

A STUDY OF WILLA CATHER'S PORTRAITURE OF  
NON-ENGLISH CHARACTERS IN HER FICTION

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## PREFACE

The subject of this thesis was first suggested to me by Dr. Agnes M. Berrigan, and as a foreign student I was especially interested in this aspect of Willa Cather. My purpose has been to study Willa Cather's portraiture of non-English characters with emphasis on her recognition of how various national characteristics and cultures helped to make American life richer and more colorful.

The main sources of this study are all the major novels and some of the short stories of Willa Cather and the biography of E. K. Brown, which proved the most helpful of the biographical sources.

I gratefully acknowledge indebtedness to Dr. Cecil B. Williams for his most generous and helpful guidance and to Dr. Agnes M. Berrigan for her valuable suggestions and encouragement, both of whom made allowances for my insufficient knowledge and understanding of American literature and inadequacy in handling the language. I should also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Hans H. Andersen, Head of the Department of English and Foreign Languages, and the Staff of the Department for their constant material and moral support which made my study in the United States possible and meaningful; and to Mrs. Millard Scherich for typing my thesis in its final form.

H. S.

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## CHAPTER I

### SOURCES OF WILLA CATHER'S INTEREST IN NON-ENGLISH CHARACTERS

In 1923 Willa Cather wrote an essay on Nebraska, where she had spent the most formative years of her life until she moved to Pittsburgh in 1896. This essay is the most explicit statement of her interest in cultures and people from various countries, and at the same time it shows her recognition that those people from foreign lands have had much to do with adding color and richness to American life. She says "they brought with them something that this neutral new world needed even more than the immigrants needed land."<sup>1</sup> By "something that this neutral new world needed" Willa Cather means not only culture in the material sense but above everything else certain qualities of mind and personality which make human life richer and more enduring.

In the age of growing material progress Willa Cather regrets that "the belief that snug success and easy money are the real aims of human life" is becoming dominant and that those things that "develop taste and enrich personality are not encouraged."<sup>2</sup> Taste and rich personality are the two things which Willa Cather was always concerned with. She tells in the same essay a story that her professor told about a student at the University of Nebraska who had unusual taste in classics and remarkable

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<sup>1</sup>Willa Cather, "Nebraska," The Nation, CXVII (September 1923), 237.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

intuition and perception in literature though his parents had no such interest at all. She says, "I knew what the professor did not; that though this boy had an American name, his grandfather was a Norwegian, a musician of high attainment."<sup>3</sup> This is one of the accounts which suggest to the readers what she was trying to do in her creation of the characters. She saw among the people from other countries not only "sturdy traits of character" but "elasticity of mind," "honest attitude towards life," and "certain quality of feeling and imagination" which, she hopes, may help to break up "American provincialism" and "conventional optimism" of art and thought.<sup>4</sup>

In Willa Cather's art one can see an unusual degree of unity of two factors--her innate artistic sensitiveness, a passion for something fine, and the variety of experiences in her life. Over and over again readers can see in her novels and essays glimpses of her cherishing hope or desire to pursue something excellent and beautiful. She was deeply interested in fineness of personality. For this reason the reader of Willa Cather gets the impression that for her art meant almost a flowering of fine personalities and the play of one personality on the other. In E. K. Brown's Biography one finds numerous accounts which show this appreciation of people.

In choosing the publisher for her books, for instance, she went to Alfred A. Knopf because she felt that he was an artistic perfectionist in everything he did, and she liked the blend of "a fiery temperamental" with "a rather severe taste" this man had.<sup>5</sup> Another instance shows her sensitiveness to fine quality in others. In 1916 she met a young violinist whom

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>E. K. Brown, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, New York, 1953, p. 213.

she saw only four times, but she felt much delight in knowing him because she found "poetic insight and a mixture of reticence and sincerity" in him.<sup>6</sup> It is easy for the reader to associate this young violinist with the character of David Gerhardt in One of Ours. Moreover, one can well understand the author's feeling when the hero of the same book says about the Erlichs, a German family whose interests and the way they spend their money are so different from those of the ordinary American town people, "they really know how to live." In the same way in The Professor's House the personality of Tom Outland is significant in relation to the theme of the book because Tom Outland is the only person in St. Peter's rather worldly life whose personality can impress him and influence his whole view of life. Willa Cather seems to suggest that Tom Outland's personality is really first rate.

It was impossible, therefore, for Willa Cather, with such sensitiveness and imagination, not to notice anything remarkable and unusual about the people from many different countries with their infinite variety of cultural heritage and traits when she became acquainted with them in a small community near Red Cloud. She says:

Few of our neighbours were Americans--most of them were Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and Bohemians. I grew fond of some of these immigrants. . . . This was, with me, the initial impulse. I did not know any writing people. I had an enthusiasm for a kind of country and a kind of people, rather than ambition.<sup>7</sup>

She took every advantage to satisfy her extraordinary curiosity concerning immigrant families. She visited the immigrant families and was fascinated

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>7</sup>Latrobe Carroll, "Willa Sibert Cather," The Bookman, LIII (May 1921), p. 212.

by listening to their stories about their countries and life. She even voluntarily delivered the mail on horseback in order to see the inside of immigrant farmhouses.<sup>8</sup> There were nearly all European nationalities in her neighborhood--Germans, Bohemians, Swedes, and French Canadians. This was her first important experience from which she collected materials for her future literary works.

Persons were the most important aspect of Willa Cather's childhood. From the gifted and cultivated people whom she came across she learned more than any teachers could offer to teach. For instance she was fascinated by an extremely brilliant French woman, Mrs. Wiener, who married one of the merchants in Red Cloud. She spoke French and German and had a large collection of excellent books. Willa Cather found infinite delight in visiting her house, which revealed rich cultural heritages.<sup>9</sup> The memory of this French woman might have been in Willa Cather's mind when she created the Rosens in Old Mrs. Harris. A German music teacher she had was another source of stimulating her interest in European culture.<sup>10</sup> He told her about the life and culture of European artists, and great music, and above all his keen insight appreciated what was remarkable in Willa Cather's mind. Among Bohemians there were some who impressed her profoundly with high European culture. For most of them had come to the United States for political and ethical reasons.<sup>11</sup> It was among them that she met an old man who later suggested to her Anton Rosicky. Of course in Anton Rosicky's character one does not find any cultural sophistication.

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<sup>8</sup>Brown, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 26.



He is rather simple, but one can recognize how Willa Cather crystallized some Bohemian strains and projected them into the delineation of the character. She also became acquainted with an extraordinary Bohemian girl, Anna Pavelka, whose personality and appearance were integrated into that of Antonia Shimerda. Willa Cather writes:

She was one of the truest artists I ever knew in the keenness and sensitiveness of her enjoyment, in her love of people and in her willingness to take pains. I did not realize all this as a child but Annie fascinated me and I always had it in mind to write a story about her.<sup>12</sup>

A long time afterwards in 1916 when Willa Cather visited this woman she found that "what was vigorous, sound and beautiful in a region where these qualities so often seemed to suffer repression or defeat" was still the quality which distinguished this Bohemian woman from the others.<sup>13</sup>

The early experiences in a small community in Nebraska, from 1883 until she went to Lincoln to study at the state university in 1891, offered notable materials for her works. Especially, her three early novels, O Pioneers! (1913), The Song of the Lark (1915), and My Antonia (1918) are almost entirely based on her interest and immediate knowledge of immigrants and their families. She wrote:

O Pioneers! interested me tremendously, because it had to do with a kind of country I loved, because it was about old neighbours, once very dear. . . . O Pioneers! was not only about Nebraska farmers; the farmers were Swedes!<sup>14</sup>

After her graduation from the University of Nebraska she spent a year in Red Cloud and then took advantage of the opportunity to go to Pittsburgh, where she worked for a magazine and a newspaper for the first

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<sup>12</sup>Mildred R. Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, New York, 1951, pp. 46-7.

<sup>13</sup>Brown, p. 199.

<sup>14</sup>Cather, On Writing, New York, 1949, pp. 93-4.

four years and then taught school for five years. As she matured, in addition to the people from foreign countries, the older cultures became important to her. It was while her home was in Pittsburgh that she traveled to Europe, especially to England and France. This is significant in connection with her interest and consequently her literary activity. In the summer of 1902 when she was twenty-eight, she left for Europe. Her book on Europe--actually a collection of small articles written to fill a weekly column or two of the local newspaper--is full of impressions of the tour seen with fresh eyes and peculiar sensitiveness. One can see the definite influence of this travel upon the settings of her later novels. Also this book shows what types of people she would choose to write about and where her main interest was fixed. Though she felt a strong affection and sense of kinship for English people, the stimulation she got from French culture is greater.<sup>15</sup> Nearly twenty years later Willa Cather wanted Claude Wheeler, the hero of One of Ours, a young boy from Nebraska, to learn the meaning of France, just as she had learned it on this trip.

In the chapter which describes the journey from Marseilles to Hyères, there is a beautiful passage on the olive trees along the coast:

It struggles so hard and patiently against circumstances the most adverse, and yet, like the people who love it, manages always to preserve in its contour, no matter how stony the soil, or how heavy the white dust hangs on its leaves, something of grace and beauty.<sup>16</sup>

This is an allegorical passage so that one can see what kind of people Willa Cather found beautiful in life. There is also a passage about Hyères.

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<sup>15</sup>Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living, New York, 1953, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Cather, Willa Cather in Europe, New York, 1956, p. 146.

She says "everyone here sings, and sings musically and tunefully." She saw a painter who was singing airs from Rigoletto all day, a group of the olive-oil buyers who sang Trovatore, and a beggar who sang the most beautiful minor airs.<sup>17</sup> These humble people impressed Willa Cather profoundly. She felt they knew what is true art almost intuitively.

During three years following the European tour Willa Cather's literary activity was limited. She published a small volume of poems, April Twilight, her first book, in 1903, and a book of short stories based on her Pittsburgh experiences, The Troll Garden, in 1905. During these years she was associated with Isabelle McClung and her family, and, through them with cultivated European-born people like Jan Hambourg, musician of mixed Russian-Jewish-English background.<sup>18</sup>

In 1906 she went to New York to join McClure's magazine, for which she worked until 1912. While she was reading various manuscripts as the managing editor, she took a long and carefree vacation and traveled to Europe again, this time mainly in Italy and France.

Significantly, her stay in New York stimulated her interest in the lives of people in a different way. She was associated with many artists, musicians, and literary people. One of the most significant associations was that with Olive Fremstad, one of the eminent opera singers. Olive Fremstad was born in Sweden and came to the United States as a small child. The beginning of their friendship was Willa Cather's interview with her for the article called "Three American Singers" in McClure's in 1913. The qualities that Willa Cather found in Madame Fremstad were qualities

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>18</sup>Brown, p. 112.

one might hope to find in a great artist.<sup>19</sup> As Edith Lewis points out, Thea Kronborg is not the direct portrait of Fremstad.<sup>20</sup> However, it is most likely that Willa Cather found the unique quality of the great artist in Fremstad, which came from her Swedish parentage, and subsequently projected it into the creation of the complex character of Thea Kronborg.

In 1912 Willa Cather resigned from McClure's and for the first time took a trip to the Southwest to visit her brother in Winslow, Arizona. Here again another important phase of Willa Cather comes--new materials for stories, settings, and above all the people. Her brother lived with a group of people entirely new to her. He traveled in Mexico and spoke Spanish. He knew many Mexicans and liked them very well. Willa Cather's remarkably intuitive understanding of the people to whom she did not belong by birth soon caused her to regard them as immensely charming people in spite of their occasional weaknesses and follies.<sup>21</sup> Among them she came to know a young handsome Mexican named Julio, who took her to Mexican dances and sang Spanish songs to the guitar for her. In The Song of the Lark the characters of "Spanish Johnny" and his group represent these experiences.

Another discovery of importance in the Southwest was that of Indian culture in the Cliff-Dwellers ruins in a New Mexican canyon.<sup>22</sup> Although ordinarily Willa Cather was primarily interested in people, the place and people had equal importance there because the people were dead. She found from the ruins something extremely simple yet beautiful. It was a remarkable history of creation done by the people whose civilization was

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>20</sup>Lewis, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>22</sup>Brown, pp. 195-8.

pure and beautiful. They knew how to live in a landscape so spectacular that it evoked a great emotion and imagination, which are the sources of great achievement.

After the publication of The Song of the Lark in 1915 the important years to supply new materials followed. In the summer of 1916 she again went to the Southwest to spend a longer time than before. She visited Taos, where the primitive Mexicans were the main population, Santa Fe, and other places in New Mexico. Father Haltermann, a Belgian priest in Santa Cruz, was the person who supplied Willa Cather with the history of French and Spanish missionary activity in the Southwest.<sup>23</sup> Any small story she heard conveyed in some way or other the mentality of men who had the intuition and keen sense to appreciate something fine. The story of a bell treasured in Santa Fe is one example. It was carried from Mexico City across thousands of miles by human hands through the most difficult wild land. They took such pains and labor because they knew that in the Southwest there were a group of people who would really appreciate that silvery tone. Obviously this story suggests the episode of the bell in Death Comes for the Archbishop.

