MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF WILLA CATHER

THESIS

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The marriages depicted in Willa Cather's fiction are a crucial element of her works. Although she does not describe in detail the marital relationships between her characters, Cather does depict these marriages realistically, and they are also interrelated with the major themes of her fiction.

The marriages in Cather's works are divided into three general classifications: the successful, the borderline, and the failure. The successful marriage is characterized by affection and friendship. In the borderline marriages the partners are mutually dissatisfied with their relationship, but they do not separate or divorce. The marital failures are complete breakdowns that result in irreparable wounds healed only by the complete withdrawal or death of one of the partners. A study of marriage in Cather's works reveals there are more successful marriages than failures.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In an interview with Eleanor Hinman in 1921, Willa Cather said, "All my stories have been written with material that was gathered--no, God save us! not gathered but absorbed--before I was fifteen years old."\(^1\) In another interview in the Omaha Daily Bee (October 29, 1921), she elaborated that a writer "may acquire a great many interesting and vivid impressions in his mature years but his thematic material he acquires under fifteen years of age."\(^2\) Willa Cather uses the material she "absorbed" in some manner in almost all of her fiction. Events she either experienced personally or heard of are reconstructed in her stories. Cather said her characterizations are not portraits but composites of three or four persons. She told Eleanor Hinman, "I do not quite understand it, but certain persons seem to coalesce naturally when one is working up a story."\(^3\) In using the people she knew best to create her stories and exemplify the themes she wanted to introduce, Cather recalls not only the persons

\(^1\) [Willa Cather], The Lincoln Sunday Star, 6 November 1921, n. pag.

\(^2\) Mildred R. Bennett, The World of Willa Cather (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 231. All references to this book are hereafter cited in the text.

\(^3\) Hinman interview, n. pag.
themselves, but also interpersonal relationships. Included among the important relationships is that of marriage.

The marriages portrayed in her fiction are crucial elements in each work. Indeed, in her twelve novels thirty-six marriages are mentioned in enough detail that the reader can form opinions and draw conclusions about them. Her short stories also contain numerous other characters and incidents that exhibit her attitude toward marriage. Cather suggests and creates an atmosphere of intense feeling in each marital situation. The protagonists, as well as the background characters, in her works are involved in marriages that may be divided into three general classifications: the successful, the borderline, and the failure. These classifications are to be examined in Chapters II, III, and IV.

Cather drew on her family as well as on friends for prototypes for her characters and their marriages. Her mother and father appeared as Mr. and Mrs. Templeton in "Old Mrs. Harris."  

Like her father, Mr. Templeton has a "boyish, eager-to-please manner" and is "too delicate to collect his just debts."  

Mrs. Templeton, like Willa's mother, is "high-spirited and direct; a trifle imperious" (p. 113). Mr.

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4 James Woodress, Willa Cather: Her Life and Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), pp. 22-23. All references to this book are hereafter cited in the text.

5 Willa Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris," Obscure Destinies (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 112. All references to this short story are to this edition and are hereafter cited in the text.
Templeton manages his office and farm and leaves the management of the house and children to his wife, Victoria, and to her mother, Mrs. Harris, who lives with them. The incidents in the story follow the period in Cather's life shortly after her family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska. If Cather is drawing on real-life persons for characterization and real-life events for elaboration in her fiction, then it seems probable that she also bases the fictional marriage of the Templetons on the marriage of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cather. James Woodress notes she again uses her family as prototypes for the Kronborgs in *The Song of the Lark* and for the Ferguessons in "The Best Years" (p. 166). The relation between Reverend and Mrs. Kronborg and between Mr. and Mrs. Ferguesson is basically the same as that between Mr. and Mrs. Templeton. There is affection between the partners, and each has his own responsibility in the family.

Grandfather and Grandmother Burden in *My Ántonia* exhibit some of the same traits and habits as Willa Cather's own grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Cather, who had also migrated to Nebraska. Grandfather Burden is a devout man who maintains the patriarchal ideal of family life (Bennett, pp. 10-11). James Woodress cites similarities between the real and the fictional grandmothers. Grandmother Burden appears as "quick-footed and energetic in all her movements." She was always eager that "everything should go with due
order and decorum" (p. 21). Like Cather's grandparents, who had three orphaned grandchildren to rear, the Burdens raise Jim, their orphaned grandson. Cather presents not only the characters but also their relationship to each other as she remembered it. By suggesting their attitudes toward each other, she recreates a stable and lasting relationship between these two people who persevere in establishing a home despite the hardships of pioneer life.

Much of Cather's fiction is intended to convey a feeling or to create impressions rather than to tell stories, and the relationships between the characters are important to the achieving of this effect. In writing about the passing of the pioneer spirit in *A Lost Lady*, Cather bases the marriage of Daniel and Marian Forrester on that of Silas and Lyra Garber, a former governor of Nebraska and his young, beautiful wife who lived in Red Cloud (Bennett, pp. 72-75). The events of the book almost parallel the lives of the Garbers, and it is through the fabrication of their marriage that Cather creates the impression she wants to leave with the reader.

Other friends who are portrayed in her works include Mr. and Mrs. Miner of Red Cloud who appear as the Harlings in *My Ántonia* (Bennett, pp. 65-69). A great friend of the Miner's daughters, Cather had ample opportunity to observe the Miner Family, and she was very impressed by the spirit
and vitality of the Miner's hired girl, Annie Sadilek. The two became friends, and when Cather saw Annie (now Pavelka) years later surrounded by her family on their farm, she found her inspiration for Ántonia Shimerda. Annie's husband became Cuzak, Ántonia's husband, in My Ántonia. However, the couple appear again as Mary and Anton Rosicky in "Neighbor Rosicky" (Woodress, p. 238). In this story their marriage and their life together are seen ten years after the end of My Ántonia.

Cather has been criticized for being "helpless when it came to sexual love." For an answer to this charge, we need only turn to the purpose of Cather's writing and to her attitudes on the art of writing. In exemplifying her major themes--the pioneer spirit, the vitality of youth, artistic endeavor, individualism, and the effects of a materialistic society--she felt it unnecessary to elaborate on the sexual relationships of the characters. Her purpose was not to de-emphasize the importance of marriage in her works but to indicate that marriage is a more involved relationship than just a sexual one. The attitudes of the characters toward themselves, as well as toward their surroundings or circumstances, influence their feelings for one another. Sexual passion is an implied component of marriage, but it is an

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aspect Cather chose not to emphasize. In "The Novel Démeublé" she writes, "Literalness, when applied to the presenting of mental reactions and of physical sensations, seems to be no more effective than when it is applied to material things. A novel crowded with physical sensations is no less a catalogue than one crowded with furniture. . . . Characters can be almost dehumanized by a laboratory study of the behaviour of their bodily organs under sensory stimuli--can be reduced, indeed to mere animal pulp." As evidenced by references to sexual passion in "Coming, Aphrodite!," A Lost Lady, My Ántonia, and Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather does not avoid sexual implications, but the purposes in her art are too large to allow her to dwell on what is inherent or obvious in a situation.

In talking about My Ántonia Cather told Eleanor Hinman, "There was the material in that book for a lurid melodrama. But I decided in writing it I would dwell very lightly on those things that a novelist would ordinarily emphasize, and make up my story of the little, every-day happenings and occurrences that form the greatest part of everyone's life and happiness." It is just this recalling of the "little, every-day happenings and occurrences" that gives Cather's

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9Hinman interview, n. pag.
fiction its vitality, and this seems to be the type of fiction the reading public desired. Cather was not intimidated by Comstockery, an over-zealous censorship of literature and the other arts because of alleged immorality. After all, she signed a petition in 1916 protesting Theodore Dreiser's treatment in his publisher's withdrawal of The Titan and the censors' subsequent attack on The Genius. However, in her own works, she insisted on portraying a balanced, not a narrow, view of married life.

She is also criticized for portraying only unhappy marriages. John Randall says that Cather condemns any spontaneity in the relation between the sexes, that she is interested in "showing that permanently satisfying relationships between men and women are impossible." James Woodress states, "It is a rare novel or story of hers in which there is not an unhappy marriage appearing either as a central element or on the periphery of the work (pp. 87-88). It is true that many of her novels and stories portray marriages that are failures or that hover between success and failure. Perhaps for a close observer of life Cather was only describing affairs as she saw them. Elizabeth Moorhead

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says of Professor St. Peter, "He fell out of love with his beautiful wife--a not uncommon circumstance in well-ordered families even here and now. . . ."12

It would surely be a false note if all the marriages in Cather's fiction were blissful. In some instances an unhappy marriage exemplifies the major theme of the work. In other instances an unhappy marriage in the background of the story provides a point of contrast for a happy one. A close study will show, however, that there are actually more successful marriages in the fiction of Willa Cather than unsuccessful ones. In all instances, her marriages directly interrelate with the themes of the novels and stories, and these themes will be explored in the following three chapters of this thesis.

Willa Cather did receive a marriage proposal from a young doctor when she went to Pittsburgh, and Woodress says she was also proposed to by Preston Farrar, an English teacher (pp. 85-86). But Cather was not in love, and she chose not to marry. She had grown enamored of her liberty and the freedom to do as she pleased. During this period when she was in Pittsburgh, Cather was struggling to earn her own living in journalism and later in teaching while she perfected her art. She was so determined to achieve her goals that in her thinking

marriage and a career were incompatible. Although she chose not to marry, Willa Cather was a generous person with the capacity for deep and sincere feelings. To those select few to whom she gave her friendship, she remained loyal throughout her lifetime and theirs. It is with this feeling of loyalty and devotion that she endows those successful marital relationships in her fiction.
CHAPTER TWO

SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES

The successful marital relationships in Cather's fiction are not depicted ideally, but as they might occur in real life. The disappointments and uncertainties, as well as the satisfactions and fulfillments, are all included in the picture. The various marriages are shown at different points of time in the characters' lives, but certain qualities remain constant. There is compatibility and sympathy between the partners, but there is not necessarily perfect agreement. One partner may be dominant without, however, dominating the other. Each is sensitive to the needs of the other. Each has a role in the partnership that he fulfills to the best of his abilities and to the success of the marriage. A modern-day definition of marriage that embraces the characteristics of Cather's successful marriages is "that relation between man and woman in which the independence is equal, the dependence mutual, and the obligation reciprocal."¹ These characteristics are evident in successful marriages throughout Cather's fiction.

In two instances, Alexander's Bridge (1912) and A Lost Lady (1923), the marriages of the protagonists are at the

center of the novels. In these cases we can examine the relationship of the partners within the direct confines of the marital situation. Although one of the partners may have a moral flaw, if he remains true to the marriage, and if the faith of the other partner is not destroyed by that flaw, the marriage remains a success. In examining the situations, we will deal with the individual personalities of the partners, but only as each is related by the boundaries of marriage.

Critics have found Cather's first novel, Alexander's Bridge, to be anomalous among the rest of her works.² The setting, Boston and London, is different from her later novels, and the characters do not have the pioneer background of the later works.

Bartley Alexander is forty-two years old, an internationally famous builder of bridges. He has a beautiful wife, whom he loves, and a happy home; yet he is dissatisfied with himself. He becomes almost obsessed with the desire to return to the carefree days of his youth. The impact of the novel lies in this theme--the desire for youth with its attendant energy and freedom.

