SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE CHARACTERS

IN WILLA CATHER'S NOVELS

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THESIS

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By

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis, as the title indicates, is to examine and evaluate the various influences that have helped to make the characters in the works of Miss Cather what they are. Her characters are mainly persons with creative ability, strong, vigorous, and ambitious. Some of them, the pioneers, are strangers in a new land, and have to make their lives over to fit an entirely new environment, while others are engaged in an intensive development of their natural talents in order to achieve success as artists. An attempt has been made to show the effects of outside influences on this group of people, and to study the reactions displayed by them in response to emotional complications.

In reading for this study, I have, with a few exceptions, been obliged to use popular editions of Miss Cather's work, since no collected edition has been available.

I have read all biographical and critical material that has been procurable. It has been impossible to examine in detail all the many interesting aspects of this subject. I have, therefore, been content to discuss only those influences which have been most powerful in shaping the individual character.

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CHAPTER I

A PEEP INTO THE AUTHOR'S LIFE

Willa Cather, who has become a recognized American novelist of the present day, was born on December 7, 1876, near Winchester, Virginia.[1] Her father, Charles Fectigue Cather, was of Irish descent. Both her mother's people, the Boaks, and her father's people had been settled in Virginia for a long time.[2] The little girl was not permitted to grow into womanhood, however, in this setting. When she reached the age of nine, her father moved his family from the well-ordered environment offered by the genteel atmosphere of the aristocratic state of Virginia to a ranch on the rolling, sparsely-settled prairies of Nebraska, near the little town of Red Cloud.[3]

Here an entirely new style of living had to be adopted. Civilization was still young in the state of Nebraska, and adventures beckoned on every hand. The rich grazing lands offering inducement to the cattlemen of the South had not yet been converted into farming land. The mixture of nationalities, Bohemians, Scandinavians, Russians, Germans, and French,

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[1]Winifred and Frances Kirkland, Girls Who Became Writers, p. 105.

[2]Rene Rapin, Willa Cather, p. 8.

[3]Ibid.

became interesting neighbors for the little girl from Virginia, and she spent many happy hours riding her little pony from one pioneer home to the other scattered over the prairie, as she brought them the mail. This contact gave Willa Cather an enviable opportunity to hear the interesting stories these settlers had to tell about their strange experiences in life, and helped her to obtain a background in her memory at that impressionable age which made it possible for her to give back to the world in her writings living recollections instead of over-worked stories of imagination. She did not have to write down these experiences to remember them; they were part of her life, and later became convenient and useful material for her literary ventures. This new environment was intensely interesting to the child because it seemed dramatic. A bond of sympathy sprang up between her and the struggling, hard-working, misunderstood immigrants. Willa Cather says that she "used to ride home in the most unreasonable state of excitement feeling as if she 'had actually got inside another person's skin,'"[4] after calling on some of her foreign friends. The aliveness of this new land grew upon Miss Cather until she felt herself a part of it. Although the novelist has never seen fit to give to the reading public many facts concerning the early years of her life, she has made parts of some of her books strongly autobiographical. In My Antonia, O Pioneers,

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[4] Ibid.

and The Song of the Lark there is much of the life of the author.

Lack of schools, a problem which presents itself in every new country, also faced this group of early settlers. In some of the foreign homes, this was probably even more serious than it was in the home of this Virginia family. There were homes in which no member of the household could read or write the language of their newly-found land. Willa Cather describes just such a situation in her book, My Antonia, in the home of the Bohemian family, the Shimerdas. Little Jim Burden became the private tutor of the younger members of the family.[5] Willa Cather's parents pondered over the educational problem confronting them. Although Nature and the foreign settlers were teaching their daughter much, there were some things she could not get through these sources. She heard many languages, but there must be some way to learn her own tongue correctly. This was made possible through Miss Cather's grandmothers, who taught her how to read the old English classics. She also learned to read Latin with her grandmothers and with the help of an old neighbor. She particularly enjoyed reading Virgil.[6] When little Willa reached high school age, the family moved into the town of Red Cloud, where high school privileges were available.[7]

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[5]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 42.

[6]Dilly Tante, editor, Living Authors, p. 66.

[7]Winifred and Frances Kirkland, Girls Who Became Writers, p. 105.

After completing public school, Miss Cather entered the University of Nebraska. While studying in the University, she helped to defray her expenses by doing newspaper work. Several of her early attempts to give the story of her foreign neighbors to the reading public are to be found in the files of the college magazines.[8] Being dissatisfied with these emotional stories, the young author promised herself that she would refrain from further attempts at portraying her own country and people, and successfully kept that promise from the time of her graduation from the University, 1895, until the publication of her first original book, O Pioneers, in 1913, eighteen long years.

Miss Cather's interests at the time of her graduation led her to seek for work in a place that would offer her greater cultural opportunities. Music was one of her principal pleasures. Since she had friends in Pittsburg, she succeeded in getting herself appointed telegraph editor and dramatic critic of the Daily Leader.[9] She remained in this position until 1901, when she was appointed head of the English department of the Allegheny High School.[10] It was while she was serving in this capacity that she began writing for publication. Her first contributions were in the form of poems which were published in various magazines. Later these poems were collected and published in book

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[8]Rene Rapin, Willa Cather, p. 11.

[9]Dilly Tante, Living Authors, p. 67.

[10]Ibid.

form as April Twilights (1903).[11] This book was published when poetry in America was considered a parlor accomplishment. It was reprinted twenty years later with several additions, but was still a slender book in both size and content.[12] Her poetry was mainly of homely sentiment, classical echoes with allusions to the early writers, reminiscences of travel, and laments for lost loves and lost youth. Only a few of her poems had any prairie flavor in them.

She had also been writing short stories for publication. A number of these short stories were later collected and published under the title Troll Garden (1905).[13] It was after S. S. McClure, the famous publisher, had read this book of short stories that he sent Miss Cather a telegram offering her an editorship on the McClure's. She was made managing editor there in 1908 and continued as such until 1912.[14]

Miss Cather had thought seriously before she made up her mind to discontinue her work as a teacher in order to take up the editorship offered her by McClure. Her new position gave her much opportunity for travel both abroad and in the southwestern part of the United States, but it did not offer her as much time as she wished for writing in which she could give

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Percy H. Boynton, "Willa Cather," English Journal, XIII (1926), 373-80.

[13] Winifred and Frances Kirkland, Girls Who Became Writers, p. 106.

[14] Ibid.

to the world something of what she knew and felt concerning her beloved Southwest. She was not satisfied abroad. The sight of the grain fields in France brought on a nostalgia that could not be overcome by anything less than a return to the old prairie section. Every vacation brought a renewed longing to be back at the old haunts. This feeling of homesickness for the scenes of her youth led her to give up the editorship of McClure's and to take up writing. In this way she was able to relive her youthful experiences as she reproduced them in her novels. It is because of her deep and sympathetic understanding of and love for that about which she wrote that she has been able to produce her great novels. She made it a rule not to write unless there was something in her. She generally revised and reviewed carefully, making two copies before turning in her final draft. Her chief aim was "to make things real ... to make them just as they are."[15] She liked to work during the morning hours and to rest and sleep in the evenings. None of her books went to the publisher before she had done her best. At first she was afraid that the public would not like her characters if they were not touched up somewhat. She did add some finishing strokes to some of them, but not to such an extent that they became unreal.

Miss Cather's first novel, Alexander's Masquerade, appeared in McClure's in 1912, one year after she had discontinued

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[15]Ibid., p. 109.

her editorial work. A short time later it was published in book form as Alexander's Bridge.[16] The following year (1913) her first full-length, original novel, O Pioneers, appeared.[17] Several other full-length novels followed. Many of her short stories showed her marked interest in young artists, especially musicians. Probably the author's personal interest in the development of an art led her to a close and sympathetic understanding of her struggling artist characters. She was able to understand characters who were torn between two allegiances or conflicting interests. She had herself probably had similar experiences.

Miss Cather had not turned out many publications before the superior quality of her work began to receive recognition. An article in the New York Times of February 24, 1931, tells of her being selected as one of the nation's twelve greatest women because of her work as a novelist. Mention had formerly been made of her Pulitzer Prize award for her novelette, A Lost Lady.[18] In the New York Times of December 20, 1930, Sinclair Lewis is cited as having made the remark at Gothenburg, Sweden, on December 19, 1930, while discussing the American criticism of his Nobel Prize award for literature, that he agreed with Van Dyke that the Nobel committee should have

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[16]Rene Rapin, Willa Cather, p. 14.

[17]Ibid.

[18]"Nobel Prize for Literature," New York Times, November 6, 1930, p. 24.

awarded the prize to Willa Cather. On November 15, 1930, she received the William Dean Howells medal for her writing of Death Comes for the Archbishop, the "most distinguished work in American fiction published during the last five years."[19] On June 16, 1931, Princeton University granted to Miss Cather its first degree to a woman.[20] In 1932, her Shadows on the Rock was selected as one of the three books chosen for the Prix Femina Americain.[21] This distinction carried no money award, but was the recognition by French literary experts of the quality of literary women artists and their works. In 1933, at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, President William A. Neilson, at the fifty-fifth commencement exercises at that place, conferred on Miss Cather, "unsurpassed among contemporary authors in her mastery of English prose, pure, firm, and melodious," the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.[22]

An honor of an entirely different nature was bestowed upon Miss Cather in 1933, when it was revealed by Miss Rebecca West that Miss Emma Goldman and Miss Cather had been declared by a gathering of distinguished epicures and gourmets as two

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[19]"Speech in America Defended by Arliss," New York Times, November 15, 1930, p. 16.

[20]"Miss Cather Wins Ovation," New York Times, June 17, 1931, p. 29.

[21]"Three Books Picked for Prix Femina," New York Times, May 18, 1932, p. 19.

[22]"Willa Cather Is Honored," New York Times, June 20, 1933, p. 12.

of the world's best cooks.[23]

This recognized American author's works are also read in foreign lands. Her complete works have been translated into the Swedish language, and many of them into the French and the Czech languages.[24]

Miss Cather's writings are often classified into three distinct groups, the first, comprising O Pioneers, The Song of the Lark, and My Antonia, which portray a period of affirmation of life. The stories are of the fresh and open world of women enroute to their proper destinies.[25] They, Alexandria, Thea, and Antonia, are women of strength and love of life. The second part presents a feeling of unrest, maladjustment, and frustration in the books One of Ours, A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and My Mortal Enemy.[26] This material is not as successfully handled by the author as that which deals strictly with characters of her own prairie land and of her own intimate acquaintance. When she gets into the problems of the ever-changing, modern world, she loses some of her power. She does not seem especially to like the problems tending toward the future, but enjoys looking back over the

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[23]"Emma Goldman Hailed as Equal of Willa Cather as 'Best Cook,'" New York Times, March 19, 1933, p. 2.

[24]Dilly Tante, Living Authors, p. 67.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Louis Kronenberger, "Willa Cather," The Bookman, LXXIV (1931), pp. 134-40.

past, recreating out of the past experiences in her memory. She laments the passing of that pioneer period of ideals and enthusiasm.

In the third period, the author retreats to where life does not figure at all, as in Death Comes for the Archbishop, which is classed by some critics as a group of beautiful and colorful frescoes. The same is also true of Shadows on the Rock, with its spirit of tranquility and its serene, idyllic, religious atmosphere. Her novels are said by Whitman to be a series of short stories tied together by a central character or scene.[27] Mr. Whitman refers to several of her novels as long short stories.

It is interesting to note the author's reactions to life in the portrayal of her characters. There seems to be in her a little of that "characteristic" woman of the Southwest, whose hospitable, friendly smile and cordial greeting accentuates the humor in her fine blue eyes.[28] There is some of that spirit of the Puritan idealist who lamented the replacing of the old order by the new, but there is also that quality of faith, grit, determination and unremitting labor which help to promote a standard of living that tends toward satisfaction, literary excellence, and a knowledge and appreciation for those cultural influences which help to make life complete.

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[27]William Whitman, "Eminence Comes for Miss Cather," Independent, CIXX (1927), p. 283.

[28]W. Tittle, "Glimpses of Interesting Americans," Century, CX (1925), pp. 308-13.

CHAPTER II

AMONG HER PIONEERS

Willa Cather understood, sympathized with, and loved her pioneers. She knew them because she had been surrounded by them while she was young and curious about the unusual things in the world about her. Many of these pioneers were foreigners who helped to make up a part of the material with which the world had surrounded her. She was one of the few writers of the day who were able to "interpret comprehensively" such materials.[1] One of her early short stories, "The Bohemian Girl," shows her interest in the foreign people.[2] The story depicts a clash between the pretty, gay Clara Vavrika and her heavy, politically-ambitious, Norwegian husband. Money and political prestige meant nothing in the life of the Bohemian girl. She desired life in its reality, with its music, its dancing, its modern attractions. It was plain that Clara's husband would never understand. She could solve her problem only one way, by going away with her husband's brother, who understood.

But Miss Cather has given us something besides this bit of entertaining story. She has given us a picture of those

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[1]Lloyd Morris, "Willa Cather," North American Review, CCIXX (1924), p. 652.

[2]Willa Cather, "The Bohemian Girl," McClure's Magazine, XXXIX (1912), pp. 420-43.

sturdy pioneer women who had left their duties for an evening's entertainment in the form of good food and refreshing drinks, climaxed by dancing to the music they loved. These women were capable, fearless people who had come out to conquer nature's obstacles and to convert the natural resources into products useful to mankind. There was no doubt as to their ability to accomplish their task. They were happy with their lot in life, and had no desire to substitute play for their love for work. "Old Lady" Ericson[3] was a powerful example of this type. She was not looking forward to retirement, but she was gloriously happy in work well done, and in children who were able to continue her work as a pioneer. It was not surprising that she should be unable to understand her musical daughter-in-law who was too proud to have children. Mrs. Ericson detested Clara's irresponsible way of living. The two people were living examples of the day's problem, the new generation replacing the old pioneer.

After a lapse of several years, Miss Cather returned to the short story form for portraying her pioneers in her book, Obscure Destinies. The first story in the group, "Neighbor Rosicky,"[4] brings us face to face with a kind and contented Bohemian who has seen both sides of life during his residence in London, in New York, and on the Nebraska prairie. It was

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[3]Ibid., p. 422.

[4]Willa Cather, Obscure Destinies, pp. 3-71.

in the great open spaces, however, that he was able to find peace and happiness.

Rosicky had been fortunate in the choice of a helpmeet. Mary had been an "awful hard worker," [5] as well as an exemplary companion and a model mother to his children. The two had reared a family of five healthy, happy boys and one daughter. Mary was one of those home-loving, capable women who felt genuine pleasure in being able to do a good turn for a fellow-man. Her hospitable attitude could make an unexpected guest at her bountifully-laden table feel not only welcome, but actually wanted.[6]

The contented atmosphere pervading the Rosicky home was not bred from the springs of wealth. Although the entire family was industrious, each one was free and easy, capable of using good judgment, but not to be classed as a pusher.[7] There were no debts, and the family was comfortable. Probably it was well to be satisfied that way, as it was better to enjoy one's life than to put it in the bank.[8]

The serious problem in the Rosicky household at the time was the failing strength of Mr. Rosicky. It was difficult for an active man of his eager, energetic type to rest from work which did not seem taxing, especially when he was feeling

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[5] Willa Cather, Obscure Destinies, p. 6.

[6] Ibid., p. 10.

[7] Ibid., p. 15.

[8] Ibid.

well. His farm, with its many tasks, was his very life. To him it symbolized freedom: liberation from crowded apartment houses, where discontented people and dirty washings greeted the laborer as he returned from the day's hard grind.[9]

It gave Rosicky a feeling of peace to know that he would never have to go far away from his farm. The little graveyard was located on his farm, near the road. It was a "snug and homelike" spot where the red grass grew tall, a place in which he could lie among friends, people who understood him.[10] This place did not seem death-like and cold as city cemeteries did. It was indeed a fitting resting place for a man who "had always longed for the open country."[11]

Life did not overcome Rosicky; neither did death. He had completed his life's work. He had conquered the prairie; had fathered a family in the true sense of the word, and had given courage to the growing generation through his own "beautiful life."[12]

These short stories were really miniature portraits of what she later produced in some of her full-length novels. The first of this group in which more complete pictures of the pioneering foreigners were given was O Pioneers (1913).[13] Alexandra Bergson, the heroine of the book, came from one of the early pioneering families that had braved the dangers of

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[9] Ibid., p. 41.

[10] Ibid., p. 19.

[11] Ibid., p. 71.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Percy H. Boynton, "Willa Cather," English Journal, XIII (1924), p. 373.

the untamed Nebraska prairies to establish a comfortable home on the unbroken plains. Her father, John Bergson, a thrifty Swedish farmer with an ambition to become a landowner, had spent eleven years on the Divide getting in and working himself out of debt.[14] His wife, who was brought "to the end of the earth"[15] by her husband against her own will, had worked hard to reconstruct her old life in this new environment. She did not have the same deep-rooted love for the land that Alexandra and her father felt. It was for that reason that John Bergson, on his death bed, extracted a promise from Alexandra that she would keep the family together on the land.[16]

Alexandra had learned to shoulder responsibility early in life, and she was equal to the task before her. The affairs of the family prospered under her management for the first three years following Bergson's death, but her real struggle came when the years of drouth and discouragement settled upon the struggling group of inhabitants, when strong spirits of much older people than she were crushed by the utter hopelessness which settled upon that section. The boys chafed under their sister's relentless determination to hold on to their land, and if possible, to acquire more.[17] The family environment was not made more cheerful by Mrs. Bergson's

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[14]Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 21.

[15]Ibid., p. 30.

[16]Ibid., p. 26.

[17]Ibid., p. 57.

usual deluge of tears after one of their family discussions.[18] It was only through Alexandra's unswerving perseverance and sensible management of man and land that she was able to survive her neighbors, and to gain by their losses.

After sixteen years of responsibility and struggle, there was little apparent change in Alexandra.

> Her figure is fuller, and she has more color. She seems sunnier and more vigorous than she did as a young girl. But she still has the same calmness and deliberation of manner, the same clear eyes, and she still wears her hair in two braids wound round her head . . . and her skin is of such smoothness and whiteness as none but Swedish women ever possess; skin with the freshness of the snow itself.[19]

She had learned many things during these years. She was now considered successful. She had established herself to such an extent that she would be missed should she go away, but that she knew that she was paying for her success is evident in her conversation with the returned friend of her childhood days, Carl Lindstrum, as she says,

> "We pay a high rent, too, though we pay differently. We grow hard and heavy here . . . our minds get stiff. If the world were no wider than my cornfields, if there were not something beside this, I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work."[20]

But she has found a certain degree of satisfaction in living and working "in a world that's so big and interesting . . . it's what goes on in the world that reconciles" her, although the

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[18] Ibid., p. 59.

[19] Ibid., p. 87.

[20] Ibid., p. 123.

sameness of the routine made her feel at times as if their lives were "like the years, all made up of weather and crops and cows."[21]

Alexandra was able to meet life's bitterest disappointments and conquer. The old pioneer qualities in her made her that way. "Her mind was slow, truthful, steadfast. She had not the least spark of cleverness," but she had a resoluteness about her "as if she knew exactly where she was going and what she was going to do next . . . her deep blue eyes were fixed intently on the distance."[22] She had that greatest of all qualities, a sympathetic understanding.

Miss Cather's next work dealing with this same type was The Song of the Lark, published in 1915. It is true that one of her other popular themes takes up much of this book, especially the last half, yet the first part contains some interesting material on the pioneer character. Mrs. Kronborg, the heroine's mother, was a striking example of the pioneering woman. She was a thrifty person who let no moments pass in idleness. There was always some handwork ready for her when she had completed the day's regular duties. During the days of convalescence following the birth of her seventh child, she "caught up" with the family mending and darning. Although she was a very busy person, she did not do her work grudgingly. She was a woman who demanded respect because she was

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 6.

"active, practical, unruffled; good-humored, but determined."[23] She was a short woman with a determined-looking head set upon her short neck. She was fair-skinned, and had a calm, unwrinkled face under a crown of braided, yellow hair. She had inherited land in Nebraska from her father. This she kept in her own name, as she had more faith in her own ability to manage it than in her husband's.[24] She believed in the business sense she had inherited from her Swedish ancestors.

There was more concern in this mother's heart for her daughter, Thea, than for any of the other children. Although Mr. Kronborg recognized that his daughter was remarkable, he did not realize, as Mrs. Kronborg did, the extent of Thea's musical talent.[25] The mother was determined that this gift must be cultivated. Again she displayed a superior foresight. She selected the one real musician in the town to instruct her daughter. It was Professor Wunsch. This old German could do more for Thea than any other person available, if he would only stay sober.[26] At this time he was living with Fritz Kohler, the town tailor, and his kind and tireless wife, who had rescued the pitiful-looking musician from a saloon attic in Moonstone.[27] The German atmosphere of his new home gave Professor Wunsch more happiness than he had ever dared to hope for until the old temptation, drink, again became stronger

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[23]Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 11.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 24.

[26]Ibid., p. 16.

[27]Ibid., p. 24.

them his power to resist.[28]

Mrs. Kronborg watched with eagerness young Thea's musical work, glowing within with a warmth of understanding, and with a pride to which she seldom gave expression. She was not one to give vent to her feelings, but when her daughter, so young and inexperienced, boarded the train for Chicago to continue her work in music, "she wiped a tear from her eye," and turning to her husband said, "She won't come back a little girl. Anyway, she's been a sweet one."[29]

Thea had received much from her big-hearted mother and her patient father. She had inherited the sterling qualities of the winning pioneers, and the best of the Swedish and Norwegian tendencies of her parents. She had learned how to stand alone and how to push forward; how to get the better things from life. Miss Cather has made us live with her foreigners, working, enjoying and conquering with them. According to Latrobe Carroll, August Brunius, who seems to be an authority on the characteristics of Swedish people, was not, as a rule, favorably impressed with the portrayal of the Swedes by people outside of their own country, but he accepted Miss Cather's presentation of them as being a work of art done with true insight.[30]

At this point Miss Cather changed the center of interest in her book from the little town of Moonstone, Colorado, to

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[28]Ibid., p. 89.

[29]Ibid., p. 156.

[30]Latrobe Carroll, "Willa Sibert Cather," Bookman, LIII (1921), p. 215.

Chicago and other musical centers, thus closing out the pioneer element.

In 1918, Miss Cather produced My Antonia, which is considered the finest thing she has yet written. Latrobe Carroll says that H. L. Mencken states it is the "best piece of fiction done by any woman in America."[31] Again Miss Cather has gone back to the vivid and responsive memories of her youth for her material. She has presented a little Bohemian girl whom she loved very much. When Miss Cather was between the ages of eight and twelve, she saw much of this big-hearted, romantic friend.[32]

This powerful story of the pioneering foreigner is cleverly presented by means of the author's individual method, indirectly. Jim Burden is permitted to relate his early experiences as they occur in his memory. This plan gives the reader a backward look, permitting him to get the feel of the "aliveness" of the pioneering period in development of the Nebraska section.