In 1925 she went back to the Southwest again. This time her interest was fixed on the story of the French missionaries in the nineteenth century. Especially the story about the first Archbishop, Lamy, interested her deeply. She

never passed the life-size bronze of him which stands under a locust tree before the cathedral in Santa Fe without wishing that I could learn more about a pioneer churchman who looked so well-bred and distinguished. In his pictures one felt the same thing, something fearless and fine and

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 198. Also, Cather, On Writing, p. 4.

very, very well-bred--something that spoke of race. What I felt curious about was the daily life of such a man in a crude frontier society.<sup>24</sup>

During this stay in the Southwest she came across a book, printed seventeen years before, about the French missionaries, titled Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Macheboauf, Pioneer Priest of Ohio, Pioneer Priest of New Mexico, Pioneer Priest of Colorado, Vicar Apostolic of Colorado and Utah, and First Bishop of Denver.<sup>25</sup> Willa Cather found this book an admirable piece of work which revealed the life of the two French Fathers she had been interested in.

Although she took some trips to Canada, Grand Manan and Quebec, she wrote Shadows on the Rock not only as a result of travel to the place, but also from the knowledge and interest in people, literature, and the history of France she had previously accumulated. Her preoccupation seemed to be to express what it means to be French. Even in the little girl Cecile strong French traits are seen. One of Willa Cather's friends, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who was born in Paris, and her family, seem to have shown to Willa Cather French traits more immediately.<sup>26</sup> Soon after the publication of the book she wrote: "Among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not **but** admire."<sup>27</sup>

As has been seen, her initial interest was in her neighbors who

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<sup>24</sup>Cather, On Writing, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup>Brown, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-4; 269.

<sup>27</sup>Cather, On Writing, p. 15.

were not Anglo-Saxon, and every foreign element she could find. As she matured, she became more aware of older culture and human life. With her discovery of the Southwest of her own country and experience with old French culture she was absolutely saturated. Some critics have pointed out that Willa Cather was disappointed with American civilization and life and turned her back on America and found reconciliation, if not refuge, in the past and Europe. However, her attitude seems more positive than merely an escape from America--the belief that America is "better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be."<sup>28</sup> Her attachment for what is fine and beautiful was never lost through her life. It was not an escape to the past, but the endeavor to recreate what she recognized as fine.

In the following chapters I shall try to illustrate Willa Cather's ability to recognize and portray various qualities of mind and personalities which she felt may help to make American life richer and more colorful.

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<sup>28</sup>Cather, One of Ours, p. 458.

## CHAPTER II

### SCANDINAVIANS

#### A. Swedish Characters

Among the foreign characters that dominate Willa Cather's novels Scandinavians play an important role. Two of her early novels are the life stories of Swedish girls--Alexandra Bergson in O Pioneers! and Thea Kronborg in The Song of The Lark. None of the Scandinavian characters in her novels present stronger strains associated with their particular race than these two heroines. They are both daughters of immigrant families on the frontier, but their lives are different in the vocations they pursue. Alexandra Bergson never leaves her farm, and her attachment is always to the land. On the other hand Thea Kronberg has to leave the place she originally belongs to because of her purpose in life.

In spite of the external differences of their lives, however, both of them have in the final analysis very similar mentality and a quality which distinguishes them from ordinary people. Some of their striking characteristics are tenacity of will, vitality, and a certain kind of sensitiveness and imagination. Both of them are, in their own ways, creative artists, one in music and the other in the creation of a better land--the projection of one's ideal through the land. In both the tenacity of will sometimes appears to be a strange kind of stubbornness,



but it actually represents a desire to be true to oneself, and a passion to pursue something fine. Moreover, it is true with both of them that the presence of imaginative quality, together with sensitiveness to the essential things in matters and situations, distinguishes their characters. Their beauty is different from the beauty usually associated with the fair sex--delicate, sensuous, or sometimes sentimental. It is a heavily outlined beauty, full of vitality and freshness, in that sense Scandinavian, and as a whole an expression of personality. Professor Wunsch in describing Thea Kronborg expressed this feeling well, "She was like the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open there in the desert; thornier and sturdier than the maiden flowers he remembered; not so sweet, but wonderful."<sup>1</sup>

Alexandra Bergson is first seen on a dreary winter day in a small town of Nebraska:

A tall, strong girl, and she walked rapidly and resolutely, as if she knew exactly where she was going and what she was going to do next. . . . She had a serious, thoughtful face, and her clear, deep blue eyes were fixed intently on the distance.<sup>2</sup>

This is an expression of her personality. Throughout her life we see the same personality growing up.

Alexandra's father, John Bergson, knew before she became twelve years old, that she was very different from his other children. His sons worked well; they did not mind hard labor, but he could never teach them how to use their brains about their work. On the other hand Alexandra was "like her grandfather," by which he meant she was intelligent and essentially Swedish--with "strength of will and the simple direct way of thinking

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<sup>1</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, New York, 1937, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Cather, O Pioneers!, New York, 1933, p. 6.

things out."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, he wanted Alexandra to continue to keep his land during her life. After their father's death Alexandra's two brothers, by far less interesting characters, wanted to give up the land to make more money out of an easier life. But Alexandra insisted on holding it, and she even bought new land. It was not only because she wanted to fulfill her father's will, but because she knew exactly what she wanted to do. The land was the medium of art for her. Had she not had imagination she would have given up the land as her brothers wanted to when she experienced three years of complete drought and failure with the wild land. Willa Gather says, "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves,"<sup>4</sup> and Alexandra does have imagination and idea.

When she went to see the neighboring land she recognizes her own high land has future rather than present prosperity. She does not need "a little certainty," for she has a passion for the "big chance." She explains to her youngest brother, who is different from her other brothers, that "we must have faith in the high land, Emil. . . . I want to hold on harder than ever."<sup>5</sup> Her brother notices that her face becomes radiant: For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. . . . She had never known before how much the country meant to her. . . . She felt the future stirring.<sup>7</sup>

It is this kind of sensitiveness and imagination that always sustained her and made her dream come true.

Another striking quality of Alexandra is a peculiar kind of indifference toward conventionalities. She is living in a community where everybody, especially her immediate family, is convention-minded. Her brothers do not like to do "anything different from their neighbours," and find fault with Alexandra for everything she does. However, Alexandra says "we still go on living as we think best."<sup>8</sup> While all the neighbours despise Norwegian Ivar and call him "crazy," she feels Ivar's real goodness and recognizes that he has something that ordinary people do not. She goes to Ivar to ask how to protect her pigs from disease. She knows he is always right about the animals because he loves animals with his whole heart. Her brothers thought Ivar's idea was crazy; so they did not approve of Alexandra's listening to him. She did not say anything to them, but made up her mind to take Ivar's advice. When this queer old character lost his land and place to live in, she took him into her house in spite of the objections of her whole family, and prepared a special place for the old man so that he would be comfortable. Her brother insisted that Ivar should be sent to an asylum for fear of neighbor's gossip. Alexandra laughed and said, "Ivar's queer, certainly, but he has more sense than half the hands I hire."<sup>9</sup> Her

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

opinion is "Ivar has just as much right to his own way of dressing and thinking as we have."<sup>10</sup> The same thing is true with her rather unnatural relationship with Carl Linstrum. When he came back to visit her farm and stayed with her, the neighborhood started gossiping about them. Her brothers again accused her of improper conduct for a woman nearly forty years of age. She was extremely direct in saying that she wanted Carl to stay, "Well, suppose I want to take care of him? Whose business is it but my own?"<sup>11</sup>

Her sensitiveness could understand that Emil, the youngest brother, was different from his brothers, and had some quality that should be developed. So she sent him to the university and let him do what he wanted to. "It is curious . . . on the outside Emil is just like an American boy,--but underneath he is more Swedish than any of us,"<sup>12</sup> she thinks. This shows the largeness of her capacity. She never left her land, but she could see the world outside of her. "We grow hard and heavy here . . . and our minds get stiff. If the world were no wider than my cornfield, if there were not something besides this, I shouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work."<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Alexandra's attitude towards Frank Shabata after he killed Emil and Marie reveals her quality more clearly. The tragedy of the two young people was an extremely severe blow for Alexandra because they were the only persons whom she really cared for and loved. Alexandra wanted to do something for Frank because she felt that she herself had been

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

more to blame than Frank. She thinks she is responsible for the wrong which Marie and Emil did. Once she is convinced of this, she decides to visit Frank in the jail. Her heart grieved for him deeply because "being what he was" Frank could not have acted otherwise.

What Willa Cather seems to convey to us is that though Alexandra's "life had not been of the kind to sharpen her vision," her innate quality let her fulfill the purpose in life.

Her training had all been toward the end of making her proficient in what she had undertaken to do. Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields. Nevertheless, the underground stream was there, and it was because she had so much personality to put into her enterprises and succeeded in putting it into them so completely, that her affairs prospered better than those of her neighbors.<sup>14</sup>

In the Bergsons Mrs. Bergson, though she plays only a small role in the early part of the story, exhibits a more or less charming character. As John Bergson said "she has been a good mother" and "always missed the old country." She does not have Alexandra's persistence or strength, but in a way she is interesting. She is a kind of person for whom habits are very important. If she were cast upon a desert island, she would thank God for her deliverance, make a garden, and find something to preserve.<sup>15</sup> She unremittently tried to preserve the routine of her old life amid new surroundings. For this reason she was always unhappy, but her endeavor indeed helped to keep the Bergsons from "disintegrating morally and getting careless in their ways." She could not stand her neighbor's "slovenly housekeeping." Once an old woman in the neighborhood hid in the haymow because she was afraid to be seen by Mrs. Bergson with barefeet. She

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

always wanted "to be let alone" to reconstruct her old life in so far as that was possible. She is not important as a pioneer woman, but in different surroundings she might have been able to find pleasure in the small things which comprise much of what is called civilization.

Thea Kronborg, too, exhibits Swedish traits. Some of these are her tenacity of will--sometimes appearing as a curious stubbornness--her uncompromising pursuit of what she wants to do, and finally her extraordinary sensitiveness and imagination. They all contributed to make her personality richer, and because her personality is richer she, like Alexandra, suffers in her environment--which consists largely of conventional-minded people.

At first Thea Kronborg is only a little happy girl eleven years of age, with soft, fine hair and a silky skin which "must have come from her mother." Even at a very early age she exhibits some passionate sensitiveness and innate fineness which Dr. Archie calls "something very different about her." She had a "flushed face, freckled nose, fierce little mouth, and her delicate tender chin--one soft touch in her hard little Scandinavian face." Certainly she was different from other children in the community. Thea's good friends--Mrs. Kronborg, Doctor Archie, Professor Wunsch, Spanish Johnny, Ray Kennedy--all could recognize that Thea has spontaneity, energy, and, above all, a rare combination of gifts: imagination, will, and passion. She shows very early her passion and sensitiveness for something fine. One day she noticed Doctor Archie's scarf-pin: "That's the prettiest one you ever had. I wish you'd stay a long while and let me look at it." Actually it was a special opal from Chihuahua. "Thea had a curious passion for jewelry" and she collected every shiny stone she saw and wandered to the sand hill to hunt for crystals, agates and others.

Professor Wunsch, who showed keen insight in recognizing Thea's talent, wonders:

What was it about the child that one believed in? Was it her dogged industry so unusual in this free-and-easy country? Was it her imagination? More likely it was because she had both imagination and stubborn will, curiously balancing and interpenetrating each other. There was something unconscious and un-awakened about her, that tempted curiosity. She had a kind of seriousness that he had not met with in a pupil before. She hated difficult things, and yet she could never pass one by. . . . She had the power to make a great effort to lift a weight heavier than herself.<sup>16</sup>

Thea Kronborg's life was nothing but the flowering of the qualities Professor Wunsch had discovered in her at an early age. Years later when she was studying under Harsanyi, he was impressed by the same thing about her, "an unusual power of work." And when she matured as an artist Harsanyi said that her secret was ". . . passion. That is all. It is an open secret, and perfectly safe. Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials."<sup>17</sup> Thea has something which intensely attracts people who have artistic sensibility. That is why Harsanyi really cared for teaching her, and tried so hard to bring out all the possibilities in her. She could never find herself by playing the piano, though she worked desperately, most of the time unsatisfied. In no other period of her life were her strong will and stubborn passion more keenly seen than in those days of her struggle with herself.

In the pursuit of her art she uncompromisingly follows her artistic conscience and sometimes her intuition. After Harsanyi's discovery of her voice she studied under Bower, who was excellent in technical instruction, but lacked the quality of Harsanyi, with whom she felt congeniality.

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<sup>16</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 570-1.