Bartley and Winifred have been married for twelve years. Bartley has already achieved fame and success. Winifred is

a personality in her own right, not overshadowed by Bartley. Lovely to look at, gracious in action, and a powerful force behind her husband, she was "the woman who had made his life, gratified his pride, given direction to his tastes and habits. Winifred still was, as she had always been, romance for him, and when he was deeply stirred he turned to her." 3 This appears to be an ideal situation. The flaw is not in the marriage nor in the relation between husband and wife, but within Bartley himself. On a business trip to London, he chances to meet Hilda Burgoyne, now a successful actress, whom he had once courted in his younger days in London. Bartley does not fall in love with Hilda but rather with the memory of his youth and the idea of freedom from obligation evoked by such memories. He does have an affair with Hilda who, although she loves him, realizes that Bartley does not really care much for her. The affair continues for a year, during which time Bartley tries twice to end it but lacks the courage to do so. The call of remembered youth is too strong. During this time Bartley suffers severe emotional turmoil. He loves his wife and does not want to leave her, but leading a life of duplicity is destroying him. Winifred does not know of Bartley's developing emotional crisis, and

Cather only hints that she even suspects anything could be amiss by describing her as "pale and unnaturally calm" (p. 70) when Bartley prepares to go to London for the last trip. However, Winifred encourages him to go so he can return at the planned time. She realizes the problems Bartley faces because of conflicts in his work and tells him that long ago when he was working on his first bridge, she "knew then that your paths were not to be paths of peace, but I decided that I wanted to follow them" (p. 71).

Finally Bartley decides to leave Winifred permanently and join Hilda in London. The powerful pull of remembered youth seems to be victorious. "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" (p. 113). Bartley cannot accept the facts that he is forty-two years old, has had his youth, and has already made the most out of what youth has to offer. Yet he knows what he is giving up in order to satisfy his folly. "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" (p. 112).

At this point, the marriage of Bartley and Winifred is still intact and basically successful. Bartley lacks the courage to face Winifred with his decision, and he cannot
bring himself to mail her the letter he wrote explaining he is leaving her for Hilda. Fate now intervenes in the lives of Bartley and Winifred. Bartley is called to Canada to inspect the construction of his gigantic cantilever bridge that is showing signs of stress. With his letter to his wife in his pocket, he goes to the construction site. Paradoxically, when he discovers the faults of the new construction, he turns to Winifred by cabling her to come to Canada. The bridge is, indeed, too weak to stand. As Bartley is going about the works telling the crews to leave, the bridge collapses, and he jumps to the river below. Struggling for safety, Bartley feels Winifred's presence telling him he can hold out, that he can make it to safety. As he is struggling, he realizes "what it would mean to die a hypocrite, and to lie dead under the last abandonment of her tenderness" (p. 124). He determines to recover all he was about to lose had he left Winifred. Too late Bartley resolves his problem, for he cannot survive the panic of the men in the water around him, and he drowns. Winifred never knows the contents of the letter in Bartley's pocket, for it was watersoaked and illegible.

Fate, in this bold intervention, plays an important part in "saving" a successful marriage and in preserving intact the reputation of a man. Due to Bartley's untimely death the secure relationship between husband and wife was unchanged by his moral flaw because he had kept his inner
conflict from his wife, and his reputation remained un-
sullied, for no one had occasion to doubt his integrity.

In A Lost Lady Marian and Daniel Forrester are depicted
during three periods of their life together. One of Cather's
concerns is the impression Mrs. Forrester makes on Niel
Herbert, a young man of Sweet Water. The novel is divided
into two parts, and in Part I the Forresters are seen twice
at a seven years' interval. We first glimpse Mrs. Forrester
through the point of view of twelve-year-old Niel. The
Forresters live on the outskirts of Sweet Water in a house
surrounded by a cottonwood grove and, being very wealthy,
divide their time between summers in Sweet Water and winters
in Colorado Springs where they enjoy the society of their
moneyed friends. Just before we meet them again, we are
told that the Captain has suffered a fall from a horse. This
accident cuts short his career as a contractor for the rail-
roads and leaves him relying on a walking cane. Both Daniel
Forrester and his wife are presented to us again when Niel is
nineteen, and at this time Captain Forrester suffers a rever-
sal in his financial affairs and a stroke which leaves him
a little slow of speech and forces him to rely on his wife
for aid.

Daniel Forrester had come West after the Civil War and
was one of those men of vision and imagination who had helped
construct the railroads. Marian is his beautiful second
wife, twenty-five years younger than he. His first marriage
to an invalid wife had been unhappy, and it was after her death that he had met Marian. With her vitality and lust for living, she is the kind of wife he wanted. He tells of choosing the site for his house: "I planned to build a house that my friends could come to, with a wife like Mrs. Forrester to make it attractive to them." The captain's esteem for her wifely conduct is suggested when Cather tells us that he had "archaic ideas about jewels; a man bought them for his wife in acknowledgment of things he could not gracefully utter. They must be costly; they must show that he was able to buy them, and that she was worthy to wear them" (pp. 51-52). Marian Forrester has exquisite jewels.

Mrs. Forrester's vitality, gaiety, effervescence, and especially her inviting, musical laughter place her far above the ordinary plane of human folk. But "it was as Captain Forrester's wife that she most interested Niel, and it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her. Given her other charming attributes, her comprehension of a man like the railroad-builder, her loyalty to him, stamped her more than anything else" (p. 78). Marian Forrester is loyal to her husband in many ways. She appreciates his moral integrity, and when Mr. Forrester loses his wealth by personally repaying the depositors whose funds are lost in the

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ruin of a bank in which he is the principal stockholder, she rises to the occasion. "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" (pp. 92-93). She accepts their state of poverty without reproach to her husband and tries to maintain her old light-heartedness and gaiety. However, "Niel knew that she faced the winter with terror, but he had never seen her more in command of herself,--or more the mistress of her own house than now, when she was preparing to become the servant of it. He had the feeling, which he never used to have, that her lightness cost her something" (p. 99).

It is during this time, just as the Captain loses his money, that Niel discovers what the reader has known for some time--that Mrs. Forrester is having an affair with the handsome Frank Ellinger. To the naive young Niel this revelation is a crushing blow. But there is no moral condemnation of Mrs. Forrester, for Cather tells us that even in Niel's disappointment "It was not a moral scruple she had outraged, but an aesthetic ideal" (p. 87).

Part II takes place two years later when Niel returns to Sweet Water from school in Boston. He first hears of the relationship between the Forresters from the town's somewhat unscrupulous new lawyer, Ivy Peters. Ivy is telling Niel about the state of Mr. Forrester's health. "He's only about
half there...seems contented enough. . . . She takes
good care of him, I'll say that for her. . . . She seeks
consolation, always did, you know. . . too much French
brandy . . . but she never neglects him. I don't blame her.
Real work comes hard on her" (p. 105). Marian Forrester has
suffered, too, from her husband's illness and reversal in
fortune. Hard physical work is seldom becoming to anyone,
especially to one fortunate enough not to have ever done any.
The Captain can no longer provide his wife with the luxuries
money can bring, but she does not desert him when he most
needs her youth and strength. For this, Niel can only admire
Mrs. Forrester, even if his ideal is somewhat tarnished. He
also discovers the extent of Captain Forrester's magnanimous
spirit. When he sees a letter Marian has written to Frank
Ellinger, he remarks only on her fine penmanship. "Niel had
often wondered just how much the Captain knew. Now, as he
went down the hill, he felt sure that he knew everything;
more than anyone else; all there was to know about Marian
Forrester" (p. 117). Captain Forrester does not condemn his
wife for her indiscretion, and Cather seems to imply that we
should not judge for him. Knowing all there is to know about
his wife, he accepts this flaw in her just as he accepts her
continuing and unabated devotion in other ways.

After the Captain suffers another stroke which leaves
him completely helpless, Niel decides to forego a year of
school and stay in Sweet Water to help Mrs. Forrester, who
has the care of her husband and the entire house to herself. "She was worn out; so exhausted that she was dull to what went on about her" (p. 138). Niel has time while he is with Captain Forrester in those peaceful closing days of his life to observe the relation between husband and wife. He grew more and more to feel "that the Captain knew his wife better even than she knew herself; and that knowing her, he,—to use one of his own expressions,—valued her" (p. 143).

The dependency of the Forresters on each other is seen in retrospect, not necessarily as the story unfolds. The Captain depends on his wife for many things. He is proud of her youth, charm, grace,—in short, her vitality and love of life. Marian Forrester, in return, has depended on her husband for much more than his money. 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" (pp. 152-153).

Cather presents the last years of this marriage as young and impressionable Niel Herbert observes it. The marriage is strong enough to withstand the vicissitudes of fortune which break many another partnership. Mutual respect and loyalty are more than time-worn expressions; they are vital ingredients of this marriage. Although the rest of the novel concerns
Marian's degradation after the death of her husband, her actions then are after the fact and do not have any meaning for the marriage itself. Trite as it may sound, each partner has the ability to accept the other for better or for worse. Marian Forrester supports her husband through some of the most trying circumstances that can befall a couple, and Daniel Forrester pays his wife one of the highest compliments--"he . . . valued her."

One of Cather's themes, the passing of the pioneer spirit and the rise of an undesirable materialistic society, is exemplified in this marriage. Daniel Forrester, the man of imagination who helped settle the West, is the embodiment of the pioneer spirit. Ivy Peters, the unscrupulous young lawyer who rents the Forrester land before the Captain dies, is symbolic of the society that rose after the West was settled. Marian Forrester, twenty-five years younger than her husband but older than Ivy, is caught in the middle. She knows and appreciates the virtues of the men like her husband, but she realizes the growing importance of men like Ivy Peters.

Niel Herbert is important as the narrator of many of the episodes because he exists chiefly to represent the attitude of the author (Gerber, p. 111). He realizes what is lost with the death of Daniel Forrester and also how much the cultural and social standards of Marian rely on the stability of her husband's circumstances. Eventually he forgives Mrs.
Forrester for her indiscretion. "He came to be very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him to life" (p. 171).

Before she wrote *A Lost Lady*, Willa Cather's reputation had been established with her pioneer novels, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918). In these works the protagonists are involved in marital relationships only toward the end of the novels. Each of these works focuses on the female protagonist. Cather gathers her evidence carefully as she presents the life of each main character, so that we may estimate the character's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and desires. Based on our knowledge of the characters and the circumstances, we can judge that the marriage in each of these novels is a success.

Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!*, at the age when most girls are interested in suitors, is left with the awesome responsibility of being the head of her household. Her father's dying instructions to his family are that Alexandra should manage the six hundred-forty acre farm and hold it together for her mother and three brothers. John Bergson had been working for eleven years to conquer the land. Although he is dying defeated, he feels that the land can be subdued and that his daughter, out of all his children, has the imagination and determination to do it. He has recognized her resourcefulness, good judgment, and intelligence.
Early in the novel Cather lets the reader see the developing relationship between Alexandra and her neighbor, Carl Linstrum. In town one winter day, Alexandra turns to Carl for help in retrieving Emil's cat from the top of a tall pole. Carl asks after her father's health, and when Alexandra replies that he will not get any better, "Carl did not say anything, but she felt his sympathy. He, too, was lonely."5 There is a rapport between these two friends that becomes more apparent as they grow older.

For three years after her father's death Alexandra manages the farm and her brothers without too much difficulty. The weather is cooperative and crops are good, and the family prospers. Then come three years of drought and failure when many people are selling their farms and leaving the country. Hard times and discouragement have come over the land and the people. Lou and Oscar, two of Alexandra's brothers, want to give up and take jobs in the cities like everyone else is doing. But Alexandra has a dream, a vision, and she is shrewd enough to see that the buyers of land at this time are the real estate men and those large land owners who want to add to their holdings by buying at depressed prices. She finally persuades her brothers that rather than leave, they should mortgage some of their land to buy more. As we see later, Alexandra is right, and the entire family becomes wealthy due to her foresight and determination.

