

**Loss and Nostalgia in Willa Cather's trilogy: *O Pioneers!*,
*The Song of the lark and My Antonia.***

Asst.Prof.Dr. Juan Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Banna

Dept. of English. College of Languages

Salahaddin University/Erbil

banaali_juan@yahoo.com

الخسارة والحنين الى الماضي في ثلاثية ويللا كاتر " يا للرواد"،

"أغنية القبرة"، و"انتونياى" (My Antonia)

أ.م. د. جوان عبدالله ابراهيم البناء

جامعة صلاح الدين/ كلية اللغات

ويللا سيبرت كاتر (1873-1947) كاتبة امريكية معروفة عاشت في النصف الأول من القرن العشرين. في ثلاثيتها "يا للرواد"، "أغنية القبرة" و"انتونياى" تقدم صورة واضحة عن الخسارة والحنين الى الماضي التي تشعر بها شخصيات رواياتها بسبب الهجرة واسباب اخرى. ان بعضا من هذه الشخصيات يحاولون جاهدا التغلب على هذا الشعور وتحقيق النجاح مثل (ثيه) بطلة الرواية الثانية، و(اليكسندرا) بطلة الرواية الأولى و(انتونيا) في انتونياى)، بالإضافة الى بعض الشخصيات الرجالية. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى فهم معنى مصطلح الشوق الى الماضي معتمدة على مختلف القواميس وارااء النقاد في هذه الشخصيات التي تعاني من هذه الحالة واسباب شعورهم بهذه التعقيدات واقتراح حلول لهذه المشاكل.

كاتر خلال رواياتها تساند الشخصيات النسائية وتحثهن على العمل بجد ومثابرة جنبا الى جنب الرجل سواء في الحقل او البيت او اى مكان اخر لتحسين الحالة المعيشية. ان كلا الشخصيات الرئيسية والثانوية يعانون من هذا الشعور المرعب بسبب حنينهم الى الماضي والى الأشخاص الذين عرفواهم في الماضي، يرافق الشعور انعدام الصحة، الكآبة والشعور بالوحدة وفي بعض الحالات تودى الى الموت واسباب ذلك هو حدوث تغييرات في الحياة، وتجارب الماضي، الوحدة والهجرة. هذه الدراسة تنقسم الى مقدمة ومبحثين، يتناول المبحث الأول معنى مصطلح الشوق الى الماضي وخصائصها وتقديم الحل المناسب وتناقش ايضا تأثير العوامل البيئية المحيطة في تقليل او ازدياد هذا الشعور.

المبحث الثانى يتناول قصة بطلة أغنية القبرة ومسألة بناء شخصية فنانة يليها اهم الاستنتاجات التي توصلت اليها الباحثة

وقائمة بأهم المصادر.

Willa Sibert Cather (1873-1947) a well-known American writer in the first half of twentieth century. In her trilogy, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of The Lark* (1915) and *My Antonia*₁ (1918), she presents a clear state of Loss and nostalgia that some of her characters feel due to their immigration and other causes like Mr. Shimerda. Peter and Pavel, Jim Burden. Some of them try hard to overcome such homesickness and achieve success like her heroines specifically Thea in *The Song of the Lark*, Alexandra in *O Pioneers!* and Antonia in *My Antonia* with some male characters. This study is concerned with knowing the meaning of nostalgia relying on different Dictionaries and some Critics 'views about Cather's nostalgic characters and the reasons behind their complicated psychological state and present suggestions for solutions of such problems. Cather through her novels supports her female characters to work hard side by side with men in the farms or at any place to go forward and improve their ways of living. Both main and minor characters had nostalgia for their old places and attached persons. Both images of successful characters and the nostalgic ones are discussed. Their nostalgia is presented through their homesickness, physical decline, isolation, loneliness, depression, and even death. In the trilogy, there are many reasons that caused the characters' nostalgia; for example, the crises and great changes in life, the important memorable experiences in the past, the mental condition such as loneliness and feeling of loss. Immigration is the obvious cause of most characters' nostalgia.

The study presents an introduction and two Sections, the first one is about Nostalgia as a term, its meanings, features and solutions. Then the rise of nostalgia with specific characters in the trilogy and the effect and role of environment in increasing or decreasing nostalgia. Section two presents the story of *the Song of The Lark* and discusses the growth of the female artist and nostalgic moments in the life of Cather's heroine Thea. The last part of the research is about the main conclusions of the study followed by a list of references.

¹ The Abbreviated form for the trilogy will be: *OP!*, *TSOL*, and *MA*.

Key Words: Willa Cather, Nostalgia, Emigration Thea, Antioia, Alexandra.