Some members of the Bohemian family of the Shimerdas were decidedly misfits in the pioneer settlement in Nebraska. The glowing stories of freedom and plenty had drawn them to this new world. Fate had placed them near Jim Burden's grandparents, who proved themselves true neighbors on many trying occasions. It was a sorry home, that hole in the ground,

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

where Jim and his grandmother presented themselves with tempting provisions, to call upon their foreign neighbors for the first time. Mrs. Shimerda nervously invited the guests into her cave, while her pretty daughter, Antonia, looked on with her warm, brown eyes shining out from the small dark-complexioned face topped with curly, brown hair.[33] The mother was one of those foreigners who are unable to make the best of what they have. She could not adjust herself to a new life. The continuous struggle for existence made her bitter and very envious of those who had better environment and prettier homes. She had come to America in hopes of finding "much money, much land for my boys, much husband for my girls."[34] Her husband had not desired to make the change. He was happy with his old friends who "made" music with him.[35] Mr. Shimerda had a look of refinement about him. He was tall and slender, with slightly stooped, thin shoulders. He wore his long, thick, iron-gray hair combed back from his forehead. His melancholy eyes were set deep back under his brows in a ruggedly-formed face which had lost its light. His white, well-shaped hands bespoke skill. He was carefully and neatly dressed.[36] There was a calm, peace-loving dignity about him that could make a person think of the aristocrats of Virginia.[37] He was not, however, one to conquer discontent, financial disappointments, and loneliness. Unlike the typical pioneer, he

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[33]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 26.

[34]Ibid., p. 102.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., p. 27.

[37]Ibid.

let life conquer him. There had been, for some time, a look of hopeless despair on the face of Mr. Shimerda, an expression that could almost lead a person to fear that he might resort to tragic measures to escape from life, but that did not entirely take away the shock which the news of his death brought to his friends and neighbors.[38] His every move had been one of defeat. He had lost his will to live.

The death of Mr. Shimerda helped to develop in Antonia some of those pioneer qualities which had already been visible as a part of her make up. She felt the necessity of earnest work on her part in order to help to preserve a home for the family. She took the position of an ordinary field hand, managing her team as well as any man.[39] She was not the type to seek sympathy. She made her sacrifices as quietly as she could.[40] Her desire for an education was not killed, but she realized the futility of her desire to be fulfilled. Antonia was proud of her strength, and the thoughtlessness and ignorance of her brother, Ambrosch, often permitted her to be taxed beyond her natural power.[41] Her environment had a tendency to make her coarse.[42]

Mrs. Burden's interest in Antonia prompted her to recommend her to Mrs. Harling as a hired girl. She was almost instantly accepted.[43] This seemed to be a golden opportunity

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[38] Ibid., p. 110.

[39] Ibid., p. 140.

[40] Ibid., p. 141.

[41] Ibid., p. 144.

[42] Ibid., p. 161.

[43] Ibid., p. 172.

for Antonia. It moved her into a better environment, gave her money of her own, and removed her from the heavy field work. She was happy with the congenial Harling family until her associates brought her trouble. She was popular with the young people, in fact, too popular to have Mr. Harling's approval.[44] His attempt to dictate to her about her friends and her places of entertainment immediately led to Antonia's moving to the Cutter home.[45] The strained relationship existing between Mr. and Mrs. Cutter was not of the kind that would encourage any young girl to find contentment in their home.[46] Antonia's stay with the Cutters ended in a very unhappy experience.[47] Her next employment was that of housekeeper in Mrs. Gardener's hotel, but there was a growing interest taking possession of her mind, the attraction for Larry Donovan, a passenger conductor who prided himself on being "a kind of professional ladies' man."[48] Antonia innocently and sincerely believed in him, and gave up her work to prepare for her marriage, but she was destined to suffer deeply as she realized the full extent of her folly. She was humiliated as well as grieved over being deserted by a man whom she had trusted, and especially over having to return to her mother's home to rear their child. She did not have even a family name to give her baby as she had never been married. Miss Cather permits

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[44]Ibid., p. 234.

[45]Ibid., p. 236.

[46]Ibid., p. 242.

[47]Ibid., p. 286.

[48]Ibid., p. 354.

Antonia's sympathizing friend, Mrs. Steavens, to tell of the unfortunate girl's experience.[49]

Antonia's suffering was truly a supreme test of her courage, but she had the power to come back. She did not permit herself to be overcome. Her love for her work and an innate desire to live, and, by a life of service, to make a worthy contribution to society, made it possible for her to find satisfaction, and what is more, happiness, in being married to an unassuming Bohemian, who knew how to appreciate a capable wife who was also a kind and understanding mother. The two seemed to live in a relationship of "easy friendliness, touched with humor . . . She was the impulse and he the corrective."[50] She was proud of her family, and loved her children with a mother's passion, eager to show them to the friend of her youth.[51] She gloried in pointing out the improvements which had changed their once undeveloped acres into an attractive and progressive farm home.[52]

It is true that in Antonia, instinctive passion appears in its noblest form. She was predestined to motherhood. Her goodness prompted her to spend her life in serving others, with a consciousness of fulfillment and destiny accomplished. This heroic quality has lifted her above the level of common experience, making her Willa Cather's loveliest character.[53]

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[49] Ibid., p. 347.

[50] Ibid., p. 403.

[51] Ibid., p. 375.

[52] Ibid., p. 385.

[53] Lloyd Morris, "Willa Cather," North American Review, CCIXX (1924), p. 648.

The strength of her character was reflected in the strength of her body. Truly, "she was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races."[54]

In her One of Ours, published in 1922, Miss Cather stepped out of her usual element for a brief time to offer a contribution on a subject that was alive at that time, the experiences and attitudes of soldiers in the World War. In discussing the Wheelers, the author has turned to the native-born Americans. Claude Wheeler was the freckle-faced, red-haired son of Nat Wheeler, the large, husky, good-humored, Nebraska farmer, who always made much of his own jokes.[55] He felt that his presence was a necessity in the promotion of a number of enterprises which could not be classed as personal.[56] He was proud of his ability to manage his financial affairs, took an active interest in politics, and heartily enjoyed food. It was unusual for a man of this type to have a son like Claude, whose most difficult task was his inability to fit himself into the social system into which he had been thrown. He was always afraid someone would laugh at him, and felt a keen desire to improve his attitude by attending the State University of Nebraska. His father felt no direct interest in his education, and his mother, who had come to Lovely Creek from Vermont to be principal of the high school,[57]

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[54]Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 399.

[55]Willa Cather, One of Ours, p. 3.

[56]Ibid., p. 6.

[57]Ibid., p. 8.

had a leaning toward Temple College, conducted by Brother Weldon, who was a Christian man.[58] Claude had disliked Brother Weldon from the very first. There were no friends in the school to attrac him, and the studies were dull and lifeless. There were, however, two attractions in his college life: the course in European history in the State University [the arrangements for him to take a course in European history in the State University had been made by Claude without his family's knowledge],[59] and the visits in the happy Erlich home.[60] The sympathetic, carefree atmosphere of this German home filled Claude's being with a feeling of ease and comfort.

After the close of the first year in college, Claude returned to the farm home. He was happy to find that his return gave so much pleasure to his mother and Mahailey [the hired girl],[61] but welcomed the approach of his second year in school and in different surroundings. His plans for a third year never matured, as his father had purchased a ranch in Yucca County, Colorado,[62] on which he was concentrating his attention, leaving Claude in charge of the Nebraska farm. What Mr. Wheeler was interested in was the elaborate preparations being made for taking over the ranch. He had given Ralph, another son, a free hand with his bank account, and

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[58] Ibid., p. 24.

[59] Ibid., p. 37.

[60] Ibid., p. 39.

[61] Ibid., p. 47.

[62] Ibid., p. 65.

the son felt no hesitancy in taking advantage of the father's generosity. Ralph and his father left for the Colorado ranch in August, and did not return to the family home until Christmas. Mr. Wheeler had planned to remain at home until spring, but Ralph's message about trouble with the foreman prompted him to leave for the ranch again in February. Mr. Wheeler was physically sturdy and mentally alert, always responsive to any call of emergency. He continued the management of his own affairs with Claude as his partner, after the latter's marriage. At the time of their marriage, Claude and his wife moved into a new house which had been constructed for them on the Wheeler farm.

News of the struggle in Europe was of no interest to the old pioneer except as it affected market prices of his own farm products.[63] Mr. Wheeler had lived in a world of selfish interest for so long that he was unable to include anything that did not directly or indirectly affect him. The war was raging far away. It grew more real, however, when his son, Claude, became one of the boys in khaki. He was disturbed over the charges of disloyalty made against some of his friendly foreign-born neighbors. They had come to Nebraska because they thought "this was a free country where a man could speak his mind."[64] Their truly foreign characteristics of plain speaking and fearlessness had brought them under the hand of the law. They had been classed as traitors. They had nothing

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[63] Ibid., p. 166.

[64] Ibid., p. 241.

to recant, however, and accepted their sentence, a fine of three hundred dollars each, with no show of emotion.[65]

The remainder of *One of Ours* Miss Cather has given over to Claude's experiences in the War, with practically no mention of his pioneering parents and their neighbors. In the closing chapter of the book, Miss Cather gives a consoling thought to mothers of war heroes in Mrs. Wheeler's remark over her own son's death. She was thankful that Claude had not lived to suffer from disillusionment as many of the soldiers had. "God had saved him [Claude] from some horrible suffering, some horrible end . . . They had hoped and believed too much. But one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion . . . safe, safe."[66] The spirit of the pioneer had conquered, but she was not sure that her son would have that same strength of spirit with which to meet the disillusionment of ideals build up during the war, had he survived. Perhaps it was best just the way it was.

These books, *O Pioneers*, *Song of the Lark*, *My Antonia*, and *One of Ours*, are probably the best work yet produced by Willa Cather or by any other American writer on the pioneers in our country's development. She has given us characters of permanency, especially women, characters who live and breathe with the people of today. They are "triumphant products of the pioneering period . . . embodying a mystical essence of

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

the heroic age."[67] She has presented Alexandra, Antonia, and Thea in such a manner as to show their weaknesses as well as their strength. That is what makes them so genuine. It is when she has "used up" the pioneering ideals that Miss Cather begins to grope for satisfactory material with which to work.

In 1923, she presented another pioneer. This time it was a man, the only one of all her male characters at all comparable in strength and vitality to her women, and again it was a native of her own country. He was Captain Forrester in A Lost Lady.[68] He had weathered the pioneering movement in railroading. The hard work and disagreeable problems which naturally played a big part in his early life had helped to make of him a kind, respected, wise man. Miss Cather describes him as

> looking like the pictures of Grover Cleveland. His clumsy dignity covered a deep nature, and a conscience that had never been juggled with. His repose was like that of a mountain. When he laid his fleshy, thick-fingered hand upon a frantic horse, an hysterical woman, an Irish workman out for blood, he brought them peace; something they could not resist. That had been the secret of his management of men. His sanity asked nothing, claimed nothing; it was so simple that it brought a hush over distracted creatures.[69]

Forrester had married for his second wife a charming young woman, twenty-five years younger than he.[70] She was the type who could captivate one by her grace, her charm, and her beauty.

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[67]Granville Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather," English Journal (1933), XX, p. 6.

[68]Willa Cather, A Lost Lady, p. 10.

[69]Ibid., p. 48

[70]Ibid., p. 13.

Captain Forrester was proud to present her as his wife. She was kind to him and never questioned his decisions in regard to his business. Even when he returned from a trip to Denver, where he had been called to help clear up business entanglements in a bank in which he was interested, and announced that he had come home "a poor man,"[71] she smilingly replied, "I expect we can manage, can't we?"[72]

Captain Forrester had displayed the best of his pioneer qualities, self-sacrifice, to save from financial loss those depositors who had risked their all in his bank. They had believed in his name, and he could not disappoint them. He had given practically all he possessed to safeguard every depositor from losing even a dollar.[73]

Mrs. Forrester was proud of her husband's unselfish sacrifice. She revealed her reaction over what had taken place. As she expressed herself to Captain Forrester's friend and counsellor, Judge Pommeroy, "I wouldn't for the world have had him do otherwise for me. He would never hold up his head again. You see, I know him."[74]

This sacrifice had cost Captain Forrester more than was at first suspected. A stroke brought him to his bed on the day of his return from Denver.[75] Although he was not permanently confined to his bed after this attack, it had taken

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[71] Ibid., p. 88.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., p. 90.

[74] Ibid., p. 92.

[75] Ibid., p. 94.

from him his strength. There was only a wreck of a once powerful dynamo left. No one knew exactly how much he knew of his wife's attitudes and actions toward other men, as she was always kind to him, but there was something sapping from him his fighting strength and will to live. A second stroke proved fatal.

Mrs. Forrester had sometimes been pitied because her husband had

> kept her from being all that she might be. But without him, she was like a ship without ballast, driven hither and thither by every wind. She was flighty and perverse. She seemed to have lost her faculty of discrimination; her power of easily and graciously keeping everyone in his proper place.[76]

She had lost a prop without which she had become unstable. She regained her old charm and power only when she acted with the charming manners which she had learned to assume as the Captain's respected wife. She liked to tell of the Captain's entrance into her life and sometimes told the story by taking up his habit of the "Once upon a time" story. She did this very effectively to a group of admiring young guests at one of her last parties before leaving Sweet Water.[77] She tried to explain the security she had felt in his presence and which was now gone. The power of the pioneer who had "dreamed the railroads across the mountains" was lost forever with the passing of men like Captain Forrester.

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[76]Ibid., p. 152.

[77]Ibid., p. 164.

Other interesting American-born characters found among Miss Cather's pioneers are Jim Burden, Dr. Howard Archie, and Wick Cutter.

Jim Burden, in My Antonia, was a young lad of ten when he was transferred from Virginia to the plains of Nebraska.[78] He had lost his parents and was going to live with his grandparents, who were among the pioneers on the Nebraska prairie. He spent much of his leisure time with Antonia Shimerda and other children of foreign extraction. Jim had the advantage over his playmates, however, in that he knew the English language, and had the wise counsel of a thoughtful pioneer grandmother who had learned much from her experiences in life. Jim Burden attended the short term of the neighborhood school, a privilege his friend Antonia was not permitted to enjoy.[79] After three years on the prairie farm, Jim's grandparents moved to Black Hawk in order that he might go to a better school.[80] When he had completed his high school courses, he entered the State University in Lincoln, Nebraska. His educational career took his interests away from the land and the ideas uppermost in the minds of his pioneer friends, and probably directed his interests toward life in the city. He finally became legal counsel for one of the great Western railways and had his office in New York City.[81] He married the only daughter of a

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[78]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 3.

[79]Ibid., p. 141

[80]Ibid., p. 163.

[81]Ibid., p. X.

wealthy and distinguished man, an act which did much to promote his popularity as a lawyer. Jim Burden's married life was not a congenial and happy one, but he let nothing kill his naturally romantic disposition. He remained young in spirit and successfully pursued his career with spontaneous enthusiasm and vigorous energy. He found much pleasure in promoting the progress of civilization in the west, and spent his leisure time hunting game and exploring the beauty of the country he loved.

In almost direct contrast to Jim Burden, Miss Cather introduces Wick Cutter, known as the "merciless Black Hawk moneylender."[82] He took advantage of every one he was able to handle to his own advantage. His aim was always to cover every debtor's property with mortgages, and to manage it all in such a way that Cutter would eventually acquire the property he desired. His plan worked out very successfully in the case of the two Russians, Peter and Pavel, who were Mr. Shimerda's friends and neighbors.[83]

Wick Cutter, besides being dishonest in business and legal affairs, was a man wholly bereft of moral principles, but he had met his match in Mrs. Cutter. The two quarreled continuously. They blamed one another for their childless home. Mr. Cutter had an uncontrollable dread of his wife's outliving him, thereby coming into possession of his property.[84]

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[82] Ibid., p. 57.

[83] Ibid., p. 68.

[84] Ibid., p. 240.

The tales of his escapades with the hired girls in his home made it almost impossible for the Cutters to procure and to retain hired help.[85] The lives of the Cutters came to a tragic end. Mr. Cutter, who continued to be tormented with the fear that Mrs. Cutter would live longer than he, decided to settle any such possibility by shooting his wife first and then himself. Men who rushed to the house upon hearing the shots, found Mrs. Cutter dead and Mr. Cutter dying. A letter on his desk, dated at five o'clock in the afternoon, stated that he had just shot his wife, and that any will she might have made would be invalid, as he had outlived her.[86] Although the end for the Cutters was a gruesome one, it was in keeping with the kind of life they had lived. The grasping, merciless, mean attitude the two had practised throughout their lifetime naturally took its toll.

In Dr. Archie, from The Song of the Lark, Miss Cather presents another native-born American. He is introduced into the story as a young man of thirty, well-groomed and distinguished-looking.[87] His educational views were a bit advanced for the inhabitants of Moonstone, Colorado, but he was respected and admired for his professional ability. Dr. Archie had been unfortunate in the choice of a wife. Mrs. Archie was extremely stingy and had a mania for gathering gossip. She succeeded in making their home so uninviting that Dr. Archie

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[85]Ibid., p. 236. [86]Ibid., p. 409.

[87]Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 3.

made use of every possible excuse to stay away.[88] He took an active interest in the promotion of the musical education of Thea Kronborg. His many talks with Thea while she was still a little girl in Moonstone, gave him an opportunity to learn much about her desires and ambitions. He accompanied her to Chicago for her first year in her study there, and continued to keep in touch with her as she climbed to fame in the world of music. He never refused her either his time or his money. He had faith in her ability.

Dr. Archie did not remain in Moonstone for many years. Mrs. Archie lost her life in an explosion which occurred while she was using gasoline in polishing the furniture.[89] Dr. Archie left for the San Felipe Mines in Denver not long after the accident, and spent the remainder of his life as a business man. His real happiness in life came after his wife's death, when he was able to live and enjoy life according to his own interests.

In the study of these two groups of pioneers, Miss Cather makes us feel that there is a difference in their interests and reactions. In the foreign-born pioneer there seemed to be, for those with strong and active qualities, a tendency to become attached to the land. This was decidedly evident in such characters as Mrs. Ericson, Mr. Rosicky, John Bergson and his daughter, Alexandra. Mrs. Kronborg, her daughter

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[88] Ibid., p. 34.

[89] Ibid., p. 389.

Thea, and Antonia grew with the spirit of the land, depending on it as a source for their inspiration and strength. Naturally there were a few who were unable to adjust themselves to the demands life made on them in this setting. In Mr. Shimerda, Miss Cather presents an example of that type. It was not a lack of attraction for the prairie that overcame Mr. Shimerda, but a feeling of loneliness for his native land and friends.

In the native-born pioneers, we sense a more restless disposition. Mr. Wheeler was not definitely interested in the land, but showed a wide range of interests which seemed to satisfy his restless energy. Miss Cather gives us no description of his being greatly attracted by the beauty of the land or the feeling of security found in it, but he was interested in it mainly as a means of profitable investment. His son, Claude, found nothing so intriguing in the prairie that he felt justified in remaining there.

Captain Forrester was interested in the promotion of modern transportation, and spent the best years of his life in railroad building. Mrs. Forrester had that same quality of restlessness that has been evident in other native-born pioneers. Jim Burden looked toward a business career. His grandparents moved away from the farm to enjoy a life of greater ease. Wick Cutter cared nothing about the land except for its financial returns. Dr. Archie, too, was interested in business, and seemingly enjoyed life most where he

could be constantly in touch with business-minded people.

It is evident that Miss Cather had an ideal foreign-born pioneer type in her memory, since practically all of her outstanding characters of that group had several characteristics in common. These people were physically constructed for a life of work. They were emotionally stable, calmly battling their way to the goal in their minds. They were honest, dependable, home-loving, willing to make sacrifices for the good of their fellowmen. Above all, they were able to conquer instead of letting themselves be conquered.

The restlessness of the native-born pioneer had a tendency to make him want to use the land as a foundation only. He was interested in making a success of his life in a financial way and often rose to high levels in the business world. The foreign-born pioneer was satisfied to settle on the land to make his permanent home. Her memory of the pioneer life in Nebraska provided her with some of the most intriguing material for her rise to literary recognition.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF THE LAND ON WILLA CATHER'S CHARACTERS

Closely associated with Willa Cather's theme of the pioneers, is her kindred theme, the attraction of the land for her characters. The land had a power over its inhabitants which created a pervading mood of helplessness in some of the struggling immigrants, while to others it gave strength and courage. There was a solidness in the feel of the land which promoted a reaction of security within people who were able to adjust themselves to the new environment. They began to feel themselves a part of it. To some, the Nebraska prairies contained a power which seemed to defy man's ability to overcome it. The few trails wending their way through the grassy flats only emphasized the futility of man's effort to conquer. There was a strength in the soil that sapped the vitality out of man, leaving him hard, wasted, and impotent.

Such was not the case, however, with John Bergson in O Pioneers. He felt a growing bond between himself and the land. He had worked hard to acquire some of it, and had the greatest ambition to be able to feel assured, as he left this world, that his children would ever look to the soil as a source for their livelihood. It was not difficult for Alexandra

to be sympathetic with her father in his suggestion to make the most of the land, for she was able to enjoy thoroughly the prairie scene rolled out before her, and eagerly inhaled the smell of the growing things, and enjoyed the sounds peculiar to the night on the plains. She was meant for the land, but there were some people who were not of the land. One of these was Carl Lindstrum.[1] He needed human life around him more than he needed the reassuring feel of the land. This attitude on the part of Carl was shared by his family and prompted them to leave their farm, thus giving Alexandra an opportunity to acquire more land. Alexandra was also interested in learning more about the river farms. She spent five days in the river land section, and returned home better satisfied where she was. She gloried in the game of chance which the land of the Divide offered. She was happy as "her eyes drank in the breadth of it." Here was

> a human face set toward it [the prairie] with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich, strong and glorious. . . . The Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or woman.[2]

Alexandra was convinced that the logical thing for the Bergsons to do was to buy more land on the Divide. She had faith in what the land would do for them. When questioned by her brother as to how she knew that land would go up, she could

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[1]Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 50.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

not explain her feelings. She merely replied, "You'll have to take my word for it. I know, that's all."[3]

It required patience and convincing argument on her part to persuade her brothers to accept her plans for the acquisition of additional acreage, thereby assuming added financial responsibility. It was from her communion with nature that she drew her strength and courage to make her fight.

> It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them [the stars], she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. . . . She had never known before how much the country meant to her. The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridge she felt the future stirring.[4]

Within the next sixteen years after the death of John Bergson, a great change had come over the Nebraska prairies. Many inviting farm homes dotted the rolling plains. Much of the grazing land had been converted into productive fields. The various seasons of the year presented a changing scene to the onlooker, the stretches of dark, rich soil recently turned by the plow, invitingly presenting itself to the seed from the farmer's hand, or the fields of yellow grain waving in the bright sunshine, awaiting the approach of the sickle.

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[3]Ibid., p. 65.

[4]Ibid., p. 70.

> There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back. . . . The air and the earth are curiously matched and intermingled, as if one were the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic, puissant quality that is in the tilth, the same strength and resoluteness.[5]

"It is in the soil that she [Alexandra] expresses herself."[6] She did not feel that she was responsible for the change in the land. She said it worked itself, and made the settlers rich in its own time and way.[7] Carl Lindstrum did not have the same kind of feeling for the land. It had created in him a feeling of fear when first he came with his people to Nebraska, a feeling as if it were a wild beast which had haunted him down through the years.[8] He felt that he was a failure in life. He had independence, but to such an extent that he was not needed anywhere.[9] Carl had not lived in any one place long, and had therefore not become a necessary part of any place. He was merely an adventurer with no home and little money. He could not even buy one of Antonia's cornfields. He, too, was prone to measure success and failure in terms of the land.

