

An Eco-feminist Analysis of Pioneer Women in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*

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This thesis examines pioneer women's seeking of the self from eco-feminist perspective in *O Pioneer!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918) authored by Willa Cather, a foremost American novelist, short story writer, poet as well as a successful journalist, critic, and editor in history of the 20th century American literature. In novels such as *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, Cather portrayed the lives of Old World immigrants, especially female immigrants, their struggle to survive, their spirit of fortitude and self-reliance on the American Mid-western frontier. Cather's fame centers on her celebration of rural American in her time, especially Nebraska, and her nostalgia for pioneering values. As women in the pioneer times, face the problem of survival on the prairie, they dig into man's sphere—the land, and achieve the ideal of self-identity. The heroines in Cather's novels partly represent the real life of the pioneer women in American history. During the pioneering times in American history, that uncultivated land in American west and mid-west possessed a magic power which had attracted many people. Pioneer women hold positive attitudes towards their life and achieve self-fulfillment in the hard natural environment.

Keywords: Willa Cather, pioneer women, self-seeking

Introduction

Willa Cather (1873-1947), a foremost American novelist, short story writer, poet as well as a successful journalist, critic, and editor in history of the 20th century American literature, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for her novel *One of Ours* (1922). In her life time, she had published altogether two volumes of poetry, 62 short stories, 12 novels, and two books of essays.

As critics have long acknowledged, Cather has established her important position in American literature through novel-writing. And her writing can be divided into two stages. In the first stage, she returned to Nebraska background which provided her with settings and characters. These novels are called "pioneer" novels. In novels such as *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), Cather portrayed the lives of Old World immigrants, especially female immigrants, their struggle to survive, their spirit of fortitude and self-reliance on the American Mid-western frontier. Cather's fame centers on her celebration of rural American in her time, especially Nebraska, and her nostalgia for pioneering values. These "pioneer" novels express the universality through the specific experience and thus reveal a fundamental understanding of human nature and experience rooted in her own life (Rosowski, 1990).

In the 1920s after World War I, the sense of disillusionment poured out over the world. The demolition between the physical world and spiritual world distressed a large number of people. In Cather's works, the feeling of old virtues disappears, instead, a sense of worried unrest, frustration, and personal defeat creeps in. Thus, Cather's writing enters the second stage. *A Lost Lady* (1923) is the representative work in this turning point. It deals with the passing of the noble era of pioneering and the decline of the West as well as pioneering spirits.

From the introduction of Cather's novel writing, a pioneering spirit is what she is much concerned about. And Cather has a nostalgic feeling for the pioneering age.

Eco-feminism is first proposed by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne. In her book *Feminist or Death* (1974), Francoise d'Eaubonne puts the ecological theory and feminist theory together, which reveals the natural link between nature and women. According to Eco-feminism, women and nature share common characters in some common essence. The core viewpoint of Eco-feminism is that there exists some historical and symbolic relationship between demeaning to women and belittling nature in Western culture.

The Opposition to Nature

When the "May Flower" shipped the first group of European immigrants and arrived at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, the Europeans repeated the migration by crossing the Atlantic Ocean to their dreamed land, a promised land built on the American Dream. From the very beginning of the formation of the United States, the national complex of the American Dream has hovered in the minds of thousands of immigrants. The words of freedom, equality, individualism, material success, and self-fulfillment are all aspects of the American Dream.

Millions of immigrants left their homestead, traveling from Europe to America impelled by this American Myth. The boundary of the first 13 colonies has been expanded over the Appalachian Mountains and across the Mississippi River to the vast western part.

The myth of the free image of the yeoman and the myth of the Garden in American west attracted immigrants from different corners of the world. But they settled down in the west, they found the New World was not an Eden Garden. They would face a number of severe challenges. And the first challenge they encountered was nature. "But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled its somber wastes" (Cather, 1913, p. 9). The nature taught the first lesson to human beings who dared to disturb it. In writing about the setting of the Midwest in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, Willa Cather chose her subject, from the classical point of view for American epic—the struggle of man against nature. Wild land was only the background of the story, and the real heroes were human beings. The more severe the environment was, the greater the figures were.

