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FROM RIVERS TO GARDENS: THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF NATURE IN MY ÁNTONIA, O PIONEERS!, AND DEATH COMES TO THE ARCHBISHOP

by

GRAHAM KIRKLAND

Under the Direction of Dr. Audrey Goodman

ABSTRACT

Though her early writing owes much to nineteenth-century American Realism, Willa Cather experiments with male and female literary traditions while finding her own modern literary voice. In the process Cather gives nature an ambivalent role in My Ántonia, O Pioneers!, and Death Comes to the Archbishop. She produces a tension between rivers and gardens, places where nature and culture converge. Like Mary Austin and Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather confronts the boundaries between humans and nature.

INDEX WORDS: Willa Cather, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Austin, American Realism, Regionalism, My Ántonia, O Pioneers!, Death Comes to the Archbishop, Nature, Gardens, Rivers

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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May 2010

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCING THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF NATURE

Willa Cather grants provisional and transitional status to the plains of Nebraska and the deserts of New Mexico, her environments in My Ántonia, O Pioneers!, and Death Comes to the Archbishop. The novels develop not only a set of characters but also a sense of place that changes over time. Jim Burden's childhood in Nebraska, as described in My Ántonia, differs from the Nebraska where he returns as an adult to find Ántonia. Jim experiences the transition of place in part because Nebraska is no longer his home. Additionally, the culture of Nebraska evolves beyond the former frontier land of the past with homesteaders like Jim's grandparents. Immigrants, like Ántonia, eventually settle the land and build more modern, permanent homes.

In the transitional space between the old frontier and the modern city, Cather creates an environment that is both a setting and a subject for her stories. The nonhuman beings of this environment interact equally with their human counterparts. Cather engages these human and nonhuman interactions, displaying the impact humans and nonhumans have on one another over time. In this thesis I focus on the tension between rivers and gardens, places where nature and culture converge. I argue that Cather gives nature an ambivalent role in My Ántonia, O Pioneers!, and Death Comes to the Archbishop.

Cather produces the ambivalent role of nature in the process of finding her literary voice. She experiments with male and female literary traditions, reflecting the contemporary atmosphere of Realism and Regionalism. Cather follows a career trajectory moving from male and female literary voices into her own modern voice. She

builds an environment where nature exists as a benefactor and an antagonist with culture. As Cather grows into her unique literary voice, she creates and reconciles the ambivalent role of nature.

Cather changes the ambivalent role of nature in each novel, from My Ántonia and O Pioneers! to Death Comes to the Archbishop. She creates ambivalences that determine the ways in which her characters respond to their respective environments. Cather's ambivalences represent different human experiences of nature. I will explain the ambivalences in her novels based on these terms: the value of nature to humanity, the influence of nature on humanity, and man's ideological views of nature. Cather projects a growing sense of the human experience in nature, as she develops her literary voice.

Beginning with O Pioneers!, I focus on the first ambivalence in terms of the value of nature to humanity. Cather's novel expresses the livelihoods of pioneers who cultivate Nebraska's farmlands. Her men and women value preservation or utilization of nature as ways of approaching the local wilderness and wildlife. Cather describes utilitarian values in scenes of farmland or hunting land. These scenes depict managed nature, often with male characters. She espouses preservation in scenes of wilderness and rivers. Her female characters tend to value preserved nature. In chapter two I will explore the ambivalent role of nature as viewed by male and female characters – Alexandra, Emil, Marie and Ivar.

In assessing My Ántonia, I turn to the second ambivalence describing nature's influence on humanity. Cather's second novel of the soil distinguishes between the dangerous side and the nurturing side of nature. Cather presents the dangers of nature

in ways common to Realism, as her narrator Jim describes the hardships of pioneering in the country. The immigrant character Ántonia, however, reflects a Romantic connection with nature. She creates a livelihood in nature, much like Alexandra, appreciating its influence on culture as a benefactor rather than an antagonist. In chapter three I will explain how Cather's female immigrants identify with nature, such as Ántonia, whereas her Americanized male characters often separate humanity from nature.

The distinction between Cather's non-Americanized and her Americanized characters becomes increasingly evident in Death Comes to the Archbishop. In this novel, the third ambivalence encompasses man's ideological views of nature. Cather distinguishes between the Western ideology of man's separation from nature and the non-Western ideology of man's spiritual connection with nature. She allows her protagonist, Father Latour, to experience the extreme environment of the southwestern desert through the perspective of a Native American guide. Cather discovers a place where Latour can overcome the ideology of man's separation from nature. In the third chapter, I will follow Cather's path into the garden.

Nature appears ambivalent in a literary context as well as an environmental context. The environmental context is evident in Cather's scenes where gardens and rivers impact mankind. Joseph Urgo says: "We feel Cather's deep love and awe for the landscape and for the tremendous forces of nature that shape and sustain it" (My Ántonia 9). The tension rises as Cather's pioneers and missionaries reach the boundaries of culture, entering an unknown world of nature. They face the dangers of extreme wilderness in the prairies of the Midwest and the deserts of the Southwest.

Conversely, they also feel nurtured by nature's beauty and tranquility. "The forty years between 1880 and 1920," says Urgo, "are known as the "formative years" of American environmentalism (and of Willa Cather)" (Cather Studies 46). I approach nature's ambivalence with ecocriticism in mind because its subject is "the interconnections between human culture and the material world, between the human and the nonhuman" (Glotfelty, Cather Studies 28). Later I will explain my theoretical foundations in more depth.

Nature seems ambivalent in a literary context based on Cather's trajectory from Realism and Regionalism into Modernism. "Cather bridges a gap," says Jo Ann Middleton, "between nineteenth-century naturalism and twentieth-century modernism" (49). She experiments with novels much as she blurs the line between nature and culture. O Pioneers! experiments with "subject matter and form," while My Ántonia plays with "points of view" (Middleton 41). John J. Murphy refers to My Ántonia as "postrealism" that "moves from a detailed presentation of certain times and places to Romantic idealism as a way to survive the disillusionments" of the modern era (7). Using Realism and Regionalism as a background, Cather provides a modern interpretation of nature and culture.

My original interest in the literary balance between nature and culture traces from my first reading of Mary Austin's "Walking Woman." Austin's story appears in The Portable American Realism Reader (Nagel). Yet the short story in some ways departs from the standard representation of an indifferent or hostile nature often found in Realism and Naturalism. The first-person narrator of the story establishes a friendship with the Walking Woman and a relationship with the desert she inhabits. The profound

connection between the Walking Woman and her desert environment seems unique compared with much American Realism.

Cather's short story "A Wagner Matineè" is included in The Portable American Realism Reader (Nagel), along with short stories by Mary Austin and influential editor and critic of Realism William Dean Howells. The introduction to the portable reader associates Realism with terms such as "common vision," "mimetic representation," and "slice-of-life fiction, a mode close to journalism" (Nagel xxv). The introduction also explains how the aesthetics of Transcendentalism and Romanticism were ignored by many Realists who were "unabashedly anthropocentric" (Nagel xxv).

Like many American Realists, Cather's professional writing career began in journalism. She worked for campus newspapers and local papers early in her career. Later she wrote for larger newspapers and publications in Pittsburgh and New York. Cather's training in journalism influences her development of short stories in the years before her novels of the soil.

Though her early writing owes much to American Realism, she circumvents certain aspects of the genre. Cather names O Pioneers! after a poem by American Romantic Walt Whitman. She merges Romanticism and Regionalism in the novel, adopting "male and female literary traditions… mating Whitman and Jewett…" (O'Brien 422). Cather abandons the "patterns she was copying" (O'Brien 423) for personal memories and childhood experiences. Later she gives My Ántonia a first-person narrative, unlike the third-person narrative in O Pioneers!. She also engages the subject of nature with evolving roles in the lives of characters. Instead of observing humanity's plight in the world, she evokes an individual's personal and emotional connection to the

land. Like Mary Austin and Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather confronts the boundaries between humans and nature.

Jewett's relationship with Cather, as both friend and mentor, may be the catalyst for narratives involving childhood memories of nature. Before her correspondences with Jewett, Cather was not ready to leave Henry James to turn "to memory, to the past, and to Nebraska for fictional material" (O'Brien 330). Jewett introduced her to a female literary tradition of regional writing, set in the country rather than the drawing room.

Early in her writing career, Cather privileged Jewett's unique regional writing over other forms of Realism. In her book reviews in the 1890s, Cather was "attacking Realism…" with the "exception of the Maine writer" (O'Brien 330). Later Cather adopted the vernacular language and local knowledge evident in Jewett's Regionalism. Jewett was "drawing on strains in both American Romanticism and Realism," and she felt Cather would find her voice in the "vernacular rather than the genteel tradition" (O'Brien 345). Through the "loving support and sound literary advice" (O'Brien 335) of her mentor, Cather opened herself to the possibility of contributing to and expanding a tradition of female regional writing.

