

# A Study of *O Pioneers!*

— The Meaning of the Soil —

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## Introduction

*O Pioneers!* is a vigorous novel. It places Willa Cather (1873-1949) definitely among the great American writers. This work is an early epic of the struggles of Swedish and Bohemian settlers in Nebraska. No one had described the American West. But Cather became the voice of an unsung people, the generation of immigrants who settled the western frontier. This book still has a strong effect on readers, for she has the power to enhance ordinary people and places with more passion and clarity. In taking for the title, the name of one of Walt Whitman's poems in *Leaves of Grass*, Cather draws attention to his influence on the mood of her narrative. From every sentence, her affectionate feeling for the earth and the early pioneers is oozing. *O Pioneers!* is, in short, "the novel of the soil."<sup>1</sup> This paper aims at elucidating the meaning of the soil through the life of the heroine Alexandra.

## Chapter 1 Cather's Apprenticeship

This chapter deals with the writing process of *O Pioneers!*, which is of great importance only to this book. The year 1912 is indeed a turning point in the development of her prose style and in her life as a writer. In other words, it is the period of turning from Henry James, who was the most interesting American writer at that time. In an interview with Latrobe Carroll, Cather states that she was once an ardent admirer of Henry James and was under the influence of his style: "In those days, no one seemed so wonderful as Henry James; for me, he was the perfect writer."<sup>2</sup> In another one with Flora Merrill, she reminisces, "When I was in college...I began by

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<sup>1</sup> *Willa Cather on Writing*[=WCOW] (University of Nebraska Press, 1988) p.93

<sup>2</sup> *Willa Cather in Person* [=WCIP](University of Nebraska Press, 1990) p.21

imitating by Henry James...and I strove laboriously to pattern after him.”<sup>3</sup> Henry James and Edith Wharton were popular novelists to the young writers who were just following their manner. It is only natural that the still young and affected Cather kept up with the main current of the literary circle. She wanted to be a writer of life rendering various lives to portray various people in life. Frankly speaking, in my judgment, perhaps her artistic disposition and attitude toward life might be formed during this period. It is the time of her trial and error, namely, her training in youth. Thanks to that, her stories and novels partake of color, beauty, power, verisimilitude and sincerity. But Cather deviates from the long tradition by a chance meeting with Sara Orne Jewett (1849-1909), who wrote about her native Maine. In 1908 Cather met Miss Jewett. Then Cather was thirty-four years old, Jewett sixty. They made friends with each other soon. But their friendship continues just for sixteen months. Here is the excerpt of Jewett’s last letter to Cather, which is one of the letters available at present.

“My dear Willa,— I have been thinking about you ...I cannot help saying what I think about your writing...if you don’t keep and guard and mature your force...you will be writing things not much better than you did five years ago. This you are anxiously saying to yourself!...I want you to be surer of your backgrounds,—you have your Nebraska life...These are uncommon equipment, but you don’t see them yet quite enough...You must find a quiet place...you must find your quiet centre of life, and write from that to the world...in short, you must write to the human heart...you can write about life, but never write life itself. And to write and work on this level, we must live on it—we must at least recognize it and defer to it at every step. We must be ourselves, but we must be our selves...”<sup>4</sup>

Is there any writer who received a piece of strict but warm advice? Judging from the date of December 13, 1908, this letter was written one year before Jewett died. When Jewett wrote this, she already felt her health decline. So she lost no time in writing what she had to say to the young promising writer in the making. The comparative “surer” urged Cather to be aware of her own background which she was still unconscious of. The negatives “don’t” or “never” make her improve her writing. Jewett’s strictness stands out all the more by using the negatives. And she employs the auxiliary “must” many a time in the latter part of the letter. She could not restrain her impatience, but her expectation is obviously reflected upon the word. Yet Jewett’s words did not get across to Cather, and she did not put them into practice. It takes four years for this seed of the advice to ripen. When she received this letter, she was still engaging in her busy job as an