Introduction:

Cather was born in West Virginia and, with her family, moved to middle west town, Red Cloud, Nebraska where she learned much about frontier life and was inspired as an artist. Many of her works reflect pictures of the land where the protagonist feels attached to because they have childhood experiences there such as *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*. Pathathai Suksangdow in her master thesis entitled as *A Study of Nostalgia in Willa Cather's My Antonia* (2006) believes that These novels present the tone of nostalgia to the land by picturing the western prairies and the memories of the characters bound with the past, places, persons, and things. *My Antonia* is one of many outstanding novels by Willa Cather which not only conveys the nostalgia that is awakened by the frontier land but also clearly expresses the nostalgic feeling of the characters such as Jim Burden, Antonia, and Mr. Shimerda (3).

Section 1:

The term Nostalgia:

The word "Nostalgia" is originated from "nostos" and "algos" in Greek. The first means "return" and the second means "pain" (Lowenthal 10). According to *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, "nostalgia" refers to "a bitter sweet longing for things, persons, or situation of the past" and "homesickness" (950). According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* the term "nostalgia" is defined as sensitively yearning for a moment in the past, "a regretful or wistful memory of earlier time" and also something that awakens the past memories (993). Additionally, nostalgia also refers to "the evocation of this emotion (nostalgia), as in a book, film, etc" (*Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language* 774). That is to say, "nostalgia" is a memory of pleasure and sorrow to the attached past moment, places, persons, or things. It also means a way or a thing that awakens this kind of feeling and leads people back to their earlier time. Generally, nostalgia is a way of looking at the world focusing on imagination and emotion toward the past of people in that present time (Kitiarsa 3). The real experiences are just a memory, and the past does not come back; thus, imagination is obviously related to the nostalgic process, experience and memory are also materials for nostalgia. By imagining, people can reproduce a vanished past and touch it again in a form of an authentic past (Ivy 58). Therefore, it seems that nostalgia is a part of human personality structure because 'pastness' considerably has influences on imagination and feeling. That is, people usually use imagination and culture to react to the limitations of the present; then, nostalgia commonly becomes a part of people's lives. Normally, nostalgia is discussed in two levels: individual level and social level. Individually, nostalgia is a psychological mechanism establishing the 'selfness'; that is, human beings create their private world and their own characteristics. Actually, nostalgia of each person is different because of various backgrounds such as family, status, environment, experience, and so on. Moreover, people implicitly use nostalgia to create personal memory and self-identity representation of their own. The past that we yearn for may return to haunt us and confine our thoughts (Kitiarsa 8). Nostalgia has been reflected in the postmodern society, as Pam Cook mentions that nostalgia, as a longing for past, remarkably characterizes postmodernism in historical approach (xii). Additionally, Nelson Graburn states, "Modernity, the belief in progress and rational solutions to problems, automatically highlights both present imperfections and lost of the past" (qtd. in Jafari 415). That is, technology and modernity

change people's lives; then, people realize its problematic effects such as competition, stress, separation, and loneliness, and seem to return to their past time by imagination and memory. For example, they may visit their hometown once after they face stress from work, or someone may be reminded by his or her childhood from seeing an old photograph. This nostalgic tone has been presented in almost every corner of society.

1.2: Nostalgic Characters In Cather's Trilogy

Suksangdow in her MA thesis very clearly presents the agonistic situation of some characters in *My Antonia*. The first character, Mr. Shimerda, is the obvious character who presents a high level of nostalgia, an old man who is the father of Ambrosch, Antonia, Yulka, and Marek, and Antonia is his dearest daughter. In his old country, Bohemia, Mr. Shimerda used to be an educated musician, and his family was respected by others. He and his family emigrated from their native land, Bohemia, to the Midwest America, Black Hawk, Nebraska in order to have a prosperous life. He has a terrible feeling of alienation in America and did not succeed as a farmer. Due to this problem, he becomes depressed and commits suicide. He was not happy in this new land. But his wife welcomes life in America. It can be seen that Antonia says about her parents, "*He not want to come, never! My mamenka make him come*" (MA 53). Mr. Shimerda's unintentional coming to Nebraska makes him sad. Also, he misses his hometown, his old friends, and his favorite music and is constantly thinking of his happier past in Bohemia. These seem to be valuable memories for him. Actually, language is one of the problems he faces in America. Mr. Shimerda has no friends in this new country because he cannot speak English at all. Therefore, it is hard for him and his family (except Antonia) to interact with neighbors. For example, "*Krajiek was their only interpreter, and could tell them anything he chose. They could not speak enough English to ask for advice*" (MA18). It is obvious that, he has to depend on the translator to communicate with others. Moreover, Peter Krajiek, who is the Shimerdas's interpreter, is not trustworthy because of his unfairness. For example, he persuades the Shimerdas to pay for things for unreasonable price. Krajiek does this because he thinks the Shimerdas has to depend on him anyway. This brings Mr. Shimerda loneliness and thinking about his Bohemian language, and people who speak the same language. He only has Russian friends who speak the same dialect as him; however, they have been in Nebraska for a short period of time since Pavel dies and Peter moves away. Antonia's father was an artist and was fond of playing music with his friends for Bohemian traditional celebrations. When he and his family move to Black Hawk, he has to change occupation and begins farming that he has never done before, "...but the father was old and frail and knew nothing about farming" (MA 18). Mr. Shimerda, though feels guilty for his lack of skills, he does not want any help from the Burdens and tells that his family is a respectable family in the old country:

He wanted us to know that they were not beggars in the old country; he made good wages, and his family were respected there ...He wished grandmother to know, however, that he still had some money (MA 48).

It is also the loneliness that hurts the old Shimerda. Since he immigrated to America and lost his old friends, he does not play music and does not go for hunting with them anymore. Of course, the past cannot become present and the present remains are full of many obstacles and the loneliness. Antonia tells Jim, "*My papa, he cry for leave his old friends what make music with him*" (MA 53). Although he meets Peter and Pavel, the new Russian friends whom he hopes to get along with in America, Pavel later dies and Peter moves out. Mr. Shimerda's nostalgia becomes severer after Pavel dies. It seems that he suddenly loses the important person in his life because Russians are the only beloved friends he has in Nebraska. A few days before Pavel's death, Mr. Shimerda is there, at the Russians' house, sitting beside Pavel's bed and listening to his haunting story about the wolves. As a friend, Mr. Shimerda witnesses Pavel's severe illness, and after Pavel dies, Mr. Shimerda becomes more depressed and isolates himself from society. "*The loss of his two friends had a depressing effect upon old Mr.*

Shimerda. When he was out hunting, he used to go into the empty log house and sit there, brooding”(MA 39). Mr. Shimerda is much attached to his Russian friends because they are not only nice men but also speak in a quite similar language as him, and do activities together (Suksangdow 19).

The characters Jim, Antonia, and the neighbors notice that Mr. Shimerda has a gloomy appearance after he and his family immigrate to Nebraska. At first sight, Jim describes Mr. Shimerda's features, "*His face was ruggedly formed, but it looked like ashes—like something from which all the warmth and light had died out*" (MA 20). Moreover, Jim and Antonia, one day, see Mr. Shimerda in the lonely and hopeless manner, as Jim describes, "*He is walking slowly, dragging his feet along as if he had no purpose*" (MA 28). Moreover, Mr. Shimerda is an inactive man as mentioned in the sentence "*She [Antonia] was the only one of his family who could rouse the old man from the torpor in which he seemed to live*"(MA 28). When the Shimerdas visited the Burdens' house, Jim observed Mr. Shimerda's gloomy behaviors finding that he had some kind of bored feeling towards the present life:

He sat still and passive. His head resting against the back of the wooden rocking-chair, his hands relaxed upon the arms. His face had a look of weariness and pleasure, like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain. He said almost nothing, and smile rarely; but as he rested there we all had a sense of his utter content" (MA 51).

In this sense, Mr. Shimerda's appearances seen by Jim, Antonia, and the neighbors are the signs of nostalgia after emigrating from Bohemia to America. These indicate his unpleasant feeling toward the new. Similarly, Mr. Shimerda feels alienated from his family, from his neighbors, and from new environment of America. He is not interested in his surroundings trying to keep himself from others. Another example is when Mr. Shimerda visits the Burdens on Christmas morning, and Jim makes the observation that Mr. Shimerda is in his personal world of past memories as follows.

"The atmosphere of comfort and security in my grandfather's house. This feeling seemed completely to take possession of Mr. Shimerda. I suppose. 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 so far behind (MA 51).

Pattana Kitiarsa, in *Humanities and Nostalgia Phenomenon in Contemporary Thai Society*, writes that human beings create their private world and their own characteristic (8 qtd in Suksangdow 22). This is, the readers can see that when a person feels nostalgic, as shown in Mr. Shimerda, he or she isolates creating their own world about the vanished past in order to replace the unfulfilled present. Antonia says to Jim, "*My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music anymore. At home he play violin all the time; for wedding and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for play, he shake his head no. Someday he take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings, like this, but never he make the music. He don't like this kawn-tree*" (MA 53).