Cather, following Jewett's advice, envisioned stories from her past in the familiar setting of Nebraska. Jewett's rural origins in Maine "helped Cather to appreciate the literary possibilities of her Nebraska past" (O'Brien 337). She was returning to her roots, "to the landscapes of her childhood…" (O'Brien 370). Cather's vision of Regionalism eventually resulted in her maturing beyond Jewett's short story form into longer novels of the soil, like My Ántonia and O Pioneers!. She realized the "literary possibilities in her own personal past spent among Virginia farmers, European immigrants, and rural

housewives and mothers" (O'Brien 246). Cather also uncovered a childhood bond with nature, complemented by a regional form of writing.

Cather's history with nature, in particular rivers and gardens, is explained in detail in two biographies: Mildred Bennett's The World of Willa Cather and Sharon O'Brien's Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice. From these biographies, I am able to map Cather's experiences in nature during her childhood and formative years. I also gather historical points of interest in the rivers and gardens in Cather's life. As O'Brien states, Cather draws on "the desert/garden opposition she inherited from her childhood" (324). I will introduce a few of the ecological experiences that influence her writing.

In their biographies of Cather, O'Brien and Bennett both analyze her historical background. Bennett, however, highlights her friendships and family relations in the town of Red Cloud. In addition to social connections, Bennett discovers the influences that draw Cather from society into nature. Among these natural settings are the rivers. Bennett reveals how these rivers instilled in Cather memories of her childhood in Nebraska. As Sarah Orne Jewett's work carries her memories of Maine, Cather's work holds memories of her childhood home.

Cather describes the rivers of Nebraska in My Ántonia and O Pioneers!. O'Brien identifies similar rivers near Cather's former home by the Republican River valley of Nebraska. "Far Island was the long sandbar in the Republican River that Cather and her brothers discovered," says O'Brien (84). Cather likely uses her memories of the river valley in the scene where Jim Burden, Ántonia and the other "hired girls" go swimming. O'Brien refers to this as an island setting "whose remoteness from the social

world suggests the magical, transformative power of the imagination" (84). Later I will explore this scene's impact on Jim's relationship with Ántonia and nature.

Describing Cather's childhood, Bennett refers to the Republican River valley, specifically Indian Creek: "In the river, near the mouth of Indian Creek, stood the island where the children fished, ran barefoot on the white sandbars and hunted treasure..." (43). Bennett describes Indian Creek as the playground for Cather and the Miner children who were her neighbors. She identifies one of the Miner boys with the character Charlie Harling in My Ántonia. Though other Miner children appear in Cather's books, Bennet thinks Hughie Miner is influential in guiding Cather to the river. The Republican River reveals to Cather a place in nature separate from the constructed world of society in Red Cloud, Nebraska.

Cather's childhood and early adulthood experiences compel her view of gardens. O'Brien takes a feminist approach to explain one's childhood experience with nature: "Because the mother's body is the first landscape the child encounters... we have the pervasive identification in Western culture of 'woman' with 'nature,' an equation that dominates Cather's fiction as well as this early memory" (64). O'Brien identifies the garden as the place where culture integrates with nature. She recounts the description of Jim Burden's arrival into his Nebraska home with "the kitchen and the garden, protected and ordered spaces where the boy feels at peace" (24). The garden, like the female body, acts as a gateway for the child's arrival into the larger world. O'Brien identifies the transition from managed to unmanaged nature in Cather's childhood. She says Cather draws on the "desert/garden opposition she inherited from her childhood..." and "...revises the myth of America, man's creation of an Edenic, garden-like realm

from untamed wilderness" (64). Cather's fiction represents the desert/garden opposition as well as the transition from wilderness to managed land. In her prairie novels, the rivers symbolize untamed wilderness. In her southwestern writing, the desert symbolizes unmanaged nature.

The transition between the garden and desert challenges Cather's view of the Southwest. Cather's interpretation of nature in the southwestern deserts, as related in Death Comes to the Archbishop, derives from her travels and studies in the area. Bennett says: "Willa's first acquaintance with the Southwest began when Douglas [her brother] was working for the Southern Pacific and invited her to visit him... Douglas took her all over the countryside – the mesas, the pueblos, the painted desert..." (37). Her memories of these adventures in the desert permeate her story about the French missionary Bishop Latour. Bennett refers to Latour's prototype, saying "Miss Cather herself has not said exactly when the resolution came to write of Archbishop Jean Lamy, the French pioneer priest of the Southwest" (132). Cather's southwestern fiction extends beyond the borders of the Southwest by reflecting the memories of a French priest.

The gardens that Latour cultivates in New Mexico symbolize a small piece of the culture of France. Cather's travels in France may provide the source material for Latour's gardens. Bennett says "the language and the people which were to have the deepest influence on Willa sprang from France" (123). Cather's memories of French gardens may appear as the childhood memories of Latour. Cather shares the memories in order to share the culture of France. As Bennett says: "her desire to show what the French had done in bringing their culture to the New World, had developed almost to an

obsession" (132). In spite of their longing for French culture, both Latour and Cather remain in the "New World." Cather's memories of France emerge in the southwestern gardens and the transplanted gardeners.

While I rely on Bennett and O'Brien for Cather's biographical history, I gather the theoretical orientation of this argument from separate authors. These authors particularly influence my terminology in interpreting Cather's novels. In applying their theories to her work, I aim to direct this paper towards a confluence of environmentalism, ecocriticism and postcolonialism.

Patrick K. Dooley deserves mention due to the theoretical approach of his essay "Biocentric, Homocentric, and Theocentric Environmentalism in *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*." Dooley selects the same novels that I choose from Cather's works. Additionally, Dooley focuses on Cather's environmentalism. He says: though she "is in favor of a homocentric position of conservation, she also... sides with a biocentric position of preservation" (Dooley 65). Dooley's assessment of the duality between anthropocentrism and biocentrism parallels my argument of ambivalence between culture and nature. I follow Dooley's ecocritical terminology, identifying anthropocentric and biocentric elements, but I also look at the environmental context alongside the literary context in the selected works of Cather. I expand Dooley's theory of biocentrism in Cather's non-Americanized characters, like Ivar in O Pioneers!, to include her female characters Alexandra and Ántonia.

Dooley combines environmental theories with a textual reading of Cather's works. For general environmentalism, without literary references, I look to the theories of Alexander Wilson. He explains American ideas of nature in many areas of popular

culture, ranging from agriculture and industrialization to marketing and education. Wilson's environmental theories provide a modern context for approaching Cather's view of nature.

Wilson offers environmental theories that support my argument about the ambivalent role of nature in the selected works of Cather. He discusses controversial topics between nature and American culture in his book The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez. Wilson analyzes cultural subjects that impact the environment. About the feminizing of nature, he says: "The identification of women with nature and men with culture was used to justify the emergent power of men and their machines over the land and its history" (Wilson 96). Wilson's ecocentric analysis of power emphasizes the balance (or lack thereof) between humans and nature.

Wilson provides a critical definition to the term *bioregions*: "a way communities or watersheds can map their identities according to climate and landforms" (113). From this description of bioregions, I make several implications on the role of nature in the selected works of Cather. Bioregions involve communities, such as the immigrants Cather renders, as part of the map of nature. Cather's immigrants and Americans gain equal standing as contributors to their particular bioregion in Nebraska. This map of their identities positions the communities based on climate and landscapes. Therefore, nature and culture define each other within bioregions.

Wilson encourages equality in his theories on bioregions and on human and non-human interactions. Rather than urging a strictly hands-off approach, he argues that we "need people living on the land, caring for it, working out an idea of nature that

includes human culture and human livelihood" (Wilson 117). This modern land ethic recognizes the value of humans in maintaining the environment. Wilson says: "Restoring this land must also mean making a place for ourselves within it" (86). Cather emphasizes restoration and renewal of the land in examples of women, like Ántonia and Alexandra, who succeed in environments where others failed.

Wilson's environmental theories explain ideas of nature from the context of American popular culture. To understand ideas of nature in a global/multicultural context, I turn to the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz. I make the transition from American to global context to emphasize the different cultural perspectives of nature. Geertz's theories on world ideologies balance and broaden the Western ideas presented by Dooley and Wilson.

Geertz supplies my argument with theories on postcolonialism and local knowledge, gathered from his book of essays Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. He compares Western and Eastern cultures by "searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviors, in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another" (58). Geertz studies the symbolic forms of cultures and the ways in which the cultures define themselves within their local environment. His essays highlight the stark differences among some Western and Eastern concepts of individualism and community. Geertz says: "The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique... and cognitive universe, a dynamic center… set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is... a rather peculiar

idea within the context of the world's cultures" (59). Geertz follows his cultural theories of identity and location in these world cultures.

In Morocco Geertz studies local knowledge on the individual level, and he looks at how individuals establish their identities within the community. He says Moroccans "gain their definition from associative relations they are imputed to have with society that surrounds them. They are contextualized persons" (Geertz 66). Unlike the often mobile and transferrable identities in Western cultures, he finds Moroccans associated with a strong sense of place. Geertz believes "their identity is an attribute they borrow from their setting" (67). The idea of a contextualized identity functions as a tool in explaining how Cather's immigrant and American characters associate themselves within their environment.