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.76

<sup>4</sup> Annie Fields ed.: *LETTERS OF SARAH ORNE JEWETT* (Houghton Mifflin, 1911) p.p.247-250

editor of *McClure's Magazine* and was absorbed in a refined story set in Boston and London in the manner of Henry James. The story was to be published in book form as *Alexander's Bridge* in 1912. Surely this first novel of hers reveals the strong influence of Henry James. It is an irony, however, that this ambitious novel ends in failure. Then Cather realized the limitation of a superficial city life. According to Louis Auchincloss, "Willa Cather herself became impatient with its artificiality, its contrived plot, and she ultimately rejected the whole business of the 'well-made' novel."<sup>5</sup> Cather herself regarded *Alexander's Bridge* as "very shallow"<sup>6</sup> when she was asked for an introduction to a new edition of the book ten years after its publication. She knew that there was nothing certain in a large city and at last relinquishes the unnecessary and the splendiferous in it. Her "Jamesian days of writing about the best people in merely sophisticated settings are over."<sup>7</sup> At the same time, she definitely resigned from *McClure's* as Jewett had demanded in that letter. As I have mentioned earlier, this is the turning-point in her career. After traveling to the Southwest, she spent a long time with her family in Red Cloud, Nebraska. It is not until she soaked in its scent, its sound, its color of Nebraska, her old memories that she first discovered that the land was worth while to write about. Of all places, her favorite was, of course, Nebraska, where she had spent girlhood with her neighbors, Scandinavian or Bohemian settlers. But the very name of Nebraska threw some critics into "a clammy shiver of embarrassment"<sup>8</sup> at that time. They did not care a bit what happened in such a "distinctly declass  "<sup>9</sup> place as Nebraska, and yet Cather made up her mind to pen the story based upon her old memories filled with the immigrants or beautiful nature. Above all, those immigrants' phraseology or queer accents, which seem to have stuck in her mind, are profusely exaggerated in many parts of conversation of the story. Their speech is especially lively and vital, and stands out among Cather's simple, straightforward, and occasionally quaint style. She no longer had any intention of doing like this or that. And she completed the Nebraska story called "Alexandra," which is the first chapter of *O Pioneers!*, "The Wild Land." After a while she began to think about another story, in the same key as "Alexandra," which she planned to call "The White Mulberry Tree." Thus all her memories of what Jewett called "your Nebraska life" which had been preserved somewhere in her mind for a long time, were about to filter through her self and to crystallize out. When the two stories came together in her mind, they became *O Pioneers!*. Without that

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<sup>5</sup> L.Auchincloss: *PIONEERS & CARETAKERS* (University of Minnesota Press, 1965) p.97

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Edith: *Willa Cather Living* (Bison books, 2000) p.77

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Sergeant: *Willa Cather a memoir* (University of Nebraska Press, 1963) p.89

<sup>8</sup> WCOW p.94

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

encounter with Jewett and her encouragement, Cather couldn't possibly find her own genuine subject matter. But when *O Pioneers!* was published in June, 1913, much to her chagrin, her friend whom she had deeply respected and felt profound ties with was not alive any longer. As a token of her gratitude, Cather dedicated the book to the late Miss Jewett. Its dedication reads: "To the memory of SARAH ORNE JEWETT in whose beautiful and delicate work there is the perfection that endures."

## Chapter 2 The Land Speaks the Truth

In this chapter, let us consider some aspects of nature which Cather describes. Between the title pages and the actual opening of the novel, Cather gives the reader two epigraphs which make clear what the novel will explore. The first epigraph—"Those fields, colored by various grain!"—is a quotation from the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855). The second epigraph is Cather's own poem entitled "Prairie Spring." This poem is, as it were, the whole picture of the story in structure. Seemingly the figure which these lines make represents the leaves of grass in the field.

### 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;  
The long empty roads,  
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 dusks.

