped mother washing dishes at the sink, laughing and chattering and a little one on a stool playing with a rag baby. The older one wore shoes and stockings, was a 'buxom girl' with dark hair and eyes calm and self-possessed (331). Anna, Yulka, Anton, Nina, and Leo 'worst of all' as Ántonia calls him as he's never out of mischief for a minute but 'loves him the best of all'. Rudolph the eldest, followed with Jan, Lucie, Ambrosch, and Martha being married Ántonia is happy to see her with the baby. The little ones could not speak English at all as Ántonia always spoke Bohemian at home as she loved to keep her traditions.

Ántonia never got 'down-hearted'. 'She loved her children and always believed they would turn out well'. Antonia promises she will never allow her daughters to work for others but will try her best to sacrifice for the betterment of them. She trains her daughters Nina, Yulka, Anna and Lucie to maintain her house in order. Her favorite is twelve-year old, mischievous Leo, who was born on Easter. There is a lively atmosphere with a pleasant supper and lively musical performances by the children.

As Jim observes:

These children seemed to be upon very much the same terms with Ántonia as the Harling children had been so many years before. They seemed to feel the same pride in her, and to look to her for stories and entertainment as we used to do. (351)

Ántonia belonged to a farm and Jim realizes how much Antonia and the land are intertwined although her husband knew very little about farming and often grew discouraged:

The first ten years were a hard struggle...there wasn't a tree here when we first came. We planted everyone, carrying water for them and had been working in the fields all day. I couldn't feel so tired that I wouldn't fret about these trees when there was a dry time. They were on my mind like little children (340)...At some distance behind the house were an ash grove and two orchards, a cherry orchard, with goose-berry and currant bushes between the rows, and an apple orchard, sheltered by a high hedge low -branching mulberry bushes (339).

Ántonia now prefers the country and never gets depressed the way she did in the city because it gives her a greater chance to fulfill herself as she comments: "Ántonia kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. I love them as if they were people" (340). Ántonia is always conscious about her husband's comfort and works for his happiness. Anton Cuzak, her husband was amused by her resourcefulness. Antonia loves him that she makes him forget his earlier misfortunes. He admires her for her tireless hard struggle on the soil. He is amused to be a father of ten children. Her support and sympathy for him enables him to change his life.

As rightly opined by Robert E.Scholes:

So it is Ántonia, who is always conscious of the past, is nevertheless free of it, and capable of concern for the future. And her past is not merely that of a generation or so.⁸

Jim tells Ántonia how much she means to him. Ántonia is a sweetheart, wife, mother and sister to Jim; she is his female complement as they grew up together in an unsettled empty environment. Ántonia captures universal human attitudes in herself and brings them out in other people She is richest in life and love. As Jim acclaims:

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct universal and true....All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions... She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races (353).

Jim and *Ántonia*'s relationship reveals many other traits of *Antonia*.

Jim and *Ántonia* meet in a journey while traveling by train. Jim ten years old is on his way to his grandparents house in Nebraska to begin a new and different life due to death of his parents. Being abandoned from his family, he unites with his grandparents and at this moment with *Ántonia* as well. Jim does not realize it at the time, he and *Ántonia* are embarking on shared adventures and their lives will intertwine in complex ways. The casual encounter on a train becomes the beginning of a mutual journey in the American West.

On Sunday morning Jim drives across fields of red grass to visit the new Bohemian family that has recently settled. Jim and *Ántonia* (Tony) become friends. They explore their new homeland together. Suddenly *Ántonia* comes up to Jim, and they run through the fields hand in hand. The physical environment and the emotions it creates in Jim to discover the fullness of the new world is realistically pictured:

We were running up the steep drawside together. ...When we reached the level and could see the gold tree-tops, I pointed toward them, and *Antonia* laughed and squeezed my hand. ... We raced off toward Squaw Creek and did not stop until the ground itself stopped. ... We stood panting on the edge of the ravine, looking down at the trees and bushes (25).

Tony was “barefooted, and she shivered in her cotton dress” and was comfortable only when they lie down next to each other in the middle of a field. They experience nature together as stare up at the blue sky. While they were having their reading lesson on the warm grassy bank, a little insect of the palest frailest green hopped painfully out of the buffalo grass. Tony all concerned for the tiny creature, made a warm nest for him in her hands; talked to him “gaily and indulgently” in Bohemian. *Ántonia* offers Jim one of her rings but Jim refuses instantly. Jim does not exactly know how much help the Shimerdas need, and are prevented from finding out because of differences of language and culture.

After three years in the country, Jim’s grandparents, move to the town of Black Hawk so that Jim can go to school. *Ántonia* follows Jim as his family moves. She gets employed in the household of Burden’s neighbours. She comes into town to work for the Harlings in their home. As Jim goes off to college he loses touch with *Ántonia* but then, through Lena, become connected to *Ántonia* again. Finally, twenty years later, Jim travels back to see *Ántonia* and her new, “enlarged” family. He was glad to see that *Ántonia* was finally again and enjoyed meeting all her children as well as her husband. It is *Ántonia* who lets Lena to come closer to Jim. *Ántonia* warns Jim not to get mixed up with the Swedish girls for a similar reason. *Ántonia* fears that he may fall in love, get married, and then never leave Black Hawk. In warning, Jim not to flirt with Lena, *Ántonia* has Jim’s long-term interests in mind.

Ántonia seems beyond the realm of sexual desire, and relations with Jim seem always chaste and innocent, though sometimes intense, Jim cannot think of *Ántonia* in a sexual light because she is more than just the beloved to him; she is a maternal, feminine presence in his life that cannot be limited simply to the role of lover. John H.

Randall: notes that *Ántonia* now prefers the country to city life where all the ground is friendly.⁹ Robert E. Scholes rightly opines that:

Jim feels “the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at night-fall,” and he wishes he could be a little boy again, and that his way would end there.¹⁰

When Jim revisits *Ántonia* and her thriving family, she has in some ways relapsed toward the past. “I’ve forgot my English so”. She says, “I don’t often talk it any more. I tell the children I used to speak it real well.” She said they all spoke Bohemian at home. The little ones could not speak English at all-didn’t learn it until they went to school”.

Jim adores *Ántonia* as seen in this episode:

Do you know, *Ántonia* , since I’ve been away, I think of you more often of the world. I’d have like to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister anything that a woman can be to a man. The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don’t realize it. You really are a part of me (321).

John H. Randall notes that: ‘She is reborn to civilization’ when she goes to town to live and relearns nice ways of doing things.¹¹ Finally, after learning all she has to learn, she is ready to take her place in the society by starting her family of her own and is reborn once again into the human community. Wallace Stenger acclaims: Jim is himself groping for an identity and an affiliation. In the process of understanding and commemorating *Ántonia* he locates himself.¹²

Ántonia represents an alternative to Jim’s life as middle-class American boy. Throughout the story *Ántonia* as a presentation of a life very different from Jim’s and

as a strong bond with the land shows us Jim's life as a middle-class American boy. Unlike Jim, she's able to move away from all the stereotypes and boundaries of her class and gender. *Ántonia* is a lot less inhibited than Jim is and listens to her heart more.

The second thing *Ántonia* represents to Jim is a close tie to the land. As much as he loves the land, Jim is able to give it up for the city, whereas *Ántonia* is the happiest there. The differences between *Ántonia* and Jim almost spell out what the Nebraska prairie means to two really specific different types of people. He's all about progress, and he doesn't mind when the grassland are wiped out for railroads. He looks at the land as an instrument for progress. Although he is married to a woman of social prominence; his childlessness and marital estrangement dampen his spirits. *Ántonia* on the other hand thinks of the lands as a divine entity driven by its own force. The book is one long paean of praise to the joys of rural living and shows her a passionate advocate of the virtues of a settled agricultural existence. At the end the of novel Cather portrays *Ántonia* in her orchards touching all of her trees that she planted and took care of 'like people.'

When the sophisticated, world-traveled, perhaps even world weary Jim Burden returns to the prairie scenes of his boyhood, Jim finds *Ántonia* of his youth, her passion for life everywhere evident: in the family she has raised, in the home she keeps, and in her flourishing farm. Having come full circle, Jim has rediscovered his youth: *Ántonia* will always represent the best of his life. She is his 'every woman-wife, mother, sister. She is the endless prairie and the immense sky' (321).

No matter how she tries, *Ántonia* cannot escape the prejudices that surround the town. Working as a hired girl, a job that demands the skill of a housekeeper and a many, *Ántonia* becomes as outcast in the city. Consequently, she is forced to

associate with only other working girls like herself. Yet it is not just her job that earns her the dislike, it is the color of her skin. Working in the fields of the country, *Ántonia* had gained a remarkable tan.

The latter, although accepted in the country, brands her a peasant in the town. No refined lady would ever subject herself to the brutal country sun. The men of black Hawk referred to as, although they could do almost anything else. The man who personifies this statement is Wick Cutter, a licentiousness man who tries to rape *Ántonia*. However, Wick's plan does not work due to *Ántonia*'s cunning and acute perception, which allows her to discern well before hand what Wick's intentions really were. She uses her intelligence and takes refuge in Jim Burden's house until she deems the situation safe to do otherwise.

As perceptively remarked by Philip Gerber:

In her struggle to tame life, *Ántonia* gropes, fumbling repeatedly. She runs a zigzag path but makes relentless progress. If ever there were a true-born victim of circumstance, it should be she a stranger, unacclimated to frontier life, unable to speak the lingua franca, socially outcast, with a defeated dreamer for a father, a harridan for a mother, a sullen lout for a brother. But *Ántonia* transcends every disadvantage and does so without soiling herself.¹³

Ántonia has managed to make her husband happy for twenty-six years in one of the loneliest regions in the world, even though he was a city man and occasionally had spells of homesickness for the theaters and lighted cafés of the Old World. In spite of many hardships *Ántonia* has to undergo during the course of her life, she remains to all a symbol of strength, courage, and happiness. She never gives up her dreams or her responsibilities. She takes what life hands her, and does so with

a smile. At the times when she has the right to give up, it is then when she is the strongest, and it is then we see the true *Ántonia*. Anton calls her 'my woman' to express his deep love for his wife. Antonia also express her love for her husband calling him 'my man'.

Ántonia Shimerdas actually progress from care- free little girl to plodding farm and then from farmhand to hired girl and later from hired girl to wife and mother is being skillfully traced in the novel. By working in the fields, *Ántonia* is able to gain the respect and independence that men her age do. Her productivity becomes the measure of her worth, regardless of her gender. Though *Ántonia*'s working as a farm laborer is perhaps unconventional, her success suggests that women should be allowed to make the same choices as a man can. By depicting *Ántonia* as a strong, determined woman, Cather is asserting that there should be no limitations set on a woman's potential.

As rightly remarked by John H. Randall III: "*Ántonia*'s great achievement and the chief subject of the book is founding of a family... Willa Cather had finally made up her mind that her true allegiance was to the soil".¹⁴ This is reflected in the character of *Ántonia*.. James Woodress noted that "in one sense Cather had been preparing to write **My *Ántonia*** for a third of a century" having known and admire Annie Sadilek for that length of time. Cather was particularly impressed with Sadilek's ability to endure adversity and still retain her enjoyment of life. In 1921 she told a reviewer that Sadilek was "one of the truest artists [she] ever knew in the keenness and sensitiveness of her enjoyment, in her love of people and in her willingness to take pains".¹⁵ These qualities are embodied in the title character of **My *Ántonia*** and are revealed by means of a complex narrative structure. *Ántonia*'s character reveals these qualities.

Ántonia, a mine of life, the mother of races, and a new thing forming itself in hardship and hope, but clinging to fragments of the well loved Old World. Hence **My Ántonia** is any American's Ántonia, Willa Cather's Ántonia. No writer ever posed that essential aspect of the American experience more warmly, with more nostalgic lyricism, or with a surer understanding of what it means.¹⁶ Ántonia is a very simple character. She represents a strong personality with her strength of physique and strongly defined idiosyncrasies can hold our attention and capture our emotion.

As aptly perceived by John H. Randall III:

She has triumphed over adversity and over nature; she has wrestled with life and imposed an order on it' her order just as she has imposed order on the wilderness of Nebraska by converting part of it into a fruitful farm with a garden at its center...In her double role as founder of a prosperous farm and progenitor of a thriving family she becomes the very symbol of fertility and reminds us of Demeter or Ceres of old, the ancients goddess of agriculture.¹⁷

Ántonia had the desire to learn every aspect of the wild land. Ántonia is the person whose inner strength enables her to live the enviable life. Cather glorifies frontier values of independence, hard work, and asceticism, and she implicitly contrasts it to the competition and isolation of modern society. Ántonia spends her whole life fighting yet she is not known to be belligerent. She is constantly being battered, but still has no visible scars. Although she suffers all through her life, she somehow manages to keep an optimistic outlook. Ántonia is one of those rare people who gain character, rather than resentment, by enduring hardship.

When Willa Cather wrote her novel **My Ántonia** in 1918, there probably was not any doubt that it was the story of a woman's accomplishment. However, today there have been many critics that claim this work to be the legacy of a girl's struggle, not triumph. This leaves readers with the choice of interpreting the book as enlightening or depressing. One can confidently say at the end of the novel that Ántonia's triumphs. Willa Cather remarked, in one of her essays, "I have not much faith in women in fiction" Yet in Ántonia Cather has created a genuinely heroic woman.¹⁸ I totally agree with Philip Gerber who has perceptively observed in the portrayal of Ántonia that "To Cather she is cause for celebration; she justifies the human race."¹⁹ Though she belongs to ordinary class still there are many extraordinary traits in her. Antonia's life are manifestations of the rural virtues that Jim associates with his grandparents and their beautifully managed old farm; cleanliness, order, decorum. Antonia now signifies nourishment, protection fertility, growth, and abundance energy in service. It is not the fine arts that Antonia comes to symbolize for Jim Burden, but the domestic ones. He is able to see her permanently, as the maker of formal gestures which he says, "we recognize by instinct as universal and true."²⁰

Economic pressure clearly shapes the lives of immigrants daughters in Ántonia. Her narrative relates immigrants' women struggle for persistence on the land. Their personal tragedies; necessitate sacrifices and sufferings. Antonia's instinct plunges her always into life's mainstream, disregarding money, position, possessions or career. At forty-four, she is the mother of eleven children, a grand mother without her former beauty. She is "grizzled," "flat-chested," "toothless," and "battered", consumed by her life of childbearing and field work. To live merely for the rich experience of living itself is the "career" she labors.

John J. Murphy is one of the few critics who recognize the importance of *Ántonia's* status as immigrant. He states:

Jim is representative of the dominant culture as opposed to foreigners like *Ántonia* who are seen as inferior by virtue of that foreigners. *Ántonia* achieves her apotheosis despite the dominant culture, and the fact that she is "rescued" by a non-American, Cuzak, is extremely pertinent. He sees *Ántonia* as retreating, in the final section of the book, from the American culture which has rejected her as inferior and "identifying with the differences that have limited her."²¹

The persistence of national culture in *Antonia's* family is apparent in their using the Czech language. The bilingual proficiency has a rootedness that Jim loses, and he attempts to supplant his own sense of dislocation by planning trips back to Nebraska. Cather's concern for the loss of cultural background appears on Nebraska's Czech immigrants transplanting their own language. The presence of Hispanic cultures, Native American cultures and Eastern European cultures is also "crucial" to the true "sense of Americanness". By marrying a fellow Bohemian and by teaching her children to speak their native language and retain Bohemian music and dance, *Antonia* preserves her own cultural strand. In the last section the violin reappears as "Leo, with a good deal of fussing got out his violin, it was old Mr. Simerdas's instrument, which *Antonia* had always kept, and it was too big for him. But he played very well for a self taught boy." (347) Willa Cather's depiction of her eponymous heroine, *Ántonia* clearly derives from and helps constitute the larger discourse of cultural pluralism.

II

SECONDARY WOMEN CHARACTERS

Lena Lingard:

Willa Cather depicts the struggle of the hired girls with the society. Lena Lingard was one of the hired girls who work for wages in Black Hawk. Lena Lingard is 'Chris Lingard's oldest girl.' Lena Lingard was not one of the most respected people in town but she wanted to improve herself. 'As she thought the work on the farm was endless she wanted to get away from it. Lena had left the farm at a young age to become a seamstress and study under Mrs. Thomas, a well known dress-maker in town. Her mother supported her decision and Lena was planning on making some money and helping her mother, back on the farm.

I've seen a good deal of married life, and I don't care for it. I want to be so I can help my mother and the children at home, and not have to ask wife of anybody (162). Lena would be chased by guys and their girlfriends because she would flirt so much and that would upset the girl friends, and that's the reason the town talked about her. Surely none of them represented more of a menace than Lena Lingard.

As perceptively observed by Terence Martin:

A blonde, Nebraskan Circe, Lena is a temptress who "gave her heart away when she felt like it", as Jim says, but kept her head for business". Lena Lingard, demure, soft and attractive, Lena radiates sexual charm without guile or effort. She is the most innocently sensuous and beautiful of all the women in Willa Cather's work.²²

Even the married Ole Benson and the proper young bachelor Sylvester Lovett the son of the local bank president, have become obsessed men because of her. Her

landlord Colonel Raleigh in Lincoln later and The Polish Violin teacher, Mr. Ordinsky, are entranced by Lena and suspicious of Jim on her account.²³

She danced every danced like a waltz of coming home to something, of inevitable, fated return (222). The eldest of many children, used to herd cattle on the prairie for her father. Though she was poor and ragged, her yellow hair, pale white skin, and soft, violet coloured eyes made her attractive. She had a gentle, easy personality. Although Lena and Antonia are friends, they are very different. Tony wants to make money so her family's farm will prosper. Lena is disillusioned about family life, and never wants to return to the farm.

Lena is more easy going, detached person, who wants to be left alone to have a good time. Lena tells of her grandfather rebelliously marrying a Lapland woman. Lapp girls were considered dangerously attractive to the men in Norway. "I guess that's what the matter with me is. They say Lapp blood will out" says Lena referring to her weakness for men.

As perceptively observed by E. K. Brown:

Lena hates laboring on the farm, wants nothing to do with having to please and work for a husband, and refuses to enter a life of constant, pregnancy and childcare. Instead, she leaves the rural.²⁴

Lena has grown from a 'barefoot farm girl into a well-groomed', accomplished young woman. Jim enjoys occasional dinners and leisurely Sunday breakfasts at Lena's place. They play and laugh together. He finds her very pretty and sees now why the Norwegian Ole Benson used to hang around her. Across the hall from Lena lives an emotional Polish violinist who is jealous of Jim's attraction to her. The violinist is also jealous of the Landlord, a widower who has a soft spot for Lena. Jim declares that all three of them are in love with Lena.

As perceptively observed by Dorothy Tuck McFarland,

The young men of Black Hawk's American families including Jim are naturally drawn to the vigor and attractiveness of immigrants daughters like the pretty Norwegian Lena Lingard . But the social consciousness of the town has decreed that Black Hawk boys should marry Black Hawk girls which, after some longing glances at the hired girls they do so. ²⁵

Lena is now established as a dress maker in Lincoln and is well on her way to become a business success. But she offers a kind of opium dream of sensuality, promising endless pleasure. Dallying with her, Jim loses interest in his classes and drifts aimlessly until his academic mentor urges him to break with Lena and follow him to Harvard. Jim hates to leave Lena. He goes to see her to discuss it. Lena informs him she's planning never to get married. She has seen too much poverty and hard work in her family brought on by too many babies, she'd slept three to a bed till she left home at nineteen. Now she does determine to keep her independence and not be "under somebody's thumb" (292). As such "autonomy and unconventional destiny" is seen in the subordinate characters. ²⁶

Lena had picked up all the conventional expressions she heard (281). Lena's assimilation to American values is too complete, however: she, like Jim, is lethargic; she has a "sleepy smile" and a "lazy, good natured laugh". She too ends up childless: it is as if acceptance of the culture of money making precludes fertility. Lena is never a rival for the central place in the book- she has not *Ántonia's* force or has insight; she is never so much alive. At times she is a foil: her fairness against beauty, her slowness and quietness against *Ántonia's* vivacity. It is easy to understand how in her rosy semi-naked beauty she became so constant a figure in Jim's adolescent dreams. ²⁷

Like Antonia, Lena is a child of the country. She farms the land, which nurtures her until she grows into a voluptuous and fertile young woman. However in her later life Lena competes to become a successful seamstress and business woman.