Oscar and Lou Bergson, Alexandra's brothers, were also products of the soil, but its influence over them had been decidedly different. The land was not bringing great returns

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[5]Ibid., p. 76.

[6]Ibid., p. 85.

[7]Ibid., p. 116.

[8]Ibid., p. 118.

[9]Ibid., p. 122.

when the Lindstrums gave up their farm; the Bergson boys, therefore, would gladly have exchanged their farm interests for some other form of investment. They certainly had no desire to try to buy more land. After the profits became encouraging, however, they were only too eager to make sure that they should get their share of it.[10] It was not love for the land, however, that prompted that eagerness, but love for what the land supplied, money. These two men sometimes became almost as unfeeling and cold as the Divide in winter, hard and repelling, with all human sympathy dead.

Alexandra had worked hard to develop a different type of personality in her youngest brother, Emil, and felt that he "had a personality apart from the soil."[11] She felt sure that he was ashamed of his brothers for their "bigoted and self-satisfied" dispositions.[12] It was lamentable that the land could not have had the same kind of influence on the other members of the family as it had on Alexandra, she felt that there was a permanent value in the possession of land; it gave her a feeling of security, as if she were holding the future in her grasp. It gave her peace, and freedom.[13] She was satisfied to be one of those who understood it and loved it, thereby being eligible to possess it for a little while.[14]

There has probably never been portrayed anywhere any

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[10] Ibid., p. 169.

[11] Ibid., p. 213.

[12] Ibid., p. 238.

[13] Ibid., p. 307.

[14] Ibid., p. 308.

greater love for the land than that possessed by Antonia in My Antonia. She became thoroughly acquainted with the flat stretches during her first years in Nebraska, as she roamed around at will drinking in the life-giving power of the land, sometimes in company with other members of her family, sometimes with Jim Burden, and at other times alone. It held no fear for her. She was conscious only of the freedom and beauty it had to offer. She was a mere child when she first began to plow the land. This work probably did more to Antonia than to make her coarse and man-like. It also helped her to understand the soil, and to develop into an integral part of it, a feeling which she became more fully aware of in her maturity. She frankly admitted, while yet a young girl, that she liked better "to work out of doors than in a house!"[15] She had no fear of becoming coarse, as she wanted to be like a man. She had not let herself become hard and unfeeling, but had remained responsive and jubilant in the free atmosphere of the country. Neither did she lose this quality when she came to town to work for the Harlings. She still enjoyed getting up early and going to work in the garden, with the feel of the earth in her hands, and the cheerfulness of the singing birds in her heart.[16] Physically, the hired girls in Black Hawk "were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigor which, when they got over their first shyness

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[15]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 157.

[16]Ibid., p. 220.

on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement, and made them conspicuous among Black Hawk women.[17] It was that same spontaneity of spirit that made Antonia one of the most popular dancers at their Saturday night frolics. These hired girls were sometimes looked down upon by their American-born neighbors, who considered them of inferior class because they "worked out," but they had that quality of determination within them which made it possible for them to send money to their parents on the farm in order that they might improve the pioneer home. It was this group of thrifty, hard-working, foreign-born pioneers who became rich first. They had been able to see that the land was their source of livelihood, and they loved the security they felt in its solidarity.

It was after Antonia's great disappointment[18] [Antonia had been led to believe that a young train man wished to marry her, but found out she had been tricked and was left to rear their child alone and in disgrace.] in life that she became most deeply attached to the land. When her humiliation was so great that she felt that it would be impossible for her to face a human being, she buried herself in the work on the farm. It seemed that the great outdoors was the only place where she could bury her disappointment. The land, with its positive influence over her life, became dearer to her with every passing

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[17] Ibid., p. 226.

[18] Ibid., p. 351.

day. She meant what she said to Jim Burden:

> "I'd always be miserable in a big city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here. Father Kelley says everybody's put into this world for something, and I know what I've got to do."[19]

She was able to fulfill that purpose. The hard farm work and the rearing of a large family had aged Antonia, but it had not taken from her the "fire of life."[20] She was supremely happy over having had the privilege of working with her husband in converting their farm land into one of the most attractive farms in Nebraska.[21] She liked to watch things grow, and belonged on the farm, where she never grew lonesome as she did in the city. Just to see her was enough "to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body."[22]

Miss Cather has not been able to conceal the fact that she has identified herself with her character, Jim Burden. He took advantage of every opportunity to describe the beauty of the land and of growing things, and finally admitted that

> mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. . . . I suddenly found myself thinking of the places and people of my own infinitesimal past. They stood out strengthened and simplified now, like the image of the plough against the sun. . . . All those early friends were quickened within it [consciousness] and in

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[19] Ibid., p. 362.

[20] Ibid., p. 379.

[21] Ibid., p. 386.

[22] Ibid., p. 389.

some strange way they accompanied me through all my new experiences.[23]

It must have been Miss Cather's own attraction for the land which prompted her to use it so deftly in all her novels to serve as a source of mood and as scenic background.[24] She has a habit of devoting the first part of her books to the development of basic mood, thereby producing a unity in the tales.[25]

The rolling plains of Nebraska presented an enticing study for this favorite theme for Miss Cather. She had been able to make a personal study of them. She knew the history of this land with its many interesting experiences. It had been open prairie, traversed by Indian and buffalo, as late as 1860. It had been crossed by Carson and Fremont in 1842, and been the camping grounds of the Mormons in 1845-6; it was crossed by the gold hunters in 1849. It contained the city of Brownville, to which the first westward-bound telegram was directed. The message itself[26] was filled with the spirit of the romance of the glowing West. It was crossed by the first Overland mail service, and served as a highway of travel for the westward-looking pioneer long before farm houses dotted the rolling plain. The Union Pacific started its progress

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[23] Ibid., p. 296.

[24] Robert H. Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather," American Literature, X (1938), p. 140.

[25] Ibid.

[26] "Westward the course of empire takes its way." Willa Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," Nation, CXVII (1923), p. 236.

across the Nebraska country in 1869. This brought in the early home-hunters in greater numbers to this land of romance. These early settlers were a mixed group, representing many foreign lands, and many church denominations. A person might spend the whole day in the little town of Wilbur without hearing a word of English spoken.[27] Prosperity came to the state through the thrift and intelligence of these foreigners. It sometimes seemed that the sturdy traits characteristic of these pioneers gave to the soil some of those same qualities. The bitter struggles which confronted them tended to bring about the survival of the fittest. Only those with an intense love for the land and an unconquerable spirit remained to help Nebraska become a prosperous, progressive, farming state. These survivors were those people who were characterized by the most enviable of human qualities: honesty, cleanliness, intelligence, and loyalty. Most of these pioneers have passed on, but they have left in their descendants an innate respect and love for the land.

Miss Cather developed the same theme in her book, The Song of the Lark, although the setting had been moved to another state. Thea Kronborg was reared in the state of Colorado. She had not been a child seeking companionship with other children of her own age, but had satisfied a longing from within by roaming around by herself or with her

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[27]Willa Cather, "Nebraska: the End of the First Cycle," Nation, CXVII (1923), p. 237.

baby brother, Thor. She seemed to resent the attention of the people of her home town who were always curious about what happened to their neighbors, especially those who questioned the propriety of her visits to Mexican Town in the outskirts of Moonstone. She always found comfort in Spanish Johnny and his musically-inclined friends, and enjoyed their stories of adventure. She took a strong liking to Ray Kennedy, not so much for personal reasons as for his connection with the Southwest, and because he was the only one of her friends who would take her to the sand hills. There was something extremely tantalizing about those hills for Thea. The pastel colors of the desert were reflected in this series of hills. Nothing was more inviting to her than to listen to Ray's and Johnny's stories of adventure in the Grand Canyon, Death Valley, or other places of intriguing mystery, as she sat in the midst of this colorful setting. Through their tales, Thea grew to think of the Southwest as a land of unlimited riches, with its beautiful scenery and rich mines. Her rides home from these sand hill excursions, in the coolness of the night air, and the lilting songs of the happy, but tired group, helped to establish the sand hills with pleasant recollections in Thea's young mind. She thoroughly enjoyed watching the magical change of the desert landscape as the seasons followed one another.[28]

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[28]Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 56.

When life had a tendency to become too complicated for the little Swedish girl, she could generally depend on the sand hills to bring her solace. Sometimes she almost "wished she were a sand hill."[29] She was probably never compared to a sand hill, but for Professor Wunsch, her Moonstone music teacher, she had identified herself with the desert. He once compared her in his mind to "the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open there in the desert; thornier and sturdier than the maiden flowers he remembered, not so sweet, but wonderful."[30]

Ray had tried to make a note of his impressions of the Grand Canyon, but it had proved to be an unsurmountable task, but he had preserved in his mind many of these glowing impressions in his easy manner toward Thea, and was able to create some very attractive pictures, but the tragic railroad accident on the Moonstone-Denver run, in which Ray lost his life, cut off forever Ray Kennedy's pleasant companionship. It was in a sand gulch that Thea spent a few last minutes with Ray before he died.

Miss Cather now moves her heroine to the city to study music. All connection with the land is replaced by interest in artists and their music. It was not before her first trip home to Moonstone that she again became fully conscious of how much the land meant to her.

> The mere absence of rocks gave the soil a kind of amiability and generosity, and the absence of natural boundaries gave the spirit a

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[29] Ibid., p. 79.

[30] Ibid., p. 96.

> wider range. Wire fences might mark the end of a man's pasture, but they could not shut in his thoughts as mountains and forests can. It was over flat lands like this, stretching out to drink the sun, that the larks sang—and one's heart sang there, too. Thea was glad that this was her country, even if one did not learn to speak elegantly there. It was somehow, an honest country, and there was a new song in that blue air which had never been sung in the world before. It was hard to tell about it, for it had nothing to do with words; it was like the light of the desert at noon, or the smell of the sage brush after rain, intangible but powerful. She had the sense of going back to a friendly soil, whose friendship was somehow going to strengthen her; a naive, generous country that gave one its joyous force, its large-hearted, child-like power to love, just as it gave one its coarse, brilliant flowers.[31]

Thea realized now that the feeling of companionship which had so faithfully and kindly bound her to Ray Kennedy, was their mutual attraction for the great Southwest. She knew also that she had been homesick for the colorful setting produced by her favorite sand hills while she had been in Chicago. She had been lonesome in the midst of crowds, not for people, but for the reassuring feel of the land.

By the remarkable description of Thea's reaction to the Southwest, Miss Cather has given us some of her own feeling toward the land she loved. Such marvelous word-pictures could not come from one who did not understand and enjoy a similar reaction. The attraction for the land was so strong in Miss Cather that it became a part of her life, the inspiration for her writing, the source of her words.

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[31] Ibid., p. 219.

Upon her return to Chicago, Thea forgot about the land until she was persuaded by Fred Ottenburg to spend her vacation in the section of the Cliff-Dweller ruins, on his father's ranch, near Flagstaff, Arizona.[32] She lost her tired unresponsive self entirely as she stepped off the train at Flagstaff in the midst of pine-covered mountains, breathing the cool, refreshing, mountain air. The friendly German family with whom she stayed, helped her to become acquainted with Panther Canyon, the site of the old Cliff-Dweller ruins. This place filled her with a new enthusiasm. Ray Kennedy had been right.

> All these things made one feel that one ought to do his best, and help to fulfill some desire of the desert that slept there. . . . Not only did the world seem older and richer to Thea now, but she herself seemed older. . . . Moonstone and Chicago had become vague. Here everything was simple and definite as things had been in childhood. . . . Her ideas were simplified, became sharper and clearer. She felt united and strong.[33]

Thea found in the land the source of her faith in herself.[34] It was its power that gave her the much-needed self-confidence which she needed in pursuing her musical career. As she watched from the craggy cliff, the soaring eagle sweeping over the ruins, she truly felt that "endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art" had come all the way, and that she was destined to continue by giving the best she

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[32] Ibid., p. 289. [33] Ibid., p. 306.

[34] Robert H. Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather," American Literature, X (1938), p. 136.

had to life.[35]

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, Miss Cather has made the land almost identical with the position of a third character. In the opening chapters of the book, we are confronted with a graphic picture of the land in which Jean Marie Latour, the new missionary, travel-worn and bewildered was scanning the arid flats of New Mexico. The entire country, as far as eye could reach, was of a monotonous sameness with no distinctive land marks to guide the lost wanderer on his way. He had ridden from the early morning hours, covering miles through these unchanging scenes, and he was beginning to develop a feeling of utter despair.[36] It is a hopeless feeling when one realizes that he has lost all sense of direction, has used all the water in his canteen, and is in danger of being overcome by the desert's sweltering heat, with no hope of being able to secure help of any kind. At such a time, the power of the land over man seems terrific. Latour's prayers to his Creator were answered, however, as he came upon a Mexican settlement, where water, food, and human assistance were available.

In this setting of desert, sand, and loneliness, lay the work of the two missionaries, Latour and Vaillant. Although it was probably a dreary thought when first they realized that their work lay in this region, yet it was not long before

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[35]Willa Cather, Song of the Lark, p. 351.

[36]Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 15.

they began to grow attached to the awe-inspiring landscape. Their lives became "a succession of mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers . . . carrying the Cross into territories yet unknown and unnamed."[37] The work of these ardent Christians frequently led them over this lonely-looking landscape both in the scorching heat and in pouring rain. Very often they could ride all day without seeing either a human being or a home. To add to the opportunity for landscape-study, which is generally available to a person traveling through a new country, these men were forced to do their traveling on horseback. Some of the rides covered hundreds of miles, which was true in the case of the Bishop's ride from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Baltimore, Maryland to attend the Plenary Council.[38]

It must have been an inspiring sight for Father Latour as he saw in the distance a few houses, like dark specks, against the gleaming, grey sand. It was beautiful, that cold whiteness of the church, and the clustered town, shaded by a few bright acacia trees, with their intense blue-green, like the colour of old paper window links.[39] It was here that the Bishop learned of that hill of white mineral which the Indians used to grind up into powder, which they used to make their whitewash.[40]

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[37] Ibid., p. 41.

[38] Ibid., p. 80.

[39] Ibid., p. 84.

[40] Ibid., p. 85.

> Upon leaving Isleta, the Bishop next crossed the desert plain west of Alburquerque, New Mexico. It was like a country of dry ashes . . . nothing but thickets of withered, dead-looking cactus, and patches of wild pumpkin.[41]

Sand blew about them at eating time, making their food gritty as they ate it. Sandstorms in this section almost obscured the sun from view, and the traveler would be forced to wear a handkerchief tied over his mouth to protect him from the blowing sand. It was in the midst of these yellow sand dunes that Laguna lay, on the side of a blue lake. Father Latour found the sand dunes to be petrified, "long waves of soft, gritty yellow rock, shining and bare except for a few lines of dark juniper that grew out of the weather cracks — little trees, and very, very old."[42]

From the place Father Latour had selected for camping over night, could be seen a group of mesas in the distance. According to his guide, Jacinto, the Indians called them Snow-Bird Mountains. The white church and the yellow adobe houses appeared in relief from the flat ledges.[43] The surrounding scene was beautiful at the setting of the sun, when the sky formed a golden glow above the blue lake, surrounded by its yellow and white buildings against a background which changed from yellow to grey.[44]

As Father Latour continued his journey, the scenery became even more beautiful. The plain between Laguna and Acoma,

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[41] Ibid., p. 88.

[42] Ibid., p. 89.

[43] Ibid., p. 90.

[44] Ibid., p. 92.

formed "a red sea of sand out of which rose great rock mesas, Gothic in design, resembling vast cathedrals."[45] The place had the appearance of an old city in which only the large buildings remained. In the sandy soil grew a few scattered junipers and desert rabbit brush, with its yellow or orange blossoms. The scene presented an uncompleted job, with all the materials assembled. It was waiting to be made into a landscape.[46] The clouds, which floated over every mesa like a huge parasol, ever changing in color and shape, had a decided effect on the appearance of the landscape, adding to its gorgeous beauty.

Acoma was a most fascinating place. The story of the great rock was a gripping tale which never lost its attraction. The experience of being caught in a cloud-burst gave the Father a new sensation as he saw through the sheets of rain the sunshine on the distant mountains.

Death Comes for the Archbishop is a series of attractive landscape portraits of this southwestern desert region. It forms a beautiful setting for a sincere, peace-loving people, who can see God in nature. Miss Cather has carefully bound many short, legendary tales together by means of her setting and mood. It was not difficult to feel the growing strength of this landscape on Father Latour. He had no desire to live elsewhere; not even his native France had for him the

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[45] Ibid., p. 95.

[46] Ibid., p. 96.

attraction of his glorious Southwest. He was happy to know that the Cathedral which he dreamed into a reality in mesa land, should be ready to receive his body when he should be no more.

Robert Footman classifies the desert in Death Comes for the Archbishop as a greater character than either Latour or Vaillant. These two missionaries merely brought to it a "'constantly refined tradition.'" To Latour the desert was an artistic treasure holding the necessary material and setting for his hoped-for Cathedral. To him man was a mere atom of the land, but even the land is subject to a greater power.[47]

Miss Cather always forces the reader to become conscious of the effect of the land on her characters. Even in her weakest novels, the land is not slighted. In Lucy Gayheart, she has gone back to the land of her youth to develop the mood for her story. Lucy was able to take with her a free, happy, healthy disposition from the little western town of Haverford, Nebraska, to her venture in Chicago. She was remembered by the inhabitants of her home town long after she had passed on, for the buoyant spring in her walk. It was part of this earthy, carefree feeling which gave to Clement Sebastain that bond with his early youth which made life more attractive to him, through his association with Lucy.

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[47]Robert H. Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather," American Literature, X (1938), p. 140.

After Lucy received the news of Sebastian's death she returned to her home town, but even there she could find no comfort except in her favorite spot in the orchard. There "those feelings with which she had once lived came back to her."[48] The snow storm at Christmas time brought back that effervescing gayety of her youth. Every nerve in her body

> was quivering with a long-forgotten restlessness. How often she had run out on a spring morning into the orchard, down the street, in pursuit of something she could not see, but knew! It was there, in the breeze, in the sun; it hid behind the blooming apple boughs, raced before her through the neighbor's gardens, but she could never catch up with it.[49]

The soothing air from the cold outdoors helped to clear her jumbled mind. Lucy revealed the depth of her feeling for her orchard when she awoke to the realization that the trees in the orchard were being cut down. She begged her sister frantically to let the trees remain for one more year, when she would be away and not there to hear every stroke of the axe as it destroyed her most cherished possession.[50]

Although the influence of the land is kept in the quiet background throughout the entire book, the reader is somehow made conscious of its power.

In A Lost Lady, it is Captain Forrester mainly, who has developed an attachment for the earth. He had selected the site for his home many years before he bought it, because it

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[48]Willa Cather, Lucy Gayheart, p. 156.

[49]Ibid., p. 183. [50]Ibid., p. 189.

looked beautiful to him. He would not drain the bottom land and convert it into rich fields as many others would have done. He liked the marshy pasture land with the creek, banked by willows, winding lazily through the tall grass.[51] The grove of trees near by made an ideal spot for a picnic lunch. The Captain was especially interested in his flower garden. After his first stroke, he found his garden his greatest comfort. He was very proud of the sundial which his friend, Cyrus Dalzell, had sent him, and placed it "in the middle of the gravel space around which the roses grew."[52]

With his two canes to lean on, Captain Forrester could drag himself to his stout old hickory chair, where he could sit and enjoy nature's handiwork.

In The Professor's House, we find Tom Outland tied to the Cliff-Dweller section with an unbreakable bond. The young boy was accidentally thrown into companionship with a new fireman on the railroad, Rodney Blake. The two boys, Outland and Blake, were sent to the winter camp, which was located near the Cruzados River, from which the mesa appeared in all its beauty.[53] They were admonished to guard the herd closely to prevent their making a break for the mesa. It seemed that both beast and man were attracted by that mysterious creation, whose "skyline was like the profile of a big beast

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[51]Willa Cather, A Lost Lady, p. 11.

[52]Ibid., p. 108.

[53]Willa Cather, The Professor's House, p. 181.

lying down; the head to the north, higher than the flanks around which the river curved." The north end was made up of "sheer cliffs that fell from the summit to the plain, more than a thousand feet."[54] It would glow with the early morning sunrise before the rest of the country had lost its greyness. At sunset "the mesa was like one great ink-black rock against a sky on fire."[55] There was something about the winter range that made it the most delightful place the boys had ever seen. The temptation soon became too great, however, and the region of the mesa was invaded. The glory of their discoveries was beyond their most extravagant imagination. They had wandered into the town of a departed race, a place filled with mystery and beauty. Tom Outland found the work in the ruins irresistible, and spent every available moment there. Everything had seemingly been preserved in perfect condition, and much of the inhabitants' history could be read in their deserted homes, which proved to be the results of patience and deliberation. The setting of this village deserves special mention. It

> hung like a bird's nest in the cliff, looking off into the box canyon below, and beyond the wide valley we called Cow Canyon, facing an ocean of clear air.[56]

There was proof enough that the Cliff-Dwellers had not moved away, for everything, even their clothes, was there.

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[54] Ibid., p. 191.

[55] Ibid., p. 193.

[56] Ibid., p. 213.

The big unanswerable question was what really had become of them. Dried human bodies were found, but that did not solve the question as to the disappearance of the inhabitants. Here was work for an archaeologist.[57]

The two young men became so interested in their newly-discovered treasures that they decided to seek the help of government authorities in developing their find. This attempt proved extremely disappointing, but the greatest disappointment came when Tom Outland was told, upon his return from his unfruitful Washington trip, that a German by the name of Fechtig, had bought Tom's entire collection of curios for four thousand dollars. Those things which meant everything to him had been sold, and could not possibly be replaced. Tom's reaction toward Rodney was little less than tragic, and resulted in the latter's permanent withdrawal. Tom could find no balm for his double loss except in his continuous work in the ruins. It was when he was on the mesa that he again had that glorious feeling that he never had anywhere else, a feeling of being in a world above the world.[58] It was a spot from where nature's most beautiful scenes lay within his line of vision. Feeling the urge for acquiring an education, Outland left his home on the cliff and took up his work under Professor St. Peter, who was able to understand and appreciate the young man's interest in the Southwest.

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[57] Ibid., p. 215.

[58] Ibid., p. 240.

Outland was always different from the other college students. Life in the free and open country had developed in him a more tolerant and comprehensive reaction toward life. He found more satisfaction in the study of the Cliff-Dweller ruins, the work in the science laboratory, and in the company of Professor St. Peter than in taking part in the social life of the average college boy. He seemed to have capacity for a more mature life. He was out in search of the great truths which he thought could be found through earnest effort.

Miss Cather used her same method for developing mood in Shadows on the Rock, but this time she chose Canada for the setting. The unity of the entire book falls back on the power of the land to hold the numerous tales together. Alphonse Auclair often thought of Canada as a vast and free country, a plausible refuge to which he could flee to escape the evils he suffered at home.[59]

A beautiful picture of Quebec is given by the author:

> Quebec is never lovelier than on an afternoon of late October; ledges of brown and lavender clouds above the river . . . and the red-gold autumn sunlight poured over the rock like a heavy southern wine.[60]

Such was the place to which the Auclairs had moved.