The former part of the poem describes the flat prairie land and the weariness and bleakness of the labor required to wring crops from it and implies Alexandra engaging in husbandry. The light of the afterglow alleviates the fatigue of the laborers and also faintly echoes the melancholy tone of April twilight. This scene is derived from Cather's Nebraska materials. On the other hand, the latter part sings juvenile life which indicates Marie and Emil. But the most important thing is to pay attention to the plot in which the poem as well as the whole story begins with the land and ends in it. In the beginning of the story, the author first gives a narration of an outlook of the land. Not a single human being appears there. The noticeable are "drab buildings," "dwelling-houses" and "a deeply-rutted road." However, all of them hint to the reader that there are some little human activities. The land makes its appearance imposingly. This willy-nilly makes us conscious of the existence of the land. In fact, Cather says, "the great fact is the land itself." (p.15) On the contrary, the author describes men as too weak to make any landmark on the land as "a record of human strivings." (p.20) The land "overwhelmed the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its somber wastes...and wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength..." (p.15) It was with the land itself that Alexandra had to face.

The young Alexandra, who had come all the way from Sweden with her family, felt the sense of responsibility for running a household and the care of the rest of the family after her father's death. Her responsibility was reflected on her reply to her dying father's will. She said not "I will..." but "We will never lose the land." (p.26) But drought and failure attacked on her family, and they lost everything they spent. "The country was never meant for men to live in." (p.47) The wild land is a place to be conquered. Alexandra had to struggle against the barren ground. She braved the difficulties of her own volition, while her neighbors on the Divide discarded their land and went away. Neither rest nor indolence was permitted her. There was no way but plowing the field every day. She was "debouching upon a world of labor and the march"<sup>10</sup> with Whitman's frontier spirit, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"<sup>11</sup> The duty for the future was the resource for

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<sup>10</sup> Walt Whitman: *Leaves of Grass* (The Heritage Press, New York) p.212

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the ceaseless labor and invested her with the power to meet the trouble. The world of the labor was free from any joyful laughter. In a certain way, it is the world of the five senses. As for the sense of hearing, there are various sounds which appeal to the ear. They contain the sound of a jolting wagon, a scythe swinging and cutting the grass, a cow's bellowing, little insects chirping in the grass, twittering birds and the soundless sound of an empty field, and what not. To begin with, let us refer to the sound of scything off the long grass with which the verdant field is covered. Needless to say, what is meant by the scythe is the sound [s]. If you stare at the word "grass," you will notice that it owns the same two letters "-ss-." This is related to the abundance of the grass along with the echo of the adjective "grassy." The sound [s] certainly produces a refreshing effect on the whole story. Cather makes use of a few words including the letter "s" in page 204.

"soil," "bushes," "grassy," "shade(2)," "(the river was) shallow," "sparkling sand," "(the water flowed) so slowly (that it) seemed (to) sleep (in the )sun," "(a) single (wild duck was) swimming..."

Most of these words represent nature and are suitable for depicting a scene of the picnic on a brook which Alexandra and Emil enjoy. Of course there is no telling whether Cather herself is conscious of such an effect as alliteration. But when you read this page aloud, you must feel the freshness of the crisp sound and would be surprised at its frequency. I dare say that most of the words expressing natural things possess the letter "s" and the sound [s]. This seems a profound phenomenon in that words embody their entities.

Let us next give an ear to small sounds of little animals.

"The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest. She[=Alexandra] had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere...." (p.71)

"...in the grass all the small creatures of day began to tune their tiny instruments. Birds and insects without number began to chirp, to twitter, to snap and whistle to make all manner of fresh shrill noises." (p.p.126-127)

How dear these descriptions are! Though we do not know exactly where little insects and birds are, nor see their figures, we can at least know that they *are* somewhere and that now they start to make varied sounds. This consciousness is through the sense of hearing. Therefore, there are some verbs are possible, such as "chirp(ing)," "twitter," "snap," "whistle." This is because the

hearing sense is keen and sharp. Their sound is not only a consolation for today but an encouragement for tomorrow. A daily small effort responds to and sympathizes with their small sounds which little musicians play as members of a nameless field orchestra. Cather maintains that even such little things live with all their might. This is an intense attachment for little things. Unlike most Western people, Cather esteems such a faint sound as a beautiful music. Her ear seems similar to our Japanese' in this respect. This is an agreeable similarity to us, and has something even in common with ancient Japanese' minds. A quiet and little sound always encourages us in spite of its slight energy which is indeed tiny in comparison with the dynamic energy of the vast field. The smallness supports the strength of the novel. Besides, there is an interest in "looking."