5Willa Cather, 0 Pioneers! (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941), p. 10. All references to this book are to this edition and are hereafter cited in the text.
It is during this time of hardship that Carl and his family move to the city. Neither Carl nor his father has the stamina to be farmers, and Carl hopes to learn engraving. The relationship that exists between Carl and Alexandra is recorded in their conversation when Carl comes to tell her they are going to leave. Alexandra says, "'But I can't help feeling scared when I think how I will miss you--more than you will ever know'" (p. 51). She tells Carl he has helped her by understanding her and the boys and her mother. "'I expect that is the only way one person ever really can help another. I think you are about the only one that ever helped me. Somehow it will take more courage to bear your going than anything that has happened before'" (p. 51). Carl admits that his family has relied on Alexandra's good judgment and that he particularly has relied on her for long talks and sympathy. "'We've always felt alike about things'" (p. 52). As she recalls some of their good times together, Alexandra says, "'We've never either of us had any other close friend'" (p. 53). True friendship is often a rare commodity in life, and Alexandra knows the value of it. Carl feels he is not meant to tame the frontier and that he will only be a failure. He wants to succeed at something that will make Alexandra proud of him. "'I'll be working for you as much as for myself, Alexandra. I want to do something you'll like and be proud of. I'm a fool here, but I know I can do something!'" (p. 53).
It is sixteen years before Carl and Alexandra meet again. Alexandra has worked hard and managed well. Cather notes, "Anyone thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, Alexandra Bergson" (p. 83). Carl has not prospered during these years. Always the artist, he found that there is no market for quality hand engraving, but instead, the public accepts cheap substitutes. In fact, Carl is on his way to Alaska to join a friend in a prospecting venture. He says, "'It took courage to come at all, Alexandra. I wouldn't have, if I hadn't wanted to see you very, very much'" (p. 121). Alexandra does not agree with Carl that he is a failure because he is poor. She realizes that his sense of freedom is an achievement. Although she is a financial success, she feels that her life has been lacking in some quality. "'If the world were no wider than my cornfields, if there were not something besides this, I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work'" (p. 124). Carl can give Alexandra the companionship and a vision of the world that she desires. Alexandra needs Carl to fulfill her life, and when her brothers object to him on the basis that he wants to be taken care of, she answers, "'Well, suppose I want to take care of him? Whose business is it but my own?'" (p. 167). Carl, however, cannot ask Alexandra to marry him until he feels he has something to offer her. He does not
realize that what he can give Alexandra is more important to her than a successful reputation or a financial statement. Even though Alexandra tells him that she has needed him for "a great many years" (p. 182), Carl asks her to wait a year longer while he seeks his fortune in Alaska. This is a sad day for Alexandra; Emil, her youngest brother whom she has reared as if he were her son, is going to Mexico; her relations with Lou and Oscar have been severed because of their feeling against Carl and their fear that Alexandra might give him some of her property; and now Carl is leaving, too. Alexandra has her loneliness to look forward to.

Carl is still in Alaska when catastrophe befalls Alexandra. Emil, who had returned from Mexico, is killed by Frank Sabata. Emil was Alexandra's joy in life, and now in her terrible sorrow, she has no one. Finally, Carl rejoins her, explaining that he had read of the murder in a newspaper and had left immediately to come to her. "'The moment I knew you were in trouble, the moment I thought you might need me, it all looked different. You've always been a triumphant kind of person. . . . But you do need me now, Alexandra?'" (p. 302). Carl now feels that he can contribute to Alexandra's life. He reveals in this statement a great deal about himself. Although he cares for Alexandra, he does not seem to be the type of person who can be comfortable in a relationship unless he can contribute to it. As he explains to Alexandra before going to Alaska, "'I know that I am going
away on my own account. I must make the usual effort. I must have something to show for myself. To take what you would give me, I should have to be either a very large man or a very small one, and I am only in the middle class'" (p. 182). Carl may have had disappointments in his career, but he is not a weak person. He cannot be wholly dependent on Alexandra. He now feels that she truly needs him, and because his business affairs in Alaska look promising, he will not be financially dependent on her.

Cather does not have Alexandra and Carl declare love or passion for each other. Perhaps they have seen too much of life and know that romance alone is often insufficient grounds on which to build a relationship. This lack of passion does not appear to be a flaw in the characters but rather a strength in their relationship. Cather seems to imply that their marriage will be built on basic human needs. Alexandra sums up the meaning of their relationship when she says, "'I think we shall be very happy. I haven't any fears. I think when friends marry, they are safe'" (p. 308).

Along with the theme of the settlement of the West, another theme of *Pioneers!* is the struggle of a person to achieve the goals he has set for himself in his youth. This is the story of Alexandra Bergson and her struggle to create a successful farm. She is dedicated to her project and to rearing her young brother, Emil. She realizes she is lonely, but there seems to be no one to turn to until Carl returns.
Alexandra did not choose not to marry earlier; circumstances prevented it. With Carl to share her life, Alexandra can enjoy her success.

The same type of circumstances that prevented Alexandra from marrying young obtain in the life of Thea Kronborg in The Song of the Lark. Thea is the daughter of a preacher in the small town of Moonstone, Colorado. All her young life she knows that she has a special talent she must develop. She will never be content to spend her days in the mundane atmosphere of her home town. Thea receives the money to go to Chicago to study music through an unfortunate incident. She is the beneficiary in the will of Ray Kennedy, a friend who is killed in a railroad accident. Thea has to study harder than ever before. Her natural talents have hardly been refined, and there is much she has to learn. She is often lonely and exhausted. Then she meets Fred Ottenburg, a wealthy young man interested in artists. Fred recognizes her tremendous talent and determines to help her, but in the process he falls in love with Thea, and she with him. Fred asks Thea to go to Mexico with him and marry him. Thea has only been studying for two years and is just beginning to find herself and feel confident about her abilities, but she accepts Fred's proposal. She does love him, and she says, "'I can't settle down to being alone again.'"

after they get to Mexico, Fred admits to Thea that he already has a wife whom he hates. They have not been living together for several years, but she will not divorce him. Fred is not all duplicity; while considering his proposal to Thea, he rationalizes, "'At least, I understand her. I know what she needs and where she's bound, and I mean to see that she has a fighting chance.' . . . He would deceive her not once, he told himself fiercely, but a hundred times, to keep her free" (p. 424).

When Thea learns of Fred's marriage, she will not live with him nor accept his financial help; so she borrows money from her old friend from Moonstone, Dr. Howard Archie, to go to Germany to study. She tells Fred, "'If I borrow from him it's to study. Anything I took from you would be different. As I said before, you'd be keeping me. . . . Being married is one thing, and not being married is the other thing, and that's all there is to it. You say I was too much alone, and yet what you did was to cut me off more than I ever had been. Now I'm going to try to make good to my friends out there. That's all there is left for me'" (p. 445). Thea is left with only her driving ambition to become a great artist. She is willing to share that ambition with Fred, but she cannot give herself to a relationship that is not completely whole. It has to be marriage or no intimate relationship at all. Fred truly loves Thea, for he tells her on the night before she departs for Germany, "'There seems to be no limit to how
much I can be in love with you. I keep going" (p. 465). It is a saddened and lonely Thea who leaves for Germany, but she is exalted in her determination to achieve the heights of success.

Thea is very dedicated to her art and begins to achieve one success after another. During the next ten years she and Fred see very little of each other until she returns to New York. Fred's wife is still living, although she is now in a hospital. There have been no other serious affairs for either of them. Thea has received a marriage proposal, but she tells Fred, "'Even if I'd married Nordquist, there would have been something left out. There always is. In a way, I've always been married to you!'" (p. 558). And when she asks Fred if he has found anyone he wants to marry, he answers, "'Not particularly. It's not your fault, but, you see, I've had you too much in my mind. I've not given myself a fair chance in other directions'" (pp. 556-557). Thea has sought and found success in her art, but as she tells Dr. Archie when he asks about her personal life, "'My dear doctor, I don't have any. Your work becomes your personal life. . . . It takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out; and that is your life'" (p. 546). Thea has lived with her art as her entire existence because she has had no one with whom to share her life. There is no one to care with her or for her. That she is not happy is evident when she continues to Dr.
Archie, "'My life is full of jealousies and disappointments, you know'" (pp. 549-550).

In the epilogue, some ten years after Thea's triumph in New York, we find out from Thea's Aunt Tilly that Fred and Thea have indeed married. We cannot help but believe that their marriage is a success. Their love has lasted through nearly twenty years of separation. Thea has achieved the pinnacle of success, and now she has someone who cares for her to share it with her. Fred not only loves Thea; he understands her, and we have no reason to doubt his vow made twenty years earlier that he will keep her free.

In this novel, as in *O Pioneers!*, Cather works with the theme of the desires and drives of youth. Thea dreams of becoming a great artist, and she has the physical stamina of the young to pursue her desire relentlessly. Cather chose to reveal Thea's struggles as they occur, whereas we view most of Alexandra's in retrospect. But the outcome for both protagonists is basically the same; after achieving their success, they each join in a meaningful marital relationship with a partner who cares for them and their well-being.

Ántonia Shimerda, the heroine of *My Ántonia*, is a different type of protagonist from Alexandra or Thea. Ántonia is not seeking an artistic career or building a land empire. She is one of those rare creations, whether in fiction or life, who lives to the fullest of her capacity every day. The story
of Ántonia and the impression she makes is recalled by Jim Burden.

The Shimerdas come to Nebraska from Bohemia when Ántonia is fourteen. They speak little English, but Ántonia is quick to learn. She is an intelligent and vivacious girl, with some of the aristocratic traits of her gentlemanly father. After Mr. Shimerda's death she grows coarse from the rough, physical work of the farm and does not have an opportunity to go to school. She is not embittered by her fate; rather, her naturalness, her enthusiasm, her joy in living make her want to know and learn nice ways from people she works for, Jim's grandparents and the Harling family in Black Hawk. The secret to Ántonia's personality is her enthusiasm. Undaunted by the hardships of frontier life and personal tragedy, she maintains her zest for living. Naive and trustful, she is seduced by a scoundrel, but even after her child is born, she maintains her self-esteem.

Jim visits Ántonia after twenty years and meets for the first time her husband, Cuzak, and their large family. Ántonia "was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things."7 Cuzak

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met Ántonia when he came to Nebraska to visit a cousin, and "she was exactly the kind of girl he had always been hunting for" (p. 365). Together they built their farm. They do not have much money, but they owe no debt on their land and are rich in things other than money. Cuzak tells Jim that many times he would have quit if it had not been for Ántonia. "Yes, she is a good wife for a poor man. She ain't always so strict with me, neither. . . . We always get along fine, her and me, like at first" (pp. 365-366). Jim notices, "The two seemed to be on terms of easy friendliness, touched with humor. Clearly, she was the impulse, and he the corrective" (p. 358).

Ántonia loves the land and rearing her children on a farm. Because of her determination and the love for her family, she has encouraged and worked with her husband. Cuzak, a furrier by trade, is a city man, yet Ántonia has "managed to hold him here on a farm, in one of the loneliest countries in the world" (p. 366). When Jim asks Cuzak if he does not miss the city life, Cuzak answers, "At first I near go crazy with lonesomeness, but my woman is got such a warm heart. She always make it as good for me as she could" (p. 367). Ántonia seems to have infused into her husband her own love of the land. They are proud of their family, their farm, and each other.