Alexandra's Frustration in Farming the Barren Land

The story starts on one January day in 1883 in the little prairie town of Hanover. Alexandra Bergson, about 20, and her very little brother Emil have to come to town on errands with their German neighbor, Carl Lindstrum. The story moves to the Bergson farm on the Divide where Alexandra's father, a Swedish immigrant, is dying after 11 years of heroic effort to farm the land. He bequeaths to his daughter and sons a full section of unencumbered land. Alexandra, the oldest child, is to look after her brothers and mother and to farm the land faithfully. John Bergson's death is followed by three fat years and three lean years, after which, Lou and Oscar, Alexandra's two younger brothers, want to quit farming and leave the land. Alexandra refuses to accept Oscar's

idea and holds that now it is the time to mortgage their land and buy more. In 10 years, she believes, the farmland will be prosperous.

The opening scenes of the novel “the roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were scarcely noticeable” (Cather, 1913, p. 19) reveal a depressing view of the country. Moreover, when the snowstorm, like an enormous eraser, sweeps away all human landmarks in its path, even the town of Hanover “anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away” (Cather, 1913, p. 3) hints that only those clinging to an inner anchor of stability will survive. This beginning serves as a foil to Alexandra’s later statue as an Earth mother with stability. Cather in *O Pioneers!* implied that human beings should never give up the self to a landscape, which threatened to erase their identity.

Alexandra recovers her soul through the garden scene. Although in reality the fierce winds blow across the prairie, Alexandra nonchalantly drowns in the garden. “Standing perfectly still, with that serious ease so characteristic of her” (Cather, 1913, p. 49), she detaches herself from surroundings in an impenetrable calm. All these show Alexandra’s firmness to stick to her desire in front of the strict social conventions. To achieve the fulfillment of her wishes, she need simply adhere to the original impulse within her. As Cather (1913) narrated:

Her face was so radiant that he felt shy about asking her. 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. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit that 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. (p. 65)

This climatic scene reveals that Alexandra wills the land to herself. She takes imaginative possession of the land so as to reconstitute her soul, which is a gesture of self-aggrandizement instead of self-abnegation. The Divide’s governing role is diminished since it bends lower than it has ever bent to a human will before, which lays stress on Alexandra’s strongest personality in the history and also reflects the desire of women who are eager to sustain their whole position in the prejudiced society. Actually, Alexandra becomes one with her land, knows the land well and concerns about the land’s needs.

Antonia’s Frustration in Exploring the Harsh Circumstances

The stages of Antonia’s life, moving from the prairie to town and city, then returning to the prairie, form a cycle. At the age of 14, Antonia migrates to Nebraska with her Bohemian family. On the virgin land, she has to face the cruel circumstances, the tough living conditions, and her father’s suicide. Working industriously without any complaint, she gives up many things to shoulder the family burden and help her family set up a farm. As a “hired girl” in Black Hawk, she learns a lot. She falls in love with a flashy railroad passenger conductor but later is deserted by him. She returns in disgrace to work on her brother’s farm and bears the illegitimate child. Later she marries the mild, friendly Anton Cuzak, set up a big family zealously and remains working on the land resolutely.

When Antonia arrives in Nebraska prairie with her family, she is a young girl. Like Jim Burden, she is at first shocked by the bleakness and vastness of the prairie. With the curiosity of children to the New World, Antonia and Jim begin to explore the countryside and share the initiatory experience of the wild land. Though life on the prairie is hard for the Shimerdas, Antonia is lighthearted and never complains. She learns to know and love the prairie.

But good time does not last long, with the arrival of winter; the Shimerdas are put into the tight spot. Without tools and skills of farm, knowing little English, they lead the harder life in winter. The coming of winter shows another side of nature—hostility and indifference to the newly arrived immigrants. It not only makes the existence harder, but also makes people lose hope. Mr. Shimerda, gentle, helpless, homesick for the old life, cannot bear the animal-like life to which the first generation of pioneers are subjected. So he killed himself with a shotgun. The hostility of the first prairie winter deprives Antonia of her father; Mr. Shimerda's death is the heavy blow on Antonia. By the end of the first year in Nebraska, Antonia has known the cruelty of nature and left the security of the childhood.