"The air was cool enough to make the warm sun pleasant on one's back and shoulders, and so clean that the eye could follow a hawk up and up, into the blazing blue depths of the sky." (p.49)

The eye of a viewer "looks" up at the sky and a hawk flying high up in the sky. His look is intensive, so the adverb "up" is used twice and emphatically like "up and up." The noun "depths" as a plural form, at first sight, gives readers an unexpected impression, for the word "depth," when employed, usually has a meaning of "down (adj. or adv.)," "profound," "intelligent." By its being used together with "up," we image an infinite sky. The more we live with our feet upon the land, the more we feel the sky. And we do not feel the freshness of air in the true sense until we start to be conscious of the existence of the land and the sky.

"...it [=the open face of the land] seems to rise a little to meet the sun. The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one is the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic, puissant quality that is in the tilth, the same strength and resoluteness." (p.p.76-77)

Nature is described as a subject to be looked at. This part is a pleasure to the eye as well as to the mind. These sentences with a wonderful simile and their picture we conceive are good to "look" at. Cather personifies the land(= the earth), the sun and the air. The three greet one another with a smile. Its personification is very innocent, childlike, and enhances the beauty of the gratifying scene. The reason why it is pleasant lies in the existence of the sun. It lights up everything with happiness. If it were not for the sun, all life on earth would not grow in the least

and, what is worse, we could not “see” anything. Light not only enables us to “look” but enlightens us. In other words, looking and listening directly lead us to philosophize about the principle of nature.

“Alexandra stood leaning against the frame of the mill, looking at the stars....She loved to watch them, to think of their vastness and distance, and their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature....She thought of the law that lay behind them....That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it....She had never known before how much the country meant to her....Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring.” (p.p.70-71)

It can be thought that in this remark the author suggests her own view of nature. It is the belief that man can live in harmony with nature and can be one with it. Probably this idea comes from the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; and it has a relation with the oriental thought, Hinduism (Bhagavadgītā) or Buddhism (the Lotus Sutra). There is no room for inferring whether she studied it or not. However, as can be seen in the expressions, such as “their ordered march,” “the great operations of nature,” “the law that lay behind them,” she admits that there exists a certain law of nature, say, in this world or the universe. These phrases can be taken as what Emerson or Thoreau calls “law” or “principle.” Intangible force though it may be, it is deducted from various kinds of natural phenomena, with the result that it is thought to be a truth. It is true, therefore, that such a transcendental thought at first glance seems vague, irresponsible and easy merely to speak of because it is a philosophy by instinct. Yet there is no gainsaying the value of such a transcendental thought. This thought never degrades the dignity of a single individual intentionally. To put it in other words, it gives him an actual place in the world of nature and a confidence to ascertain his primary significance of existence. Only those who make an effort every day in solitude or live in a crude nature can duly realize this inspiring thought. Just as Emerson produced *Nature*(1836) in Concord, and Thoreau found out the true law of nature through the life of woods on Walden Pond, so Cather arrived at the universal truth in the vast Nebraska Plains. When one’s inner efforts are accumulated, one’s environmental force is about to stir for the future by its being in concord with the rhythm of nature. Hence optimistic attitude toward life. It reminds us of Whitman’s pioneer spirit. But what should not be ignored is that Alexandra’s eye returns to the earth upon which her daily life is based. After all, man’s life is closely connected with the land.