With My Ántonia Willa Cather's novels which focus on the struggles of youth come to an end. Ántonia and Cuzak's
family is the culmination of their struggle and dream. Antonia does not desire a professional career as does Thea, nor a land empire as does Alexandra, but she pursues her dreams just as relentlessly as they pursue theirs.

In Cather's short story "Neighbor Rosicky" (1930) we meet the Cuzaks again some ten years later. This time their names are Mary and Anton Rosicky. There is a peace and harmony between them and a quiet consideration for each other. "Life had gone well with them because, at bottom, they had the same ideas about life." Cather, in this short story, portrays an older couple in the last few months of the husband's life. There is a concern and regard for each other that has nothing to do with the husband's health, but with years of working together and knowing each other.

Another aspect of the successful marriage is noted in the relationship between Henry and Sapphira Colbert in Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940), Willa Cather's last novel and the only one with a Virginia setting. The time is just prior to the Civil War. To understand the Colbert's relationship, it is necessary to understand Cather's setting with all its implications of aristocracy. Sapphira Dodderidge is the oldest daughter of a wealthy, slave-owning family in Virginia.

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Left at twenty-four as the only unmarried daughter to care for her invalid father, Sapphira met Henry Colbert, the oldest son of a miller, who sometimes advised Mr. Dodderidge on business matters. After her father's death, Sapphira announced her engagement to Henry; her friends and family felt she had taken "a long step down." The newly-weds, and Sapphira's score of slaves, move to Sapphira's inherited farm on Back Creek where Henry is the only miller for miles around.

Henry undoubtedly knew Sapphira's self-indulgent nature and her sense of pride, as well as her views on slavery, before their marriage. He had observed her upbringing and the values of her mode of living. The issue of slavery is the main disagreement between them, but Henry accepts his wife's owning them as a way of life. He had also observed her management of her father's farm during his illness and knew Sapphira's abilities to organize and manage. Sapphira is the aristocrat, with her fine manners and her belief in slavery. Henry is the plebian, a plain man who feels that owning slaves is wrong. Although in cultural standards and social position the two are far apart, they establish a relationship that weathers many storms.

Sapphira arranges her life so that she has the best of her two worlds. Back Creek is far enough away from her family home that she will not be plagued with reminders that she married beneath her station. She and Henry establish

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their home to their own satisfaction. But she does not sever relationships with her family; she travels annually to spend several weeks with a sister and keeps abreast of her old friends and their activities. Henry has no desire to make this visit with her. He is content to stay in Back Creek and tend his mill and farm.

Sapphira is a capable wife, often vain, sometimes cruel, but indulgent with her husband. Throughout their thirty years of marriage, Sapphira remains the same type of person Henry wed. Although he "had never understood her very well, he had always been proud of her" (p. 268). In later years, after Sapphira has suffered in her uncomplaining manner from dropsy for a long while, Henry re-evaluates her. She meets her illness and approaching death with "that composure which he had sometimes called heartlessness, but now seemed to him strength" (p. 268). The tone of their relationship is set early in the novel when at tea one afternoon Sapphira refers to her husband as "the Master," and Henry replies, "Don't you put on with me, Sapphy. You're the master here, and I'm the miller. And that's how I like it to be" (p. 50). Cather makes Sapphira the dominant partner, but she does not dominate her husband. He is an individual, trusted and respected in the community. In the mode of the time period, "Miss Sapphy" manages the household and the slaves in her energetic, capable manner while Mr. Henry manages the business. Together they have built a fine home where they are both content
to be. They have common interests in the management of their affairs and enjoy each other's company. Without referring to affection, Sapphira implies a great deal of it when she tells Henry, "'Take it all in all, though, we have had many happy years here, and we both love the place. Neither of us would be easy anywhere else'" (p. 269).

Cather does not deny to any of her protagonists the basic need of marital fulfillment. This need appears strongly as an undercurrent through the novels and stories. The marital relationships the protagonists are seeking are not relationships of passion; they are relationships based on mutual interests and sympathetic understanding. Inherent in that understanding between two people is the quality of love. The characters are allowed to be individuals with strong interests, but they are also depicted as well-rounded persons with the basic needs of comradship and affection. Once each marital union is formed, the partners work together with each other's welfare as a common ground to assure the success of that union. Each partner depends on the other for some fulfillment; yet each maintains his individuality. Even Alexander Bartley, who is depicted in the throes of trying to return to his youth, is loath to harm his relationship with his wife. As he is drowning, he realizes that she is more important to him than pursuing an elusive dream.

There are also successful marriages among the background characters of Cather's novels and stories. Although these
marriages may not directly involve the main character, they do influence him or her in some way. In My Ántonia Grandfather and Grandmother Burden are depicted in the later years of their lives after Jim comes to live with them. Their actions and ideas complement each other; Grandfather is a good manager of the farm, and Grandmother provides care and comfort for those who live there with them. Their respect for each other is reflected in their attitude toward others. Their home is a refuge for Mr. Shimerda during that first terrible winter in Nebraska and the place where Ántonia first begins to learn refined ways. It is through Grandmother Burden's influence that Ántonia comes to Black Hawk as a hired girl for the Harling family. The Harlings enjoy one another's company and the simple pleasures of life. The secure relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Harling provides the basis for their happy home. Ántonia loves the Harlings, even though she leaves them because of Mr. Harling's strictness about her attending dances, and in later years tells Jim, "I learned nice ways at the Harlings', and I've been able to bring up my children so much better. . . . If it hadn't been for what Mrs. Harling taught me, I expect I'd have brought them up like wild rabbits" (pp. 343-344).

The Kohlers in The Song of the Lark affect Thea more then they ever knew. The comfort they find in each other is reflected in their attitude toward others. Thea loves them and loves being at their house. After she becomes a
success, she tells Dr. Archie that sometimes she comes home from a performance distraught and bitter. "And I've gone to sleep and wakened up in the Kohler's garden, with the pigeons and the white rabbits, so happy! And that saves me" (p. 551).

The happy relationship between Andor Harsanyi, Thea's first professional teacher, and his wife also has a good influence on Thea. Lonely and often frustrated by her work and her poverty, Thea enjoys an occasional evening at the Harsanyi home. "The Harsanyis were poor, and it was due to Mrs. Harsanyi's good management that their lives, even in hard times, moved along with dignity and order" (p. 233). It is this sense of dignity and order that Thea respects and appreciates. Mrs. Harsanyi is kind to Thea, who returns her kindness with friendship. Mr. Harsanyi, a brilliant pianist with a successful career before him, particularly appreciates his wife's understanding, as well as her delicious dinners, after an exhausting day of teaching. "Quiet and order and his wife's good taste were the things that meant most to him" (p. 233). Mrs. Harsanyi "adapted herself to circumstances with a well-bred ease which solved many of her husband's difficulties, and kept him, as he said, from feeling cheap and down at the heel. No musician ever had a better wife" (pp. 227-228).

In Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) Don Antonio Olivares and his wife, Dôna Isabella, provide for Father Latour and Father Vaillant a retreat from the Indians and
rough frontiersmen of mid-nineteenth century New Mexico. "It was refreshing to spend an evening with a couple who were interested in what was going on in the outside world, to eat a good dinner and drink good wine, and listen to music."\textsuperscript{10} Don Antonio is a wealthy rancher happily married to an attractive, cultivated, gracious wife. Dôna Isabella has made a pleasant home of the rambling adobe ranch house and enjoys receiving her husband's friends as guests. Cather notes that Dôna Isabella is sometimes the subject of gossip "since she had retained her beautiful complexion and her husband's devoted regard for so many years" (p. 178).

In \textit{Shadows on the Rock} (1931) Cather reveals the events of 1697-98 in the French colony of Quebec. Euclide Auclair, the apothecary, and his twelve year old daughter, Cécile, are important persons in the episodes. Although Madame Auclair has been dead for two years when the story opens, her influence is still felt by her family. Cécile keeps the house and cooks for her father as her mother had instructed her, striving to maintain the traditions and life style to which her father is accustomed. Euclide is a patient, kind father, but the absence of his wife is keenly felt. Cather seems to imply that the devotion between the Auclairs is the force that sustains Euclide and Cécile. Cécile has this type of

relationship as an example for her own marriage to Pierre Charron. Although this marriage is mentioned only in the epilogue, which takes place fifteen years later, Cather has carefully developed the friendship between Cécile and Pierre into the body of the novel. Pierre visits the Auclairs when he is in Quebec, and during one visit Cecile thinks of him as a "friend, devoted and fearless, here in the house with them, as if he were one of themselves." Friendship seems to be one of the ingredients of the successful marriages in Cather's works.

Rachael Blake, a motivating character in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, has come to live near her parents, Sapphira and Henry Colbert, after the death of her husband, Michael. The Blakes had lived in Washington where Michael was a member of Congress and where Rachael "had lived the happiest years of her life" (p. 131). The Blakes had mutual interests, both politically and socially. Michael was often "beaming with pride in her" (p. 140) after a dinner party. They were devoted to each other, and Rachael feels a great void in her life since her husband's death. She fills this gap by caring for her two daughters and nursing the sick people who call on her.

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In the short story "Old Mrs. Harris" (1930) Cather briefly depicts the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. David Rosen in their friendship with their neighbors, the Templetons and Victoria Templeton's mother, Mrs. Harris. The Rosens are a well-educated Jewish couple, admired by the Templeton's teenage daughter, Vicky. Having no children of their own, the Rosens take an interest in the activities of Vicky and her four younger brothers. They encourage Vicky to compete for a college scholarship, loan her books, discuss her plans with her, and even help by financing the expenses her scholarship does not cover. Mrs. Rosen is particularly solicitous of old Mrs. Harris, who manages her daughter's house. She has a great respect for Mrs. Harris' wisdom and patience, even if she does not approve of all the work Mrs. Harris has to do.

The kindness and sincere interest shown by the Rosens is a reflection of the serenity of their marital relationship. They are comfortable with each other and with their surroundings. "Mr. Rosen was a reflective, unambitious man, who didn't mind keeping a clothing-store in a little Western town, so long as he had a great deal of time to read philosophy."\(^\text{12}\) He is patient with Mrs. Rosen's talk of the Templeton household because "it was a bitter sorrow to Mrs. Rosen that she

\(^{12}\) Willa Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris," Obscure Destinies (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 103. All references to this short story are to this edition and are hereafter cited in the text.
had no children" (p. 101). There seems to be no jealousy or suspicion in the Rosen's relationship. Even though Cather tells us twice of Mr. Rosen's admiration for the attractive Victoria Templeton, this admiration seems to be purely platonic. Mrs. Rosen, an outspoken person, accepts Victoria as a fact, not as any threat to her marriage. She says to Mrs. Harris about Victoria, "All the merchants down town will take anything from your daughter. She is very popular wid de gentlemen, Grandma" (p. 85). Mrs. Rosen's attitude toward her husband is shown when Cather tells us it was for his "transcendental quality of mind that she reverenced him in her heart, and thought him so much finer than any of his successful brothers" (p. 159).

Other successful marriages that appear in the background of the novels serve as a contrast to the less successful marriages depicted. In One of Ours (1922) Susie and Leonard Dawson marry a short time before Claude and Enid Wheeler, whose unsuccessful marriage is discussed in Chapter IV. Susie and Leonard seem to have the same ideas about the importance of a husband and wife working harmoniously together to build a home. They have pride in each other as they look toward their future together. Angélique and Amédée Chevalier, the young French couple in O Pioneers!, are almost ecstatic in their joy as their marriage begins. Amédée declares marriage is the "greatest thing ever" (p. 160). Emil likes "to see and to think about Amédée's sunny, natural, happy love"
The Chevaliers' cheerfulness contrasts sharply with the degenerating relationship between Marie and Frank Sabata and with the fruitless relationship developing between Marie and Emil Bergson.