The final theorist who contributes to my argument is Michael Pollan. Like Geertz, he also analyzes Western culture in his early work Second Nature: A Gardener's Education. Pollan directly engages the question of culture vs. nature while exploring American views of gardening. He believes: "Americans have historically tended to regard nature as a cure for culture, or vice versa" (Pollan 73). He sees the cultural divide as a classic struggle for American authors and thinkers, such as Thoreau. "Even once we have recognized the falseness of the dichotomy between nature and culture," says Pollan, "it is hard to break its hold on our minds and our language…" (97). In the future, he seeks a balance between our destructive development over nature and our hands-off preservation of nature. "The land is too important to our identity as Americans," he says, "to simply allow everybody to have their own way with it" (Pollan 61). Ultimately, Pollan hopes to establish a common ground for mankind and nature.

Pollan decides that the common ground between culture and nature lies in the garden. He supports the “idea of a garden – as a place… where nature and culture can be wedded in a way that can benefit both…” (Pollan 5). Pollan argues for gardening as a personal experience with nature. Instead of preserving nature untouched, humans can manage a garden for food and enjoyment while promoting the environment. Pollan also identifies the garden as an important place for learning about nature as a child. The garden operates as a gateway for early childhood experiences in the borderland between culture and nature.

Pollan's theories on American gardening influence my reading of Cather's works, especially Death Comes to the Archbishop. Bishop Latour's fondness for gardening takes on a new light with Pollan's view of early European settlement: “European weeds and European humans proved formidable ecological imperialists, rapidly driving out native species and altering the land to suit themselves” (Pollan 112). However, the more important argument that I borrow from Pollan applies to Bishop Latour's personal experience in gardens. Pollan says: “Gardens instruct us in the particularities of place” (64). Bishop Latour connects with the new southwestern environment by planting gardens. He also remembers his childhood experiences in the gardens of France. His memories of gardens and nature become part of his contextualized identity, which is a common element to Cather's immigrant characters.

The combination of my three main theorists – Wilson, Geertz, and Pollan – introduces a junction point between nature and culture. Wilson approaches nature with theories on bioregionalism and environmentalism, while critiquing American culture. Geertz distinguishes between Eastern and Western associations with identity and

community. Pollan builds a common ground between mankind and the environment. He enables the garden as a meeting point for culture and nature.

CHAPTER 2.

RETURNING TO THE ROOTS IN O PIONEERS!

Before writing her first novel, O Pioneers!, Cather recognized the influence of Sarah Orne Jewett's regional short stories. Cather discovered in Jewett an alternative to the male-dominant Realism. She found a female literary tradition. Jewett offered a female voice in Regionalism that respects nature and the memories of Cather's past. Jewett's mentoring challenged Cather to abandon the popular drawing rooms of Henry James. The "materials for art," Jewett advised, "were in the 'simple scenes close at hand'" (O'Brien 337). Cather eventually decided to set aside the contemporary urban material to explore her own past in Nebraska.

With O Pioneers! Cather accomplishes a task performed by few female American authors in the nineteenth century. Instead of pursuing the popular form of short stories, Cather contributes a novel to the female literary tradition of Regionalism. This substantial change in form happens at a time when William Dean Howells claimed that women writers "excelled in the form" of short stories, which seemed "'faithfuler and more realistic than those of men'" (Quirk xix). While thousands of regional short stories were published by the turn of the century, there were "relatively few novels in the mode" (Nagel xxiii). Jewett's novel Deephaven is an early challenge to the literary status quo. Cather advances the female literary tradition of Regionalism (which she inherited from Jewett) with her own novels.

Cather's first novel of the soil, O Pioneers!, marks the point where she locates her own voice in memories of nature. She follows Jewett's advice by returning to the country and the vernacular language of Nebraska. "She had let the country be the

hero," says O'Brien (421). Cather also exhibits the female literary tradition she inherited from Jewett. O'Brien believes she reencounters her childhood, "where rural women had expressed their creative desires through the anonymous, female pursuits of gardening, quilting, and storytelling" (419). Cather creates a female protagonist with a connection to nature, adopting a central theme from Regionalism. She gives the "power of song and expression to her artist/farmer heroine… and to the natural world" (O'Brien 420). Cather's female literary voice embodies the role of Alexandra, while affecting the role of nature in O Pioneers! O'Brien says that Alexandra represents "the woman writer's attainment of authorship and authority" (422). Alexandra also symbolizes Cather's developing roles of nature and culture.

Alexandra's memory, like Jewett's advice to Cather, returns to the landscapes of childhood. In Alexandra's second river scene, she remembers watching a wild duck in the river. Her brother, Emil, refers to it as "our duck." But, unlike her brother Emil, Alexandra never hunts ducks as an adult. She prefers to admire and remember the duck, similar to the preservation ethic of Jewett's protagonist in "A White Heron." Her identity stands at the boundary of managed fields and unmanaged wilderness. "Frontier identity," says Yukman, "is a difficult constant process in Cather's 'novels of the soil'" (103). Alexandra symbolizes Cather's early attempts at reconciling male and female literary traditions, Realism and Regionalism.

Interpreting the role of nature in Cather's O Pioneers! requires a close examination of the subject matter – pioneers and their land – and the narrative structure. O'Brien believes Cather "offers another vision of the taming of the land, one erasing the polarities and hierarchies in the Whitman poem: male/female,

culture/nature, subject/object" (440). While polarities between culture and nature are erased for Alexandra, her male friend Carl maintains a separation from nature. "The Catherian 'Great Divide,' made emblematic by Carl and Alexandra," says Joseph Urgo, "is that between homelessness and rootedness" (Migration 48). In her beginnings as an immigrant, Alexandra was not so rooted in America. But Cather's frontier allows space where "the historically marginal status of the homeless person is redefined on heroic terms…" (Urgo, Migration 48).

Cather's narrative structures provide a place for an immigrant like Alexandra to develop her identity. In O Pioneers! the narrative locates her within an environmental context, shaping her sense of nature. Cather explicitly shows this context in chapter titles such as "Neighboring Fields" and "The White Mulberry Tree." These titles focus on landmarks, while "Winter Memories" establishes context within the seasons. O'Brien marks the titles as a statement about the settling of land: "the 'essential quality of America' resides not in the unsettled land but in the transformation from the 'The Wild Land' to 'Neighboring Fields'" (433). The transition from "wild" to "neighboring" reflects Alexandra adopting and creating the land as her home.

Cather references natural landmarks and events not simply for a geographical setting. Rather, the tree and the fields mark points in Alexandra's memories. Cather reveals in the structure of her novel that "form derives naturally from subject matter" (Middleton 33). The importance of the landmarks comes from the personal meaning she gives them. The narrative in O Pioneers! maps the memories of Alexandra's life in Nebraska, similar to the map of Jim's memories in My Ántonia.

The landmarks in O Pioneers! display the way Alexandra's environment changes over time. The wild land in the first chapter includes Ivar's pond. Alexandra's distant neighbor Ivar lives in a sod house in the hill next to the pond. Alexandra shows her younger brother Emil the pond, knowing that he will enjoy the wildlife. The sod house and the wildlife at the pond distinguish Alexandra and Emil's early youth from later adulthood. The sister and brother also spend time at a landmark in a river valley known as the Great Divide. As an adult, Alexandra remembers their time watching a wild duck at the river. Her early years with Emil contrast with the later years when Emil plans to leave the community. This contrast "may accurately reflect the transformation the landscape undergoes" from wilderness to farmland (Lindeman 39). The white mulberry tree of the next-to-last chapter is a solitary landmark that shows the isolation Alexandra feels as an adult. As a successful farmer, Alexandra reminisces about her childhood experiences in nature.

The omniscient narrator in O Pioneers! sets the stage for a narrative structure involving the present and the past, thoughts and memories. Alexandra cultivates her identity from the memories of her past life in the old world and her current life in the new world. The narrator locates Alexandra in the crossroads of these two cultures. Alexandra remembers moments that increase her understanding of the local environment. Some of these memories, which I discuss later, involve her encounters with nature. The omniscient narrator filters the communication of Alexandra's experience through her present and past life.

In the novel's characterization, Cather presents male and female traditions along with the ambivalent role of nature. Carl and Emil pursue careers in prospecting and

mining, choosing culture over nature, migration over rootedness. They represent an Americanized segment of the settlers in Nebraska. Alexandra and Marie, who are both immigrants, adapt to the local environment and bond more closely with nature than their male counterparts. Alexandra identifies with nature while participating in culture. She, above all in the novel, navigates the ambivalent role of nature.

Cather's female view of nature in O Pioneers! expresses biocentrism, a statement that "natural ecosystems possess value in their own right, independent of their value to humans" (Bell 30). One scene exemplifies the value of nature when Marie responds with horror to Emil's duck hunting. Cather describes the shock in Marie: "As she stood looking down at them, her face changed. She took up one of the birds, a rumpled ball of feathers with the blood dripping slowly from its mouth, and looked at the live color that still burned on its plumage" (O Pioneers! 118). Marie, at this moment, feels the intrinsic value in the birds' lives. She "cried in distress, 'Oh, Emil, why did you?'" (Cather, O Pioneers! 118). She feels empathy for the dying ducks once she sees their bodies dripping blood. Marie's distress and empathy reflect an egalitarian attitude towards living beings.

