

## **I: Cather's Life and Her Works: An Introduction**

Willa Cather, an American female novelist able to establish female selfhood and autonomy through literary writing, was born on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1876 in Virginia. She moved to Nebraska with her parents in 1884 and graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1895. She engaged in various works in Nebraska. She worked as a school teacher and also in the newspaper in Pittsburg. She began her career in literary field through writing short stories. The literary reputation of Willa Cather has steadily risen since her first volume of short stories appeared in 1905. Her fictions portray the life of a diverse group of characters ranging from Midwestern immigrants to middle class esteems to cosmopolitan singers and artists.

Cather is one of the most renowned novelists of the early twentieth century America who raises voice against the patriarchal ideologies as they are false and so called conception. Cather attempts to keep women in the position of highest dignity of the canon. She does not see any difference between male and female. She desires to place women values in the row of male values. Equality among all is her prime motto of literary writing. She does not allow hierarchy in her writing. She challenges male for their suppression over female and who praise phallocentrism to dominate women in the society. She revolts against the traditional and conservative Victorian males for their power seeking tendency and their narrow mindedness and misconception about female.

Cather claims that women are not men's toys only to act in the male guidance but the next wheel of the same cart. If one is absent, other cannot work. So, both of the wheels are equally essential to continue life properly. Most of her novels do have women heroes with autonomous power to strengthen female in the society. So, her novels are not only to entertain her readers but also to reform the society. Her novels

stand the female heroes to attack the society which neglects female for their supremacy. Indeed, her novels contain female originality. The veil of phallogentric norms are torn in her novels. In other words, social realities are mirrored. Cather's female characters always fight against patriarchal norms and values to establish the female selfhood and autonomy. Women characters are put of the temptation created by males. In short, her female characters reject the showy love and care of males for their freedom, selfhood, existence and identity. Her passion is for heroic individuals. She prefers them to be heroic. Mostly she favors women heroism to emancipate women from narrow minded patriarchal rules and regulations.

Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, appeared in 1912 and was followed a year later by *O' Pioneers!* Cather was forty when the book appeared. It was an archetypal success story of a daughter of Swedish immigrant farmers, Alexandra Bergson, who arrives on the wind-blasted prairie of Hanover, Nebraska and grows up to make it a prosperous farm. Cather resigned in 1912 from *McClure's*, began writing full time and travelled to the southwest, returning there a few years later. The theme of a journey appeared in her novel, *The Song of the Lark*, which was partly set in Walnut Canyon, Arizona and took the form of the opera singer Thea Kronberg's pursuit of artistic excellence. The title of the novel was according to Cather, inspired by "a rather second-rate" painting in the Chicago Art Institute that showed a peasant girl listening to a bird in a field.

*My Antonia*, another novel about Nebraska, celebrated the land and the immigrant pioneers, and linked the enduring figure of Antonia to the life force itself. The book consists of the loosely structured memories of Jim Burden, who recounts tales of his Nebraska farm upbringing, and especially of the beautiful immigrant girl from Bohemia, Antonia Shimerda, who he loves with a pure innocence. *My Antonia* is

among Cather's finest work, but later critics have also pointed out that though Cather did not deal specifically with lesbianism, normal sex stands barred from her fictional world and her male characters often have female attitudes and interests. Jim Burden grows up in the novel with an intuitive fear of sex and only in fantasy he does allow a half nude woman to smother him with kisses. The original of Antonia was Annie Sadilek Pavelka, whom Cather had met in childhood and with whom she maintained a lifelong friendship.

Especially the autonomous female protagonists in Cather's novel are a break from the existing tradition of the masculine heroes of early 20<sup>th</sup> century novels. The women in her women centred novels are the heroes of new kind with new life history having right to exercise full power and strength. But the women in her contemporary novelists' novels are only the heroines, the wives of the heroes, without any autonomy. In comparison to the male protagonists they show their greater strength in the course of their action, valor and behavior than those of males. That is why Doris Grumbach rightly states about Cather's heroines: "She has created heroines who are longer than life and stronger than the men around them; her male characters seem to be weak and ineffectual in contrast" (47).

### ***O' Pioneers!:* An Overview**

The difficult relationship between the individual and society is one of the most enduring themes of American culture, and as such figures prominently in American literature. America's first puritan forebears were dissenters, forced to reconcile their impulse toward revolution against the society that confined them with their faith in the sanctity of the idea of community. Since then America has been marked by the uneasy balance between the forces of the personal and the public, between those of individual dreams and the great American dream. Cather's first great novel, *O'*

*Pioneers!* addresses itself in large part of that uneasy balance. In the story of Alexandra Bergson, the novel measures the potency of the remarkable individual against universal human desires and the forces of national history.

Stating concretely, the uneasiness that makes the characters' relationship with society and history in *O' Pioneers!* is presented in their relationship with the land. The land is their home and their livelihood, and it constitutes the promise that they sought in moving to the west. Cather gives the land a force and presence of its own, utterly independent, even disdainful of human settlement. She imbues the prairie with a vast inescapability and an undeniable power over those who attempt to exert their will upon it; the land field in what matters, not the people who inhabit there. Thus, the land of Alexandra Bergson in particular, and of the west in general, becomes timeless and impersonal in their massive scale. Cather writes that the land wants and feels, it gives and it takes, leaving the pioneers to submit to its whim. In its vastness, the land seems beyond transformation, always holding individual pioneers in its grasp. Yet, over time, though no individual pioneer can conquer the land, the cumulative sprit of generations of pioneers is a force unto itself. Through the collective successes and failures of these individuals, the land is indeed transformed. Alexandra Bergson's relationship with the land epitomizes this grand struggle between human agency and the larger forces that manipulate individuals. Alexandra exerts her will upon the land even as it bends and shapes her. Yet her relationship with the land goes deeper than mere control or influence. She is, to some extent, an incarnation of the land, at the same time, she seems curiously empty of human emotion and personality. Her relationship with Carl Linstrum seems strangely devoid of romance; her attachment to him is largely unemotional. Her recurring fantasies of a man who resembles a mystical corn god demonstrate her connection to the land and dissociation from

conventional society. Her story can be seen as a kind of creation myth, a universalized story about the cultivation and settlement of the American west.

As *O' Pioneers!* depicts individuals within a massive, unforgiving landscape, the novel puts very little faith in the ability of individuals to control their lives. Nor does it have much faith in the human capacity to form meaningful and lasting relationships: tragic and abortive relationships, especially unhappy marriages, abound in *O' Pioneers!*. In the end Cather's novel celebrates the ambitious idea and hard reality of pioneer America, but remains skeptical about the individual pioneer's ability to affect history through positive action. Yet, while Alexandra occupies a very familiar cultural space that of the individual struggling against larger forces. The novel neither resolves the question of human historical agency nor, because of her great will and deep respect for the pioneer spirit, depersonalizes Alexandra by consigning her to a stereotype. By the end of the novel through a sort of passive, stoic will that seems to minor the will of the land, Alexandra is able to avoid loneliness in her union with Carl and gain some measures of individuality.

### **Literature Review**

Willa Cather is one of the most renowned women novelists in twentieth century American literature. Among the various novels she wrote, her second novel *O' Pioneers!* has elicited much attention since its publication in 1913. The novel has been viewed from existential, frontier, religious perspective and from the perspective of style and technique.

Regarding Cather's *O' Pioneers!* Jamie Ambrose said: "*O' Pioneers!* portrays the growth of a new country and its people. The reader watches as the pioneer state of Nebraska moves through its early hardship of drought and failures towards the expansion of material success on the edge of the twentieth century"(87).

Jamie's remark throws the clear light on the issue that the novel is concerned with the immigration and the problems that are faced by the migrated people.