The successful marriages in the background of the novels have the same traits of mutual interests and understanding between the partners that are evidence in the protagonists' successful marriages. Always implied is the ingredient of love, but Cather does not emphasize passion in these portrayals, either. Rather, she often allows them to show that successful relationships can thrive in the same circumstances as unsuccessful ones. The partners' attitudes toward each other and toward their marriages determine the degree of success of the marital relationship.
CHAPTER THREE

BORDERLINE MARRIAGES

The marriages discussed in this chapter are neither successes nor utter failures. The partners lack the compatibility and the regard for each other that mark the successful marriages. The borderline marriage may occur because of a change in circumstances, the intrusion of some element one of the partners cannot cope with, a deficiency of understanding and mutual concern, or a combination of these forces. In these portrayals, as in the successful marriages, Cather reflects reality. There are moments of happiness intermingled with the indifference between the partners; sometimes there are years of tender regard before the souring process occurs. These couples do not separate or divorce; their situations are not unbearable, only unsatisfactory. There is mutual dissatisfaction, and each person seeks his own idea of happiness apart from his partner.

In The Professor's House (1925) Professor Godfrey St. Peter reflects "that people who are intensely in love when they marry, and who go on being in love, always meet with something which suddenly or gradually makes a difference."

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This is not the Professor's or Cather's renunciation of love, but rather an affirmation that affection alone is insufficient to sustain a marriage. Many times in her works Cather suggests the importance of love as an ingredient of other human needs. It is the stabilizing force behind Alexander Bartley's delinquent decision to stay with Winifred; it is the enduring quality in the relationship between Fred Ottenburg and Thea Kronborg; it is the zest in the lives of Ántonia and Cuzak. Cather implies that love is a part of other basic human needs which must be present for a marriage to succeed. The main characters of The Professor's House seem to meet with that something that gradually makes a difference in their marital relationship, and they have built no other sustaining qualities between them. The attitudes of the partners determine the degree of success, or failure, of their marriage.

At the time we meet Professor and Mrs. St. Peter, their marriage is hovering between success and failure. They are mutually dissatisfied with each other's temperament and disposition. Mrs. St. Peter remarks to her husband, "You grow better-looking and more intolerant all the time." St. Peter answers, "'Intolerant?' . . . The thing that stuck in his mind constantly was that she was growing more and more intolerant, about everything except her sons-in-law; that she would probably continue to do so, and that he must school himself to bear it" (p. 35). During the year of their lives
that Cather depicts, the Professor comes to understand himself and his relationship with Lillian. Godfrey and Mrs. St. Peter have been married nearly thirty years. Both of their daughters now have homes of their own. Rosamond, the older, is married to Louie Marsellus, and they are quite affluent due to money from Tom Outland's invention. Tom, Rosamond's fiance who was killed in the war, had willed Rosamond the rights to his patent. Kathleen, the younger daughter, appears to be happy with Scott McGregor, a young newspaperman. The McGregors do not share in Rosamond and Louie's good fortune, and there is a widening break between the two sisters. Professor St. Peter has finished his history of the Spanish explorers, a work that absorbed his energies for fifteen years. He has won acclaim for his writing and received enough financial reward to allow the St. Peters to build a new house into which they have moved.

Cather begins the narrative at this point in the St. Peters' lives with Godfrey refusing to move his study into the new house. He prefers to continue renting the old house and working in his inconvenient third-floor room where he created his masterpiece, Spanish Adventurers in North America. The old study has always been a refuge for him, and he cannot bring himself to give it up. Always interested in his family, Godfrey is not, however, involved in domestic affairs, and he finds his role of father-in-law unsatisfactory. His grown
daughters no longer rely on him as they once did, but the old study, which was also the sewing room, brings him many pleasant memories of the girls' younger days when new party dresses hung on the dress forms still standing in the corner.

Godfrey "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" (p. 258). Now that his romance of the mind has come to a successful close, he has left to him his romance of the heart—his wife. Godfrey and Lillian were very much in love when they married and remained so for many years. His relationship with her has been happy; he has no regrets about his life. "Lillian had had the best years of his life, nearly thirty, and joyful years they had been, nothing could ever change that. But they were gone" (p. 281). Along the way something came between him and his wife in the person of Tom Outland. Tom, with his intimate knowledge of the Southwest, had been a great help, and even a confidant, to the Professor as he was writing his history. Godfrey had never before turned to anyone except Lillian for mental stimulation. "Lillian had been fiercely jealous of Tom Outland" (p. 49). While Godfrey was occupied with his work, and after Tom's death, Lillian turned to new interests. "With her sons-in-law she had begun the game of being a woman all over again. She dressed for them, planned for them, schemed in their interests" (p. 79). She seems to
change so much "Godfrey began to think that he understood his own wife very little" (p. 78).

As Lillian becomes more worldly, the Professor turns to the memories of his younger days when his history was still a dream, not yet a reality. Lillian notes this change in him when she says, "You're naturally warm and affectionate; all at once you begin shutting yourself away from everybody. I don't think you'll be happier for it" (p. 162). The crisis in the Professor's life comes during the time Rosamond and Louie take Lillian with them to Europe for several months. Godfrey moves his belongings back to the old house to live there alone in his wife's absence. In his solitude he ponders the affairs of his life. He returns in his thoughts to his boyhood, before there was love, Lillian, marriage, or responsibilities. He comes to value these day-dreams of his youth and reads with despair in his heart Lillian's letter telling him the family is returning home. "He could not live with his family again--not even with Lillian. Especially not with Lillian! Her nature was intense and positive; it was like a chiselled surface, a die, a stamp upon which he could not be beaten out any longer" (p. 274). Godfrey comes to think that "surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love--if once one has ever fallen in" (p. 275). Because Godfrey and Lillian cannot recognize each other's needs, they have no obligations to each other. Each
has become independent of his partner. For Godfrey, falling out of love "seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed" (p. 275).

Ironically, it is not Lillian, but Augusta, the seamstress, who inadvertently rescues the marriage of the St. Peters from complete disaster by saving the Professor's life. Unexpectedly she arrives at the old house just in time to revive Godfrey from asphyxiation by a faulty gas heater. Godfrey does not plan his death, but as he slowly realizes what is happening to him, he has no fear of dying; in fact death is almost welcome to him. On awakening and finding Augusta in his study, the Professor admits he is lonely and asks her to stay. Augusta has worked for the St. Peters for years, and her patterns and sewing work have shared the Professor's study with his notes and manuscripts. Augusta is practical; she takes life as it comes to her, the bad with the good. She is the "bloomless side of life" (p. 280) Godfrey has always run away from. Augusta and Godfrey have been friends for a long time, and she is a kind and loyal person. Godfrey "even felt a sense of obligation toward her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real. And when you admitted that a thing was real, that was enough--now" (p. 281). Being honest with himself, Godfrey feels no obligation to his family. They have their own interests and seemingly have no
need for him. After his brush with death, Godfrey realizes that life has been given back to him. He must accept it as it is. He cannot relive his boyhood or his young manhood when he was just beginning his writing. He must give up the past and live in the present.

The St. Peter's marriage is not completely unsuccessful, but it is mutually unsatisfactory. Mrs. St. Peter's involvement with her children, their families, and the society around them absorbs her interests and fulfills her needs. The Professor feels he has no one, but after his solitary summer, he is able to accept his family for what they have become.

Two themes of Cather's works are exemplified in the sources of Professor St. Peter's unhappiness. Similar to Bartley Alexander, the Professor misses the days of his youth; however, St. Peter longs for the thrill of beginning his works of history. It is the struggle that appeals to him, not a return to an imaginary freedom. Unlike Bartley Alexander, Godfrey is given the chance to accept life in the present.

The other dissatisfaction in his life is the attitude of his family toward their newly acquired wealth. John Randall says the conflict between the characters is "a conflict between two different world views, one materialist and the other nonmaterialist."² The family's emphasis on material

possessions and their giving up of personal relationships
seems to be a major concern in the novel. The family ties
seem to break. Mrs. St. Peter becomes worldly, and Rosamond
becomes cruel. Kathleen cannot help being jealous of her
sister's sudden fortune and hurt by her exploitation of Tom
Outland's name (Rosamond and Louie have decided to name their
magnificent new house Outland). To Kathleen, as to the
Professor, Tom Outland's friendship was above monetary reward.

One of Ours (1922), besides being an important view of
marriage in Cather's works, is also a thrust at materialism.
Nat Wheeler, a prosperous Nebraska farmer, and his youngest
son, Ralph, seem to be more interested in new machinery, both
for the farm and the house, than they are in family relation-
ships. Mrs. Wheeler and the middle son, Claude, are more
introverted and more interested in ideas than in material
things. Mr. Wheeler's purchase of a new farm in Colorado
and his decision that Claude should manage the Nebraska land
ruin Claude's hopes of returning to college.

Nat Wheeler, a boisterous extrovert, is seldom at home
more than necessary. He enjoys visiting friends around the
countryside and dabbling in the politics and concerns of his
many acquaintances. "There was this to be said for Nat
Wheeler, that he liked every sort of human creature; he liked
good people and honest people, and he liked rascals and hypo-
crites almost to the point of loving them. If he heard that
a neighbor had played a sharp trick or done something particularly mean, he was sure to drive over to see the man at once, as if he hadn't hitherto appreciated him."

Perhaps Mr. Wheeler's attitude toward his family stems from the basic differences between Mrs. Wheeler and him. Mrs. Wheeler is a shy quiet person, afraid of the world, afraid of new ideas and people. She takes no part in even simple decisions concerning the farm—whether to plant a garden or to butcher a steer. These activities that affect her whole family are left up to Mr. Wheeler and his often whimsical nature. As a shield against her husband's lively, active life, Mrs. Wheeler is deeply involved in the church and in "religious thoughts."

"When she was not lost in religious meditation, she was likely to be thinking about some one of the old books she read over and over. Her personal life was so far removed from the scene of her daily activities that rash and violent men could not break in upon it" (p. 69). Mr. Wheeler has little interest in the spiritual concerns of his wife, though he does not interfere with her. The two seem only to tolerate each other as each goes about his own affairs.

In the same novel, Cather depicts another marriage filled with dissatisfaction and disappointment, that of Mr. and Mrs. Jason Royce, the parents-in-law of Claude Wheeler.

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3 Willa Cather, One of Ours (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 8. All references to this book are hereafter cited in the text.
Mr. Royce, the prosperous miller, is an affable, congenial man. His wife, always preoccupied with her health, is "distrustful and reserved" (p. 122). The dissatisfactions of their marriage are a presentiment of the relationship between Claude and Enid. When Claude asks Mr. Royce's permission to marry Enid, Mr. Royce tells him, "'You'll find out that pretty nearly everything you believe about life--about marriage, especially, is lies. I don't know why people prefer to live in that sort of world, but they do'" (p. 150).