Let us succinctly consider our relation to the land. Man's primary connection is with the land itself. Man and land are most primitive elements and bear a close resemblance to Adam and Eve in the Paradise. The land alone has existed from time immemorial, and that eternally. On the other hand, a human being is mortal and reiterates the cycle of life and death like a flickering light in the darkness. We are born onto the land and die into the land; that is, we are born of our mother's womb and return to the mother earth. When we often say, "When mankind appeared on the Earth..." we premise that the land is precedent to the appearance of mankind. Then we never fail to say that phrase by using "on." This short word is also told in another case where our feet touch "on" the ground. It is a truly mystic fact that our feet are formed in a mother's womb before we are born. We are destined to walk and live on the earth. The preposition "(up)on" plays a role in linking the human being with the land ; therefore, its *raison d'être* is essential. The land is the center of nature Cather depicts.

Here I propose to recount the background of Cather's affection for nature. Her deepest feelings for it are entirely rooted in Nebraska, where she spent in her grandfather's ranch when she was a girl of eight or nine. In particular, she inhaled the smell of the soil luxuriously, and it became a deep-seated scent in her body in all her lifetime.

"When I crossed the Missouri River coming into Nebraska the very smell of the soil tore me to pieces....I loved the country where I had been a kid, where they still called me Willie Cather....I knew ever farm, every tree, every field in the region around my home, and they called out to me...."<sup>12</sup>

As Bennett indicates, Cather's feelings for the earth and the trees of Nebraska are responsible for the flavor of this novel. The sensation of the land and the impression of Nebraska engraved so deeply on the young Cather. *O Pioneers!* is a recollection of all such things. More than anything else, "it is the soil that she expresses best."(p.84) And she herself fully recognizes the importance of depending upon her memory. As she says: "...most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen. That's the important period: when one's not writing. Those years determine whether one's work will be poor and thin or rich and fine"<sup>13</sup>: "one's strongest emotions and one's most vivid mental picture are acquired before one is 15."<sup>14</sup> Thus Cather

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<sup>12</sup> WCIP p.37

<sup>13</sup> WCIP p.20

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.37

implies that despite the fact that memory itself is more or less obscure now and then, individual experiences or a psychological influence of the milieu upon the mind are of great moment to writers. To borrow Faulkner's words, "Memory believes...."<sup>15</sup>

Sixteen years after John Bergson's death, Alexandra finally realized such an immense plantation as her father had wanted badly. The soil became rich and fertile, and yielded heavy harvests. The land was conquered by her hands; or rather, it succumbed to her strenuous labor. Nevertheless, she does not think of herself as a conqueror. She believes that she belongs to the land and is a part of it. And she comes to the conclusion that the land is "the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for."<sup>16</sup> Alexandra overcame untold hardships.

"Toil triumphed over every obstacle, unrelenting

Toil and Want that pinches when life is hard"<sup>17</sup>

says Virgil in his *Georgics*. Cather conveys his tone to this novel. This phrase reminds us of how Alexandra toiled and moiled with the soil and of her laborious days. She was capable of the incessant hard labor her life demanded.

Saint-Exupéry in the beginning of his *Terre des hommes* narrates that the tireless labor teaches a worker a great deal: "The land teaches us more things than all the books do because it resists. Man finds his self when he fights with the obstacle....Through his labor he draws from nature little by little some secrets and the universal truth...(my translation)"<sup>18</sup> The land is her teacher all her life. Thus she not only drew nourishment from the prairie soil like cottonwood trees on Nebraska field but cultivated her wisdom rightly; and gradually grew into a woman of enduring strength. The nourishment is "love."

### Chapter 3 Love and Death

This chapter analyzes an aspect of love through Marie's and Emil's love affairs. Cather pours her passion into Part Four of *O Pioneers!*, "The White Mulberry Tree," which is the most dramatic story. It is a tragedy of Marie and Emil, whom Alexandra raised almost as a son. Most of the readers assume there will be a happy union of Marie and Emil at the end. That expectation is frustrated by Marie's elopement with Frank Shabata; they are both Bohemians.