During this period, the stage of American's life is in nature—Nebraska prairie. From the beginning, Antonia is mainly depicted in terms of natural, land-related image. Her appearance and her spontaneity make her seem nature's child. The qualities of warmth and light importantly connote the very vitality, the vigor that is so frequently associated with Antonia's character throughout the novel, and anticipate the ingredients essential to the earth-goddess image Antonia projects in the last section of the novel. The color brown that dominates this part clearly has affinities with the land itself, bringing to mind the rich hue of the soil. It implicitly establishes the strong link between Antonia and the land and thus highlights the endearing naturalness and durability of her character.

Furthermore, Jim's most cherished memories of Antonia are related with animals or plants in nature: Antonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of Jim's pony when they come home in triumph with the snake, Antonia in her black haw shawl and fur cap as she stands by her father's grave in the snowstorm, Antonia coming in with her working team along the evening sky-line, etc.. She brings the Old World into the New, and she changes the disadvantages.

During this period, Antonia is not daunted by the harsh circumstances. Displaying from the beginning energy, vitality, intelligence, and adaptability rather than meekness, passivity, and dependence, she establishes the harmonious relationship with nature. This quality of being able to dissolve in nature and stand up as nature is what Jim loves in Antonia, and he guards this quality cautiously.

The Struggle Through Hardship

In appearance, men and women have "the seemingly contradictory traits American society divides between men and women—strength and pragmatism as well as intuition and compassion" (Brien, 1987, p. 429). However, pioneer women are by no means male in disguise. The outer signs of dress and physical appearance represent pioneer women's inner complexity. By wearing men's dress and doing men's job, Willa Cather's female protagonists prove themselves as strong and powerful as the opposite sex. Simultaneously, pioneer women redefine themselves and refuse to follow the suit of conventional female.

With their tender love for living things, women enjoy much in the great nature although the wilderness brings them too many troubles. In facing the problems of survival and adapting themselves to the environment, female characters communicate with nature vigorously and actively, and finally achieve self-discovery.

Alexandra's Acquisition of Land

Alexandra is a strong-willed woman who is optimistic and never yields to difficulties. The land helps us to understand the differences between Alexandra and her brothers. Unlike her brothers—Oscar, who only plants

mechanically regardless of the conditions of the land and Lou, who is just a user of the land but not part of it, Alexandra sagaciously plants wheat instead of corn and makes the land fertile with alfalfa crops, which increases the productivity.

Her dominating her brothers Lou and Oscar to make decisions on land is a symbol of matriarchal authority. Sixteen years after John Bergson's death, the harsh land flourishes under Alexandra's maternal nurture:

There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the mental, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. (Cather, 1913, p. 76)

Alexandra can conquer the difficulties, no matter how appalling the ugliness of the prairie was, nature could be made to wear the beautiful color of spirit. With her superior attributes, Alexandra can defect from the true animating spirit beneath the seeming indifference of the land. In this way, Alexandra is eulogized as an Earth Mother.

Though Alexandra has the priority of having property rights—a sovereign and inviolable possession of the land, she seems to merge into the nature as she is exposed in the sunshine. When her sick, reddish braids, twisted about her head, fairly burned in the sunshine, it seems that in the garden the sunshine's energy is transformed to her power as an exceptional being and reveals her privileged divinity overshadowing the mundane world around her. In fact, Alexandra's role throughout the chapter "The Wild Land" is to "hold on". Her "calmness, deliberation of manner" (Cather, 1913, pp. 87-88) and her unchanging relation with the land reinforce her image as an Earth Mother. Therefore, Alexandra's success attributes to loving the land as a patron deity but just dominating it as a conqueror.