Another character who lives in the sort of world described by Mr. Royce is Jim Burden, the narrator and one of the main characters of My Ántonia. Ántonia is presented through Jim's memories of his youth in Nebraska, and her life is highlighted by the contrasts between her situation and Jim's. One of these contrasts concerns their marriages. Ántonia's highly successful marriage has already been discussed in Chapter II. We know of Jim's marriage only from the narrator's chance encounter with him on a train. Although Jim is successful in his professional career, his private life is very unsatisfactory. His wife "seems unimpressionable and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm."4

Jim appears as a very impressionable person, and it is Ántonia's enthusiasm for all of life that so endears her to Jim. Mrs. Burden and Jim are worlds apart in their interests and ideals. She "finds it worthwhile to play the patroness to a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability" ([p. ii]). Jim loves the great open country and is instrumental in its development. Frustrated in the personal life of his adulthood, Jim's youth is the high water mark of his life. He finds great satisfaction in reliving his boyhood with Ántonia. Although his disappointments in marriage are only mentioned, Cather's purpose in including them seems to be to give added merit to the basic values Ántonia possesses. Jim recognizes these values and appreciates them all the more because he has missed them in the relationship with his own wife.

Dr. Howard Archie in The Song of the Lark is similar to Jim Burden in the success of his professional life and the dissatisfaction of his personal life. Howard Archie, a romantic, fell in love with lovely Belle White without realizing her true nature. Belle really is a very selfish person whose stinginess makes Dr. Archie's life miserable. "She was one of those people who are stingy without motive or reason, even when they can gain nothing by it."\(^5\) She

skimps so on her husband's meals that he seldom dines at home. She keeps her house closed and dark so that no dust, or neighbors, will enter. Although everyone respects Dr. Archie, a favorite joke on Mrs. Archie is her small, mean donations to church bazaars and charity projects. Dr. Archie, however, does not seriously consider divorce because he places great value on his sense of respectability. He also feels that marriage is "somehow made sacred by a church in which he did not believe" (p. 108). However, "his marriage was a very unhappy one" (p. 12).

Because of his poor relationship with his wife, Dr. Archie stays away from his house as much as possible. He spends a good deal of time around the town and at his office after hours. He often sees Thea Kronborg and visits with her. They become good friends during Thea's youth and remain so throughout her struggles to achieve success, as well as after she becomes famous. Dr. Archie advises her, aids her in small ways, including financing her trip to Germany to study, and remains a steadfast friend.

Like the Archie's relationship, the two marriages in the background of Lucy Gayheart (1935) also border on being failures. Perhaps if they had been successful, Lucy's life would not have been a tragic one. Lucy is a talented young piano student studying in Chicago where she meets Clement Sebastian, a famous singer who needs an accompanist for his practice
sessions. Sebastian is giving concerts in America before he returns to Europe for the summer. Sebastian "had married the woman he loved, and for years they had been happy; now they were both better off when they had the Atlantic between them."\(^6\) Sebastian and Professor St. Peter share a common background. The disruptive force in both their marriages is the presence of a young person. In the Professor's case, the youth is Tom Outland of whom his wife is jealous. Sebastian had taken into his home a talented young boy, an orphan, who became devoted to Mrs. Sebastian. "But she had taken a strong dislike to him and treated him harshly. . . . Her severity amounted to cruelty" (p. 81). Sebastian "had seen a side of his wife's nature which he had never before suspected; it had changed his feeling for her. She sensed this, and was bitter" (p. 81). Although his affection for his wife has altered, Clement still relies on her judgment in musical problems which affect his career.

Sebastian, like the Professor, is approaching middle age and is beginning to miss his youth. "Nothing had ever made Sebastian admit to himself that his youth was forever and irrevocably gone. He had clung to a secret belief that he would pick it up again, somewhere" (p. 79). He does find

youth and youthful enthusiasm in the person of Lucy Gayheart, who takes the position of his part-time accompanist. Lucy falls in love with Sebastian and he with her, or perhaps he falls in love with her youth. Sebastian tells Lucy, "I love everything about you. . . . I love young ardour, young fire. . . . I went to work with more spirit because things were new and wonderful to you" (pp. 90-91) Cather seems to imply that Sebastian knows his love for Lucy is a love of her vivaciousness and youthful attitude. James Woodress says Sebastian "is captivated by Lucy's youth, vitality, and adoration." If, however, his own relationship with his wife had been more satisfactory, quite possibly Sebastian would not have felt the need for a youthful presence.

Because Lucy does love Sebastian, she refuses the marriage proposal of Harry Gordon, the young banker from Haverford. For revenge against Lucy, Harry quickly marries wealthy, but homely, Harriett Arkwright. When Lucy returns to Haverford a few months later, Harry is very distant to her. In fact, he goes out of his way to avoid her. Depressed and lonely, Lucy needs a friend, but Harry rejects her small overtures of friendship. "He, and he only, knew why he had been so brutal to Lucy Gayheart when she came home. . . . He had regretted his hasty marriage at the end of the first week. . . . He knew that he was hurting himself in order to

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7Willa Cather: Her Life and Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 250. All references to this book are hereafter cited in the text.
hurt someone else" (p. 216). As Lucy is going skating one cold winter afternoon, Harry passes her on the road and refuses her a ride to the river. Stunned and hurt by his rudeness, Lucy fails to notice that the river has changed its course. She skates out toward the middle, falls through the thin ice, and drowns. In an effort to forget Lucy and his treatment of her, Harry thrusts himself wholeheartedly into his business affairs and is quite successful, although he has a reputation for eccentricity. He becomes involved in war work and even goes to Europe with an ambulance unit. His absence from Haverford seems to help Harry; "ever since he came back the townspeople had felt a change in him" (p. 212).

The marriage of the Gordons is perhaps the only instance in Cather's works in which a marriage bordering between success and failure improves. Mrs. Gordon is an intelligent, reasonable woman, and a good manager. Harry's dissatisfaction with his marriage had been that his wife lacked the attractiveness and vitality of Lucy. After his return from Europe, "at home he played his part better. He and his wife seemed more companionable. . . . The air in their big, slippery-floored, many bathroomed house was not so chill as it used to be" (p. 212). Cather does not imply that the Gordons were happy, but that Harry had learned to live with himself and therefore is more considerate of his wife.

The borderline marriage of Count and Countess de Frontenac mentioned in *Shadows on the Rock* is in contrast
with the happy relationship between Cécile Auclair and Pierre Charron. The Count is Auclair's patron and had brought Auclair and his family to Canada with him when he became Governor. In France the Count and Countess lived in separate residences, and the Countess did not accompany her husband to New France. Ill and facing death, the Count reflects on his success with various ladies of his acquaintance. "Not all women had found him so personally distasteful as his wife had done." The Count has no wish to linger in this world in a state of poor health. "There was no one in this world whom he would be sorry to leave. His wife, Madame de la Grange Frontenac, he had no desire to see again, though he would will to her the little property he had, as was customary" (pp. 285-286). The Count dies lonely and unhappy. Cather places the Count's death as the last chapter in the novel, and immediately in the epilogue we learn of the happy marriage of Cécile and Pierre Charron. A contrast between the two relationships seems natural because they represent one of Cather's themes of this novel; that is, the New World versus the Old. "The New World is free from the abuses of class society, the necessity to truckle to those in authority, the unjust operation of the laws. . . . Count Frontenac

illustrates the evils of Europe and the *ancient régime*" (Woodress, p. 234). The Charrons represent the personal freedom of the New World. Pierre and Cécile have their faith in and dependence on each other as they rear four boys as the first true Canadians. The Charrons do not have to concern themselves with aristocratic status or favors from the king as did Count Frontenac. They value personal accomplishments and relationships.

The relationship between the Kronborgs in *The Song of the Lark* borders nearer success than failure; however, the partners seem to lack the camaraderie that marks the successful marriage. Mrs. Kronborg is an active, practical woman, "good-humoured, but determined. Exactly the sort of woman to take care of a flighty preacher. . . . She had profound respect for her husband's erudition and eloquence. But she had no confidence in his administration of worldly affairs" (p. 14). Mrs. Kronborg looked to her husband "to supply whatever parental sentiment there was in the house . . . to point the children to moral and patriotic ideals" (p. 14). But it was her job "to keep their bodies, their clothes, and their conduct in some sort of order" (p. 14). It is Mrs. Kronborg who allows the children to be individuals and who recognizes Thea's unusual talent. Mr. Kronborg acquiesces to his wife's judgment on domestic affairs. He is a rather lazy person whose profession does not require much activity.
As a preacher "he was more sincere than many" (p. 165). However, in his secret convictions he did not quite believe in the kindlier manifestations of human nature. "He believed his wife was absolutely good, but there was not another man or woman in his congregation whom he trusted all the way" (p. 168). On the other hand, Mrs. Kronborg "was likely to find something to admire in almost any human conduct that was positive and energetic" (pp. 168-169). Reverend and Mrs. Kronborg do not have any serious disagreements or secret passions that disrupt their relationship, but Cather implies a distance between them. There does not seem to be that easy friendliness that is a part of the successful marriage. The Kronborgs are almost like business partners who cooperate with each other for the sake of a mutual interest, but there is little affection or warmth between them.

Like the Kronborgs, the Templetons in "Old Mrs. Harris" do not seem to have any serious disagreements, but their relationship is also unsatisfactory. Victoria Templeton is an attractive woman, pampered by her husband and her mother who lives with them. Mrs. Harris, her mother, manages the house, and Victoria's time is relatively free to attend club meetings and socials. Victoria is very selfish; everything that comes into the house must be for her or for her disposal. Mr. Templeton indulges his wife's every whim as much as possible in his present financial straits. Because her
husband has not been very successful, Victoria feels that "life hadn't brought her what she expected when she married Hillary Templeton; life hadn't used her right." A handsome young man, naturally cheerful, Hillary Templeton is rather lighthearted about his responsibilities. He seeks refuge from his wife's displeasure by going out to his farm to visit the German tenants. Perhaps both partners are immature in their attitudes. Their relationship seems to be defined by Cather's statement that Victoria "still treated her husband as if he were her 'beau'" (p. 92).

Flavia Hamilton in "Flavia and her Artists" (1903) is similar to Victoria Templeton in her concern only for her own pleasures. She "collects" artists at her country estate by inviting them to spend weeks with her. Although she does not have "the slightest notion of what these people are really like," her vanity is flattered by their presence. Flavia's husband, Arthur, is devoted to her and patient with her and her ambitions. The Hamiltons are not in agreement about the necessity of Flavia's having these house parties and devoting so much time to her guests. Arthur would like

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to move further out to the country, but Flavia will not leave the area of the city because she fears she cannot attract her artists if she is too far away.

At a dinner honoring her guests Arthur rescues Flavia from being the butt of a heartless joke after one of her artists publishes a satiric characterization of her in a newspaper. Flavia has no idea that she is being ridiculed, but her artistic guests understand perfectly Arthur's verbal attack on them and decide to quit the Hamilton's house. In her ignorance of the satire published about her, Flavia is terribly upset and blames Arthur for making her guests leave. She feels he "has no sympathy, no aesthetic sense whatever" (p. 47).

At the time we glimpse the Hamilton's marriage, it appears to be an unsatisfactory one. Flavia is vain and selfish in her demands. She does not think of Arthur, but only of her own pleasure. Arthur wants his family to live a different type of life, but he yields to Flavia's demands. Jemima Broadwood, Flavia's very practical cousin, sums up Arthur's action when she says, "Why he has sacrificed himself to spare the very vanity that devours him. . . . He is magnificent!" (p. 51).