Before seeing the dying ducks, however, Marie was fine with Emil hunting them. The abrupt change in her behavior startles Emil. He replies indignantly: "'Why, Marie, you asked me to come yourself'" (Cather, O Pioneers! 118). Emil stands on the side of anthropocentrism, as he recognizes only the value of ducks to humans. He fails to see why Marie should feel emotions towards killing animals for food. To him, killing animals is a part of human life. Marie understands Emil's view of killing animals for food, or she would not be on a hunting trip with him. Still, Marie has dynamic characteristics that

allow her to change views of nature depending on the context. In the cultural context, Marie understands nature enables man to grow crops and hunt for food. In the environmental context, she envisions man and nature supporting each other rather than hunting each other. Marie balances the value of nature to humanity as both a natural resource and an equal partner, depending on the context.

In a literary context, Marie acts within the male tradition of Realism and the female tradition of Regionalism. In an environmental context, she moves between the ideologies of anthropocentrism and biocentrism. The dialectic between the worlds of man and nature exists in Marie with social consequences. Emil laughs at her, comparing her to "crazy" Ivar. But Marie defends Ivar, saying he's right about wild things: "They're too happy to kill" (Cather, O Pioneers! 118). Emil gives an apology with some bitterness because he doesn't appreciate the intrinsic value in wild animals. Marie holds a tenuous balance between protecting nature and following her culture. She pleads with Emil to preserve the wildlife, rather than participate in the cultural tradition of hunting. She struggles with culture and seeks release in nature. The deaths of Marie and Emil are made more tragic by their embrace under a white mulberry tree.

Cather instills in Marie the capacity for opposite ideals, moving from culture to nature based on the context. Cather presents the same dual capacity later in Ántonia's aspects of Regionalism and Romanticism. Marie represents what Aldo Leopold defines as a "land ethic," where humans are equal members of the ecosystem, rather than the dominant species. With the opportunity to shift values from culture to nature, Cather shows how a land ethic can "result in a complete restructuring of a person's or a culture's values in an ecocentric direction" (Bell 30). Marie and Alexandra share a

similar land ethic, respecting the wildlife and soil as part of their community. Emil has a view of nature limited by his culture. He prefers mining and hunting. Emil seems estranged from his family and from the land ethic shared by Marie and Alexandra.

Cather continues to discuss the ideals of a land ethic in her description of the religious zealot Crazy Ivar. Ivar originally lives in a sod house in the country with very few neighbors. “Ivar had lived there for three years in the clay bank,” says Cather, “without defiling the face of nature…” (O Pioneers! 39-40). Ivar separates himself from humans to be closer to the environment. Cather says: “He disliked the litter of human dwellings…He preferred the cleanness and tidiness of the wild sod” (O Pioneers! 40). Unlike Marie and Alexandra, Ivar does not equally balance culture and nature. Instead, he distances himself from humans, preferring the wilderness.

Crazy Ivar earns his nickname from the locals who believe his bias towards nature is a mental imbalance. Ivar prevents the young boys from shooting guns near his home. He “treats animals humanely” (Glotfelty 38). He doesn’t believe in harming them or eating meat. What is even worse to his neighbors is his lack of farming. Alexandra’s brothers say he “would never be able to prove up on his land because he worked it so little” (Cather, O Pioneers! 47). After Ivar loses his land due to “mismanagement,” he must live with Alexandra in the barn. There he is “very comfortable, being near the horses…” (Cather, O Pioneers! 84). Alexandra’s brothers fear that Ivar may hurt somebody, but Alexandra knows him to be kind to humans and animals alike.

Ivar maintains a “biocentric ethic,” according to Patrick K. Dooley (71). Dooley, however, contends that Ivar’s “benign use of resources” and his preservationist outlook are rooted in his religion. Dooley claims: “His fundamental commitment is religious”

(73). While Ivar is certainly influenced by religion, I disagree with Dooley's claim that theocentrism drives Ivar's land ethic. Like Marie and Alexandra, Ivar is not a static figure who maintains one ideology. Instead, Ivar's religion is a catalyst that helps move him from egocentrism and anthropocentrism into biocentrism. Religion opens a gateway for Ivar to be interconnected with the environment. Similarly, Alexandra and Marie seem interconnected with the environment, though neither expresses the religious commitment that Dooley attributes to theocentrism.

Though I disagree with Dooley's assertion about environmental theocentrism, I agree with another part of Dooley's assessment of Ivar. Dooley says Cather "relies on non-Americanized characters to express her biocentric impulse" (69). Ivar is seeking to preserve nature, while avoiding dominance over and interference with the environment. This "hands-off preservationist stance," Dooley says is "generally given the token status of a minority dissenting view" (69). Cather distinguishes Ivar as an immigrant and as an eccentric among immigrants. Dooley relates Cather's ecocentrism to "marginalized" characters such as Ivar.

Wilson's definition of bioregionalism may explain Ivar's relation to nature and his isolation from town. Ivar seems to identify with the natural community, the plants and animals, landforms and climate. Ivar lives with and cares for the nonhuman world. This explains why Alexandra refers her sick horses to him. He understands animals and communicates with them better than with people.

Ivar's inclination towards bioregionalism may only be appreciated by Alexandra. Most of society shuns an equal relation with nature. Ivar, in turn, abandons the fields and towns for the river, moving from human to non-human world. He establishes a sod

house made from the earth, an early form of immigrant and farm housing that had been replaced by wooden houses of Alexandra's generation. The more Ivar tries to position himself within the non-human world, the further he drives away the human world. O'Brien says: "The identity Ivar experiences between self and world makes him protect life but prevents him from marking his environment: he does no harm, but he does not create" (435). Ivar's exclusion of human society precludes the full concept of bioregionalism, where man and nature live equally. Without humans in the picture, Ivar contextualizes himself among the non-human side of nature.

Cather displays an element of Regionalism in Alexandra's memories of her childhood connection with nature. Similar evidence of Regionalism also appears later in Ántonia's connection with nature. The narrator explains Alexandra's personal life, comparing it to an underground river. The underground stream "came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields" (Cather, O Pioneers! 183). The narrator establishes a connection between Alexandra's personal life and a river. "The metaphor of the underground stream conveys the fertilizing power of Alexandra's unconscious creativity," says O'Brien, "which nourishes her crops even if hidden from view" (436). Alexandra labors in the fields and cultivates crops, but her life's passion is in the river. O'Brien adds: "Cather uses the concealed river to symbolize the unconscious when she describes Alexandra Bergson's submerged passion flowing under, and nourishing, her fields" (203). The river symbolizes the unmanaged, wild side of nature; it is the opposite of the managed fields of Alexandra's culture. The underground river breaks the boundaries from wilderness into cultivated land. Her dream implies competing forces of man and nature. As a

farmer, Alexandra must deal with the “difficulty of making one's living from the land against the opposition of the force of nature” (Yukman 97). Although she cultivates her farmland, she also recognizes the river as another part of her identity.

The river is a recurring theme for Cather. As a landmark, it symbolizes a part of nature that nourishes life. Alexandra's memory returns to the landmark and to a particular encounter with the river and its inhabitant. She and Emil watched “a single wild duck swimming and diving and preening her feathers... No living thing had ever seemed to Alexandra as beautiful as that wild duck” (Cather, O Pioneers! 184). In this memory, Emil is a young boy who is not yet hunting wild ducks. “Emil must have felt about it as she did...” says the narrator, “he used to sometimes say, 'Sister, you know our duck down there —' Alexandra remembered that day as one of the happiest in her life” (Cather, O Pioneers! 184). Alexandra shares Emil's enthusiasm for the duck. This joyous moment in her life contrasts with Marie's painful moment with Emil and the dying ducks.

Geertz’s theories on local knowledge help one understand Alexandra’s identity. As opposed to the Western identity set against the social and natural background, Alexandra’s identity arises from her environment. “Challenging the traditional culture-nature dichotomy in which men are aligned with culture, women with nature,” says O’Brien, “Cather portrays Alexandra both as connected to nature and as separate from it...” (434). Alexandra maintains her identity in both social and natural contexts by participating in the transformation of her environment. O’Brien says: “Alexandra extends her mother's efforts and transforms the wilderness into a fruitful, orderly garden...” (441). She appreciates the wild passion of the river as well as the managed produce of

the garden. O'Brien describes Alexandra's identity as a combination of her setting and herself, saying her "relationship with the land dissolves boundaries between self and other, but with the soil she can both erase the self and create it" (435). Alexandra defines her identity by participating in the creation of nature.

Cather chooses to name the final chapter of O Pioneers! after her female protagonist Alexandra, perhaps suggesting that Alexandra encompasses the main themes of the novel. As an adult, Alexandra draws on both traditionally female and male roles. She utilizes a homestead and transforms it into managed farmland, expressing the value of nature to humanity. She also preserves and appreciates the wilderness, including the river that feeds her farm and her passion. Cather instills in her protagonist the ambivalent role of nature, displaying how Alexandra values both her farmland and the river. Alexandra receives physiological nourishment from the former and spiritual nourishment from the latter.

Cather adopts a central theme from Regionalism with Alexandra's connection to nature. Cather explores the value of nature to humanity in both male and female literary traditions, Realism and Regionalism. Cather's first novel of the soil contributes to the female literary tradition of Regionalism, while developing the ambivalent role of nature that follows in her successive novels.