Tiny Soderball:

Tiny Soderball 'trim and slender', with 'lively little feet and pretty ankles'-she wore her dresses very short. She made the difference by being quicker in speech, lighter in movement and manner than the other girls (192). She works as a waitress at Mrs. Gardener's Boys Home Hotel. Tiny like some of the immigrant who seek opportunity to make fortune, goes to the gold mines.

Tiny Soderball, made her fortune in the Klondike before settling down in San Francisco. Tiny and Lena her companion, lived in a mutually beneficial supportive relationship: Tiny audits Lena's accounts occasionally and invest her money for her; and Lena apparently takes care that Tiny does not grow too miserly (328). Both Lena and Tiny are independent and unconventional; Lena particularly understands and values the single self.

As perceptively observed by Deborah G. Lambert:

Lena describes marriages as "being under some body's thumbs".

Her description of Lena and Tiny undercuts their achievement and portrays them as stereotypical "old maids" who have paid for their refusal of their "natural" function.

Tiny has become a "thin, hard-faced woman, very well dressed, very reserved" and something of a miser; she says, frankly that nothing interested her much now but making money. Moreover,

tiny has suffered the mutilation of her “pretty little feet” the price of her unnatural success in the Klondike.²⁸

Lena has been successful and her friend Tiny Soderball, another girl from the Divide, has had almost unbelievable success, but their lives in San Francisco are ‘solitary and rootless.’

Three Bohemian Mary’s:

The three Bohemia Mary’s include Mary Dusak had been housekeeper for a bachelor rancher from Boston and after several years in his service she was forced to retire from the world for a short time (202). She later takes the place of her friend Mary Svoboda who was similarly embarrassed. Antonia’s Mary is also a wrong wife of crooked Ambrosch and praises her instead that her children will have a great chance (224). Mary Svoboda’s the ‘best butter maker’ in all this country and was a fine manager too (349). Coming from large families they were industrious and wanted nothing but the best for their families.

The three Bohemian Mary’s were considered as high explosives to have about the kitchen, yet they were such good cooks and such admirable housekeeper, that they never had to look for a place. Three Bohemian Mary’s tried to make up for the years of youth they had lost. Every one of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars.

Danish Laundry Girls:

There were four Danish girls, smiling up from their ironing-boards, with their white throats and their pink cheeks. As these girls were fond of dancing they never

missed being at the Progressive Euchre Club. The four Danish girls lived with the laundryman and his wife behind the laundry. As aptly observed by Terence Martin:

Black Hawk provides a canvas on which Miss Cather can portray social consciousness and burgeoning social change in the Nebraska of this time. Despite the domestic in vitality of the Harling family, readily available for Jim Burden to draw on...small and very proper, the town makes life for young men an initiation into monotony. Except of course for presence of hired girls. These young women, all of foreign families, bring vivacity to Black Hawk: light-hearted, gay and unpretentious, at the dances they are in great demand.²⁹

Because the town girls have money and respectability, they are paradoxically limited in their life possibilities. They are not expected or encouraged to choose vocation for themselves, and they are just expected to get married. Their options in life are limited to becoming wife and a mother. On the other hand, the country girls who are born poor have much who is open to them. Since then families do not have the luxury of allowing them to stay at home. They have to go out into the world to work, and they there discover the myriad of possibilities open to them. They are thus able to actually choose vocation make money, more fully engage in worldly pursuits.

Terence Martin further opines that:

While the hired girls are able to break free of traditional male-female constraints, they do so at a price” they lose social standing and respectability. Indeed, determined town girls, if they chose, could very well become employed, but they would risk a number of social privileges. Country girls have nothing to lose and only financial

remuneration to gain. However, though their farm labor makes them more attractive than town girls, they will never be completely accepted. More often than not, however the proper young men must meet them surreptitiously, for the hired girls enjoy a lower social status than do the girls of the older American families in the town.³⁰

Frances Harling:

She is a Norwegian, daughter of a businessman. Frances Harling is one of the vast examples of what a strong woman can be. She was her father's chief clerk, and virtually managed his Black Hawk office during his frequent absences. Because her unusual business ability... He paid her a good salary,... and [she] never got away from her responsibilities. On Sundays she went to the office to open the mail and read markets (149). She was quick at understanding the grandmothers who spoke no English, and the, most reticent and distrustful of them would tell her their story without realizing they were doing so (151). Frances taken care of the finance of many people around the country and though she is a woman, is very much trusted. 'She carried then all in her mind as if they were characters in a book or play.'

Frances is very talented. She could play the piano without a light and talk to her mother at the same time. Frances also was one of the most dependable people in town. If any one had a wedding she would bring a present. If there was a funeral she would be there to help console them. You would always count on her to be there, as she attended funerals and wedding in all weathers. A farmer's daughter who was to be married could count on a wedding present from Frances Harling (149). Frances loved dances and thought her fellow companions and had the gift of understanding.

Mrs. Gardener:

Mrs. Gardener was admittedly the best-dressed woman in Black Hawk, drove the best horse, and had a smart trap and a little white and gold sleigh. She seemed indifferent to her possessions, was not half so solicitous about them as her friends were. (182) Being the hotel owner, it was Mrs. Gardner who ran the business and looked after everything. Molly Gardener was 'tall, dark, severe, with something Indian-like in the rigid immobility of her face'. Her manner was 'cold, and she talked little. Mostly liked to have the best material goods in the town, and she liked to show them off.

Mrs. Harlings:

Mrs. Harlings were Norwegians, and had lived in Christiania until she was ten and her husband was born in Minnesota. She had 'bright, twinkling eyes and a stubborn little chin. She was quick to anger, quick laughter, and jolly from the depths of her soul'. Mrs. Harling generally runs the household. "When the Harlings' cook leaves, Mrs. Harling hires *Ántonia* on request of Jim's grandmother. Mrs. Harling finds *Ántonia* pretty, and mandate a certain amount for her personal use." She took up her 'crocheting again and sent the hook in and out with nimble fingers. 'Mrs. Harling had studied the piano under a good teacher, and somehow she managed to practice every day' (158). And so she was an accomplished pianist; and knowledgeable about opera. She resembles Mrs. Julia Miners a very close friend of the Cather's family. Her enthusiasm, and her violent likes and dislikes asserted themselves in all occupations of life (148). Though she does not have any real occupation, her role, as a mother is worthy of respect and much appreciated by Jim.

Frances and Mrs. Harlings exemplify female strength and initiative, and for this reason, Cather's work can be considered progressive and profeminist. Women like Francis can have the responsibilities usually granted only to men, but such a lifestyle should be a matter of personal choice. If women like Mrs. Harling choose to raise a family, they should be celebrated for doing that too, as it is clearly a pursuit to be admired.³¹

Mrs. Shimerda:

The mother of *Ántonia* is a woman of extreme temperament susceptible to jealousy and anger. Mrs. Shimerda, during her adolescence worked as a servant girl for Mr. Shimerda's household there she becomes pregnant thereby he is compelled to marry her against his parents wishes". Mrs. Shimerda was a "good house wife in her own country, but she managed poorly under new conditions. "Mrs. Shimerda is a very poor house keeper and makes bad bread. Mrs. Shimerda had a 'quick ear, and caught up phrases' when ever she heard English spoken" (77). Mrs. Shimerda wanted to come to America because she thought that Ambrosch would be able to become rich here. She was intelligent enough to get valuable secrets from others.

Mrs. Emmaline Burden:

Mrs. Burden was one of the primitive immigrants who were well settled in Virginia. Jim's grandmother is a very generous and tolerant woman; she took care of *Ántonia*, as she did not like her working out in he fields. She introduces her to Harling family. Grandmother loved cooking and prepared variety of dishes of ham or bacon or sausage meat. She likes sewing and knitting". She was cheerful and she saw that every one was kept warm comfortable and well fed she did all the household chores.

Grandmother felt sorry for *Ántonia*'s hard work in the farm, she said, 'Heavy field work 'spoil that girl. She'll lose all her nice ways and get rough ones'. Her concern for poor Grandmother thought *Ántonia* needed shoes more than Mrs. Shimerda needed prayers. She unquestioningly supports her pious husband attend the 'church suppers ' and 'missionary societies' During Christmas, she loved to prepare the delicacies along with *Ántonia* and her sister Yulka. Grandmother always "talked to herself or to the Lord, if there was no one else to listen" (111).

Widow Steavens:

Being a generous neighbor of *Ántonia* she lends a helping hand to the family at the time of Mr. Shimerda's suicide. She is good speaker kind hearted and a fearless woman. Later on she rents the Burden farm and grows extremely fond of *Antonia*. She teaches *Ántonia* 'hemstitching' and helped her to cut and fit as she runs tailoring. She is a feminist in true sense who readily faces cruel Ambrosch's disgrace to plead for *Ántonia* at her child birth. Steavens assists *Ántonia* at her delivery as she is the one who accepts the child with open arms and later attends to all her needs. Being a widow she had an open mindedness and was a highly resourceful person in her simple ways of living.

An independence of women prevailed in this novel. There were not many women with intelligent portrayals in this novel because it was written in the early years of the twentieth century. Three women's successes are firmly noted. Lena Lingard, a childhood friend of Jim and *Ántonia*'s, left Black Hawk as a simple worker. She went to New England and eventually opened her own prosperous dress shop. James Woodress, wrote, "the softly alluring Lena, who so unaccountably failed to go wrong. "This is an example of independence and accomplishment."³²

Frances Harling, a neighbour of the Burdens is an accountant and handles her father's business office more efficiently. She is highly appreciated by her neighbouring pioneer women for her sincere support to them at their prosperity and adversity. This was extremely unusual for the time. Tiny Soderball another unlikely candidate for success, struck gold out west after leaving Black Hawk a maid. These three women's achievements add to the probability that Antonia's life was commendable. Frances shows responsibility skills, Molly shows leadership skills, and Lena shows the will to improve herself. While Lena, Tiny forgo marriage, Antonia seems to have found a relationship based on equality and mutual respect. Although relegated to subordinate roles, these women are initially presented favorably but Cather simultaneously praises Antonia's role as mother and demeans the value of their independent lives. The minor women characters also possess multidimensional personality having good hearts and courage to struggle at different circumstances. Mostly they suffer at the hands of corrupt males but still they move forward and plead for the miserable women.

There was a lot of segregation and poverty as the newer immigrants from Europe arrive with little money or experience in farming. The immigrants were not wealthy and struggled to survive on what they had. They were tricked into buying expensive items and land and were treated as minors. The different amount of languages spoken also made it extremely difficult to communicate with others. When the immigrant daughters come to town as hired girls they are looked down on by some of the town families and were treated disrespectfully as well. As remarkably opined by John J. Murphy: 'The Hired Girls' section depicts social fragmentation rather than the tightening of the organic bonds of the frontier. A dubious but higher stage in the cultural evolution of the frontier is portrayed.³³

III

My Ántonia is a celebration of the 'Nebraska Pioneer' as exemplified by Ántonia.³⁴ From the Hired Girls to Tiny Soderball and Lena Lingard women are capable of self-sufficiency and happiness. The majority of the truly contented people are either alone or living without the opposite sex. Ántonia and Cuzak are the only example of a normal happy couple, all others have some problems that prevent a normal relationship. Jim bestows the praise on the immigrant girls. Jim realizes that people from his past in Black Hawk, the immigrant girls in particular, have the special qualities that inspire artists: 'if there were no girls like them in the world there would be no poetry'.

Willa Cather focused on depicting ethnic values of the different cultures of the various immigrants who came to Nebraska. She wrote that Slavonic, Germanic, Scandinavian, Bohemian and Latin "spread across our bronze prairie like the splatter of colour upon, on a painter's palette". Ántonia is quick witted and opinionated. She eagerly learns by watching. Devoted to values as the importance of family and the need for human courage and dignity, she created strong female characters whose sort of strength and determination had previously been attributed only to men.

Characters in **My Ántonia** who represent the "Old immigrants" from the northern and western Europe notably, the Harlings, Mrs. Gardener, and Mr. Jensen are presented as "upright and cosmopolitan".³⁵ As perceptively remarked by James E. Miller: **My Ántonia** is; "I believe, a community on the American experience, the American dream, and the American reality."³⁶ Living as we do in a rapidly changing world, in which prairies and pioneers have all but disappeared, Cather's story, nearly a century old, possesses a chilling relevance: are we forever doomed to pine for that

which we once had, but lost! Elizabeth Sherpley Sergeant rightly observes: “I want my new heroine to be like this,” she said, “like a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides. I want her to stand out-like this –because she is the story.”³⁷

The Shimerdas reflect this change, arriving late, on the largest wave of Czech immigration. These more recent immigrants “bore the brunt of the economic insecurity of the period” as well as tensions surrounding World War I (25). Czechs are an impulsive people which might make them especially friendly or, possibly, especially violent. Cather portrays music as having an especially emotional and even nationalist resonance with her Czech characters. For instance, the mere chirp of a cricket changes *Ántonia’s* disposition from merry to melancholy by evoking memories of Old Hata, who “sang old songs to the children in a cracked voice” back in Bohemia (27). Before committing suicide, Mr. Shimerda reveals his despair by no longer playing his violin. “My papa sad for the old country.” *Ántonia* says, adding, “He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never. [...] He don’t like this kawn-tree” (59). Here, Cather illustrates a close relationship between music and Bohemia itself. Cather shows the Czech trait of musical talent surviving among a Czech family’s first American-born generation.

The persistence of national culture in *Ántonia’s* family is also apparent in their using the Czech language. As Susie Thomas writes, “*Ántonia’s* household is a Bohemian one: Jim is offered coffee and kolaches, pictures of Prague hang on the parlour wall, the children cannot even speak English until they go to school.”³⁸ The novel is about the transplanting of European culture in American soil and repeatedly affirms Old World values” in fact, “Cather’s ideal was an intermingling of Old and

New” (96-97). This intermingling is significant since *Ántonia*’s household is actually bicultural. Along with serving kolaches, *Ántonia* values the “nice ways” of cooking, housekeeping, and childrearing she learned from the Harlings. (221), and importantly, the Cuzaks are bilingual. For instance, Anton Cuzak easily switches from Czech to English so that Jim will not be excluded (229). Also, the older children speak proficient English instead of the telegraphic dialect the Shimerdas use in the early chapters. This bilingual proficiency helps to dramatize how, in becoming American; *Antonia* has remained connected to her cultural heritage.

Here, Cather uses sarcasm to denounce Americanization. In *My Ántonia*, she makes the same point by dramatizing the value of immigrants speaking two languages. *Ántonia*’s large, happy family has her own fortune and lives her own life. *Antonia*’s family is closely knit, and her children carry forward the knowledge of their mothers past. *Antonia* clearly values children and country life more than money. As *Ántonia* says: “It’s no wonder their poor papa can’t get rich, he has to buy so much sugar for us to preserve with” (217).

When Jim delves into European literature, associating the laughter of the immigrant girls he left behind with the poetry of Virgil (173). In addition, Lena- so altered by the assimilation process that she twice is barely recognized by her old friends (103,170) - becomes entranced by musical theatre alongside him. They enrich their lives through art while *Ántonia* who retains much of her Bohemian identity in the end, finds fulfillment in life itself.³⁹

As perceptively observed by Deborah G Lambert:

The image of *Ántonia* that Cather gives us at the novel’s conclusion is one that satisfies our national longings as well: coming to us from an age which gave us Mother’s Day, it is hardly surprising that **My Ántonia** has lived on

as a celebration of the pioneer woman's triumph and as a paean to the fecundity of the American woman and the American land.⁴⁰

Randolph Borune rightly acclaim that: Her purpose is neither to illustrate eternal truths nor to set before us the crowded gallery of a whole society. Yet in these simple pictures of the struggling pioneer life, of the comfortable middle classes of the bleak little towns, there is an understanding of what these people have to contend with and grope for that goes to the very heart of their lives.⁴¹

Sally Petltier Harvey interpretes that Cather also stresses the impact that a lone individual can have on that larger community of human kind: "The history of every country beings in the heart of a man or a woman."⁴² Antonia's life is a triumph of innocence and vitality over hardship and evil. But Willa Cather does not celebrate this triumph; rather, she intones an elegy over the dying myth of the heroic innocent, over the days that are no more.⁴³

Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade-that grew stronger with time...there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old wood cuts of one's first primer: Antonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of the pony when she came home in triumph,... Antonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snow-storm; Antonia coming in with her work-team along the evening skyline. she still had that something that could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things (353).

Antonia, who, even as a grown woman somewhat downtrodden by circumstance and hard work, "had not lost the fire of life", lies at the center of almost

every human condition that Cather's novel effortlessly untangles. **My Ántonia** is a perspective that takes into account Ántonia's status as immigrant and hence as "other" to the Midwest community in which she finds herself and Cather's own ambivalent relationship to her heroine's marginal status. She represents immigrant struggles with a foreign land and tongue, the restraints on women of the time with which Cather was very much concerned, the more general desires for 'love, family, and companionship, and the great capacity for forbearance that marked the earliest settlers on the frontier. She creates a sort of resourcefulness, a paradise of beauty and passes on to the next generation pure traditional values. She is the symbol of all immigrant women.⁴⁴

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CHAPTER-4

CREATIVE POWER OF THE ARTIST

The Song of the Lark is Willa Cather's the third of her twelve novels, published in 1915 and belongs to the early stage of her distinguished literary career. After its publication, however, the great literary critic H.L. Mencken said that it placed Cather in "the small class of American novelists who are seriously to be reckoned with."¹ It is the first novel in the western tradition that signifies the physical background of Willa Cather's writing, and its spiritual concern. The spiritual core of the novel is Thea's discovery of the ultimate nature of art. Music as Edith Lewis recalls was for Willa Cather 'an emotional experience that had a potent influence on her imaginative process.'² Cather chose her stories to be of pioneers and artists, men and women of simple passions and creative energies.

Thea Kronborg the main protagonist in the **The Song of the Lark** which carries her aspiring qualities is a novel rich in homely realism. Like Thea Cather made use of the common things and disciplined effort to influence her art. **The Song of the Lark** is the story of a young Swedish immigrant girl who comes of age in a pioneer western town, maturing through several stages of awakening into a woman and later becomes a famous singer. It is what the Germans call a *Künstlerroman*,³ a novel depicting the growth of an artist. The story is set in Moonstone, Colorado, a small western town that resembles Cather own hometown, an exact facsimile of Red Cloud, Nebraska where Cather spent her youth.

Much of Thea's story concerns her struggle to bring the artist within her to life- something that would take hard work, discipline, perseverance and passion.