She is never happy under Bower. She first resents the vulgarity, showiness, and materialism of Bower's professional pupils, and is especially dissatisfied with the way he compromises with them. When she goes back to Moonstone for a vacation, she suffers with her family in the same sense. Thea's sister and brothers are just like the Bergson boys, who do not have any imagination and are jealous of Thea's larger experience. In her home town she was expected to sing in churches and at funerals, which her sister, for instance, thought Thea's duty. Thea's quick and instinctive appreciation of beauty, her utter disregard of prejudice and conventions, directed her actions. She declined to sing at church because she knew those respectable-looking people on the whole had no ability to appreciate music. On the other hand she was willing to visit Spanish Johnny and the Mexicans. She danced with them, enjoyed their music, and sang for them in one of the most beautiful scenes in Willa Gather's novels. There were a sensitive exchange of emotion and overwhelming joy of appreciation of good music between Thea and the Mexicans. Her association with the disreputable Mexicans shocked her brother and her sister. But for Thea what was important was not worldly respectability. Here again we see the same quality as in Alexandra Bergson. She knows that Mexicans are extraordinary musicians and are able to appreciate almost intuitively what is great art.

Thea could not help wondering whether the Mexicans had no jealousies or neighbourly grudges as the people in Moonstone had. There was no constraint of any kind there . . . , but a kind of natural harmony about their movements, their greetings, their low conversation, their smiles.<sup>18</sup>

Thea sang for them and "this was the first time she had ever felt the

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 289.



response that such a people can give." This kind of experience is completely alien to her sister Ann.

The subtlest example of her sensitiveness to finesse is seen in her response and appreciation of the Cliff-Dwellers' ruins, ". . . from the ancient dwelling there came always a dignified, unobtrusive sadness; now stronger, now fainter . . . but always present, a part of the air one breathed."<sup>19</sup> Thea felt the ancient people's perception of the mysterious power which resides in the grandeur of nature, and which conveys the "sadness of history" and the "hardness of human life." She thought "all these things made one feel that one ought to do one's best, and help to fulfill some desire of the dust that slept there."<sup>20</sup> Years after she said, reflecting this experience, "They taught me the inevitable hardness of human life. No artist gets far who doesn't know that."<sup>21</sup>

Thea Kronborg is a complex figure; besides all those qualities above seen there is a strange absence of weak intellectuality or sentimentality. Perhaps it is Scandinavian doggedness. Once Ottenburg said, "I've decided that you never do a single thing without ulterior motive."<sup>22</sup> Her love for Ottenburg is typically Thea Kronborg's own. Thea gave her love because of gratitude, and agreed to marry him. But after she knew he was married, she did not hesitate to leave for Germany to study. She refused to accept financial support from Ottenburg, but she did not hesitate to ask for help from Doctor Archie. She knew that Doctor Archie was the only person

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

she could ask for it.

During her stay in Germany Thea's mother, to whom she was greatly indebted for her excellent qualities, died. Her mother was the only person in the family who understood Thea. When she heard that her mother was on her death bed, she would have gone back to see her if she had not felt a still stronger obligation to her art. She knew that she absolutely had to stay or lose everything.

We have a direct statement of what Willa Cather wanted to convey:

What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape; the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from commonness. She seemed wholly at the mercy of accident; but to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen.<sup>23</sup>

Mrs. Kronborg has larger capacity than her husband, though in her whole life she always admired her husband's honesty and goodness. She was "active, practical, unruffled; good-humoured, but determined." Moreover she had a "singularly unprejudiced point of view." One of the largest enjoyments in her life was to watch Thea's unfolding. In this respect she is by far better than her husband. "Mr. Kronborg considered Thea a remarkable child, but so were all his children remarkable."<sup>24</sup> However, Mrs. Kronborg found Thea "more interesting than her other children, and she took her more seriously." She always told the other children "You ought to know enough to let Thea alone." This is where Mrs. Kronborg differs from her husband. She understood Thea in the best sense. When Professor Wunsch said Thea had a "talent," Mrs. Kronborg was the only person who could understand what Professor Wunsch exactly meant, "To any other

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. vii.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

woman there, it would have meant that a child must have her hair curled every day and must play in public. Mrs. Kronborg knew it meant that Thea must practise four hours a day."<sup>25</sup> In her disposition there was a complete absence of littleness and sham--she would even encourage Thea to visit the Mexican gathering because she knew Thea would really enjoy it. Indeed if Thea has something admirable in her disposition, it must have come from her mother. Willa Cather says of this naturally understanding and kind woman that she would have made a good chess player, for she had a head for moves and positions.

#### B. Norwegian Characters

Willa Cather presents another rather charming member of the Kronborg family, Thea's Aunt Tillie, who is "more like the Norwegian" than Swedish. She was an eager admirer of Thea because she had intuition and "romantic imagination" to find possibilities in her niece. She was an example of "a belief that people who are foolish about the more obvious things of life are apt to have peculiar insight into what lies beyond the obvious," in "older countries, where dress and opinions and manners are not so thoroughly standardized."<sup>26</sup> She always made some enemies by advocating Thea's "wonderfulness" everywhere, in a church group and a drama club she belonged to. "By one amazing indiscretion Tillie very nearly lost her hold upon the Moonstone Drama Club."<sup>27</sup> Once they chose Thea to take the leading role in a very ambitious play they were putting on. When

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

they announced it to Tillie, they expected her to be overcome with joy, but to their surprise she looked embarrassed and said,

Thea hasn't got time to do any showing off. Her time to show off ain't come yet. I expect she'll make us all sit up when it does. No use asking her to take the part. She'd turn her nose up at it. I guess they'd be glad to get her in the Denver Dramatics, if they could.<sup>28</sup>

With this queer aunt, Thea is always very patient, although she is ashamed of her behavior very often. It is strange because Thea usually does not have enough patience with other people.

Norwegian Ivar in O Pioneers! is one of Willa Gather's striking characters. Usually Norwegians are considered religious people, but Ivar is more than that. His religious fervor is sometimes beyond ordinary comprehension so that the neighbors decided that he was crazy and violent. He becomes irritable only when people disturb his belief or solitude. For this reason he hates people. He has a strange sense which enables him to communicate with animals, which comes from his extreme love for them. At the bottom of his heart is a truly simple, childlike quality. He reads the Norwegian Bible in his dugout and gets comfort from it. He puts on a clean shirt on Sundays, though he never belongs to any church. He simply does not like civilization, "the litter of human dwellings: the broken food, the bits of broken china, the old wash-boilers and tea-kettles thrown into the sunflower patch."<sup>29</sup>

However, Ivar has his own peculiar tastes. He likes cleanness and tidiness in his simple life. His belief was that his simple way of living, his closeness to the wilderness, is truer to the teaching of his Bible. He did not like the manners of the kitchen girls in Alexandra's household

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>29</sup>O Pioneers!, p. 37.

because they seemed to be too familiar toward their mistress; so he always speaks to Alexandra in terms of the deepest respect to set them a good example. Likewise he has his own way in everything, therefore he resents the attitude of people toward him.

You believe that every one should worship God in the way revealed to him. But that is not the way of this country. The way here is for all to do alike. I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I do not cut my hair, and because I have visions. At home, in the old country, there were many like me, who had been touched by God, or who had seen things in the grave yard at night and were different afterward. We thought nothing of it, and let them alone. But here, if a man is different in his feet or in his head, they put him in the asylum.<sup>30</sup>

It is difficult to say whether his character is from Norwegian strains or not, but some peculiar quality, perhaps the lack of intellectual quality derived from intuitive imagination, conveys a feeling of an old country. One can feel this coming from his extreme honesty and goodness which most innocent creatures on earth understand. It is not altogether strange, therefore, that he was the most understanding and sympathetic helper when Alexandra was troubled and depressed. Willa Cather seems to mean that in Ivar's quality so different from others, even if that difference does not mean superior gifts as in the heroine, there is something better than conventional petty-minded people.

Willa Cather presents furthermore some other Norwegian characters of considerable importance in My Antonia. Norwegian girls who are hired in Black Hawk are always seen in contrast with American girls, being superior in their charm and sometimes sparkling liveliness. Especially Lena Lingard is one of Willa Cather's most innocently sensuous beauties. Mrs. Harling, another interesting Norwegian character, has enthusiasm

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-3.

and vivacity to an unusual degree and exhibits an interesting disposition in her violent likes and dislikes. However, without detailed examination of those minor Norwegian characters, the above observation on those who have strongly colored personalities will suffice to show Willa Cather's interest in them and her opinion of them.

## CHAPTER III

### BOHEMIANS

In O Pioneers! Willa Cather juxtaposes Alexandra Bergson and a striking Bohemian girl, Marie Shabata. The resulting contrast is interesting. When we turn our eyes from Alexandra's "Scandinavian doggedness" to this Bohemian girl, we observe some kind of sprightliness in her all the time. It is perhaps the difference between Scandinavian gravity and Slavonic impulsiveness. Both Thea Kronborg and Marie Shabata are passionate girls, but the former's is persistent passion and the latter's is like a flame of fire. Alexandra compares Swedish and Bohemian girls: "Most of my girls have married men they were afraid of. I believe there is a good deal of the cow in most Swedish girls. You high-strung Bohemians can't understand us. We're a terribly practical people."<sup>1</sup> Here "high-strung" seems to mean intensity of feeling or passion.

Marie Shabata represents some of the Bohemian characteristics--impulsiveness, gaiety, and warm-heartedness. She is always vividly alive and the incarnation of passion, beauty, and loveliness. "She was incapable of being lukewarm about anything that pleased her. She simply did not know how to give a half-hearted response."<sup>2</sup> Nobody could help loving her, and her lovely figure and intensity of expression enslaved and

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<sup>1</sup>Cather, O Pioneers!, pp. 228-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

maddened men's hearts. Even when she was but a small child, she was always in the middle of the crowd of her admirers: "A coaxing little red mouth, and round, yellow-brown eyes. Every one noted her eyes; the brown iris had golden glints that made them look like gold-stone, or in softer lights, like that Colorado mineral called tiger-eye."<sup>3</sup> Her admirers were delighted with her good looks, for "they seldom saw so pretty and carefully nurtured a child. They told her that she must choose one of them for a sweetheart."<sup>4</sup>

Even after she ran away from the convent school and married a man like Frank Shabata, people liked her as much as they had when she was little. All the neighbors were very patient with Frank Shabata's jealous attitude for Marie's sake. After church, people would see her standing on the road laughing and shaking hands with people. She looked excited and gay. If, at the fair, she had a stand and sold candy it was the most popular place. All kinds of people crowded around her, French and Bohemian boys, and the priest himself.

She was not happy with her husband, who used to be a very handsome and attractive playboy. She captured his "proud heart," but also she fell in love with him. She confessed that "he used to be awfully gay . . . when he was a young man. . . . Frank would be all right in the right place. . . . He ought to have a different kind of wife."<sup>5</sup> She knew that Frank was the kind of person who needed all of her attention; she must not be interested in anything else but Frank. However, such loyalty was impossible for a person like Marie. She was the one who had suggested their running away to marry. Therefore, she felt the fault was more hers than

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 196-7.



his, and her warm-heartedness always sympathized with Frank Shabata. She could not help loving Emil Bergson, but she also knew it was not the right thing for her to do. She seems to resent herself when she says, looking at the trees in the field, "I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do."<sup>6</sup> That is why in spite of her passionate love for Emil Bergson she could not run away with him.

Marie's personality was beyond the comprehension of common sense and morality. Even Alexandra could not understand completely her insistence on delight in life. Marie gave away everything to live. "She'll work all day and go to a Bohemian wedding and dance all night, and drive the hay wagon for a cross man [Frank] next morning."<sup>7</sup> Emil always wondered "why had she ever run away with Frank Shabata, and how could she go on laughing and working and taking an interest in things? Why did she like so many people?"<sup>8</sup> But this was the way that she, by her nature, must express herself.

Moreover, she once said that she would not like to live beyond thirty. She should be always young, lovable, and full of life. The whole tragedy of Marie and Emil was caused by her loveliness and passion. It was not her fault; she could not help being herself. Alexandra Bergson only observed the situation superficially with her conception that both Emil and Marie were good, and only bad boys ran after "married women," and after all Marie was a "married woman." However, after the tragedy Willa Cather makes it clear through Alexandra's recognition that "Marie

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

was, after all, Marie; not merely a 'married woman.'"<sup>9</sup> Her happy and affectionate nature had brought destruction and sorrow to all who had loved her. Was there anything wrong in being warm-hearted and impulsive like Marie Shabata? Willa Cather seems to give her answer to this question when Carl Linstrum says:

There are women who spread ruin around them through no fault of theirs, just by being too beautiful, too full of life and love. They cannot help it. People come to them as people go to a warm fire in winter. I used to feel that in her when she was a little girl. Do you remember how all the Bohemians crowded round her in the store . . .? You remember those yellow sparks in her eyes?<sup>10</sup>

Willa Cather suggests that although Marie caused a destruction by her personality, her personality was, by far, richer and more colorful than ordinary people; and that her intense passion and incapacity for "being lukewarm" needed more sympathy and understanding.

The whole impression of My Antonia is, above anything else, of a colorful and fresh personality named Antonia--a girl with sturdy character and dynamic life. "Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade."<sup>11</sup> Antonia's personality is a happy blend of those sensitive qualities Marie Shabata has--playfulness, impulsive fire of passion, warm-heartedness, and sturdiness. She never loses her honest attitude towards life, which is inherent in her.