CHAPTER 3

ESCAPING TO A RIVER IN MY ÁNTONIA

As she moves more towards Romanticism, Cather approaches nature in My Ántonia differently than in O Pioneers!. Cather is limited by Realism and Regionalism in O Pioneers! because the literary styles offer less room to reflect on the past. Realism and Regionalism emphasize everyday details in the context of the current time. In My Ántonia Cather seeks to enhance the ordinary life of a female immigrant in the Midwest. Cather shifts the story from ordinary to individual and unique by engaging the personal and emotional details in her character's past. Cather leaves the male tradition of Realism and the female tradition of Regionalism for her reinterpretation of Romanticism.

Cather's Romantic vision impacts the ambivalent role of nature along with its influence on humanity. She looks at nature with wonder and opportunity, rather than with bleakness and determinism. The ambivalent role of nature in her novel parallels a historical context where people were "grappling with the right relation between humans and nature" (Urgo, My Ántonia 20). She writes the novel at a time when America was preserving wilderness in national parks. "The era of *My Ántonia* is one of national landscape preservation," says Urgo (My Ántonia 20). Cather visits national parks and rides on railroads to experience the expanding country. Urgo says the novel "raises to the status of 'landmark' the human experience on the landscape it recounts" (My Ántonia 19). Cather presents her childhood memories as a Romantic and nostalgic way of sharing the landscape.

The role of nature changes from O Pioneers! to My Ántonia as Cather changes the narrative technique. While the circumstances of Alexandra and Emil may at first seem similar to those of Jim and Ántonia, the narrative point of view moves from third person to first person. This shift to first-person point of view solidifies Jim and Ántonia's childhood connection with nature.

The narrator begins My Ántonia by framing the story with Jim's text, a diary of his experiences in Nebraska with Ántonia. Jim's memories of the past evolve as though they were the present. Unlike the fragments of Alexandra's memories in O Pioneers!, Jim's memories constitute the entire story. He recalls many experiences with Ántonia in nature.

Jim's memories of Ántonia, as collected in his diary given to the narrator, explain the sense of place that Jim establishes upon arriving in Red Cloud, Nebraska. His early memories begin on the family farm and end in the nearby town. Cather structures the chapters to reflect Jim's memories of Ántonia and Nebraska. The first chapter, "The Shimerdas," refers to Ántonia's family, while the second chapter, "The Hired Girls," includes Ántonia along with other hired immigrant women in town. The "Cuzak's Boys," named for Ántonia's children, is the closing chapter. The final chapters describe Jim's departure and eventual return to Red Cloud, Nebraska, after going away to college. Jim's connection with Nebraska during childhood contrasts with his disconnection from it later. His nostalgia for nature and Ántonia show how much he admires her rootedness, the sense of place he can only remember.

Cather's first chapter follows the annual cycle of seasons. Jim's family moves to Nebraska in the winter, and Jim experiences the harsh weather of the Midwest. He

describes winter as a season “with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and gray as sheet-iron,” (Cather, My Ántonia 47). His fear of winter weather increases when there is a storm. “The cold was not severe,” says Jim, “but the storm was quiet and resistless,” (Cather, My Ántonia 92). He worries most about his family and friends and their livestock during a storm: “perhaps the cattle had frozen to death; perhaps a neighbor was lost in the storm,” (Cather, My Ántonia 101). These worries over survival connect Jim in a substantial way to the people who work the land.

Jim and his family and friends experience the danger of seasonal weather caused by cycles of nature. It is “the world of nature rather than the human world which dominates,” (Miller 479). They learn to live by the rules and cycles of nature; the consequences of not learning can be dangerous. Jim says of Ántonia's family: “the snow and the bitter weather had disheartened them all,” (Cather, My Ántonia 90). In comparison to Jim's family, her family is ill-prepared for winter. Ántonia's family eats few meals, and the children sleep in dug-outs. Their unstable immigrant homestead intensifies “the drama of the human being at the mercy of the cyclic nature of the universe,” (Miller 478). Jim and Ántonia must accept the dominance of the seasons in order to survive the harsh winters in Nebraska. Otherwise they face the "difficulty of making one's living from the land against the opposition of the force of nature,” (Yukman 97). In frontier life, this “force of nature” is often the dangerous winter season.

In spite of the dangerous role of nature, I also find the nurturing role of nature in My Ántonia. The cycle of seasons not only threatens life with its harsh winters, it also cultivates life with its vibrant springs and warm summers. Jim shows how this thrill for

life begins even in the winter: “In the winter bleakness a hunger for color came over people,” (Cather, My Ántonia 143). Cather describes the seasonal color in the plants, from trees and fields to flowers and crops.

After fall and winter, spring revives nature for Jim. He remembers one spring, saying the “buffalo-peas were blooming… the larks... were singing straight at the sun... the wind blew about us in warm, sweet gusts,” (Cather, My Ántonia 118). Jim appreciates spring for its renewal of life; it awakens the plants and animals around him. He praises the season for “the throb of it, the light restlessness, the vital essence of it everywhere; in the sky, in the swift clouds, in the pale sunshine, and in the warm, high wind” (Cather, My Ántonia 114). Jim notes the change of season in the land and the sky. “It was one of those lovely warm May days, and the wind was blowing and the colts jumping around in the pastures,” he says (Cather, My Ántonia 214). Spring days remind Jim of his fascination with nature as a young boy, while playing with Ántonia.

Jim remembers the nurturing power of the summer, the season of light and warmth. He describes “burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the color and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests;” (Cather, My Ántonia 47). The settlers rely on this vegetation to give them food and crops for the following seasons. Jim discusses the importance of summer towards agriculture: “July came on with that breathless, brilliant heat which makes the plains of Kansas and Nebraska the best corn country in the world,” (Cather, My Ántonia 123). The settlers depend on cultivating and reaping their harvests during the summer. Jim says: “their yield would be one of the great economic facts... which underlie all the activities of men, in peace or war,” (Cather, My Ántonia

124). The natural cycle of seasons, in this case summer, influences human activity. Jim thinks of the summer even during the winter: “It was as if we were being punished for loving the loveliness of summer” (Cather, My Ántonia 143). In contrast to the barren, cold winter, the summer is warm and pleasing. “The wind that sweeps in from the open country strips away all the leafy screens that hide one yard from another in summer,” says Jim (Cather, My Ántonia 143). He relishes the liveliness and activity of the season.

Cather continues referencing her natural landmarks from O Pioneers! to My Ántonia by including another river scene. Alexandra carries a loving memory of her river scene with Emil; similarly, Jim reminisces over his river scene with Ántonia and the “hired girls.” This landmark reminds Jim of his early childhood relation to Ántonia and to nature. The hired girls, like Ántonia, “are memorable because they literally embody the landscape…” (Urgo, Cather Studies 53). Jim waits for the girls to arrive at the river, and it occurs to him for the first time that he “would be homesick for that river after I left it” (Cather, My Ántonia 175). The river marks a place is his memory of childhood activities in nature. Jim is “cognizant of…the connection between landscape and memory” (Urgo, Cather Studies 54). As he grows aware of the river, he becomes self-aware of his being and sensing. “Charley Harling and I had hunted through these woods, fished from the fallen logs,” says Jim, “until I knew every inch of the river shores and had a friendly feeling for every bar and shallow,” (Cather, My Ántonia 175). Jim's knowledge of the bioregion interconnects with his self-awareness and his awareness of Ántonia.

Jim discovers that Ántonia also senses a bond with the river, which she identifies with her father and her homeland. As an immigrant to America, Ántonia ties part of her identity to her native land of Bohemia. She thinks of the old country as she experiences

nature: "'It makes me homesick, Jimmy, this flower, this smell'" (Cather, My Ántonia 176). When Jim asks about her homeland, she recalls the countryside. "My feet remember all the little paths through the woods, and where the big roots stick out to trip you," says Ántonia. "I ain't never forgot my own country" (Cather, My Ántonia 177). Ántonia cultivates a relationship with nature much like the relationship with her family, especially her father. Jim believes her deceased father's spirit is in nature: "I always thought of him as being among the woods and fields that were so dear to him" (Cather, My Ántonia 176). Ántonia feels close to nature because she connects nature with her childhood experiences in two disparate lands.

Cather emphasizes Romanticism in the reflective style of Jim and Ántonia's time in nature. Jonathan Gross discusses the Romantic elements in My Ántonia , which he believes "celebrates Wordsworth's values" (119). Cather mirrors these values in the river scene with Jim and Ántonia. The Romantic elements in the river scene include an awareness of and sensitivity to nature. Gross says: "Cather depicts a special understanding between reader and listener, one fused by the landscape they shared and by their sensitivity to nature" (121). Cather also displays the influence of nature on man in Jim and Ántonia's recollections by the river. Gross attributes this Romanticism to Cather's "method of mixing recollection and erotic passion" (125). As Jim listens to Ántonia, he gains an appreciation for her bond with nature.

