

**ANALYZING PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAJECTORIES OF
THE CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF
WILLA CATHER**

A Thesis

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for the award of the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**In
ENGLISH**

By

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(Ritu Gupta)

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Introduction

Willa Sibert Cather (1873-1947) is a prominent American novelist belonging to the transitional period when America entered into a new phase of industrial growth after World War 1. She was recognized during her lifetime as one of the outstanding figures in American fiction. She was a keen observer of men and their manners as she had witnessed the era of massive transformation and the emergence of money culture in America. The pioneers had migrated from Europe to America to explore the vast prairies of America. They had struggled very hard to cultivate the barren and mountainous land of America. Since her death her reputation has grown and a better understanding of her importance has been promoted with the publication of several biographical studies and critical works. The pioneers of Nebraska experience death and destruction and many of them committed suicide in depression as they were too fragile and vulnerable to cope with the changing environment and culture. Her works stimulated renewed interest in the critics and the reviewers. This thesis explores and investigates the inner turbulent world of her characters who have experienced multiple psychological ailments in their life. Willa Cather has been a prolific writer of a dozen novels and sixty short stories. Willa Cather is regarded as one in both in her life and in her fictional worlds, Cather characterized the tensions of American existence in the twentieth century. Willa Cather witnessed “the world broken into two” and she was caught up in this rift (Sergeant 114). Her experience as a settler and as a writer is a microcosm of the spirit of the time. This creative force guided Cather in her career as a journalist, editor and fiction writer.

Willa Cather wrote novels such as *O Pioneers!* (1913), *My Antonia*

(1918), *One of Ours* (1922), *A Lost Lady* (1923), *The Professor's House* (1925), and *My Mortal Enemy*, (1926) depicting the feelings of depression and alienation. All her major novels deal with the episodes of disillusion and the loss of innocence of the pioneers and the destructive nature of the mercantile culture that ruined the old valuesturning American Dream into nightmares. The pioneers of Willa Cather are alienated from society; they experience pain and feel tormented. All their struggles with the wilderness of the prairies result into loss of innocence, starvation and deaths. They feel depressed and often lose interest in life since they feel that life is meaningless. They are cut off from their roots with the rise of science and technology, the onset of fashion, sexuality and modernism. They stand naked in the cruel and mysterious universe. They realize that their epical journey is futile. The pioneers of Willa Cather living in Nebraska struggle to question the universe around them.

This study is primarily focused on the dilemmas, anxieties, and neurotic life of the characters of Willa Cather. The writings of Willa Cather have been interpreted from various points of view. Some celebrate her as a writer of strong women characters in pastoral settings. Cather's novels and stories chronicle the plight of the pioneers who became the victims of industrialization and progress, and the alienation and initiation of the young. For Willa Cather, the American Dream had become American nightmare as the old values were fast declining. People had become greedy, selfish and money minded. The world which the reader finds in her short stories and novels extends from the prairies of Nebraska to the concert halls of Boston and New York, from the desert towns to the exciting and crowded capitals of Europe. It is peopled with men and women who suffer from many psychic wounds.

Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* greatly impacted *The Great Gatsby* of Scott

Fitzgerald. The two novels depict the dissolution of the American Dream. The worst affected were the pioneers who lost their innocence with the growth of moneyculture. The twenties was a time of excess and extravagance, when the chase for money and material value flourished more than ever. The historical configuration of these two opposite tendencies is obvious in the two novels, which investigate precisely the moment when the world seems to have broken in two, or cracked-up as Fitzgerald put it. The depletion of the West is suggested by the titles of the two novels: Gatsby's greatness alludes to the incommensurable American dream that slowly falls to pieces, whereas the "lost lady" in Willa Cather's novel represents the corruption and loss of the dream through moral decadence. The novels do not hint simply at the political and social transformations during the twenties, but emphasize also the loss of aesthetic and moral values which are a symbol of humanity. The influence of Cather upon Fitzgerald's fictional world is tangible at a few points: the main theme, the construction of the characters, and the style of writing are similar. The novels depict the poignant sufferings of the pioneers who feel alienated in the society. The pioneers of Willa Cather are alienated from society; they experience pain and feel tormented. All their struggles with the wilderness of the prairies result into loss of innocence; starvation and deaths. They feel depressed and often lose interest in life since they feel that life is meaningless. They are cut off from their roots with the rise of science and technology, the onset of fashion, sexuality and modernism. They stand naked in the cruel and mysterious universe. They realize that their epic journey is futile.

