

CARROLL COLLEGE

O' PIONEERS, MY ANTONIA, AND DEATH COMES FOR THE  
ARCHBISHOP: WILLA CATHER'S CHARACTERIZATION OF LANDSCAPE

A Thesis For Honors Submitted To The Faculty Of The  
Department Of English In Connection for the degree of  
Bachelors in English Writing

Department of English

Joan L. Lea

Helena, Montana

April 2, 1990



CORETTE LIBRARY CARROLL COLLEGE

3 5962 00083 841

CORETTE LIBRARY  
CARROLL COLLEGE

SIGNATURE PAGE

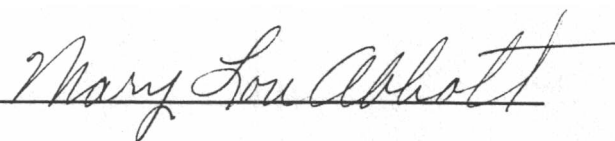
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department  
of English Writing.

  
\_\_\_\_\_

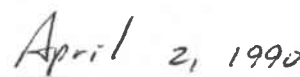
Director: Mr. Thomas Herbeck

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Reader: Mr. Michael Cronin

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Reader: Mrs. Mary Lou Abbott

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Throughout my academic career at Carroll College, I have been fortunate to have had excellent instructors, friends, and classmates who have helped and encouraged me throughout my studies. That encouragement is the result of this thesis.

My very special thanks to Mr. Ralph Beer who suggested the theme of landscape, and to Father Robert Butko for introducing me to Willa Cather and her beautiful language of landscape. I also want to acknowledge Mr. Thomas Herbeck, my director, Mr. Mike Cronin, and Mrs. Mary Lou Abbott for their constructive criticisms and their unrelenting red ink!

I would also like to acknowledge my sister-in-law, Betty Warnke, for her assistance, Father John Ward for his valuable suggestions and his unflinching belief in my abilities, and Jesus, for without whom none of my accomplishments would hold any value.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments . . . . .	ii
Table of Contents. . . . .	iii
Introduction . . . . .	1
Landscape and the life of Willa Cather . . . . .	2
<i>O' Pioneers</i> . . . . .	7
<i>My Antonia</i> . . . . .	12
<i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> . . . . .	16
Summary . . . . .	20
Works Cited. . . . .	22

***O' Pioneers, My Antonia, and Death Comes for the  
Archbishop: Willa Cather's Characterization of Landscape***

This mesa plain had an appearance of great antiquity, and of incompleteness; as is, with all the materials for world-making assembled, the Creator had desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau. The country was still waiting to be made into a landscape.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop*

Moody and sullen, gray and dreary, blistering, cold, ruthless, dry, wet, life-giving as well as life-threatening: landscape holds as many moods as a lover or a villain. And when an artist can bring these moods, these elements and characteristics of change, to life, on canvas or in words, landscape becomes a vital part of the work. Indeed, landscape becomes a character, an important actor in the novels of the artist and in the lives of their characters.

Willa Cather is such an artist. Through the tremendous descriptive use of the language, she brings alive her characters and the character of

her landscape.

This paper shows the personalities of the land as they relate to the characters in three of her novels: *O' Pioneers*, *My Antonia*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* .

#### Landscape and the Life of Willa Cather

Leonard Unger states that "it is customary to speak of Willa Cather as an elegist of the American pioneer tradition," with elegy suggesting a "celebration and lament for a lost and irrecoverable past . . ." (312). But, I suggest this past, in the boldest and most beautiful of Willa Cather's fictions, is not an irrecoverable quality of events, but is, rather, present in human truth repossessed through her sensitive picture of landscape, its textures, horizons, and weather.

Willa Cather, one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century, brings to life in her novels of the American frontiers the travels and struggles of the immigrants coming to settle in a new and wild world; of the artists, bishops, and young children searching for a new and gracious civilization.

Cather's novels, which stir readers both with their perception and simplicity, express the character of the landscape of the American West and of these noble people who first saw it. Brown claims that of "American artists she was the first who wooed the muse in her particular wild land" (Brown 259). And her land was the American frontier.