The female bond with nature is another Romantic element, in addition to awareness, sensitivity, and recollection in nature. Jim understands the female bond with nature and appreciates Ántonia's "dignity (her "grizzled" hair)… her unconventionality in the best Byronic, Wordsworthian, and Romantic spirit" (Gross 126). Jim associates

Ántonia with nature partly because Romanticism is a male literary tradition, and he is "possessed with a Romantic idea of Ántonia" (Handley 149). Cather uses Jim Burden's male voice to express, and perhaps criticize, the Romantic idea of women and nature. Gross discusses the Romantic bond between women and nature: "Both Burden and Wordsworth celebrate their own countries, their own land, and the women who inhabit them" (127). Jim idealizes Ántonia in the same way that Romanticism idealizes nature.

Cather reworks the Romantic tradition of classic practitioners, such as Wordsworth, to suit her literary purpose. While she writes about the common life of ordinary people, Cather elevates the experiences of a non-American female character (Ántonia) above the experiences of the traditional Romantic male character (Jim). She creates an immigrant identity for Ántonia, avoiding Romantic ties to Nativism. Cather imagines the New World of an immigrant, while evoking Ántonia's memories and emotions. Instead of exploring the land from a male perspective, Cather offers scenes of female immigrants on the farm and in nature. Cather reframes the traditional Romantic male idea of nature into the female space of Ántonia.

Ántonia's connection with nature differs from Alexandra's in O Pioneers!, partly because Ántonia reminisces about the Old World. Ántonia expresses a Romantic identification with her two worlds. She seeks to escape the harsh realities of pioneering life by enjoying memories of nature. Alexandra seems more Realistic, in contrast, as she spends less time remembering her former homeland and more time building her current home. Ántonia's memories of nature relate to her homeland before immigrating to Nebraska, whereas Alexandra's memories of nature remain tied to Nebraska. Ántonia seeks landmarks, like the river, that remind her of her native country. This

contrasts with Alexandra, who relishes landmarks that remind her of pioneering with her family in America. Alexandra's landmarks relate to Realism, while Ántonia's landmarks relate to Romanticism.

Cather chooses to align Ántonia with Romanticism in contrast to Alexandra, whom she associates with Realism and Regionalism. The change in literary styles from Realism to Romanticism offers Cather a new opportunity to explore her character without the patterns of her predecessors, like Henry James or Sarah Orne Jewett. In O Pioneers! Cather relies on Realism and Regionalism, styles established with many American readers, to describe the hardships of Alexandra. Cather presents Alexandra's life on the farm within her immigrant community. But Cather is limited by Realism and Regionalism to tell only the story of Alexandra in the New World, not the story of her former life in the Old World. In My Ántonia Cather employs Romanticism to express the memories of Ántonia before immigrating, in addition to her story of pioneering in the Midwest. Cather enables Ántonia to revisit her life in the Old World, comparing it with her life in the New World. Cather escapes beyond the literary boundaries of Realism and Regionalism in associating Ántonia with Romanticism.

The differences between Realism and Romanticism reflect ambivalent attitudes on the influence of nature on humanity. Joseph Meeker explains the ambivalent attitudes in an ecocritical context: "Post-Renaissance philosophy has taught us to think of nature either as an idyll of simplicity and peace populated by noble savages [Romanticism]… or as a bloody battlefield where only the most brutal can survive [Realism]" ("Comedy" 17). Because Alexandra and Ántonia are both immigrants and settlers, they adopt the perspectives of American pioneers. Meeker believes such early

settlers “looked upon the land as a natural refuge from the oppressive cities of Europe. America was thought of from the beginning as a gigantic garden or wilderness park" (“Red” 4). Alexandra sees the struggle of pioneers in the wilderness, while Ántonia remembers her idyllic experiences in nature. “Both views drastically oversimplify the intricate processes of nature,” says Meeker, “because they reflect the methods and values of a pioneer species, man” (“Comedy” 17). Later, in Death Comes to the Archbishop, Cather combines these ambivalent views of nature into man’s experience in the garden.

As with Alexandra’s identity in O Pioneers!, Geertz’s theories on local knowledge help explain Ántonia’s identity. Ántonia arrives in Nebraska as an immigrant, free from the Western concept of a separate identity from nature. She originally derives her identity from the Old World. Her father symbolizes the Old World culture that never transitions into the New World. It follows that Ántonia thinks of her father when she is in nature. The wilderness that she identifies with in the new country reminds her of the wilderness that her father identifies with in the old country.

Unlike her father, Ántonia cultivates her identity in the New World. “Characters also reinvent themselves in their new surroundings,” says Urgo; “Ántonia’s greatest resource may be the capacity to shed an old self and take on a new one…” (My Ántonia 24). She transforms her identity by adopting some of the culture and nature of her new country. She retains her non-American identity, and she does not replace her memories of the Old World. Instead, she remembers her childhood, her father, and her old country in the context of nature. Urgo says: “Preserving landscapes, in turn, is remembering: it is the aesthetic expression and the physical behavior of memory itself”

(My Ántonia 22). But Ántonia preserves memories of her childhood by experiencing them again in nature. Urgo believes “we also must work to remember the landscape of our own origins, to preserve the labor and the identities of those who have contributed to the making of the present” (My Ántonia 21). Ántonia builds her identity in the present by remembering the contributions of her father and the landscape of her origins.

CHAPTER 4

GROWING A GARDEN IN DEATH COMES TO THE ARCHBISHOP

Cather's transition from My Ántonia and O Pioneers! to Death Comes to the Archbishop indicates a shift from her previous subject matters and narrative structures. As she looks away from Realism, Cather turns to the past for romance and mythology. O'Brien believes that most romance writers "set their heroic tales in the historic past or in exotic, timeless realms… safely distant from the grubby or oppressive realities of the industrial and urban present" (152). The Southwest opens Cather to a new environment for adventure and historical fiction. She romanticizes the Southwest and the restorative power of nature. Cather adopts some of the "the late nineteenth-century ideology of masculinity and Emersonian self-reliance" in her "infatuation with romance and adventure fiction" (151). She finds space in the desert for experimenting with male and female literary traditions.

Cather approaches the ideological views of nature through male and female literary traditions of Romanticism and Regionalism in Death Comes to the Archbishop. Similar to the Romantic style of My Ántonia, her southwestern novel romanticizes the area "in a manner she had previously reserved for eastern and European culture" (Handley 131). Cather moves further from Realism and its established cultural views, but she maintains a Romantic view of nature influenced by Western ideologies. She looks at "the gap between experience and the (often Romantic) representation of experience" (Handley 127). Cather relies on the Western view of nature for a sense of nostalgia about a landscape imagined by pioneers. This ideal landscape is "that which no American has ever found: a perpetually happy home on the range" (Handley 7).

Whereas Realism often presents an unsympathetic view of nature, Romanticism shows an imaginary view of an idyllic nature. Cather's Romanticism "does not so much tell the truth about real places and people as it satisfies, engenders, and explores our need for fictions about them" (127). Cather imagines nature through the myths and stories of southwestern culture.

Cather received from the southwestern desert a canvas for expressing the female literary tradition of Regionalism. "Cather found women's creative power written into a female landscape" says O'Brien, because the desert "granted her spaces outside of patriarchal definitions of gender and creativity" (417). She escaped some of the patterns of the male literary tradition of Realism, which was less established in the Southwest.

Cather continues her exploration of Regionalism in Death Comes to the Archbishop by replacing the landmarks of Nebraska with southwestern landmarks, like caverns and underground rivers. Gardens take on a new importance as landmarks in the arid desert region, where the difficulty of growing plants and capturing water can be more difficult than in Nebraska. Cather displays elements of Regionalism in her sensitivity towards nature, especially the nurturing of gardens.

Cather experiments with narrative structure in Death Comes to the Archbishop, infusing her own memories of the desert into Bishop Latour's reflections on being a missionary. Unlike the first-person narrator of My Ántonia, Cather chooses an omniscient narrator. She refers to the novel as "experimental," saying she "wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment" (Middleton 42). The omniscient narration of the novel enables broadened views of the

ambivalent role of nature. Cather at times “portrayed desert landscapes as psychic and creative wastelands…” says O’Brien, but “she also viewed arid countries as places for sensual liberation or spiritual revelation” (406). Cather’s narrator observes nostalgic views of gardens along with fearful views of an underground river and other desert wilderness.

Cather’s characterization changes from My Ántonia to Death Comes to the Archbishop, affecting the ideological views of nature. She creates a pair of French missionaries, instead of Nebraskan settlers and immigrants. She also avoids a female connection with nature, which is central to the Regionalism in My Ántonia. Her protagonist, Father Latour, cultivates a view of the southwestern landscape based on his missionary background. Cather alternates his story between “legends and tales of adventure and the reflective moods of memory-laden protagonist filters” (Murphy 4). Father Latour’s childhood memories in France influence his view of nature in the Southwest.

Cather establishes in Father Latour a Romantic view of nature both from his childhood in France and from his early adult years pioneering in the Southwest. Latour shares a national identity in both places, giving him the enchantment of a “particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as a homeland" (Schama 15). Latour creates memories from his experiences of the gardens and mountains in France and the desert hills of the Southwest. The landmarks are "culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" (Schama 61). Latour’s identity is rooted in Western ideology and Romantic imagery of landmarks.