Thea is one of seven children growing up in an overcrowded little house in, Nebraska. Her parents recognize and respect their daughter's unusual gifts, but her siblings and neighbors think of Thea as 'spoiled, rebellious and stuck-up'. Her refuge is only a tiny room in the high-windowed gable of the attic, a rose-papered bower where she can read, write, and dream in peace. Thea a little girl of eleven 'could sense something very strange and extraordinary' She had moments of excitement when she felt that something unusual and pleasant was about to happen (10). Thea a tall, fair girl with 'two yellow braids,' grave, candid eyes hid her restless depths of thought and feelings due to her shy awkwardness. Her face was 'scarlet and her eyes were blazing' (298). The daughter of the Swedish Methodist pastor, Thea Kronborg was raised in the small town of Moonstone, Colorado. Her father Peter Kronborg, came from a lowly, ignorant family from a poor part of Sweden. His great grandfather married a Norwegian girl and this strain of 'Norwegian blood' expressed itself in each generation of the Kronborgs. As in the words of the narrator "Both Peter Kronborg and his sister Tillie were more like the Norwegian root of the family than like the Swedish, and this same Norwegian strain was strong in Thea, though in her it took a different character" (309).

Thea's household includes Gus, Charley, Anna, Axel, Gunner, and Thor the new arrival in the family. Tillie Krongorg, her aunt was the only member that seemed to comprehend her. The young Kronborgs headed for Sunday school and their 'communal life was definitely ordered.'(309) Thea had the 'curiosity for reading' Later some among

Thea's favorite poets were that of 'Byron's poems.' and Anna Karenina these are Cather's own memories of books she read while growing up.⁴

Having a 'curious passion for jewelry' too, Thea wanted every shining stone she saw, and in summer she was always going off into the sand hills to hunt for crystals and agates and bits of pink chalcedony. She had two cigar boxes full of stones that she had found or traded for. Imagining that they were of enormous value, she was always planning how she would have them set (305).

Very sensitive about being thought as a 'foreigner', Thea was proud of the fact that, in town, her 'father always preached in English' (19). Resented fiercely the demands of family and school during her childhood days she committed her self for her artistic performance. Thea had no friends among children of her own age in the hometown of Moonstone and as "even her own family has so little to offer her, she seeks out and chooses her own community."⁵ Thea, who had a rather sensitive ear, until she went to school never, spoke at all, except in monosyllables, and her mother was convinced that she was tongue-tied. She was still inept in speech for a child so intelligent. Her ideas were usually clear, but she seldom attempted to explain them, even at school, where she excelled in "written work" and never did more than mutter a reply.

Thea's childhood friends are a handful of adult men who appreciate her qualities and are themselves restless or unhappy in Moonstone. All have counterparts in Cather's life: Ray Kennedy, who loves to explore cliff ruins, combines features of her brother Douglass and his railroading friends, the wild mandolin player Spanish Johnny was

inspired by the musical Mexicans Cather had met in Arizona. Thea's most important childhood friend, Dr. Howard Archie, was modeled on Dr. G.E. McKeeby, with whom Cather assisted as a teenager on prairie housecalls.⁶

Dr. Howard Archie, the town physician barely thirty was one of Thea's closest friends who saved her life when she had an 'attack of pneumonia'. He was a 'distinguished looking man, tall, with massive shoulders and a large, well-shaped head' in small Colorado towns. Having no children and unhappily married, Dr. Archie loved the young girl and often wondered what would become of a girl 'so passionate and determined'.⁷

Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor's life in Moonstone" (301). A little girl of eleven, has a croupy cold lie wide awake Dr. Archie could not help thinking how he would cherish a little creature like this if she were his. Her 'hands were so little and hot, so clever too' (12). He looked intently at her wide, flushed face, freckled nose, her defiant brows, fierce little mouth, and her delicate, tender chin in "hard little Scandinavian face he wonders if some fairy grandmother had given it to her as a kind of a "cryptic promise" (12). Dr. Archie thought to himself what a beautiful thing a little girl's body was,--like a flower. It was so neatly and delicately fashioned, so soft, and so milky white. Thea must have got her hair and her silky skin from her mother. She was a little Swede, through and through.

Thea's illness alarms Doctor Archie because he feels she is no ordinary child. "There was something very different about her," he reflects, and in a moment of annoyance with the other members of the family he says to himself "she's worth the

whole litter”(10). Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor's life in Moonstone. Doctor Howard Archie detects her difference from other Colorado girls. Thea bestows on the doctor all the ‘greedy affection’ expressed in a private code of winks and grimaces, secret glances and shy caresses which she cannot feel for her father.

Doctor Archie lends her his books who is certain that the immigrant child Thea Kronborg is an unusual child. Thea with her insight and intelligence could title the book Dr. Archie was reading as "A Distinguished Provincial in Paris." As Doctor Archie had passion for reading Thea thoughtfully remarks "Nearly every time I come in, when you're alone, you're reading one of those books" (50). Howard Archie was "respected" rather than popular in Moonstone. Thea often consulted Dr. Archie for advice. When she wanted to know about the window in the upper wing, he told her that a girl who sang must always have plenty of fresh air, or her voice would get husky, and that the cold would harden her throat. The important thing, he said, was to keep your feet warm (344).He further remarks that Thea is always ‘curious’ about people and could find the difference among the city and country people.

As Linda Huf opines:

Doctor Archie realizes that although he has achieved all that he thought he wanted-money and power- he has acquired very little. The moments spent with her, an eleven –year old child in Moonstone, had been closer than anything else to what he had dreamed of finding in the world but had not found.⁸

Doctor Archie professes to Thea, life would have been pretty bleak without her. He further comments: I' guess I'm a romantic old fellow underneath. And you've always been my romance" (252). Thea to be a noted Scandinavian-American singer works her way up from the dusty desert town of Moonstone, to the boards of the Metropolitan Opera house. Thea's professional life, is presented from the career of the Wagnerian soprano Olive Fremstad, who was the kind of artist Willa Cather still aspired to be. Cather's passion for opera had survived her Lincoln days, and once settled in Bank Street she and Edith went to the Metropolitan as much as they could; Edith's retrospective letters are full of opera-going memories. Personally, Fremstad attracted her because of her familiarity. She had grown up in a small town in Minnesota, in a poor, religious family of Swedish immigrants, and had to battle her way out of a hard childhood in a 'new crude country where there was neither artistic stimulus nor discriminating taste'.⁹ She was just like the "immigrant women on the Divide-with suspicious, defiant, far- seeing pioneer eyes."¹⁰

Thea, like Olive Fremstad, comes of Swedish-Norwegian stock and is the musical daughter of a Methodist pastor, grateful to give lessons and play and sing at the prayer meetings and revivals. Professor Herr Wunsch, the old German romantic, wandering piano teacher, a crony who lived with Mrs. Kohlers, played in the dance orchestra, tuned pianos, and gave lessons. She was going to the Kohlers' to take her lesson, where Professor Wunsch lived, psychically lame like the other Moonstone friends, has the most to do with Thea's artistic preparation. Professor Wunsch gives Thea all he can was the first of her childhood friends to recognize that Thea's talent, and committed himself to teach her. Being 'careful with his scholars'; and his 'language' Thea's mother approves

him as her tutor. 'Gruff, disreputable' drunkard but talented pianist, is a sympathetic portrait of Herr Schindelmeisser, a traveling musician Cather knew in Red Cloud.

He gives Thea a first glimpse of artistic endeavor. The characteristic musical trait runs in the family as Mrs. Kronborg and her three sisters had all studied piano, and all sang well, but Thea being an exception was the only one who had 'talent.' Thea's mother, shrewd and practical in all matters, knows that her daughter is different in a special way, She instinctively realizes this means hard work, not recitals for the local ladies' groups Wunsch looking quizzically at Thea shook himself as he listens to Thea singing "*Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal,*" as the song died away he comments: "Such a beautiful child's voice!" "That is a good thing to remember," It was his pupil's "power of application, her rugged will," that interested him (318).

A. Wunsch (whose name means desire) introduces Thea pupil to Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the score of which in German translation is his most prized possession. He plays and sings for Thea the haunting aria, "*Ach, ich habe sie verloren* [Oh, I have lost you]" (84). He had lived for so long among people whose sole ambition was to get something for nothing that he had learned not to look for seriousness in anything. She reminded him of "A yellow flower, full of sunlight, perhaps. No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbor, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood"--Wunsch felt ashamed and dragged his slippers along the path to the kitchen, his eyes on the ground (38).

Thea 's self identity is also being recognized by her uniqueness in her voice: "Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember". Having a strong sense of separate identity, Thea does not settle for being molded or shaped by family or community pressure.¹¹

Thea with both 'imagination and stubborn' will... there was something unconscious and unawakened about her. She hated difficult things and yet she could never pass one by. ... she had no peace until she mastered them... She had the power to make great effort, to lift a weight than herself ... her broad eager face, so fair in color, with its high cheek bones, yellow eyebrows and greenish-hazel eyes. It was a face full of light and energy, the unquestioning hopefulness of first youth. Wunsch compared her to the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open in the desert; thornier and sturdier than the maiden flowers ... not so sweet but wonderful" (379).

Mrs. Kronborg had no faith in the women in her society as she rightly opined: "these women that teach music around here don't know nothing. I wouldn't have my child wasting time with them." Mrs. Kronborg thus supports her daughter to unveil her talent and march ahead. Thea's Aunt Tillie delights in telling the neighbors that some day Thea will make them all sit up and take notice. But it is Professor Wunsch who defines and gives direction to Thea's "promise." One morning he startles her most secret thoughts when he says that she will some day be a singer: 'Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires' (95). As observed by Lee, "almost all Thea's watchers are male, but they are

all carefully disqualified from being sexual partners; instead, they prepare the way for the voice that is going to outsoar them like an eagle.”¹²

Thea comes nearest to the elemental impulse of the earth with Spanish Johnny, the unreliable alcoholic. The music Johnny makes on a mandolin is frenzied and exceptionally skillful, but its strength and beauty reside in the racial consciousness which is at the heart of his songs. After Thea returns from a year of formal study in Chicago, she identifies the emotional freedom she enjoys with the Mexicans through the ethnic current in their music.

Among Mexicans, an especially with Johnny, music is felt reality and common expression. Even their movements have “a kind of natural harmony”. When she sings before a “really musical people” like the Mexican neighbors, Thea receives “the response that such a people can give” pleasure and affection (292), when she lifts a seashell from Spanish Johnny’s garden to her ear, she hears a voice calling her from afar. For Thea the summons from the world of art is like a call to heroic action. She is stirred by the “piece – picture” on the Kohlers’ wall of Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow.

“Music unites Thea with emotional allies for whom society provides no regular means of exchange.” Among the Mexicans she unearths a collective human feeling through songs of joy, love, riches, and delicate swallows: “Ultimo Amor,” “Noches de Algeria,” “Fluvia de Oro,” “La Golandrina.” The spiritual transfer with simple people is important. During her operatic career, Thea constantly draws from the deep reservoir of basic human yearning. At the close of **The Song of the Lark** the final measurement of her brilliant Sieglinde is the “Brava! Brava!” of “a grey haired little Mexican” perched in

the top gallery. His excitement assures us that Thea Kronborg's voice reaches the sympathetic center of those from whom she first learned music's primitive energy (572).

The railroad is the town's only lifeline to the larger world and as a powerful representation of monstrous but thrilling progress and Westward expansion. It was Thea's twelfth birthday and it was Ray Kennedy the "chivalrous, self-instructed" railroad brakeman a worthy man in Moonstone was a conductor on a 'freight train' was planning to marry Thea. Thea liked Ray for reasons that had to do with the adventurous life he had led in Mexico and the South-west, rather than for anything very personal. She liked him, too, because he was the only one of her friends who ever took her to the sand hills. The sand hills were a constant tantalization; she loved them better than anything near Moonstone, and yet she could so seldom get to them.

Thea's journey out into the desert along with Ray Kennedy and her brothers Gunner and Axel sitting behind in the wagon with Spanish Johnny and Tellamantez followed the faint road across the sagebrush; they heard behind them the sound of church bells, which gave them a sense of escape and boundless freedom. As they went farther, the illusion of the mirage became more instead of less convincing; a shallow silver lake that spread for many miles, a little misty in the sunlight. Thea ran about among the white stones, her skirts blowing this way and that, the wind brought to her eyes tears. This call toward creativity with its accompanying frisson of desire is like an epiphany which brings Thea closer to her inner voice. As they drove homeward the stars began to come out, pale yellow in a yellow sky, and Ray and Johnny began to sing one of those railroad ditties that are usually born on the Southern Pacific and run the length of the Santa Fe and

the "Q" system before they die to give place to a new one. This was a song about a Greaser dance, the refrain being something like this:--

"Pedro, Pedro, swing high, swing low,

And it's allamand left again;

For there's boys that's bold and there's some that's cold,

But the gold boys come from Spain,

Oh, the gold boys come from Spain!" (70)

Like Cather, Thea is an adventurous girl who loves to explore the land beyond the town. The creeks canyons gullies and sand hills all appealed to her. Ray realized that Thea's life was 'dull and exacting,' He knew she worked hard, that she put up with a great many little annoyances, and that her duties as a teacher separated her more than ever from the boys and girls of her own age. He did everything he could to provide recreation for her. He brought her candy and magazines and pineapples--of which she was very fond from Denver, and kept his eyes and ears, open for anything that might interest her.

Thea, stirred by tales of adventure, of the Grand Canyon and Death Valley, was recalling a great adventure of her own. Early in the summer her father had been invited to conduct a reunion of old frontiersmen, up in Wyoming, near Laramie, and he took Thea along with him to play the organ and sing patriotic songs. There they stayed at the house of an old ranchman who told them about a ridge up in the hills called Laramie Plain,

where the wagon-trails of the Forty-niners and the Mormons were still visible. The old man even volunteered to take Mr. Kronborg up into the hills to see this place, though it was a very long drive to make in one day. Thea had begged frantically to go along, and the old rancher, flattered by her rapt attention to his stories, had interceded for her (67).

The wind never slept on this plain, the old man said. Every little while eagle flew over. When she sighted down the wagon tracks toward the Blue Mountains. She told herself she would never, never forget it. "The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles" (69).

As rightly opined by David Stouck:

Thea's vision of human courage soaring above the world like the eagles over the Laramie tableland culminates an excursion into the sand hills with Ray Kennedy and Spanish Johnny which has a kind of mythic shape and purpose. The whole sequence is like a ritual of initiation into the world of the imagination: the journey out to the desert (a flight into the world of freedom), the warning from the mentor (Wunsch) against commitment to the ordinary world, the amphitheatre in the richly – colored hills, the storytelling, the music and singing, the play – acting of the children, and the final vision of the indomitable human spirit coursing westward.¹³

Thea's eyes kindled when Ray Kennedy talked about creative ideals. As a child she instinctively comprehends the timelessness of man's fight for the civilized things which make him man, because she has within herself a yearning to create and because she

requires direct contact with the vital source of life Ray speaks of. Later of course she does live fully by the natural pull of things in the Southwest-actually immersed in the life-water of the earth-and the conception of art which Thea achieves during this baptism is an enlargement of Ray's idealism. As Ray comments "When you look at it another way, there are a lot of halfway people in this world who help the winners win, and the failures fail" (156). Ray Kennedy was thinking of the future, dreaming the large Western dream of easy money, of a fortune kicked up somewhere in the hills,--an oil well, a gold mine, a ledge of copper... and that by the time she was old enough to marry, he would be able to keep her like a queen (340). When Ray Kennedy encounters a railroad accident it claims the life of Thea's friend Ray Kennedy.

As Thea grows from childhood to adolescence, there are a good many episodes that mark her growth. Thea is able to take over Wunsch piano students. She drops out of high school and becomes self supporting. She also sings in the church choir and plays the organ for services. Thea learns about human nature from her encounters with the mean-spirited Mrs. Archie and the envious Mrs. Livery Jhonson whose untalented protégé Lily Fisher upstages her in a Christmas talent show. It was the first time she had ever played in the opera house, and she had never before had to face so many people. Thea wore her white summer dress and a blue sash, but Lily Fisher had a new pink silk, trimmed with white swans down. Tillie Kronborg belonged to a dramatic club that once a year performed in the Moonstone Opera House such plays as "Among the Breakers," and "The Veteran of 1812." Tillie played character parts, the flirtatious old maid or the spiteful *Intrigante* this motivated Thea to get into her profession.

A scourge of typhoid broke out in Moonstone and several of Thea's schoolmates died of it. She went to their funerals, saw them put into the ground, and wondered a good deal about them. But a certain grim incident, which caused the epidemic, troubled her even more than the death of her friends. Thea had always found everything that happened in Moonstone exciting, disasters particularly so. She read sensational Moonstone items in the Denver paper. Thea had three music pupils now, little girls whose mothers declared that Professor Wunsch was "much too severe." They took their lessons on Saturday, and this, of course, cut down her time for play. She did not really mind this because she was allowed to use the money--her pupils paid her twenty-five cents a lesson--to fit up a little room for her upstairs in the half-story.

Thea had a few enemies one of them was Ms. Livery Johnson. Out of the others was her rival Lily Fisher. Mrs. Johnson disapproved of the way in which Thea was being brought up, of a child whose chosen associates were Mexicans and sinners, and who was, as she pointedly put it, "bold with men." She so enjoyed an opportunity to rebuke Thea. Frowning, Thea turned away and walked slowly homeward. She suspected guile. Lily Fisher was the most stuck-up doll in the world, and it was certainly not like her to recite to be obliging. Nobody who could sing, ever recited because the warmest applause always went to the singers (76). However, when the program was printed in the Moonstone *gleam*, there it was: "Instrumental solo, Thea Kronborg. Recitation, Lily Fisher" (76).

His orchestra was to play for the concert. So Mr. Wunsch imagined that he had been put in charge of the music, and he became arrogant. He insisted that Thea should

play a "Ballade" by Reinecke. When Thea consulted her mother, Mrs. Kronborg agreed with her that the "Ballade" would "never take" with a Moonstone audience. She advised Thea to play "something with variations," or, at least, "The Invitation to the Dance" (76).

It was the first time she had ever played in the opera house, and she had never before had to face so many people. Wunsch would not let her play with her notes, and she was afraid of forgetting. Before the concert began, all the participants had to assemble on the stage and sit there to be looked at. Thea wore her white summer dress and a blue sash, but Lily Fisher had a new pink silk, trimmed with white swans down. Lily Fisher was pretty, and she was willing to be just as big a fool as people wanted her to be. Thea Kronborg wasn't the same (81).

One may have staunch friends in one's own family, but one seldom has admirers. Thea, however, had one in the person of her addle-patted aunt, Tillie Kronborg. The dramatic club was the pride of Tillie's heart; always attended rehearsals and urged young people to 'stop fooling and to begin now' (85). Tillie's mind was a curious machine; when she was awake it went round like a wheel when the belt has slipped off, and when she was asleep she dreamed follies. But she had intuitions. She knew, for instance, that Thea was different from the other Kronborgs, worthy though they all were. Her romantic imagination found possibilities in her niece. When she was sweeping or ironing, or turning the ice-cream freezer at a furious rate, she often built up brilliant futures for Thea, adapting freely the latest novel she had read (83). Tillie could predict that she would make all her audience to 'sit up' when it comes. She further comments: 'her time to show off ain't come yet...I guess they would be glad to get her in Denver Dramatics'.

Thea had always found everything that happened in Moonstone exciting. Thea was 'haunted' by the figure of the tramp, Dr. Archie, honestly and leniently puts forth his advice as seen in this episode:

Well, Thea, it seems to me like this. Every people have had its religion. All religions are good, and all are pretty much alike. But I don't see how we could live up to them in the sense you mean. I've thought about it a good deal, and I can't help feeling that while we are in this world we have to live for the best things of this world, and those things are material and positive. Now, most religions are passive, and they tell us chiefly what we should not do (175).