Some of the borderline marriages hover close to failure, some close to success. Though they may possess some of the characteristics of a successful marriage, there is a deficiency of one or more of the elements that constitute the
successful marriage. As we look at the relationships that completely fail, we will recognize them as being void of the characteristics that mark the successful marriage.
CHAPTER FOUR

UNSUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES

After World War I there seemed to be a general malaise in America. There were those who wanted to cling to old ideals and customs and those who were caught up in the expanding industrial growth of the United States, with its emphasis on the importance of materialism. Willa Cather said, "The world broke in two in 1922,"\(^1\) the year *One of Ours* was published. In that novel, Claude Wheeler represents the idealist, and the story concerns Claude's frustrated search for values in life. His marriage to Enid Royce is a part of his search, but the failure of this marriage exemplifies much of the dissatisfaction and disappointment prevalent during the time of the first world war and immediately following it.

Philip Gerber says Claude Wheeler "represents Cather's sad bewilderment at a society that tells a man to consider himself odd if he tries to think through a problem and explain himself logically, if he dresses with care and taste, or if he is caught taking pains in any concern. Claude is a loser, from the first page of the novel."\(^2\) As a youth he is

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\(^2\)Willa Cather (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 106. All references to this book are hereafter cited in the text.
frustrated by the attitudes of his family. Claude's father, never really interested in domestic relationships, is a boisterous man, content with being a successful farmer and landowner, and unable to communicate with Claude about his problem of relating to life. Mrs. Wheeler, shy and withdrawn from social contacts, feels that Claude's dissatisfaction stem from his uncertainties about the values of the church. Claude turns to Enid Royce for a solace that she is unable to give him. One of the tragedies of this relationship is that Claude and Enid fail to recognize each other's true personality before their marriage. All the signs are present that they will be unsatisfactory partners for each other. Claude knows of Enid's missionary zeal. In fact, when he proposes to her, Enid tells him she does not think the marriage will work because she wants to serve in the missionary field with her sister, Carrie. In his idealism, Claude feels that Enid will find missionary work at home and that she will be happy in marrying him. How much he underestimates the power of his love--and Enid! After a discussion with Brother Weldon, a preacher for whom Claude has little respect, Enid decides her duty is to save Claude's soul by marrying him. "Enid had been almost certain that Mr. Weldon would approve her course before she consulted him, but his concurrence always gratified her pride."  

reasons for her decision. Claude knows Enid does not love him as he loves her, but he thinks "everything would be all right when they were married. He believed in the transforming power of marriage" (p. 176).

While Claude and Enid are building their new house before their wedding, Claude feels that Enid's interests lie more with the house and where she will lodge visiting preachers than with him. He is disappointed in her attitude, but seemingly there are no lines of communication between them. Claude cannot tell Enid his deepest feelings; perhaps if he could, their disastrous marriage could have been avoided. Ironically, there is a person who can share Claude's sympathies had he only made the choice. Gladys Farmer, a friend of his and Enid's "had his own cursed kind of sensibility; she would expect too much from life and be disappointed" (p. 182). Claude does not pursue the one moment of understanding that passes between Gladys and him one day when they are alone together, before his marriage to Enid; perhaps if he had, "The strength in him would have found what it was seeking; even in this short interval it had stirred and made itself felt, had uttered a confused appeal" (p. 182).

After their wedding, Claude realizes that there is nothing magical about the marriage ceremony. Enid does not suddenly become an affectionate person. In fact, she turns Claude away from their stateroom on their wedding night under the pretense of feeling ill. Claude is soon to know that
"everything about a man's embrace was distasteful to Enid" (p. 210). Claude is a sensitive person who needs a sympathetic, understanding, affectionate partner. Only a year after their wedding, Claude comes to feel, "'It's the end of everything for me!'" (p. 210). He is lonely, hurt, disappointed. His best friend, Ernest Havel, does not come to visit because he has been offended by Enid in her work for the Prohibition cause. Even though she is often away from home all day and into the evening working with the Anti-Saloon League, Enid does not neglect her household. The house is always spotless, the laundry carefully done, and a supper ready for Claude when he comes in from the fields. But Claude cannot be happy with a wife who merely functions as a housekeeper, even if she is a good one and usually cheerful. "If his wife didn't love him, it was because love meant one thing to him and quite another thing to her" (p. 210).

Enid, too, is dissatisfied in their marriage. She does not understand Claude's indifference to the social questions that have so much importance to her. She feels that he wants to lead a selfish life and tells him, "you are not willing to govern our lives by Christian ideals" (p. 222). Enid is so zealous in her piousness that she fails to place any importance on personal relationships. She knows Claude's needs before their marriage, for he has told her of his dissatisfactions and his feelings of failure. Enid seems to
feel that these feelings are a part of Claude's youth, that they will pass as he grows older, and she places no importance on them.

The crisis in their marriage comes with a letter to the Royces telling them that Enid's sister, Carrie, is ill in China. Enid decides immediately that she must go to her and leave Claude to stay at his mother's house for at least a year and perhaps longer. Their conversation seems to pronounce the end of their marriage. Enid tells Claude, "'But no feeling would be right that kept me from doing my duty'" (p. 221). And Claude replies, "'It's not only your going. ... It's because you want to go. You are glad of a chance to get away among all those preachers, with their smooth talk and make-believe'" (p. 222). There seems to be nothing left between them. They have no common interests, no goals to work toward together. Neither has sympathy or concern for the needs of the other. Love, which often smooths over hurts and is a bridge to understanding, seems to be noticeably absent. After Enid goes to China, she is not mentioned again in Claude's thoughts or feelings. This seems to be Cather's implication that the marriage has totally failed.

The last half of the novel is involved with Claude's army experiences in World War I in France and his searching for and finding sympathetic friends. Here among the ravages of a French village he finds a French girl, Mlle. de Courcy,
who shares his ideas. She tells Claude that "this war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feelings matter" (p. 386). Claude has felt all his life that too much value is placed on material things, yet he can never express his thoughts. "Haven't he been trying to say this ever since he was born? Haven't he always known it, and hadn't it made life both bitter and sweet for him?" (p. 386). Cather is emphasizing her thrust against materialism in the words of Mlle. de Courcy while indicating that Claude could have found a girl who shared his feelings, had he been more discriminating. Claude is reassured here that there are still people who value ideals. Although he is killed in the war, Claude has found a cause he feels to be noble and worth fighting for.

My Mortal Enemy (1926), like The Professor's House, deals with the corruption of personal relationships. Unlike The Professor's House, in this novel the absence of wealth, not the sudden acquisition of it, causes the main character to change in attitudes and therefore brings the ruination of the marriage between Myra and Oswald Henshaw. Philip Gerber says that in My Mortal Enemy "Cather undertakes the portrait of a woman who hoodwinks herself into marrying under the delusion that love is her first concern; but she learns, when she knows herself better, that her essential passion is for money" (p. 118).
Myra Driscoll, an orphan reared by a wealthy great-uncle, falls in love with handsome, but poor, young Oswald Henshaw. Mr. Driscoll dislikes Oswald because, among other reasons, he is not a Catholic and threatens to disinherit Myra if she marries him. Myra elopes with Oswald, and her uncle is true to his word; he leaves his fortune to the Church. When the story opens, Myra, now married about twenty-five years, meets for the first time Nellie Birdsong, the niece of her childhood friend, Lydia. Nellie narrates their first meeting at her Aunt Lydia's house, a Christmas visit at the Henshaw's New York apartment a few months later, and their last encounter on the West Coast some ten years after that.

Myra Henshaw is an attractive woman of forty-five when Nellie first meets her. She has the poise and decorum of a lady of fortune, but Nellie is most impressed by her laugh—an angry laugh. Myra laughs at the world, even though she becomes very embittered by her lot in life. She places great value on appearances, even giving her husband's new shirts to the janitor's son because they bulge in the front.

As Nellie discovers on her visit to New York, Myra has two sets of friends: "artistic people—with whom she was always at her best because she admired them, and moneyed friends . . . these she cultivated on Oswald's account."4

Myra is generous almost to a fault with her friends, sending them expensive gifts and giving them her time and advice. Although to all outward appearances, Myra and Oswald seem happy, Myra makes several remarks that illustrate her disillusion with her marital situation. She tells young Ewan Gray, who asks her advice on what jewels to give his sweetheart, "'Love itself draws on a woman nearly all the bad luck in the world; why, for mercy's sake, add opals?'" (p. 260). Handsome Ewan Gray and his sweetheart Ester are very much in love, and Myra tells fifteen-year-old Nellie, "'and very likely hell will come of it'" (p. 262).

Oswald is devoted to Myra and very patient with her. Lydia remarks of their relationship, "'He has been devoted to a fault. ... And she's often most unreasonable with him--most unreasonable!'" (p. 265). Oswald has not achieved the financial success that Myra desires for them. Although they are not poor, she cannot afford luxuries such as a carriage, and Myra dislikes feeling inferior in any way. She is a haughty, proud person and comes to regret having given up her inheritance to marry for love.

Nellie meets the Henshaws ten years later in a second-rate apartment hotel in a city on the West Coast where they now live. Through a series of unfortunate business reversals, the Henshaws are now quite poor. Myra is terminally ill, and Oswald nurses her tenderly. In her illness and disappointment in life, Myra turns against Oswald, blaming him
(p. 321). Nellie is horrified by this terrible judgment, but she realizes "violent natures like hers sometimes turn against themselves . . . against themselves and all their idolatries" (p. 321). Myra seems to be uttering her own doom, not Oswald's. She has recognized herself for what she is--a selfish, greedy woman who has done a great deal to destroy the passions and hopes of another. Myra Henshaw is perhaps one of the most vicious of Cather's characters. Thinking only of herself, she forgets the years of comradeship and turns against the person who has remained true to her through all the vicissitudes of life. Oswald is perhaps the most tender of Cather's portraits. He, too, suffers from Myra's disappointments. There seems to be no recovery for their marriage, destroyed by Myra's selfishness. Oswald does not desert her, partly because of the happiness they once shared and partly because he remembers the young Myra he loved. He tells Nellie after Myra's death, "'These last years it has seemed to me that I was nursing the mother of the girl who ran away with me. Nothing ever took that girl away from me. She was a wild, lovely creature, Nellie'" (p. 328). Myra has become so changed and hardened that when she dies, Oswald chooses to remember her only as she was when they first married, not as she had become. Her death leaves Oswald with no illusions of what might have been. He is now freed to pursue his own happiness.
"The Diamond Mine," a short story published in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920), is another example in Cather's fiction of the disastrous results of emphasizing monetary values rather than personal ones. Cressida Garnet, an accomplished singer, has been financially successful in her career. Her brother and sisters, whom she supports, are envious and jealous of her success. The affection of her son, Horace, is in proportion to the amount of the check he receives, and Jerome Brown, her new husband, marries her for her money. Quite a figure on Wall Street, he invests her funds poorly and almost succeeds in depleting her fortune. Cressida is extremely generous with her family, but she receives no happiness from any of them. She entreats Jerome to come to Europe so they can live more economically. Only her death on the *Titanic* stops Jerome's spending of what is left of her wealth. Jerome and Cressida's family quarrel bitterly over the remains of Cressida's estate. They have never thought of Cressida as a person with feelings and affections. "They regarded her as a natural source of wealth; a copper vein, a diamond mine." Her money brought only unhappiness to her marital relationship as well as to her family relationship. Although Cather capably builds her case against monetary proprieties, in this story she has an abundance of petty,"

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jealous characters. Cressida, the only generous character in the story, cannot survive against such odds. Seeking relief from her grasping family in her marital relationship, Cressida finds only disappointment as she discovers her husband is also only interested in her money.