Cather and her family moved to Nebraska in 1883 when she was a young child, "just before the U.S. Census Bureau declared in 1890 that the

American frontier has closed, that all of the American West had been either explored or settled" (McFarland 8). In these early days of the Cather's settlement on the Nebraska prairie, Willa accumulated most of her artistic material of landscape images that she would use in her writings. She became close to the land. And here, on the prairie of Nebraska, Cather founded her conception of landscape as a force.

This force influenced the immigrants Cather came to know so well, and it soon influenced the world of her fictional characters. She shows the broader scene as a manifestation both of the environment that is found in the climate of the natural world, and in the intrusion of humanity upon its surface:

Our lives are like the years, all made up of weather and crops and cows (*O' Pioneers* 131),

The rains had made channels of the wheel-ruts and washed them so deeply that the sod had never healed over them. They looked like gashes torn by a grizzly's claws, on the slopes where the farm-wagons used to lurch up out of the hollows with a pull that brought curling muscles on the smooth hips of the horses (*My Antonia* 238).

Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants. They thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks, climbed up and down its terrible canyons on stone-bruised feet, broke long fasts by unclean and repugnant food (*Death Comes for the Archbishop* 278).

In Cather's novels she shows a distinction between land and the landscape. The reality of the land was always there; the concepts of the

landscape she created. She seemed to view nature as a manifestation of a divine force. Landscape contained a strength and energy that the sensitive soul could perceive.

Cather often explored how the climate of the land surrounding the artist affects the artistry--both providentially and adversely. Cather views rural living, for example, as the life-blood of survival with the land, while she views city life as more superficial and far less sustaining. She views urban life as an escape from the beauty and realities of life that the earth offers. A repeated theme is that the landscape of rural living is more natural and fulfilling than the landscape of urban life, which is not natural:

. . . the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland was trying not to be blown away . . . buildings huddled on the gray prairie, under a gray sky. The dwelling-houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod . . . The main street was a deeply rutted road, now frozen hard... (*O' Pioneers* 3).

For Cather, having an artist's imagination is bittersweet, as ultimately the artist must choose communion with the self rather than with humanity if she is to have the freedom to create, if she is to fulfill her artistic purpose. The artist, then, with this uneasy freedom, "becomes the transmitter of ultimate truth, ultimate reality" (McFarland 10).

Brown states that to Cather the expansive western setting "could move a person like no other place" (259). As a child she absorbed the land into her soul--her total being. The land became a part of her, and she made the land a part of her writing. The land was with Cather from the very

beginning and she clearly showed the images of landscape in each of these three novels. Therefore, not only does Cather create characters who have strong emotions about their environment, but she also turns the landscape itself into a leading character. As Jim says in *My Antonia*, "there was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but the land" (7).

Cather uses dramatic and subtle changes in landscape to emphasize her characters and their situations. The characters she creates become a part of those settings. Landscape, through Cather's pen, becomes a controlling influence on the behavior and personalities of those who inhabit the land, both those who live in the land, and those who live apart from the land.

In a true sense, Cather is the creator of her landscape, by interpreting the land to fit her other characters. She carefully shows the modification of the land and the resentment of the land toward humanity's intrusion upon its surface. Cather brings together the will of the land and the will of her characters. Each relationship to the land is different. In *O' Pioneers*, for example, Alexandra embraces the land; they become one and grow together. Neither one gives in, but each learns to respect the other.

Even as individuals exhibit multi-faceted aspects of a personality, so Cather develops landscape to be a multi-faceted personality. The personality of her character of landscape is many sided: moody, secretive, hostile, whimsical, consistent, relentless, life-giving, forgiving and unforgiving, angry, gentle. Cather gives the characteristics of life to the landscape. And even when that characteristic may be cruelty, Cather's own

belief finds nature inspiring to those who have a survival attitude toward life and who respect the attributes of the land.

Cather rounds out the life of landscape's character in the relationships she establishes between its life and the lives of the other characters of her stories, the emotions of each in constant motion with the other. Cather, through her artistry, gives landscape a consciousness. In *O' Pioneers*, *My Antonia*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she is equally adept at capturing the unique consciousness of each landscape.

## ***O' PIONEERS***

The novel opens with landscape framing the characters. The landscape is a raw, barren countryside of winter against the savage vastness of the untouched earth. Humanity seems weak and puny in comparison to the landscape: houses are dwarfed, roads are but faint tracks in the grass:

The little town behind them had vanished as if it had never been, had fallen behind the swell of the prairie, and the stern frozen country received them into its bosom . . . .But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its somber wastes (15).