"But poor fellows like that tramp--" she hesitated and wrinkled her forehead. The doctor leaned forward and put his hand protectingly over hers, which lay clenched on the green felt desk- top. He further narrates:

Ugly accidents happen, Thea; always have and always will. But the failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten. They don't leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don't affect the future. The things that last are the good things. The people who forge ahead and do something, they really count. (175)

Dr Archie saw tears on her cheeks, and he remembered that he had never seen her cry before, not even when she crushed her finger when she was little. He rose and walked

to the window, came back and sat down on the edge of his chair. Dr. Archie further remarks

Forget the tramp, Thea. This is a great big world, and I want you to get about and see it all. You're going to Chicago some day, and do something with that fine voice of yours. You're going to be a number one musician and make us proud of you. Take Mary Anderson, now; even the tramps are proud of her. (176)

Thea escapes into the unknown 'world beyond Denver' after the death of Ray Kennedy, as he dies in a railroad accident, leaving Thea his six hundred dollars life insurance policy with the stipulation that it be used to study music in Chicago. Dr. Archie accompanies Thea, after much discussion, convincing her parents "that she's a most unusual child, and she's only wasting herself" (427).

Mrs. Kronborg felt the more at ease about letting Thea go away from home, because she had good sense about her clothes and never tried to dress up too much." Dr. Howard Archie takes the responsibility of Thea, as she ventures into the new world. Now in Chicago, Thea is introduced to the Reverend Lars. Larsen like Peter Kronborg was a 'reactionary Swede.' He got well in the ministry, he made the most of his skill with the violin he played for women's culture clubs (438). Later he helps her find a piano teacher, a place to live, and a job singing in a church choir.

Thea feels she is a part of this community, Thea finds 'purpose and meaning for her own individual endeavors' Thea's sense of membership in the community is now

focused on these ancient artists to her present-day fellow artists and audiences, that inspires her, helping her to define herself and giving meaning to life. She fulfills herself through a sense of duty to these other lovers of art- “an obligation to do one’s best.” (550) Thea finally takes control of her own life, as advised by Dr. Archie that she must someday do. Thea during her teens at that time she was a believer in the Standard American Dream. She was of the understanding that money was “the only thing that counts” because “to do any of the things one wants to do, one has to have lots and lots of money (504). But when Dr. Archie responds: That Thea could make money, “if you care about that more than anything else,” Thea replies to that “I only want impossible things. The others don’t interest me” (505).

Archie answers to that “if you decide what it is you want most, you can get it (505). This makes her to recall Wunsch’s earlier advice. “There is only one big thing –desire.” Just as Cather had seen the material success of the early pioneers as merely an outward sign of “a moral victory,” Thea rejects the shallow goals that clouded her vision and hid her real self in order to fulfill her dreams:

There was certainly no kindly Providence that directed one's life; and one's parents did not in the least care what became of one, so long as one did not misbehave and endanger their comfort. One's life was at the mercy of blind chance. She had better take it in her own hands and lose everything than meekly draw the plough under the rod of parental guidance (555).

Thea had to drop out from school at the young age of fourteen as her parents realized that 'she's far along for her age'. And she can't learn much under her principal As Mrs. Kronborg stresses. "She frets a good deal and says that man always has to look in the back of the book for the answers. She hates all that diagramming they have to do, and I think myself it's a waste of time" (382). Before Thea's fifteenth birthday she had four pupils of her own and made a dollar a week, Thea gained popularity as the 'best musician' in town. As aptly noted by Philip Gerber:

Hard work is no obstacle, for Thea quiet fully understands what will be demanded. for her fierce self assertion points her always towards that single final goal: "a great many trains... carried young people who meant to have things. But difference was that she was going to get them !... As long as she lived that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it work for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height.¹⁴

Thea at seventeen leaves home to study music in Chicago. Thea's first teacher in Chicago, a sensitive, one-eyed Hungarian violinist named Harsanyi, discovers her voice:

Andor Harsanyi had never had a pupil in the least like Thea Kronborg. He had never had one more intelligent, and he had never had one so ignorant. When Thea sat down to take her first lesson from him, she had never heard a work by Beethoven or a composition by Chopin. She knew their names vaguely. Wunsch had been a musician once, long before he wandered into Moon- stone, but when Thea awoke his

interest there was not much left of him. From him Thea had learned something about the works of Gluck and Bach. (219)

Harsanyi the violinist found in Thea a pupil with sure, strong hands, one who read rapidly and intelligently, who had, he felt, a richly gifted nature. But she had been given no direction, and her passion was unawakened. She had never heard a symphony orchestra. The literature of the piano was an undiscovered world to her. He wondered how she had been able to work so hard when she knew so little of what she was working toward. She had been taught by Professor Wunsch according to the old Stuttgart method; stiff back, stiff elbows, a very formal position of the hands. Thea studied some of the *Kinderzenen* with Wunsch her music teacher, as well as some little sonatas by Mozart and Clementi.

The best thing about her preparation was that she had developed an unusual power of work. "He noticed at once her way of charging at difficulties. She ran to meet them as if they were foes she had long been seeking, seized them as if they were destined for her and she for them. Whatever she did well, she took for granted. Her eagerness aroused all the young Hungarian's chivalry. He usually kept her long over time; he changed her lessons about so that he could do so, and often gave her time at the end of the day, when he could talk to her afterward and play for her a little from what he happened to be studying. It was always interesting to play for her. Sometimes she was so silent that he wondered when she left him, whether she had got anything out of it. But a week later, two weeks later, she would give back his idea again in a way that set him vibrating. All this was very well for Harsanyi; an interesting variation in the routine of

teaching. But for Thea Kronborg, that winter was almost beyond enduring. She always remembered it as the "happiest and wildest and saddest of her life" (221). Thea fought her way across the unprotected space in front of the Art Institute and into the doors of the building. She did not come out again until the closing hour. In the street-car, on the long cold ride home, while she sat staring at the waistcoat buttons of a fat strap-hanger, she had a serious reckoning with herself. She seldom thought about her way of life:

What she ought or ought not to do; usually there was but one obvious and important thing to be done. But that afternoon she remonstrated with herself severely. She told herself that she was missing a great deal; that she ought to be more willing to take advice and to go to see things. She was sorry that she had let months pass without going to the Art Institute. After this she would go once a week (247).

Whenever she visited the Art Institute she found escape from Mrs. Andersens' tiresome overtures of friendship. The building was a place in which immigrant Thea could relax and play, and she could hardly ever play now. Some of them she knew;

The Dying Gladiator she had read about in "Childe Harold" almost as long ago as she could remember; he was strongly associated with Dr. Archie and childish illnesses. The Venus di Milo puzzled her; she could not see why people thought her so beautiful. She told herself over and over that she did not think the Apollo Belvedere "at all handsome." Better than anything else she liked a great equestrian statue of an evil, cruel-looking general with an unpronounceable name.

She used to walk round and round this terrible man and his terrible horse, frowning at him, brooding upon him, as if she had to make some momentous decision about him. (248)

There she liked best the ones that told stories. There was a painting by Gerome called "The Pasha's Grief" which always made her wish for Gunner and Axel. The Pasha was seated on a rug, beside a green candle almost as big as a telegraph pole, and before him was stretched his dead tiger, a splendid beast, and there were pink roses scattered about him. She loved, too, a picture of some boys bringing in a newborn calf on a litter, the cow walking beside it and licking it. The Corot which hung next to this painting she did not like or dislike; she never saw it. But in that same room there was a picture oh, that was the thing Thea ran upstairs so fast to see! That was her picture. She imagined that nobody cared for it but herself, and that it waited for her. That was a picture indeed! she exclaimed. She liked even the name of it:

"The Song of the Lark." The flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl's heavy face--well, they were all hers, anyhow, whatever was there. She told herself that that picture was "right." Just what she meant by this, it would take a clever person to explain. But to her the word covered the almost boundless satisfaction she felt when she looked at the picture (249).

Thea on her return from Chicago participates herself in Mexican out-door parties Thea's singing with the Mexicans object her family members she is severely criticized for going to a dance in the Mexican Town, and again feels a conspiracy in the world

against her. She had sung for churches and funerals and teachers, but she had never before sung for a really musical people, and this was the first time she had ever felt the response that such a people can give. She felt as if all these warm-blooded people debouched into her.

Thea's artistic soul rises against the disapproving conventionality of the little towns when she sings for the music-loving Mexicans. Thea momentarily has become their artist-priestess, and Spanish Johnny follows her performance with a teasing song which is a comic variation on that idea. When she finished, her listeners broke into excited murmur. The men began hunting feverishly for cigarettes. Famos Serranos the barytone bricklayer, touched Johnny's arm, gave him a questioning look, then heaved a deep sigh. Johnny dropped on his elbow, wiping his face and neck and hands with his handkerchief. "*Senorita*," he panted, "if you sing like that once in the City of Mexico, they just-a go crazy. In the City of Mexico they ain't-a sit like stumps when they hear that, not-a much! ...Come, sing something with me. *El Parreno*; I haven't sung that for a long time." Johnny laughed and hugged his guitar. "You not-a forget him?" He began teasing his strings. "Come!" He threw back his head, "*Anoch-e-e --*"

' Anoch me confesse

Con un padre Carmelite,

Y me dio penitencia

Que besaras tu boquita..' As the author translates it:

(Last night I made confession

To a Carmelite father,

And he told me to do penance

By kissing your pretty mouth.) (293)

When time comes to leave Moonstone Thea felt the pain to leave all behind her. She comments: Living's too much trouble unless one can get something big out of it (305). Thea's commitment to art is defined as both heroic and irrevocable: At this point Thea's obligation to art and isolation is motivated by revenge as well as self-discovery. That evening, talking with Doctor Archie, she asserts as seen in this episode:

"I hope you will; awfully rich. That's the only thing that counts." She looked restlessly about the consulting- room. "To do any of the things one wants to do, one has to have lots and lots of money." Thea shrugged. "Oh, I can get along, in a little way." She looked intently out of the window at the arc street- lamp that was just beginning to sputter. "But it's silly to live at all for little things," she added quietly. "Living's too much trouble unless one can get something big out of it."...You can make money, if you care about that more than any- thing else." He nodded prophetically above his interlacing fingers. "But I don't. That's only one thing. Anyhow, I couldn't if I did." She doesn't mean money-- "I only want impossible things," she said roughly. "The others don't interest me" (305).

The Swedish minister Mr. Larsen in Chicago is a happy, contented man, but he is remarkable for his soft, indolent habits and his laziness. Thea's physical strength and well being are most sharply accented by glimpses of sick and dying girls: on the train back to Moonstone she sits in front of a girl who is dying of tuberculosis, and when she arrives home she is told almost at once that one of the sickly girls from prayer meetings has just died. But as Thea's sense of heroic purpose grows stronger, the gap for her widens between the claims of ordinary life and the desire to be an artist. When Thea and Doctor Archie look for lodgings they are depressed by the sleazy, unkempt, wastes of Chicago and the ill-favored aspects of boarding houses.

The Swedish church where Thea sings is in "a sloughly, weedy district, near a group of factories," and her lodging is an unpainted, gloomy-looking place in a damp yard where there is no running water; Thea has to carry both water and fuel to her room. But particularly when she is filled with the ecstasy of an imaginative experience she feels life around her becoming ugly and hostile.

As rightly observed by Richard Giannone:

Thea's mind is haunted by an indefinite "tale of past times." Though the facts of the tale are in the future, "Die Lorelei" foreshadows a journey beset with danger. It will be Thea's journey on the Rhine of artistic ambition. The strange splendors and exquisite allurements which in the end destroy the voyager are the countless obstacles hindering her journey.¹⁵

In Willa Cather's treatment of Thea's response, however, the Walhalla music bodes her destiny as a distinguished Wagnerian soprano. Wagner mingles with Dvorak to create Thea's New World of Music, suggestively, Willa Cather announces a thematic image that recurs throughout her fiction in various forms and at the end of **The Song of the Lark** with complex associations: "The cold, stately measures of the Walhalla music rang out, far away; the rainbow bridge throbbled out into the air, under it the wailing of the Rhine daughters and the singing of the Rhine" (252).

She finds out what she is not and comes generally to sense what she must be. Ironically, when she begins formal study of voice, her progress seems slow. The bitter part of every Orpheus' "bitter struggle" (221), shows itself in the acquisition of control. She meets difficulties with "imagination and a stubborn will (254). But Thea's demands and ambition are beyond Bowers' reach or interest, Thea took her lesson from Madison Bowers every day from eleven-thirty until twelve. Then she went out to lunch with an Italian grammar under her arm, and came back to the studio to begin her work at two.

Madison Bowers had first been interested in Thea Kronborg because of her bluntness, her country roughness, and her manifest carefulness about money. The mention of Harsanyi's name always made him pull a wry face. For the first time Thea had a friend who, in his own cool and guarded way, liked her for whatever was least admirable in her. "I may cut my lesson out to-morrow, Mr. Bowers. I have to hunt a new boarding-place" (317). The immigrant Thea is unable to put up with her friends. She comments "The studio Club's all right for people who like to live that way. I don't." "I can't work with a lot of girls around. They're too familiar. I never could get along with

girls of my own age. It's all too chummy. Gets on my nerves. I didn't come here to play kindergarten games" (317).

In Chicago, along with her study of piano and voice, she meets – and dismisses – several young men whose interest might have distracted lesser girls from their goals. The first such fellow, a “toughest young Swede.”, he finds Thea disappointing at best, because she neither grows faint nor clings to the arm he keeps offering her. Instead she asks a lot of exacting questions and shows impatience because he knows so little of what goes on outside his department (340). Madison Bowers’s cynicism and slovenly standards make her depressed and surly. She finds both a champion and a romantic interest in the musical amateur Fred Ottenburg.

Fred Ottenburg son of a rich brewer and an amateur musician, met Thea Kronborg for the first time at the studio of Madison Bowers. When Fred Ottenburg pleaded Thea to sing, “He wanted to have some ‘German words’ He further comments can you really sing the Norwegian? but is disappointed to know that she don’t know either English or Swedish very well and Norwegian’s still worse....She further adds I understand. We immigrants never speak any language well” (526).

As observed by Richard Giannone:

Philip Frederick Ottenburg, a “florid brewery magnate,” entertains her in a style to which she is unaccustomed and introduces her to the Nathanmeyers, whose knowledgeable approval of her singing and personality momentarily cheers her; but Ottenburg’s interest is only

ostensibly musical. The Bowers period when she tries to emerge as herself is filled with irritations intense enough to embitter Thea and to make her cynical of everyone's motives or aspirations. Everywhere about her she sees compromise, contempt and vanity. The warmth and idealism of Moonstone and her first Chicago teacher have vanished, leaving the life of art merely another way of meeting daily hardness with comparable artistic obduracy¹⁶ (139).

In such a hostile community, Thea recounts her frustrations with its society. In this atmosphere of struggling, competitive people, Thea herself begins to become harsher, a success-motivated individual who wants no ties, no encumbrances. She cannot make friends with the other girls in her boarding house.

I dislike so much and so hard that it tires me out. I've got no heart for anything." She threw up her head suddenly and sat in defiance, her hand clenched on the arm of the chair. "Mr. Harsanyi couldn't stand these people an hour, I know he couldn't. He'd put them right out of the window there, frizzes and feathers and all. Now, take that new soprano they're all making such a fuss about, Jessie Darcey. She's going on tour with a symphony orchestra and she's working up her repertory with Bowers. She's singing some Schumann songs Mr. Harsanyi used to go over with me. Well, I don't know what he would do if he heard her" (324).

It is Thea's 'sweetheart', Fred Ottenburg, a wondrously cultured, rich, generous, affable, music-loving brewer's son, whose only disqualification is his secret marriage to an 'insufferable' woman he can't divorce. So he too becomes one of the chivalric spectators, like Dr Archie 'watching her contemplatively, as if she were a beaker full of chemicals working' (305). In their love scenes in Panther Canyon, Fred and Thea are seen as 'two boys' playing together, throwing stones and making camp in a cave and climbing perilously down the rocks in a thunderstorm. Similarly, the only offstage detail of her later romance with the Teutonic singer Nordquist is an adventure story of their rowing for their lives through a storm on an icy lake. Close up, Fred treats Thea like a savage young Amazon: "I'd like to have you come at me with foils; you'd look so fierce!" he chuckled' (386). But she gets away from him, climbing to the horizon:

This delving beneath personal identity to something elemental and universal about life prepares Thea for her vision of art as a sacred trust for the whole of mankind, rather than a struggle for individual achievement and recognition. Fred knew where all the pleasant things in the world were...and the road to them...and that he had the keys to all the nice places in his pocket and being young "Thea want him for a sweetheart" (540).

Through Ottenburg's influence Thea was given singing engagements at the parties of his fashionable friends. Ottenburg in this episode is seen turning over to Bowers.

If you'll lend me Miss Thea, I think I have an engagement for her. Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer is going to give three musical evenings in April,

first three Saturdays, and she has consulted me about soloists. For the first evening she has a young violinist, and she would be charmed to have Miss Kronborg. She will pay fifty dollars. Not much, but Miss Thea would meet some people there who might be useful (528)'.

Thea went upstairs with the maid and had enjoyed the Nathanmeyers and their grand house, her new dress, and with Fred Ottenberg, her first real carriage ride, and the good supper (353). She spoke Swedish with Ottenberg who was interested to hear that Thea's mother's mother was still living, and that her grand-father had played the oboe (347). Thea could sing with her melodious voice some of her favorite songs by Schumann which she had premeditated with her music mentor with rigorous practice; it was Harsanyi who had all the patience for it and that delighted him.

When Fred Ottenberg introduces Thea to Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer, for an musical evening, Fred liked to hear her sing one of her favourite childhood song which she sung at nineteenth the aria from 'Gioconda " and some songs by Schumann which she studied with Harsanyi and it was *Tak for dit Rad* he liked the most. It was also much liked and appreciated as the musician Mrs. Nanthanmeyer quotes : "that's the real voice I have heard in Chicago." She further comments about her contemporaries whom she fiercely hates and remarks "I don't count that stupid priest woman". The song speaks for Thea's spiritual courage which must combat storms of hostility. With the dauntless sailor in Grieg's air, she must carry on the struggle for guidance which comes only from the friendly spirit inside. Thea takes a high ideal to be a hard command. Her burning desire made her feel that in singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on

one's and held it on one's breath" (304). Defeat is more usual than victory on the concert or operatic stage, and she has yet to meet anyone who has succeeded in the way total dedication deserves. The models have been negative. Two things do work in favor of her taking the risk, however. She cannot forget how their responsiveness to her singing gave an entrée into the "second selves" (273).

Thea not afraid of Ottenberg, and had a good reason for her refusal to bow down to him. Yet she feels that "he was not one of those people who made the spine like a steel rail" but he was the one who made her 'venturesome' (338). "The failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten," Thea is told; "they don't leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don't affect the future." Because her own aim at perfection is never deflected, Thea manages to identify and avoid every temptation, while the disasters around her comment ruefully on the pitted and boulder-strewn obstacle course an artist must travel alone. Yet the solitary way is the only sure way. Cather had written admiringly of Fremstad that no other singer had "managed to live in such retirement," an island of self in the city's flood; "work is the only thing that interests her."¹⁷

Thea, after an exhausting and depressing second winter in Chicago, takes Fred Ottenburg's advice and with his help withdraws to the desert in the southwest to be completely alone. Her two years in Chicago had not resulted in anything. She had failed with Harsanyi, and she had made no great progress with her voice. She had come to believe that whatever Bowers had taught her was of secondary importance, and that in the essential things she had made no advance. Her student life closed behind her, like the forest, and she doubted whether she could go back to it if she tried. Probably she would

teach music in little country towns all her life. Failure was not so tragic as she would have supposed; she was tired enough not to care.... Thea's life at the Ottenburg ranch was simple and full of light, like the days themselves.