In the same way Richard W. Etulian in his article "From Frontier to Post Region" presents his views saying: "Cather's first western novel *O' Pioneers!* is a revealing example of the transition between frontier and religious in western American history and culture. In roughly the two decades covered in the novel, the Nebraska settings and society are transformed from a pioneer to settled community"(49). Etulian's comment on *O' Pioneers!* highlights the period of transformation and flux of the pioneer between frontier and religion in American history and culture.

Similarly David Daiches in his *Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction* talks about her most famous novel *O' Pioneers!* and states:

*O' Pioneers!* is the first of a group of novels in which the impact of a young country on the sad sensitivity of uprooted Europeans is presented with a sympathy and an insight rare in American writers. Even the most sophisticated of whom tend to regard the European immigrant as only too happy to leave the bad old world behind and settle down in the land of the free. (20)

Daiches's criticism very implicitly digs out the intermingle background and tensions of the migrated Europeans in the free land, which owes its own quality and its power.

*O' Pioneers!* is an experiment of Cather in subject matter and form about her use of style and techniques. Praising the exactness and beauty of presentation and talking about different sources of inspiration Jo Ann Middlenton puts his view as:

From Flaubert, she learned the value of language, the beauty of well-made sentences, and the power of selective detail; from James, she

learned the necessity of suggestion, the importance of compression and the evocation of emotion. To these she added her own criteria of limitation and patience in order to process her memories into art and her own willingness to experiment in order to do so. (40)

The above commentary reveals the fact that Cather as a novelist seems to have highly been affected by the modernist writers like James Flaubert Basically her techniques of writing are obviously directed to the modern way.

Likewise Benty Carl avers his views, “Alexandra in *O’ Pioneers!* sees the land as beautiful and rich and strong and glorious. By the force of her will, she is able to tame the same spirit of the land that her father considered malevolent, making it bend lower than it ever bent to a human will before” (37). Hereby it gets clear that Alexandra as the central character acts heroically in order to pave a new path of agricultural prosperity and advancement.

In this way Alan Curve states by focusing on the interplay between spirit and circumstances, “*O’ Pioneers!* proves itself, to some extent, a romantic novel; characters do not develop according to an interior plan, but rather respond to, and are driven by, forces beyond their control” (83).

In spite of the numerous studies done on the text, the issue, which this researcher raises, has not been explored yet. He has attempted to analyze the text in relation to the heroism and vitality performed by the protagonist to evoke prairie happiness and to establish the family fortune. The raised issue is researchable but challenging.

In the following chapter, this researcher will mention distinct sorts of feminism as well as details of women’s position in different western environments. Furthermore his attempt will be on Cather’s heroic women characters who undergo

the difficulties due to the immigration and adoption of new agricultural lifestyle. The reflection on numerous hindrances in the path of women's progress, prosperity, fame and dignity will be vitalized as well.

Similarly, the third chapter will be textual analysis. Besides this, the hypothetical statement will be elaborated with textual evidences in order to strengthen and enhance the thesis promulgation itself. Eventually, the fourth chapter will be conclusion. In fact, the deducing chapter will have a glance at all previous chapter.



## **II: Feminist Thought: A Discussion**

Feminism as a movement got its impetus within the social history of modern women. The women recognized unequal status and banded together in collective action to rectify the wrong done to them. They dared to come out from behind closed door to tell their plight and their vision without sexual bias. Men had long denied women their right to personhood. They achieved that rights by not allowing women to own property or to enter into contracts, education and citizenship.

Feminism came into existence with women questioning their place in patriarchal society. They examined the control, men had on women, and established the ground on which women started their concerns of subjugation. A good understanding of a definition of feminism becomes crucial to give a clear cut concept of the term and its basic premises. Feminism is a doctrine that holds a belief in sexual equality and opposes the sex hierarchy. It presupposes that women's condition is socially constructed rather than simply predestined by God or nature. It posits that women perceive themselves not only as a biological sex but also social grouping. Gerda Lerner articulates her opinion regarding a feminist consciousness:

I define feminist consciousness as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but it is socially determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination. (14)

Feminist consciousness developed over time and challenged the practices that perpetuated notions of superiority of men and inferiority of women. Feminism demands equal rights and opportunities for women in a political, economic, psychological, social and individual sense. Now, feminism represents a phenomenon that is identified with diverse ideas and is labeled as liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, existentialist, psychoanalytic, postmodern, multicultural and finally ecological. These levels stress the idea that feminism is not a monolithic idea. Feminism has not been static, rather it has evolved throughout history to include many different subjective locations.

Since race, class, culture and sexuality also affect how people are treated, gender and sex are understood by taking into account cultural practices. Because of the history of male dominance over women in western societies have taken notice and action against the inequality they have historically experienced. Feminism has been used to create awareness of gender inequality in society. It has also been used as a jumping off point in taking action to address inequality.

Male dominance was perpetuated by men who documented the history of social life as a male endeavor. As texts were written by men, they assumed or promoted their own superiority. Women were assumed to lack intelligence, but in actuality, women were not allowed to be liberated. Taking such issues into historical context, one can study some historical literary evolution. Feminism became a dominant approach in literature only in the late nineteenth century with the recognition of women's roles and achievements. It began when women became conscious of their relationship to language and of themselves as writers. Twentieth century writers such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir laid the groundwork for the development of feminist theory. It was earlier started formally through the

writing of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

Wollstonecraft laid down a tradition of liberal feminist and placed women's rights and sexual differences at the centre of social and political debate. Her writings challenge male birthright, advocate women's equality and rationality and argue against the degradation and subjugation of women. Rosemarie Tong finds Wollstonecraft a pioneering figure to emphasize on commands of reason to liberate women from oppressive males:

Despite limitation of her analysis Wollstonecraft did present a vision of a woman, strong in mind and body who is not slave to her passions, her husbands or children. For Wollstonecraft, the ideal woman is interested in fulfilling herself it by self-fulfillment is meant any sort of pondering to duty distracting desires than in exercising self-control. (16)

Hence, it is obviously stated that women by nature, are not weak and fragile. Rather they are made inferior in different aspects in the male oriented society.

Wollstonecraft indicates the fault in the process of the socialization. She detests the false education system that inspired women to love at the expense of reason and encourages women to study medicine, business and mathematics.

Rosemarie Tong examines Wollstonecraft's views about women's education that they should "be provided with a real education, one that sharpens focuses her mind and gives her a chance to develop her national and moral capacities, her full human potential" (15).

Later John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor join with Wollstonecraft in celebrating rationality. But they take it both morally as autonomous decision-making and prudently as self fulfillment. They believe that the ordinary way to maximize, aggregate happiness or pleasure is to permit individuals to pursue whatever they

desire. They also focus on provisions of civil liberties and economic opportunities. In her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Freidan contends that the idea of women finding satisfaction exclusively in the traditional role of wife and mother has left women, at least middle class, suburban, white heterosexual housewives feeling empty and miserable. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Taylor, Mill and Freidan advocate a balance of women's assimilation of men into family. Liberal Feminism shows a critical concern with the value of individual autonomy and freedom from supposedly unwanted restrictions by other. Public citizenship and the attainment of equality with men in public arena are central to liberal Feminism. Unlike radical feminists, liberal ones emphasize reform of society rather than revolutionary changes.

Radical feminism rejects the liberal orientation towards the public world of men. It arrogantly focuses on raising consciousness about oppression prevalent in a social order dominated by men. The notion of sexual oppression is intimately attached with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women. Radical feminists demand in literature an expression of female sexuality which will burst through the bonds of male logic with a poetic power. They find no distinction between personal and political realms. They assert that everything that happens in the personal lives of women happens to them as sex class, and is therefore political.