The land, the landscape, have always been upon the plain. The characters arrive upon its surface and change forever what was first created. The settlement of a wild land is symbolically equivalent to the divine act of a creator who establishes an ordered universe out of "primordial chaos" (McFarland 23). It is an undertaking which is charged with significance for the human community:

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. The Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman (65).

In *O' Pioneers*, Cather presents a conflict between the land and the pioneers. In the first part of the novel, we witness the beginning of the

struggle of the relationships which develops between the land and Alexandra. Alexandra's parents had come from Sweden to take up farming the land in Nebraska. Alexandra's father had hoped to settle the land, plant crops, provide for his family, and have a rewarding life from the land. The land was not kind to him:

In eleven long years John Bergson had made out little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame. It was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why . . . There it lay outside his door, the same land, the same lead-colored miles (20).

The death of her parents while she is in her twenties leaves her the head of a family with three brothers. The patch of land in the high, dry prairie country of the Divide, won by homestead rights, is the only means of survival they have left.

Alexandra faces the exigence of that destiny in the almost unconscious spirit of a person driven by an unseen force. McFarland states that Alexandra's own "personal life, her own realization of herself was almost a subconscious existence: like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there at interval months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her fields" (18). With this force, she makes her heroic peace with the elements of the land.

Included in the dialogue between the characters of *O' Pioneers*, Cather uses civilization as a symbol of humanity's destructive force of materialism. Alexandra's two older brothers have such a fear of financial failure they cannot see the land's potential. They cannot make the land produce in a way that would give them a comfortable life. They become

impatient to have the material gain and wealth they think they need and want. As far as they are concerned, selling the land would be the greater profit. "At this Lou plunged in. 'You see, Alexandra, everybody who can crawl out is going away. There's no use of us trying to stick it out, just to be stubborn. There's something in knowing when to quit' "(57). Yet, even when her brothers and neighbors grow to despise and curse it, Alexandra believes in the land and loves it.

Alexandra is something of an earth mother, a being so closely linked with the land, with soil and growing, that her very oneness with it seems eventually to convert the harsh wild land into a richness that, at last, willingly yields its treasures. Yet the conversion is not easy. The land treats Alexandra with a challenge.

The land plays with Alexandra, testing her to see if she is worthy of the earth's fruits, and to see if she can draw out, nourish, and care for the land with tenderness, determination, and discipline:

It was like that when Alexandra tested her seed-corn in the spring . . . .From two ears that had grown side-by-side, the grains of one shot up joyfully into the light, projecting themselves into the future, and the grains from the other lay still in the earth and rotted; nobody knew why (164).

The latter part of the novel shifts the focus from man's relationship to the land to his relationship to the community. Alexandra's creative response to the land is symbolically parallel to the creation:

When you go out of the house into the flower garden, there you feel again the order and fine arrangement manifest all over the great farm; in the fencing and hedging, in the windbreaks and sheds, in the

symmetrical pasture ponds, planted with scrub willows to give shade to the cattle at fly-time. There is even a white row of beehives in the orchard, under the walnut trees. You feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best (84).

The story line continues to follow and reinforce the contrast between the way of life that grows out of Alexandra's relationship with the land and that of her materialistic brothers. Throughout the novel, the land wells up larger than the characters who have emerged from it. Some of the characters, however, are enriched in their lives as they are sustained by the land that bears them and which will someday receive them into its bosom, "to give them out again in yellow wheat, in the residing corn, in the shining eyes of youth" ( Unger 319).

The earth will yield its fruits and cover the stains of humanity's errors. Grass and yellow wheat will cover the stains of human blood and tears which results in Emil's love affair with Marie. It's the land and the landscape that witness Frank who murders his young beautiful wife and her lover under the White Mulberry Tree. The White Mulberry Tree and Alexandra are brought into a oneness. Alexandra becomes submerged with the land and engages her work with the land in the rhythms of the land, powerful urgencies of seasons and weather, and their influences on human life. "There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back" (76).

And, toward the end of *O' Pioneers*, when Alexandra is almost broken by young Emil's death, she seeks comfort and refuge in the land. "That,

too, was beautiful, that simple doorway into forgetfulness. The heart, when it is too much alive, aches for that brown earth, and ecstasy has no fear of death" (257). She goes to his grave in the night during a severe storm, and is found there in the morning, drenched, icy-cold, and nearly unconscious by Crazy Ivan, an old man who lives in a clay bank-like cave.