This shows that Mr. Shimerda thinks of the past experience about playing music in Bohemia; he has never played music like that in America. Other character who feels terrible sense of nostalgia in this novel is Peter and Pavel. They are Russians who were obliged to remain in Nebraska for being part of an accident that caused the end of their friends life with his wife. Peter and Pavel had to drive his friend, the groom, with his bride home after the wedding party. During the journey, the cruel wolves chased their sled trying to attack them, and the sled was out of control. To survive, Pavel decided to lighten the sled by knocking the groom and the bride out of the sled to feed the wolves. Pavel and Peter were the only two survivors, and they could not live in Russia anymore. After that, they had to run away to many places until they settle in America (qtd in Suksangdow 24). Due to such terrible accident, they both feel frightened especially Pavel then he becomes sick and dies. Peter and Pavel face

economic problems because Peter Krajik had cheated the immigrants like Mr. Shimerda and the Russians Pavel and Peter which automatically create depression and nostalgia.

"Peter could give no very clear account of his transactions with Cutter. ..., and the debt grew faster than any crop he planted. Now everything was plastered with mortgage"(MA33).

Mr. Shimerda after all his loss of his dear friends and due to his hopelessness he shoots himself:

Presently grandfather came in and spoke to me: " Jimmy, we will not have prayers this morning, because we have a great deal to do. Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress. (MA 66)

Concerning the bad aspect of Krajik all the other characters in *My Antonia* distrust him for cheating them:

Well Ma'm, I found Krajiek's axe under the manger, and I picks it up and carries it over to the corpse, and I take my oath it just fit the gash in the front of the old man's face. That there Krajiek had been sneakin' round, pale and quiet, and when he seen me examin' the axe, he begun whimperin', "My God, man, don't do that!" ' I reckon I'm a-goin' to look into this, ' says i. Then he begun to squeal like a rat and run about wringin' his hands.' They'll hang me! Says he. 'My God, they'll hang me sure! (MA 68).

Willa Cather presents an image of a nostalgic person who unfortunately commits suicide because of his homesickness:

I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country. I thought of how far it was to Chicago, and then to Virginia, to Baltimore-and then the great wintery Ocean (MA 70).

Suksangdow in her MA thesis presents a comprehensive analysis of the characters who complain from Nostalgia. she states that: Jim Burden, the narrator of the story, is an orphan who takes a journey from Virginia with his grandparents to Black Hawk. He is a smart, thoughtful and romantic man who has a strong sense of the past and has been a friend with the Bohemian girl, Antonia. Jim is educated in New York and becomes a lawyer who is married without love and no children (31). As a narrator, Jim tells the story about the relationship between Nebraska, Jim, and Antonia in the past. Therefore, the story he tells is like the past memory awakened and transferred to readers. In fact, the entire novel is Jim's nostalgia for Antonia. It is obvious that Jim feels nostalgic for places and persons throughout the novel. There are two places where Jim feels nostalgic for Virginia and Nebraska. In the beginning of the story, Jim is nostalgic for his homeland, Virginia, because he moves to Nebraska when he is a boy. In the very first time he gets on the train to Nebraska; Jim fears the new country, America, which is not like his hometown. To explain further, Jim writes in the very first part that *"We went all the way in day coaches, becoming more sticky and grimy with each stage of the journey"* (MA 9). This shows that Jim begins to feel strange of the new place and fears about what will happen to his life. A boy like Jim feels strange to a prairie with no trees and buildings, unlike those in the Virginia town he left behind.

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which

countries are made (MA 11).

The main causes for Jim's nostalgia for Virginia are the immigration and especially the loneliness that influences his mind. According to Dix McComas's study, parents' absence causes children to suffer a psychic loss and depression; the children replace the painful past with fancied past, nostalgia. In *My Antonia*, Jim has lost his father and mother before he immigrates to Nebraska and also has no brothers or sisters. When he moves to Nebraska where the landscape is different and he knows nobody, he longs for the past and the landscape of Virginia. That is, he thinks back of the former time in his homeland in order to fulfill the feeling of emptiness (qtd in Suksangdow 32). Jim tries to cope with the new people, friends and neighbors in Nebraska. He spends his time in a field with friends, especially Antonia. However, Jim has to go to study in New York when he grows up many years later. In this sense, he has the same feeling and has to face a lot of new things again, like when he emigrated from Virginia. Therefore, another place that Jim also yearns for is Nebraska. Jim feels nostalgia when he leaves Nebraska for New York to study Law at Lincoln University. Jim thinks of the past in the university. He misses the prairie land in Black Hawk, Nebraska where he lives before coming to New York. This shows that Jim has homesickness and nostalgia for Black Hawk even though he lives in a good society of scholars in Lincoln University. In addition, his nostalgia becomes severer when he returns to Nebraska one day in summer. Jim explains that the landscape of Black Hawk is different from the old days. For instance, some wooden houses appear instead of the old sod dwelling; wheat fields and cornfields replace the pastureland. While describing the landscape, he mentions that these changes are like the growth of a great man, and he can remember all trees and things used to be there including the land reformation (33). When he is in New York and feels lonely, he recalls the memory of his old friends, Jake and Otto. Although he does not really miss them, the memories of them are distinct as if they are going along with him all the time like a shadow.