Father Latour identifies with Western culture in contrast to the nature-centered beliefs of some people he meets on his adventures in the Southwest. The prologue in Death Comes to the Archbishop sets the tone between clergy and Native Americans, as the Cardinal over Father Latour sees the "redskins through Fenimore Cooper…" (Cather, Archbishop 14). Latour, though he personally befriends Native Americans, still applies an imperialist attitude in terms of their beliefs and their land ethic. His partner, Father Vaillant, also adheres to his European beliefs. When Father Latour thinks of the cruciform tree that rescues him, he says Vaillant would have the miracle "very direct and spectacular, not with Nature, but against it" (Cather, Archbishop 30). Their Western view of nature signifies the separation of heaven and earth that is part of their religious beliefs. These cultural beliefs are "dualisms prevalent in Western thought that separate mind from body, men from women, and humanity from nature" (Glotfelty 29). Throughout the novel, Father Latour adheres to his Western theology with a separation from the environment.

Cather's narrative structure in Death Comes to the Archbishop mirrors Latour's Western cultural viewpoint, creating distance from the southwestern bioregion. The narrative point of view remains in third person. Unlike the first-person narration of Jim and Ántonia's personal connection with nature, the third-person narration encompasses the Bishop's spiritual and professional relationship with his religious community. The third-person point of view limits the direct communication of experience from Latour.

Instead of a direct experience of nature, Latour often receives a mediated or guided interpretation of it. He listens to the stories of Mexican ranchers, American settlers, and Native Americans. Latour understands the southwestern environment

through second-hand experiences. Though he travels frequently across the deserts and into distant terrains, he accomplishes these adventures with the help of guides.

Cather associates southwestern natural landmarks with marginalized non-Americanized groups such as Native Americans. The narrator describes their land ethic in the “Stone Lips” scene with Jacinto and Father Latour in Death Comes to the Archbishop. Cheryll Glotfelty refers to the scene as the “closest to making the dangerous crossing into prelandscaped land in that [Cather] gives the underground river scene great power, she respects the Native way of dissolving into the landscape…” (33). The underground river scene projects a dissonance between the Western culture of Father Latour and the Native American culture of Jacinto. This dissonance arises from the negative reactions of Father Latour and from the reluctant guidance of Jacinto.

Father Latour enters the cave with fear and awe, asking for a fire to feel safe in the foreign environment. In spite of the cave’s shelter from the storm, he is “struck by a reluctance, an extreme distaste for the place” (Cather, Archbishop 134). The primitive space of the cave displaces the Bishop’s Western cultural bias. He must rely on Jacinto to navigate the terrain. The Native American says: “I do not know if it was right to bring you here. This place is used by my people for ceremonies… When you go from here you must forget” (Cather, Archbishop 135). Jacinto recognizes the Bishop’s confusion. He is more familiar with such sublime relics of land. He maintains the capacity to change from the anthropocentric view of Europeans, like Father Latour, to the biocentric view of Native Americans. Though Latour is non-American, he is more Americanized than his Native American guide. Cather highlights their disparate

ideological views in relation to natural landmarks, like the cave and the underground river.

Father Latour seems distant not only from the cave but also from the river beneath the cave. He notices a “dizzy noise” in his head, thinking it is vertigo. The cave “hummed like a hive of bees, like a heavy roll of distant drums” (Cather, Archbishop 137). Cather employs metaphors of nature and exoticism to describe the territory unfamiliar to the Bishop. He tells himself he is “listening to one of the oldest voices of the earth” (Cather, Archbishop 137). In a sacred place with Jacinto, Father Latour interconnects his own humanity with nature. The Bishop ends his encounter with nature saying: “It is terrible” (Cather, Archbishop 138). Unlike Jacinto, who balances culture and nature, Father Latour prefers his landscaped gardens to the primitive cave.

After returning home, Father Latour remembers the ceremonial cave with discomfort. It represents to him not only the primitive earth but also the primitive religion of Native Americans. The Native American religion connects them to the land, creating landmarks within their belief system. This biocentric connection between land and religion threatens the Bishop’s Western mindset. Though he remembers the storm with a “tingling sense of pleasure,” he remembers the cave with “horror” (Cather, Archbishop 141). The storm is a physical danger, but the cave is a mental or metaphorical danger.

The “Stone Lips” scene with Latour and Jacinto invites many interpretations, but I choose to approach it with Geertz’s theories of local knowledge. Because Jacinto’s Native American background gives the spiritual context to the cave, the site defamiliarizes Latour by displacing him outside of his Western context. O’Brien refers to the moment metaphorically when “the priest simultaneously enters the mouth and the

womb of the natural world…" (202). Latour loses his sense of identity just as he loses his context with the Western world. O'Brien continues: "Because he has repressed this primal force, the cave – which speaks through the voice of the river – has the power to silence him…" (203). The underground river creates natural energy in the wilderness. Though Alexandra has the capacity to understand it, Latour fears the mystery of the wild river. O'Brien believes the "Archbishop is too fearful of the cave's contents to unite inner and outer by bringing the submerged to the surface" (203). Latour's inability to recognize the submerged force of the river parallels his inability to understand Native American spirituality in the context of the cave.

Latour lacks context in regards to Native American culture because his Western culture depends on mobility, according to Joseph Urgo. "The confrontation between whites and native peoples on the American plains pitted a culture of migration and transferal... against a culture in which places and landscapes are sacred..." (Urgo, Migration 177). Latour's motivations for arriving in the Southwest reflect the imperialism of European countries across the New World. Urgo says Cather's novel "projects these simple and great thoughts of transmission as the seeds of empire in the United States" (Migration 168). Latour and other missionaries spread Western religion and culture, dominating what they considered to be a spiritual wilderness. "Part of Latour's melancholy at the end of his life," says Urgo, "is probably due to the knowledge that he is also a part of the machinery of empire that is displacing a civilization" (176). The effects of this displacement severely impact the southwestern environment and the influence of nature in Native American culture.

Latour witnesses the removal of Native Americans from the landscapes they consider sacred. “In Cather's view, however,” says Urgo, “it is this quality of stasis that dooms them in the face of the migratory culture of the United States” (Migration 184). Latour follows the idea of nature as a transferable commodity. He believes that “in America, place and belief, land and religion, are not and cannot be connected by sacred links” (Urgo, Migration 176). Latour accepts the missionary life as one which transforms people and place. He embodies “the will and ambition that transform the landscape from historical, sacred place to the spatial setting for an empire of migration” (Urgo, Migration 179). Latour appreciates the local knowledge displayed by his Native American guide. He separates the knowledge of place from the spirituality of landmarks. He even “suspects that this kind of thing is superstition, magic, and is not to be trusted” (Urgo, Migration 178). Unlike his guide Jacinto, Latour refuses to acknowledge the physical and spiritual power of the wilderness. Perhaps he foresees the destructive impact of Western culture over southwestern nature.

Like Jacinto's role as a guide to the wilderness, the garden serves as an intermediary between Latour and nature. Father Latour invests in his garden an order and idealism, cultivating its physical growth in the same manner his church cultivates religious growth. “He urged the new priests to plant fruit trees...” says the narrator. “Wherever there was a French priest, there should be a garden of fruit trees and vegetables and flowers” (Cather, Archbishop 278-279). He spreads the seeds of fruit trees as readily as he spreads the word of Christianity through the Southwest.

Mark A. R. Facnitz attributes this idealism in the garden to a vision in which “pure desire seeks to act in a rank world that nowhere offers concrete demonstration of

absolute good or truth" (293). Latour enjoys relief from earthly troubles, transcending this world with the belief that "gardens are Romantic..." (Facnitz 293). While Father Latour is not so much a Romantic as Jim Burden, Latour manages to uncover a provisional space for transcendence in the prosperity of his garden. Facnitz says: "we see characters touch their idealism before, inevitably, being snapped back into ordinary life" (306). Latour spends his golden years maintaining a garden that captures his ideal qualities of nature.

The garden sits at the crossroads between nature and culture. Long before his journeys through the deserts in America, Latour experiences gardens as a young man in France. His memories, similar to those of Jim Burden's childhood, reflect a personal connection to the gardens in Clermont. Michael Pollan offers: "One of the things childhood is a process of learning about the various paths that lead out of nature and into culture, and the garden contains many of these." (18). Latour learns to appreciate the blending of nature and culture into a garden.

Father Latour decides not to retire near his beloved gardens in France, perhaps because there was "too much past..." (Cather, Archbishop 286). "Much of gardening is a return," says Pollan, "an effort at recovering remembered landscapes" (33). Latour stays in New Mexico for the air that makes him feel like a child again. He notices that this "quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvests" (Cather, Archbishop 286). This reflection on man's damage, a paradox in light of his own contributions to his religious empire, shows Latour's understanding of the path from culture into nature.

Manuel Broncano emphasizes the significance of gardens to Cather's story, especially in the meaning it gives to the missionaries. He argues that Death Comes to the Archbishop "is articulated upon a series of gardens that provide the text with a unifying structure… through the minutely re-created southwestern ecosystem… the orchard where Jean Latour seeks refuge after retirement" (Broncano 130). Father Latour begins his journey in the Southwest with very little time for planting, but by the end he cares for orchards and gardens. Broncano says " they plant a garden that will grow old with them, its trees providing saplings for orchards all over the territory" (131). Their hardships in successfully growing gardens in the Southwest parallel the challenges of missionary work in the region.