"Alexandra rose and looked about. A golden afterglow throbbed in the west, but the country already looked empty and mournful. A dark moving mass came over the western hill" (54). It would be Ivan. He would pick her up off the blood-stained and tear-stained earth.

Perhaps the elements of the land through the severity of the raging storm were scorning Alexandra and humanity. Or, perhaps the severity of the wind and rain, in cooperation with the land, was cleansing humanity's mistakes. The rain washed away the blood of death from around the White Mulberry Tree; from the death of Emil and his lover. Perhaps by the same token, the wind and rain were washing away Alexandra's sense of sorrow, giving her renewed hope in life. The land, being nourished by rain and combined with Alexandra's tears, planted forever her love and pain upon the land.

## **MY ANTONIA**

In the beginning of *My Antonia*, the immigrants arrive at the land, new to them, unsure of what awaits them. Antonia and Jim, the narrator, arrive by separate means in a country completely foreign to them. They with wonder the wide open land.

As far as we could see, the miles of copper-red grass were drenched in sunlight stronger and fiercer than as at any other time of the day. The blond cornfields were red gold, the haystacks turned rosy and threw long shadows. The whole prairie was like the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed . . . . As the sun sank there came a sudden coolness and the strong smell of earth and drying grass (28,29).

Antonia, in the long, cold, and dreary ride to her new home, becomes aware of the land. She slowly absorbs her surroundings. And as she grows up, in her dark brown eyes the land seemed to come into focus, a place where she becomes so absorbed, that she actually lives "in the land," in a cave.

Jim's response to the landscape "establishes the form of reference which gives the pioneer experience its symbolic meaning" (McFarland 41). As Jim's family lives in a house, so, in stark contrast, Antonia's family lives in a root-cellar type cave carved into the bowels of the earth. Antonia slept in a hole tunneled into the mud of the cave. Around them is nothing but earth.

Jim describes her home. "In the rear wall was another little cave; a round hole, not much bigger than an oil barrel, scooped out in the black earth. When I got up on one of the stools and peered into it, I saw some quilts and a pile of straw. The old man held the lantern. 'Yulka,' he said in

a low, despairing voice, 'Yulka; my Antonia' . Grandmother drew back. 'You mean they sleep in there - your girls?'" (50).

Magill tells us that Antonia becomes a "total embodiment of the strength and generosity associated with those who are at one with the land and not the forces of nature" (497). However, the two must go together in keeping with Cather's own perception of landscape as a character in relationship with her human characters. Antonia's capacity for life finds expression not only in the trees and fields she tends but also, near the story's end, in her many children, who seem to have sprung up almost miraculously from the earth from which Antonia was "raised in" herself.

In telling his story, Jim relates the conflicts he has between prairie life and city life. He was never one with the land as was Antonia. In *My Antonia*, a majestic image occurs, one that suggests the timeless aspect to the characters interacting with the landscape. Here Antonia, Jim, and the Hired Girls from town witness the involvement of the earth's interaction with the landscape:

. . . . presently we saw a curious thing: There were no clouds. The sun was going down in a limpid, gold washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the great red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance across by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk: the handles, the tongue, the share-black against the sun. Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared, the fields below were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgot plough

had sunk back to its own bitterness somewhere on the prairie (156).

Jim then escapes from the realities of the land by allowing Antonia to represent for him all the positive values of the earth for which no amount of civilization can compensate. But, he finds himself returning to view the landscape, and to see Antonia once again. He approaches landscape like a picture on a wall--something that happened in the past that he can look at and admire from time to time.

Although Jim does marry once, after leaving the Divide, he remains what he always was, romantic in disposition, in love with the Western country, "as impressionistic as a boy" (Brown 152). He "tried" to experience the land once, with Antonia and the Hired Girls, but loses the true sense of the land, and moves on.

Cather had stated in an interview concerning Jim's relationship with Antonia that "she [Cather] had been trying to achieve two effects that were not really compatible; Jim was to be fascinated by Antonia as only a man could be, and yet he was to remain a detached observer, appreciative but inactive, rather than take part in life" (Brown 206).