In Willa Cather's view of artistic growth the reposeful hill is a crucial moment. It is particularly restorative for Thea Kronborg. Thea's experience in the spacious, powerful canons of the Southwest incorporates the early excitement of childhood among the open sand hills; and intellectually it goes back further, to the nature of history. Contact with the earth removes data from history to leave only the basic thing: man's continuous fight to achieve something beyond himself. Thea fight holds value, and it repeats itself in everyone at every stage of human development. The contest is the basis and embodiment of art. Thea achieves this understanding among rocks, air, birds, and sky, the first things which tested man's power to control and shape.¹⁸

Thea spends long stretches of time in the ancient cliff dwellings of one of the canyons, where she feels released from the tiresome sense of her individual personality and becomes attuned to a more primitive, fundamental sense of life and creativity. This sequence in the book is another imaginative ritual: the journey into the brightly painted desert, the canyon, cliff dwelling and stream as *locus dramatis*, and the culminating vision of art Thea experiences standing in the stream. While Thea is physically immersed in the "precious element" that she gains the deepest knowledge of art. Not when she practices or performs but when she bathes in a stream comes the understanding that art is the giving of human shape to physical nature. Thea does become a great singer until she returns to the land she knew and dreamed of as a child. Thea leaves Moonstone because she feels confined by the narrow conventions that were imposed on women at the time. In

Chicago, she has difficulties supporting herself while working constantly to become a singer. Feeling exhausted and discouraged, she makes a trip to Panther Canyon, Arizona.

Thea's full artistic awakening does not take place in the cold gray canyons of Chicago, where she labors at her music lessons, but in a brilliant desert canyon where Fred sends her to rest and recuperate. There she comes upon an isolated gorge sheltering silent prehistoric ruins and spends weeks lying alone on the sun baked rock ledges and in the shade of ancient pueblo rooms. Enfolded in the shelter of the canyon she sheds restrictive clothing and mental debris, bathes naked in the stream at its base, naps under an Indian blanket, and opens every pore until her body becomes completely receptive, a vehicle of sensation. Thus poised, she suddenly recognizes the spiritual connection between the shards of ancient Indian pottery she finds in the stream—vessels designed to bear life-giving water—and her own throat, a vessel which carries song: "what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment, the shining, elusive element which is life itself? . . . In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals."

Thea leaves Panther Canyon; she is all set for the long struggle to become an opera singer which necessitate years of study in the enriching Old World atmosphere of Germany. Thea's re-entry into the mainstream of life comes when Fred Ottenburg joins her in Arizona and persuades her to run off to Mexico with him. He tries all his stunts to get close to win her that he may have pleasure with her. Eventually she discovers that Ottenburg is already married; had a neurotic, invalid wife. Thea upset and stunned; refuses Ottenburg offers of assistance.

Thea values her dignity; so borrows money from Dr. Archie her good old Moonstone friend, to leave America for further studies in Germany. At first it appears that Thea has been betrayed by her renewed contact with her fellow men, but, as Ottenburg himself finally makes her recognize, the experience was essential to Thea for further defining herself and determining her course. Their love affair never involved the submission of one to the other, but was more like camaraderie; they were equals in all their adventures. Thea admired Ottenburg's physical energy and vied with him at throwing stones in discuss fashion; to Henry Biltmer, the lodge keeper in Arizona, they look like two boys moving about nimbly on the cliffs. On one of their expeditions Thea climbed to the top of a cliff, and Ottenburg, seeing her from below, thought of her as some wild creature from early Germanic times.

After Thea has broken off their affair, Ottenburg tells her that by going to Mexico with him "you'll always drive ahead.... It's your way"(444). Thea loves Fred Ottenburg, but her desire to be a great artist is still strong. Their love has enriched her experience of life, and the fact that he is already married leaves her free to continue music and mesh that experience with her art. On the eve of Thea's departure for Germany he notices that her excitement, eagerness "to get it," is no longer colored by memories and personal struggles, but is now "unconscious,"- something selfless and instinctive. With her mother Thea travels to Pedro's Cup, "a great amphitheatre cut out in the hills, its floor dotted with sagebrush and grease wood. On the surface of this fluid sand, one could find bits of brilliant stone, crystals and onyx, and petrified wood as red as blood" (402).

As significant as the metaphor that links Thea's growth to her world is the beauty of the description, by which Cather affirms her character's growth in terms of her

developing female body. Gradually, she becomes aware of a larger world, are metaphorically linked with the female sexuality that underlies a woman's creative passion. Becoming an artist means being able simultaneously to abandon her body to sensuous experience and to control that experience, keeping it from contamination. "The condition every art requires," Cather would later explain, is "freedom from adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter," and at this point, Thea severs those human ties that threaten to compromise her. It is in experiencing this emotional pain that she discovers her strength as a woman and ultimately as an artist.

Her family, mentors, and suitors serve Thea the woman only as they serve Thea the artist. She is completely obsessed with the intellectual and physical rewards of her craft. Her regimen is grueling, and her exacting standards make her arrogant and lonely. She is sometimes frightened, and more than once the idea of marrying and being taken care of tempts her. She grieves at the conflict between personal and professional needs, particularly when choosing an important European debut over a journey home to see her dying. From time to time reported reached Dr. Archie of Thea's progress abroad, Fred Ottenburg, still her admirer, realizes that only the challenge of her art brings back her vitality and zest for life: "It was only under such excitement, he reflected, that she was entirely illuminated, or wholly present. At other times there was something little cold and empty, like a big room with no people in it" (500), and that "new understanding" has been the goal toward which Thea has been moving all her life.

The admiration derives from series of Wagnerian roles which Madame Kronborg interprets. The principal ones are: Elizabeth (*Tannhauser*), Elsa (*Lohengrin*), Venus

(*Tanhauser*), Fricka (*Das Rheingold*), and Sieglinde (*Die Walkure*). The list of appearances suggests a general movement from the more lyrical to more complex and dramatic, which hinds of Madame Kronborg's style, but the important thing is that it shows the soprano's range, her rapid ascent at the Metropolitan, and her indefatigable energy.

The first important role was sung in Dresden where, thanks to the 'lucky chance' (485), every daughter of music needs, Kronborg got to sing Elizabeth. The role and the circumstances of her debut are brought to mind during Archie's visit to the ailing Mrs. Kronborg. The doctor notices a "photograph of the young woman who must have been singing '*Dich, theure Halle, gruss' ich wieder*', her eyes looking up, her beautiful hands outspread with pleasure" (492). Willa Cather's music allusion is perfectly clear and perfectly appropriate. The song, refers to Elizabeth's entrance and praises music itself, doubles as Madame Kronborg's artistic entrance into her personal "Hall of Song. It is a joyous symbolic debut, this salutation of the hall.

Oh, hall of song I give thee greeting!

All hail to thee thou hallowed place!

'T was here that dream so sweet and fleeting,

Upon my heart his song did trace.

But since by him forsaken

A desert thou dost seem-

Thy echoes only waken

Remembrance of a dream,

But now the flame of hope is lighted,

Thy vault shall ring with glorious war,
For him whose strains my soul delighted
No longer roams afar!¹⁹

One of the final questions considered in the novel is the relation of the artist to the people in his past. Doctor Archie always regretted that Thea did not get home when his mother was dying. Her failure to return appears callous and neglectful; and yet Oliver Landry, Thea's friend, tells Fred Ottenburg that the special in Thea's Interpretation of Elizabeth in Tannhauser derives from the anxiety and grief she felt over his mother's death: "The last act is heart-breaking. It's as homely as a country prayer-meeting: might be any lonely lady ready to die. It's full of the thing every plain creature finds out for himself, but that never gets written down" (540). Among other things we are reminded of those humble faces at the mournful prayer meetings which, for Thea, were so tedious, but promised to mean something some day. Through the "new understanding" of her art Thea appreciates those faces as she could not before; they are part of that passion, that vital enrichment in her art.

Kronborg's move from the opera house in Dresden ... to the Metropolitan signifies her arrival at the top. Too many sopranos are tussling for too few roles. When Cather remarks that Kronborg sings Elsa in Lohengrin the first time that Dr. Archie sees her in New York; she conveys both the competitive state of affairs in opera and her heroine's capacity to cope with its demands.²⁰ Soon she is scheduled for a Sieglinde of her own. It is a command performance. "On Friday afternoon there was an inspiring audience; not an empty chair in the house" (565). Fred Ottenburg, along with the soprano's benefactor Howard Archie, Andor Harsanyi, back from a successful engagement in Vienna, and his

wife also are in the house. Of all the grace gifts the artist possesses, the most magical is the power to vault the barriers between time and place and person and construct a rainbow bridge to them all. Willa Cather does not count the curtain calls, but the fierce “clamour” (569) of the audience makes it unmistakably clear that Thea Kronborg is the kind of singer who leaves beautiful memories behind her. As Andor Harsanyi turns to his wife at the opera “‘At last,’ he sighed, ‘somebody with *enough!* Enough voice and talent and beauty, enough physical power. And such a noble, noble style!’”(569). A soul has touched a soul.²¹

For Thea art always comes first. It takes every ounce of strength, leaving her drained, aged, and often unfit for company. When urged to take more time for her “personal life,” she replies, “Your work becomes your personal life. You’re not much good until it does.” Her work requires the kind of perfect dedication that Nietzsche called chastity, and its goal is a paradox, the kind of “sensuous spirituality” which is also the goal of the mystic. As opined by Gerber, “The Swedish heroine marries Fred Ottenburg; but marriage for her is no more a “panacea” than Alexandra Bergson’s union with Carl Linstrum (87). Thea Kronborg, having achieved success as an opera singer in New York, she credits Moonstone for giving her a sense of standards and a ‘rich, romantic past’ ” (552). Thea’s talent is a combination of intelligence and fierce originality. Through tremendous effort she has used both to transform talent into art. Like Olive Fremstad Thea as a child, had been driven hard and grueling. Through years of disciplined effort she has learned to do the “impossible.”²²

II

Secondary women characters:

Mrs. Kronborg:

She was a short, stalwart woman, with a short neck and a determined-looking head. Her skin was very fair, her face calm and unwrinkled, and her yellow hair, braided down her back as she lay in bed, still looked like a girl's. She was a woman whom Dr. Archie respected; active, practical, unruffled; good-humored, but determined. Exactly the sort of woman to take care of a flighty preacher. She had brought her husband some property, too,--one fourth of her father's broad acres in Nebraska,--but this she kept in her own name. She had profound respect for her husband's erudition and eloquence. She sat under his preaching with deep humility, and was as much taken in by his stiff shirt and white neck-ties (14).

She looked to him for morning prayers and grace at table; she expected him to name the babies and to supply whatever parental sentiment there was in the house, to remember birthdays and anniversaries, to point the children to moral and patriotic ideals. It was her work to keep their bodies, their clothes, and their conduct in some sort of order, and this she accomplished with a success that was a source of wonder to her neighbors. As she used to remark, and her husband admiringly to echo, she "had never lost one." With all his flightiness, Peter Kronborg appreciated the matter-of-fact, punctual way in which his wife got her children into the world and along in it. He believed, and he was right in believing, that the sovereign State of Colorado was much indebted to Mrs. Kronborg and women like her (14).

Mrs. Kronborg believed that the size of every family was decided in heaven. More modern views would not have startled her; they would simply have seemed foolish-- thin chatter, like the boasts of the men who built the tower of Babel, or like Axel's plan to breed ostriches in the chicken yard. From what evidence Mrs. Kronborg formed her opinions on this and other matters, it would have been difficult to say, but once formed, they were unchangeable. Calm and even-tempered, naturally kind, she was capable of strong prejudices, and she never forgave (15). Mrs. Kronborg let her children's minds alone. She did not pry into their thoughts or nag them. She respected them as individuals, and outside of the house they had a great deal of liberty. But their communal life was definitely ordered (23).

Tillie:

Tillie of Swedish origin was a queer, addle-pated thing, as flighty as a girl at thirty-five, and over-whelmingly fond of gay clothes-- which taste, as Mrs. Kronborg philosophically said, did nobody any harm. Tillie was always cheerful, and her tongue was still for scarcely a minute during the day. She had been cruelly overworked on her father's Minnesota farm when she was a young girl, and she had never been so happy as she was now; had never before, as she said, had such social advantages. She thought her brother the most important man in Moonstone. She never missed a church service, and, much to the embarrassment of the children, she always "spoke a piece" at the Sunday-School concerts. She had a complete set of "Standard Recitations," which she practiced on Sundays. She belonged to a dramatic club and performed plays such as 'Among the Breakers' and 'The Veteran of 1812' (84).

Tillie always coaxed Thea to go "behind the scenes" with her when the club presented a play, and help her with her make-up. Thea hated it, but she always went. She felt as if she had to do it. There was something in Tillie's adoration of her that compelled her. There was no family impropriety that Thea was so much ashamed of as Tillie's "acting" and yet she was always being dragged in to assist her. Tillie simply had her, there. She didn't know why, but it was so. There was a string in her somewhere that Tillie could pull; a sense of obligation to Tillie's misguided aspirations (85).

Anna:

Anna the eldest in the family of six was her mother's lieutenant. All the children knew that they must obey Anna, who was an obstinate contender for proprieties and not always fair minded (23).

Mrs. Kohler:

Mrs. Kohler seldom crossed the ravine and went into the town except at Christmas-time, when she had to buy presents and Christmas cards to send to her old friends in Freeport, Illinois. As she did not go to church, she did not possess such a thing as a hat. Year after year she wore the same red hood in winter and a black sunbonnet in summer. She made her own dresses; the skirts came barely to her shoe-tops, and were gathered as full as they could possibly be to the waistband. She preferred men's shoes, and usually wore the cast-offs of one of her sons. She had never learned much English, and her plants and shrubs were her companions. She lived for her men and her garden. Beside that sand gulch, she had tried to reproduce a bit of her own village in the Rhine

Valley. She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned (28).

Mrs. Tellamantez:

Mrs. Tellamantez the somber Mexican woman did not seem inclined to talk, but her nod was friendly. Thea sat down on the warm sand, her back to the moon, facing Mrs. Tellamantez on her doorstep, and began to count the moonflowers on the vine that ran over the house. His wife, Mrs. Tellamantez, sitting on the doorstep, loved to comb her long, blue-black hair. As Cather remarks; Mexican women are like the Spartans; when they are in trouble, in love, under stress of any kind, they comb and comb their hair. When her son Spanish Johnny's health was at risk she rose without embarrassment or apology, comb in hand, and greeted the doctor (52).

Mrs. Tellamantez was always considered a very homely woman. Her face was of a strongly marked type not sympathetic to Americans. Such long, oval faces, with a full chin, a large, mobile mouth, a high nose, are not uncommon in Spain. Mrs. Tellamantez could not write her name, and could read but little. Her strong nature lived upon itself. She was chiefly known in Moonstone for her forbearance with her incorrigible husband.(53-54) but everybody was disgusted with Mrs. Tellamantez for putting up with Spanish Jhonny. She ought to discipline him, people said; she ought to leave him; she had no self-respect. In short, Mrs. Tellamantez got all the blame. Even Thea thought she was much too humble. She could think that 'there is nothing so sad in the world as that kind of patience and resignation' (55).

Old Mrs. Lorch, and, Mrs. Andersen:

Old Mrs. Lorch, and, Mrs. Andersen,, here are two German women, a mother and daughter. The daughter is a Swede by marriage, and clings to the Swedish Church., but Mrs. Lorch, the mother, is a good cook,--. The daughter, Mrs. Andersen, is musical, too, and sings in the Mozart Society (211). Old Mrs. Lorch could never bring herself to have costly improvements made in her house; indeed she had very little money. She preferred to keep the house just as her husband built it, and she thought her way of living good enough for plain people. There was an ingrain carpet on the floor, green ivy leaves on a red ground, and clumsy, old-fashioned walnut furniture. The bed was very wide, and the mattress thin and hard. Over the fat pillows were "shams" embroidered in Turkey red, each with a flowering scroll--one with "Gute' Nacht," the other with "Guten Morgen." The dresser was so big that Thea wondered how it had ever been got into the house and up the narrow stairs. Besides an old horsehair armchair, there were two low plush "spring-rockers" (213).

There was only one picture on the wall when Thea moved in: a large colored print of a brightly lighted church in a snow-storm, on Christmas Eve, with greens hanging about the stone doorway and arched windows. There was something warm and home, like about this picture, and Thea grew fond of it. Both the widows were kind to her, but Thea liked the mother better. Mrs. Andersen was certainly a depressing person. It sometimes annoyed Thea very much to hear her insinuating knock on the door, her flurried explanation of why she had come, as she backed toward the stairs. Mrs. Andersen admired Thea greatly. She thought it a distinction to be even a "temporary soprano"--

Thea called herself so quite seriously--in the Swedish Church. She also thought it distinguished to be a pupil of Harsanyi's. She considered Thea very handsome, very Swedish, very talented (217).

III

Cather combined various immigrant nationalities into the symphonies which is more prominently observed in **The Song of the Lark** just as Anton Dvorak's *New World Symphony* that appeared in 1915 wanted to "encourage young American composers in the development of their own native [ethnic] sources."²³ As remarkably opined by Ann Moseley "The strongest cultural movement featuring in this novel is Scandinavian, for Thea's mother is pure Swedish, her father part Swedish and part Norwegian, and the names of Thea and her little brother Thor originate in 'Nordic mythology'. All the Kronborg children but Anna have Scandinavian features, but Thea is the most Scandinavian of them all."²⁴

As discussed earlier, her friend Dr. Archie muses that the child 'was a little Swede through and through'. Moreover, the Norwegian strain is also strong in Thea, though it takes a different direction in her father and Aunt. Moseley further opines that: "Thea receives from the Swedes her determination and love of order, and from the Norwegians her passion and imagination, all of which are qualities essential to the development of any artist."²⁵

Thea absorbs not only her own culture but also those around her. Professor Wunsch her German piano teacher introduces her to German art and music, especially to German opera. These early bonds with European life and art are augmented throughout

her musical career. When she goes to Chicago she studies with Hungarian piano teacher Andor Harsanyi. In Chicago also, she meets and falls in love with rich German Fred Ottenburg, who, in turn, introduces her to the rich and cultivated German Jewish family, the Nathanmeyeres. This interest in German culture is climaxed when she actually goes to Germany to study voice, and after several years returns to America as masterful interpreter of Wagnerian opera. Thea's music, however, has roots not only in the cultivator and intellectualism of German life but also in her Mexican friends especially with Spanish Jhonny, the young mandolin player. Each in his own way offers a dimension of himself as a source of identification to Thea.

Thea Kronborg, like Alexandra, is a self-conscious, even backward, girl, until she discovers her purpose in life- to absorb and express the people and bring them happiness through her singing. She sacrifices personal life like Alexandra. Thea Kronborg adds to the strong-willed Alexandra Bergson the intellectual and cultural achievements of the artist in the great world. Thus as opined by Glen "Thea becomes the first of Cather's major figures in whom western and eastern values combine in a sustained and productive relationship." She belongs not with the pioneers like Alexandra but with the following generation, and like her contemporaries she must "fight her way through the narrow and repressive atmosphere of her western town in order to find the meaning of her own life and ambitions revealed in the life itself."(178) Thea as a true artist is honored by attaining highest status in her time and becoming "la divina". As rightly remarked by James Woodress: Cather always believed that the pioneer women on 'The Divide' possessed many traits- the drive, the perception, the energy, the creative force. They had created a new country out of an idea.²⁶

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CHAPTER- 5

THE WOMAN WHO WOULD BE AN ARTIST

I

Cather's **Lucy Gayheart** is the "love story" yet it is her "most complex novel philosophically".¹ The main protagonist is Lucy Gayheart, of immigrant descent. She epitomizes the German inheritance. **Lucy Gayheart** deals with the theme of the artistic growth and the price it has for a woman, especially one of pioneer descent, to pursue life in art. **Lucy Gayheart** is artfully put together and contains some of the author's most profound reflections on art and human relationships. As perceptively remarked by Richard Giannone:

The essential drama of living for Willa Cather takes place behind the brow. "Some peoples' lives are affected by what happens to their person or their property, but for others fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts-that and nothing more." Such people whose inner being is their destiny are the heroes and heroines of Cather's fictions. Their inward journey culminating with each character experiencing himself or herself in a new way is Cather's story.²

Lucy Gayheart the main protagonist of an immigrant descent portrays the womanhood, the very ideal of feminine charm. Lucy Gayheart the attractive daughter of German watchmaker and flute player, whose only access to an adult world as she grows up is through men: as accompanist to the artist which eventually speaks of salvation through courtship and coupling which impedes her achievement. In **Lucy**

Gayheart the title character is a rather ordinary young woman whose story is one of apparent failure rather than conspicuous success. It begins and ends in a fictional Red Cloud.