All the trade generally took place in what was known as the Lower town, and the most important merchants lived on the market place. These houses, which had formerly been built

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[59]Willa Cather, The Shadows on the Rock, p. 31.

[60]Ibid., p. 33.

of wood, had been rebuilt of stone following the great fire. On market days the country women generally assembled in the market square at an early hour with their dog-drawn carts filled with their wares, in order that everything might be in readiness for the eager customers when they should arrive to do their shopping.[61]

The entire town seemed to have been dipped in the atmosphere of France, finished by the brush of the Catholic church. The prevailing serenity of the convent, together with the peacefulness of a clear, warm, fall day, seemed to spread a benediction over the little town. There were seldom any confusing disturbances to shock the quiet of the place, and the majestic foundation upon which it rested, with its over-view of the deep blue water, had developed the feeling of unquestionable permanency in the minds of the inhabitants. It is true that Quebec would become so bitterly cold during the long winter months that every person was careful to practice the greatest of care as he ventured out of doors, but the comfortable snugness of the in-doors was not affected by this.

The atmosphere thus created for Shadows on the Rock was a fitting background against which Miss Cather cleverly raised her series of frescoes of scenes "remembered rather than experienced."[62] The beauty of this novel seemingly

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[61] Ibid., p. 46.

[62] See her letter to Governor Cross, Saturday Review of Literature, VIII (1931), p. 216.

rests on the power with which the author describes the softly flashing northern color and the landscape.[63] She had accomplished what she had set out to do.

It is not surprising that Miss Cather is sometimes referred to as "the priestess of the soil." Her heart and her memory were concerned with the country and the people. She had a keen sense of life, the tragedy and the hardship of the untilled, fertile soil, because she had lived the pioneer life in its completeness.[64] She understood the heroism, piety, hardships, and sacrifices that the land demanded of the early settlers, and was naturally able to give her descriptions the quality of authenticity, and her deep, abiding love for and interest in the two combating forces, the people and the soil, filled her work with an inspirational enthusiasm. To her the land stood for permanency. It belonged to the future. People came and went, and those who loved it, owned it for a while.[65]

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[63]John Chamberlain, New York Times Book Review, August 2, 1931, p. 1.

[64]William Whitman, 3, "Eminence Comes for Miss Cather," Independent, CIXX (1927), p. 283.

[65]Granville Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather," English Journal, XXII (1933), p. 703.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARTIST AND HIS ART

A third cherished theme developed by Miss Cather concerned the artists, especially those interested in painting and in music. Her very first book of short stories, Troll Garden (1905), contained seven stories dealing mainly with this theme. Her artists were placed in various settings, New York, Boston, London, and other places. In these short stories she has limited herself mainly to the development of such rather superficial beauty as may be found in studio and concert hall. She was charmed by "the artificialities of polite metropolitan life."[1] It was not until she started writing her full-length novels that she took up seriously the struggles of the artist in pursuing his art.

According to Rene Rapin, one of the stories from Troll Garden in which the artist element is stressed is "Flavia and Her Artists."[2] The heroine of this story, Flavia Hamilton, was "an unbalanced, hysterical woman, aglow with a passion for art which is but a disguise for her worldly ambition and

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[1]Percy H. Boynton, "Willa Cather," English Journal, XIII (1924), p. 374.

[2]Willa Cather, p. 17 (A copy of Troll Garden was not available for this study.)

her absence of feeling and genuine interest in life."[3] She was saved from social embarrassment by her patient and unassuming husband.

Some of the other stories included in Troll Garden did not stand the test of time, and little can now be learned about them, but a few were included in a later collection of her favorite short stories, Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920). The stories reprinted from The Troll Garden are: "Paul's Case," "A Wagner Matinee," "The Sculptor's Funeral," and "A Death in the Desert."

"A Wagner Matinee" gives the interesting reactions of a poor, tired, worn-out farm woman from the Nebraska prairies upon a visit to the haunts of her youth. She had seen and experienced the hard life of the pioneer woman, suffering probably more than the average, as she had known better things in life. After fifteen years, her husband brought her "a little parlour organ."[4] She had not forgotten her love for music, but it was too dear to her to be discussed.

When she returned to the town of her youth, Boston, she spent an afternoon at the opera. She had never heard a Wagner operatic concert before, but she knew its story. At first the country woman registered no reaction to the beauty of the program, but it was not because she was not appreciating it.

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[3]Ibid., p. 17.

[4]Willa Cather, "A Wagner Matinee," Youth and the Bright Medusa, p. 238.

As the program progressed, her tears began to fall freely. It was the reawakening in her of the experiences of her lost youth. She had suppressed these thoughts through many long years, but now she was coming to the full realization of what youth, music, and the cultural life had meant to her. She did not wish to leave this soul-satisfying atmosphere to return to Nebraska.[5]

Miss Cather, in this way, shows that a sense of appreciation for the cultural side of life, if once stirred, will continue to live, although the expression of its influence is suppressed.

In "The Sculptor's Funeral,"[6] Miss Cather portrays an artist in another field, a sculptor. He was a sensitive, misunderstood boy, who broke away from a coarse, curious home-town group to find himself in the study of his art. The beautiful impressions in his mind could not have developed among his boyhood friends. They would never have been able to understand. They considered his ideas nonsense.

The author makes very clear in the conversation which takes place during the night-watch over the sculptor's dead body, the real condition of this western town, and the reaction of an unintelligent citizenship toward their "educated" friend. The lawyer put up a strong defence for the ideas of

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[5]Willa Cather, Youth and the Bright Medusa, p. 246.

[6]Ibid., p. 248.

his dead friend, and tried to show the men present that there were other things in this world that counted besides the acquisition of money and land. Young Merrick (the Sculptor) had probably found the fulfillment of his life in the beauty of his art.

In "A Death in the Desert,"[7] we meet an artist who has separated herself from the environment she loved in order that she may find it a little easier to let go of life. Katharine Gaylord, the great singer, had fallen prey to the ravages of tuberculosis. She spent practically all the money she had made in visiting health resorts, but only to meet with disappointment. She finally retired to her brother's home in the sandy desert in Wyoming. She was simply waiting to die.

During her musical career, she had grown away from her people. The life of the opera singer, with all it included, had become her life. She was unable to readjust herself to the environment of her early life, and was, therefore, miserably unhappy.[8] With the coming of Everett Hildegarde, brother of her music teacher, and who bore a strong resemblance to him, Katharine found some consolation for her unhappiness. She was not aware of the fact that Everett Hildegarde had been attracted to her for years, and was satisfying a yearning within himself in being able to bring

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[7]Ibid., p. 273.

[8]Ibid., p. 280.

some happiness to her during the last days of her life. Katharine Gaylord was another artist who had lived for the sake of her art, making sacrifices demanding both will-power and loyalty to her chosen profession. Willa Cather had probably learned in her climb to success that those qualities were highly essential to success.

The first story in Youth and the Bright Medusa, "Coming, Aphrodite!" takes the reader into the everyday life of two ambitious young artists. Don Hedger, a young man of twenty-six, had already spent several years in the study of art, never being conscious of any interest in the society of man or its proceedings. His Boston bull terrier, Caesar III, was his sole companion. Hedger had sought refuge on the top floor of an old house on the south side of Washington Square, hoping that in this place he would be free to pursue his work.[9] He had hardly become settled in his flat when he became aware of a new neighbor. It happened to be an unusually attractive, but a very independent young lady, Eden Bower, also pursuing her art. Her field, however, was music. She was young in her work, but eager to win. Before long, the common center of interest, their art, drew the two into a friendly relationship. This companionship became very precious, but fear that it would in any way break into a visualized career caused each one secretly to seek escape

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[9] Ibid., p. 11.

from the other.[10] Each made his escape and continued his work.

Don Hedger became a great influence in modern art, and Eden Bower won her place in the world of song. They had reached a goal, and they had paid the price. Miss Cather probably felt as many others making a success in public life have, that every thing should be sacrificed to the development of that career, especially if the person belonged to the artist group.

"The Diamond Mine" is another story filled with the life of the artist. Cressida Garnet had acquired both fame and a bank account through her untiring efforts, but she had not, like Eden Bower, shunned the ties of marriage. She had first been attracted to Charley Wilton, a church organist, and later married him. He was the father of her one child, Horace, who required both patience and funds.[11] Cressida had displayed almost superhuman courage during the three years with her first husband. He had been confined to his bed for a long period, with tuberculosis, during which time she had nursed him and made their living. There was probably more real sentiment combined with this union than in any of those in which she figured later. Wilton had been interested in her interests, being her first music teacher, and besides, he was a handsome young man.[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 69.

[11] Ibid., p. 92.

[12] Ibid., p. 98.

Cressida's second husband, Ransome McChord, foreign representative of McChord Harvester Company, was too jealous of the singer's relationship with her accompanist, Miletus Poppas, for his own or Cressida's comfort. Her absolute need of Poppas in her musical work, prompted her to choose him in preference to her husband.[13]

Her third husband, Blasius Bouchalka, a Bohemian violinist, probably won that honor through his silent devotion to her. His knowledge of music, and his ability to write it, made him an attractive character for Cressida, but what she learned of his lack of character cut short the length of time in which he might enjoy the place which filled him with inactive content. Cressida had sympathized with him in his troubles, and excused him for his inactivity, but she was unable to excuse him for an act which, to her, meant lack of character.[14] For her husband to become familiar with the caretaker in the home was unexcusable.

Jerome Brown, her fourth husband, was a financier, but not what might be termed a successful one. He did much to destroy her youth and her carefree attitude. Backing a losing financier was a big responsibility.[15] Cressida's death came with the sinking of the Titanic. The property and personal effects of the popular operatic singer, recognized for her efficiency, were a source of much dispute on the part of a grasping husband and of greedy relatives.[16]

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[13] Ibid., p. 101.

[14] Ibid., p. 133.

[15] Ibid., p. 134.

[16] Ibid., p. 138.

Cressida had found a certain kind of success. She had gone far in her musical career, but there is a question as to whether or not that fully compensated for her disappointments in her family relationships.

"A Gold Slipper," from Youth and the Bright Medusa, introduces another musical artist, Kitty Ayrshire. Marshall McKann through the insistence of his wife, attended the Carnegie Music Hall concert. He did not wish to become interested in the singer, but there was something rather fascinating about her, and he was conscious of his eyes being attracted to her.[17] A trick of fate later threw the two, Miss Ayrshire and Mr. McKann, together on a train trip after the concert.[18] In the course of the conversation that followed, in which he accused her, as a member of her profession, of being light, with no depth, pampered and self-indulgent, he gave Miss Cather, in the words of Kitty Ayrshire, an opportunity to enumerate some of the good deeds done by the average artist. Kitty admitted being self-indulgent, but could see no good reason for not being. She felt that she did her share in carrying the burdens of the world.

> One should give pleasure. . . . You'll admit that I give pleasure. . . . One should help people who are less fortunate; at present I am supporting just eight people, besides those I hire. . . . One should make personal sacrifices. . . . I give money and time and effort to talented students. Oh, I give something

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[17] Ibid., p. 145.

[18] Ibid., p. 150.

> much more than that, something that you probably have never given to any one. I give, to the really gifted ones, my wish, my desire, my light, if I have any; and that, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, is like giving one's blood. It's the kind of thing you prudent people never give.[19]

Probably Miss Cather is trying to justify the gayety and glamour which seems to surround the operatic stars. Miss Ayrshire continued to defend the artists when she said, "my mind tells me that dullness, and a mediocre order of ability, and poverty, are not in themselves admirable things."[20] The criticism against professional artists, which McKann strived to prove well-founded, is the reflection of a fault-finding public. It seems to have developed in the early times and to have become a traditional idea. Miss Cather's sympathy for the struggling artist naturally led her to be desirous of destroying that old idea, and to build up a wholesome, open-minded public attitude toward them. She wishes to emphasize the sense of humor generally present in the personality of the successful artist. The gold slipper which Miss Ayrshire contributed to McKann's baggage, was the symbol of her light-heartedness, and strange to say, he never destroyed it, but was reminded each time he saw it, of life and youth.[21]

The novelette, Alexander's Bridge (1912), was Miss Cather's first short novel. It does not take up her favorite theme of the pioneer in his struggle with the powers of

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[19] Ibid., p. 159. [20] Ibid., p. 164.

[21] Ibid., p. 168.

the land, but it does treat, in a secondary way, of the artist.

Bartley Alexander, a bridge architect of recognized standing, had married a charming person who made for him a comfortable and attractive home. He had felt no regrets over having broken off his relations with Hilda Burgoyne to marry Winifred. In fact, he had forgotten about Hilda in a very short time.[22] It was not until his friend, Maurice Wainhall, invited him to go with him to see Hugh MacConnell's new comedy, "Bog Lights," that he remembered Hilda. She was a decided "hit" in this production.

Bartley could not resist the temptation to call on her. The sight of her on the stage had stirred many long-forgotten memories of his youth, and of his happy times with Hilda. She had been very fond of going to museums. He had not been to one since their companionship had ceased. There was a charm in this friend which he could not resist. She was extremely attractive in appearance. Her self-possession and self-reliance gave her poise.

She seemed capable of giving his very youth back to him.[23] She mixed and mingled with people whom he liked. Her rooms reflected her admiration for French prints. The drinks she served had the flavor of genuineness. She loved flowers, played and sang for him the songs he liked to hear.[24]

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[22]Willa Cather, Alexander's Bridge, p. 37.

[23]Ibid., p. 52.

[24]Ibid., p. 74.

Although much of Hilda's time was taken up with her practice and performances, he always spent some time with her when they happened to be in the same city at the same time. His life grew complicated. He realized he was being drawn to the charming artist against his own will. He wished to remain true to his wife. She was a deserving person. Somehow, it was to Winifred he naturally turned when danger threatened him.

Hilda, too, was an artist who had been successful in her chosen career. She had developed and preserved in herself those qualities which are essential in her profession. She was able to draw the public and to hold it, but she had to pay the price. Perhaps she had not been to blame, since Alexander had shifted her for another, but she had at least been able to make the necessary adjustment, and let her career fill the vacant place in her life.

In almost every novel written by Miss Cather, there has been some mention of the artist and his art, although the theme has sometimes held a minor place in the development of the story. This is true in the case of My Mortal Enemy (1926). John Driscoll, a wealthy philanthropist of Parthia, promoted interest in music by his monetary contributions to the town band.[25] In fact, it almost became his band.

We meet Ewan Gray, who is in love with a young actress,

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[25]Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 19.

but we get only a passing glance of them.[26] Madame Modjeska was one of the favorite artist friends Mrs. Henshawe liked especially well. She always tried to brighten Madame's life, especially at Christmas time, with gifts of flowers or other luxuries. She was still, in spite of her ageing lines one of the best of actresses.[27] Her singing revealed a hidden something in her nature which was "compelling, passionate, overmastering." Her "Casta Diva" aria presentation was something not easily forgotten.[28]

Mrs. Henshawe also tried hard to bring cheer to Anne Aylward, the poet, who was now dying of tuberculosis.

Miss Cather has a way of suggesting theatre parties as a favorite way of entertaining her characters' guests. Her characters, even in the most unexpected places, make themselves known through their humming of some highly recognized air, or by a chance remark revealing their cultural knowledge in the field of arts. These incidental references made by the author, keep alive the realization of her admiration for professional people. They add a touch of refinement to any story. Although Miss Cather was deprived of direct contact with people of high artistic development for several years while on the Nebraska prairies, this had not destroyed their attraction for her. Her ancestors had probably helped develop this quality in her, or perchance it was a faint

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[26] Ibid., p. 32.

[27] Ibid., p. 57.

[28] Ibid., p. 61.

recollection of something remembered from her days in aristocratic Virginia.

Up until the last days of Myra Henshaw's life, after poverty, disappointments, and illness had overtaken her, she remained faithful to art and artists. She enjoyed hearing poetry read to her.[29] She never forgot Madame Modjeska, and saw to it that mass was said for her dead friend on every anniversary of the actress's death.[30]

In One of Ours, Miss Cather is much concerned with problems vastly foreign to the artist, but she does not miss the opportunity of introducing even in this book, one character of the artist type who can not be overlooked. He is the young violinist who came to mean so much in the life of Claude Wheeler. He was introduced as Lieutenant Gerhardt.[31] He was a young man with "a broad white forehead under reddish brown hair, hazel eyes with no uncertainty in their look, an aquilane nose, finely cut,— a sensitive, scornful mouth, which somehow did not detract from the kindly, though slightly reserved, expression of his face."[32] He had studied violin in France before the war,[33] and although he could have secured a soft job because of his accomplishments, he had refused any favors. The knowledge of this act on his part brought him

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[29] Ibid., p. 96. [30] Ibid., p. 101.

[31] Willa Cather, One of Ours, p. 346.

[32] Ibid., p. 347. [33] Ibid., p. 354.

the respect of his fellow officers in spite of the attitude of reserve for which they were sometimes prone to shun his company.[34]

Claude was surprised to find that there were several recordings made of his friend's violin solos.[35] David Gerhardt had little to say about his own accomplishments, and it was only through direct questions that Claude was able to learn anything about him. He did, however, volunteer the information that he would never go back to the violin.[36] He had left France when the Conservatoire closed at the beginning of the War, going to work in the United States, doing a concert tour. Two winters of that work were successful, and then came the call to arms. At first he had considered trying to get out of it, but when he saw the other boys who would have to go, he gave up the idea of evading the call. A short time afterward, his violin, a Stradivarius, was smashed in a car accident. That seemed to smash within the young boy, all his musical ambition. It was simply a prophecy of what the war would eventually do to the beautiful things in life.[37]

It was while on leave from the front that Gerhardt and Wheeler visited in the home of the parents of a soldier friend of Gerhardts, Rene, who had already given his life

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[34] Ibid., p. 357.

[35] Ibid., p. 371.

[36] Ibid., p. 407.

[37] Ibid., p. 408.

for the cause. Rene, too, had played the violin, and now his family wished Gerhardt to play that almost sacred instrument. Mlle. Clair accompanied him on the piano, and the members of the family re-lived many memories as they listened to Gerhardt's playing of the last selection Rene played on that violin the night before he went away.[38]

The two young men, Gerhardt and Wheeler, so strongly drawn to one another, were a constant source of inspiration to one another during the trying days at the front before both made the supreme sacrifice. The musical ability of Gerhardt was both admired and envied by Wheeler. It caused him to be more sensitive than ever before to his own limitations.

> If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting there tonight a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it, tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. If one were born into this world like a bear cub or a bull calf, one could only paw and destroy, all one's life.[39]

Yet the emotional side of Claude Wheeler found a peculiar satisfaction in his friend's accomplishments. He was as proud of him as a doting mother is proud of a talented child. It helped him to preserve a faith in life and to see beauty even in war.

In Lucy Gayheart (1935), Miss Cather presents a group

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[38] Ibid., p. 417.

[39] Ibid., p. 418.

of artists, artists in different stages of development. Jacob Gayheart, the father of Lucy, not only had the artist's aspirations to a certain degree, but he actually looked different.

> Mr. Gayheart looked like an old German poet; he wore a mustache and goatee and had a fine sweep of dark hair above his forehead, just a little grey at the sides. His intelligent, lazy hazel eyes seemed to say: "But it's a very pleasant world, why bother?"
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> He managed to enjoy every day from start to finish. . . . Usually he put a flower in his coat before he left home. No one ever got more satisfaction out of good health and simple pleasures and a blue-and-gold uniform than Jacob Gayheart.[40]

Mr. Gayheart led the town band and gave lessons on the clarinet, flute, and violin, and was really much more interested in that than in his watch-repairing business, or his own financial affairs. His enthusiasm, and an inherited family liking for music were evident in his young daughter, Lucy. She had given music lessons to beginners ever since she was in the tenth grade. She had not at that time thought seriously about a career in music, but had enjoyed the work as "a natural form of pleasure."[41] Lucy went to Chicago to pursue her work in music. She was a lonely child in the midst of strangers, and made no effort to make acquaintances, as social obligations would distract her attention from her work and it would also require more money for her. She had very little of either time or money. Her music teacher, Professor Auerbach, was a thoughtful friend as well as a

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[40]Willa Cather, Lucy Gayheart, p. 6.

[41]Ibid., p. 5.

conscientious teacher. He gave his pupil every possible opportunity to hear and to meet his famous musician friends. He even secured a ticket for her in order that she might attend Clement Sebastian's recital. Lucy was not very enthusiastic about it, but as she sat through the concert, a new feeling developed within her. She was unable to explain it. "It was a discovery about life, a revelation of love as a tragic force, not a melting mood, of passion that drowns like black water."[42] The audience was spellbound, and refused to accept the last number on the program as final. At last he came back to sing an encore. There was something about his personality that helped to emphasize the power of his song.

> He was not young, was middle-aged, indeed, with a stern face and large, rather tired eyes. He was a very big man; tall, heavy, broad-shouldered. He took up a great deal of space and filled it solidly. His torso, sheathed in black broadcloth and a white waist coat, was unquestionably oval, but it seemed the right shape for him.[43]

Lucy felt he looked as a great artist should, and Professor Auerbach had said he was exceptional; he was a fine artist.[44] Lucy's great opportunity came when Sebastian's accompanist had to undergo an operation, and she was recommended by her teacher to be permitted to try out as a substitute accompanist. As an answer to her prayer, she was selected to continue her practice with Sebastian as soon as

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[42] Ibid., p. 31.

[43] Ibid., p. 29.

[44] Ibid., p. 33.

she should return from her Christmas vacation. It was a momentous time in her life.

The two workers soon became very good friends. She looked forward to their practice periods with keen interest. Sebastian took a vital interest in her home, her family, her interests. He showed her his apartment, introduced her to his valet, and often entertained her with a tasty lunch after the work was completed. The lunch period was a very pleasant one, for it was at that time that they really learned to know one another. He made her feel at ease. The presence of James Mockford, Sebastian's regular accompanist, gave her exactly the opposite reaction. He was a master at his work, but

> there was something uncanny in that young man's short, insinuating fingers. She admired him, but she did not like him. . . . Something in his physical personality set her on edge a little. . . . His face looked like a handful of flour thrown against the velvet. His head was rather flat behind the ears, and his red hair seemed to clasp it in a wreath of curls that were stiff but not tight. . . . His lameness gave him a weak, undulating walk.[45]

There was something fascinating as well as something repelling to Lucy about Mockford. He seemed so self-satisfied about his relation with Sebastian and Mrs. Sebastian. Lucy had not known there was a Mrs. Sebastian. Later she learned more about her. Sebastian had married the woman he loved, and they had been happy together for a number of years, but

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[45] Ibid., p. 38.

an unusual situation shattered that relationship. They had no children of their own, but Sebastian had taken a talented young orphan boy into their home. The boy was very attached to his benefactors, but Mrs. Sebastian had taken a decided dislike to him. The peaceful atmosphere of the home suffered, and Sebastian sent the boy away to school in order to restore peace, but he had seen in his wife, during that time, a quality which he was unable to forget. His attitude toward her had been changed by it; she was conscious of this and resentful. Sebastian had returned to the land of his birth, America, which he had left when he was eighteen.[46]

Sebastian felt that he had lost something in life, a relationship "with a country side and a people."[47] This was something he could not go out and find, but a way of living. He knew he had missed one of the most satisfying experiences a man can have. There was a certain compensation for what he had lost in his companionship with Lucy. She was an attentive listener when he spoke of the friends and experiences of his early days, and sympathetic and interested in his plans for the future. He liked the sincerity of her remarks and the genuineness of her reactions. Sebastian had suffered many disappointments in life in spite of the fact that he was a success in his operatic work. One of the disappointments

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[46] Ibid., p. 78.