At the end of the story, Jim determines to revitalize his past association with the land and yet still remain a city man at heart. Jim felt or at least acknowledged the challenge of the land. However, he did not want to embrace that challenge. Even so, Antonia has a pride in Jim for his "city" accomplishments. This would not necessarily come from the land's

point of view, but from Antonia because of her relationship with Jim.

I found myself telling her everything: why I had decided to study law and go into the law office of one of my mother's relatives in New York City; about Gaston Cleric's death from pneumonia last winter, and the difference it had made in my life. She wanted to know about my friends, and my way of living, and my dearest hopes (205).

Antonia lives the land, shares herself with the land, and wants to share her joy and pride of the land and her children with Jim. She proudly introduces Jim to all her children she had loved and nourished. Antonia walks with him through the orchard she planted and nourished.

As we walked through the apple orchard, grown up in tall bluegrass, Antonia kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. 'I love them as if they were people,' she said, rubbing her hand over the bark. 'There wasn't a tree here when we first came. We planted every one, and used to carry water for them, too . . . They were on my mind like children' (219).

Antonia loves the land, shares herself with the land. Jim lives off the land, and sees landscape through "rose colored glasses." Jim eventually leaves the land and unlike Antonia, his is a barren life without family or children or the fruits of the land.

The story of Antonia keeps close to the solid earth. With her we roam the boundless prairie, lost in the tall shaggy, red grass; we drift along the dew-covered cornfields; we watch with her on a riverbank the fading colors of landscape.

## ***DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP***

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* is the culmination of Cather's efforts at reconciling her two central urges, one towards the land and the other towards art. Most of the events relate to the virtues of place--the textures of earth and nature--that are the basis of a total sense of reality, one in which the relationships of human generations silently hand down their wisdom of place. The growing interaction of these generations with the land in this novel is perhaps stronger and more definitive than in the others.

When they left the rock or tree or sand dune that had sheltered them for the night, the Navajo was careful to obliterate every trace of their temporary occupation. He buried the embers of the fire and remnants of food, unpiled any stones he had piled together, filled up holes he had scooped in the sand. Since this was exactly Jacinto's procedure, Father Latour judged that, just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a little (at least to leave some mark of memorial of his sojourn), it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air. It was the Indian manner to vanish into the landscape, not to stand against it. (233).

As a young priest, Father Jean Latour is sent from a highly cultivated environment in France to revitalize Catholicism in the rugged New Mexico territory. Magill states that Latour, "might well be Cather's ideal human being" (482). Even though Latour is a scholar of the arts and dedicated to his calling, this fine-textured man is forced to work out his destiny in a

a desolate, stark land:

The wiry little priest whose life was to be a succession of mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers, who was to carry the Cross into territories yet unknown and untamed, who would wear down mules and horses and scouts and stage-divers . . .(41).

Latour's task is to serve the people through the Church in a vast desert land. Toward the end of his life, his remarkable nature is imprinted indelibly on the barren landscape, and the landscape is imprinted indelibly in his nature. Given the choice, instead of returning to France, he chooses to stay in New Mexico. His total reconciliation and acceptance with the land are symbolized in the fulfillment of his dream to build a cathedral out of the golden rock of New Mexico, a dream that is realized in his "golden" years.

While yet a young bishop, Latour, after traveling three days in a desert of brick-colored sand hills, comes upon a juniper tree in the distinct shape of the cross. There he kneels to pray to the Mother Mary for water for his animals and himself. Shortly thereafter, he comes to a place called Hidden Water, where a spring is revealed to him. Latour felt as though his prayer to Mary opened to him a priceless treasure--that of a fresh running stream that gives and sustains life, coming from the very depths of the earth:

About a mile above the village he came upon the waterhead, a spring overhung by the sharp-leafed variety of cottonwood called water hint of water until it rose miraculously out of the parched and thirst sea of sand (31).

The realization of Latour's dreams and accomplishments are in part

brought about with the arrival of a fellow priest from France, Father Joseph Valliant. Valliant takes on more of the cultural, civilized duties of life, which allows Latour to seek his fulfillment with the life of the land that at first seemed lifeless and barren. In the building of the Cathedral, Cather merges the art of civilization gracefully with the soil and the Western landscape:

    Wrapped in his Indian blankets, the old archbishop sat for a long while, looking at the open, golden face of his Cathedral. How exactly young Molny, his French architect, had done what he wanted! Nothing sensational, simply honest building and good stone-cutting, --good Midi-Romanesque of the plainest. And even now, in winter, when the acacia trees before the door were bare, how it was of the South, that church, how it sounded the note of the South!