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<sup>15</sup> William Faulkner: *Light in August* (Vintage,1990) p.119

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Mitchell: *Gone With the Wind* (Scribner, 1964) p.32

<sup>17</sup> Virgil: *Georgics* (Harvard University Press, 2001) p.109

<sup>18</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry : *Terre des hommes* (Gallimard,1993) p.9

Emil was despondent about the news. After a while the relation of the couple as husband and wife became cold. Marie was attracted by Emil, who was now virile as a young fellow. Marie was so bright and gay a girl that he was fascinated with her beauty. Emil ventured to go to Mexico to avoid seeing her. After his going, Marie was lonely. An empty field spreading before her eyes was a melancholy one. When she heard of his return, she tried as hard as possible to escape from seeing him and listening to his adventures uttered by his own voice. In the heart of each of them was merely the feeling of being lonely. It is the very solitude in love. The emotion is extremely difficult to mitigate because it is impossible to share the life with the partner. In other words, that emotion of being forlorn desires the partner which is inherent in the essential solitude of an individual human being. To say it reversely, the partner whom he or she wants to meet is *not* present here in front of him or her at the very moment. This reality gives a true account of the verb “miss.” Now that there is not the remotest possibility to unite one with the other, they must give up one another. At once his agony and hers grew day by day. When either he or she “must go away,” he determined to leave her again. He became a wandering solitary soul lingering on the darkling field and tortured himself with the thought whether he should be existent or non-existent in this world like a young Werther, while she determined to live with a treasure of pain in her breast forever. It seems as though they were two clouds drifting in the sky, now meeting, now parting.

Marie: What am I to do if you don't go away? I can't go, and one of us must.

Emil : On my honor, Marie, if you will say you love me, I will go away. (P.232)

He was on the verge of emerging from his conflicting emotion. The more the spatial distance between them widens, the more the inner distance shortens. There works a blind, unspoken force. Sakutarō Hagiwara says, “Love is the very feeling of all the feelings and the highest heat of man's emotions. (*my translation*)”<sup>19</sup> From another viewpoint, Tolstoy says with enthusiasm, “...love and to be loved! This is the only reality in the world: all else is fiddlesticks. And this is the one thing we are interested in.”<sup>20</sup> This truth, I dare say, rules our hearts all over the world in varied situations, so much so that love excludes in a mass all the frivolous except for itself as the word “fiddlesticks” shows. To love and to be loved is the most precious inner life. If you carefully compare “life” with “love,” you may notice that there is some close connection between

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<sup>19</sup> 萩原朔太郎 『恋愛名歌集』(新潮文庫 昭和52年) p.11

<sup>20</sup> Leo Tolstoy: *War and Peace* (Penguin, 1982) p.387

them. This is partly because they begin with the letter “I” and partly because the alternate arrangement of two vowels and two consonants is precisely the same. Uttering the two words, you should feel each of them sounds in a gloomy tone. A deep nostalgia dwelling in a human soul by nature feels a sorrow or affliction. It is not a coincidence that “I” is included in a few words which evoke a dreary mood; for instance, “forlorn,” “lonely,” “lonesome,” “melancholy,” “solitary,” “solitude,” and so forth. In fine, love inevitably pursues “the moments of happiness” to be seized. If there is a case where the fire of a true love must die for good, its spirit must literally live a dead life. So with Marie and Emil. The two of them were tormented by the stings of conscience because of the presence of Marie’s husband. But in spite of themselves they gave way to the impulse to unite with each other. When they were together under a mulberry tree on a fine day, they were shot to death on the spot by Frank’s rifle. She was dead with her head on her lover’s shoulder and her hand on his breast. Their blood incarnadined the pasture grass as if to symbol their love. It contrasts strikingly with such innocence as the “white” mulberry tree. Here Cather employs a tale of tragic love that befalls Paolo and Francesca, who appear in *Inferno* by Dante. They were captured by the spell of love and were not able to escape the final destruction. They could not help it. It is true that Cather seems to describe a true love at first sight, but she tells us an aspect about love itself. Love is of various kinds. Let us again cite the four lines of the above-mentioned epigraphic poem.