In the very beginning a man who saw this Bohemian girl among the immigrant family on the train noted that she was "as bright as a new dollar." Later, though she spoke very little English and was in humble circumstances, she was the dominating character because she was a kind

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 304-5.

<sup>11</sup>Cather, My Antonia (New York, 1954), p. 352.

of person whose inner strength enabled her to live a richer life. Therefore her attitude toward life was always eager, passionate, and tenacious. When she had only fragmentary English, she had opinions about everything.<sup>12</sup> In spite of adverse circumstances--hard work and scarcity of food--she instinctively knew how to live on the open prairie. We see her eagerness to know how to say "blue sky" in English, and her intense pleasure when she learns it. She could always forget about the troubles at home or difficulties in life in running away over the prairie, scaring rabbits or starting up flocks of quail.<sup>13</sup> This is the picture of her first period in the new country. Years later when she was over forty and the mother of ten children, this same kind of "fire of life" had not been lost.

After her father's death she began to exhibit the strength and tenacity of will toward the life she must confront. She worked in the field like a man, barefooted and ragged. "But she has such fine brown legs and arms, and splendid colour in her cheeks--like those big dark red plums."<sup>14</sup> Her honest attitude towards life was seen again when she came back to her farm after her imprudent and unfortunate marriage. Her worldly brother and ambitious mother had no sympathy with her at all. They grumbled over the whole situation. Antonia took her destiny calmly and started to work as hard as she could. "There was a new kind of strength in the gravity of her face, and her colour still gave her that look of deep-seated health and ardour."<sup>15</sup> This is Antonia's attitude towards

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

life. She never cried over what had been done already, but her sturdy character pushed her forward to pay for her fault. She did not take her pretty clothes she had made when she went away to marry Larry Donovan out of the trunks again. She took a man's work on the farm quietly and steadily so that no neighbors could make unsympathetic remarks about her, and they respected her industry and tried to treat her as if nothing had happened.<sup>16</sup>

While she was working in town as a "hired girl," Antonia began to be more feminine as well as to show a certain kind of talent. She picked up all the household tasks as quickly as she had learned how to speak English. She exhibited unusual talent for dressing up charmingly imitating the very fashionable ladies in town. The same thing was true with her dance. As soon as she learned some dance steps, she became the best dancer on the floor. Her talent for dancing made one think if "old Mr. Shimerda had stayed in New York and picked up a living with his fiddle, how different Antonia's life might have been!"<sup>17</sup> Although she never tried music training by herself nor studied any books, she always appreciated good music and had an admiration for books. This kind of sensitiveness she had inherited from her father.

Antonia is, like Marie Shabata, capable of intense passion, but sometimes completely incapable of recognizing anything outside of her impulse. This tendency was seen even when she was a child. When she was working at the Harlings, Mrs. Harling observed that her greatest fault was that "she so often stopped her work and fell to playing with the children."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

When she was told to stop going to dances, she just could not imagine herself without dancing and the gay crowd of boys around her, and did not hesitate to leave that most understanding woman, Mrs. Harling, and go to the Cutters, who had a very bad reputation. She declared, "A girl like me has got to take her good times when she can. Maybe there won't be any tent next year. I guess I want to have my fling, like the other girls."<sup>19</sup> She is incapable, here, of recognizing how she has been happy at the Harlings, or the moral obligation she has toward many people. With the same imprudence she ran after a man like Larry Donovan, who was so much inferior to Antonia's goodness and capacity. He was a well-dressed gallant and nothing else. As Antonia herself reflected later, the trouble with her was she could never believe harm of anybody she loved.<sup>20</sup>

This occasional lack of prudence in her behavior disappointed people who loved her. However, everyone realized how much better Antonia's personality was than that of the other girls who made no mistake and succeeded in their careers. After Antonia left, Mrs. Harling bitterly said that she "wished she had never let herself get fond of Antonia."<sup>21</sup> The Widow Steavens felt despair that Antonia, who had so much good in her, had come home disgraced. And that Lena Lingard, that was always a bad one . . . had turned out so well, . . . there is a great difference in the principles of those two girls. And here it was the good one that had come to grief!<sup>22</sup>

Those readers who had known Antonia as always ambitious and vivid

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

might have difficulty in recognizing her when she was married to an obscure Bohemian and the mother of ten. However, it is not the picture of the failure of the girl who used to be so ambitious. Antonia was essentially genial and warm-hearted with sound mind and body, and, as Mrs. Harling had noticed her love for children and animals, Antonia had the natural capacity to be a good housewife and mother. Antonia's husband was, by no means, happy in the new world. The life they established was a fine life, but it was not certainly the kind of life he wanted to live. Like Mr. Shimerda he missed the gay company he had always been associated with. However, he did say "at first I near go crazy with lonesomeness . . . but my woman got such a warm heart. She always make it as good for me as she could."<sup>23</sup> This is the secret of her success.

Willa Cather says through Jim Burden's comment that Antonia, in the full vigor of her personality, is "a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races."<sup>24</sup>

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. . . . She 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. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions.<sup>25</sup>

Mr. Shimerda in My Antonia is an unfortunate Bohemian immigrant. He is an intelligent, warm-hearted, and cultured man. "There was not a man in Black Hawk who had the intelligence or cultivation, much less the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

personal distinction, of Antonia's father."<sup>26</sup> His temperament prevented him from grumbling over his miserable life. One can see the glimpse of the same quiet personality as Anton Rosicky has in Mr. Shimerda. However, Mr. Shimerda was so sensitive that he could not adjust himself to the lonely and mean life he had to confront. If he had had a strong and honest attitude toward life, he might have been able to endure life in the new rough country, if not to adjust to it. He did not want to come to America, but his wife, less refined, coarser, and more covetous, had persuaded him. Antonia told that her father had grieved deeply on leaving his old country and friends with whom he used to play music. Within himself the memory and nostalgia overcame any ambition and desire. He gives a glimpse of an older, mellower, and soberer world, and his suicide leaves us the impression of the world mysterious.

Mr. Shimerda's suffering was that of a cultured man. He had much education and knew so many things that even "Bohemian priests came to talk to him," and he had skill in playing the violin and horn. However, after he came to the new country, he never played music, even though his daughter begged him to. "Somedays he takes his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings" but never made music. His violin symbolized his good old days that were lost. Mr. Shimerda wanted Mrs. Burden, the kind and helpful neighbor, to know that they were not beggars in the old country, that his family were respected, and that he had some savings left so that when the spring comes he could be a little bit better off and able to build a new house. However, his desire was very weak.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

The manner of his speaking was kindly. Though he never spoke much he conveyed much affection when he spoke to Antonia. One day when he came back from hunting, he brought back a green insect and put it in Antonia's hair tenderly, and when the insect started to chirp faintly he listened as if it were beautiful music.<sup>27</sup> This sensitive man found that it was impossible to endure life in the mean environment, without any culture or beauty, in the crowded clutter of his cave, with his coarse grumbling wife. "The old man had come to believe that peace had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the world he had left so far behind."<sup>28</sup> Only when he was in a warm and peaceful atmosphere did he look rested and comfortable.

He was always neatly dressed. "Everything about this old man was in keeping with his dignified manner." Even in the miserable winter in his cave "he was clean and neat as usual, with the green neckcloth and his coral pin."<sup>29</sup> Even to the moment of his death he carried himself thus.

He done everything natural. You knew he was always sort of fixy, and fixy he was to the last. He shaved after dinner, and washed himself all over after the girls had done the dishes. . . . Then he put on a clean shirt and clean socks, and after he was dressed he kissed Antonia and the little one, took his gun and said he was going out to hunt rabbits. . . . When we found him, everything was decent.<sup>30</sup>

Although he was completely incapable of adjusting to the new life and supporting his family, his memory has been always in Antonia's mind. When she became the mother of ten, she told that her father had been "dead all these years" and "yet he is more real than almost anybody else." His

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 96.



qualities were something precious for Jim Burden's life too. Jim Burden remembered Mr. Shimerda when he was making the valedictorian speech and he, in his mind, dedicated it to that unfortunate cultured man. Mrs.

Burden says:

When [Antonia] first came to this country . . . and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she'd led, . . . Things would have been very different with poor Antonia if her father had lived.<sup>31</sup>

Mr. Shimerda would have been the kind of person who can keep human life from losing beauty and becoming mean. But he was too sensitive and weak to continue the hard life. Again, Willa Cather seems to demand sympathy toward this kind of people.

Very different from Mr. Shimerda, Anton Rosicky is an ideal portrait of a Bohemian immigrant farmer. Perhaps he is one of the most genuine and serene persons Willa Cather ever created. His story gives a sense of what such a life stands for in terms of a satisfactory adjustment in the new farming environment, and all that was significant in the man's whole life.

His life is well established and stable, with a good-natured and simple wife and five handsome boys, all of whom have "natural good manners." As Doctor Burleigh says Rosicky's house is the most comfortable place to visit. However, his life story is by no means without hardship and meanness. The hardship and meanness did not affect his personality because he never lost his taste for a certain kind of life he liked and his warmest love for his fellowmen. His face suggested "a contented disposition and a reflective quality that was gay rather than grave. This gave him a certain detachment, the easy manner of an onlooker and observer."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-4.

<sup>32</sup>Cather, Obscure Destinies (New York, 1932), pp. 4-5.

He was a quiet and reserved man, yet as the above quotation suggests he knew the delight of life which is one of the Bohemian traits.

As Mrs. Rosicky often realizes, Anton Rosicky is gentle and "city-bred." Though he had married a "rough farm girl, he had never touched her without gentleness."<sup>33</sup> Although he has those qualities that only a cultivated man can attain, he is a very simple man "like a tree that has many roots, but one tap-root that goes down deep."<sup>34</sup> By saying the root goes down deep, Willa Cather seems to mean that this man had something by which his whole life was directed and sustained. As we observe Rosicky's life, we see that it is an unusual degree of good taste which directed it. That is why his life is extremely serene. He could not stand a certain kind of coarseness in life and people. His life was sometimes hard, but at the same time "soft," because Rosicky could never be brutal and coarse. When he reflects upon his youth, he feels much satisfaction and gratitude about his present life. He remembers that he had to take away money from a poor hungry child who "let it go so wistfully because it was money due his boss;" and that he had to see "the face of a woman become like a wolf's from struggle and famine." It was those kinds of things that Rosicky hated with his whole heart. He wanted to live on the farm because he was disgusted with the situation in which he could not keep his distance from the "depraved and poisonous specimens of man."<sup>35</sup>

Another remarkable quality of Anton Rosicky is his extraordinary love and warm sympathy toward people. He could not feel easy so long as

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

he knew somebody was suffering. Once he even did begging which he had never done before or since, because by his fault he had eaten a duck which his poor landlady had prepared for her hungry family for Christmas dinner. His sympathy toward his daughter-in-law, the only native American in the family, is the warmest one. He understood perfectly how this girl felt lonely and uncongenial with the different kind of people. He gave his car for her to use on a weekend although he knew quite well that his other sons had been waiting for a whole week to have fun. It was important for him that "either a woman had that sweetness at her heart or she hadn't. You couldn't always tell by the look of them; but if they had that, everything came out right in the end."<sup>36</sup> His daughter-in-law felt that Rosicky was really a warm person, that "nobody in the world, not her mother, nor [her husband], or anyone, really loved her as much as old Rosicky did."<sup>37</sup>

He never cared for a life which was rich in a material or a monetary sense. He loved life itself and knew how to live. Again his innate taste determined his life. The neighbors of Rosicky sometimes wondered why Rosicky "did not get on fast." When most of the neighbors bought new land to make more profit Rosicky was indifferent.

He was industrious, and so were his boys, but they were rather free and easy, weren't pushers, and they did not always show good judgment. They were comfortable, they were out of debt, but they did not get much ahead.<sup>38</sup>

Doctor Burleigh is right when he says: "People as generous and warm

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

hearted and affectionate as the Rosickys never got ahead much; maybe you couldn't enjoy life and put it into the bank, too."<sup>39</sup>

One of the incidents illustrates Rosicky's remarkable quality of mind--his attitude toward life--very clearly. On the Fourth of July a terrible hot wind attacked their farm and all the crops were burnt out. He actually lost all the crops of that year. Rosicky was cultivating the corn when the hot wind came, and after he witnessed his disaster he quietly came home and proposed to have a picnic dinner in the orchard. He killed the best chickens to prepare special fried chickens, and washed his children and himself. After he refreshed from the sweat of the day, they took dinner under the Linden trees. It was a lovely and peaceful picnic dinner. Rosicky did not tell anyone of the sad news; he did not even look discouraged. After supper his wife asked about the corn he was cultivating:

"Corn," he says, "there ain't no corn."

"What you talkin' about?" [his wife asked,] "Ain't we got forty acres?"