*This was the road over which Antonia and I came
on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk
and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children,
, being taken we knew not whither.... The feelings of that
night were so near that I could reach out and touch them
with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself
.... Now I understood that the same road was to bring us
together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed
together the precious, the incommunicable past (MA196).*

1.3: Environmental role in increasing or decreasing Nostalgic feeling

Environment has important role in increasing and decreasing the feeling of nostalgia. For at the time that Alexander's father in Cather's *O Pioneers!* has a terrible feeling of nostalgia, his daughter works hard buys the pieces of lands from the bankrupt neighbors feels happy with nature. Willa Cather as an author sticks to place and nature as important elements of her trilogy. She affirms the view that love is the reason behind the existence of nostalgia and feeling of loss. Love always remains in our memory and we miss it. This state of loss of love results in terrible nostalgic feeling toward the person or place you love.

In *O Pioneers!* Alexandra loves and yearns for the wild lands. She approaches the land in a gentle manner and in turn the land showers her with wealth. The same gentle approach towards nature is also found in Antonia, in *My Antonia*. Antonia has the pioneer spirit at its best. Being a lover of the landscape, having undaunted cheerfulness and resiliency, Antonia climbs up the ladder of fortune and becomes a successful owner of a larger and fertile farm. Alexandra, the protagonist in *O Pioneers!*, loves and yearns for the wild land in spite of its adversity. Even though she knows well how fragile the plight of the pioneers was, she respects and adores the land. The Land was "*still a wild thing that had its ugly moods, and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why. Its Genius was unfriendly to man.*" (*OP!* 20) Unlike her brothers and neighbors, Alexandra believes in the natural world and relishes

the enjoyment of the world. It is not a wonder that she “buys up” (OP! 59) the lands of her bankrupt neighbors and plows for profit and prosperity. Alexandra approaches the land in a gentle manner and in return the land showers her with wealth. (Shoba 4) The nature loving characters like Ivar and Alexandra in *O Pioneers!* and Antonia in *My Antonia*, can be brought under the followers of the natural theology of the Greek. The natural theology of the Greek advocates that nature is a symbolic system through which God speaks to man. Cather, too, seems to advocate this theory through her characters. *My Antonia* is often considered to be the best of Cather’s twelve novels. In this novel, Cather has given a transcendent vision of the remote folk of the western farmlands. These farm lands are very real. This is Cather’s most ardently remembered and best loved novel with her outstanding prose style.

[John Bergson] often called his daughter in to talk to her about [farm production]. Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment. His boys were willing enough to work, but when he talked with them they usually irritated him. It was Alexandra who read the papers and followed the markets, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. It was Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than John Bergson himself. Lou and Oscar were industrious, but he could never teach them to use their heads about their work (OP! 22-23).

Alexandra inherits land, but that land contributes to her being single well into her adulthood, familial estrangement, and the loss of her youngest brother.

In contrast, the heroine of *My Antonia* never controls the family farm after her father’s untimely death, but by the end of the novel she lives a traditionally happy family farm life (MA 72-73). In her teens after her father’s death, Antonia first labors on the homestead under the direction of her older brother (MA 93-96). Then she works in town and sends money back to her brother to help fund the farm. Despite financially contributing to the family homestead, Antonia, like many women, is left without land ownership. Her life is difficult. However, the last time the reader encounters Antonia, she is thriving on her husband’s land with her children and is much happier than Alexandra at the end of *O Pioneers!*. Cather suggests Antonia’s familial happiness arises from not inheriting the land and acquiescing to traditional gender roles. In *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra’s decision-making ability does not seem to have produced a better life. Cather assumes an obvious and not requiring argument or justification that the natural world exists to serve human welfare and to satisfy human desires. It is, however, a pristine world (Dooley qtd in Rosowski 66) that must be humanized, for in its original, natural state, it can be an alien, hostile place where settlers, native as well as emigrants, are unwelcome foreigners:

The little town behind them had vanished as if it had never been, had fallen behind the swell of the prairie, and the stern frozen country received them into its bosom. The homesteads were few and far apart; here and there a windmill gaunt against the sky, a sod house crouching in a hollow. But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its

somber waste. It was from facing this vast hardness that the boy's mouth had become so bitter; because he felt men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be left alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness (OP! 21)

Though Cather's frontier is not the gritty, even malignant, place that Hamlin Garland's hapless homesteaders confront, nonetheless the setting is harsh and the contest with the land is a stern one. Witness Alexandra's father's trials: In eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land that he had come to tame. It was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why. Mischance hung over it. Its Genius was unfriendly to man (qtd in Rosowski 67).