Alexandra's determination to bring order out of disorder and to establish civilization on the desolate land is a heroic trait. It is the narration of her father's death intensifying her matriarchal dominance, for the sacrifice of the father is made to create a new order through the emergence of the female and make way for establishing a matriarchal society. The older generation of males fails to subdue the land. Old Mr. Bergson's life is depleted by the struggle with the land, it "was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods, and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why" (Cather, 1913, p. 15). Even young Emil feels gloomy of the land and never becomes a part of the untamed land:

The land seemed to overwhelm the little beginning of human society that struggled in its somber wastes. It was from facing this vast hardness that the boy's mouth had become so better; because he felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness (Cather, 1913, p. 9).

During the first three hard farm years, her brothers propose to abandon the highland on the Divide, when one of the brothers Lou says the land "was never meant to grow nothing on..." (Cather, 1913, p. 58). As a young woman goddess, Alexandra intuitively knows that "down on the frozen crusts, at the roots of the trees, the secret of life was still safe, warm as the blood in one's heart; and the spring would come again" (Cather, 1913, p. 117). She insists on making fruition of the land that "Some day... will be worth more than all we can ever raise on it" (Cather, 1913, p. 58). Her resistance to her brother challenges the weakness of her brothers' masculine practice and her insistence reflects her trying to establish order out of the unconquered. Alexandra maintains a matriarchal role throughout the novel and is depicted as both the masculine explorer-conqueror and feminine peacemaker.

Judging from all her features, Alexandra actually plays the dominant role that human hold in primitive agricultural society. Like the primitive fertility goddess, Alexandra's capacity of combining both masculine and feminine characteristic is important to her role as goddess. She is identified with the feminine Earth mother through appears with the masculine plow, but the material qualities of fruitfulness, imagination, and humanity are those that finally matter most, both to her and to the world about her. Contrasted with the weakness of the man about her, Alexandra's strength both physical and moral, is embodied in the first description of her and the men in her family. She walks rapidly and resolutely, as if she knew where she was going and what she was going to do next. However, her brothers, Oscar and Lou are physically strong but lack the ability of judgment and take a pessimistic view towards future. It is only Alexandra who can understand the land. In her eyes, the land is a living creature with personalities. She identified with it by merging her spirit with the land and bringing fertility. Alexandra resembles a mythic Earth mother because of her union with the land: "she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil" (Cather, 1913, p. 24). So far, the theme of "as one with nature" has got sublimation. The land corresponds with her:

For the first time, perhaps, since the 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. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. (Cather, 1913, p. 65)

The vital aspect of making success on the land is Alexandra's mystic intuition. As a fertility goddess, Alexandra depends on her unconsciousness as the operative force, so that in many realistic ways she excels the ordinary farmers. For example, she increases her acreage when others are selling them to speculators. When asked how she knows the price of the land will rise, she says she cannot explain it. Alexandra owning realization of herself is described as a subconscious existence. Since her ideas are all her impersonal ones; her mind is "a white book, with clear writing about weather and hearts and growing things". Being a goddess also facilitates her noble status on the Divide. Cather never directly portrays Alexandra's physically working on the land, we may understand Alexandra's statue indirectly: a conqueror who cultivated the land and an Earth mother who brings fertility and becomes oneness of the land.

Antonia's Awakening to Nature

Transplanted from the Old World to the New World, men will encounter various kinds of difficulties and challenges. When ideal conflicts with realities, only those have strong will and confidence can overcome. Though innocent enough, Antonia has gained talents and mysterious characteristics, which will help her, succeed in the New World in the future.

Jim Burden first meets Antonia Shimerda and her family at the railway station. Before that he heard of Antonia and her family through a passenger conductor. "The family 'across the water' whose destination was the same as ours", and the girl "as bright as a new dollar" with the "pretty brown eyes", all she can say is "We go BlackHawk, Nebraska" (Cather, 1994, p. 6).