"We ain't got an ear," he says, "nor nobody else ain't got none. All the corn in this country was cooked by three o'clock today, like you'd roasted it in the oven. . . . No crop this year," he says, "That's why we're havin' a picnic. We might as well enjoy what we got."<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Rosicky told her sons years later:

That's how your father behaved, when all the neighbours was so discouraged they couldn't look you in the face. And we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an' our neighbours wasn't a bit better off for bein' miserable. Some of 'em grieved till they got poor digestions and couldn't relish what they did have.<sup>41</sup>

Rosicky knew how to live and what was the precious thing in life. Just as his wife preferred putting some color into their children's faces to

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

putting money in the bank, Rosicky loved things which make life richer and more endurable. After Rosicky's death Doctor Burleigh felt Rosicky's life had been "complete and beautiful." And so it impresses readers of Willa Cather's story.

It is people like these, or their attitude toward life, that Willa Cather felt contributed to the American provincial world, which too often lacked color and sensitiveness.

## CHAPTER IV

### GERMANS

Willa Cather shows definite appreciation of German people for their characteristics and way of life. Although she does not present many German characters who play important roles in her fiction, in various places we see her recognition of German qualities--extraordinary industry and thoroughness in doing things, love for rich and colorful family life, and love and talent for music. In O Pioneers! Alexandra Bergson always admires Germans for their extraordinary industry in watering their orchards. She says, "that's one thing I like about Germans; they make an orchard grow if they can't make anything else."<sup>1</sup> In One of Ours we find a line such as "German neighbours, the Yoeders, who hated to stop work for a quarter of an hour on any account."<sup>2</sup>

In many places Willa Cather portrays German families who are particularly remarkable for their beautiful and colorful gardens and abundance of planted trees. This was a very important aspect of their contribution to life on the newly opened prairie, for, "Trees were so rare in that country, and they had to make such a hard fight to grow, that we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons."<sup>3</sup> The German neighbors whom Jim Burden visited had admirable catalpa groves

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<sup>1</sup>Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup>Cather, One of Ours, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Cather, My Antonia, p. 29.

and big elm trees. It is apparent that the German people's effort and love of growing plants added much color to life on the land where there were no gardens except "the big yellow pumpkins that lay about unprotected by their withering vines."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Willa Cather says,

There is hardly a German family in the most arid parts of Utah, New Mexico, or Arizona, but has its oleander trees. However loutish the American-born sons of the family may be, there was never one who refused to give his muscle to the back-breaking task of getting those tubbed trees down into the cellar in the fall and up into the sunlight in the spring. They may strive to avert the day, but they grapple with the tub at last.<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Kohler in The Song of the Lark is a remarkable example of this German love of maintenance of cultured home life in terms of making a beautiful garden. Her ambition was to reproduce "a bit of her own village in the Rhine Valley" in her garden.<sup>6</sup> She had tamarisk hedges, European lindens, many kinds of flowers, and fruit trees.

She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned. In the blaze of the open plain she was stupid and blind like an owl. Shade, shade; that was what she was always planning and making.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Wunsch's only hope was to end his life with her and to be buried in her garden, under the linden trees. For Thea Kronborg it was a precious thing too. When she became a great singer in New York, she reflected upon it and said that "the old things, things like Kohler's garden" were very precious for her because they sustained her art.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 551.

Another remarkable characteristic of Mrs. Kohler is her love for music. She always took pleasure in listening to Thea Kronborg taking lessons from her permanent guest, Professor Wunsch. Although she had never had the opportunity of going to a concert or listening to any singing, she had a natural capacity for enjoying good music. Thea usually sang especially for Mrs. Kohler, whose face was relaxed and perfectly happy listening to Thea. She was one of a few people in the town who could enjoy the music heard from the Mexican settlement. The night when Thea sang with the Mexicans, while the whole neighborhood was asleep, Mrs. Kohler could not stay in bed when she heard their music. It is one of the beautiful scenes in the novel that she, with her husband, opened the window and listened to the music across the gulch:

The soprano voice, like a fountain jet, shot up into the light. . . . How it leaped from among those dusky male voices! How it played in and about and around and over them, like a goldfish darting among creek minnows, like a yellow butterfly soaring above a swarm of dark ones.<sup>9</sup>

Her husband, **Fritz Kohler**, is an extremely quiet person. Willa Cather does not denote much character drawing to him. However, in his work as a tailor he is a perfectionist. His "piece-picture" was a marvelous work of art. He took much time and chose a more difficult way in order to produce a better effect. This kind of artistic conscience may be derived from German traits.

A German family, the Erlichs, in One of Ours is significant in connection with Willa Cather's appreciation of the German way of life. Claude Wheeler, a sensitive young boy from a small town in Nebraska, found their family life was very different from that of those people to whom he belonged. This recognition of the quality of a German family's life

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 296.



influenced Claude Wheeler's whole outlook. Life for him came to have a richer meaning after he knew the Erlichs. There was nothing wonderful about the rooms of the Erlichs' house except a large number of books which looked "interesting and hard-used."<sup>10</sup> The boys in the family were mentally so alert that they took interest in many fields and discussed together in extremely interesting ways.

The center of this family, Mrs. Erlich, had a rich and colorful culture, "Her face, . . . suggested a daguerreo-type; there was something old-fashioned and picturesque about it."<sup>11</sup> She was most understanding about Claude's unfortunate state of mind and invited him to visit her house often. When she talked to Claude, she taught much about life and he felt from her full warmth and kindness. She had something which made one think "Beechwoods and walled towns, or about Carl Schurz and the Romantic revolution."<sup>12</sup> Her Christmas cake was very elaborate. It had tradition she inherited from her own old culture. Beside the many ingredients, there were things which were not named; "the fragrance of old friendships, the glow of early memories, belief in wonder-working rhymes and songs."<sup>13</sup> Willa Cather conveys through Claude Wheeler's perception the atmosphere of German culture.

Willa Cather seems to suggest that the Germans knew the secret of avoiding monotony in family life: simple practices and customs, small things in themselves, contributed a precious element necessary to make daily life more colorful and attractive. This kind of life was absolutely

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<sup>10</sup>Cather, One of Ours, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

necessary for the young people like Claude Wheeler who came from the place where most people did not have anything like taste. Claude first thought the Erlichs were rich, but soon discovered they were rather poor people. "They merely knew how to live, . . . spent their money on themselves, instead of on machines to do the work and machines to entertain people. Machines . . . could not make pleasure, whatever else they could do. They could not make agreeable people either."<sup>14</sup>

Professor Wunsch in The Song of the Lark is a marvelous creation of a German character. Nobody knew about his past. When he drifted from somewhere into Moonstone, he was a drunken and ragged musician. His entire worldly property consisted of two shirts. The whole town was surprised when the Kohlers took him to live with them. People believed he was merely one of the wandering musicians who were incapable of being better off by any means and were scandalized by him. However, he proved a real artist and a better musician than any other music teacher in town. From time to time he showed glimpses which revealed that he had once been a distinguished musician and teacher. Beneath his idleness there was a severe artistic integrity--a strong belief in his theory of art and the artist--a thoroughness of mental discipline, and a great capacity for emotion. In this sense he is a real German.

Though Thea Kronborg was only twelve years old when she began to study under Professor Wunsch, she recognized his greatness. And the Professor recognized Thea's great promise. When people asked Thea if he acted during the lessons as if he had been drinking, she angrily answered, "He knows a lot. More than anybody. I don't care if he does

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

drink."<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Kronborg also recognized his quality as an artist. "He's a good teacher" she said; "It's good for us he does drink. He'd never be in a little place like this if he didn't have some weakness. . . . He's careful with his scholars; he don't use bad language."<sup>16</sup>

In teaching Thea, Professor Wunsch expressed his passion because he found in Thea someone to whom he could communicate some of his ideals of art. It is hard to tell what was the conflict within Professor Wunsch which broke him down and caused him to become a failure--to seek refuge in alcohol. However, one of the causes of his progressive disintegration was the fact that he had been embittered by the necessity of teaching provincial American girls. It was impossible to teach the mellow tradition of art and the tremendous demands of artistic integrity to those girls whose greatest interest was to play something showy in a pretty dress at a church concert. They had no idea about the intelligence and emotion needed for music. He felt bitterly that music was never an art for them, and was maddened by the shallowness and complacency of the people. From that most pathetic scene when the Professor repeatedly sang a passage from Orpheus,

Ach, ich habe sie verloren  
 . . . . .  
 Euridice, Euridice.<sup>17</sup> . . .

we know he had lost his Euridice once so dear to him. We do not know exactly whom and what he had lost. But he must have lost much of his culture, art, and artistic ambition.

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<sup>15</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

Professor Wunsch taught only one pupil seriously. He was uncompromising in teaching Thea the necessity of hard work and persistence. He gave her a severe discipline. When she mashed her fingers and was unable to practice he let her work with her left hand only.<sup>18</sup> The best training he gave her was in the development of her musical intelligence and power to work. He did not give her wider information about the composers and their works. The result was as Harsanyi later noticed that "he had never had one more intelligent, and he had never had one so ignorant."<sup>19</sup> What Professor Wunsch taught her was the essence of art. He insisted that Thea must play a "Ballade" by Reinecke at the Sunday School Christmas concert if she played anything at all. Even Mrs. Kronborg said that the "Ballade" would never take the "Moonstone audience." However, the Professor said "It is time already that they learn something."<sup>20</sup>

His enthusiasm, perfectionism, and passion for art were shown when he sang an aria from Orpheus.<sup>21</sup> He told Thea about the great woman singer who, he considered, was the only capable singer in the world for that aria. He said she was the most "Kunst-ler-isch."<sup>22</sup> As he always said "There is only one right way" in art. This kind of enthusiasm for perfection and clarity of mind is characteristic of German mentality.

Artists must have something by which they can know the secret of the universe, Professor Wunsch says. "It is necessary to know if you know

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

something. Something can not be taught. If you not know in the beginning, you not know in the end."<sup>23</sup> What he called "something" is the secret, "What make the rose to red, the sky to blue, the man to love--in der Brust, in der Brust it is, und ohne dieses giebt es keine Kunst, giebt es keine Kunst."<sup>24</sup> Art for him is neither something which can be imitated nor something fanciful which American girls learn. The people who are like the ones in the fairy tales, with "a grinning face and hollow in the inside," cannot learn.

Although Thea could not understand what Professor Wunsch meant exactly, he lit the fire in her mind. He told her "Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. The world is little, people are little, human life is little. There is only one big thing---desire."<sup>25</sup> Nobody in Moonstone could make such a profound statement but Professor Wunsch. He made Thea realize that if she wanted to be a musician she must be a good one---a real artist. After a drinking frenzy he left Moonstone for somewhere, but the memory of his personality long remained in the minds of those who recognized his real quality. Although he is personally a failure in life, Willa Cather seems to emphasize that the existence of people like him is important in the world.

Willa Cather gives other German characters who exhibit some remarkable qualities, though they are not as strong personalities as Professor Wunsch. Sebastian, for example, in Lucy Gayheart, was willing to say

The people in choral societies really get something out of music, something to help them through their lives, not something to talk about.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Plumbers and brewers and bank clerks and dressmakers, they wouldn't be there unless it meant something.<sup>26</sup>

And he often made engagements with those kinds of people, although most musicians of his distinction do not. Jacob Gayheart, a watchmaker in a small town, was a German who played the clarinet and the flute. He often forgot about his necessity to earn a living in order to give lessons to the town band. No further detailed observation will be needed to prove that Willa Cather was deeply interested in the German character and had a profound appreciation of it.

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<sup>26</sup>Cather, Lucy Gayheart, p. 68.

## CHAPTER V

### SPANISH-MEXICANS AND INDIANS

The main source of the character study of Mexicans and Indians is Death Comes for the Archbishop, in which Willa Cather presents various native Mexican and Indian characters who, as the French missionaries discover, represent strong traits of their own cultures. Therefore both of the two groups of people will be treated in this chapter.

#### A. Spanish-Mexicans

Willa Cather shows a warm sympathy and appreciation of the Mexican people in her delineation of their characters. Her portrayures of the Mexicans are rich in variety, and extremely charming. Instead of presenting one or two major characters, she shows us many minor, yet, in each way, colorful ones. She seems to be trying to convey the virtues of Mexican qualities which seldom receive appropriate attention. Mexicans have a mixed cultural heritage of Indian and Spanish, but with the Mexicans in Willa Cather's fiction Spanish traits are often dominant. The native priests who appear in Death Comes for the Archbishop have strong Spanish characteristics including Spanish passion. Spanish Johnny and his neighbor Mexicans in The Song of the Lark are gay, carefree, and naturally indolent. However their easy-going way of life has a strange mixture of that enthusiasm which is characteristic of the Spanish.

The Mexican people in the Mexican settlement in The Song of the Lark

are simple people toward whom the people in Moonstone have a contemptuous attitude; to them they are low-born foreigners and do not have "respectability." However, in spite of their simple way of living, their ability to enjoy the small pleasure of life--music or dancing--and the spontaneity of their emotions make their life warm and colorful.