Broncano portrays Father Latour with a spiritual and natural connection to the Southwest, in opposition to my argument that he distances himself from nature. Broncano says such "a fusion of missionary work with gardening reunites land and spirit, self and nature" (131). He argues that the priests grow plants where few had existed before. "This quiet labor… leaves behind the priests a trail of vegetation," says Broncano, "havens of life in the barren landscapes of the New World" (131). But these landscapes hardly appeared barren to the Native Americans who populated them and grew crops on them. The priests' gardening may prove spiritually rewarding to themselves, offering a way to commune with nature. Their expansion of territory, however, represents the encroachment of Western culture into the southwestern wilderness.

Cather identifies Father Latour with Western culture through the end of Death Comes to the Archbishop. She envisions his lasting impact on the southwestern

landscape in the form of a cathedral, “which would also be his tomb” (Cather, Archbishop 285). Cather imagines a cathedral that rises into the “blue air, while the body of the church still lay against the mountain” (Archbishop 285). The cathedral contrasts with its southwestern setting in a way that reminds onlookers of European churches. Cather creates the cathedral as a monument to the legend of Father Latour.

Although Cather buries Father Latour in his cathedral, she ends the novel with a memory of his childhood in nature. Latour fades into the afterlife while recalling his former life in France. He remembers “standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains” (Cather, Archbishop 285). There he convinces the young priest Vaillant to travel with him to Paris.

Cather juxtaposes the cultural scene at the cathedral during Latour’s funeral with the natural scene in the mountains of Latour’s childhood. In an example of her emerging modern literary voice, she closes the novel with Latour’s body in the church though his mind is in memories of nature. Cather’s modern ending follows the experimental subject matter of Death Comes to the Archbishop, which balances both nostalgic and fearful views of nature.

CHAPTER 5.

COMBINING MALE AND FEMALE LITERARY TRADITIONS

Cather's garden scenes in Death Comes to the Archbishop grant a transitional space between the progression of Western culture and the preservation of wilderness. Cather's ambivalent role of nature ultimately reconciles the competing forces of culture and nature by establishing roles for both in the garden. Of course, reconciling nature and culture is no accident in Cather's writing career. In charting the course from Cather's rivers to gardens, I have previously been pointing to stages in the development of her writing about man and nature. Cather collects and filters her point of view on nature from both male and female literary traditions.

I present in previous chapters the literary context of Cather's trajectory from Realism and Regionalism into Modernism. In O Pioneers! Cather refines the established male and female traditions of Realism and Regionalism. But Cather is limited by these styles in her ability to reflect on the past. With My Ántonia Cather escapes from Realism and Regionalism by returning to Romanticism for personal memories and individual emotions. Cather finds space in the desert in Death Comes to the Archbishop to experiment with male and female literary traditions. She escapes further from the male tradition of Realism and contributes to the female literary tradition of Regionalism. She returns to Romanticism for telling myths and stories of southwestern culture. Cather combines the male and female literary traditions of Romanticism and Regionalism into a modern interpretation of nature and culture.

In an environmental context Cather creates ambivalences based on different human experiences in nature. In chapter 2 on O Pioneers! I explain her ambivalence in

the value of nature to humanity. In chapter 3 on My Ántonia, I analyze her ambivalence in the influence of nature on humanity. Finally, in chapter 4 on Death Comes to the Archbishop, I look at her ambivalence in man's ideological views of nature. I will review Cather's development of the ambivalent role of nature with male and female literary traditions. I believe the third and final novel from the selected works culminates in a reconciliation of man and nature in the garden.

Cather begins the long journey into the wilderness with her novels of the soil. "The results are her best novels," says Murphy, "in which the materials of Realism are filtered through the glow of cultivated consciousness, just as her landscapes radiate with the light of the setting sun" (3). I note how Cather mixes the male tradition of Realism with the female tradition of Regionalism. She uncovers in Regionalism a "pastoral world separated from the competitiveness and aggressiveness of American life" (O'Brien 370). Cather's combination of both male and female literary traditions, Realism and Regionalism, introduces the concept of an ambivalent nature.

In O Pioneers! Cather confronts the male literary tradition of Realism in the novel's characterization. Cather's characterization acknowledges that the "American pastoral feminizes nature and the other, incorporating them into an alienated subject's nostalgia for a lost state of being" (Yukman 96). Cather reveals the struggle over the value of nature to humanity in the scene where Marie and Emil argue over duck hunting. Emil and Marie value opposing sides of culture and nature. Emil displays competitive and aggressive elements of Realism.

Cather presents the value of nature to humanity through the female literary tradition of Regionalism. Similar to Jewett's Regional classic "A White Heron," Cather's

O Pioneers! provides a female role as protector of wildlife. Marie feels empathy for the ducks at the river. The female bond with nature reflects Cather's Regionalism and her "desire that women, less invested in masculine myths and denied power, will have the last word on narrating the West's true history" (Handley 138). The heroine of O Pioneers! is Alexandra. She successfully navigates the wilderness and the farming society of Nebraska, valuing both nature and humanity. Alexandra personifies the type of Cather's characters who finds fulfillment by "connecting to 'something complete and great' that enriches, extends, and defines the self even as it dissolves it – religion, land, the family, art" (O'Brien 48). Alexandra defines herself by creating and participating in nature.

In My Ántonia Cather describes nature's influence on humanity through the male literary tradition of Romanticism, finding a way to "nostalgically romanticize a disappearing frontier past" (Handley 127). She chooses Jim Burden as a protagonist and a first-person narrative voice, as opposed to the omniscient narrator of O Pioneers!. For Jim, "home will always be in Nebraska, and Nebraska will always be elsewhere, a place in the past..." (Urgo, Migration 56). His nostalgia for Nebraska includes an escape into wilderness, such as his river scene with the "hired girls." Cather's settlers often "carry within their minds the dream of flight or the memory of escape" (Urgo, Migration 57). The Romantic elements of nostalgia and escape bond Jim not only with Ántonia but also with the wilderness of Nebraska.

Cather shows Romanticism in Ántonia's memories. Ántonia lives at the boundary of society and wilderness. Her immigrant identity is built on memories of the Old World and experiences in the New World. "Romanticism comes easily to migrants," says Urgo,

“who must preserve things of tremendous value through conscious memory” (Migration 56). Unlike Jim or Alexandra, who have nostalgia for youthful times in Nebraska, Ántonia reminisces about her childhood in the Old World. She remains rooted to nature and to Nebraska. Rather than separating herself from the landmarks of memory, she embraces the influence of nature on her immigrant-frontier identity.

Cather creates a unique modern voice in Death Comes to the Archbishop, combining Regionalism and Romanticism into fictional history. Handley says: “Cather's distinctive combination of literary impulses needs to be understood within a cultural context" (127). Cather continues the female tradition of Regionalism, but she also maintains a Romantic view of nature influenced by Western ideologies. In Cather’s literary West, says Handley, “power, influence, survival, control, and reason are not exclusively masculinity's domain, but neither are human beings free to remake civilization, unconstrained by the Old World" (135). While considering man’s ideological views of nature, Cather also finds a meeting point for the ambivalent role of culture and nature in the garden. Before reconciling man and wilderness, Cather challenges her protagonist in an underground river scene. The “Stone Lips” scene in Death Comes to the Archbishop exposes a cultural separation between the ideologies of the French missionary Latour and his Native American guide, Jacinto. Latour realizes his fear of wilderness while seeking refuge in the cavern. His spirituality distances him from the underground river. Jacinto, in contrast, identifies with the underground river as a source of life and spirituality in his Native American tradition. Latour remembers the underground river with horror, recognizing the wilderness as a dividing point between their ideological views of nature.

Cather creates a space that reconciles man and wilderness, after she confronts the separate ideologies of Father Latour and Jacinto. She offers an intermediary in Latour's gardens. "Nature as antagonist," says Facnitz, "…gives either in proportion to human greed or takes in proportion to our neglect" (292). As a benefactor, nature can "represent the boundless human capacity to despoil and pervert the good or... demonstrate the magnificence... of the idealized garden..." (Facnitz 292). Man and nature share complementary roles as guides to one another on a common ground.

Cather's ability to create and reconcile the ambivalent role of nature depends on her trajectory from Realism and Regionalism into a modern literary voice of her own. "Cather's literary West," says Handley, "in which romance and realism run up against each other, is a prism through which Americans' divided sensibilities have found themselves refracted" (126). Early in her career, Cather follows the male literary tradition of Realism. She adopts the drawing rooms of Henry James, presenting culture without nature. With Jewett's help, she finds the female literary tradition of Regionalism in her novels of the soil. She creates an ambivalent role for nature, exploring culture and nature in both literary and environmental contexts. Handley explains that Cather's fiction is Realistic and Romantic, "like the range of human experience in the West itself" (126). As I have shown, Cather reconciles male and female literary traditions in her unique modern voice, while offering a space for nature and culture in the garden.

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