Existential Feminism emerged with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) with a particular focus on liberation. She proclaims that women can not be equal until they are free to change their condition. Women are not free because they are the 'Other' to man's self. This notion of the otherness of women has the effect of equating masculinity and humanity and the language conditions to speak of mankind instead of human kind. Women of this thought state that they must rise above their oppression themselves and then choose not to become the second sex.

Socialist Feminism emerged as a combination of Marxist and radical feminism with a social analysis of patriarchy and capitalism. The reason of gender inequality in the unequal distribution of capital, they draw on Marxism and see the problem as economic exploitation. They place women as proletariat and men as bourgeois and propose to wage war against that unequal distribution and disrupt the socioeconomic structure.

Psychoanalytic Feminism gathers Freudian and Lacanian arguments. It rejects both Freud's claim of women's destiny as an outcome of biology and Marx's claim of women's identity determined primarily by society's economic means of production. It analyses the formation of identities and stresses the prior importance of the mother. Post-colonial feminists criticize western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and its basic assumption, universalization of female experience. They argue that this assumption is based on the experience of white, middle class women for whom gender oppression is primary; and that it can not so easily be applied to women for whom gender oppression comes second to racial or class oppression.

British feminist theory has achieved sophistication through its interaction with Marxism as well as French deconstruction and psychoanalytical theory. British feminists tend to focus on class along with gender as a critical determinant of literary production. Men and women they argue, are ideologically inscribed in their culture. Ideologies of gender, when caught in texts, should be called into question so that social change can become possible. Gender, in their opinion, is the product of masculinist thought as it is relegated to the particular ways in which women's productive, reproductive and domestic life is organized. Mary Jacobs, Rosalind Lowand, Michele Barette, Juliet Mitchell and Lara Kaplan are those scholars who combined Marxist theoretical interest in the production and ideology of literature with

feminist concerns for women's writing. Kaplan, best known for her essay, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism (1985)", shows how closely a notion of ideology can approach psychoanalytical criticism. Kaplan insists that we understand the class bound nature of bourgeois femininity and that we take notice of how writing from within its assumptions constructs us as readers in relation to its particular subjectivity.

American model of feminism is called socio-historic feminism due to its analysis of text as historical process whether it be social, emotional or psychological. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Tillie Olson's *Silences* (1965), Mary Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Eva Fige's *Patriarchal Attitudes* and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* are those founding texts that concentrate on the cultural representation of women. Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* challenged several long established American attitudes, especially the notion that women could find fulfillment only as wives and mothers. It explained that the idealization constituted a conspiracy to prevent women from competing with men. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* sought to change social order, paying special attention to the images of women in cultural representations, while indicating the crucial nature of verbal and visual representation as descriptors of oppression. Her work won a frontal attack on overt misogyny in literature, particularly in the works of Henry Miller, D.W. Lawrence and Norman Mailor. Other group of critics including Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Eliane Showalter prefer on feminist writing.

Coining a term 'gynocriticism' in *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1979) Showalter introduced a critical practice devoted to the female author and character, utilizing theories and methodology based upon female experience. She emphasizes upon the specificity of women's writing through uncovering a tradition of women's

literature and women's culture. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, profits from the historical emphasis of Showalter. It stresses that in the nineteenth century female authored text, an important character is the madwoman who exists in the fantasies and dreams of every decorous spinster herself often a double of her author. Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar adapted Harold Bloom's reading of male authors, *The Anxiety of Influence* to reveal in the work of women writers, a narrative that expressed their feelings of being restricted, silenced, and dispossessed by an oppressive patriarchal culture. For Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar and Feminist critics who follow their lead, the practice of feminism, is political. In that sense any criticism which does not take the feminist perspective into account is flamed and deceptive.

French model of feminism concerns itself with philosophical and psychoanalytic issues relating to woman and language in the search for writing peculiar to women. It questions the Lacanian assumption that femininity can only be seen from the point of view of phallic culture. It believes that femininity offers a possible procedure for subverting the marginalizing mechanisms of power, thereby breaking it up. M.H. Abrams emphasizes the major concern of its theorists:

To establish the very possibility of a woman's language that will not, when a woman writes, automatically be appropriated into this phallogentric language, since such appropriation is said to force her into complicity with linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience or even of linguistic nonentity. (92)

The writings of these French critics such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have also interacted with two leading French male thinkers, Jacques

Lacan in psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida in philosophy. Cixous is allied to other French feminists in her emphasis on the unconscious, the deep structures of culture and language of psychoanalysis, she separates the female from the male unconscious and upholds the former as the site of disruption of a dominant patriarchy. Her best known essay "The Laugh of The Medusa" (1976), intends to break down the favoured status of the rational published text, celebrating the Derridian notion of 'differance' and suggesting a repressed, unsignified feminine which defers meaning while suggesting multiple significance through 'differance'. Julia Kristeva as contrasted to Cixous and Irigaray, is much more directly interested in examining the nature of literary discourse. Her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) sought to problematize the position of subject in language, emphasizing language as process. She posited two processes in sign-making language per se (symbolic) and all those signs which precede or exist outside language (semiotic). The two modalities are inextricably entangled in Kristeva's view, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse which emerges.

Women in the west are economically and academically advanced. They have realized the undervalued position of women imprisoned within the narrow domestic world of mothering and house managing and the biasness in the field of education and employment. As a result they are demanding for proper place of women in the society. Nancy F. Scott examines the origin of women's movement: "Such consciousness of [...] inferiority was the first group consciousness likely to produce a feminist movement because of acknowledged cultural and social determinates of women's capabilities as well as divine and natural ones, and thus allowed for the possibility of change" (The bounds 202). The revolutionary origin has given an impetus to the development of historical feminist figures.



Historical feminist personalities have raised a strong voice for women's liberation from the biased male tyranny on women. Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18<sup>th</sup> century attempted to liberate women from male dominating motives hidden in the emphasis of feminine features like weakness, humility and childishness. Unraveling the bases of women socialization whereby they are taught to be feminine, she indicates the fault in the process of socialization.

Similarly Virginia Woolf advocates for the radical change in the conception of family and social life. She refutes the traditional view about women that they are submissive, and cries for a separate space for women in literature and society because they are also independent human beings like men. Hazard Adams presents Woolf's view about women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they used exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much on their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation [...], it is narrow minded in their mere privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (822)

Another historical figure, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, directs women towards useful works created by modern industry and profession. Highlighting women's capability to work in the public world, she focuses on economically beneficial occupation for women. She refutes the childcare and housework, which deprive them of opportunity and the development of their genuine potentiality. Cott speaks of Gilman:

“She proposed [...] the socialization of remaining home employments such as cooking and laundry and argued that house cleaning and childcare would be better performed by specialized paid employees than by housewives and mothers not necessarily suited and not paid for the tasks” (The Grounding 41).

Likewise Simone de Beauvoir has brought a widespread consciousness on the part of women, pointing to the socio-historical construction of women. She contends the socialization that persuades women to be sexy and to be flesh for the mere entertainment of male ego. Rather, she creates a mentality for women to be self-assertive and determinate, able to tackle with impediments, and to liberate them from the social construction of femininity. Jane Freedman says that her “distribution between biological sex and the social creation of the ‘eternal feminine’ is a precursor of the distinction between sex and gender that is common in much feminist theory.” (14)

Kate Millet has further led the women’s revolution making a connection between the personal and the private world. Maggie Humm presents her remark: “the personal is political” (195). It is by scrutinizing the personal level internally at home that we can comprehend suppression on women at broad level, and it is by addressing the collective issues related with men’s power and upper position that we can reconstruct and reform the structure, which ultimately influences women’s life in personal level. She doesn’t find any difference between the personal and the public level. The decisions made by the public sector in the field of women, children and family ultimately affect the private life of women.