Their ardent yet sensitive appreciation of music is particularly remarkable. At a Sunday School concert Thea Kronborg played the "Ballade" of Reinecke to an audience for whom a pretty little piece played by a lovely girl would have been enough. The audience was bored and fell to whispering. But a group of Mexicans in the audience really appreciated the music, and when Thea finished her performance, unusually enthusiastic applause came from them.<sup>1</sup> Their appreciation and enjoyment of music and dancing were spontaneous and sensitive too. As Thea Kronborg observed, their life was very much a family affair. Everybody--young and old--danced well and genuinely enjoyed it. Even Mrs. Tellamantez, who "always held her shoulders so stiffly," danced better than Thea. The atmosphere of their gathering was entirely spontaneous; the musicians did not keep their part only, but whenever they felt like dancing, they called some of the boys to take their instruments and went on the floor. It was very different from the dance known to Thea in which "the boys played rough jokes and thought it smart to be clumsy and to run into each other on the floor. For the square dances there was always the bawling voice of the caller, who was also the county auctioneer."<sup>2</sup> In the Mexican dance, however,

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<sup>1</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 289.



The rhythm of the music was smooth and engaging, the men were graceful and courteous. . . . There was an atmosphere of ease and friendly pleasure in the low, dimly lit room. . . . There was no constraint of any kind . . . but a kind of natural harmony about their movements, their greetings, their low conversation, their smiles.<sup>3</sup>

No other scene gives more beautifully their enthusiastic appreciation of music than that when Thea sang for them after the dance.

She had sung for churches and funerals and teachers, but she had never before sung for a really musical people, and this was the first time she had ever felt the response that such a people can give. They turned themselves and all they had over to her. For the moment they cared about nothing in the world but what she was doing. Their faces confronted her--open, eager, unprotected. She felt as if all these warm-blooded people debauched into her.<sup>4</sup>

After Thea finished one of the Mexicans said, "If you sing like that once in the City of Mexico, they just-a go crazy . . . When they like, they just-a give you the town."<sup>5</sup>

It is this kind of quality in the Mexicans, Willa Cather emphasizes over and over again, that makes life infinitely warmer and more colorful, a quality which provincial American communities represented by Moonstone so often fail to recognize.

Spanish Johnny is the most interesting and colorful example of the Mexican character. He came to Moonstone as a painter and decorator. As a worker he was clever and faithful. Because of his warm-hearted, gay, and carefree disposition his "popularity would have been unusual for a white man; for a Mexican it was unprecedented."<sup>6</sup> He was gifted in music--a tenor voice, the mandolin, and the guitar. The trouble with him was

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

that he, as people said, "periodically went crazy."<sup>7</sup> Once that kind of spell attacked him he would play the mandolin furiously and drink until he passed out. Finally he ran away from the town, wandering from one saloon to the other playing music until he was completely exhausted and became sick in heart and body. He entirely forgot about Mrs. Tellamantez and his obligation to work until he needed to come back to her to be taken care of. His conflict was that he had in his mind some inexplicable longing which he wanted to satisfy. His musical instinct and emotion sometimes grew up so intense that he needed some means to express them. Therefore, he wanted more excitement, a better and more receptive audience, and, above all, to burn up his emotion by losing himself in ecstasy. Because of this impulse he forgot all responsibility and judgment. Nobody could check his behavior, for, as Mrs. Tellamantez said, "a little thing is big to him."<sup>8</sup> Here Willa Cather suggests that Spanish Johnny is more capable of emotion and sensitiveness than most of the people who have common sense and behave accordingly. After Mrs. Tellamantez died, he decided to take the mandolin as a way of living and his life then became more regular. Years later in an opera house in New York Spanish Johnny was the most enthusiastic and perhaps one of the best listeners to Thea's performance. Spanish Johnny came out of the Opera House, and Willa Cather gives a suggestive passage:

He walked down Broadway with his hands in his overcoat pockets, wearing a smile which embraced all the stream of life that passed him and the lighted towers that rose into the limpid blue of the evening sky. If the singer, going home exhausted in her car, was wondering what was the good of it all, that smile, could she have seen it, would have answered her. It is the only commensurate answer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 573.

The Mexicans in Death Comes for the Archbishop often exhibit a combination of cunning, indolence, and generosity. They are on the whole simple, devout, and warm-hearted. When Bishop Latour lost his way in the desert somewhere in central New Mexico, he found a little Mexican dwelling and was received at one of the homes there.

From the moment he entered this room with its thick whitewashed adobe walls, Father Latour had felt a kind of peace about it. In its bareness and simplicity there was something comely, . . . He found himself very much at home with the four dark-headed men who sat beside him in the candle light. Their manners were gentle, their voices low and agreeable.<sup>10</sup>

This is a picture of typical Mexican people in Death Comes for the Archbishop.

There are the Mexican priests, who have developed authorities of their own according to their own interest and the local need. Padres Gallegos and Martinez are the extreme examples. They were, as priests, morally lax and corrupted. However, there was something very powerful and magnificent about them. Padre Gallegos was a drunkard and a professional gambler. Yet, "there was something very engaging about Gallegos as a man. As a priest, he was impossible; he was too self-satisfied and popular ever to change his ways."<sup>11</sup> Padre Martinez had, also, many scandals in his personal life and a very arrogant personality, but he was not only well learned in the Latin and Spanish classics but knew about his country so well that no one could give better accounts on the history and situation of New Mexico. He kept his church in good condition and had a large and devout congregation.

The delicate lace, snowy linen, and burnished brass on the altar told of a devoted Altar Guild. The boys who served at the altar wore rich smocks

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<sup>10</sup>Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 25-6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

of hand-made lace over their scarlet cassocks. The Bishop had never heard the Mass more impressively sung than by Father Martinez. The man had a beautiful baritone voice, and he drew from some deep well of emotional power. Nothing in the service was slighted, every phrase and gesture had its full value.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Latour thought this Mexican priest might have been a great man, if he had been rightly guided. "He had an altogether compelling personality, a disturbing, mysterious, magnetic power."<sup>13</sup>

Antonio Olivares was one of the prosperous Mexican rancheros. He had married a girl from Kentucky, who was educated at a French convent and had exceptional refinement and beauty. However, we can well imagine that the generous and gracious way of living of Olivares helped considerably to keep his wife's charm and beauty. He had refinement of dress and manners, and good taste about everything. He offered the warmest audience for his wife's music. The silver basin, pitcher, and toilet accessories that pleased Bishop Latour, the man of severe taste, all the rest of his life were the present from Olivares. He had also such sensitivity to people's taste that once his wife remarked that "her husband always gave Father Vailliant something good for the palate, and Father Latour something good for the eye."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he was the kind of person who cherished friendship. Olivares was the most understanding and clever advisor for Bishop Latour's ambition to build a cathedral in Santa Fe. It was not only his deep affection for his native town that made him wish to assist the Bishop's plan, but he liked "to help a friend

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-50.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

accomplish the desire of his heart."<sup>15</sup> Willa Cather seems to mean that it is the people like him that, among simple and sometimes savage natives, gave great comfort to the life of the French priests with generous and gracious personality.

The Mexican women in Death Comes for the Archbishop have quiet beauty and delicate charm. They are not obtrusive but always calm and modest. They have extremely delicate sensitiveness, which is usually expressed in terms of small everyday things and life. They have also spontaneous inclination to find pleasure in small things. The totality of these qualities make their life, while their way of living is simple and limited, colorful and attractive. For instance they exhibit artistry in needlework and drawnwork with which they decorate houses and churches. There was a charming account about a wooden figure of the Virgin Mary in the church of Bishop Latour. It was taken care of by the devout Mexican women who loved to sew for this Virgin. It had such a rich wardrobe--a chest full of robes and laces, and gold and silver diadems--that Father Latour thought even the Queen of England or the Empress of France did not have so many costumes.<sup>16</sup>

The wife of Kit Carson is one of the best examples of the quiet and beautiful Mexican women. Even the most refined person like Father Latour admired her quality. She received the guests with "quiet but unabashed hospitality which is a common grace in Mexican households."<sup>17</sup> Though she did not have any education and could not read, her eyes, face, and

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-80.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

conversation showed intelligence. She had a cheerful disposition and a pleasant sense of humor, but was always modest, which Bishop Latour called the "discipline of life."

Magdalena is another example. When she was saved from the horrible life with her brutal husband who murdered many travelers, and even his own children, she looked "half-witted." However, after she went to the church to serve the nuns and lived in the peaceful place, she soon recovered her natural serenity and beauty. Her beauty and serenity became a great pleasure to look at for the two missionary priests. During the last days of the Archbishop her delicate and graceful attendance was a great consolation and pleasure for him.

There is still another touching story of a simple but devout Mexican woman. Sada is an elderly slave in an American family. For nineteen years she had been cherishing but one hope that she could visit the church and pray and receive blessings. However, her American Protestant family did not allow her to go out, and she had been closely watched days and nights. One winter night Father Latour found this poor old woman crying in the garden of the church. Though she was worn out by miserable life and sorrow, "pure goodness" shone out of her countenance. Father Latour, as he prayed with her, found she remembered all the words of prayer surprisingly. The woman said, "Ah, Padre, every night I say my Rosary to my Holy Mother, no matter where I sleep."<sup>18</sup> Her face was shining in the ecstasy of joy that nineteen years of hope had come true.

Never, as he afterward told Father Vaillant, had it been permitted him to behold such deep experience of the holy joy of religion as on that pale

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

December night. He was able to feel, kneeling beside her, the preciousness of the things of the altar to her who was without possessions.<sup>19</sup>

Sada is a humble slave woman, but Willa Cather shows how it makes one's life more beautiful to cherish a noble concept, and not to lose it however hard one's life may be.

Mrs. Tellamantez, the wife of Spanish Johnny, looks strong and proud and does not have the delicate sensitiveness of Magdalena or Senor Carson, at the first glance.

Mrs. Tellamantez was always considered a very homely woman. Her face was of a strongly marked type not sympathetic to Americans. Such long, oval faces, with a full chin, a large, mobile mouth, a high nose, are not uncommon in Spain. . . . Her strong nature lived upon itself.<sup>20</sup>

However, she has also, under her proud appearance, delicate understanding for the sensitive qualities.

In Moonstone she was known for her "forbearance with her incorrigible husband." People overlooked Spanish Johnny's idleness and irresponsibility because of his exceptionally lovable personality, but they accused Mrs. Tellamantez of "putting up with him,"<sup>21</sup> and she received all the blame for her husband's conduct. Her patience and resignation were regarded as the absence of self-respect, and it was felt that they accelerated Johnny's craziness. However, she was the only person who could really understand and sympathize with what was the matter with her husband--unsatisfied longing in his heart.

'He is always fooled'--the Mexican woman spoke rapidly and tremulously, her long underlip quivering. 'He is good at heart, but he has no head. He fools himself. You do not understand in this country, you are

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>20</sup>Cather, The Song of the Lark, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

progressive. But he has no judgement, and he is fooled."<sup>22</sup>

She took up one of the white conch-shells and said, "You hear the sea; and yet the sea is very far from here. You have judgement, and you know that. But he is fooled. To him, it is the sea itself. A little thing is big to him."<sup>23</sup>

There was something "awe-inspiring" about Mrs. Tellamantez and her seashell, Thea Kronborg felt. Thea vaguely realized, then, why Spanish Johnny sometimes would run away. Through this perception of Thea, Willa Cather means that within this Mexican woman there was a certain kind of intuitive understanding of her husband's good and sensitive quality, which most of the people in the town failed to recognize. It was not her lack of self-respect or insensible patience with which she endured life. Because she understood well that "a little thing is big to him" she was sympathetic and generous about his fault.

It is a suggestion of Willa Cather, through these people, that there are some things to admire and appreciate within these low-born and simple people.

#### B. Indians

Willa Cather shows a profound interest in the Indian culture. Her interest is almost admiration. She appreciates the Indian culture in terms of their way of living in which they respected tradition, and certain aspects of their attitude toward life which shows discipline and training of life. In The Song of the Lark although Willa Cather does not

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-7.



create any Indian character, her admiration of their culture is apparent. In Thea Kronborg's whole life the visit of the Cliff-Dweller's cave was significant, because by that experience she strengthened her energy to pursue artistic ambition, and, moreover, learned much about life. Their way of living was expressed through the place itself, ". . . a certain understanding of those people came up to [Thea] out of the rock-shelf . . . , suggestions that were simple, insistent, and monotonous, like the beating of Indian drums. They were not expressible in words."<sup>24</sup> They expressed their desire and aspiration through everything they produced, and they did it beautifully. Willa Cather suggests: "All these things made one feel that one ought to do one's best, and help to fulfil some desire of the dust that slept there."<sup>25</sup>

In The Professor's House Tom Outland, a youth of distinguished quality, was fascinated by the ancient Indian culture. What he found from the excavation was the beauty of their way of living. Their ancient city was beautifully proportioned. "There was something symmetrical and powerful about the swell of the masonry."<sup>26</sup> Everything proved their "patience and deliberation." One could not help admiring their place, because it conveyed the hardest experience of human history. They built the city without "the influence of example or emulation, with no incentive but some natural yearning for order and security."<sup>27</sup>

Indian characters in Death Comes for the Archbishop are the embodi-

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>26</sup>Cather, The Professor's House, p. 201.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

ment of what Willa Cather thought beautiful in Indian qualities. Although there is no way to communicate the European civilization to them, from some of the Indian characters one feels there is a long tradition of their own. This fact leaves some mystical and shadowy impression about the Indians. However, what Willa Cather emphasizes about the Indian characters is the personal qualities which only highly cultured men could equal.