... Bergson went over in his mind the things that held him back. One winter his cattle had perished in a blizzard. The next summer one of his plow horses broke its leg in a prairie-dog hole and had to be shot. Another summer he lost his hogs to cholera, and a valuable stallion died from a rattlesnake bite. Time and time again his crops had failed. He had lost two children, boys, that came between Lou and Emil, and there had been the cost of sickness and death. Now, when he had at last struggled out of debt, he was going to die himself. He was only forty-six, and had, of course, counted on more time. (O P! 26)

In *My Antonia* those who "struggle with the soil" (116) and fail were ill-prepared duped by land sharks and unscrupulous merchants, or were physically and temperamentally unsuited to homesteading, as was Mr. Shimerda. But those who are patient and hardworking, resilient and resourceful, can succeed. As Cather puts it in *O Pioneers!*, although "the land, in itself, is desirable," it is "an enigma" (27). But once the key is found and the puzzle solved, the land submits to the human hand that develops, tames, subdues, orders, masters, controls, and improves (all Cather's terms) it. For Cather two points need to be emphasized: though it is "the wild land" (*O P!* 26), "a dark country" (24) with "wild soil" (49), and "a raw place" (59), after an initial struggle it readily tolerates the human imprint. Second, once humanized, the land becomes vastly more productive and fruitful, at least in so far as satisfying human desires. The natural world made to fit human designs is a recurring theme celebrated by Cather. Here are two of her accounts. In the first, it is sixteen years since John Bergson has died, and Alexandra, her brothers, and her mother have turned a homestead into an estate:

They drove westward toward Norway Creek, and toward a big white house that stood on a hill, several miles across the fields. There were so many sheds and outbuilding grouped about that the place looked not unlike a tiny village. A stranger, approaching it, could not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the outlying fields. There was something individual about the great farm, a most unusual trimness and care for detail.... Any one thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide. (O P! 80)

In the second account, Jim Burden, recently graduated from college and about to enter law school, has retraced his initial boyhood journey from Black Hawk to his grandfather's homestead (Rosowski 68). As a ten-year-old he was surrounded by nature:

There seemed nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a county at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land.... I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction. (MA 7)

Ten years later the human had supplanted the natural:

The wheat harvest was over, and here and there along the horizon I could see black puffs of smoke from the steam threshing-machines. The old pasture land was now being broken up into wheatfields and cornfields, the red grass was disappearing, and the whole face of the country was changing. There were wooden houses where the old sod dwellings used to be, and little orchards, and big red barns; all this meant happy children, contented women, and men who saw their lives coming to a fortunate issue. The windy springs and blazing summers, one after another, had enriched and mellowed that flat tableland; all the human effort that had gone into it was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility. The changes seem beautiful and harmonious. (298).

Nature is dominant in Cather's novels and *O Pioneers* is not an exception, the narrator of *O Pioneers!* explains that “that summer the rains had been so many and opportune that it was almost more than Shabata and his man could do to keep up with the corn; [so] the orchard... [became] a neglected wilderness” (*OP!* 138). Or much earlier, when it appears that mother and children will have to struggle on without Mr. Bergson, Alexandra expresses her misgivings:

I don't know what is to become of us, Carl, if father has to die. I don't dare think about it. I wish we could all go with him and let the grass grow back over everything.” Carl made no reply. Just ahead of them was the Norwegian graveyard, where the grass had, indeed, grown back over everything, shaggy and red, hiding even the wire fence. (21–22)

Rosowski claims that some of Cather's characters, however, find wildness and naturalness the preferred state (69). Alexandra Antonia and Thea are models of seriousness and optimism for in spite of the fact that these three female protagonists feel nostalgic about the new situation they live in the new place but because of their will power they overcome all the difficulties and achieve their works successfully.

Section Two:

2.1: The story of Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark*

Thea's story begins when she is an eleven-year-old living with her large family in the town of Moonstone. As the daughter of the Methodist minister Thea is well known in her town. She prefers to socialize with the musical Mexicans in Mexico Town and Her Wunsch a professional musician who has ruined his career with alcohol. Thea takes piano lessons from Wunsch who recognizes a great talent and willingness to work in her. Thea's other supporters include her mother who recognizes that Thea is different from her other six children and has special qualities that others have not. Howard Archie, the