Antonia is peculiar in her characteristics. From the very beginning, she is inclined to be intimate with others and with the New World. When Jim visits Shimerda's house-hold with his grandmother, he describes Antonia's physical attributes to express his curiosity of her mysterious character:

I remember what the conductor had said about her eyes. They were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood. Her skin was brown, too, and in her cheeks she had a glow of rich, dark color. Her brown hair was curly and wild-looking. The little sister... was fair, and seemed mild and obedient. (Cather, 1994, p. 17)

The use of colors and attributes in the description of Antonia reminds us of the image of the land, and shows us her natural bond with the land. In contrast to her little sister, Antonia seems to have a closer relationship with the native land. Her deep, thoughtful eyes reflect the beauty of nature. The warm and light filled in her eyes evoke the feeling of hope and comfort. The combination of her flowing skin and wild hair shows that she is an adventurous girl compared with the subdued attributes of her sister. The natural connection of the heroine to the land continually occurs as a theme in the novel.

Her warm generous personality is another characteristic that will aid her in her journey. She is eager to make friends. "While Krajiek was translating for Mr. Shimerda, Antonia came up to me and held out her hand coaxingly. In a moment we were running up the steep downside together" (Cather, 1994, p. 18), and in return for Jim's quick vocabulary instruction, Antonia offers him a ring, such innocent action strikes Jim as "reckless and extravagant". All this shows that European traditions brought to the new country have started to take root not only among the immigrants, but also among the local people.

Antonia is not defeated by the difficulties but moves on to engage in a new life in a new world. After the death of her father, Antonia, merely 15 years old, starts to work like a man so as to help support the family. Wearing the boots thoughtfully taken off by her father before shooting him and his old fur cap, Antonia is out in the fields from sunup till sundown.

The relation between Antonia and her father Mr. Shimerda embodies the relation between the New World and the Old World. Mr. Shimerda holds a strong sense of nostalgia of the Old World. He inherits the European tradition and artistic talents. He loves his Bohemian ancestry; he is sad for the old country and tortured by loneliness. He often caresses his violin, his joy in Bohemia, but never plays music any more. Without inspiration, his spirit falters. Antonia's strong characteristics of artistry, intelligence, and friendship evolve and are nurtured through her relationship with her father; Antonia receives her love of art through their musical experiences. "At home he plays violin all the time; for weddings and for dancing. He cries for living his old friends who make music with him. He loves very much the man what play the long horn..." (Cather, 1994, p. 59). Antonia sees his father's sadness, knowing he suffers because he is an artist but he is unable to express and adapt himself to a new environment. Although frustrated with the new country, Mr. Shimerda has an expectation of his daughter Antonia. To her father, Antonia embodies the pioneer spirit of sacrifice, seeing her eagerness to learn and love for the land that are the potentials for success, Mr. Shimerda provides many opportunities for her to develop her personality against the traditional female roles of Bohemia. He realizes Antonia must master the language and use her intelligence to understand the culture and express herself creatively. His faith in Antonia's ability to succeed reveals his hope in her. He believes Antonia has, like an artist, the creative characteristics to cultivate the land.

One problem, which new immigrants would meet when they arrived in the New World, was the language barrier and the exchange of culture between various races of peoples. The Native Americans hold discriminatory view against foreigners. Maybe they sympathize these poor newcomers but exclude them from their heartfelt recognition. They seem to have neglected the facts that the immigrants are also the memories of the nation, and they take part in the construction of the nation, and contribute a lot to the formation of aspects of American life.

Since the immigrants are regarded as “others” in Native Americans’ sub-consciousness, if they want to obtain their deserved status in the new country, they must struggle to develop their self-identity.

Antonia is placed in a new land and culture from her forefathers, and therefore will create a different role for herself. Antonia is promised to adapt to the new environment and survived in it. She is a quick and very earnest learner. When she has the first meeting with Jim, she has learned a score of words. In her family she is the only one who can speak English, and is encouraged by her father to learn English. Mr. Shimerda has high expectations of Antonia, hoping that she will have a bright future in the New World. Antonia is smart enough to understand.

Antonia is not only smart at language learning but also at housework. This is the preparation for her later roles as a hired girl and mother. Antonia loved to help Mrs. Burden in the kitchen and to learn about cooking and housekeeping. She could stand besides her, watching her every movement. Antonia’s learning enables her to adapt with ease to a new environment. Her flexibility will show later in each situation she encounters.