Jacinto was the first Indian who personally worked for Father Latour as a helper and guide of his missionary journeys. What distinguished this young Indian was his unfailing good manners and reserve which was never taken by surprise under any circumstances.

One felt that his training, whatever it had been, had prepared him to meet any situation which might confront him. He was as much at home in the Bishop's study as in his own pueblo--and he was never too much at home anywhere.<sup>28</sup>

He was only twenty-six, and people called him "boy," but his behavior was by no means boyish. The kind of courtesy he had was that of a highly cultured man.

Eusabio was another Indian with whom Father Latour had long mutual reverence. He was one of the most influential men among the Navajo Indians. He was refined, intelligent, and much admired. Quick to perceive the fine qualities of Father Latour, he dedicated himself to helping the Bishop from the first time they met each other. Willa Cather describes beautifully the meeting of these two fine men:

At first he did not open his lips, merely stood holding Father Latour's very fine white hand in his very fine dark one, and looked into his face with a message of sorrow and resignation in his deep-set eagle eyes. A wave of feeling passed over his bronze features as he said slowly:

"My friend has come."

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<sup>28</sup> Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 93.

That was all, but it was everything; welcome, confidence, appreciation.<sup>29</sup> Like Jacinto he had unfailing good manners and a reserved personality. Willa Cather emphasizes this Indian reserve--the always "unobtrusive demeanour"--"as if it were his business to pass unseen and unheard through a country."<sup>30</sup> When the Bishop stayed at the village of Navajos, Eusabio's hospitality was never intrusive; after making the Bishop understand that he was glad to have him with them, he let the Bishop alone so that he could take enough rest and contemplation.

The Bishop felt that Eusabio had a remarkable attitude toward nature. Travelling with Eusabio was like travelling with the landscape made human. He accepted chance and weather as the country did, with a sort of grave enjoyment. He talked little, ate little, slept anywhere, preserved a countenance open and warm.<sup>31</sup>

This attitude was very different from the Western attitude toward nature. The Westerners had been trying to "master" nature and even to change it, if possible, by human power, or at least they wanted to leave some mark on the earth. Eusabio, on the contrary, gave the most minute care not to leave a trace of their camping when they left one place to go to another. It was "the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything."<sup>32</sup>

The absence of desire to conquer nature was not due to the Indians' indolence, for they exhibited tremendous industry and patience in doing things. It was mainly the result of their "inherited caution and respect." "It was as if the great country were asleep, and they wished to carry on

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

their lives without awakening it; or as if the spirits of the earth and air and water were things not to antagonize and arouse."<sup>33</sup>

Although the Indians were not civilized in the European sense, there were, as has been observed already, some qualities which struck one.

The Bishop had observed in Indian life a strange literalness, often shocking and disconcerting. The Acomas, who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change,--they had their idea in substance.<sup>34</sup>

[Navajos] stirred [the Bishop's] imagination. Though this nomad people were much slower to adopt white man's ways than the home-staying Indians who dwelt in pueblos, and were much more indifferent to missionaries and the white man's religion, Father Latour felt a superior strength in them. There was purpose and conviction behind their inscrutable reserve; something active and quick, something with an edge.<sup>35</sup>

No other writers have ever given such a perception of Indian qualities as these. It is these Indian qualities, Willa Cather recognized, that we should pay more attention to.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

## CHAPTER VI

### FRENCH

Admiration and interest in French culture appeared very early in Willa Cather's novels. In One of Ours through the impact of France on Claude Wheeler she expressed her admiration for the French culture and people. Claude was saturated with the Church of Saint-Ouen at Rouen, the beautiful green country, and the people who took such care of trees and flowers, the warm and sympathetic French women, and above all, something enduring and strong which existed within the lives of the individuals. And he finally concluded that France is "better than any country can ever be."<sup>1</sup> However, it is in Death Comes for the Archbishop that we see Willa Cather's fullest and clearest presentation of French qualities.

No characters in Willa Cather's fiction exhibit more exquisite quality and mind than Bishop Latour in Death Comes for the Archbishop. He exemplifies the qualities and the essence of the refined and cultured Frenchman. Willa Cather's portrayal of him is richest and most beautiful among all the characters she ever produced. At the opening of the book a group of cardinals were discussing the appointment of a new Vicar to New Mexico. Father Fernand, Irish-French, who had already Father Latour in his mind as the candidate for the post, said:

The new Vicar must be a young man, of strong constitution, full of zeal, and above all, intelligent. He will have to deal with savagery and

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<sup>1</sup>Cather, One of Ours, p. 458.

ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigue. He must be a man to whom order is necessary--as dear as life.<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish Cardinal immediately realized that Father Ferrand was thinking of someone French, and agreed that the French are "the best missionaries . . . They are the great organizers."<sup>3</sup> He proceeded to the more definite statement:

The Germans classify, but the French arrange! The French missionaries have a sense of proportion and rational adjustment. They are always trying to discover the logical relation of things. It is a passion with them.<sup>4</sup>

As suggested in this introduction, sense of order, sense of proportion, and belief in the preeminence of ideas over material things are the qualities which the French people are famous for. Father Latour is an embodiment of those characteristics. However his qualities are not only these. Father Ferrand continued, "I have noticed that he is a man of severe and refined tastes, but he is very reserved,"<sup>5</sup> and has intelligence, not simple intelligence, but "a versatile intelligence."

We see this man of extraordinary qualities, Father Latour, in the middle of the desert for the first time. Willa Cather describes him thus:

. . . a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance. His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man,--it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat severe. There was singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth--brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and God whom he was addressing.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

This cultured Frenchman seems little fitted to the life of an uncivilized country. However, his thirty-seven years of devotion gave the country, where "lawless personal power" had been the rule, order and a civilizing and humanizing force.

His intelligence and logical mind clearly saw the nature of his new task. He knew that he had to carry out his plan slowly and steadily because any impetuous reform would only invite a chaos. He discovered many native priests corrupt and scandalous. Padre Martinez was an extreme example. His conduct was more than the Bishop's fastidious taste could bear, but once he saw that his church had a strong organization and a devout congregation he said, "I do not wish to lose the parish of Taos in order to punish its priest,"<sup>7</sup> checking a hasty judgment of Father Vaillant. He knew when to strike and when to temporize. Although it took a longer time to put the recalcitrant priests into the right way, to establish churches and to strengthen the order and standards which already existed, the result was great. It was the result of his sense of order and intelligence.

Perhaps his enjoyment of ideas and feelings over the material interest was from his French strain. This kind of mentality was seen in Mlle. de Courcy in One of Ours with whom Claude Wheeler enjoyed a brief encounter during the war. She looked as if she were the essence of French culture. The beautiful country had been damaged by the war and people were suffering from the shortage of things. She did not have any fancy things around her, but Claude felt her unusually beautiful personality. She said:

They must love their country so much, don't you think, when they endure such poverty to come back to it? . . . Even the old ones do not often

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

complain about their dear things . . . If they have the ground, and hope, all that they can make again. This war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feeling matters.<sup>8</sup>

Though Father Latour could never have succeeded as the first Bishop in the new country without the devotion of Father Vaillant, Father Vaillant was never capable of being clear-minded like Father Latour. He was always very practical, vehement, and emotional. Therefore Father Latour's ability to think of matters in terms of idea and feeling is best seen in contrast with Father Vaillant's frame of mind. For their first Christmas in the new country, Father Vaillant prepared dinner. The soup was excellent, and Father Latour commented, apologizing that he was not deprecating the individual talent, "A soup like this is not the work of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup."<sup>9</sup> However, for Father Vaillant the idea of tradition did not mean much. For him a practical question was more important: "How can man make a proper soup without leeks, that king of vegetables? We can not go on eating onions for ever." Another example is seen in their conceptions of miracles. When they heard the story of a miracle which happened in the sixteenth century, the Holy Mother's appearance to an obscure, humble neophyte in the City of Mexico, Father Vaillant was deeply moved by the story. He said with a strong feeling, "It is a household word with them that their Blessed Mother revealed Herself in their own country, to a poor convert. Doctrine is well enough for the wise . . . , but the miracle is something we can hold in our

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<sup>8</sup>Cather, One of Ours, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup>Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 39.



hands and love."<sup>10</sup> For him the miracle must be "very direct and spectacular, not with Nature, but against it."<sup>11</sup> Father Latour said:

One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always.<sup>12</sup>

Another example is seen in the interests shown by these two men in the old Spanish bell found in the basement of an old church. Father Vaillant taught a Mexican boy to ring it properly. When Father Latour heard the bell ringing, it stirred his imagination:

. . . he yet heard every stroke of the Ave Maria bell, marvelling to hear it rung correctly . . . and from a bell with beautiful tone. Full, clear, with something bland and suave, each note floated through the air like a globe of silver. Before the nine strokes were done, Rome faded, and behind it he sensed something Eastern, with palm trees,---Jerusalem, perhaps, though he had never been there.<sup>13</sup>

He told Father Vaillant that the bell which contained a good deal of silver must be Moorish. Father Vaillant impatiently retorted that Father Latour was trying to make his bell an infidel. Father Latour said, "I am trying to account for the fact that when I heard it this morning it struck me at once as something oriental." This kind of thinking was rather annoying to Father Vaillant, but it meant much to Father Latour.

Bishop Latour is a man of extremely severe and refined taste; and his taste is altogether French. His fastidious taste sometimes could not

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

stand certain kinds of aspects of life among the uncivilized people. "The hideous houses and churches, the ill-kept farms and gardens, the slovenly, sordid aspect of the towns and country-side,"<sup>14</sup> depressed Father Latour. While he has the most sensitive sense of appreciation of the beautiful human qualities, he disliked a personality like Trinidad, a student of Padre Martinez, almost unendurably.

We see the glimpse of his sensitive taste of life in his letter:

My new study, dear brother, as I write, is full of the delicious fragrance of the pinion logs burning in my fire-place. (We use this kind of cedar-wood altogether for fuel, and it is highly aromatic, yet delicate. At our meanest tasks we have a perpetual odour of incense about us.) . . . What a pleasure to come home at night and put on my old cassock! I feel more like a priest than--for so much of the day I must be a "business man!"--and, for some reason, more like a Frenchman.<sup>15</sup>

He never lost this kind of sensitiveness while he underwent the discomforts and hardships of frontier life. He showed delicate appreciation of the human quality in everyday things too. For instance he loves the pleasant irregularity of "the thick clay walls" of his study finished by "the deft palms of Indian women."<sup>16</sup> Or he found the wooden figures of saints in the humble Mexican houses exceedingly interesting. "They were much more to his taste than the factory-made plaster images in his mission churches in Ohio--more like the homely stone carvings on the front of old parish churches in Auvergne."<sup>17</sup>

Bishop Latour's severe taste--perfectionism--is best seen in his construction of the cathedral in Santa Fe. He had a definite ideal and

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

dream about what the new cathedral should be—a cathedral which "would be worthy of a setting naturally beautiful;" a cathedral like the "old Palace of the Popes, at Avignon."<sup>18</sup> He explored every direction to search for the most suitable stone for the cathedral until he found a beautiful hill of "strong golden ochre, very much like the gold of the sun-light," and he instantly knew that it was for his cathedral. In his ideal of the cathedral again we see a tremendous difference between Father Vaillant's mind and that of the Bishop. Father Vaillant wondered why "a poor missionary Bishop should care so much about a building. He himself was eager to have the Cathedral begun; but whether it was Mudi Romanesque or Ohio German in style, seemed to him of little consequence."<sup>19</sup> However, the Bishop's ideal and taste were so fastidious that he did not want to leave anything "to chance, or to the mercy of American builders." He believed that his cathedral would be for the future, and if he should only produce another "ugly church on this continent where there are so many already," it was better not to lay a stone at all.