Shulamith Firestone proposes a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of offspring. And males are the owners of the labor market, females are no more than the workers to the

reproductive system. Oppression on women due to the productive function is a historical out, and the emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denies the emotional attachment of parents with their children, and speaks for undoing family unit. Freedman further displays her:

“Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family unit, with children being brought up by ‘households’ made up of about 10 adults, and set up to bring up children over a period of time. Children would develop no special bonds with their parents but would instead form love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex.” (70)

Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity.

Elaine Showalter a prominent American feminist has entitled women’s writing and culture in which she says that women have their own type of cultures, they have their own type of body, their speaking style, the languages, the capacity of thinking and believing. Therefore, they are naturally different. In the discussion of women languages Showalter asserts that feminist criticism is the wilderness. In *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter formulates three categories to adjust British women writers in the past and present according to their intensity of female voice. They are feminine, feminist and female. The first phase dating from 1840 to 1880 and makes the female voice raising in literature though buried in the so-called feminine substance and gets immensely affected by male pedagogy. In this phase, women writers like G. Eliot and Bronte sisters imitate and internalize the dominant male aesthetic tradition and standards, which require that women writers remain gentlemen. The main area of their work is their immediate domestic and social circle.

The second phase dating from 1880 to 1920 clearly demonstrates the determined effects for political and social equality and women's literature is able to advocate minority rights and protests against the unjust treatment of women. This includes writers like Elizabeth Robins, Olive Schceiver who, however, remain dependent upon the prominent masculine aesthetic.

The third phase dating from 1920 onward, dawns with Dorothy Richardson, Katharine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf who venture to counter balance the male dominated literary sphere and realize the historically ex-polarized tendency in literature. In this phase the dependency on opposition is being replaced by a rediscovery of women's text and aesthetics. However, they couldn't dispose the blames put upon them by male writers nor could they explore the actual physical experience of women. It was only with the coming of postwar novelists such as Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing etc. that we see female aesthetic and the distinct female view of life. They have counterchanged men for their taboos stamped on women and have focused on all areas of female experience.

Showalter divides feminist criticism into two distinct modes. The first mode is ideological which she terms "Feminist Critique". It is concerned with the feminist as reader and it offers feminist reading of text which considers the images and stereotypes of women in literature. The exclusion and misconception about women in criticism and women assign in semiotic system. The second mode of feminist criticism according to Showalter is the study of women as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' and provide the subjects, the history, style, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career and the devolution and laws of a female embraces different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of

women. Several dimensions have been shown ranging from liberal attitude and the demand for equal rights for sexes to the radical one voicing out the extreme ideology that tends to theoretically turn the patriarchy upside down. Liberal and radical feminism are distinguished in terms of their intensity of demand and the arrogance.

Willa Cather, indeed, a liberal feminist author continues the serious exploration of women's lives, extending the range covered both socially and geographically. Her contribution is a reinforcement and an enlargement of the realization what women know and do and think, of and by themselves, is worth writing about. Willa Cather resists cultural instructions against writing with flamboyant candor. Acting on feminism's hope of claiming the virtues of anatomy for women, Cather also studies the genres that are narratives of the self - the diary, biography, autobiography. Furthermore, she questions the meaning of a woman author's membership in a social group or groups. Doing so, she revitalizes the society and study of the materiality of literature. These groups might be sexual, economic, racial, ethnic, regional, colonial or postcolonial, national, religious. Whatever the community, belonging to it is a vital element of identity that a writer, reader or critic must be at the very least acknowledged. Such elements form a variety of compounds with each other and with gender.

Cather has ever attempted her level best to cope with women figures whose basic concerns are agrarian. Her female characters resist male chauvinism in very humble and meek ways. Resistance is not male figures all in all. Rather women figures seek for their rights even objecting cultural situations created in the favour of male. Cather's liberality is obviously perceived in her most of writings. She is not radical any more in dealing with the roles of women in society. Due to being a woman author, she understands the problems and complications that women face in course of

life. She really feels what women often feel in the countryside. In respect to her position in the field of writing, Berant Pope states:

I appreciate Cather not because she has written a number of literacy works but because of her liberal ways while creating female protagonists. One thing that I would prefer to admire her for, is realistic reflection of the current and live social problems. Moreover, Cather seems to have taken care of male's natural habits and manners.  
(112)

In the same vein, many other critical readers do opine in regard to her liberal writerly virtues as well. In *O' Pioneers!* she is liberal in creation of female and male characters. The female protagonist, Alexandra Bergson, does not revolt and deconstruct all the established social structures. Rather she deals with every kind of ups and downs very intellectually and brilliantly in order to achieve the goals. She does not oppose male figures. She, indeed, goes against bad and idiotic manners of her brothers; Lou and Oscar. She is even found to appreciate male figures like John Bergson. On this ground, it can clearly be stated that Cather's position of writing is liberal rather than radical.

The whole research in the next chapter, will be centered on analyzing what other mechanism and how do they lead the female protagonist to perform the heroic actions for the betterment of prairie land in the dark world of unyielding nature.

### **III: Female Heroism in Willa Cather's *O' Pioneers!*: The Heroic Self**

In *O' Pioneers!* The protagonist Alexandra Bergson is not merely an exemplar of the spirit of an entire pioneer generation, but also an embodiment of the power of the American land itself. The rejection of a conventional marriage ending underscores Alexandra's individuality. After her dramatic and cathartic expedition through the storm to visit Emil's grave, Alexandra thinks not of Carl, but rather of the mysterious figure that has filled her fantasies since her girlhood. She envisions him as an incarnation of the land coming to ease her weariness. Her relationship to Carl stands in the way of this sought after union, but he understands, and is willing to accept, that she truly belongs not to him but to the land. In the initial phase of the novel, Alexandra, despite being a woman shows her heroism to a great extent. She indeed proves a path which can direct all remaining family members towards hope and agrarian success. To an extent, Alexandra's brothers are caricatures of rural farmers bound to tradition, obsessed with popular opinion, and frightened by unconventional thought. Just as Lou and Oscar initially resist Alexandra's vision of the land's future and later her innovative farming techniques, so too do they scorn her impulse to treat crazy Ivar with kindness, because Ivar is different. Paradoxically, in a land that celebrates individualism and the pioneering spirit, the pull of conventional opinion is often irresistibly strong. By defying public attitudes, Alexandra proves herself a true heroic individual.

As a matter of fact 'self' refers to the inner being of a person, which directs and controls her/his social interaction. A person has to acclimatize with the milieu where one lives, and the acclimatization develops into different human personalities that vary according to socio-cultural values. Hereby Alexandra, as an individual is too

much bold and flexible in dealing with the different bits of time. She is innovative and changeable. She doesn't remain in the track of the convention and despair. Her ingenuity enforces herself to be heroic. In course of time she is getting stronger and more rational. Whatever familial and social challenges come on the way of creating a new way of success and development, she faces very patiently and intelligently.

Speaking concretely, most western women are inclined towards an autonomous individual self. They tend to seek for their own dreams and desires for the future. Their self precedes the social relation. Observing the western "female self" Alison Prentice and Ruth Pierson say: "women have a human need equal to men's for affection and emotional support but that for satisfaction of this need women should not have to make a greater sacrifice of autonomy than men" (64). The autonomous personality attracts them towards the self-assertion even in the physical appearance. The above quoted view prevails in the inner self of Alexandra Bergson as well. She doesn't seem to be hensive in her family affairs. When she is called by her father, she exposes her as a heroic figure. She takes family responsibility so mightily that she is equal to men in all aspects of human life. She dares to direct her brothers Oscar and Lou who are pessimists and do not want to work any thing risky. They are not courageous enough to respect the innovative technique of agriculture. They are losing a battle which is too much challenging. But it is Alexandra who creates her supremacy in the making of decision in regard to the land and undermines the negative and pessimistic views of her brothers.