[47] Ibid.

which cut deepest into his life was that of finding friendships changed. He had been grieved over what he learned about his wife's peculiar form of envy. He was almost as much hurt over the peculiar change which he found in his college friend, Larry, when he came to visit in the Sebastian home, but he decided later that Larry's dislike for almost everything and his rudeness to his host were due to his breaking health.[48] Sebastian had depended on his music to serve as a source of comfort, and he had not been disappointed.[49]

Lucy was becoming definitely conscious of the fact that she loved Sebastian, and admitted to her admirer from her home-town, Harry Gordon, that she had changed, and that she loved another man.[50] She knew that she could never be happy with Gordon. He lacked that deep, full understanding that she had found to mean so much to her. He had no sincere understanding of either music or art. He thought in terms of facts and financial gain.

Lucy was shocked and humiliated over Harry Gordon's behavior when she told him of her feeling for Sebastian. At first he seemed to refuse to believe her, but when he did begin to feel the full meaning of her words, he simply walked out and left her without an escort in the dining room at the Auditorium Hotel. The head waiter notified her that Mr. Gordon

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[48] Ibid., p. 83.

[49] Ibid., p. 80.

[50] Ibid., p. 110.

would probably not be back.[51] He had shown a streak of cowardice. He had not been able to accept her refusal like a man. He had failed to show her a gentleman's courtesy toward a lady. This act on Gordon's part caused her to appreciate Sebastian more than ever.

Lucy continued her work in music in Chicago. She had a class of pupils besides her intensive practice to keep her busy. Sebastian and Auerbach made arrangements for her to remain in Chicago for the summer so as to be able to take up her work as accompanist for Sebastian in New York in the fall upon Sebastian's return to America after a summer abroad. She was to use Sebastian's study during the summer months. Everything in her life was connected with Sebastian and with music. It was, therefore, a crushing blow to Lucy to learn of the accident which resulted in the death of both Sebastian and Mockford. They had been caught in a storm while out for a sail on Lake Como, Italy. Sebastian had died trying to save his lame accompanist, who was not able to swim.[52]

Lucy was rushed home to Haverford from Chicago by the kind Auerbachs. They realized what had happened in her life. She told nothing at home and curious people worked on a number of theories in an attempt to solve Lucy's strange action. Some thought she had lost her job; others thought that she was grieving over Harry Gordon's marriage; and a few ventured

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[51] Ibid., p. 112.

[52] Ibid., p. 137.

to say something about a love affair in Chicago. Lucy fought her grief and disappointment out in her own way and finally concluded that there was just one thing she could do. She wrote Professor Auerbach to see if she might take up her work with him again. She stated in her letter:

> "I have found out that I can't run away from my own feelings. The only way for me, is to do the things I used to do and to do them harder."[53]

The Auerbachs were happy over Lucy's decision, and were glad to tell her of her opportunity to get her old place back again, since the boy who had taken over her pupils when she went home was leaving in April to study abroad. She spent much of her time at the piano from then on. She had not confided her plans to anyone, and her sister could not understand why she did not start herself a music class in Haverford. Life was beginning to look forward again for Lucy. She was eager to get back into her work. Music was bringing back to her a new hope in life. It seemed that the feeling of the real artist was taking possession of her spirit, when it was all cut short by Lucy's tragic accident on the ice. She had fallen through the ice while skating. Probably she had gone on to the land of music to be reunited with her friend who had merely gone on before. Another rising artist had been lost to the world.

Probably the best portrayal of an artist's life ever made by Miss Cather was that of Thea Kronborg in The Song of

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[53] Ibid., p. 185.

the Lark. This was one of her first novels, and the most voluminous she has written yet. It deals specifically with the life of the artist from youth to maturity. Little Thea had always displayed a more or less exclusive attitude. While sitting alone out on the rolling hillside, her eyes would often contain a distant look as if she were looking into the future. She had often sought refuge in Mexican Town with Spanish Johnny and his friends. She liked the atmosphere which surrounded them, a lazy, contented resignation to the romantic airs thrummed out on their guitars while they lounged comfortably on the ground, or on the house steps, the moon furnishing the necessary light. Occasionally some one would break out into a song in time to the strains of the music. It was all very peaceful. It seemed that music had always been a part of Thea's life. Her talent for music had early been noticeable. She had played for the singing in her father's congregation since she was a little girl, and then had taken music lessons from Professor Wunsch, who was recognized as a capable musician. She always took part in the special programs given in Moonstone. She had often found consolation and enjoyment in secluding herself in her own room to read, probably a copy of Musical Memories, by the Reverend H. R. Haweis.[54] She was fascinated by the stories connected with music and artists told her by Professor Wunsch.

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[54] Ibid., p. 64.

Thea hoped that some day she could go away to learn, but it all seemed hopeless to the thirteen-year old child. It was then that Professor Wunsch expressed himself.

> "Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. The world is little, people are little, human life is little. There is only one big thing — desire."[55]

It was her music teacher, Wunsch, who was among the first to recognize quality in her voice. She early confided in Dr. Archie her wish to gain a thorough knowledge in music, probably to study in Germany. Her confidant encouraged her, and reminded her that being a Swede would be in her favor.

Thea's routine was changed a short time afterwards when Professor Wunsch went away. Thea soon took over the music pupils left without a teacher. Her father was in favor of this arrangement, as he did not believe Thea would be happy if she settled down to married life. "She's too peppery and too fond of having her own way. Then she's always got to be ahead in everything."[56] She was an established music teacher in Moonstone by the time she was fifteen years old. She told Ray Kennedy, a kind and sympathetic friend, that she wished she could go to Chicago to study, but she was afraid she would never be able to save enough money.

Thea felt that her liberty was infringed on by her father when he asked her to play for the prayer-meetings and to lead

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[55] Ibid., p. 75.

[56] Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 102.

the singing. The people who attended the meetings seemed extremely monotonous, as were also their prayers. The opportunity to get away from Moonstone and its many limitations came to Thea much sooner than she had ever hoped, and in a way wholly unperceived. Ray Kennedy's death, resulting from a railroad accident, brought her chance. Ray had saved a few hundred dollars which he had specifically stated were to be used by Thea in starting her studies in music in Chicago. It was finally arranged that she should be accompanied to Chicago by Dr. Archie, who was to help her find a boarding place and to make arrangements for her instructions under Andor Harsanyi. He also helped her to get a church position under Mr. Larsen of the Swedish Reform Church.[57]

The move to Chicago presented a new life to Thea. Every thing was entirely different. Harsanyi felt that he had never had a pupil more intelligent nor more ignorant.[58] She had no ardor, knew nothing about many of the recognized composers, nor had she ever heard a symphony orchestra. Her training had been in accordance with the old formal method. Harsanyi gave much time and effort to his pupil. The winter was a trying one to Thea, too. She remembered it as "the happiest and wildest and saddest of her life."[59] She blamed her parents and her former teacher for her ignorance, but Harsanyi corrected her by telling her that it was her duty

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[57] Ibid., p. 162.

[58] Ibid., p. 174.

[59] Ibid., p. 175.

to make herself into an artist. She exhausted both herself and her teacher at the piano, and often returned to her room after the music lesson in the depth of despair. She was lonesome in the center of a large city. Her behavior was at times most puzzling.

Harsanyi was very fortunate in having a sweet and charming wife. Thea was a guest in their home on several occasions. She was a favorite with the Harsanyi children. It was while enjoying one of these visits that Harsanyi learned that Thea was singing in a church choir. When he felt that she had sufficiently recovered from her dinner, Harsanyi asked Thea to sing for him. It almost turned out to be a voice lesson before the evening was over, and her music teacher resolved that he would immediately begin teaching Thea some songs.[60] She had every indication of being a singer, and yet he had never thought of it. After this, a singing lesson would follow every music lesson, even if for only half an hour's time. She was not quick to catch the feel of the song at times, but when she did, she was full of it.[61] Those singing lessons grew to be some of the happiest moments in her work.

Thea had learned very little about Chicago during her first year there. She had visited Montgomery Ward and Company's big mail-order store and Packingtown. She later became interested in the Art Institute, and spent much of

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[60] Ibid., p. 186.

[61] Ibid., p. 192.

her spare time there. She received more satisfaction out of what she called her picture than from any other thing there. This was "The Song of the Lark."[62]

Harsanyi gave her a ticket for a symphony concert at two-thirty in the afternoon at the Auditorium. The glamour of the place, the people, and the instruments held her attention during the execution of the first number, but during the remainder of the concert she was fairly transferred to another world. She acquired an ecstacy which would ever be hers. "She would live for it, die for it, but she was going to have it."[63]

Harsanyi consulted Theodore Thomas, the conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, whom he considered the best voice teacher in Chicago, about Thea's training. Madison Bowers was named, although Thomas did not like the nature of the man. A discussion of Thea's qualities and chances for a musical career were then taken up. She was classified as being intelligent, but uncultivated, possessing a quality which made her distinctly individual, and which seemed to be characteristic of Scandinavians.[64] She was described as being solid and real, and not like many of the others. These two men were both great musicians with sympathy and understanding for beauty and accomplishment in their field. Thomas had received great inspiration from Jenny Lind and Henrietta Sontag

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[62] Ibid., p. 197.

[63] Ibid., p. 201.

[64] Ibid., p. 203.

in his youth. Their ability as artists and their personal charm had served to encourage Thomas's desire to become an artist. He had worked ever since trying to repay his debt to the singer's art.[65]

Not long after this, Harsanyi told Thea that he wished her to start her singing lessons with Bowers. It took much explanation on the part of her teacher to get her to understand his reasons for making this suggestion. He told her that she was talented, but that to become the kind of pianist she wished to become, a person needed the most careful training during his early years; he said her technique was good, but not remarkable, and he was afraid that she would never be able to find herself; and to find herself, he felt, was the greatest need of her nature. That was possible, he felt sure, through her singing. He felt that nature had already done for her voice what it would take her many years to do at the piano. She told him that she wanted to be an artist, and that she had always wanted to sing until she began to take lessons from him. It was then she decided that she wanted to play.

Thea admitted that she had always felt that her feeling about her voice had been her own secret, and too personal to discuss with Harsanyi. It was all she had. He understood. Every artist had some such secret. Harsanyi suggested that she must study French, German, and Italian as well as voice.

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[65] Ibid., p. 206.

He was assured that she was truly a girl who thought that "one swallow does not make a summer."[66]

The Hungarian musician had sacrificed much when he let Thea go. She was his best pupil, but he had a satisfied feeling that he had done the right thing. He had been fair to his profession.

Before leaving for her home in Moonstone for the summer vacation, Thea had taken twenty lessons from Bowers. Somehow, she was happier than she had been with Harsanyi, not that she liked Bowers so well personally, but it was clear to her why she was taking voice. It was like finding her second self.[67] She felt now that she knew that she was going to get something, and nothing could stop her.

When Thea reached home, her family soon felt a change in her. She had no sooner come home than she was asked to sing at a funeral. At first she refused to do this, but her mother's sensible attitude prompted her to change her mind.[68]

There were not many things at home that interested her. She planned to go to the sand hills, and to call on the Kohlers, and to visit Mexican Town.

The trip to Mexican Town was a real treat. The Kohlers were enjoying the guitar music accompanying the dreamy voices of the Mexican boys. It was when the soprano voice joined in that they felt moved.

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[66] Ibid., p. 204.

[67] Ibid., p. 216.

[68] Ibid., p. 225.

> How it leaped from among those dusky male voices! How it played in and about, and around and over them, like a goldfish darting among creek minnows, like a yellow butterfly soaring above a swarm of dark ones.[69]

Somehow Thea drew comfort and inspiration from a few remarks Dr. Archie made in the course of a conversation with him. She told him she wanted "only the impossible things. The others did not interest her."[70] When Dr. Archie replied, his words carried much thought.

> "Thea, I won't say that you can have everything you want — that means having nothing in reality. But if you decide what it is you want most, you can get it. Not every body can, but you can. Only if you want a big thing, you've got to have nerve enough to cut out all that's easy, everything that's to be had cheap."[71]

When Thea left for Chicago again, she felt a breaking within herself. That, she knew, meant that she was going away for always. She had a long fight to make.[72]

She continued her work under Bowers, and her days were very, very full. She played accompaniments for his soloists, gave music lessons to his pupils, and studied Latin, besides taking her own lesson. She liked to work for him, but she felt keenly his lack of generosity and warmth.[73] She missed the companionship of the Harsanyis, who had moved to New York. She disliked Bowers' pupils. There was something cheap about them.

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[69] Ibid., p. 235.

[70] Ibid., p. 243.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., p. 246.

[73] Ibid., p. 250.

While working with Bowers, Thea met Fred Ottenburg, an imaginative Chicago business man. He had charge of his father's branch brewery at that place.[74] He sometimes came to Bowers to take a few lessons. His voice was fairly good. He also played the piano. He took a liking to Thea, and introduced her to Mrs. Nathanmeyer, who engaged her to appear in one of her series of programs. Mrs. Nathanmeyer was a Jewess who appreciated talent. She felt that much of the future for Thea depended upon the kind of ideas with which she lived. The glint in Thea's eyes made Mrs. Nathanmeyer feel that the people would not make a great deal of difference. Above all, she warned her to remain herself.

Ottenburg became an important figure in Thea's life. He was now twenty-eight. He was extravagant, but not prodigal. His outside interests were so many that he never had time to get bored for very long at the time. Music was one of his natural forms of expression.[75]

Thea was ill for some time in the spring. The people who knew her were very lovely to her. Ottenburg even sent her flowers. These favors were appreciated, but she had no desire for human companionship. She was rather depressed in spirit. Her work in Chicago during the last two years had failed to bring the desired results. She was tired, and had no desire to get on in the world. Thea accepted Ottenburg's

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[74] Ibid., p. 266.

[75] Ibid., p. 282.

offer to spend her vacation on his father's ranch near the Cliff-Dweller ruins in Arizona, and she found there a place where she could thoroughly enjoy a much-needed rest. She was away from the bustle and activity of the city which had always tired her. It began to come to her that "voice was, first of all, vitality; a lightness in the body and a driving power in the blood. If she had that, she could sing."[76] The rest in this particular environment was giving her that vitality. Musical phrases were beginning to float through her mind, and seemed to develop themselves into desire for action. She was grateful to Ottenburg for helping her to acquire this quality, and she loved him in a way, but her ambition for a musical career had grown so strong that she would not consider exchanging it for a home and a family with him.[77]

Fred Ottenburg had experienced a disappointment in life. He had been married to a person with whom he could never live a congenial life. Divorce was the only way out, and his wife would never grant that.[78] He had found association with artists a pleasant relief, and had spent much time with them both in the United States and abroad. He could enjoy a different kind of friendship with men, and especially women, who had careers to follow. Marriage was not uppermost in their minds. Thea had much the same outlook. She was emotionally an artist, but he felt that he could do much to help her to

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[76] Ibid., p. 307.

[77] Ibid., p. 317.

[78] Ibid., p. 338.

get on with people and to find the better things in life. Even if he could marry her, he would never be a hindrance to her in her career. The future was too much in her eyes; he could not and would not take that away from her. He would gladly furnish her with money to go abroad, but she would not accept it. That would make her feel obligated to him in a certain sense. She would rather let Dr. Archie, her friend of Moonstone days, help her. Ottenburg could not understand this, and it hurt him. She accepted three thousand dollars from Dr. Archie, and the only favor she would accept from Ottenburg was a promise that he would see that Dr. Archie was paid that amount if something happened to her.[79] All preparations had been made for the voyage abroad. She was going to Germany to study. It was not always easy to leave home and break old ties, but she could not turn back. The future always beckoned her onward. She carried a something with her from her interested friends which would always help to inspire her.

Four years after Thea went to Germany, her father died suddenly of cancer.[80] That proved to be a blow Mrs. Kronborg was unable to live over. In her decline, she felt a desperate need of Thea's presence. Dr. Archie wrote Thea, explaining everything, but this letter reached Thea at the time that she was given an unexpected opportunity to take her first really

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[79] Ibid., p. 375.

[80] Ibid., p. 402.

big part in opera, as Elizabeth in "Tannhauser." She simply could not leave Dresden in less than six months. She wrote to her mother asking her to get strength and wait for her. She would come directly back to Moonstone as soon as her work was completed, and take her mother back with her to Germany where she could live in the environment she loved.

Mrs. Kronborg was proud of her daughter, but she had no will to live on. Thea did not need her any more. The mother had fulfilled her mission in this world, and she knew it. She hungered for her daughter across the waters, but felt a certain satisfaction in having been privileged to enjoy her when she was young, when her career was taking root. She could go out of this world with no regrets.

When Thea returned to New York to appear in "Lohengrin," Dr. Archie went to hear her. He was not prepared for the change he saw. She was not the same Thea, but something so wonderful that it hardly seemed real. He spoke a few words with her after the performance, but she was still not real. She had grown much older, but she had found herself. She had what very few singers ever have, color in her voice. Her voice was mind and heart. She made a person have an assurance about her, to have no doubt or fear.[81] There was a basic idea pulsing back of every bar she sang. Her musical talent gave her the power to get at the root of every character or idea. She did not have to invent artificialities.

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[81] Ibid., p. 420.

Her poses were all natural.[82]

When Dr. Archie called on Thea the following day, he found a different Thea. Ottenburg, too, stepped in, and the conversation turned to opera. The plans for a peaceful visit together for the three old friends on Monday evening was interrupted by a call for Thea to come at once to substitute for Hecker as Brunhilda.[83] Hecker was too ill to sing. It was another big opportunity for Thea. Her entire time seemed taken up with her music, but she did manage for an occasional visit with her two friends. Her talks with them were confidential and genuine. She felt that they alone thoroughly understood her. The game had been hard and she needed their sincerity and encouragement. She felt repaid for all it had cost her, however, as she completed a very successful performance of "Siegline," in which she had been able to give herself in the fulness of her artistic growth. What she had so often wanted so much to do had been possible for her that afternoon. Her body, her face, and her voice had worked together in a harmonious whole. Harsanyi, Spanish Johnny, all of those who cared and who had come to find out about her went away pleased. She had found what she had given a life to. It was not surprising that Moonstone was proud to claim her. She was a real artist.

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[82] Ibid., p. 422.

[83] Ibid., p. 439.

No one without Miss Cather's deep and thorough feeling about the artist and his art could have given these pictures of the grinding struggles and the almost superhuman compensations experienced by the artist. She knew artists personally, as is evident by her reviews of the work of Louise Homer, Geraldine Farrar, and Olive Fremstad.[84] These people were full of inspiration; they were people who had done things in a big way. They had lived in the atmosphere of music from early childhood, and had developed, body and spirit, toward a goal in the world of music. They had put art first. In fact, Olive Fremstad felt that her work was the only thing that interested her. To her, art was the only thing that was beautiful. She gave her whole self to her role, and found in that her power to conquer.

Miss Cather has accomplished what she was aiming at in her stories of the artists. She has created a new respect and love for them and their works in the minds of the public. They have become as real as her pioneers, and as genuine as her land.

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[84]Willa Cather, "Three American Singers," McClure (1913), XLII, pp. 33-48.

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES IN WILLA CATHER'S WORK

It had been evident for some time in Miss Cather's writings that there was a certain tendency on her part to depend upon the power of religious influences in her books to create a particular mood. She had experienced a keener insight into the effect of religious tendencies than many others had ever had the opportunity to experience. Her early years on the Nebraska prairies had brought her into direct contact with many different points of view in religion. She had been so situated that she could take her choice of attending a Norwegian, Danish, Swedish or German Protestant church, or a French, Bohemian, or Catholic church.[1] There were also some American congregations not far away. This variety of groupings naturally made an impression on her plastic mind. She kept her religious impressions fairly well out of her short stories, but they came out in a rather incidental way in some of her first novels. Probably she was personally influenced in her writings by her religious faith, and perhaps this influence has prompted her to proceed with greater gentility and has limited her discussion of moral

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[1]Willa Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," Nation, CXVII (1923), p. 237.

problems.[2] She seems to find insufficiency in the philosophy of the nineteenth century, and turns to religion in her writing. She treats, however, of the catholicism of culture rather than that of doctrine. It is safe to be a pioneer with a religious goal. She is able to satisfy a yearning present in the human being, for something permanent, something enduring. She does not permit herself to be influenced by the modern trend in social conditions, but relies on the standards set by a sane pioneering people with an established religious background. The rock, in Shadows on the Rock, becomes the symbol of the solidarity of religion.[3]

Miss Cather had not planned to write a Catholic novel. Although she had found the stories of the work of the church and the struggles of the missionaries very interesting, she had entertained no intention of writing about them. She considered that to be a job for some Catholic writer, certainly not hers.[4] She merely set out to present the experiences and emotions of a group of people by the light of her own reactions.

Miss Cather makes mention of Ivar in O Pioneers, who was often thought of by the majority of the people who knew him as mentally unbalanced, as reading a Norwegian Bible when

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[2]Clifton Fademan, "Willa Cather: The Past Recaptured," Nation, CXXXV (1932), p. 564.

[3]Lionel Trilling, "Willa Cather," New Republic, XC (1937), p. 12.

[4]Rev. Mark Barron O.P., "The Catholic Novel," Commonweal, XXIII (1936), p. 665.

Alexandra and the boys called on him one Sunday afternoon.[5] He had a religion of his own, and could not seem to fit himself in with any denomination, but he seemed to find great consolation in the reading of the Bible, and often committed chapters to memory.[6] Probably that helped to develop his sympathetic feeling for animals and for nature in general. He probably knew more about the care of farm animals than any other inhabitant on the prairie. Even old Mrs. Lee considered Ivar's reading of the Bible a pleasant and inspiring habit.[7]

The French Church, the Church of Sainte-Agnes, "a high narrow, red-brick building," with tall steeple and steep roof, was located on a hill above the little town of Sainte-Agnes. It could be seen from miles around and added an air of power and triumph to the appearance of the surrounding country. Alexandra and her brother, Emil, were to attend a supper in the basement of this church. There was to be a gala festival there at this particular time, with contests, a program, an auction, and plenty of good things to eat. Everybody turned out to come to this fair. Father Duchesne was present to see that everything went on in an orderly way.

"The Church has always held that life is for the living."[8] There were busy preparations being made in the little church

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[5]Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 36.

[6]Ibid., p. 37

[7]Ibid., p. 189.