I want a plain church, but I want a good one. I shall certainly never lift my hand to build a clumsy affair of red brick, like an English coach-house. Our own Mudi Romanesque is the right style for this country.<sup>20</sup>

When he discovered the stone to his taste, he said, "I could hardly have hoped that God would gratify my personal taste, my vanity, . . . in this way."<sup>21</sup> He brought an architect from France to whom he entrusted his ideal, and he produced exactly what he wanted.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 242-3.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

Nothing sensational, simply honest building and good stone-cutting,--good Midi Romanesque of the plainest . . . how it was of the South, that church, how it sounded the note of the South! . . . The steep carnelian hills drew up so close behind the church that the individual pine trees thinly wooding their slopes were clearly visible . . . the tawny church seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills--with a purpose so strong that it was like action.<sup>22</sup>

His appreciation of personalities is still more remarkable. He found admirable qualities even among the humble Indians and Mexicans. Two Mexican women he was particularly fond of, Magdalena, whom he saved from her horrible life with a brutal husband, and the wife of Kit Carson. Whenever he visited the Church school, he entered by the kitchen-garden in order to see her "serene and handsome face" devoted to the nuns. Kit Carson's wife was, he thought, intelligent, and her countenance showed that "discipline of life" which he admired. In the same way he made a deep friendship with Kit Carson, and some of the Indians. At the first meeting with Kit Carson the Bishop felt "a quick glow of pleasure in looking at the man," because he saw in this scout "standards, loyalties, a code which is not easily put into words but which is instantly felt when two men who live by it come together by chance."<sup>23</sup> He also appreciated some qualities in Indians. "Their veneration for old customs was a quality he liked in the Indians, and it played a great part in his own religion."<sup>24</sup> Since he had his own memories of meek European civilization, he also respected "a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate" behind the Indians. Their way of living in which, the Bishop thought, they showed unfailing good manners, and "training" of life.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 271-2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

The most beautiful example of his appreciation of human quality is that of Dona Isabella Olivares. She was a Kentucky woman and married to a rich Mexican. She was beautiful and a woman of great accomplishment, educated at a French convent. It was naturally a great enjoyment for Father Latour, among uncivilized people and rough frontiersmen to be welcome to this cultivated woman's house "to sit by that hospitable fire-side, in rooms enriched by old mirrors and engravings . . ." <sup>25</sup> After her husband died unexpectedly, his brothers contested his will by which his legacy was supposed to go to his wife and daughter. The main point of their attack was that Isabella Olivares was too young to be the mother of Olivares' daughter. She refused to tell her real age and proclaimed that she did not care whether she lost all of her husband's property. When the lawyer asked the two priests to help to persuade this lady to admit an appropriate age in the court, Father Latour was reluctant to interfere in so delicate a matter. He felt very sorry for Madame Olivares. Forty-two to your friends, dear Madame Olivares, and to the world. In heart and face you are younger than that. But to the law and the Church there must be a literal reckoning. A formal statement in court will not make you any older to your friends; it will not add one line to your face. A woman, you know, is as old as she looks. <sup>26</sup>

No other statements would show more beautifully the French idea of life than Father Latour's final plea to this lady.

Looking merely at the temporal aspect of the case, you would find poverty hard to bear. You would have to live upon the Olivares's charity, would you not? I have a selfish interest; I wish you to be always your charming self and to make a little poesie in life for us here. We have not much of that. <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 190-1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

This way of thinking makes one feel almost envious, that if one could think things in this way life would be by far richer and more beautiful.

Father Latour is also reserved and his courtesy is unfailing. He never lost himself nor showed the expression of surprise on his countenance. Willa Cather called it "well-schooled."<sup>28</sup> He was "at ease in any society and always the flower of courtesy. It had always been so. He was like that even as a boy; gracious to everyone."<sup>29</sup> The reserve, which awed Mexicans, stirred the Indians' veneration and confidence in him. He never showed his surprise or disgust toward the disordered life of the native priests, nor did he question Jacinto, a young Indian, about his thoughts and beliefs because he did not think it would be polite. This is a remarkable characteristic for a missionary priest which Father Vaillant would never understand. One of the revealing statements was made through this Indian youth's perception:

. . . he had the right tone with Padre Gallegos, the right tone with Padre Jesus, and that he had good manners with the Indians. In his experience, white people, when they addressed Indians, always put on a false face. There were many kinds of false faces; Father Vaillant's for example, was kindly but too vehement. The Bishop put on none at all. He stood straight and turned to the Governor of Laguna, and his face underwent no change. Jacinto thought this remarkable.<sup>30</sup>

Willa Cather seems to conclude, through Father Vaillant's reflection, what the life and personality of this distinguished man meant:

To man's wisdom it would have seemed that a priest with Father Latour's exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome person, and delicate perceptions all have their effect; and that a man of much rougher type would have served God well enough as the first Bishop of New Mexico. . . . Perhaps it pleased

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

Him to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality. And perhaps, after all, something would remain through the years to come; some ideal, or memory, or legend.<sup>31</sup>

Though Father Vaillant did not have the refinement of Bishop Latour, he exhibited genius in practical things and human relationships. He did not have any pretence or vanity of doing things. He learned English and Spanish quickly, but incorrectly at first. However he had no vanity about grammar or refinement of phrase so long as he was able to communicate with people. "To communicate with peons, he was quite willing to speak like a peon."<sup>32</sup> Father Latour always needed him because he had so much tact with the natives and so much sympathy with all their short-comings, though he always curbed Father Vaillant's "hopeful rashness." While the Bishop belonged to an upper and scholarly class, Father Vaillant was from a humble station. The Bishop always admitted himself that Father Vaillant excelled him in the fervor of his faith.

His personality is composed of many contradictions. He was one of the most truly "spiritual men," though he was "so passionately attached to many of the things of this world." Or though he was extremely fond of good eating and drinking he "not only rigidly observed all the fasts of the Church, but he never complained about the hardness and scantiness" of the missionary journeys.<sup>33</sup> The Bishop was often embarrassed by Father Vaillant's persistent begging for the parish, but for himself he was "scarcely acquisitive to the point of decency."<sup>34</sup> However, none of those

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 253-4.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

qualities explain Father Vaillant fully. "The man was much greater than the sum of his qualities."<sup>35</sup> The Bishop said "you are a better man than I. You have been a great harvester of souls, without pride and without sham."<sup>36</sup>

There are numerous episodes which illuminate Father Vaillant as a man of attraction. For instance at the funeral service of Father Vaillant there was the spectacle of a seriously sick man, his forehead resting against the edge of the coffin. He had been Father Vaillant's Vicar, who became ill in the hospital in Chicago, and as soon as he knew of Father Vaillant's death he came to the funeral, and after three days he died. "It was one more instance of the extraordinary personal devotion that Father Joseph had so often aroused and retained so long, in red men and yellow men and white."<sup>37</sup>

When Willa Cather says "He added a glow to whatever kind of human society he was dropped down into--a Navaho hogan, some abjectly poor little huddle of Mexican huts, or a company of Monsignori and Cardinals at Rome-- it was all the same,"<sup>38</sup> she conveys what this man's life meant to humanity.

In Shadows on the Rock Willa Cather depicts the French people during the colonization of Canada in the seventeenth century. Most of the people are the kind of persons who try to make their life in the new world a replica of the home country. The household of Euclide Auclair, which is the center of the action, is an example of French love of old ways of life--

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 228.



love of peace and order. In the new country, where the ship from France which comes only twice a year is the only contact with the civilized world, they try to keep "the mellow art of living."

Madame Auclair, who died soon after she came to Canada, wanted to leave her daughter "something so precious, so intangible; a feeling about life that had come down to her through so many centuries and that she had brought with her across the wastes of obliterating, brutal ocean. The sense of 'our way.'"<sup>39</sup> She was always sick in the new world, but as long as she lived she endeavored to make the new life "as much as possible like the old." For her everything must be carried on in a refined way and order. For instance, she would say,

The sheets must be changed every two weeks, but do not try to have them washed in the winter. I have brought linen enough to last the winter through. Keep folding the soiled ones away in the cold upstairs, and in April, when the spring rains come and all the water-barrels are full of soft rain-water, have big Jeanette come in and do a great washing.<sup>40</sup>

After she realized that she would never recover from her illness, she trained her daughter Cecile so that she would carry on the life she had cherished with her whole heart. She told Cecile:

Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages. At home, in France, we have learned to do all these things in the best way, and we are conscientious, and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe.<sup>41</sup>

As Madame Auclair said, Euclide Auclair's "whole happiness depended on order and regularity."<sup>42</sup> After his wife's death he kept his house with his daughter as an example of neatness, orderliness, and beauty. The

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<sup>39</sup>Cather, Shadows on the Rock (New York, 1937), p. 25.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-5.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

interior of his house was "like home to the French-born." In order to keep the French cookery through the frozen months, he went to the market by himself to buy enough variety of foods and preserved them. From a pot of chocolate at their breakfast, which he prepared himself very carefully, to dinner Auclair regarded as very important---"as the thing that kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman."<sup>43</sup> His life was on the whole monotonous, but keeping the routine in order he found life endurable. He decided that tranquility was the important thing.<sup>44</sup> This attitude of life made his life something that appealed to the nostalgia of all sorts of people from the old world.

Cecile Auclair was brought to Canada when she was still small and did not remember the old world, and in many respects she belonged to Canada. While her father always waited for the day when he would be able to go back to France, the idea of going back upset Cecile. However, she was definitely a product of French culture. She exhibited when only a small child love of order and fastidious taste on many matters. And above all she knew what her mother called "a feeling about life."

She carried with loyalty to her mother all the household affairs almost meticulously. When she visited the Harnois farm on the Ile d' Orleans her fastidious taste suffered very much. So often she reminds one of Father Latour's taste. She found people were dirty. "When they showed her the pigs and geese and tame rabbits, they kept telling her about peculiarities of animal behaviour which she thought it better taste to ignore. They called things by very unattractive names, too."<sup>45</sup> The rooms

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

were so smelly and stuffy that she was horrified with the idea of sleeping inside. The bed was so dirty that she felt she could not possibly lie down in that bed, and she stayed up the whole night in a chair. The food was heavy with lard. Then she realized what clean and beautiful cooking, eating, sleeping, and living in her home, which her mother had left her, meant in life.

These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them one made, not shoes or cabinet-work, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate; one made the days,--the complexion, the special flavour, the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life.<sup>46</sup>

There are many other French people in Shadows on the Rock who exhibit, though each in a different way, some of the French characteristics already observed. Willa Cather writes: "Among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire."<sup>47</sup>

The foregoing presentation makes it clear that Willa Cather recognized that these people, while not changing the basic nature of American culture, added to the texture of American life something rich and lasting.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>47</sup>On Writing, p. 15.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION--SIGNIFICANCE OF WILLA CATHER'S PORTRAITURE OF THE VARIOUS NATIONAL CHARACTERS

In her early works Willa Cather drew vivid pictures of the immigrants in the new settlements on the frontier. With the Scandinavian and Bohemian characters she shows what she calls their "sturdy traits," "elasticity of mind," and "honest attitude towards life" combined with sensitiveness and imagination. She is concerned with the struggle of those personalities with the environments which so often make for hardship, poverty, vulgarity, conventionality, and disillusionment. However, her emphasis is always on the richness of personality of those foreign-born people. Willa Cather seems to suggest that the meanness of life never changes those qualities that made their lives rich and enduring, and that those qualities deserve adequate attention. The essential thing to Willa Cather is that these immigrants did not allow the difficult circumstances to mutilate their lives. Willa Cather reveals the beauty and grace of little things, the indestructible power of personality, and the "immemorial human attitude which we recognize as universal and true." In presenting the better qualities of their racial traits she does not mean that those immigrants are better than American people, nor does she say foreigners are ideal, but her love of fineness and the tenderness of her love cannot fail to recognize their beautiful qualities, which small provincial American communities often fail to notice. What distinguishes her attitude

toward them is her warm sympathy and sensitiveness.

In introducing simple people like Mexicans and Indians she does not change her attitude. Mexicans are poor for the most part in her fiction, but they enjoy a colorful and rich life of their own. Even from the very humble people whose grace of soul or complete self-abnegation is their only distinction she draws something beautiful. Their sensitiveness and such love of precious things as that felt by a poor Mexican slave when she comes into the church to pray, she describes with deep sympathy and appreciation. In Indian qualities, which are so alien to the European culture, she recognizes, as few writers have done, something which stirs one's imagination and admiration. She recognizes in these people qualities which are beautiful and precious to have in human life. Her descriptions are moving because they spring from her deep sensitiveness in discernment of human value and warm sympathy.

With European culture Willa Cather's feeling for life reaches the highest point. Her deep appreciation of the German culture and way of life makes her say that the Germans really know how to live. She creates not only personalities highly colored by cultural heritage and traits, but conveys much of their feeling for life. The characters are endowed with more sensitiveness and taste than are her earlier characters. Willa Cather seems to come closest to the French temperament. One of Ours and Shadows on the Rock convey the feeling of the French culture and people more than anything else. And finally we have the information that Willa Cather's final and unfinished novel, which she had wanted to write for years, was about the Avignon story.<sup>1</sup> In the delineation of such a

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<sup>1</sup>Brown, p. 269.

distinguished character as Father Latour she conveys all the possible intellectual and spiritual grace of the cultivated Frenchman. Willa Cather shows that she has her roots deep in the authentic culture, and, moreover, she has extraordinary sensitiveness to recognize the excellence of the particular racial qualities and the genius to express them beautifully.

The love of color, the feeling for things, and the delight in fineness are all present in Willa Cather's portrayal of personalities. It is a great testimony of what she believes in. It is her most precious legacy to the world that she shows extremely sensitive portraiture of so many different racial traits which have gone into the making of American life. Willa Cather is, of course, aware that the Anglo-Saxon heritage, which is so often over-emphasized, has been basic and at its best a valuable part of American culture. But she is also deeply aware of the fact that the cruder elements in American society have not appreciated these qualities brought by other races. The qualities she shows unmistakably in her novels are these from which America may learn much.

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