The novel likely had its source of inspiration in a real-life character who teased the author's imagination over the years; she based her central character upon two girls she had met while living there. As perceptively observed by James Woodress: "Sadie Becker, a Red Cloud girl Cather had known in her youth, had "golden-brown eyes," who used to skate on the old rink in a red jersey."³ Sadie Becker was a musician, the accompanist of a local singer; who left Red Cloud to continue her music studies. In Red Cloud Sadie Becker was known for her skating, her vivacious manner, and her romance with a local boy.

The heroine's symbolic name and her general characteristics also have their foreground in another real person; "a spirited girl by the name of Miss Gayhardt" in 1895, Willa Cather once met roughly the time in which the novel is set.⁴ The vivacious young schoolteacher Cather had met and instantly liked when she was visiting Red Cloud in the summer of 1896. Cather talked about the classics and French literature with a Miss Gayhardt, "a fine, delicate, sensitive creative who seemed to her pitifully unsuited to teach school in that remote rough village."⁵

In Haverford on the Platte Cather describes Lucy as a girl whose essence cannot be portrayed by a static art: her "gaiety and grace" would "mean nothing" in photographs. She has to be recognized as a "figure always in motion"- joyous motion. In Haverford, Harry Gordon picks her out instantly from all the other skaters on a distant stretch of ice. Her movements are "direct and unhesitating and joyous" as she heads into the wind,

quick and easy in her squirrel jacket, the tip of her crimson scarf floating in the air. (8) Lucy has the spontaneous vitality and is 'happy', 'pretty', and 'best-loved girl' in her community. Even though people especially the older women stood indoors when there was heavy snowfall Lucy "not shrinking" giving "her body to the wind" as if she were catching step with it (3).

There was something in her nature that was like "her movements, something direct and unhesitating and joyous," and in her golden-brown eyes. Flashed with "gold sparks like that Colorado stone we call the tiger-eye." Her skin was rather dark, and the colour in her lips and cheeks was like the "red of dark peonies--deep, velvety" (4). Lucy was just thirteen, her "hair down her back, wore a short skirt and a skintight red jersey, and had the prettiest eyes in the world (20). Lucy having lost her mother wanted to be alone; but normally she was glad to meet Harry. In Haverford she sometimes stopped for only a word with him, his "vitality and unfailing satisfaction" with life put her up (18). The first time Harry ever saw Lucy it was in the old skating – rink. (19). Lucy had good times in the old rink, that her sister Pauline wouldn't let her go to dances.

The only girl who gave Harry Gordon any deep thrill was this same Lucy, who lived in his own town, "was poor as a church mouse, never flattered him, and often laughed at him." When he was with her, life was unusual; and he loved every moment of being together with her (22). Harry Gordon handsome banker sought a highly stereotypical personal relationship with Lucy. He never missed taking out Lucy for the opera something she enjoyed in his company:

On the morning after they heard *Otello*, Lucy cut out her practicing because Harry had asked her to take him through the Art Museum. It

was rather gentle, sunny morning, and as they walked over toward Michigan Avenue they stopped to do a little shopping. The next evening Harry and Lucy appeared for the next opera *Aida*. At the opera they had excellent sets; Harry had written for them weeks ago... He enjoyed the music, and the audience, and being with Lucy. His enthusiasm for the tenor was sincere; the duet in the third act was, he whispered, his idea of music. ...Tonight they would hear *Traviata*, and for tomorrow, Saturday they had chosen the matinee instead of the evening performance, because Lucy had never heard *Lohengrin*, and she especially wanted to (103).

Lucy Gayheart's most vital human moments with Harry Gordon: are skating, attending an opera, and visiting a museum. Lucy's passionate response to art in the absolute sense and her openness are indicated as she observes the first star of the evening:

That point of silver light spoke to her like a signal, released another kind of life and feeling that did not belong here. It overpowered her. With a mere thought she had reached that star and it had answered, recognition had flashed between. Something knew, then, in the unknowing waste . . . That joy of saluting what is far above one was an eternal thing . . . The flash of understanding lasted but a moment. Then everything was confused again. Lucy shut her eyes and leaned on Harry's shoulder to escape from what she had gone so far to snatch. It was too bright and too sharp. It hurt, and made one feel small and lost (11-12).

Lucy Gayheart cuddles dreamily against handsome Harry Gordon, who is giving her a ride home in his sleigh. Suddenly she feels her heart throb in her throat, a symptomatic agitation familiar to readers of popular romance as the feeling of falling in love. The object of Lucy's desire is not Harry, however, but the evening's first star. From across the sky, this bright signaling star has "overpowered" Lucy with its light-a "flash" which brings the mutual "recognition" and "understanding" missing in her relationship with Harry. Throughout the novel, Lucy yearns to renew her communion with the gleaming stars of the sky and with a glamorous singing "star" first seen on the concert stage. Both distant and unreachable, they represent to Lucy "another kind of life and feeling" to which she aspires.⁶

On the last afternoon of the Christmas holidays before she departs for the city, Lucy is out with a party of young people of Haverford "skating on the long stretch of ice", the two ends of her scarf floating behind her, like "slender wings" moving gracefully and athletically over the frozen river (7). Driving his horse into a lather to join the party is Harry Gordon, who, when he reaches the river, hurries into his skates and shoots past the others to take Lucy for a turn before sunset. They skate far down the river leaving the rest of the party behind; when they reach the end of an island they rest and watch the sun sinking back to town in the sleigh, which is described as "a tiny moving spot on that still white country settling into shadow and silence"(11). She skates until she is near exhaustion. Harry then adopts the role of her chivalric protector, and she becomes completely passive beneath his benevolent power.

In some aspects **Lucy Gayheart** is reminiscent of **The Song of the Lark**. Like Thea, Lucy is a small town girl who loves to study music but while Thea's desire is for

artistic creation itself, Lucy finds the embodiment of her desire in the person of the singer Clement Sebastian.

She had gone to his studio the first time because she was asked to come; she loved being there, and went again and again. He had seemed pleased and amused, and was very kind. She even felt that he liked her being young and ignorant and not too clever. It was an accidental relationship, between someone who had everything and someone who had nothing at all: and it concerned nobody else. She had dropped down into the middle of this man's life, and she snatched what she could, from the present and the past. Her playing for him was nothing but make believe: and his friendliness was make – believe, perhaps. Then there was nothing real about it,- except her own feeling. That was real (61).

The female heroine is the “incipient artist and her responses are shaped by this inner quality.”⁷ Lucy had given piano lessons to beginners ever since she was in the tenth grade. She is loved by children because she never treated them like kids especially the little boys. And at the tender age of eighteen Cather takes its heroine, Lucy Gayheart, to Chicago to study in preparation for a musical career. In Chicago, she gets a job accompanying a famous singer, whom she falls in love with. The singer is nearly fifty he is world-weary and unhappily married, Lucy is full of youth and vitality. Lucy's tragedy is that “she has the desire, but not the will or talent for an artistic career” (5).

Lucy didn't like the “pervasive informality” of the boarding place; when she first came to Chicago. She once remarked to her music teacher, Professor Auerbach that she

“would never get on unless she could live alone with her piano, where there would be no gay voices” (26). Having a great lure for the German tradition Lucy took a room at once where there was a “German homely restaurant” specializing in German dishes conducted by Mrs. Schneff. Lucy for the first time in her life could come and go like a boy; “no one fussing about, no one hovering over her” (26). Born of Bavarian parents in the German colony at Belleville, Illinois, Jacob Gayheart had learned his trade under his father. Lucy’s father “led the town band and gave lessons on the clarinet, flute, and violin”, behind his watch-repairing shop. He took more pains to make the band boys practice than he did to keep up his interest payments on his farms which were now mortgaged (5). With the musical traits running in her family Lucy thought of music as a means of earning money to help her father.

Lucy is “talented” but too “careless” and “light-hearted” to take herself very seriously. She never dreamed of a “career.” She thought of music as a natural form of pleasure, and as a means of earning money to help her father (4). Lucy’s father also an amateur astronomer (29) studies the stars. Clement Sebastian himself an established artist or “star” sings about them. Lucy did not miss a word of the ‘German’. She had never heard anything sung with such elevation of style. The “mortal” view of human experience adumbrates from Sebastian and his music. When Lucy first hears him sing in Chicago, she is struck by “something profoundly tragic” about the man. Lucy is aroused by Sebastian’s appearance before she hears him sing. At a concert when he comes upon the stage, she responds to his “large, rather tired eyes,” in a black coat with a white waistcoat that solidly fills the space it occupies. The arousal becomes possession when Lucy hears Sebastian sing “*Der Doppelganger*,” a song which cast over her a spell, in which she

struggles “with something she had never felt before.” Lucy lapses into unconsciousness, unaware of Sebastian’s exit, only later to realize “there was nobody left before the grey velvet curtain but the red-haired accompanist, a lame boy, who dragged one foot as he went across the stage” (29). As rightly opined by Susan Rosowski this is Lucy’s story of awakening desire, vulnerability, and possession, with Lucy when she first sees Sebastian, and we learn about her feelings when she first hears him sing.⁸

“*When We Two Parted*,” which Sebastian sings at the recital; a song of separated lovers, it laments the infirmity and the inevitable closure of human relationships. Sitting here in her cloak, shivering, she had whispered over and over the words of that last song:

When we two parted,
In silence and tears,
Half broken – hearted,
To serve for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Surely that hour foretold
Sorrow to this. (32)

As Lucy listens to him sing, “the outside world seemed to her dark and terrifying, full of fears and dangers that had never come close to her until now” (31). Sebastian turns to Lucy because he knows his former self cannot be revived. Lucy is profoundly moved by what she glimpses in Sebastian’s singing, and she goes home that night “tried and frightened, with a feeling that some protecting barrier was gone – a window had been

broken that let in the cold and darkness of the night” (32). In such a world all values are human and individual; but subject to time and change, they are fragile and fleeting.

Lucy had felt an omen for herself in the Byron song, and shortly after the concert she has the opportunity to work as Sebastian’s rehearsal accompanist. Her fears of the singer are dispelled by his kindness, and after they have worked together for some time she finds herself falling in love with him. But Sebastian cannot return her love. When he sings Schubert’s *Die Winterreise* we are given an insight into his feeling for Lucy. The Schubert song cycle presents a rejected lover who is psychically resurrected in winter to experience again and express the anguish of his loss. Sebastian sings the song without dramatic involvement. He does not identify with the melancholy youth, but presents him “as if he were a memory, not to be brought too near into the presents (38).

The emotional distance Sebastian establishes between himself and the youth of the songs defines his relationship to Lucy: she revives in him a memory of his youth, but romantic love is no longer a dramatic reality for him – his thoughts and emotions are preoccupied with much grimmer facts of life. In his studio Sebastian is always kind and courteous, but when Lucy, by chance, catches a glimpse of him walking alone in the street, she sees a man whose face is filled with a profound and forbidding melancholy – his other self.⁹

Lucy ponders on Sebastian’s relationship with his estranged wife and wonders if she is not the source of his unhappiness. But Sebastian is not a lover grieving over failure with a woman; rather, he is a man coming to terms with the knowledge that he must some day die. Lucy comes closest to understanding this when, unnoticed, she attends the funeral service for one of Sebastian’s friends – a French singer who died suddenly while

on tour in America. As the coffin is carried to the altar of the church, Sebastian follows it with a look of anguish and despair that strikes a chill in Lucy's heart. Unlike his rendering of *Die Winterreise*, Sebastian's involvement at the funeral is "personal and passionate," and Lucy feels, as at the first recital, that "a wave of black despair" had swept through the room – an image which recurs several times in the novel linking death with water. Lucy wonders if the woman had been dear to him or whether death itself is so horrible to Sebastian; but when she remembers seeing him once before emerging from a church, she realizes that his despair has to do, not with the heart, but with "the needs of his soul" (55).

Following the death of a boyhood friend, Sebastian realizes his own youth is "forever and irrevocably gone" (77). The apparently safe, normal world about him drops away, and "everything . . . had suddenly become unfamiliar and unfriendly" (78). To save himself Sebastian looks for "one lovely, unspoiled memory" (79), but to compound his horror, he is unable to recall anything worth remembering. It is then that he turns to Lucy. Sebastian embraces Lucy Gayheart, he grows stronger, fresher, younger, while she becomes increasingly passive and dependent. Her pulsating energy gives way to timidity, uncertainty, and bewilderment, until she gives herself to embraces in which Sebastian's soft, deep breathing seemed to drink her up entirely" (87). Ultimately, her comfort is that of the womb. Lying in the dark against his shoulder, "she felt herself drifting again into his breathing, into his heart-beats" (89).

When Sebastian takes Lucy into his studio, it is as to a place as isolated, remote, and strange as Count Dracula's mountaintop castle. With him there, Lucy is "shut away from the rest of the world. It was as if they were on the lonely spur of a mountain,

enveloped by mist” (75). Lucy Gayheart is unspoiled youth, and Sebastian clings to her as desperately as though more elegantly than his accompanist Mockford will later cling to him. In doing so he immerses Lucy in emotions for which she is unprepared.

Lucy instinctively hates Mockford, for she is his antithesis – an embodiment of life with all its energy and desires. Fumingly, it is because of Mockford’s diseased hip that Lucy is ensnarled in the mortal chain that leads to her own death. While Mockford is resting for an operation, Lucy becomes Sebastian’s pianist and falls in love with in. But, as we know from his singing, Sebastian is in death’s train: he remarks to Lucy that Mockford is “one of the few friends who have lasted through time and change” (52). There is perhaps another grim double meaning intended when Sebastian says to Lucy at the piano, “Catch step with me” (41).

David Stouck perceptively observes that:

At first the singer is simply courteous to Lucy, for he is completely absorbed by a sense of life’s futility, but gradually he begins to respond to the freshness and spontaneity of Lucy’s presence in his studio. As she would make her way along the lake from, the sharp air off the water “brought up all the fire of life in her,” and she would take into the studio “the freshness of the morning weather.” Sebastian watches for her from the window and delights in seeing her tripping along the street in the cold wind. Her figure hurrying along recalls to him a passage from Montaigne: “in early youth the joy of life lies in the feet.”¹⁰

The worth of the vision is affirmed in **Lucy Gayheart** as well as in the **Song of the Lark**. As Janis Stout remarks: “Art is seen as a discipline and as redeemer of life from

shabbiness or inadequacy and thus as a goal well-worth the sacrifices it requires.”¹¹ Lucy admires a vase of flowers Sebastian sends to her. “Yes, they’re nice, aren’t they? Very suggestive: youth, love, hope – all the things that pass” (69). Lucy asks him if he never got any pleasure from being in love, and he answers, “N-n-no, not much”. News of an old companion’s death makes him reflect on all of life as a hopeless failure. But Lucy’s eager sympathy revives his spirits, and he leaves her looking forward to the morning again.

The following day he tells Lucy that he loves her, and although he confesses he has “renounced life” and will never share it with anyone again, he still believes in “the old and lovely dreams of man,” which he will teach her and share with her. Sebastian is, in fact, falling in love with life again, with its movement and its ardor as embodied in Lucy. He says to her, “When I caught sight of you tripping along in the wind, my heart grew lighter When you knocked, it was like springtime coming in at the door” (88-99).

At Sebastian's recital a baritone voice opened her consciousness to suffering, during *The Bohemian Girl* a soprano shows Lucy the way to heal the pain. The soprano on stage is Lucy's doppelganger in mature form; she is the musical counterpart to old Mrs. Ramsay, Cather's wisdom figure. The soprano conspicuously reflects Lucy's sense of loss and displacement. She "sang so well that Lucy wondered how she drifted into a little road company like this one" (152). Lucy at twenty naturally equates achievement with successful living and love with protection against loss. One of Lucy's virtues is that she has the courage to bear gentleness. Richard Giannone notes that “she holds firm as her heart expands under the burden placed on her consciousness by Sebastian's exceptional artistry. The *lieder* send melodic wave after melodic wave of their dark male

beauty over this young woman.”¹² To keep her heart from sinking, Lucy must struggle; but the music overcomes her resistance. Schubert's songs immerse Lucy in "a discovery about life, a revelation of love as a tragic force. . . of passion that drowns like black water" (26).

At that October recital in Chicago, an ingenuous Nebraska woman of twenty has the first flush of her enthusiasm for life. During the performance, Lucy draws near to the vortex of what Joan Acocella, calls Cather's tragic sense of life.¹³ Yes, this music jolts Lucy into a maelstrom of emotion. The disturbance is seismic on impact, glacial in outcome. Sebastian's singing causes a shift in Lucy's inner world that alters her perception of the "outside world." Once bright and welcoming, reality becomes "dark and terrifying, for Lucy as life is full of fears and dangers that had never come close to her until now" (26). Somehow, Lucy was not afraid of the cold. "She slipped into her only evening dress and put on the velvet cloak she had bought before Christmas. Tonight there was a bitter wind blowing off the Lake, but she was going to have a cab – She rather liked the excitement of winding a soft, light cloak about her bare arms...and running out into glacial cold (37).

Auerbach, the only music teacher portrayed in *Lucy Gayheart*, and the person who links Lucy to the baritone Clement Sebastian, helps Lucy to a limited degree but on the whole is too negative and derogatory. At one critical turning point, when Lucy appeals to Auerbach for professional advice, his words to Lucy correspond eerily to those of Wunsch to Thea. However, while Wunsch cautions Thea about the dangers inherent in marrying some Moonstone "Jacob" and keeping house for him (95) instead of following her desire, Auerbach encourages Lucy to reject the musical profession in favor of "a nice

house and garden in a little town . . . a family – that’s the best life” (134). When Lucy wonders “if there were not more than one way of living,” he responds, “Not for a girl like you, Lucy; you are too kind” (134).

When Harry Gordon comes to Chicago to pursue his courtship of Lucy, he brings back to her a world which has never looked at life’s tragic side. Harry is the embodiment of self-confident youth and vigor: “He came to meet her with such a jolly smile, fresh and ruddy and well turned-out in his new grey clothes.” And Lucy recognizes at once that the thing she liked best about him was “the fine physical balance which made him a good dancer and a tireless skater” (97). But Lucy has “caught step” with Sebastian, and when she lies to Harry and tells him that she has “gone all the way” with the singer, that there is no going back; she unwittingly speaks a prophetic truth.

Lucy turns down Harry's' offer of marriage but she loses her self-control in the process, and even more critically, she surrenders center stage to Sebastian. The artist requires freedom and independence in every sense: personal, emotional, financial. She needs to break away, from societal constraints in general and her roots in particular including family, friends, and place in order to find her true artistry and her voice.¹⁴ On the other hand, Cather succinctly summarizes circumstances or conditions that serve the artist in *Lucy Gayheart*: “escape, change, chance” (24). But while Lucy, like Thea sets out fearlessly to seek escape and change in the city, chance never works in her favor, and the events that befall her are unlucky one.