[8]Ibid., p. 251.

of Sainte-Agnes on Saturday before the confirmation service was to be held the following day. White veils and white dresses were being made for those who were to take part. One hundred boys and girls were in the class, and the Bishop was coming in to conduct the services. A cavalcade of forty French boys was to ride across the country to meet the Bishop's carriage as it came in from Hanover. They met at the church at six o'clock on Sunday morning to ride out in a group. It was an enthusiastic and zealous group of young men who met the Bishop five miles out of Sainte-Agnes. He was attended by two priests. Like one man, the group of forty removed their hats "in a broad salute, and bowed their heads as the handsome old man lifted his two fingers in the episcopal blessing. The horsemen closed about the carriage like a guard."[9] Mass was at eleven and the people were making their way to the church in buggies and in wagons. After the pews were filled, the men and boys filled the space at the back of the church, kneeling on the floor. Almost every family in the town had some relative in the class. There was an atmosphere of reverence throughout the congregation, but it was especially noticeable in the faces of the new communicants, reflecting a beautiful glory as they took the places reserved for them. Even the songs were more impressive than usual. The confirmation service followed the mass. When this was all over, the young people of the class were the center of

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[9]Ibid., p. 253.

attraction. They were "kissed and embraced and wept over. All the aunts and grandmothers wept with joy. The housewives had much ado to tear themselves away from the general rejoicing and hurry back to their kitchens."[10] It was indeed an important day in the life of the people of Sainte-Agnes. Practically every home contained guests.

The third meeting in this same little church took place on the day following the confirmation services. This meeting marked the final rites over one of the community's much-loved young men, Amedee Chevalier, who had died very suddenly following an operation for appendicitis.[11] He had waited too long. This time the church was decked with black. The church had played a big part in this young man's life. It had been the scene of some of his most serious and some of his happiest hours. There was a feeling that "through the church on earth he had passed to the church triumphant, the goal of the hopes and faith of so many hundred years."[12]

This series of pictures of the little church of Sainte-Agnes gives a very limited idea of what part the church played in the little community. As a rule, the church was the social center in an immigrant community. The church building was one of the first buildings to be constructed after the homes had been completed. These strangers in a strange land found

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[10] Ibid., p. 256. [11] Ibid., p. 246.

[12] Ibid., p. 252.

in the church's presence a moral courage which was necessary to their bleak lives; it promoted an atmosphere of peace, security, and sweetness.

There is very little mention given to religious influence in The Professor's House; however, Augusta, the sewing-woman who came to work in Professor St. Peter's house, is described as being "a reliable, methodical spinster, a German Catholic and very devout,"[13] and strangely enough, she was one of the few characters in this book of struggle with the oncoming modern ideas, who remained stable and firmly balanced.

Professor St. Peter, in his discussion of science, brought in a few thoughts that expressed a certain kind of faith, although it could not be attached to any particular denomination.

> "It's the laboratory, not the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. . . . I don't think you help people by making their conduct of no importance — you impoverish them. As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing. The king and the beggar had the same chance at miracles and great temptations and revelations. And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own individual lives."[14]

Even Moses had learned that he could make a population of slaves into an independent people more quickly if he

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[13]Willa Cather, The Professor's House, p. 16.

[14]Ibid., p. 68.

invented elaborate ceremonials to give them a feeling of dignity and purpose.[15] Even the cutting of the finger nails was a religious observance. "With the theologians came the cathedral-builders, the sculptors and glass-workers and painters."[16]

Professor St. Peter's family wondered how he got by the Methodists with his talks. As life went on, Professor St. Peter outgrew the terrified feeling he had once had of death. He used to wish that his wife might be buried in the coffin with him; that would at least be some comfort. "But now he thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth."[17]

Some reference to religious influence is also found in My Antonia, although it is not used as a dominant theme. We are led to understand that the Shimerda family felt a reversant reaction toward religion. This was definitely displayed by Mr. Shimerda as he knelt before the Christmas tree in the home of the Burdens. After the candles were lighted, "Mr. Shimerda rose, crossed himself, and quietly knelt down before the tree, his head sunk forward. His long body formed a letter S." There was some apprehension for a while as to how Grandfather Burden would feel regarding this demonstration, as he was prone to be narrow about religious matters, but the

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[15] Ibid., p. 69. [16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 272.

sincerity of Mr. Shimerda's act caused even the Protestant host reverently to bow his head.[18]

It must be generally accepted that the Burden family was devout in its devotional duties. Mr. Burden believed in morning prayers in his home, and unlike many men who lead in devotional services, he was able to make his prayers interesting and revealing as well as sincere. His command of expression was unusually good, and his thoughts were often revealed in the content of his prayers. They served, to a great extent, as the key to his personality. On Christmas morning his prayers were a little longer than usual, and probably reached out a little farther in sympathy to suffering mankind.[19]

The religious atmosphere in the Burden home served as a calm and peaceful influence over the family as a whole. Everyone who entered the home seemed naturally to feel the effects of a secure and contented orderliness. Religion in the Shimerda household was entirely different. Instead of a confidence in a merciful and gracious God, they seemed to feel the wrath of an angry God hanging over them. This feeling was clearly portrayed in the uneasiness from which Ambrosch suffered before he was able to secure a priest to help his family pray his father's soul out of torment.[20] A faith in the power of prayer for the dead could not be argued

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[18]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 99.

[19]Ibid., p. 96.

[20]Ibid., p. 118.

out of the minds of these Bohemians. Jelinek was much concerned over the fact that his friend had died without receiving the Sacrament, for that, he felt, was a powerful safeguard against the powers of evil.[21]

The fact that Mr. Shimerda had committed suicide also brought up another problem, that of a place in which to bury his body. The Catholic cemetery was too far away, and the roads too nearly impassable to permit them to carry the corpse there at that time, and there was also a doubt that they would permit a suicide victim to be buried in their cemetery. The Norwegians near Squaw Creek were appealed to, but after a meeting of their church officers, they returned an answer of refusal. They could not accept the body of a suicide into their graveyard. Mrs. Burden felt very resentful about this foreign clannishness, but it finally resulted in Mr. Shimerda's being buried on the southwest corner of his own land. This was Mrs. Shimerda's wish. It was also her wish that Mr. Burden should say a word of prayer in English over the lonely grave of the departed, which he very graciously did.[22]

The remainder of this book has been dedicated to the main theme, pioneers, with no further discussion of religious influences.

Little direct reference to religious influence is detected in reading <u>One of Ours</u>. The entire book is one of

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[21]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 121.

[22]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 134.

strife, and the peace of religious influence is lacking. In reading Milton's "Paradise Lost" to her son, Claude, Mrs. Wheeler got into a discussion with him about interesting characters in the Bible. Claude thought that if all the great sinners were taken out of the Bible, the interesting characters would also be removed, as even Christ was considered a dangerous kind of criminal by the Jews. At first Mrs. Wheeler thought Claude was trying to confuse her, but he went on to explain that the people who were merely free from blame did not generally amount to much.[23] The mother then began to feel that he was trying to get her back to Faith and Works, since that had always raised a question in his mind. Perhaps the explanation she gave was as satisfactory as any that could have been given.

> "I don't know as much about it as I did then [when Claude was young]. As I get older, I leave a good deal more to God. I believe He wants to save whatever is noble in this world, and that He knows more ways of doing it than I. I believe He is sometimes where we would least expect to find Him,— even in proud, rebellious hearts."[24]

Claude, during his youth, had formed an impression about some people in the church, which was difficult for him to change. At the time he began to consider seriously the question of going away to school, a Brother Weldon from Temple College, came to his mother's home to enlist the interest of prospective

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[23]Willa Cather, One of Ours, p. 87.

[24]Ibid.

students in that particular school as a safe place to which to send a boy who was leaving home for college for the first time. The result was that Claude was sent to Temple College, as Mrs. Wheeler felt that the influence of a Christian school would be unquestionably the best place for her son. Claude had always thoroughly disliked Weldon, and was able to see through that sanctimonious expression of righteousness with which Weldon had fooled Mrs. Wheeler. Claude felt that he was a decidedly selfish, lazy, hypocritical person, who seemingly spent his summer months soliciting students, but in reality was more interested in satisfying his gluttonous appetite and having an easy time under the pretense of being engaged in study and meditation.[25]

The people with whom Claude lived while in school did not add much to his admiration for people connected with the church. Captain Chapin was a man of twenty-six. He was studying for the ministry, and was doing every available odd job to help defray his expenses. He had been studying in Temple College for four years, and it seemed very probable that he would be there two more before he would be able to complete his work. He was the type of student who carried his books with him on every occasion, and read them even while riding the street car, but his natural stupidity was evidentally so great that he was unable to make any noticeable progress. He applied himself audibly to his study of

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[25] Ibid., p. 30.

elocution and oratory, in a voice that re-echoed in harsh, rasping sounds throughout the house. Chapin's sister was almost as repulsive to Claude as Chapin himself. She was a sentimental, giggling sort who wore out some of the best literary masterpieces by making a chant of them while at her work about the house.[26]

Claude built up a wrong conception of religion because people like those just mentioned had represented religion in his mind.

Fate seemed determined to bring suffering to Claude in this field of thought. Just as his mother had accepted Brother Weldon as a true representative of religious influence, so did Claude's wife, Enid, drink in the platitudes of the "purring, white-necktied fellow."[27] Claude could not understand how such sensible women could be capable of exercising such poor judgment. Enid had always felt that she should like some day to join her sister in China as missionary. Enid's opportunity to go to China came when her family received a letter telling of her sister's serious illness in a mission hospital. Although she would have to break up hers and Claude's home and move out of the new house specifically prepared for them, Enid felt that the call to Christian duty would justify her in doing this. Claude felt that everything he entered into in life was a failure, even his marriage.

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[26] Ibid., p. 32.

[27] Ibid., p. 130.

With his wife in China for an indefinite length of time, there was not much left in life for him. The religious influences seemed to have weakened rather than strengthened his grasp on life. Doubt ruled supreme for him.

Miss Cather has used the religious influences in One of Ours to accentuate the feeling of despair which prevails throughout the story, and no particular denomination is indicated.

There is practically no mention of any religious influences in My Mortal Enemy, until the last few pages of the book, when we find Mrs. Henshawe arranging for mass to be said for Madame Modjeska on the fifteenth anniversary of her death. Mrs. Henshawe's next speech indicates that she blamed her husband for her own lack of affiliation with church.

> "Yes, I broke with the Church when I broke with everything else and ran away with a German free-thinker; but I believe in holy words and holy rites all the same. It is a solace to me to know that tomorrow a mass will be said here in heathendom for the spirit of that noble artist, and that beautiful and gracious woman."[28]

During the last part of Mrs. Henshawe's illness, her mind seemed actively concerned with questions pertaining to religion. Father Fay, a pleasant young man, visited her often. Mrs. Henshawe seemed to revolve in her mind many questions which arose over their discussions. She wondered if candles (the flame) were in themselves religious and why.[29] At

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[28]Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 102.

[29]Ibid., p. 111.

another time she expressed her reaction to religion by saying that she thought that it was different from every thing else; because in religion seeking is finding. To her it meant fulfillment.[30] She, somehow, felt that her condition was unbearable. She suffered when she was alone; she was her own mortal enemy.[31] She called for the Sacrament to be given her on the morning of the day of her death, and seemed to fall into quiet repose after that. She wished to be alone, with only a sister from the convent to care for her. It was in the state of greatest anxiety that Mr. Henshawe turned from her empty bed room to seek for his dying wife who had cautiously slipped out on a last journey. She had left him a note asking him not to follow her, as she wished to be alone. She had even made provision for money for masses.[32]

Mrs. Henshawe's body was found on a headland overlooking the cool waters. It had become a favorite retreat for her. "Her head had fallen forward; the ebony crucifix was in her hands."[33] She had once expressed a desire to be in this place as the morning broke over the water, and there was every reason to believe that she had lived to fulfill her wish. She had gone out to be alone with her God, and to find peace in the majesty of His handiworks.

The mood created by this introduction of religious

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 113.

[32] Ibid., p. 115.

[33] Ibid., p. 118.

sentiment is of the type which prompts a person to bow his head in silent reverence. Miss Cather has touched a feeling which demands the finest of man's reactions, silence.

In The Song of the Lark, Miss Cather brings us directly into the home of a Methodist preacher and his family. It is not the strength of the preacher's personality, however, that makes us admire the stability of the family. Peter Kronborg was "a tall, loosely built man, with a thin brown beard, streaked with gray. He wore a frock coat, a broad-brimmed black hat, a white lawn necktie, and steel-rimmed spectacles. Altogether there was a pretentious and important air about him."[34] He had a tendency to control himself by withdrawing to his habitual pulpit manner. When nervous, he would be bothered by a ministerial cough. He was the type of man who seemed always to be getting in the way in the house. His appearance in the pulpit in his spotless shirt and white neckties was irreproachable. His wife had full faith in his education for his position and for his eloquence in delivering his sermons, but she had no faith in his ability to take care of their worldly affairs, and therefore took care of the business end of the family's affairs herself. Kronborg capably cared for the moral side of the household, leading his family in morning prayers and grace at table, and encouraging a clean, patriotic, orderly atmosphere about the house.[35]

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[34]Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 4.

[35]Ibid., p. 12.

Peter Kronborg had been born in the Scandinavian colony in Minnesota, and had been sent to study for the ministry by the women of a Swedish evangelical mission. These women believed in his talent. They helped the lazy, lanky youth to complete his education. He was able to speak Swedish in the performance of duties where that language was required, and the rest of the time he used a very bookish English. He seemed not to be blest with a spontaneous flow of words.[36] He came from a poorer stock than his wife, and really appeared more Norwegian than Swedish.

There were present in the town of Moonstone also a new brick Catholic church,[37] and a Baptist congregation. Members of the Presbyterian faith were to be found among the town inhabitants. It was typical of the mixture of denominations that Miss Cather had lived in the midst of in her youth while among the pioneers on the Nebraska prairies.

Peter Kronborg was interested in the welfare of his family. He encouraged Thea's musical interest, probably not so much because he realized the full extent of her ability, as that he needed her to help him in playing for his meetings and leading in the songs. He was proud to feel that his daughter was a capable music teacher in the town at an early age, and was actually making money by her accomplishment. He also felt that by giving her work to do in the church, he

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[36] Ibid., p. 15.

[37] Ibid., p. 37.

would be able to feel assured that she would always be present. She had refused to take part in any of the church organizations, and that placed him in a very embarrassing position when he admonished the other young people of the town to take part. He did not want people to be able to say that his own children did not take part. The mid-week prayer meetings were rather monotonous, a hymn, Kronborg's reading from the Bible, another hymn, the pastor's explanation of his Bible reading, another hymn, and then the open meeting in which old men and women talked and prayed by turns. The attendance was usually very small. The whole meeting was such that it was not surprising that the young, energetic people were not inspired to attend.

Mr. Kronborg enjoyed his ease too much and was too sensible to worry his children much about religion. He was probably more sincere in his work than many preachers, but when he spoke about matters of the church to his family, he usually admonished them to keep up appearances. Religion was handled like any other business that concerned the family. It was a kind of accepted routine of the household.[38]

Ray Kennedy seemed to feel a kind of repulsion at the mention of religion. Mr. Kronborg tried to speak to him in the capacity of a preacher at the time of the railroad accident, but Ray's answer gave no encouragement:

> "Never mind about all that, padre. Christ and me fell out long ago."[39]

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[38] Ibid., p. 131.

[39] Ibid., p. 145.

And a little later to Dr. Archie:

> "Get the old preacher out of the way, doc. I want to have a little talk with her."[40]

Kronborg generally spent some of his time in his study, a little room behind the church. He prepared his sermons in this room. He "did not write out his sermons, but spoke from notes jotted upon small pieces of card-board in a kind of short hand of his own."[41] Many members of his congregation regarded him as a model preacher and sincerely appreciated his bookish language. He was especially appreciated because he neither smoked nor touched spirits, and because he took a particular interest in the culinary abilities of the women of the congregation. "He ate enormously, with a zest which seemed incongruous with his spare frame."[42]

When Thea was leaving for Chicago to take up her study of music, her father deemed it his Christian duty to admonish her not to forget that her talents came from her heavenly Father, and that they should be used to His glory, but the straightforward look in Thea's eyes completely disarmed him, and he was unable to continue his admonition. He consoled himself with his faith in her Christian character.[43]

Mr. Kronborg really did feel that big cities were places filled with wicked people. He knew they were places of hustle and bustle in the world's activities. From his own college

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[40] Ibid., p. 146.

[41] Ibid., p. 150.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., p. 155.

days he remembered Chicago as "a place full of cheap shows and dance halls and boys from the country who behave disgustingly."[44]

When Thea arrived in Chicago, she called on the Reverend Lars Larsen, a friend to whom Mr. Kronborg had written. He was pastor of the Swedish Reform church, a neat little building with a clean and comfortable-looking parsonage next door.

> Mr. Larsen was a small, plump man, with a short, yellow beard, very white teeth, and a little turned-up nose on which he wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses. He looked about thirty-five, but he was growing bald, and his thin hair was parted above his left ear and brought up over the bare spot on the top of his head. He looked cheerful and agreeable.[45]

He was the lazy son of Swedish parents who had worked hard on their homestead in Kansas. All the other members of the large family had worked hard except Lars. He had been a model student in school because he found getting his lessons easier than farm work. He decided early in life to study for the ministry, since that would be easier than any other calling he knew.[46] His father, who had been opposed to the boy's plans, finally agreed to send him in order to conceal his son's laziness from his neighbors.

Larsen got along with the women of his congregation. As a preacher, he was a person of mediocre ability, but as a violinist he was better. He was a good manager in financial affairs,

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[44] Ibid., p. 156.

[45] Ibid., p. 162.

[46] Ibid., p. 165.

and had managed the property he had inherited in such a way as to be independent. He enjoyed the softer things in life, late sleeping in the morning, good food and plenty of it, sentimental novels, music, resting and playing. He was not insincere, but simple-hearted and kind. He enjoyed candy, and thought much of his children.[47] He managed to give Thea a temporary place in his choir, and was also able to suggest a comfortable place for her to room and board.

The remainder of The Song of the Lark is given over to the musical development of the young artist, and no mention is made of religious influence. It is quite clear that the part played by the religious influence in this story was that of helping to build up a proper background. It helps to get the full feeling of the atmosphere in which Thea grew from childhood to young womanhood. Neither of the preachers described is of a model type. Each one entered the ministry because it offered a soft way of making a living. The men were not insincere, and yet they were certainly not men who would inspire a true Christian enthusiasm.

There is an entirely different type of character presented in Death Comes for the Archbishop (1926). Here we come upon men who have but one purpose in life, to spread the power of the work of the church. There was a meeting called to discuss the founding of an Apostolic Vicarate in New Mexico. The meeting was held near Rome, Italy. Three

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[47] Ibid., p. 166.

cardinals dressed in black cassocks with crimson piping and crimson buttons, and a bishop wearing a long black coat over his velvet vest, were present. The language used was French.[48] The new territory under consideration was practically unknown to this group of men. The missionary was convinced in his mind that this new territory had a great future, and made a desperate appeal to his friends. If that country could still call itself a Catholic country after three hundred years of the most desperate struggle and neglect, surely something could be made of it, and this was the proper time to clean out the impurities from within its confines so as to be able to demand the respect of the world. The condition of the mixed nationalities of inhabitants scattered over that isolated desert country, crossed by canyons and gorges, but uncrossed by means of communication, was practically unknown, and there was a question as to which nationality should be represented by their leaders. The men each had a tender feeling for a particular country, Spanish, German, and French, but the final decision was made in favor of Bishop Jean Marie Latour.

In Latour, Miss Cather has given us a character who not only has the appearance of a devout Christian, but who really is all that he seems to be. After an extremely exhausting journey through the pathless stretches of desert land, with

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[48]Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 2.

a dizzy feeling of being utterly lost in the wilds, we see him as he turns to his God for strength and guidance.

> A young priest, at his devotions, and a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance. His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man, — it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat severe. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentleness, brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing.[49]

A man who can answer to such a description is the kind who will establish in his fellowmen a feeling of absolute faith in mankind. He is in reality one of the chosen few fit to carry on God's work here on earth. Surely no better representative could have been selected to go out into this forsaken country to give new life and enthusiasm to that group of tired and discouraged survivors of the Catholic Church.

Latour had left his work at Cincinnati a year ago, and had been on his way to his Vicarate ever since. No one seemed to be able to direct him to this new place. He had gone down the river to New Orleans, by boat to Galveston, across Texas to San Antonio, and along the Rio Grande to New Mexico. He had met with much misfortune while on his way. Accidents, loss of his goods, and illness had delayed him. It was with thankful hearts that Bishop Latour and his boyhood friend,

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[49] Ibid., p. 16.

Father Joseph Vaillant, rode into Santa Fe, "claiming it for the glory of God."[50] But Latour's troubles had not ended with his first hard journey. When he did present himself before the Mexican priests in Santa Fe, they refused to recognize his authority, and demanded that he present his credentials. This meant that he must make a journey of three thousand miles into Old Mexico to Bishop Durango in order that the necessary arrangements might be made. On his return to Santa Fe, he was lost in the desert, and finally found himself in a little Mexican settlement where he was shown every possible kindness. While speaking with these people, he learned that they were strongly opposed to Americans, and unwilling to become citizens of that country. They considered all Americans infidels; in fact all people outside of the Catholic Church were infidels to them. The Mexicans were not impressed by what Latour told them of his years of experience with the Protestants in the northern part of the country.

Father Latour was interested in looking at the holy images, of which there was always a collection, even in the poorest Mexican homes. Many interesting legends were connected with the history of the images and what they symbolized.

Father Latour remained in this village long enough to hold mass, "hear confessions, baptize, and sanctify marriages."[51] He spent some time also in learning a little about the

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[50] Ibid., p. 20.

[51] Ibid., p. 26.

surrounding country. Many of the things he saw in nature were to him symbols of some part of the work in the church. He returned to his Santa Fe church just a short time before Christmas, and was happy to find that a friendly welcome awaited him. Father Vaillant, who remained in Santa Fe while Latour went to Old Mexico, had won many friends for the new workers.[52] He had also made their new home as comfortable as possible with the means at hand. Latour spent part of Christmas day writing a letter to his brother in France. It was not a letter filled with lonesomeness, but with an enthusiastic description of the surroundings and the work of the two missionaries in their new field. The two men were happy as they sat down to a meal, prepared with skill by Father Vaillant.

A person can not fully appreciate the Bishop's faithful helper until he has some idea of his appearance. Miss Cather presents Father Vaillant as

> Crimson from standing over an open fire, his rugged face was even homelier than usual — though one of the first things a stranger decided upon meeting Father Joseph was that the Lord had made few uglier men. He was short, skinny, bow-legged from a life on horseback, and his countenance had little to recommend it but kindliness and vivacity. He looked old, though he was then about forty. His skin was hardened and seamed by exposure to weather in a bitter climate, his neck scrawny and wrinkled like an old man's. A bold, blunt-tipped nose, positive chin, a very large mouth — the lips thick and succulent but never loose, never relaxed, always stiffened by effort or working with excitement. . . . Even his eyes were nearsighted,

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[52] Ibid., p. 32.

> and of such a pale, watery blue as to be impressive.[53]

There was no striking forcefulness in Father Vaillant's appearance, but there was a certain quality about him — "homely, real, persistent, with the driving power of a dozen men in his poorly built body." Even the shallowest Mexican seemed to sense quality in him.[54]

The faithful Father Vaillant often announced that he would go no farther with Latour, although he felt in duty bound to actively serve his church at that time.[55] It was Father Vaillant's delight to do things for his master, such as placing the old bell in the church yard at Santa Fe, and teaching a Mexican boy how to ring the Angelus.[56] This act brought back many pleasant memories of their peaceful life in France.