The individualistic attitude of western women encourages them to detest the biased socialization by which women internalize the feminine attributes like beauty, meekness and dependence to be the dolls of men. Adams presents Beauvoir's views on the socialization: "The feminine body is asked to be flesh but with discretion: it is to be



slender and not loaded with fat; muscular, supple, strong” (1000). They are interested in the kind of physical beauty that is for them. Alexandra Bergson is extraordinary who undercuts the feminine qualities of the female. She is presented as the female hero who fights against all the conventional qualities of women. She proves herself as a heroic daughter of her father by subverting the hierarchy created by her brothers. Her inner self is so strong that she abandons her temporary and momentary pleasure for the sake of the long lasting benefits to all her nears and dears. She does not remain confined to the boundary created by the male for their fleshy pleasure. Rather she crosses all boundaries and enters the domain of practicality and rationality.

Along with negation of the physical beauty for male consumption, most western women avoid the psycho-emotional inculcation by the male-oriented western society but women are sentimental and emotional. They regard the feelings and emotions as weaknesses that create fear, dependence and helplessness. Adams presents Wollstonecraft’s comment on educational method: “Another instance of that feminine weakness of character, often produced by a confined education, is a romantic twist of the mind, which has been very properly termed *sentimental*” (398). Feminine values such as caring, sharing, loving and nurturing weaken them and subordinate them to the male suppression. Most western women prefer self assertion, and the self-assertion encourages them to search for individual respect even in the married life.

### **Alexandra as a Hero**

Alexandra Bergson, the dutiful hero of *O’ Pioneers!* comes from the Swedish immigrant farming family settled in Hanover. She is known as an earth mother for her deep love of and devotion to Hanover land. Her father John Bergson appoints her as trustee to his land recognizing her strength to its management. He thinks that his dutiful daughter Alexandra and not his notorious sons Oscar and Lou, has practical

ability to fulfill his dream of converting his wild land into productive farm. From his death bed, he says to his stupid sons: "I want you to keep the land together and to be guided by your sister...Alexandra is the oldest and she knows my wishes. Alexandra will manage the best she can" (20-21). After John Bergson's death, she goes on looking after her family sincerely, enriches her father's land and buys new land.

Alexandra is the most innovative woman of the pioneer country. She makes new land plan of her own and imitates new cultivating techniques with new seeds for her farm. The expansion of Alexandra's land in Hanover, even after their partition makes Oscar and Lou most envious to her. So they shamelessly claim for the ownership of her farm. When they find themselves defeated, they drive away Carl Linstrum, her well wisher, from her home with much insult. But Alexandra, a pioneer woman with love of the frontier soil, thinks her loyalty to her farm greater than to her lover. So she bids Carl farewell with tears in her eyes and goes on working on the farm until she fulfills her father's dream of the land.

Alexandra truly bears a sense of responsibility to the land and guardianship to her orphan brothers. All the time, she is found either to be associated to the frontier land for its enrichment or working for the betterment of her brothers to make them independent beings. But, when Oscar and Lou vainly criticize her at the question of her relation to Carl Liustrum, she shows her feminist look at them to set them right.

As Alexandra is a wide-hearted woman, she behaves all of her neighbors in a friendly way and wins their hearts. But she specially appreciates Bohemian farmers for their skill to tame cattle and grow more crops on the farm. She says, "Bohemians certainly know how to make more kinds of bread than any other people in the world" (144). She appreciates Bohemian Marie Shabata for her skill in baking cake. In turn, Alexandra gets much support from her neighbors. Their support and good wishes

prove to be a divine power for her to grow more wheat in the farm and be a manager of her big farm. Carl, her close friend at her neighborhood, selflessly supports her giving good advice for carrying out her duties to her family and providing his helping hands to hers. In need, he is found to add his smiles and tears to hers. Though shattered by Emil's murdering, she goes to prison to set his murderer Frank Shabata free. She presents herself guiltier even than him because she has stopped Emil from marrying Marie. She assures Frank: "I am never going to stop trying until I get you pardoned. I'll never give the government any peace. I know I can get you out of this place" (216). It shows the greatness of Alexandra's heart.

Carl Liustrum, the son of a German Pioneer mother in Hanover, seems to be her 'mystic lover' who remains like a dream at Alexandra's life. But she feels his great need for her life when she is tired and frustrated. So she is tied to him with the marital relation at forty for his assistance to her farm works.

In fact, Alexandra is the dearest of all other women heroes for the novelist for her great devotion to the new soil and unbelievable coverage to struggle against the hardships of her life.

Alexandra as an extraordinary child of the Bergson family encourages her brothers Lou and Oscar who are not willing to commence anything that is of great risk and challenge. But she inspires them showing the responsibility of children to the parents. She seems to be a very loving daughter to John Bergson as she favors him in more than anybody in the family. It can evidently be proven through her original statement: "Of course," Alexandra went on, steady her voice a little, "the boys are strong and work hard, but we've always depended so on father that I don't see how we can go ahead. I almost feel as if there were nothing to go ahead for." (16)

Despite being too young, Alexandra helps her father a lot. John Bergson doesn't confide the boys Lou and Oscar though they are industrious. Alexandra has the sound understanding and the power of judgment. This is why John Bergson takes her help in most of family deals. Boys are just a burden on the parents. They are found useless and redundant whereas Alexandra is not. She cares for things she has got. She never goes beyond her capacity and resources. This is the principal cause John Bergson teaches her to accomplish different jobs. Hence Alexandra appears as a heroic child in the eyes of her father, her role subverts the common concept of people in regard to the gender role. The following extract can prove the fact:

Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment [...] Lou and Oscar were industrious, but he could never teach them to use their heads about their work. (22-23)

So far as the feminist women protagonists are concerned in Cather's novels, they are the achievements of the novelist's maturity in both of her age and writing experience. These protagonists are selected totally from the world of women. So Jeane Harris rightly says:

As Willa Cather matured, she eventually abandoned the male values she once associated without, thereby reconciling the opposing poles of woman and artist [...]. For whatever reason, during her adolescence Willa Cather admired male behavior and even adopted male dress, her apparent identification with males is evident from herself imposed nickname [...] 'William Cather' that she used well into her college years at the University of Nebraska. (81-82)

The female heroes, who come from the poor common group of the pioneer communities, are rich with unique characteristics. But the female heroes who come from the upper class families, exhibit their poor and shallow character. To hint out the universal predomination of the 'evil' forces over the 'good', the novelist either makes the division of family characteristics of her major and minor characters of the same novel or compares the heroes of her one novel to another. If her female hero Alexandra represents the 'good' in the Bergson family, her brothers Oscar and Lou from the same family stand for the 'evil'. Though these evil forces annoy Alexandra of her agricultural plan, she succeeds to stand herself in the male dominated Hanover society.