Lucy had temporarily rekindled in Sebastian a desire to live a revival of the heart, but having looked at life from a “long distance,” he could not turn back and evade the terrible knowledge of death. She had brought sunlight to his studio, but he could not

escape from death's shadow. Lucy fell under the shadow of Sebastian's vision temporarily she is seated in the shadow of a pillar when he performs *De Winterreise*, but hers is not a tragedy of death but of love's eternal frustration. When she goes back to Haverford she must discover not only a way of continuing to live, but a way of being able to love again.

It is Mrs. Ramsay who suggests to Lucy a way of finding happiness again. She says to her, "Life is short; gather roses while you may . . . Make it as many as you can, Lucy. Nothing really matters but living. Get all you can out of it. I'm an old woman and I know" (165). Her advice is purposely a generalization, for happiness can only be sustained by life itself, not by an individual, perishable love. The importance of Mrs. Ramsay's words to Lucy is anticipated when Mrs. Ramsay's daughter observes the change that has come to her mother with the years. Once the older woman's sympathy for Lucy would have been passionate and very personal, now it was "more ethereal", like "the Divine Compassion" (147).

The fact that life must end in death does not matter to Lucy; when she feels the renewed desire to go back into the world, her mind is filled with pictures of people in movement: "She could think of nothing but crowded streets with life streaming up and down, windows full of roses and gardenias and violets . . ." (184). The words from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* that Sebastian sang for her in the beginning – "*If with all your heart you truly seek Him*", *you shall ever surely find Him* (41) – acquire their full value for Lucy as a description of living, not as a revelation after death; for seeking is finding, or, as Willa Cather herself quoted, "*Le but n'est rien; le chemin, c'est tout.*"¹⁵ The musical exultation takes her toward action: "Now she knew what she meant" (156).

Seeking the source of life she is committed to pursue the way of desire to its term. Immediately her pliant body is swept up into her search. Lucy stretches her arms outward to greet the winter storm and “whatever might lie behind it.” With every physical fiber, she bids: “Let it come!” (156).

Art, like love, provides the façade beneath which age seeks to stave off death by feeding upon youth. Lucy Gayheart seems largely unconscious when with Sebastian; she is happiest when, back in her own room at night, she recalls the day.” As discussed by psychoanalyst Phyllis Greenacre “this sense of another self is not uncommon in creative individuals. This second or artist self serves to provide Thea with a feeling of power and security no matter what obstacles come her way. Lucy doesn’t possess a distinct second self-image.”¹⁶ However, she is attuned emotionally to art as a realm apart from life’s more mundane aspects, even though its prospects may frighten her previously evidenced. Also, during her mourning period in Haverford, Lucy is inspired to resume her pursuit of excellence when she hears the performance of an aging soprano and senses in herself “something that was like a purpose forming . . . beating like another heart” (181). It is this loss of a self that is most chilling in Lucy’s relationship to Sebastian, for as he draws life from her, he leaves her with emptiness and estrangement. After their first embrace, in which he took from her youthful love and gave to her his renouncement of life, she felt “far away from herself . . . as if everything were on the point of vanishing.”

Taking her youth with him, Sebastian leaves Lucy with his cast-off loneliness and sorrow. She returns to his empty study, where “all her companionship with him was shut up” (131), and she visits the church where she had seen him at a funeral, “a place sacred

to sorrows she herself had never known; but she knelt in the spot where he had knelt, and prayed for him” (136).

Later when she learns of Sebastian’s death, she returns to Haverford, a pale, lifeless ghost of her former self. Her estrangement from the human world is such that she dreads to touch anything in her own house, lies tense even in her own bed, and sometimes is afraid of sleep, for “there had been nights when she lost consciousness only to drop into an ice-cold lake and struggle to free a drowning man from a white thing that clung to him. His eyes were always shut as if he were already dead; but the green eyes of the other, behind his shoulder, were open, full of terror and greed” (157-158).

She feels again the yearning she had sought to satisfy through Sebastian, but she now confronts her independence, asking “how could she go on alone?” The answer comes as Thea reached toward ancient truths she was to find in Panther Canyon:

Suddenly something flashed into her mind, so clear that it must have come from without, from the breathless quiet. What if – what if Life itself were the sweetheart? It was like a lover waiting for her in distant cities – across the sea; drawing her, enticing her, weaving a spell over her. She opened the window softly and knelt down beside it to breathe the cold air. She felt the snowflakes melt in her hair, on her hot cheeks. Oh, now she knew! She must have it, she couldn’t run away from it. She must go back into the world and get all she could of everything that had made him what he was She crouched closer to the window and stretched out her arms to the storm, to whatever might lie

behind it. Let it come! Let it all come back to her again! Let it betray her and mock her and break her heart, she must have it! (184-85).

Lucy's drowning when she goes skating on the river attests again to death's inexorable presence, but the image of the wagons crawling along the frozen land, taking her body home, initiates yet another tragedy in the novel –Gordon had loved Lucy Gayheart, but he had not understood her, and after her declaration of love for Sebastian his only thoughts were of revenging himself, of punishing Lucy. When Lucy came back to Haverford after Sebastian's death, he refused, in spite of her plea, to help or comfort her, withdrawing into the exclusive confines of his unhappy new marriage and the family bank. Indeed, on the last day of her life he had rudely denied Lucy a lift in his cutter. As if to break an evil spell, Lucy turns to her hometown suitor, Harry Gordon, to look at her in the old way, with life. Harry Gordon is the attractive and wealthy man who wished to marry Lucy, but flees not when he believes Lucy loves another man but when he believes she has had sex with him.

Twenty-five years have passed, and Gordon has attended the funeral of his one remaining friend and the last member of the Gayheart family, Lucy's father. With Mr. Gayheart's death, Gordon realized, "a chapter was closed, and a once familiar name on the way to be forgotten." The Gayheart's are on the way to "complete oblivion" (207). One of the winter afternoon of old Mr. Gayheart's funeral; during the services the townspeople feel "almost as if Lucy's grave had been opened" (207). Gordon, now fifty-five, reflects on the years since Lucy's death, and at last admits to himself his guilt. He had done everything possible to make Lucy suffer: the day on which she drowned "he refuses to the most worthless old loafer in town" (220). He realizes that his guilt has

been the preoccupation of his life since that day; he thinks of it and his barren marriage as a "life sentence." As an "act of retribution" he has kept up a friendship with Lucy's father, and when Mr. Gayheart is gone he takes possession of the Gayheart house with its sidewalk where Lucy's footprints are imprinted in the cement.

Cather defines the real psychological milieu in **Lucy Gayheart**. As rightly opined by Dorothy Tuck McFarland **Lucy Gayheart** reflects Willa Cather's life long concern with the "invisible, inviolable world", the reality of which is intuitively sensed in childhood and in adulthood, is apprehended in art or religion.¹⁷ Lucy seems to represent the thrust toward that world, the desire itself, seen like "a meteor momentarily flashing across the sky and then extinguished." There are only two townspeople who recognize Lucy's creative potential. One is her suitor Harry Gordon who idealizes her after she dies but is too short-sighted and self-serving while the other is Mrs. Ramsay who remains basically on the periphery of Lucy's life. The larger point is conveyed when Lucy's one-time lover Harry Gordon revisits her death and finds that she still lives in his memory as an embodiment of devotion to beauty.

The footprints Gordon preserves are of a thirteen-year-old girl. The adult Lucy, the young woman pulsating with desire, no longer exists, even in memory. Cather closes *Lucy Gayheart* with an appropriate symbol and recognition of individual uniqueness: Harry notices Lucy's three footprints; made years ago in the wet cement of the sidewalk. They serve as a vivid reminder of this unique person. Harry Gordon, in fact, has a stronger sense of Lucy as individual than she herself ever has. As a young-man, he admits to himself -that there is "nobody like her"(21). After her death, he reflects that she is the "one face, one figure" in his past that stands out (223). Harry's musing and shaping of his

recollections around Lucy Gayheart's footsteps emblemize a material and an art as remote from the art of Sebastian as the earth from the stars. Her footsteps, inevitably fleeting, are also vital, constantly present triggers in the everyday world of powers he had stifled in himself.

As aptly observed by Linda Chown:

In the persons of Lucy, Harry, and Sebastian, the novel explores delicately, yet pointedly, three early twentieth-century perspectives toward art. Sebastian personifies the artist, whose aesthetics divorce him from everyday life; Lucy is the romantic resolutely idealizing the artist's trappings; Harry is the materialist who learns to respect something of the intangible and to get closer to the ineffable in himself and his objects”¹⁸

The pursuit of art then as personified by Lucy Gayheart is redemptive for others as well as for herself. Redemption shines out of the artist “like the flash of the distant star seen through the windows” (189). For Cather's female 'artists, escape and change are associated, with the big city where, as Lucy appreciates, “the air trembled like a tuning-fork with unimaginable possibilities” (24). Lucy Gayheart sets out across the ice to escape from all that existence in Haverford had in store for her, to “get away from this frozen country and these frozen people, go back to light and freedom such as they could never know” (198), she finds herself suddenly submerged in icy black water.

Her destiny, unlike that of her counterpart Thea Kronborg appearing some twenty years earlier in Willa Cather's career, ends not with a departure for unknown heights and fulfillment of her youthful artistic yearnings, but in a fatal plunge into the frozen deep of the Platte. Two weeks after the performance of, *The Bohemian Girl* before Christmas at

the window she calls in the spirit which she experiences both as an eternal reality and an interior presence. The result is a new knowledge of herself. She feels part of the whole. As partaker of divine nature, she knows for the moment that she is one with the world through receiving the principle of life at its source. And so Lucy's name becomes her being as she becomes transparent to the spirit of joy. Music, in Cather is a two-way bridge for the creative spirit, which can accomplish this porosity because it issues from and returns to being's source¹⁹. Music for the narrator marks the course of Lucy's fate and subtly resounds in the destiny of all those touched by her vibrant spirit. Music is inseparable from her life. Lucy has the capacity to turn herself over to music again and again.

II

SECONDARY WOMEN CHARACTERS

Pauline:

Cather delineates other minor immigrant women characters like that of Lucy's elder sister Pauline, of German legacy, keeps house for her widowed father while Lucy goes off to Chicago to pursue her musical studies; In Lucy's sister, Pauline, Cather comments both compassionately critically on the need to conform or-"fit in," which she saw being taken to neurotic extremes in the America of the 1930s, thus threatening the survival of the individual. Pauline is completely immersed in community, but feels just as empty "as her passive sister.

Where Lucy is too weak ever to develop an autonomous self, Pauline is submerged in community, struggling constantly to be everything that Haverford expects

her to be. She is other-centered in an all-consuming way. Left with the responsibility of raising young Lucy when their mother dies, Pauline lives through Lucy, but continually finds herself competing with Lucy for community praise. She is torn between her motherly love and loyalty to what is "Gayheart" in Lucy (167), and her own need for a fulfilling, individual," existence. Focalized through Pauline's consciousness, the narrative lists her painful snubs and very real grievances. Although Lucy has not "the least idea of what Pauline was really like- never considered it" (171-72), it is difficult for a reader to ignore the suggestion that Pauline's dull and unrewarding life is what Lucy's life could have become had not Pauline's hard work made it possible for her father to insist that Lucy "grow up at the piano" (170).

Lucy's and Pauline's lives are two halves of one whole, knotted most tightly through economics: "Lucy had earned nothing during her first two winters in Chicago. Mr. Gayheart paid for her lessons and her living expenses. That was why he was always short of money, and why Pauline had to raise onions" (172). Pauline must raise onions so Lucy, who "earned nothing," can continue with her music in an exciting world far beyond Pauline's most suppressed desire or imaginings. What she resents about Lucy is what she sees as most individual," perhaps because she herself has trouble being "individual." Pauline is a divided person like so many of Cather's characters" always walking behind herself" (168).

She tries to "fit in", in Haverford, which is no easy task with an eccentric father and a sister who has returned from Chicago under mysterious circumstances. Pauline's last verbal exchange is an argument 'with Lucy over responsibility, ending with Pauline's good-intentioned though half-hearted effort to follow her angered sister down the street in

order to give her a shawl to protect her from the cold weather. This scene characterizes the two forces struggling within Pauline: sisterly resentment and maternal love-both hinging on her relationship to Lucy. Pauline so defines herself through Lucy that after Lucy's death, Pauline disappears from the narrative, except for brief, distanced references to her death.²⁰

Mrs. Ramsay:

Mrs. Ramsay as the widow of one of Haverford's founders, Mrs. Ramsay holds a key position among the townspeople. Mrs. Ramsay is instrumental in shaking Lucy out of her grief and in pointing her toward some goal. But beyond that role in the plot, Mrs. Ramsay holds a crucial thematic role in *Lucy Gayheart*. She, like the other characters who achieve some degree of personal success, has –changed Lucy's way of thinking. Mrs. Ramsay's daughter, observing her mother's sympathy for Lucy, reflects that it is not the "quick, passionate sympathy" that she used to see in her mother, but is "more like the Divine compassion" (146). Mrs. Ramsay, with "divine compassion," takes responsibility for Lucy. She insists that Lucy come to visit, and she then advises her to "go right on living," despite the fact that "sometimes people disappoint us, and sometimes we disappoint ourselves" (165).

Fairy Blair:

Fairy Blair the town extrovert and tease, jumps out of the carriage and, throwing her coat in the air for the boys to catch, runs down the length of the station platform. When it was announced that the train will be twenty minutes late, she grabs two boys by

the elbows and dashes into the street “doing an occasional shuffle with her fee.” Soon she leads the whole group in a crazy chase: “She couldn’t push the boys fast enough; suddenly she sprang from between the two rigid figures as if she had been snapped out of a sling-shot and ran up the street with the whole troop at her heels. They were all a little crazy, but as she was the craziest, they followed her (14). In the depiction of secondary characters Cather has shown that all women like Mrs. Ramsay do display humanitarian attitude.

III

Lucy Gayheart is having the theme of the struggling artist. It is a sort of awakening novel. During her short life span, Lucy tried to find meaning in life, meaning in nature and in every thing else around her. She struggled in her mind and in her thoughts to reach a stage in which she could be contempt with. For Lucy is like a newborn seeking a parent; abandoned by those who could guide her. Her mother died when she was six; her sister was temperamentally unsympathetic to her. The artist she loved left her; and her hometown suitor rejected her pleas. To complicate matters, Lucy’s newborn second self reside within a woman’s body, announcing a sexuality for which she was unprepared. **Lucy Gayheart** tells of a girl whose only access to an adult world as she grows up is through men. As accompanist to the artist Clement Sebastian and even then, she may accompany him only in rehearsal, to be replaced by a man in performance, or as wife to the town banker, Harry Gordon. Lucy fails at love; she fails, too, in her attempt to break away from her home town of Haverford and to become a professional accompanist. When Clement Sebastian, a famous singer who has taken her under his wing, drowns

during a European concert tour, Lucy loses a lover as well as the person who could have provided her the opportunity to achieve her career goals. After Sebastian's death, Lucy returns to Haverford, feeling empty and without a goal or a direction.

Lucy is a far smaller figure than Thea, less emotionally sturdy and certainly physically vigorous. Lucy has experienced a renewal of vision that would carry her through to a life of art whether she achieved greatness as a performer or not. Clement Sebastian and Lucy's love affair, their romance consist thus of sharing of romantic aspiration. Lucy feels she must go "back to a world that strove after excellence." But she is not a lonely artist figure like Thea Kronborg who would fight for a great career by denying herself life's pleasure; rather, she would return to a life of "flowers and music and enchantment and love," those things which symbolized the fullness of her life with Sebastian. Lucy would not return to "Art", but to "Life" enriched by the arts.

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CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSIONS

Willa Cather has become a national literary icon in America. Her name evokes the courage of immigrant farmers struggling with the raw American plains, and her reputation rests secure on her frontier masterpieces, with which miraculous economy and stylistic excellence capture a defining moment in the American experience.¹ Her life her work and her personality have a simple unity and consistency.

Willa Cather was born in Back Creek Valley, near Winchester, Virginia in the home of her maternal grandmother Rachel Boak. The eldest child of Charles and Mary Cather, both descendants of established Virginian families. Her childhood was reportedly happy and well-ordered, and is remembered in her late novel **Sapphira and the Slave Girl**. In 1883, the Cathers' moved to Webster County, Nebraska, joining members of the family who settled there earlier. This crucial move, dislocating and dramatic, introduced Cather to the landscape and to the ways of life she would memorialize in her famous prairie novels, **O Pioneers! My Ántonia**, and **A Lost Lady**, as well as in parts of **The Song of the Lark**. In the small town of Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather was a notably energetic, intelligent, and outspoken child, while, as her novels show, the town often seemed to her repressive. In Lincoln, Nebraska, where she attended the state university, she began her journalistic career, writing numerous reviews for the local newspapers. There, too, she published her earliest stories, formulated her idealistic and romantic ideals about art, and nurtured her literary ambitions. Those ambitions had to wait for their fulfillment while she earned a living in Pittsburgh as journalist and teacher, and then in

New York as an editor for **McClure's Magazine**. With the publication of **O Pioneers!** In 1913, Cather became the dedicated writer of her own dreams, in time achieving recognition for her prairie novels and for rare and unique works such as **My Ántonia**, **Death Comes for the Archbishop**, and **Shadows on the Rock**. She led an ordered life, writing stories, novels, and critical essays, traveling regularly, and maintaining valued friendships among them with neighbors from her childhood, as well as with famous writers and musicians. She was honored for her writings, receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for **One of Ours**, a novel about a soldier in World War I.

Cather became a strong individual, despite all the sufferings. She discovered her literary talent at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and began to use it immediately. Cather strove to express herself in an environment where self expression outside of set narrow limitations was considered eccentric and an active mind for a woman was unthinkable. During her life time she became increasingly alienated from the materialism of modern life and wrote of alternative visions in the American Southwest and of the past. For many women in the nineteenth century writing novels was just one of the things they did. For Willa Cather, writing was her life.

Willa Cather came to Nebraska in 1883 after a year the family moved to Red Cloud. As a child she was surrounded by older women- the pioneering immigrant settlers from Scandanvia, Russia, Germany, France, and Bohemia. "What was unique about the immigrant settlers for Cather was that they *were* the past. The old women were not words, or tales, or the pages of a book. They came, living, from the Old World, and turned the stories into reality."² She used to listen to the stories of their homeland. After eighteen months her family moved to a small farm house in Red Cloud. Soon Cather

developed a fierce passion for the land which has remained at the core of her writing. This childhood environment influenced Cather's life as an artist as discussed earlier. It oriented her towards the land, the immigrants and Europe, in short towards the essence of American pioneer experience. Many of the experiences and people played significant roles in her novels.

Cather was one of the few writers to depict the community of new immigrants in a positive manner at a time when most Americans viewed these new comers with fear and suspicion. She could see that 'Old World' values were fading away and so she had a special attachment to and appreciation for this transplanted community. She was fascinated by immigrants' speech, customs, and the way of living. The immigrant women spoke a different language, they wore strange garments: even their smell was different-exotic. She had respect for European traditions and culture. The old hands that Willa saw kneading dough represented generations of technique. They were patient hands, performing everyday tasks from a long tradition of care and love. She developed not only sympathy for the struggling immigrant women but the empathy. Sometimes this very tradition became the downfall of the immigrants, when they tried to farm a new land with old techniques. Failure, starvation, even death usually followed for those who could not adapt even partially, such as the suicide of Francis Sadilek, alias 'Papa Shimerda' of **My Ántonia**. Thus she developed attachment for these women for their heroic endurance and fortitude as they finally triumphed over the initially unyielding soil. Cather celebrated their success in some of her fiction notably in **O Pioneers!** and **My Ántonia**.