In another instance Cather treats both an unsatisfactory relationship and love of money in a comic vein. Wick Cutter, the money-lender in My Ántonia, and his wife "live in a state of perpetual warfare," particularly over money. Although Cutter is a despicable character, Cather does not dwell on the moral implications of his acts, but tells of his actions through a third person, usually Jim Burden or Ántonia and her family. Not only is he avaricious, Cutter also has a reputation for "being notoriously dissolute with women" (p. 210). He is particularly fond of the hired girls and goes to extremes to get Mrs. Cutter out of the house in order to seduce Ántonia. Because of Ántonia's wariness, his plan fails. Mrs. Cutter is also an unsavory person; she is terrifying-looking, and to Jim Burden "there was a gleam of something akin to insanity in her full, intense eyes" (p. 211).

The major subject of the Cutter's arguments is the matter of inheritance. Because they have no children, Wick Cutter fears his property may go to his wife's family, whom

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he detests. Antonia's son Rudolph tells Jim Burden what has become of the Cutters in Jim's absence from Black Hawk. After years of argument Cutter devises an elaborate scheme to outwit his wife. To insure that she will not outlive him, he kills her; then to invalidate any will she might have made in favor of her family, he survives her for one hour before killing himself. Jim Burden reflects only on the strength of hate. Cather implies that the last laugh is indeed on Cutter himself when Cuzak says merrily of Cutter's estate, "The lawyers, they got a good deal of it, sure" (p. 364).

Other disastrous marriages in Cather's works exemplify the same characteristics as the relationships between Claude and Enid Wheeler and Oswald and Myra Henshaw. There is incompatibility, lack of understanding and concern, no mutual interest, and destruction of any affection that originally existed. The marriage of Fred Ottenburg and his first wife in The Song of the Lark is an example of a marriage that failed because the partners had nothing in common. Fred was infatuated by the physical attributes of his bride but found her to be an insensitive, selfish woman who cared only for her own pleasure. He tries to divorce his wife, but she does not allow him to. She enjoys the prestige of the Ottenburg name. Finally Fred settles her in a house in California so he will not have to see her. After many years her death frees Fred to marry Thea Kronborg. Fred's marital
failure illustrates the concept that there must be a mutual interest and need between two people for a relationship to survive. His realization of this insight is another affirmation of the success of the marriage between Thea and him.

Although in her first works Cather glorifies the role of the immigrant, it would perhaps distract from the quality of her characterizations if all her immigrants were happy and successful. In *My Ántonia* Cather depicts the terrible hardships of the Shimerda family and the disintegration of their marriage. Neither Mr. or Mrs. Shimerda is prepared for the conditions they find on the prairie. The way of life awaiting them is totally different from what they have known, and Mrs. Shimerda, a coarse, grasping woman, is not a homemaker. She does nothing to make their poor dugout more habitable or to "bolster the morale of her gentle, mild-mannered husband, who is pining away with homesickness for his native Bohemia." There seems to be no kindness or tenderness about her as she not only accepts but expects aid from her neighbors. Mr. Shimerda seeks companionship from the Burden family and from the two Russians who live near him because "in the crowded clutter of their cave, the old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left.

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so far behind" (p. 86). He is a gentle, aristocratic man, but his wife has none of these qualities. Finally, after only a few months, the desperate, lonesome Mr. Shimerda commits suicide.

In another unsuccessful marriage among her immigrants Cather depicts young Frank Sabata in *O Pioneers!* as he destroys all the affection of his vivacious, lovely young wife, Marie. Frank has a basic grudge against life; he seems to feel life owes him something more than he has received. People do not respond to him as they do to Marie; in fact, most of his neighbors tolerate his gruffness because of Marie's kindness. Frank seems to get satisfaction from feeling himself abused, and his unfounded jealousy of Marie widens and hardens the gap between them. "It had never more than dimly occurred to Frank that he made his own unhappiness."8 Marie is very much in love with Frank when they first marry, and she is wise enough to know that her affection blinded her to his faults. In that respect she is much wiser than Claude Wheeler, who could never reconcile himself to Enid's shortcomings. Marie turns her attentions outward to friends and falls in love with Emil Bergson. Frank comes upon Emil and Marie the one and only time they are together and kills them both. In his terror over this act, Frank

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rationalizes that Marie has made him do this terrible thing. He cannot accept the consequences of his own actions or behavior even now. He tells Emil's sister, Alexandra, after he has been sent to prison, that he did not mean to harm his wife or "dat fine boy" (p. 296). Few, if any relationships can survive unfounded jealousies and suspicions. Finally Frank drives Marie to the love of another man. Frank Sabata's attitude and the terrible result of his actions seem to lend validity to Alexandra Bergon's statement to Carl Linstrum, "'I think when friends marry, they are safe'' (p. 308).

In the unsuccessful marriages, there is a complete breakdown in the relationship between the partners. Cather portrays these failures realistically, as she does the borderline and successful marriages. Some of the failures occur in the early years of the marriage when it is apparent that the partners have no common interests on which to build their relationship. Other failures occur after years of marriage when there is an erosion of the finer qualities of affection and friendship. In either case, the relationship becomes intolerable, and the problem can be solved only by the separation of the couple--either a physical separation or the death of one of the partners.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The marriages depicted in the works of Willa Cather are a vital element of her fiction. A study of marriage is not the major thrust of her novels and stories, but the personal relationship between two people is a strong undercurrent in her works. Often Cather's characters are involved in a satisfying, successful marriage; occasionally they are disappointed in marriage. Although the marital relationships are interrelated with her themes, Cather does not distort them by forcing them to serve as vehicles for the larger designs of her works. Her view of marriage is realistic. The partners' reactions to circumstances, to events, and to each other determine the degree of success or failure of their marital relations.

In this thesis the marriages in Cather's major works are divided into three categories. There are eighteen successful marriages, eleven that border between success and failure, and only seven that are complete failures. The basis for a successful marriage seems to be summed up by Alexandra Bergson's comment to Carl Linstrum in O Pioneers!, "I think when friends marry, they are safe."\(^1\) Love, naturally, is essential, but friendship is an important element

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of a successful marriage because it implies a mutual respect and concern for each other. Friends usually have common goals and/or interests to hold them together. In "My Ántonia" Cuzak and Ántonia "seemed to be on terms of easy friendliness." Cécile Auclair in *Shadows on the Rock* thinks of her husband-to-be, Pierre Charron, as a "friend, devoted and fearless." In "Neighbor Rosicky" the successful marriage of Anton and Mary Rosicky is due to the fact that "at bottom, they had the same ideas about life." The borderline marriages form a more elusive category. Some of the relationships hover close to success, some close to complete disaster. But in each instance, there is an erosion of friendship. In the case of Professor and Mrs. St. Peter in *The Professor's House*, a gradual loss of common interests occurs over a period of years, and the Professor discovers after thirty years of a relatively happy marriage that he and his wife are both dissatisfied. In the borderline marriages the characters do not separate or divorce, but the basic good will of the successful marriages is missing.

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In the cases of Howard and Belle Archie in *The Song of the Lark* and the Jim Burdens of *My Ántonia*, the partners discover near the beginning of their marriages that they are not congenial. Again, these couples do not separate; they do, however, lead separate lives. Howard Archie stays at his office or goes to Denver to escape going home to Belle, and Jim Burden travels throughout the country while his wife stays in New York.

The marital failures in Cather's fiction sometimes occur after several years of marriage and occasionally result in violence, as in the cases of Marie and Frank Sabata of *O Pioneers!* and the Cutters of *My Ántonia*. Marie has been unhappy with Frank's perverseness, but she remains true to him. Finally she admits to herself her love for another man. Frank discovers her and her lover together the only time they meet and kills them both. The Cutters have kept the townspeople entertained for years with their quarrels. Finally greed and hate become too powerful for Wick Cutter, and he shoots his wife, then himself.

In other instances of failure, the partners are mismatched from the very beginning of their relationship. If there are no common interests and if the partners are not friends before their marriage, the relationship is seemingly doomed from the first. Claude and Enid Wheeler in *One of Ours* have different interests and share very little in common, and their marriage is thus unsatisfactory for both of them.
The illness of Enid's sister in China offers a perfect excuse for their separation. Jerome Brown in "The Diamond Mine" seemingly has little regard for Cressida, his wife. Since he marries her only for her money, he is quite satisfied when her extended European concert tours cause separation. Fred Ottenburg in The Song of the Lark was distracted by his wife's beauty and married her after a short whirlwind courtship. To his dismay, he quickly finds she is not the type of person he thought and finally settles her in California, across a continent from him.

Certainly affection between the partners of a marriage is a necessary ingredient, but the affection Cather intimates is more than a physical intimacy. It also involves a tenderness and concern for the well-being of another person. Her view of marriage is all-encompassing.

Cather wrote in her essay on Katherine Mansfield, "In those simple relationships of loving husband and wife, . . . there are innumerable shades of sweetness and anguish which make up the pattern of our lives day by day, though they are not down in the list of subjects from which the conventional novelist works."\(^5\) She may well have been describing her own fiction, for "the innumerable shades of sweetness and anguish" Cather creates around her marital relationships lend authenticity that makes each marriage memorable.

APPENDIX

MARRIAGES CITED

SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES

Alexander, Bartley and Winifred
Auclair, Euclid and Madame
Blake, Michael and Rachael (Colbert)
Burden, Josiah and Mrs.
Charron, Pierre and Cécile (Auclair)
Chevalier, Amédée and Angélique
Colbert, Henry and Sapphira (Dodderidge)
Cuzak, Anton and Ántonia (Shimerda)
Dawson, Leonard and Susie
Forrester, Daniel and Marion
Harling, Mr. and Mrs.
Harsanyi, Andor and Mrs.
Kohler, Mr. and Mrs.
Linstrum, Carl and Alexandra (Bergson)
Olivares, Don Antonio and Doña Isabella
Ottenburg, Fred and Thea (Kronborg)

NOVEL OR SHORT STORY

Alexander's Bridge
Shadows on the Rock
Sapphira and the Slave Girl
My Ántonia
Shadows on the Rock
O Pioneers!
Sapphira and the Slave Girl
My Ántonia
One of Ours
A Lost Lady
My Ántonia
The Song of the Lark
The Song of the Lark
O Pioneers!
Death Comes for the Archbishop
The Song of the Lark
Rosen, Mr. and Mrs.  
Rosicky, Anton and Mary  

BORDERLINE MARRIAGES  

Archie, Dr. Howard and Belle (White)  
Burden, Jim and Mrs.  
Frontenac, Count and Countess  
Gordon, Harry and Harriett (Arkwright)  
Hamilton, Arthur and Flavia  
Kronborg, Reverend and Mrs.  
Royce, Jason and Mrs.  
St. Peter, Godfrey and Lillian  
Sebastian, Clement and Mrs.  
Templeton, Hillary and Victoria (Harris)  
Wheeler, Nat and Mrs.  

MARITAL FAILURES  

Brown, Jerome and Cressida (Garnet)  
Cutter, Wick and Mrs.  
Henshaw, Oswald and Myra (Driscoll)  
Ottenburg, Fred and first wife  
Sabata, Frank and Marie  

"Old Mrs. Harris"  
"Neighbor Rosicky"  

NOVEL OR SHORT STORY  

The Song of the Lark  
My Ántonia  
Shadows on the Rock  
Lucy Gayheart  
"Flavia and her Artists"  
The Song of the Lark  
One of Ours  
The Professor's House  
Lucy Gayheart  
"Old Mrs. Harris"  
One of Ours  

"The Diamond Mine"  
My Ántonia  
My Mortal Enemy  
The Song of the Lark  
O Pioneers!
Shimerda, Mr. and Mrs.  
Wheeler, Claude and  
Enid (Royce)  

My Ántonia

One of Ours
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