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Flaming like the wild roses,  
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,

.....

Its fierce necessity,  
Its sharp desire,

.....

The former of the first two lines sings Marie flaming like a wild rose to bring a joy to the people around her, while the latter does Emil wandering over the field to seek for a paradise. But they were too young to foresee the future. Their love was not long like the length of the first two lines. Its duration was short like the length of the latter two lines: “[i]ts fierce necessity, [i]ts sharp desire.” Love led them to death. Thus Love and Death dwell in one. Strictly speaking, this tragic love takes its origin from the fact that they could not live with the soil. They could not get the nourishment from the soil to live on. Therefore, the rose and the lark became the two corpses on the field in a flash.

## Chapter 4 Excelsior!

This miserable event was the second trial for Alexandra. Masaru Shiga speaks to the effect that in her case it does not end up as a tragedy after all. She suffered Frank to let out of prison despite the fact that he had taken the two young lives. The central topic of this last chapter is to grope for the reason why she could forgive his offense. To tell the truth, her forgiveness is entirely supported by all her experiences hitherto. She unconsciously attained to it step by step. There is an actual process to reach it. We can deem it a trace of her spiritual growth. The “responsibility” builds up “endurance”; and the “endurance” leads to “tolerance.” Hence love. It is nurtured in this process, too. The reason why Cather must shift the background of her novels from a large city to the country lies in the problem of love. Varied kinds of love in the large city melt into such alcohol with momentary pleasure as Hemingway describes in his *The Sun Also Rises*. There is nothing steadfast at all in it. People surrounded by the urban din or the clamor of the street have no other choice but to depend on the transient. When the day is done, they have only to wait for tomorrow to come. So they drink spirits from morning to midnight and live in an ephemeral world with an illusion named alcohol. They have no soil to raise love since everything is “lost.” On the other hand, in turn, this seems to tell us what man ought to live by. It was by the soil beneath her feet which Alexandra lived. It not just helped the woman with her inner spirit but also provided her with nourishment for her body and soul. We call this nourishment love. It is justly said that if this love is born of the soil itself, that is genuine. The soil originally possesses real power to raise living things, to be more exact, something organic. When a human being lives, breathing, treading on the earth, his or her love never fails to develop. It follows from the fact that Marie and Emil, who did not have their bed of love, could not even foster their love. Apart from this, it is often said that the story of Alexandra has nothing to do with the tale of Marie’s and Emil’s tragic love. But it seems at least to the present writer that such a fallacy is due to losing sight of the problem of love. This undertone of love is a key to understanding the whole story. The certainty of love directly from the soil, as can be seen in Alexandra’s case, is all the more sublated by a rootless love of Marie and Emil. Such a genuine love alone can overcome even hatred which is the only cause of ceaseless, innumerable tragedies occurring all over the world. This is true of Alexandra. We must be aware that hatred is also the other side of love, while now we humans must needs exert a considerable effort to surmount hatred for others. The exertion must be a quiet inner revolution because it can only be achieved within our hearts. This is a great challenge to our future. In the final analysis, love is endurance. *O Pioneers!* reveals to

us the supreme wisdom.

## Conclusion

The natural world Cather describes consists of the great and the little, or dynamic and static elements. It restores, in a word, its equilibrium. The great are made of the little. The seed of the wisdom was first embedded as a single one in a sterile land by Alexandra's hands. The first step is that she determined to cut through her destiny at the center of her heart. Her many years' incessant efforts have borne fruit at last. The land alone has witnessed and known the vicissitudes of her life hitherto. Alexandra knows that she must still go on toward the final goal. She appreciates the equation of victory that "the history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman."(P.65) There is no end in endeavor through her life. So she will be out in the field tomorrow!

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