This book is a series of experiences of these two devout Christian missionaries. Miss Cather has very cleverly introduced a number of legendary tales into the experiences related, each one being so arranged in its relation to the story as a whole as to emphasize the romantic mystery of the religion of these early people. Among the stories referred to is the one told by Padre Escolastico Herrera, of the revelation of the Mother of God appearing in the New World. The portrait to verify the truth of the story was to be found in

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[53] Ibid., p. 37.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 41.

[56] Ibid., p. 44.

the shrine of Our Lady of Guadaloupe.[57]

It was necessary for these missionaries to make many tiring journeys into different sections of this wilderness in order to serve the scattered members of their flock. The servants on the large ranches had to be married according to the Catholic faith, and their children had to be baptized. Father Vaillant made a journey of this nature to Senor Lajon. Lajon was a wealthy rancher who enjoyed his poker games and old wine. He liked to display his stock, and it was while indulging in this pleasure that Vaillant managed to persuade Lajon to give him his two most highly-prized beasts of burden, Contento and Angelica, in order that he would be able to carry on his missionary work in a more comfortable and efficient manner.[58]

Father Joseph and Father Latour had many unusual experiences, some of which were hair-raising in nature. The incident which brought into their hands a poor woman who became a faithful servant in their service, was among the most interesting of these experiences. In seeking shelter for the night, the two missionaries wantered into the hut of a murderer, and would undoubtedly have become two more of his victims had not his wife, Magdalena, been able to save them. She had a gruesome tale to tell about her husband when she was rescued from him. She told of how he killed their children, and murdered innocent travelers. Her married life had been one of terror, and

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[57] Ibid., p. 46.

[58] Ibid., p. 63.

had practically destroyed any desire on her part to live, but she did wish for the aid of a priest to make her soul right with God before she died.[59] This episode also had other results. It brought about the acquaintance of Father Latour and the well-known Kit Carson. The latter had married a Mexican woman, and had become a Catholic as a matter of form, but his attitude was changing to a more serious acceptance of the faith. In his younger days Carson had thought of all priests as rascals, and all nuns as bad women. That had been true of a few of them, but that idea was being changed. Although uneducated in book learning, Carson was a man of quick intelligence, with a clean sense of honor and a compassionate heart.[60] By his knowledge of the people and the country, he was able to be of great help to the two missionaries.

Father Latour and Father Vaillant met many peculiar characters on their rounds. Among their fellow workers they found such men as Padre Gallegos, who was cordial and most ceremoniously polite, but whose religious duties were shamefully neglected,[61] or Father Jesus whose simple mind made him almost childish, but whose quality of goodness made him admirable. Then there was Jacinto, who proved himself a most efficient guide. It was on one of their rides that the Bishop learned something about Indian beliefs. Having been caught

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[59] Ibid., p. 74.

[60] Ibid., p. 78.

[61] Ibid., p. 83.

in a blinding snow storm, the two men took refuge in a cave. Father Latour was upset by a most peculiar sound coming through a crack in the ground, but Jacinto seemed entirely undisturbed by it, and did not seem to have any explanation to make in regard to the sound. Whether it was a river, a snake, or any other known thing Father Latour did not know, but he did know that whatever it was, it had some meaning to Jacinto. He was convinced that it was really true that no white man knew anything about Indian religion, because Indians did not tell. Even an Indian converted into a devout Catholic would continue to believe in certain mysterious symbols.[62]

Father Vaillant contracted black measles from some of his Indian friends in the Pecos mountains and became seriously ill. Father Latour again nursed him back to health.[63]

Father Martinez had been both the spiritual and temporal ruler of Northern New Mexico. He had been a grasping, cruel power, who unmercilessly crushed anyone who formed the least obstacle to his plans. He met Father Latour with crude pompousness, and invited him into his disorderly living quarters. Latour was also introduced to his student, Trinidad, who was making his preparations to become a priest. Trinidad was a nephew to Father Lucero.[64] Father Latour was overwhelmed by the prevailing disorder and barbaric state in which he found things, and hoped to be able to make a much-needed

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[62] Ibid., p. 138.

[63] Ibid., p. 119.

[64] Ibid., p. 144.

change, but decided that the wisest thing to do was to remain silent for a short while longer. Padre Martinez was getting old and would eventually have to be replaced. His people were attached to him, and if Father Latour took any steps against him, it would result in the permanent loss of Taos to the French missionary. Father Vaillant, too, agreed that Latour's plan of procrastination was a sane one.

Father Vaillant who had been in church work at Albuquerque for some time, was recalled to Santa Fe while Father Latour made a business journey abroad. Latour returned after an absence of nearly a year, bringing with him four new priests. One of the four was sent to Taos. Although Padre Martinez, the former priest, had resigned his parish, he still continued to celebrate high mass, and to perform marriage and burial services, as well as to dictate the lives of the parishoners. A clash between Padre Martinez and the new priest naturally followed. This resulted in the organization of a schismatic church which attracted much attention to the two old priests for some time. They made Trinidad their acting curate. Much scandal developed, and Father Vaillant was finally sent to quiet the disturbance. Letters of excommunication were read against the offending priests. Father Martinez died a short while after this event, while still at the head of the schismatic church, and was buried by Father Lucero. After a victorious struggle with an attacking robber, Father Lucero, too, soon passed away, with Father Vaillant, who had brought about

Lucero's excommunication, serving as his Christian servant and comforter during his last days. Strangely enough, a sum of nearly twenty thousand dollars was left by the old priest.

Father Vaillant had a very earnest desire to work in the country near Tucson, and lived to have his wish granted. (His life had turned out vastly different from what he had once planned it. He had thought that he would like to lead a life of seclusion and solitary devotion, but his love for human contact had changed his mind). Father Latour called his old friend back from Tucson to reveal to him a very ambitious idea. He had found what he considered an ideal place for building a Cathedral for the future, in the hills about fifteen miles from Santa Fe, from the beautiful native stone.[65]

A call for a resourceful, kind, and understanding priest for the mining camps of the Colorado Rockies came to the two missionaries. Again Father Vaillant was eager to take up his much-loved work of bringing, if possible, solace to those in trouble. It was in this region he spent the last of his failing strength. He was never to return to his work in New Mexico.[66]

Father Latour spent much of his time during the last few years of his life training new missionary priests from France. He spent some of his time in his little adobe house in the hills near Santa Fe. He had bought and arranged this place

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[65] Ibid., p. 244.

[66] Ibid., p. 259.

according to his own liking, orchards, chapel, and all,[67] though he still retained his study in the house of the new archbishop. How much of the last few years he spent in reliving in his memory the many years of service he and Father Vaillant had spent together in the service of the church! They had both been rewarded in a number of ways. Besides the honor that came to Father Latour on being made a bishop, was that greatest of all compensations, satisfaction in a Christian work well done. Father Latour truly died "of having lived,"[68] and was ready to be received into his Cathedral which had been his closest friend since the passing of Father Vaillant.

It is a wonderful and awe-inspiring picture of sincerity that Miss Cather gives us in these two characters. She presents a comfortable thought as she portrays the old order of selfish, ignorant native priests being replaced by this new order of righteous, God-fearing French priests who so capably and majestically won the souls of men.

One of the last novels written by Miss Cather, Shadows on the Rock, is imbued with much the same atmosphere as that with which Death Comes for the Archbishop is imbued. The setting of the story has been changed, however, from the Southwest to Canada. Euclide Auclair, a French philosopher-apothecary, had been called to Quebec, where he lived on the

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[67] Ibid., p. 266.

[68] Ibid., p. 270.

winding stairway connecting the two halves of Quebec, in order that his service might be equally accessible to the citizens of both sections.[69] Auclair had come to Quebec with his young daughter and frail wife, upon the summons of Count Frontenac, whom he always served with humble devotion.

Miss Cather wrote this book to satisfy a desire which had developed in her mind after she had looked upon the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes of the life of Sainte Genevieve. She wished to do something similar in prose. Her frescoes consisted of seven panels depicting life in Quebec at the time of Frontenac. It is a peaceful book devoid of exciting conflict.[70]

It is, in a way, expressive of Miss Cather's own reaction to life, a withdrawal from the coarser influences of a struggling, moving world, to a quiet, comfortable home where the power of the refining influence of a French civilization, tempered by the serenity of the Catholic church folds its protecting arms around a tired worker. It is not surprising that this book should be chosen for the Prix Femina Americain.[71]

Much of the story is concerned with the life of little Cecile, daughter of Auclair. By following the development

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[69]Willa Cather, Shadows on the Rock, p. 8.

[70]John Chamberlain, New York Times Book Review, August 2, 1931, p. 1.

[71]"Three Books Picked for the Prix Femina," New York Times, May 18, 1932, p. 18.

of this growing child, Miss Cather is able to give a rather clear description of both the religious and the social life of the French people in Quebec. Life in this place centered in the work of the church. The atmosphere of the Auclair home was really a reflection of that of the town itself. Madame Auclair had brought with her her most highly treasured household goods, and had established in her new home a replica of what she had left in her native land. She realized a short while after she reached Quebec that she did not have many years to live, and therefore put forth a strong effort in training her daughter so as to be able to carry on the household affairs in the same manner in which she herself had set them up. She wished her to get the feel of their way of doing things so as to preserve that fineness of living so greatly admired by the cultured Frenchmen.

> The individuality, the character, of M. Auclair's house though it appeared to be made up of cloth and glass and a little silver, was really made of very fine moral qualities in two women: the mother's unswerving fidelity to certain traditions, and the daughter's loyalty to her mother's wish.[72]

The Auclairs moved to Quebec when Cecile was four years old, M. Auclair going as the personal physician of the seventy-year old Count Frontenac. Cecile, through her direct contact with the nuns and the Reverend Mother, learned early in life some facts about Mother Catharine de Saint-Augustin, which established in her the deepest admiration for the saint. She

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[72]Willa Cather, Shadows on the Rock, p. 25.

offered up many a prayer for the repose of the Mother who had sacrificed much to come to Quebec to save her church.[73]

It was natural for Cecile to be kind to those in need. She saw that old Blinker regularly received his bowl and his loaf, and he repaid her by doing some heavy task for her, such as getting wood or water, or carrying away the garbage.[74] She was also the best friend of Little Jacques, the son of 'Toinette Gaux, and did much toward instilling into the child's mind some very good principles of character. Little Jacques had no father, and he had a mother who could give him little in moral training or in refinement.[75] She also encouraged him to keep his body clean, a point which seemed to be much neglected. Cecile liked to answer his many questions about the church, and often took him with her to prayer. It was not always easy for Cecile to do things for Jacques, as his mother was of an extremely jealous nature, and became very angry over kind acts proffered her son, instead of being thankful for a kind deed done.[76]

Much of the time of some of these devout people was spent in saying mass. All Soul's Day was almost completely spent at the church. People greeted one another with lowered eyes and subdued voice. Bishop Laval began ringing the Cathedral bell at one o'clock in the night and continued ringing it

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[73] Ibid., p. 32.

[74] Ibid., p. 15.

[75] Ibid., p. 53.

[76] Ibid., p. 90.

every hour until the time of early mass. This day was a sad one for the older people, whose memories went back to church and cemeteries in far-away lands. This time of year marked the close of the season, and there would be no opportunity for receiving news from abroad for approximately eight months, and it was really with an anxious feeling that they faced the coming winter. The nuns gave much inspiration for an optimistic outlook for the future. They knew that "there was sin, of course, and there was punishment after death; but there was always hope, even for the most depraved; and for those who died repentent, the Sisters' prayers could do much,— no one might say how much."[77]

Cecile had a very dear friend in the shoemaker's mother, a kind old woman who took great pride in her little chapel in her home. She was lame and could not often get to mass, but she did not let that interfere with her time and form of worship. Cecile also had her nook for personal devotions. She had received a box from her aunt in far-away France, containing the figures of the Holy Family. Jacques and Blinker were ardent admirers of the Holy Family and what it stood for.

Bishop Laval, who worked so faithfully in his capacity, was often distressed over the attitude of Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier. He was not the man to take over the work in Quebec. He had recommended an entire change in "Laval's

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[77] Ibid., p. 107.

system for the training and government of the Canadian clergy, thus defeating the dearest wishes of the old man's heart and undoing the devoted labour of twenty years."[78] Saint-Vallier lacked a thorough understanding of conditions in a new country, and often appeared arrogant and unfeeling in his dealings. His many trips to France placed much responsibility and hard work on Laval, more than his physical strength could well hold up under.

Many stories of a romantic and mysterious nature were enthusiastically listened to in the little French town, some of which Auclair thought rather exaggerated. For him it was past the time of miracles, but to Cecile they were fascinating. The story of Jeanne Le Ber was a favorite story in Quebec. This beautiful young daughter of a wealthy Montreal merchant, after three years in the Ursulind Convent pursuing an education, found no interest in social life, or the many admirers who sought her hand, and managed to obtain her parents' consent to take the vow of chastity at seventeen. She went into complete seclusion in her own room, never again seeing or speaking with her parents. She even refused her dying mother's request to come to her and give her a farewell kiss. She gave her physical self very little attention, but spent her time in prayer and devotion to her soul's salvation.[79]

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[78] Ibid., p. 120.

[79] Ibid., p. 130.

This story of self-sacrifice was of vital interest to the imaginative little Cecile.

Among the many people who came to the apothecary' office, none was probably more interesting to Cecile than Pierre Charron, a fur trader who wandered from one region to the other in the Canadian provinces in quest of his wares.

> He had the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New. He was proud, he was vain, he was relentless when he hated, and quickly prejudiced; but he had the old ideals of clan-loyalty, and in friendship he never counted the cost. His goods and his life were at the disposal of the man he loved or the leader he admired. Though his figure was still boyish, his face was full of experience and sagacity; a fine bold nose, a restless, rather mischievous mouth, white teeth, very strong and even, sparkling hazel eyes with a kind of living flash in them, like the sunbeams on the bright rapids upon which he was so skilful.[80]

Charron did not bear a great love for priests in general, and very little for Saint-Vallier. He was not opposed to religion, however, and always had a mass said for Cecile's mother before he departed for the woods each fall. For him the family came first. One of his expressions was: "Religion for the fireside, freedom for the woods."[81] This handsome young man was said to have been one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Jeanne Le Ber. He had seen her later than anyone else probably had, as he had once made it a point to see her as she went to early morning mass. She was still the same

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[80] Ibid., p. 72.

[81] Ibid., p. 175.

beautiful girl, but firm in her decision to remain in seclusion. She asked Charron to leave and to get married, promising him that she would pray for him every day that God would watch over him, and that they might meet in heaven.[82]

Charron still had a kind feeling for Jeanne, but he no longer loved a woman who had been dead to him for over twenty years. Once again, however, he watched for her as she went to mass, this time at midnight, but this time he saw a changed person. Her face was like stone. It had known every sorrow. Her voice was hoarse, hollow, and despairing. Again she promised to pray for him and asked that he in turn pray for her. There was nothing personal in this meeting.[83]

Cecile had always been eager to go to the Ile d'Orleans. Charron therefore invited her to go with him to visit his friend Jean Baptiste Harnois. The invitation was accepted, but the visit was not a successful venture. Cecile was very unhappy in the environment of her hosts' home and begged to return to Quebec before the time planned. She did not find that sacred, refined atmosphere there that prevailed in her own home. The beauty of her own home now really dawned upon her, and she was eager to get back to it.[84]

The arrival of the ships from France was a great event in the lives of the people of Quebec. They were eager for tidings from those loved ones whom they had left at home, and

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[82] Ibid., p. 179.

[83] Ibid., p. 181.

[84] Ibid., p. 183.

they were happy over the new supplies which were added to their stores. There was celebrating in the village as the tired seamen came in to enjoy a few days of relaxation from their strenuous duties aboard. Even the priests were kept busier than usual as the sailors came to confession and attended mass.[85]

Count Frontenac had waited for some time for the King to call him back to France. He had completed his work in Canada. For nine years he had worked to restore peace between the Iroquois and French colonists. He had succeeding in helping to establish a growing trade. He was now seventy-eight years old, and eager to get back to his old home, but he was beginning to realize the futility of his desire. He had expected Auclair and Cecile to go with him. Cecile was not especially pleased over the prospect of leaving Quebec, and was greatly distressed over the thought of leaving Jacques.

Count Frontenac knew the end was near, and he was ready to die. There was nothing to hold him to this life. He had no fear of appearing before his maker. He made his will, and disposed of his personal belongings. When his time came, Auclair was with him. He gave every attention to the comfort of the man who had been his protector for so many years, and had no patience with Saint-Vallier's idea that Frontenac had much to put right with Heaven, and that he had used his authority and influence for worldly ends, rather than for the promotion of God's kingdom.[86] Auclair refused to disturb his

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[85] Ibid., p. 209.

[86] Ibid., p. 255.

patient, and insisted that he be permitted to pass on in peace. Frontenac had received the sacrament in perfect consciousness, and then slept for a few hours. Seeing several people in the room, the Count had motioned for them to withdraw. "This I will do alone," he had added, and so it was.[87] Auclair remained to fulfill the Count's last wish, that of having his heart removed and sent back to France. It was a sad task for a faithful friend to perform.

Fifteen years after the death of Count Frontenac, Saint-Valliers returned to his people after an absence of thirteen years. He found Auclair almost entirely unchanged, happy in his work and in the thought that Cecile was a happy housewife caring for hers and Pierre Charron's family of four sons. Jacques Gaux was living with Auclair. As Auclair looked into the face of Saint-Valliers, he noticed a telling change in him. He had grown heavy, losing his fine carriage. His brown hair had become thin and grey. He had lost his sharpness, but he had become kinder looking and more considerate and humble in his dealings with his fellowmen. Life had used him roughly, but had probably made of him a better man for his place. Now it seemed that his chief concern was the welfare of hungry souls.

Willa Cather has presented her frescoes in prose, and has worried little about creating an interesting and gripping story. She has woven a complete masterpiece of legendary

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[87] Ibid., p. 262.

stories held together by a bond of the old French influences made beautiful by a majestic setting and softened by the benediction of the religious essence of the cultural church of the priests and of the nuns. In her complete group of writings, she has created an atmosphere of sincere love and respect for the influence of the church, but a feeling of repulsion for the hypocritical would-be worshipper of God.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRUGGLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL FOR SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

Between her pioneers and her artists, Miss Cather introduces still another type of character, the one who is unable to make the necessary adjustment to fit himself into the social scheme in which life has placed him. There are those who spend a lifetime in doubt and misery attempting to find themselves in some particular setting. Several of her characters are just that type. These people are not necessarily lacking in ability, emotions, or personal attraction, but they simply fail to fit where they have been placed, and what is still worse, they do not know what to do to improve the situation.

Among these characters we find from My Antonia, the Bohemian, Mr. Shimerda. He had been happy in his native land, where he could be with his own friends, speak his own tongue, and play the kind of music he knew and enjoyed. He might probably be classified as an emotional type of person, who naturally felt a close tie between his people, his country and himself. He was not one who could make friends easily, especially in a place where he could not even speak the language. Judging from Shimerda's appearance and behavior,

anyone would feel in speaking with him, that he was facing a real gentleman. He felt keenly his own limitations in the New World, and was eager that his children should be able to overcome any obstacles confronting them. With an earnestness that was almost pathetic, he pleaded with Mrs. Burden to "Te-e-ach, te-e-ach my Antonia!" The book he held in his hand contained both an English and a Bohemian alphabet.[1]

For a while it seemed that Mr. Shimerda had found some one with whom he might have something in common. It was the two Russians, Pavel and Peter.[2] The tall one, Pavel, was said to be an anarchist. He was of "great frame, with big, knotty joints, and a wasted look, and the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek-bones. His breathing was hoarse, and he always had a cough." His friend, Peter, was "short, bow-legged, and as fat as butter."[3] Peter was a happy, polite man with very pale flaxen hair and beard. The little log cabin in which the Russians lived was neat and well cared for. They had a garden, and a cow, and seemed well provided for. Peter was very pleased to receive callers, and entertained them by showing them around, by serving them watermelon, and by playing the harmonica.[4]

Trouble soon came to the two Russians. They had borrowed money from Wick Cutter, with the result that he managed to get

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[1]Willa Cather, My Antonia, p. 30.

[2]Ibid., p. 37.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 39.

a mortgage on everything the Russians possessed. About the time that financial troubles were becoming almost unbearable, Pavel was overcome by a hemorrhage while lifting timbers, and never regained enough strength to leave his bed afterward. Mr. Shimerda spent much time with his two friends during Pavel's illness. A horrible incident in the life of these two Russians came back to the sick man with renewed horror as he fought his last fight against death. While escorting a wedding party home after an evening of merry-making in snow-covered Russia, they were overtaken by a pack of hungry wolves. One by one the sleighs were emptied of their precious burdens, until only the sleigh containing the bride and groom was left. Pavel and Peter were with them. As they saw the wolves approaching their sleigh, Pavel arose, and by sheer force, threw the bride and groom overboard in order to lighten their load, and detain the hungry beasts for a few minutes. The two Russians were the only members of the party who were saved, and they remained two lone outcasts ever afterward. They were run out of their home town, and every other place they ever settled in as soon as their identity was made known. After five years of saving, they came to America, but even here they were victims of hard luck.[5] Pavel died within a short time after his strain, and the property of the Russians was sold at auction. Peter was extremely grieved over his losses, and

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[5] Ibid., p. 63.

left the prairie to start again in a new place. These two Russian friends had committed an act which made of them social outcasts. We do not know what their lives had been before the wedding party incident, but we do know that there was something strangely unaccounted for in the nature of men who could forcefully throw a bride and groom into the jaws of hungry wolves, and leave them to their fate, while they drove to safety among the friends of the victims. Life must have been dear to Pavel at that time, but how dearly both he and his friend paid for it later!

Mr. Shimerda felt more desolate than ever before after the loss of his two friends, and would often go to their empty cabin to sit and brood. His health had been failing for some time. He would often wander about in a kind of torpor, oblivious of anything about him. He was very kind, and would gladly part from his most cherished possession if he thought it would bring pleasure to those whom he loved. He even promised his gun, a gift from a wealthy Bohemian, to Jim Burden when Jim grew to be a big boy.[6]

Mr. Shimerda's visit to the Burdens at Christmas time seemed to fill him with content. The clatter and disorder in his own home had probably caused him to feel that peace was not to be found in this new land, that he had left it all behind when he crossed the ocean.

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[6]Ibid., p. 46.

> He sat still and passive, his head resting against the back of the wooden rocking-chair, his hands relaxed upon the arms. His face had a look of weariness and pleasure, like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain.[7]

Mr. Shimerda seemed reluctant to go back to his own uninviting home of bickering and discontent, and did not leave the Burden home until nine o'clock in the evening.