The conflict in the lives of the pioneer female heroes arises sometimes from the opposite nature of the major and minor characters of the same family like that of Shakespeare's heroines and sometimes from the outside forces. There is a clash between gentle Cordelia and her cruel sisters, Regan and Croneril in Shakespeare's *King Lear* because Cordelia speaks plain words to protect her old father Lear from their flattery. Selfish Regan and Croneril lie to their aged father mainly to take over his crown and Cordelia objects them. Similarly jealous Oscar and Lou always trouble Alexandra because she is committed to fulfill her father's wish of enriching his land. Alexandra's mercenary brothers succeed to drive away Carl Linstrum, Alexandra's well wisher. In the similar manner Regan and Croneril banish Earl of Kent for his direct support to Cordelia. But Alexandra's father John Bergson is not as foolish as Cordelia's father king Lear who distributes his kingdom to his cunning daughters during his life, preventing his selfless youngest daughter Cordelia from it. Consequently he suffers much at their hands and even Cordelia's defensive warfare also cannot save him in spite of the fact that she loses her life at the battlefield for his

sake. Unlike King Lear, Alexandra's father has reasonable power to make right judgement of his sons and daughter. So he rightly declares from his death bed that only his oldest daughter Alexandra and not his foolish sons, is capable of taking the leadership of the Bergson family and his farm. In this sense, he is a male feminist who sincerely and indiscriminately defends his daughter.

Alexandra is conscious and revolutionary both in her views and actions. She brings drastic changes in her agricultural activities through her innovative land plan and its implementation to her farm. She accepts the 'Cross man' culture rejecting the concept of narrow minded ethnic culture. Though her revolutionary ideas are helpful to bring co-operation, coordination and integration among the people of the pioneer community, she does not want to bring unnecessary changes in her personal life. Alexandra wishes that she should not cross the certain line of her family life. So she does not want to make excessive use of her freedom. She says: "perhaps they (Alexandra's brothers Oscar and Lou) think me too independent. But I have had to think for myself a good many years and am not to change." (33)

The pioneer woman protagonist does not come from the royal family with silver spoon in her hand but from the hardworking group of common people earning their bread from the sweats of their labour and patience. Alexandra always makes hard work with her scythes and spades on the farm. She is very honest and punctual to her duties.

In fact, the female protagonists in Cather's novels represent the everyday life of the common women living in the American society. As the farm women, they simply involve in harvesting and reaping crops on the farm, and as the hired girls, they work in the landowners' kitchens cooking food items and cleaning utensils. But they are also interested to take various other professions, such as dancing and singing

for their survival. When they run such and such professions, they meet many problems. In short, these heroines are surrounded by their everyday life problems, which may arise from any of these reasons: a) The poverty of the family leading them to debt. b) The jealousy and betrayal of selfish, corrupt males. c) The ill fate of the married or unmarried women. d) The misunderstanding between husband and wife. e) The unsuccessful marriage of the married partners. f) The long waiting of the unmarried women for marriage or doom. g) Women protagonists' too much loyalties to their duties. In fact these women meet ups and downs, smiles and tears, success and failure as the living women do during their working life.

Hence, Alexandra as a leader of the family, works for her brothers to raise their living standard, but Oscar and Lou take her each step negatively and move against her. Still her strong position in the family helps her to retain her identity. Furthermore, her father John Bergson as being feminist sees the pertinent capacity and energy in Alexandra. So he speaks:

“Alexandra, you will have to do the best you can for your brother everything will come on you”.

“I will do all I can” father.

Don't let them get discouraged and go off like uncle Otto. I want them to keep the land.”

“We will, father, we will never lose the land.” (86)

Thus, Alexandra, as a winner of her father's favour, encourages and assures John Bergson to believe her for good consequences of her actions and steps. She shows her intellectual maturity before her father so that he can feel content while being on the verge of death. John Bergson is very loving to all his children. He does not seem to discriminate among his children. All are dearing and lovely. His main

intention is to flourish the family's economic and emotional state. He has found Alexandra as the best leading figure who can easily guide the whole family and let her brothers be patient and integrated. The family integration, mutual co-operation and economic prosperity are the John Bergson's wants and desires. This is why he suggests his sons Lou and Oscar to remain under Alexandra's guidance and leadership in his absence. He is looking forward to seeing justice and joins division of the land in case any of the children wants to live separately. John Bergson delivers his wish in this way:

“Boys”, said the father wearily, “I want you to keep the land together and to be guided by your sister I have talked to her since I have been sick, and she knows all my wishes. [...] when you marry and want a house of your own, the land will be divided fairly, according to the courts. But for the next few years you will have it hard and you must all keep together. Alexandra will manage the best she can.” (26-27)

As a matter of fact, Alexandra's revelation at the end of the opening section brings her into a new relation to the land. It is possible to consider this abrupt and dramatic conviction regarding the land's beauty and potential as a somewhat clumsy mechanism to advance the plot. Thus this revelation lacks explanation, like Marie's final reverie and Emil's musical epiphany later in the novel, points to the fact that *O'Pioneers!* does not delve much into its characters' psyches. Rather the novel's structure consists of various forces placed in opposition to one another, and its core constitutes an exploration of the struggles between these forces, most notably in the measuring of Alexandra's individual agency against the impersonal historical forces that shaped the west. It is said that the pioneer should be imaginative and creative. Alexandra as a pioneer, does indeed have the very quality: “the pioneer should have



imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves” (48). Very surprisingly Alexandra’s brothers Lou and Oscar are discouraged enough. They are very coward and do not dare to face the complication of life. Rather they feel hard to cultivate in the country. They prefer to flee away from there as other country people are doing. But it is Alexandra who passes energy and air to them to be patient and breathe in. In fact she gets tired of convincing all in the jeopardy:

Alexandra sighed. “How discouraged the boys will be when they hear. They always come home from town discouraged, anyway. So many people are trying to leave the country, and they talk to our boys and make them low spirited. I’m afraid they are beginning to feel hard toward me because I won’t listen to any talk about going. Sometimes I feel like I’m getting tired of standing up for this country.” (53)

In fact the people of her place do play the role of villains. They often discourage her brothers Lou and Oscar. Speaking obviously they are inferring in the Bergson family. But Alexandra does not bother a lot. Rather, she faces every situation very tactfully and intelligently. She really does what she thinks better of doing. She does not invite anyone’s suggestion in the conduct of her jobs. Her plans are, indeed, genuine which she gets successful to accomplish as well. Even her younger brother, Lou, suggests Alexandra to leave the country. He shows the uselessness of the place. He does not see any future. He is very pessimistic in the matter of setting down in the very place and remains there. He wants his family to leave the place as soon as possible. Moreover, he is expecting a fixed time from Alexandra when they leave for somewhere else. He asserts his views as such: “you see, Alexandra, everybody who can crawl out is going away. There is no use of us trying to stick it out just to be

stubborn. There's something in knowing when quit" (57). He doesn't indeed see any possibility of bettering the place. He so boldly and confidently asks Alexandra why she is willing to reform the land and cultivate it. He brings out references of other people have been unsuccessful in achieving any benefits out of setting up there. He does his level best to prove his opinion worthy to be implemented. He speaks in this way:

“Why Alexandra, you don't know what you're talking about. Our place wouldn't bring now what it would six years ago. The fellows that settled up here just made a mistake. Now they're beginning to see this high land was never meant to grow nothing on, and everybody who ain't fixed to graze cattle is trying to crawl out. [...] that man Percy Adams, north of town told me that he was going to let fuller take his land and staff for four hundred dollars and a ticket to Chicago.” (58)

It is a great wonder that Alexandra is too strict and bold that no force can shake her position. She moves ahead in accordance with her circumstances. She doesn't see any similarity between the rich and the poor. Her brothers Lou and Oscar take the rich as the model but she denies following any step of them. Furthermore she brings about a record of the past in order to make brothers aware of the father's harder labour and the more complicated and challenging time. She is so logical and persuasive. She exclaims:

“I wish that man would take me for a partner. He's feathering his nest! If only poor people could learn a little from rich people! But all these fellows who are running off our bad farmers like poor Mr. Linstrum. [...] I think we ought to hold on as long as we can on father's account.