town doctor, is also a close friend of Thea's. Archie also recognizes Thea's special talent and intelligence that sets her apart from the other townspeople of Moonstone. Ray Kennedy, also a friend of Thea's from Moonstone, is the one who gives her the funds she needs to start serious music lessons. Unfortunately Kennedy is killed when his caboose is hit by a train engine. However, he had a life insurance policy which named Thea as the beneficiary. At Kennedy's request Thea uses this money to spend a winter in Chicago taking piano lessons. The next summer, Thea realizes how different she is from her family. After an argument with her sister Thea leaves her home and vows not to return until she has made something of herself. The following winter Thea takes voice lessons from Madison Bowers, an experience that leaves Thea discouraged and exhausted. Fred Ottenburg sends Thea to spend the summer exploring cliff dwellings at Panther Canon. The experience refreshes Thea. During the summer Thea falls in love with Ottenburg and agrees to marry him. The two travel to Mexico where Thea discovers Ottenburg is already married. As promised Ottenburg takes her to New York where Thea plans to go to Germany to study music. In order for her to afford her studies, however, Thea borrows money from her old friend Archie. After making a name for herself in Germany, Thea returns to New York to sing. Her old friends Archie and Ottenburg join her in New York to hear her performance. Thea's career is determined by a Mexican, who unknown to Thea, visits one of her New York performances. The man is Spanish Johnny, a Mexican from Moonstone who recognized Thea's talent when she was just a small girl. The smile on Johnny's face would have let Thea know how useful and full of meaning her life had become.

2.2: Modernity, Artistic development and Autobiography in Cather's *The Song of the Lark*.

Willa Cather tries to present a modern piece of art in her novel *The Song of the Lark*. Many critics believe that Cather herself was undergoing a transcendental state like her heroine Thea in her story. It is necessary to understand all the factors that led Thea to change in spite of the fact that she faces difficult moments of loss and nostalgia after her success.

Artistic growth is, more than anything else, a refining of the sense of truthfulness. The stupid believe that to be truthful is easy; only the artist, the great artist, knows how difficult it is. ?Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (697)

In 1915, Willa Cather published *The Song of the Lark*, the book that has become synonymous with her childhood and her artistic growth. Yet while critics have hailed it as the "most thinly veiled autobiography of the development of the female artist," they tend to remain puzzled when facing the form of the novel. Robin Heyeck and James Woodress describe the book as "overstuffed," "going on and on" for 490 pages. Hermione Lee agrees, describing the work as a "thick, heavy, straggling detailed narrative," not Cather's best method of writing. True, *The Song of the Lark* is so different in feel and temperament as compared to *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* (qtd in Ahearn 143).

The Song of the Lark is a novel of place and places, saturated with Cather's knowledge of music and the visual arts' the book is at the center of arguments about her sense of modern cultures. Our contributors explore the text's mapping of apparent opposites: the rural and the urban, Chicago and the Southwest, the modern and the ancient. In "Thea's 'Indian Play' in *The Song of the Lark*," Sarah Clere considers the dynamic interplay between the modern and the anti modern in Cather's representation of Native cultures. Tracing the "discovery" of the Southwest by anthropologists and explorers at the end of the nineteenth century as a context for Thea's encounter with Indian artifacts in Panther Canyon, Clere shows how this particular place fed into American culture's ambiguous sense of progress and empire: in the Southwest, a once-powerful culture had seemingly vanished. Clere argues that a reconsideration of ideas of the modern provides new ways to approach old questions about how Cather represents female characters (qtd in Homestead and Reynolds xiii).

The description of Thea's room during childhood is important for her because it resembles her development as a character:

It was at the end room of the wing, and was not plastered, but was snugly lined with soft pine.

The ceiling was so low that a grown person could reach it with the palm of the hand, and it sloped down on either side. There was only one window, but it was a double one and went to the floor. In October, while the days were still warm, Thea and Tillie papered the room, walls and ceiling in the same paper, small red and brown roses on a yellowish ground. Thea bought a brown cotton carpet, and her big brother, Gus, put it down for her one Sunday. She made white cheesecloth curtains and hung them on a tape.

This is the very beginning of paying attention to Thea that her parents feel her different from her brothers and sisters.

Her mother gave her an old walnut dresser with a broken mirror, and she had her own dumpy walnut single bed, and a blue washbowl and pitcher which she had drawn at a church fair lottery. At the head of her bed she had a tall round wooden hat-crate, from the clothing store.... The acquisition of this room was the beginning of a new era in Thea's life.

It was one of the most important things that ever happened to her. Hitherto, except in summer, when she could be out of doors, she had lived in constant turmoil; the family, the day school, the Sunday-School. (TSOL 343-345).

Willa Cather presents a view of her protagonist who is going to be an artist. This story is full of suspense in spite of the fact Thea faces many difficult time. She wishes to be a famous opera singer and musician. Thea has a certain schedule to follow as her life system. She does not want to waste time. Similar to Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, *The Song of the Lark* presents issues of land and immigration; people from German, Russia and other parts come to Nebraska, to be a stranger is unbearable, to leave your home and go away to hire a room or little house for your family is worse. Nostalgic feeling and loss attacks the psychological state of every one who immigrates.