Antonia also has passionate emotions towards nature. Inhabited in the badger-hole like dwelling, Antonia desires to be free in the open land. For her and her sister the nature and the land are their refuge that keeps them off from the distress of their family. The land then becomes a place for Antonia to receive inspiration, comfort, and refuge during her quest. With Jim, she explores the land, learning a great deal of the creatures of nature. Antonia comforts the grasshopper, encouraging it to sing its little song. Jim sees a connection to nature in her love of animals and their appreciation of her. “The female heroine finds connections among all living things and this episode reveals Antonia’s similarity with other maternal and compassionate feminine figures that identify with vulnerability and with natures to another link in the woman’s tradition of ecological holism” (Reynold, 1996, p. 110). Thus, Cather portrayed Antonia who fully developed her characteristic through the conflicts with nature.

The Achievement in Livelihood

Although the heroines experience different kinds of frustration or failure in their life, they are not discouraged and still hold an optimistic view for their life. They are so confident that eventually they find their identities and fulfill themselves in the bosom of land.

The use of symbol and myth frequently occurs in Willa Cather’s “pioneer” novels. The affinity with the nature endowed the heroine with an imaginative power. Alexandra is blessed with such imaginative power. During the hard times in the Divide, every one was nearly driven to the brink of despair. Many people sold their land and went out to seek for work in cities. Alexandra objected to her brothers’ proposal to sell the land; on the contrary, she let them pay the mortgage for buying new land.

The land, the animals, the trees, and all the creatures in the nature under Cather’s pen are personified. Alexandra explained the fertility of the land. She said, “We hadn’t any of us much to do with it. The land did it... It worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself...” (Cather, 1913, p. 69). Antonia also shows love to creatures. “As we walked through the apple orchard, grown up in tall bluegrass, Antonia kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. ‘I live them as if they were people,’ she said, rubbing her hand over the bark” (Cather, 1994, p. 219).

The heroine has a perplexing, and magic relationship with the land. In contrast to her slowness in her private life, Alexandra has intuitive connection with the land. An illusion that a very strong man likes no man in the

Divide lifted her up and carried her lightly into the field. This man possesses the characteristics of land. "He was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him" (Cather, 1913, p. 120). The heroines are so tightly linked with the land that we can hardly tear them apart. No wonder Cather sighs in *O Pioneers!* (1913), that "the history of every country begins in the heart of a man or woman" (p. 38) and also sighs in *My Antonia* (1994), "that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great" (p. 14).

Alexandra finds the land has its own nature and pours all her love to tame it. Therefore, her feminine power enables her to erase the opposition between the two spaces of house and outside world by turning the desert into a garden. Being sensitive and imaginative, women characters find more accurate representation of people's desire and accomplishment: showing love for nature and minor things, having great intuition to acknowledge their environment. This communion bridges human with nature. Through this sort of communion women characters define themselves in relation to the natural world instead of revolting against it. On the other hand, men are relatively passive and violent in this regard.

To glorify the pioneer women, Cather has elevated them onto epic figures. Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!* has the same name as great Greek conqueror Alexander. Yet different from a conquest by weapons, Alexandra conquers the land with "love" and "passion".

Then 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. (Cather, 1913, p. 38)

With the similar connection with the land as Alexandra, Antonia Shimerda in *My Antonia* is an image of the earth mother. At the end of the story, Antonia manages the farm surrounded by 11 children. After years of hardness, she is "a stalwart, brown woman, flat-chest, her curly brown hair a little grizzled" in appearance (Cather, 1994, pp. 213-214). But she

...still had that something which fires the imagination... she had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came in her body that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions. It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races. (Cather, 1994, p. 227)

Conclusion

The heroines in Cather's novels partly represent the real life of the pioneer women in American history. During the pioneering times in American history, that uncultivated land in American West and mid-west possessed a magic power which had attracted many people. Pioneer women hold positive attitudes towards their life and achieve self-fulfillment in the hard natural environment.

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