Cather has expressed her views on art from time to time in interviews. She compared writer to the musician, writing being to the author what music is to the

violinist. According to her life, in itself is a great task and to live it well or decently is an art. She believed that artist should enjoy liberty. She felt an art to be universal must be true and not an imaginary. She had no faith for the schools which offered the courses in writing. She believed that religion and art spring from the same root therefore they are close kin³

Her life as a writer is so important to her that she writes about the artistic process of writing. Consequently, she develops a philosophy to explain how one gains entry into the kingdom of Art. Cather's artistic credo is worth noting: "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named- that one might say is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, which gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself." Cather was a dedicated artist and deeply moral. Because of this, her criticism of moral values has stretched into realm of aesthetics, just as her sense of beauty.⁴

Cather owed a great deal to the women who brought her up her own ruthless drive towards independence, her ambition, her resilience and adventures, her competence in organizing the shape of her life, her great capacity for work, her impatience with the illness she suffered in later years. It is possible to study Cather's work from a feministic point of view. Her subject matter and her main characters as well as her own emotional life almost seem to invite such an approach. It is also important to remember that Cather did not consider herself a feminist writer. Often she dismissed women writers as overly sentimental and incapable of writing poetry. Willa Cather is neither antifeminist nor a staunch supporter of feminism. However she has empathy for women. Cather's

immigrant novels under study have brought her immense popularity as an important writer in American literature. I have examined in the foregoing chapters of Cather's novels **O Pioneers!** **My Ántonia**, **The Song of the Lark** and **Lucy Gayheart** in the light of the definition of the immigrant fiction given by William Q. Bohelhover as mentioned in the first chapter. It is a journey of an immigrant protagonist through an alien culture of America with its trials and agonies. All the protagonists in her immigrant novels are women. Cather frequently used women pioneers as representative heroic figures. Informing her creation of these icons was her faith in the cultural values revealed in their struggles, a heritage transmitted to their female descendants.

Cather clusters immigrant women to reflect her experience with Scandinavian and Bohemian immigrants in Nebraska. Willa Cather's first major attempt to bring life and breath to frontier women through literature embodied itself in **O Pioneers!** This novel, published in 1913, follows the life of a family settling on the land of the American West. Cather weaves the tale of the Bergsons, a Swedish family, and details the life and times of the members of this small clan. Her main focus lies on the character Alexandra Bergson, and her surprising role as head of the family. Moreover, Cather expresses both the changing roles of women and the true connection experienced between the frontier women and the land.

Alexandra is given charge of the family when her father, John Bergson, succumbs to his battle with death. Alexandra is the eldest child out of the four children and is chosen to accept the role of head of the family. Alexandra is the child chosen to take control of the Bergson's land. John Bergson, in fact, begins to recognize Alexandra's strengths at a young age. He had come to depend more and more upon her

resourcefulness and good judgment. His boys were willing enough to work. Alexandra's final promise to her dying father focuses on the responsibility bestowed upon her and the conviction in her own mind. She says, "We will never lose the land" (**O Pioneers!** 15).

In **O Pioneers!**, Willa Cather provides a deeply focused look at a frontier woman determined to belong to and work with the land. Certainly, Cather takes a brave step both in the world of reality and the world of literature by providing a female protagonist as the figure in the form of a friend, relative, or husband. Cather also chooses to portray Alexandra as a decidedly stronger character than the majority of the male characters in her novel. In fact, Cather's main female character turns to a man only when her work is seemingly done and she is prepared to retire to a less vigorous lifestyle. The love, which Alexandra holds for the land and her methods of working with the land, mirror Cather's personal love for the land of the American West. Her vivid descriptions of the land itself and the labor of those who work the land provide a means for Cather to live vicariously through her character, Alexandra.

Through the character of Alexandra Bergson, Cather makes available to the reader a woman of intense desire to prevail and an intense need to produce fruit from the land. Alexandra is headstrong, intelligent, opinionated, and yet empathetic to those around her. However, she is quite realistic concerning her status as a woman and her more inferior position in society. When asked by her father to take over the Bergson land, Alexandra realizes that life for her will not simply be a series of menial tasks or "traditional" jobs for women of that period. Instead, she will have to defy her brothers who often think her decisions are incorrect and a society that does not consider women on equal footing with men, yet she proceeds with passionate determination.

Towards the middle of the novel, Alexandra's brothers severely question her judgment and the topic of Alexandra's gender comes into play at this time. Lou Bergson, one of Alexandra's brothers, questions her with these words. "This is what comes of letting a woman meddle in business," he said bitterly. "We ought to have taken things in our hands years ago. But she liked to run things, and we humored her. We thought you had good sense, Alexandra. We never thought you'd do anything foolish" (**O Pioneers!** 98). Further on in the dialogue, her brothers accuse her of not deserving the land due to her gender: "the property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, because they are held responsible, and because they do the work" (98). These hurtful words sting Alexandra's pride and cause her to virtually disown her brothers for their greedy and hasty words. Though the circumstances against Alexandra are great in this novel, she does indeed earn recognition at the end, as said by her friend, Carl Lindstrum, "You belong to the land ... as you have always said. Now more than ever" (179). Alexandra has succeeded on the Nebraska land due to her fervent determination and her ability to work and to appreciate the land.

Taking a closer look at *Ántonia* Shimerda herself, the internal and physical strength she possessed are abundantly clear as well as her desire to ultimately become a mother of a family and the frontier itself. She comes to the frontier not only as a young girl, but also as an immigrant to the United States. She is expected to take a principal role in the family regardless of her gender or age. In fact, Jim Burden notices this and comments, "Much as I liked *Ántonia*, I hated a superior tone that she sometimes took with me. She was four years older than I to be sure, and had seen more of the world, but I was a boy and she was a girl, and I resented her protecting manner" (**My *Ántonia*** 30).

Specifically when her father dies, *Ántonia* is hired out to other farms to assist in the farm work. Cather writes, “Mrs. Shimerda then drove the second cultivator, she and *Ántonia* worked in the fields all day did the chores at night” (85). *Ántonia*’s life did not consist only of housework and caring for her younger siblings.

When Jim visits *Ántonia* many years later, her achievements are tangible, in the forms of her children and the amount of land she owns. He barely recognizes her upon first glance, but then he realizes that “She was there, in the full vigour of her personality, battered but not diminished, looking at me ...” (*My Ántonia* 214). Through *Ántonia*, Willa Cather exemplifies the ability of women to succeed on the frontier despite huge disadvantages as both a woman and an immigrant. Through her ability to work with the land, *Ántonia* survives and, in many ways, replicates images of historical American frontier woman.

By looking specifically at the relationship between the characters of Alexandra Bergson and *Ántonia* Shimerda and the land, further conclusions can be drawn about this essential partnership. Both of these women worked alongside the land, and their stories are somewhat replicated in other frontier women who also had to learn how to deal with the inconsistencies of the prairie land and the often unfortunate circumstances which arose on a daily basis. *Ántonia* Shimerda also acquires an authoritative role of caring for her family, though not as a direct claim to the headship of the family. Her employment spans farming in the field to housekeeping in the ever-growing Nebraska town life. *Ántonia* constantly works for her family, pushing herself to great limits to establish a life for her mother, sisters, and brothers. When Jim asks her if she would like to go to school in order to improve her English, she responds, “I ain’t got no time to learn. I can work

like mans now. My mother can't say no more how Ambrosh do all and nobody to help him. I can work as much as him. School is all right for little boys. I help make this land one good farm" (*My Ántonia* 80).

Cather sees Ántonia's European culture as something richer and superior to the American culture of materiality and holds the two civilizations up against each other. Ántonia represents a "counter culture in the west.... poverty rather than riches, family rather than town society, and spiritual rather than material prosperity."⁵ Ántonia represents immigrant struggles with a foreign land and tongue, the restraints on women of the time with which Cather was very much concerned, the more general desires for love, family, and companionship, and the great capacity forbearance that marked the earliest settlers on the frontier. Willa Cather focuses on 'human condition in the portrayal of Ántonia. As rightly perceived by Blanche H. Gelfant: "Ántonia Shimerda with the universal physical and spiritual drives have permitted humanity to flourish."⁶

The Song of the Lark is a story of the emergence of the artist; most of its major themes are related to issues of identity. Cather believed that every artist had to "make himself born." **The Song of the Lark** may be seen as the struggle to give birth to the artistic itself. **The Song of the Lark** is the story of a young Swedish immigrant girl who comes of age in a pioneer western town, maturing through several stages of awakening into a woman and later becomes a famous singer. The story is set in Moonstone, Colarado, a small Western town that resembles Cather's own hometown an exact replica of Red Cloud, Nebraska where Cather spent her youth. Much of Thea's story concerns

her struggle to bring the artist, within her to life. It would mean hard work, discipline and perseverance and passion.

A major theme of **The Song of the Lark** is the power of the dream as something that must be carefully guarded and protected if it is to be realized. From the opening pages of the novel, Cather presents her heroine, Thea Kronborg. Thea's childhood friend, Doctor Archie, himself destined to become a tycoon by the novel's end, recognizes her potential, her "cryptic promise" (9). Thea, discovering her passionate desire to pursue a dream to make something of herself, quickly begins to associate this dream with art. After her music teacher guesses her ambition to sing, Thea senses a secret between them: "Together they had lifted a lid, pulled out a drawer and looked at something. They hid it away and never spoke of what they had seen; but neither of them forgot it" (70).

Protecting this dream requires fierce self-confidence as well as a determination to renounce the compromises demanded by one's family or community. Indeed, the community may not recognize the power of the dream. Thea is compared with the conventionally pretty and insipid "Lily Fisher," whom the community of Moonstone adores and looks like pictures of children advertising boxes of soap. Thea's gift, in contrast, goes unrecognized, but neither will it be compromised or commercialized for mass consumption. As Willa Cather stresses in the preface to her book, Thea is a "talented young girl fighting her way" to the top. It sometimes seems that men appear like magic to "liberate her from commonness." Thea embodies the quality of "desire and glorious striving of human art!" The experience of childhood positively contributes to the development of her aesthetic sense.

The others against whom Thea defines herself as a young girl and ambitious artist are the failed artists of her hometown. For example, her German music teacher, Herr Wunsch, is a passionate but dissolute, washed up musician who drowns his awareness of his own failure in alcohol. Wunsch is both excited and ashamed when he recognizes Thea's potential, since it drives home to him an awareness of his own bad faith and his inability to realize his artistic dream. Similarly, there is a Spanish Johnny, who is carried away by the intoxication of performance and loses himself in drunken escapades. Cather writes that his "talents were his undoing" (38). The capacity for a powerful emotional response to art is valued regardless of the cost of this ecstasy. These failed dreamers are Thea's early heroes who form an alternative set of values of Moonstone's dull conformity. But Thea is different. What they have lost, and what Thea stands to gain, is the emergence of an artistic identity that offers her the expectation of wholeness.

Thea Kronborg whose first name means "gift of God" and surname means "crown fortress" is presented as a woman both blessed and isolated by her divine gift. She is completely obsessed with the intellectual and physical rewards of her craft. She grieves at the conflict between personal and professional needs. Cather always maintained that the great artist must be what people call 'selfish'; she must always keep others from cluttering up the path on which she drives herself forward. Thea like Alexandra Bergson, before her and Antonia Shimerda ' later is that best sort of second generation American who leaves or retains some of the intellectual and artistic tradition of Europe, without losing the American freshness and without falling into the common trap of a commercial and limited 'practicality'. These are all success stories of sorts and all reflect a very American groping toward a secure identity.

In writing **Lucy Gayheart** Cather returned imaginatively to the Nebraska home she had lost in her life and to memories of a youth now far behind her. The central character is based upon two girls she had met while leaving there. Sadie Becker in *Red Cloud* was known for her skating, for her vivacious manner and her romance with a local boy. The second model Miss Gayhardt was from a later period whom she met in a dance at a small town, who was a teacher in a remote village. Cather wrote this novel as she was nearing the end of her long career. The model presents several hackneyed versions of Lucy's love affair; involves her in a variety of eternal triangles, and places her in two obviously formulaic plots. In one, Lucy finds and loses a lover, and in the other, the epilogue's sub plot, she is lost and miraculously recovered. The characters' versions of these plots include Harry's self-serving story of a young girl's infatuation, Fairy Blair's "story" of her suicide, Pauline's of her jilting, and the townspeople's whispers of her desertion by the man who had "got her in trouble."

In some aspects this novel is the reminiscent of **The Song of the Lark**. Like Thea the protagonist of **Lucy Gayheart** is a small town girl who loves to study music but while Thea's desire for artistic creation itself, Lucy finds the embodiment of her desire in the singer Clement Sebastian. There are several suggestions that Lucy possesses at least the vestiges of the artist self, and in fact, Lucy and Thea share many of the same characteristics with regard to artistic sensitivity. Both possess the "quivering nerve" and inner "vibrating" and a degree of expressiveness as powerful at moments as a machine.

It is a sort of awakening novel. Unlike Chopin's novel, in which the heroine awakens to a sexual passion that dramatizes the insufficiency of her life, Cather's novel begins by teaching her heroine a lesson about what "the passion of love" can and cannot

fulfill in a life. Only when Lucy Gayheart finally understands and accepts what the narrative argues is the insufficiency of love does she “awaken”- into death.⁷ Both of these schemes involve the protagonists learning a lesson of sorts. The lesson Lucy learns is one about the proper expectations for and limits of her own passion. She never once conceives the desire to be an artist, however aspires throughout the novel to be nothing more than Clement’s apprentice, or his accompanist and spiritually as devotee to what art offers through him. Her tragedy is that she has the desire, but not the will or talent for an artistic career. Cather in **Lucy Gayheart** has written a novel about a limited and potentially tragic heroine who awakens to, but does not master, “the art of living.”

Willa Cather’s concept of the woman artist was affected in another way by the supposedly anomalous position of the woman artist: while she believed that a woman had to forego the typical life of women if she did not want her art to suffer, Cather presents us with an image of the relationship between the woman artist and her genius that is fundamentally “feminine” and so merges the woman and the artist on another plane.⁸ I agree with J. Susan Rosowski that Lucy Gayheart fits Cather’s early descriptions of women distinguished by an ability to love rather than by drive and ambition, for she is “too kind” to live the harsh life of an artist.⁹

Cather peopled her fiction with individuals and immigrant groups who had not been written about before. Her characters are individualized, intriguing and true-to-life. Sensitive to the mannerism and phrases of the people who inhabited her spaces, Cather brought individual and American regions to life through her loving portrayal of it. She was captivated by the customs and languages of the diverse immigrant population of Webster county. She felt a particular kinship with the older immigrant women and spent

countless hours visiting them and listening to their stories. They are simple primeval, with a strain of hardness and heroism. This exposure to Old World culture figures heavily within Cather's writing and choice of characters. Cather once remarked that the city robbed man of his roots, heritage and continuity of feeling with the earth and mankind. The land of the Nebraskan country symbolized permanence, freedom of spirit, timelessness and a sense of endurance. She viewed earth and nature as the personal, primeval force that enriched and sustained life and creativity. The pioneers passed on their old customs, culture and ways of life that enriched the life and the new way of life. The frontier gave the immigrants and pioneers creative individualism, a free will and an opportunity to develop the pioneer spirit.

Cather appreciates women who choose to serve their husband and children and also as a woman who follows her career. She believes that even after marriages "Nightingales seldom sing." Women must choose love or music. Cather presents increasingly restrictive social and economic circumstances surrounding her female characters at the same time giving them increasingly personal and specific strength to defy apparent restrictions placed upon them. Cather created strong female characters with the courage and vision to face all obstacles in their difficult lives.

Struggling with the growing awareness of her sexual nature and wishing desperately to be accepted by the male literary establishment Cather denigrated women artist in her writing. All the immigrant women characters in the novels **O Pioneers!** **My Ántonia**, **The Song of the Lark** and **Lucy Gayheart** exhibit the following qualities: Alexandra is an embodiment of dedication, vitality, and has the power to love the land. Pioneer values, such as strength, courage, hard work, self-reliance, and the refusal to

submit to adversity as exemplified by *Ántonia*, discipline, almost boundless satisfaction, genuineness determination as shown by *Thea*; while in depicting *Lucy Gayheart* her classic symptoms of powerlessness, passivity, victimization, subordination and psychic annihilation are portrayed. We get the affirmative portraits of women in *Alexandra Bergson*, *Thea Kronborg* and *Ántonia Shimerda*. Cather greatly admired the pioneers who struggled to cope with the wilderness and to make a better life for themselves and their families. These pioneers were family oriented and wanted nothing but the best possible for their families. Cather focuses on depicting ethnic values as discussed above of the different cultures of the various immigrants who came to Nebraska in the late nineteenth century America.

Cather's favorite theme persists through out: the conflict of the superior individual with an unworthy society with the lure of greed and materialism. Her view is that the pioneers in general were folk largely endowed with creative power and imagination. These pioneers worked a true labour of love. Cather is most often remembered as a chronicle of the pioneer American West much like the women, artist and immigrants she depicted in her fiction. Critics note that the themes of her work are intertwined with the universal story of the rise of civilization in history, the dramas of the immigrants in a New World, and views of personal involvement with art. Cather's fiction is characterized by a strong sense of place, the subtle presentation of human relationships. When the country was struggling to assimilate waves of foreign newcomers, the public of 1918 welcomed Cather's celebration of a Bohemian immigrant girl. *Ántonia's* struggle condensed the nation's predicament, and her success in overcoming poverty and exile expressed America's hope for the future.¹⁰

The depiction of these immigrant women reveals that Willa Cather had much admiration for Europe and its culture. Europe, stood for in Willa Cather's system of values, Europe is meant to symbolize a civilized society, one in which intelligence is appreciated to the extent that a man can make a career for himself as contrasted with the back breaking manual labor necessary to make a career on the Divide.¹¹ It is a society which provides outlets for the satisfaction of cultural needs such as the male chorus to which John Bergson belonged, and it encourages the amenities and rituals of civilized life, such as the dress suits which the sinners have to wear when giving a performance. Life in Europe is seen as pleasant as and far more stimulating than in the Middle West; it is more varied and contains pleasures which Nebraska never dreamed of. In brief, the image of Europe represents civilized sensibility, a heightened enjoyment of life, and a response to art, all three of which Willa Cather sees as painfully lacking on the Divide.

In spite of all its manifold virtues, however, Europe for Willa Cather lacked one thing which frontier Nebraska had and that one thing was of the highest importance to her. She supposed that in Nebraska no restrictions were placed in the development of superior people; that America was par excellence the land of the creative will. On the frontier, she believed, there was freedom to develop as one pleased; to follow one's career or bent without hindrance from anybody. This accounts for her all-important choice of the immigrant as her protagonist in the prairie novels, rather than a pioneer of Native American stock. Cather regarded the immigrant as having at his best, all the civilized sensibility of the European together with the freedom of action of the American. He is the cream of two continents and combines the best features of both Old World and New. Cather approached her characters with deep respect for what they had endured and

accomplished. Having great insight into women psyche Cather expressed what she saw in these immigrants and that she presumably wanted the rest of the nation to value, if not to imitate.

Critics like Joseph R. Urgo has dismissed Willa Cather's work as regional writer¹² and Ann M. Begley excluded her from the mainstream of American fiction.¹³ I don't agree with these views. Her works posses much more than local colour. These pioneers stood for spiritual and moral values maintaining their personal integrity within an unworthy society. The moral thrust of Willa Cather's art, her concern with pioneers and artists as symbolic figures represents the unending human quest for beauty and truth and places her among the number of the true spiritual pioneers of all ages whose life or works other men shall continue to find inspiration. I consider Willa Cather rose above women of her times in thought and creativity and has taken herself out of the rank of regional writers and given us something we can fairly class with the modern literary art.

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