He was so set on keeping this land. He must have seen harder times than this, here. How was it in the early days, mother?" (58-59)

Similarly, Alexandra requests her brothers to go down themselves and see the things with their own eyes. She compares her land with the river land to vitalize her stand point. She makes them believe that their land has potentiality and they can reform it by hard labour. She shows the bright future saying that the price of their land will double in five years. The rich do not own the bad land. Rather they own all the best land. They are even ready to buy other lands. So, that they can make good profits out of selling them later. Furthermore she suggests them to do other essential things in order to raise their economic state.

Alexandra, an iconoclast, contends with the close-minded and petty world of small town America, represented by her brothers Lou and Oscar. To an extent, Alexandra's brothers are caricatures of rural farmers, bound to tradition obsessed with popular and revolutionary opinion, and frightened by unconventional thought. Just as Lou and Oscar initially resist Alexandra's vision of the land's future and later her innovative farming techniques, so too do they scorn her impulse to treat crazy Ivar with kindness, because Ivar is different. Paradoxically, in a land that celebrates individualism and the pioneering spirit, the pull of conventional opinion is often irresistibly strong. By defying public attitudes, Alexandra proves herself a true individualist. The nature of the American spirit, however, comes into question, since as the novel points out, conventionalism is more common than individualism, even in the west of the pioneers.

Thus, Alexandra forges her own destiny, creating a link between individualism and agency. Ironically, however, Alexandra's assessment of Carl of the successful cultivation of the west de-emphasizes the role of humans in the shaping of history.

Alexandra loves Carl too much. She can't betray him. She always suggests him to follow the right paths: Alexandra shook her finger at him. "See this, you have walked into a trap. You do not get away so easy". "She put her hand affectionately on his shoulder". You owe me a visit for the sake of old times. Why must you go to the coast at all? (107)

Alexandra is selfless and carefree. She always thinks of others so positively. She is no more hostile to anyone as she is compassionate enough to deal with people around her. She sees favorable possibilities on the part of Carl and Emil. She respects wishes and desires of others. To please and satisfy others through her behavior, she behaves friendly as well. She compares Carl with her father since John Bergson has even gone under complication and challenges in regard to the land reformation. It can be proven:

"He shall do whatever he wants to", Alexandra declared warmly. "He is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that's what I've worked for [...]. Sometimes, just lately, he has been talking about going out into the sand hills and taking up more land. He has his sad times, like father. But I hope he won't do that. We have land enough, at last!"

Alexandra laughed. (117)

Alexandra's attachment to Carl for example, is devoid of any romantic element; their friendship seems to serve more as a mutual part against loneliness. The marriage between Signa and Nelse Jenson is an unhappy union seemingly came out of ease and convenience since both work for Alexandra. Cather's description of Alexandra as unimaginative seems to mean that Alexandra's emotional creativity exists only in her relationship with the land. Alexandra feels the joyous germination in the soil in her body; in a metaphoric sense, the land impregnates Alexandra's mind

and imagination. Her lack of true passion for Carl Linstrum arises from the fact that the energy of her emotional faculties is concentrated on the land. The erotic undertones of her metaphorical insemination by the land and the fact that the man about whom she fantasizes, seems to be an incarnation of the land reinforce her rejection of customary human sexuality. Alexandra, however, is not entirely comfortable with this sexualization of her relationship with the land; after these fantasies occur, she mortifies her gleaming white body by drenching herself with cold water. Despite all these situations, Alexandra proves her as a good and loving beloved to Carl Linstrum as well. Her devotion and dedication as a beloved as well as a well-wisher to Carl can not be ignored and over looked. She is so heroic and hopeful about her future. She dares to do all prevailing in the world. Nothing appears impossible in her vision. On the other hand, her lover Carl Linstrum feels sacred so many things in his life. His pessimistic and surrendering personality to the situation tells us so much about him. He sees an oceanic gap between his position and Alexandra's in terms of so many aspects of social life. He is no more tempted to the materialistic world. He sees similarities among human beings only through the lenses of death. He shamelessly presents him as a hack person before Alexandra. Thus he utters his inner feelings and desires:

Carl shook his head mournfully "Freedom so often means that one isn't needed anywhere. Here you are an individual, you have a background of your own, you would be missed. But off there in the cities there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing. When one of us dies they scarcely know where to bury him. [...] We have no house no place no people of our own. We live in the streets, in the parks, in the

theatres. We sit in restaurants and concert halls and look about at the hundreds of our own kind and shudder. (122-23)

Though, Alexandra has finally united with Carl Linstrum, she yearns to become one with the land “Fortunate country”. The novel rhapsodizes that receives hearts like Alexandra’s into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of ‘youth’. Death is a triumph for Alexandra, as it is only by her abandonment of earthly life that her spirit can be where it has desired to be throughout the novel and truly belongs. Similarly, Alexandra finally fulfills her spirit’s promise only in death comments on her impending marriage to Carl. The novel looks forward not to Alexandra’s joining with her future husband, but rather to her union with the land. The rejection of a conventional marriage ending underscores Alexandra’s individuality. After her dramatic and cathartic expedition through the storm to visit Emil’s grave, Alexandra thinks not of Carl but of the mysterious figure that has filled her fantasies since her girlhood. She envisions him as an incarnation of the land coming to ease her weariness. Her relationship to Carl stands in the way of this sought after union, but he understands, and is willing to accept, that she truly belongs not to him but to the land. In this acceptance, Carl not only displays the same stoic resolve that has served Alexandra so well, but also breaks free from the male pattern of jealously coveting what one can not have. Ultimately, given the failure of other romances in novel, the fact that Alexandra’s fulfillment is not that of the conventional woman’s marriage to a man makes her as pioneer in spirit as well as in society.

As a matter of fact, Alexandra’s brothers Oscar and Lou interfere with the personal affair of Alexandra especially in her relationship with Carl Linstrum. Oscar does point out that his clinging to a woman without social recognition is invalid and

unruly. He can't tolerate her manners and presence in the touch of Carl Linstrum. This is why he speaks: "About you, keeping him here so long. It looks bad for him to be hanging on to a woman this way. People think you're getting taken in" (166). Lou callously shouts that the land is his property. Alexandra should not show her ownership over the land as she is a female member in the family. Similarly Oscar favours him adding his views that any parental property must not go to the daughter. Rather it goes to the boys who succeed the family. Thus, he so boldly says, "The property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, no matter about the title. If anything goes wrong. It's the men that are held responsible" (169). But Alexandra doesn't get afraid of their blows. Rather she challenges them so boldly since her conscience is strong enough and she is fully confident that her action will bring about justice and righteousness in the family. She is a hero despite being a female. She knows that the gender concept is a social construct. The inhuman discrimination prevailing in the male dominated society is a matter of the power. As the male are in power, they hold most aspects of the society themselves. Furthermore, they divide the role relation in terms of male and female. Hence, Alexandra Bergson subverts this hierarchical frame of the conventional and superstitious society with the help of her zeal and courage. In this way she responds her brother Lou: "I know you and Oscar have always expected that it would be left to your children, and I'm not sure but what you're right. But I'll do exactly as I please with the rest of my land, boys". (167)

In fact, Alexandra is sexless. She, being rational and creative, loves to engage herself in the creative works avoiding sex. About her sexless nature, her amorous brother Emil comments that she cannot understand his longing for his beloved Marie because she has no experience of sex. She has her boy-friend who accompanies her at the time of difficulty. But Carl Linstrum attempts to have affairs with Alexandra.

Alexandra takes sex as a dream or only as a memory. She remembers her boy friend when she needs his assistance. So, she marries him at maturity not for sex but for friendship. Her boy friend Carl Linstrum is not loyal to his girl friend for sex. He supports her for the good achievement of her assigned task. Carl helps Alexandra because she is in need of his support as she misses her father earlier and finds her younger brothers, Oscar and Lou always disobedient to her. So Carl is used even to pulling out the pillar of her farm house.