The difference between Thea and other female protagonists of Cather is that though Thea is travelling away from her family and town but she is sure that she goes to Chicago for learning and becoming a famous artist. Even her mother who surely was crying for her loss but she was confident of her own daughter's ability and success:

Mrs. Kronborg reflected that she would never see just that same picture again, and as Thea's car slid off along the rails, she wiped a tear from her eye. She won't come back a little girl, Mrs. Kronborg said to her husband as they turned to go home. Anyhow, she's been a sweet one. (433)

Another outstanding point about Thea is that she does things after thinking about them. She was a practical girl, successful, walking steadily in her steps without fear. The will power in her was excellent. She was a good girl knowing what to do and how to protect her self from bad deeds and bad people.

Thea was glad that this was her country, even if one did not learn to speak elegantly there. It was,

somehow, an honest country, and there was a new song in that blue air which had never been sung in the world before....She had the sense of going back to a friendly soil, whose friendship was somehow going to strengthen her; a naive, generous country that gave one its joyous force, its large-hearted, child-like power to love, just as it gave one its coarse, brilliant flowers(485).

The feeling of loss that Thea has is due to a fact that her brothers and sisters have envied her for being outstanding and everybody viewed her as a different individual. When first she returned back from Chicago to her town in Moonstone which some critics named the place as a source for gossip, she missed every part in her plastered room and home and Dr. Archie. When she awakes she looks at the sight in the street:

The blue jays were fighting and screeching in the cottonwood tree outside her window, as they always did, and she could hear the old Baptist decon across the street calling his chickens, as she had heard him do every summer morning since she could remember. It was pleasant to waken up in that bed, in that room, and to feel the brightness of the morning, those lines, and the face of her old teacher, came back to Thea, floated to her out of sleep(TSOL 487).

Her loss of affection of her brothers and sisters had started when Thea had attended the Mexican evening party and sang a song and a man had gossiped her to her family. Thea immediately feels bad:

During the silence which preceded the blessing, Thea felt something uncomfortable in the air. Anna and her older brothers had lowered their eyes when she came in..."High society, that," remarked Charley....Thea looked across the table at the uncompromising countenances of her older brothers(499).

Unfortunately Thea felt terrible and she decides that she will return to Chicago as soon as possible:

After such feeling of estrangement and loneliness she decided to leave to Chicago:

This time, when Thea left Moonstone to go back to Chicago, she went alone. As the train pulled out, she looked back at her mother and father and Thor. They were calm and cheerful; they didn't know, they didn't understand. Something pulled in her- and broke. She cried all the way to Denver, and that night in her berth, she kept sobbing and waking herself (507).

Cather uses different immigrant nationalities in her trilogy to emphasize on the loss they feel with nostalgia like the Swedish, German and Norwegian citizens:

Thea looked at it, then at him, and shook her head." I can't. The truth is i don't know either English or Swedish very well, and Norwegian's still worse," she said confidentially. She not infrequently refused to do what she was asked

to do, but it was not like her to explain her refusal,
even when she had a good reason. I understand.
We immigrants never speak any language well.
But you know what it means, don't you? (526)

At the end of the story, Thea goes to Germany *and* achieves success in her artistic goal and she accepts all her nostalgic sense and receives her future optimistically.

Conclusion

Change of place for some people in general is troublesome and leads to nostalgic feeling. Due to the process of immigration, Cather's characters differ in their feeling of Loss and Nostalgia. Some are deeply affected and become traumatic and commit suicide like Mr. Shimerda and others try to cope with the situation and start again optimistically like Cather's female protagonists, Alexandra, Thea and Antonia. Mr. Shimerda moving from Bohemia to America feels terrible for he misses his old days, old native land and friends. Peter and Pavel also suffer for change of place for them not only led to physical decline but to economic decline as well. Jim Burden feels alone when he is obliged to leave his childhood friend Antonia to complete his education. Antonia also immigrates to America and this change of the place causes her to feel depressed.

In addition to immigration which is one of the main reasons for feeling nostalgic, missing the old happy memories of the past tortures human beings. Thea leaves her country and moves to Germany to study music. Away from home, she misses her old room in Moonstone and feels nostalgic but her will power pushes her to mend such feeling and overcome or control her sentimental weakness about remembering her family and her old days. By seriousness and hard working she overcomes her nostalgia.

Alexandra is a successful model of getting used to the new situation in America. She progresses in her farm and becomes a successful rich farmer. But the difference between her and Antonia is that Antonia marries and becomes very happy with her new family whereas Alexandra does not. It is necessary for all ages and sexes to cope with new situation and try to control the agonizing feeling and memories of the past for it affects the psychological state. People miss the past when they face changes in the present world. As a result nostalgia is one of the important issues that should be studied carefully to understand people in the society better and respond to their sufferings.

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