    No one but Molny and the Bishop had ever seemed to enjoy the beautiful site of that building . . . perhaps no one ever would....The steep carnelian hills drew up so close behind the church that the individual pine trees thinly wooding their slopes were clearly visible . . . . the tawny church seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills--with a purpose so strong that it was like action. Seen from this distance, the Cathedral lay against the pine-splashed slopes as against a curtain (271/272).

By the end of the story Cather has created a blend of the virtues of the untamed landscape and the finest aspects of civilization. It might be that Cather is moving to bring these two aspects of life together.

Throughout this novel, as in the other novels, Cather conveys a strong feeling of order and tranquility with landscape that is characterized by a simplicity of language and delicate harmony of color.

    The sun had set now, the yellow rocks were turning gray, down in the pueblo the light of the cook fires made red patches of the glassless

windows, and the smell of the pinion smoke came softly through the still air. The whole western sky was the colour of golden ashes, with here and there a flush of red on the lip on a little cloud (92).

Cather uses the images of landscape to interact with the characters of Archbishop Latour and Father Valliant to draw us into the powerful images of landscape. We follow both the landscape and what it means for their lives. There are also the reflections of their purpose of service to the Creator and the lives of the people of the land. A connection is made between civilization and the land.

## SUMMARY

Willa Cather once said in an interview that the Nebraska landscape was "the happiness and the curse in my life" (Magill 476), a statement showing her intense involvement in her life-long relationship with landscape--whether Nebraska or the Southwest.

As long as her parents were alive, Cather made repeated trips back home to see them, and each time she crossed the Missouri River, "The very smell of the soil tore me to pieces" (476). Cather knew that she had to leave her Nebraska prairie in order to fulfill her compelling desire for broader experiences for her artistic creation of landscape. Like Father Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather knew she would never find fulfillment unless she left her home. Simultaneously, however, she discovered that her very being was rooted in the landscape of her childhood which she beautifully orchestrated with Alexandra's commitment to the land in *O' Pioneers.*, and Antonia's involvement with the land in *My Antonia*.

But Cather is an honest writer, and the land is never the same for everyone. The raw hardships of prairie life, for example, could sometimes mutilate the body and drain the spirit, and a human being often needed something else. Antonia's father, for example, a man of genuine sensitivity and culture, could not have survived in a hard land. And indeed, he did not.

Not only could the beloved land be killingly cruel, but it would also fail to provide the environment of training, discipline, and appreciation so

necessary for the growth and development of an artist. Although the land provided the materials for the memory to work with and the germinating soil for the seed of talent, it could not or would not produce the final fruit without that one person or persons who would eagerly, willingly choose to embrace the land and become one with the land, with the landscape.

And this oneness grew so strong for Cather, that the land became part of her life. The landscape she created became part of her writing. For Willa Cather, then, landscape is a character, a character touching and shaping all those who came to live within its world.

#### PRAIRIE SPRING

Evening and the flat land,  
Rich and somber and always silent;  
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,  
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;  
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,  
The toiling horses, the tired men;  
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,  
The eternal, unresponsive sky,  
Against all this, Youth,  
Flaming like the wild roses,  
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,  
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;  
Youth with its insupportable sweetness,  
Its fierce necessity,  
Its sharp desire,  
Singing and singing,  
Out of the lips of silence,  
Out of the earthy dusk.

Willa Cather

## WORKS CITED

Brown, E.K., and Leon Edel. Willa Cather: A Critical Biography. Avon Books, Publisher. New York, N.Y. 1953.

Cather, Willa. Death Comes for the Archbishop. Published by Random House, Inc. New York. 1927.

-----, My Antonia. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston. 1918. Copyright renewed, 1977.

-----, O' Pioneers. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston. 1913.

Magill, Frank N., Editor. Critical survey of Long Fiction. English Language series. Authors Call-Dur. Vol. 2. Walton Beacham Academic Director. Salem Press. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1983.

McFarland, Dorothy Tuck. Willa Cather. Frederick Publishing Co., New York. 1972.

Unger, Leonard, Editor in Chief. American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies. Volume 1, Henry Adams to T.S. Eliot. Charles Scriber's Son, New York. University of Minnesota. 1971.