As marriage is a natural right to a woman or a man, no one can take it as a romance or sex. Alexandra surrenders to Carl and gets marriage him at forty when she feels tired and frustrated from Emil's murdering and other two brothers' ill treatments. About the sexless nature of Cather's heroines, Gelfant also asserts:

Her characters avoid sexual union with significant and sometimes bizarre ingenuity or achieve it only in dreams. Alexandra the heroine of *O' Pioneers!* finds in recurrent services the strong transporting arms of a lover; and Jim Burden in *My Antonia* allows a half nude woman to smother him with kisses only in unguarded moments of fantasy [...]. No wonder, then that Cather's heroes have strong intuitive aversion to sex which they reveal furtively through enigmatic gestures. (147-48)

Cather's heroines who marry at maturity with their childhood friends are successful to lessen their burdens of life by sharing with them. Alexandra takes a breath of relief after she marries Carl, her childhood friend.

Likewise Cather's love of her past is her persona Alexandra's respect for the bygones. Alexandra says, "I even think the old country better [...] I think about father and mother and those who are gone" (88-89). Again her foundling of Emil resembles with Cather's foundling of Douglass. Taking pride in Emil's love of his old country



Alexandra says: “I really built it (this house) for Emil [...] I’m sure it was to have sons like Emil and to have them a chance. On the outside Emil is just like an American boy [...] he graduated from the State University [...] but underneath he is more Swedish” (87). Like Cather’ Alexandra also disdains love marriage as well as polygamy. That is why she does not allow Emil to marry Marie, the married girl whom Emil blindly loves. Thus Cather resembles with her female hero Alexandra for her challenging strength and skill to carry out her assigned tasks and holding similar views about life, love, marriage and art. So Elizabeth Janeway says: “In short, she (Willa Cather) was very much like her heroine, Alexandra” (13).

Overall, Alexandra is an androgynous woman who plays a dual role in her family, a manly hero and a kind sister. As a manly hero, she wears man’s hat and gent’s coat to struggle like a man with the hard soil of Hanover and fights with her poisonous brothers like a brave soldier to keep up her rights to the land. But as a sister, she wears women’s veil and looks after her brothers very carefully showing much affection to them. She is too kind even to her satan like brothers, Oscar and Lou, who always trouble her. She honestly divides her parental resources among her brothers like a father and educates her obedient brother Emil to see him a good lawyer. As she is more labourious than a man, she produces more crops from her sixteen years’ efforts to her farm.

#### **IV: Conclusion**

Alexandra, the female hero in *O' Pioneers!* immigrated from Sweden to Hanover with her parents and three brothers, Oscar, Lou and Emil in 1890s is the true representative of the women in farming as she possesses outstanding qualities of all farming women of the pioneer country. Physically she runs her farmworks more efficiently and encourages her brothers and neighbors for the development of their land. Mentally she is too knowledgeable to understand the strength and weakness of the soil. Her first three years of efforts, after her father's death, for making the land rich and productive, turns into ashes because of the hard times of further three years drought and its impact on the crops. It causes great depression not only to the Bergsons but each American farmer, especially to the pioneer farmer of Nebraska. As a result there is no balance between the food and labour - food being very costly and labour being extremely cheaper. Alexandra's life becomes so difficult that she is highly burdened with the loans as an impact of the great depression (1890s) of the United States. She goes on struggling against her hard time with a promise to convert her farm into fertile and productive one.

In fact, Nebraska, being the newly built area of the immigrants has no effective infrastructure to supplement farmers for their crops. So Alexandra in farming has to depend on her manual work with the traditional tools, not having any scientific instruments for agriculture, except some windmills. As Alexandra is prevented from physical facilities, she has to struggle more and more to run her farm works. She faces many obstacles to make her land fertile because the land itself is faceless, dry and withered not fit for cultivation. Again, her Satan like brothers, Oscar

and Lou always try to disturb her land plan to prevent her from its implementation. That is why Alexandra needs sixteen years to change the face of her prairie farm. But, the frontier land need not suffer so longer because it wins love and devotion of Alexandra. Her only mission to life is to restructure her land and convert its harshness, blankness and dryness into the rich soil with its vitality and greenness.

The female hero, Alexandra who always belongs to the soil of Hanover thinks 'land' more pious and greater than everything else in the world. She never forgets her responsibility to the soil, nor she forgets about the greatness of the soil. She takes 'land' and freedom as synonymous to each other and says that freedom can be enjoyed if sacrifices can be made for the development of 'ever lasting' land.

As a matter of fact, true idea about the farm and farming occurs to Alexandra's mind when she deeply meditates upon her frontier soil, is the manner of lord Buddha who achieves eight truths of life after He meditates upon the facts of the world. Though Alexandra is fond of reading Sunday newspapers, Long Fellow's verses and other poems by heart, she always looks more thoughtful about the question of growing more wheat on the farm than reading books. The joy of her heart knows no bound when she comes across the reality, beauty and strength of Hanover soil. "It (the land) seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breath of it, until her tears blinded her." (50)

Alexandra's plan of the land to borrow money for six years to buy new land and to sell the land at a profit within six years – prospers their land and makes the Bergsons independent farmers. Though her foolish brothers, Oscar and Lou always remain criticizing her, she tirelessly goes on convincing them and makes them work hard for their better life than their foreparents:

Speaking truly the offence of the male offenders makes Alexandra a prudent feminist. Carl's arrival at her home in Hanover converts her happiness into tears when Oscar and Lou show their unwelcoming hands to Carl and bitterly pinch her: "Alexandra! Can't you see he's just a tramp and he's after your money. He wants to be taken care of [...] Don't you know he'd get hold of your property?" (124). Feminist Alexandra strongly answers them to defend herself: "when you married we made division of the land, and you were satisfied. I've made on my farms since I've been alone" (125). But Oscar and Lou drive Carl away from her house insulting him with the most disgraceful utterances. But bold and strong Alexandra promptly encounters each event, while weak minded Carl is too coward to face with any of such misfortune. So he again quits off from Hanover as before. Still feminist Alexandra, as determined not to leave Hanover cowardly, struggles against her brothers for Carl's right to stay at her home.

Alexandra's utmost love of Hanover soil does not die though the murdering of her dearest brother Emil, her helping hand at her farm works, deadly upsets her. It makes her totally lonely, void and depressed. Amidst her shocks and distresses, she is violently attacked by Oscar and Lou. They blame her that, she has murdered Emil by educating him in the University. He is her most obedient brother, the centre of her hope, for whom she lives. About her fondness for Emil, once she says: "Now I shall have nobody but Emil. But he is my boy, and he is tender hearted" (41). When he comes back from the University on holidays, he goes to the farm with the spade to help his sister. She has brought him up and educated him to see him a good lawyer. Now, he is killed by Frank Shabata for his love of Marie, his wife. But optimistic Alexandra, with the lure of the land, wants to continue her agricultural life through somebody's help. So she goes to prison to release Frank and take him at Emil's place

to take his help for her farm works. But sincere Carl's arrival diverts her mind. Now, she seeks Carl's helping hands to continue her farm works and proposes him for the marriage for the development of her farm. It means that she wants to strengthen her agricultural life by showing with Carl's hopes, tears and smiles. Thus, Alexandra as an intellectually advanced and heartily kind personality, overcomes all swarming problems and proves to have been a female hero. Her energetic, resourceful and heroic quality that expresses vitality and makes her bold, firm and determined to evoke harmony and prairie happiness in the dark world of unyielding nature, is the matter of remark and praise.

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