It was a blow to the members of the Burden family as well as to his own family, when Ambrosch came to the Burdens in the middle of the night some weeks later to tell them that his father had been found dead. Mr. Shimerda had shaved after dinner, and had taken a bath. He dressed himself in clean clothes, kissed Antonia and the little children and took his gun as if he were going to hunt rabbits. All indications were, however, that he had gone directly to the barn and lain down on the bunk-bed where he always slept. He had hung his coat on a peg and his boots were under the bed. He had taken off his silk neck cloth, folded it, and stuck his pin through it, turned back his shirt at the neck, and rolled up his sleeves. It seemed that he had placed the end of the gun barrel in his mouth, and that he had pulled the trigger with his toe.[8]

It had all been very carefully planned. He had made his preparations carefully and deliberately. The poor man had found life too hard for him; the soil of this new world, with all its burdens, had succeeded in breaking the will power

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[7] Ibid., p. 98.

[8] Ibid., p. 111.

of a submissive stranger. Mr. Shimerda found it impossible to re-adjust himself so as to fit into this new scheme of things. It was loneliness and homesickness that had killed the kind, attractive, and intelligent, but broken-spirited man.

One of Miss Cather's other characters to suffer in somewhat the same way, was Bartley Alexander from Alexander's Bridge. Mr. Alexander seemed happy until, after several years of married life with Winifred Alexander, he again was brought face to face with his first real sweetheart, Hilda Burgoyne. He had never felt any regrets over his marriage, and had been happy in his chosen field of work, bridge building. While traveling on business, Alexander attended a theatrical performance with his friend Mainhall, and it was in that artistic presentation that he again saw Hilda. She had become a recognized singer and actress. Seeing her there before him in the glory of her career brought the past back to his mind with forceful vividness, and a strong desire to renew his acquaintance with Hilda came over him. He had never even told Winifred about his youthful relations with Hilda. He tried to console himself with the thought that they were very young and irresponsible at that time, and that they should probably laugh about their early attraction for one another if they should meet now.[9]

Alexander had known Hilda ever since she was a child

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[9]Willa Cather, Alexander's Bridge, p. 40.

about Bloomsbury, while her actor parents played in the provinces. Somehow, his popular reputation as a builder and all the things that had happened within the last six years seemed small and worthless compared with his earlier years so full of youth and of Hilda.[10] These thoughts seemed to force upon him the dread of the calm of middle life. He had always wanted freedom, unconquered youth. This call of youth in Alexander was the awakening in him of a dangerous restlessness, a dissatisfaction in the life he was living.

Bartley Alexander made several calls on Hilda. He was attracted, not by Hilda only, but by her surroundings and the glamour of the life she lived. Their pleasant visits and short trips together unfortunately brought back something besides pleasant memories. It also brought back that mutual feeling of attraction referred to as love.[11] He became conscious of a feeling of doubt, fear, and uncertainty. When he was home in his comfortable home with friends and a charming wife, it frightened him to think that his life should be marred by haunting thoughts of discontent. There was no peace for him anywhere. He made up his mind that he would end it all when again his business took him to England, but he found it difficult to decide how to proceed. His voyage to England was a continuous round of changing emotions, at times gay and contented in the freedom and vivacity of

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[10] Ibid., p. 46.

[11] Ibid., p. 76.

life, and again overwhelmed by the depressing conflict of emotions.[12]

As Alexander neared the end of his voyage, he could not wait until he could see Hilda. He had made up his mind to tell her how he felt about the double life he was living, but when he came to her he found it all very different. He was miserable as he said,

> "I am not a man who can live two lives. Each life spoils the other. I get nothing but misery out of either. The world is all there, just as it used to be, but I can't get at it any more. There is this deception between me and everything."[13]

The mixed tangle of life was just as difficult for Hilda as it was for Bartley Alexander. Outside of her career, he was all she had, and she did love him. To give him up, never to see him again, was like giving up something that made life livable for her.

> "Just something, Bartley, I must have you to think of through the months and months of loneliness. I must see you. I must know about you. The sight of you, Bartley, to see you living and happy and successful — can I never make you understand what that means to me?"[14]

Alexander knew he was a coward. He felt that his youth, that which he wanted so much in life, was with Hilda. It would be so comfortable to forget this struggle which was tearing at their very souls, and be happy for just a little while. It was impossible for Hilda to make herself promise that no

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[12] Ibid., p. 98.

[13] Ibid., p. 104.

[14] Ibid., p. 110.

matter how much Alexander begged to see her, she would refuse his admittance. The result was that he remained in Hilda's company until the last possible moment before catching his boat for America. As soon as he reached his home, Alexander wrote her a letter filled with his despairing emotions. He was afraid of what would happen to him, and was asking her for help.[15] When they were again in the same town together, Alexander did not go to call on Hilda, but spent half a day writing her a letter. This time it was she who did not have the strength to stay away, but called at his rooms. He had forbidden her to write to him and made his plans so as to avoid her, but it seemed that fate willed it otherwise. Her manager changed Hilda's schedule so that she was still in town when Alexander arrived. She came to him now to tell him that she had decided to end it all by getting married, not to anyone she loved, but just to someone so as not to be any longer at the mercy of the man she loved.[16] Alexander was unable to accept this great sacrifice on her part. There seemed to be no logical way to make a satisfactory adjustment.

Before receiving a telegram telling him of trouble in the Moorlock bridge construction job, Alexander had written Winifred a long letter, but he hesitated to mail it.

> Winifred was not a woman who could bear disappointment. She demanded a great deal

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[15] Ibid., p. 127.

[16] Ibid., p. 138.

> of herself and of the people she loved; and she never failed herself. If he told her now, he knew, it would be irretrievable. There would be no going back. He would lose the thing he valued most in the world; he would be destroying himself and his own happiness. There would be nothing for him afterward.[17]

He had a feeling that he would be an aimless wanderer forever afterward if he lost Winifred, and yet he was unable to forget that he had promised to be in London at midsummer.

> His wife was the woman who had made his life, gratified his pride, given direction to his tastes and habits. The life they led together was beautiful. Winifred still was as she had always been, Romance for him, and whenever he was deeply stirred he turned to her. When the grandeur and beauty of the world challenged him — as it always challenges even the most self-absorbed people — he always answered with her name. . . . In his feeling for his wife there was all the tenderness, all the pride, all the devotion of which he was capable. There was everything but energy; the energy of youth which must register itself and cut its name before it passes."[18]

Alexander's letter to Winifred was never mailed. The contents of the telegram changed his plans, and he left at once for Moorlock. His trouble made him feel the need of Winifred's presence, so he sent her a telegram to come to him at once.[19] As usual, she immediately responded to his call, but it was too late. The bridge disaster had taken his life before she arrived.[20] His life was ended, and Winifred never learned the contents of the water-soaked, illegible

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[17] Ibid., p. 142.

[18] Ibid., p. 144.

[19] Ibid., p. 154.

[20] Ibid., p. 160.

letter she found in his pocket.[21]

Everything was probably better just the way it happened. After all those years of anguish, Alexander had never been able to work himself out of the entanglement of his complicated life, and there were no hopes that he ever would have been.

Claude Wheeler from One of Ours, is another of Miss Cather's characters who spends years as a social misfit. He was too sensitive for his father's rather coarse humor, and too submissive to break away from those influences which were annoying him. He had the physical vitality and the courage of the pioneer, the instinctive idealism, the imaginative restlessness, and the sharpened emotional capacities of an artist, but he seemed to lack coherence in his aspirations, and was incapable of conceiving the end upon which to direct his energy. There was nothing for him to conquer on the Wheeler farm, and for that reason life there became monotonous to him. There was no incentive adequate to absorb his life.[22] Claude had never been able to find comfort in the church, or enjoyment in the social life of his community. His college life had not been satisfactory and when he tried to settle down to married life, he found that, too, empty. Everything he touched seemed doomed to failure.[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 166.

[22] Willa Cather, One of Ours, p. 88.

[23] Ibid., p. 220.

He should like to start all over again, but he did not know how to begin. It was when he came to France as a soldier that life began to mean something to Claude. It began to take form while he was still on the ship. He found himself useful, capable of filling a place in the world. Somehow, the French people had a different attitude toward life. They loved their country to the extent that they were eager to heal the ugly wounds made by the war. They loved the trees and the flowers. As he explained to Mlle. Olive about conditions in his own country, he had a feeling of being completely understood.[24] It brought him a new kind of happiness, and a new kind of sadness. He was beginning to understand life. Sometimes Claude had the feeling that when the war was over he would not return to America, but buy a farm and stay there the rest of his life. He would never be able to find the life he wanted in his native land "where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down. He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotions."[25] After all, life was so short that he felt that he should be justified in settling where the compensation was the greatest. He had found his "happy youth in France." He felt sure no place would ever be like this again. Life had, after all, turned out well for him.

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[24] Ibid., p. 391.

[25] Ibid., p. 406.

and everything had a noble significance.[26] He was unable to understand now that he should ever have succumbed to a life of nervous tension such as he had experienced in Nebraska. Strange as it might seem, he had even been able to find his ideal type of man in France.[27] The war had done this for him. It had given him an opportunity really to live.

Through the horrible days of intense fighting before the final chapter in Claude's life, his chief aim was to prove himself worthy of the brave men with whom he was fighting. "It was worth having lived in this world to have known such men."[28] He felt the responsibility of leading men of this type, and it made it easy for him to make the supreme sacrifice.

Claude had always been afraid of being fooled. As it was, he had found his life before he had to let go of it.

> He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any other country can ever be. And those were beautiful thoughts to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more.[29]

It would have been almost unbearable for one like Claude to have been awakened from the dream ideal which had taken form in his mind. Probably death was the kindest thing that could have happened.

In A Lost Lady, Miss Cather portrays the struggles experienced by a charming woman who found it impossible to

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[26] Ibid., p. 411.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 450.

[29] Ibid., p. 458.

accept the place given her in life. Marion Forrester is probably Miss Cather's most intelligent character. She has charm and beauty, but her failing lies in her being unable to accept her place as Mrs. Forrester. She liked too much to play with the fires of youth. Her romantic nature demanded of life some of those attentions that contact with the young men of the world could bring. She was a woman of slightly hysterical tendencies and unbalanced judgment, being held in place by the calm and sensible influence of her husband, but she was not fully conscious of this fine influence and what it really meant to her until he was taken from her. That was when her many weaknesses became noticeable to the public. She sought relief for her maladjusted emotions in flashy entertainments and social relationships that cheapened her. That courtesy, refinement, and culture established by Captain Forrester was being replaced by instability and artificiality. She was, indeed, a lost lady. She married again after Captain Forrester's death, "a rich, cranky old Englishman."[30] She seemed to have everything money could buy, but how much of real happiness she found in this union, Miss Cather does not reveal. She spoke of her second husband as being kind, and probably she found a certain satisfaction in being a rich man's wife. She at least never forgot Mr. Forrester, and continued to have flowers sent to his grave on Decoration Day until the time

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[30]Willa Cather, A Lost Lady, p. 173.

of her death.[31]

Professor St. Peter, from The Professor's House, is another of Miss Cather's bewildered and strangely out-of-place characters. He was a Spanish-looking person with "a long brown face, with an oval tuft of shiny black fur. With this silky, very black hair, he had a tawny skin with gold lights in it, a hawk nose, and hawk-like eyes — brown and gold and green. They were set in ample cavities, with plenty of room to move about, under thick, curly, black eyebrows that turned up sharply at the outer ends, like military mustaches."[32]

Professor St. Peter had made an intensive study of Spanish history while writing his Spanish Adventures in North America.[33] He found much real pleasure in working with his flowers in his walled-in garden, and he liked to take his books down and work over them under the linden trees, when his wife and daughters were away. There seemed to be just one person who thoroughly understood the old Professor. That was Augusta, the sewing woman.

Professor St. Peter lived a double life. During the day time, he carried a full teaching load at the university; in the night and on holidays he worked on his History. He was attracted to his university work through his love for youth.

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[31] Ibid., p. 174.

[32] Willa Cather, The Professor's House, p. 13.

[33] Ibid., p. 25.

The doubting, critical mind of youth fascinated him. Tom Outland was a student of that type, and Professor St. Peter found unlimited enjoyment in working with him. For relaxation from his strenuous work he went to the shore of Lake Michigan, where he indulged in swimming, sailing and resting. His writing had brought him no recognition at first, but his last two volumes brought him the Oxford prize for history, with its five thousand pounds.[34] With this money he had built a new modern house, but to him this new place could never be home. The fun he had enjoyed writing his history meant more to him than anything else in life, and all the pleasant memories connected with this task were tied up with his old house.

Professor St. Peter's family had outgrown him. The modern world of society, convenience, and travel had called them. The Professor had traveled some, but it had been in the interest of his writing. This aimless touring held no charm for him, and he avoided being drawn into that type of traveling with members of his own family. He felt that all the important things in his life had come by chance, but after all, he was satisfied with life, and had no demands to make.

> He had had two romances: one of the heart, which had filled his life for many years, and a second of the mind — of the imagination.[35]

Just at the time that the last of these was wearing off, Tom Outland came into his life, and the social intercourse

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[34] Ibid., p. 33.

[35] Ibid., p. 258.

with him brought the older man the joy of a kind of second youth. Through young Outland's eyes, he saw the full glory of the glamorous Southwest. The two also visited Old Mexico together, but their trip to France never matured. That fact had always been a disappointment to the Professor, but he was convinced that Outland had been fortunate in escaping the demands which the world and an ambitious wife would naturally have demanded of him. The glory of fame, Outland had left to his survivors.[36]

The summer which the members of his family had spent in traveling abroad, leaving him at home alone, had been a happy one for the Professor. He had spent some time annotating Tom Outland's diary of his days on the mesa, and the rest of the time had been spent in pleasant memories of the days of his youth, and in becoming acquainted with his real self of long ago. It had truly been a period of "mental dissipation."[37] Life with his second self was delightful and real. It began to appear that "his career, his wife, his family, were not his life at all, but a certain chain of events which had happened to him. All of these things had nothing to do with the person he was in the beginning."[38] His backward look at life was very different from what he had expected it to be. Somehow, he felt indifferent toward his past. He was beginning to realize that his life would soon be over. He felt

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[36] Ibid., p. 261.

[37] Ibid., p. 263.

[38] Ibid., p. 264.

no enthusiasm over the opening term of school, and no desire to move into his new abode. He was certain that everything would soon be over. His letter from Mrs. St. Peter announcing the return of his family from abroad, was almost unbearable to him. He wished to be alone, and most of all he wished not to have to live with his wife. It seemed that some great misfortune had occurred within him.

> Surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love — if one has ever fallen in. Falling out for him seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family.[39]

He did not know where he had made his mistake in life; probably it was in the attitude of his mind. He could find little comfort in anything except the presence of Augusta. She seemed always to have had a remedial or corrective influence over him. He felt a kind of friendly obligation toward her. He had no such feeling for his family. There was just one member of his family who sometimes understood him, and that was his younger daughter, Kitty. She sometimes felt that same reaction of aloneness that her father so often experienced, and sought relief by confiding in him.

The accident with the gas stove a short time before the return of his family did something to Sta Peter. The wind had blown out the flame, and he had been almost fatally overcome by the fumes. In a semi-conscious way, he had been aware of

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[39] Ibid., p. 275.

what was taking place, but he had felt no desire to save himself. He had lapsed into unconsciousness only to be rescued by Augusta. That brief period of release from life had done something for him. It would be easier now to meet his family. He felt more sure of himself.[40] The peace brought about by this change made it possible for him to accept the remainder of his life with a certain resignation. He had learned to be able to live even after there was nothing left in life which prompted him to have a desire to live.

Mrs. Henshawe from My Mortal Enemy also found life a merciless leveler. During her youth and early married life she enjoyed everything that money and social distinction had to offer, but it was a crushing blow that severed her connections with the place in the world which she so thoroughly enjoyed. She had always been exacting of her friends. She liked refinement in people and cultivated the friendship of the "moneyed" class.[41] But she felt a certain kind of envy or jealousy of people who had acquired a higher social prestige than she. She had a tendency to grow bitter over disappointments and she suffered from an overdose of pride. She was more unmerciful toward her husband than toward anyone else, and seemingly blamed him for any reverses which came her way. She was keen witted, and knew how to use a sharp tongue effectively.

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[40] Ibid., p. 285.

[41] Willa Cather, My Mortal Enemy, p. 50.

When Mr. Henshawe lost his railroad position through the failure of the company, the Henshawes seemed to lose their grip on life. A smaller position held no appeal for them, and hard luck ruined a second job for Mr. Henshawe in San Francisco. Life had been unmerciful to both of them, especially Mr. Henshawe.

> The corners of her [Mrs. Henshawe's] mouth had relaxed a little, but they could still curl very scornfully upon occasion; her nose was the same sniffy little nose, with its restless, arched nostrils, and her double chin, though softer, was no fuller. A strong cable of grey-black hair was wound on the top of her head.[42]

Illness had overtaken her, and she had become a cripple, but she still retained a certain power.

> She looked strong and broken, generous and tyrannical, a witty and rather wicked old woman, who hated life for its defeats, and loved it for its absurdities.[43]

She had always met either shock or sorrow with a peculiarly dry, exultant chuckle that seemed to contain a challenge as to the injustices which God permitted to exist. Her husband had learned to know her well, and understood her unparalleled reactions to some incidents. He knew what it meant to be locked out of his own room for days while she was having her individual fight with life. He said she was not like anyone else, that "she can't endure, but she has enough desperate courage for a regiment."[44]

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[42] Ibid., p. 77.

[43] Ibid., p. 80.

[44] Ibid., p. 92.

Mrs. Henshawe had always needed money, and the fact that they had been forced to get along without it toward the last, made her feel that life had been ruined for both of them. She was unable to get any comfort out of the memory of the happy years they had enjoyed together. If she had been able to swallow her pride, she could have returned to the home of her youth. There would have been money and a place waiting for her. Had Mr. Driscoll lived until she had become old, too, she probably would have gone back to him; for now she understood what it was "to be old and lonely and disappointed."[45]

Myra Henshawe had a feeling that people could be lovers and enemies at the same time, and that, she felt, was what had happened in her case. She was unable to forgive Henshawe for the harm she had done him. The fact that there had been no children had tended to increase the bitterness of their lives. She could not understand why she should have to die alone with her mortal enemy. She had turned against herself and all that was dear to her. It had been a bitter judgment for proud Myra Henshawe to be compelled to receive favors from her friends, and to feel her utter dependence on others, especially her husband. Death was indeed a welcome relief; it was a battle she was able to fight alone.

Among the other characters who suffered from life introduced by Miss Cather are Professor Wunsch from The Song of the Lark, Emil Bergson and Marie Shabata from O Pioneers, and Aunt

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[45] Ibid., p. 98.

Georgiana from "A Wagner Matinee" taken from Youth and the Bright Medusa.

Professor Wunsch was a man with unusual possibilities in the musical world, but he had permitted the world to ruin him. He had an incurable passion for drink, although he knew only too well what it meant to give over to its power. He could not remain in any one place long, but roamed from place to place, living the life of the lowest vagabond. The world had completely broken his power to adjust himself to the better things in life. People called him a failure, but knew very little about the real man.

Maria Shabata died from having loved life and its romance too much, and she had dragged an innocent friend with her. She had no intention of being false to Frank, her husband. She had made a mistake during her impulsive youth, and she had to pay, but she was conscious of making others suffer for her mistake, too.[46] She realized that she was weak, and feared for what might eventually be the result if Emil did not leave. Fate settled their problem in a tragic way. Maria had unwillingly brought tragedy to those whom she loved most, death to Emil, and unsufferable agony to her husband. She had to pay with her life for being unable to obey the traditionally accepted rules of life. Frank Shabata had tried to make her see the ugly side of life, to realize its grimness, but she

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[46]Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 231.

would accept nothing but life's joys and pleasures.[47]

Aunt Georgiana, too, had faced life in a seemingly reasonable way. She had not complained of the harshness of its measures. She had made a mistake and she had accepted the punishment, but she had been able to do so by one method only. She had closed the door to her own feelings, and had never permitted herself to consider how much she was paying. It was when she gave away to the realization of what giving up everything in the life of her youth had meant to her, that she sensed the impossibility of continuing her mode of living. She felt her emotions overpowering her will power. It was the signal of approaching danger.

Little remains to be said by way of conclusion of the social backgrounds of the characters in Willa Cather's stories. These pictures of maladjusted people do not tend to make life appear romantic, but they are real. Miss Cather has seen people suffer in this way. In fact, she has experienced some of that suffering herself. She has felt the attacks of modernism on the ideals of her beloved pioneers; she has seen the land conquered by the powerful machinery of modern civilization; she has lived through the soul-crushing struggles of the rising artist; and she has found peace in the influences of the beautiful sincerity of religion, and the majestic strength of nature. She has suffered

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[47] Ibid., p. 267.

and loved and lived with the people she loved and has made them to live again for us in her writings. Her skill as a writer and her authenticity of material has added something to the collection of American history and literature which will tend to establish the name of Willa Cather as a literary artist regardless of what course her future aspirations in literary creation might be.

When Willa Cather started writing, she was guilty of doing what many other inexperienced writers have done. She did not write of that which she knew by first hand observation. She had a tendency to try to follow in the footsteps of Henry James and Mrs. Wharton. She began to come into her own with the writing of O Pioneers and The Song of the Lark, but was not generally recognized as a writer before the publication of My Antonia.[48] Her real creative work is to be found in her colorful people. Critics have expressed a hope that she would not leave her prairies and her pioneers, since it is with them that she shows her superior ability as an artist. The current problems can be left to lesser writers.[49] When she felt that the field of the pioneer and the land had been thoroughly explored, Miss Cather turned to present-day problems in One of Ours, but she lacked some of her power and enthusiasm in dealing with what was not really hers through personal

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[48]Percy H. Boynton, "Willa Cather," English Journal, XIII (1924), p. 374.

[49]Ibid., p. 380.

observation, and later returned to the pioneer in a slightly different setting in Death Comes for the Archbishop. In this book she goes back into the past, and takes advantage of the opportunity to express her admiration for heroism, natural beauty, and the security of unquestioned faith.[50] When she produced Shadows on the Rock, her theme was somewhat the same, but her characters had been weakened in comparison with those portrayed in her earlier writings. Cecile Auclair is insignificant when compared with Antonia or Alexandra. Miss Cather seems to have taken refuge from the struggles of contemporary life by going back to these two books of idyllic figures in a setting of a religiously tempered past.

It has been generally accepted that Willa Cather is an artist. Her style and her choice of words have both been praised. She is one of the few modern writers who have the ability to handle the sex question effectively yet delicately. She tones down the harshness and bitterness in her characters, giving her material a fine finish and a tranquil and serene atmosphere. She had not been able to do her best work in her writing, however, until she "quit trying to write and started to remember."[51] She has been able to improve her literary style and to reach a high peak in the literary world through the friendly advice and sympathetic encouragement of her

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[50]Granville Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather," English Journal, XXII (1933), p. 710.

[51]Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, "Willa Cather," New Republic, XLIII (1925), p. 92.

friends, Henry James and Sarah Orne Jewett. Her perfection has come through pruning rather than from the white heat of imagination that blazed the errorless way. She is an artist dealing with the idea. Her dignified reserve in handling certain problems, present-day questions and sex relationships, has been considered by some critics as a limiting factor in her writing, but her unexcelled treatment of the subjects in which she has been interested has outweighed any such limitation.

Willa Cather has set for herself a goal in art. We do not know that she feels that art and religion are identical, but we do know that she has pursued her art as fervently as a devout Christian gives himself to his faith, and we feel that she has received from her work a joy and a satisfaction that no other field could have given her.

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