Many of her early books depend heavily on her childhood memories and

personal knowledge of the American Mid-West Novels. She has depicted a fascinating exploration of the pioneers' experience in the wild plains. In her book, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, Joan Acocella explains that "Cather is traditionally regarded as the elegist of the pioneer period, the repository of what America thinks of as its early, true-grit triumphs" (Scott, 127). Willa Cather gives an insight into old American culture and the contribution of the pioneers to the development of Nebraska. Willa Cather has depicted the existential struggles of the pioneers and their confrontation with the absurdities of life at the early stage of American history. Cather has also taken up the themes of friendship, family, and freedom in her novels laying stress on the old values of the pioneers. Cather's immigrants settled in the Nebraska prairies confronting with all the challenges during cultivation exhibit their pioneering spirit. Their epical struggles are faithfully documented by Willa Cather as each of Cather's novel is a cultural document recording their despair, depression and physical and psychological traumas of life. The critics and reviewers of Willa Cather have highly eulogized her for unmatched "clarity, beauty, and simplicity." Each of her novels is identified as an epitome of the struggles of the pioneers; a heartrending tale of existential illusion and disillusionment; and the touching story of the loss of their pristine innocence. Jo Ann Middleton (1990) avers that Willa Cather's famous novels *A Lost Lady* and *One of Ours* depict "the plight of the pioneers and the collapse of American Dream" (Middleton 41).

Critics have identified Cather as a psychologist and canonical American writer, the peer of authors Hemingway, Faulkner and Judith Wharton. Willa Cather took up the serious themes of life and the existential struggles. Cather's

concern for the problems of pioneers settled in the Nebraska prairies and farming communities made her an international celebrity. Sinclair Lewis observed that “Miss Cather is Nebraska's foremost citizen, the United States knows Nebraska because of Willa Cather's books.” Cather's *One of Ours* (1922) got her Pulitzer Prize. The critics and reviewers of Willa Cather have expressed their divergent views on the themes of Willa Cather. Bernice Slote (1966) notes that Cather “learned the great epics so well that all the seas and islands of the ancients are living and real” (35). She has discussed her love for nature and her concern for the growth of American culture and values.

Willa Cather wrote novels to explore the sufferings of Americans; their loss of innocence and sense of disillusionment expressing her cosmic vision and a new sense of history. Her plots describe the Virgilian allusions; longing of characters trapped in the destructive money culture and their nostalgia for bygone days. John Murphy (1989) in his *My Antonia: The Road Home* observes that Willa Cather uses Virgilian allusions to filter details of Nebraskan landscape through the lens of classical tradition. Murphy even sees Cather as explicitly adopting “techniques shared with Virgil” (Murphy 42). Joan Acocella published his *Willa Cather and Politics of Criticism* (2000) exploring the themes of lesbianism and sexuality found in the novels of Willa Cather. Acocella considers “Cather as an idealist who believes that behind what is essentially the disaster of life there exists disaster, some realm of meaning, that explains and dignifies our life, turns them from disaster into a tragedy” (Acocella 73). All these learned critics focus on idealism, mysticism or feminism of Willa Cather. No critic in the past and in the present has investigated the psychoanalytical perspective of Willa Cather. In the present study, the main focus will be the historical, moral and

psychoanalytical perspective; the socio-political forces will be investigated that brought about the collapse of values of the pioneers who struggled for liberty and identity.

Willa Cather closely observed the cultural transformation of the transitional period of America. The industrialization led to the growth of capitalism and there was tremendous expansion in construction, railroad and transportation and communication. The values of the pioneers were fast declining with the emergence of the money culture. The pioneers realized that they were outdated as the society had changed and the main focus of the people was to mint dollars by hook or by crook. There was no certainty in life in business and in life as the economic activities were accelerating. Everything now was measured in terms of money and the farming was becoming traditional and outdated. Farming was no longer a money making business as people in construction business and in real estate were making huge money. The attitude of the bankers and big money lenders was also anti-farming. The youth represented by Claude Wheeler were not interested in the farming. Willa Cather created characters struggling to build cities and railways turning uncultivable prairies into fertile land. The pioneers who migrated to Nebraska prairies were the real American heroes but they also experienced depression and frustration as nature was very destructive and many of them lost their lives.

Born in Virginia on December 7, 1873; Willa Cather spent her major portion of life in Nebraska with her family. She got her education in Nebraska in 1895. Both in her fictional worlds and lectures, Cather explored the causes of the existential tensions of the life of the pioneers who built Nebraska. Willa Cather

witnessed “the world broken into two” and she was caught up in this rift (Sergeant 114). Her experience as a settler and as a writer is a microcosm of the spirit of the time. She was rooted in the past and adored its certainty and stability. She was always haunted by the fear and terror of losing the old values and the fall of the old order and yet she was sensitive to the promise of the future in the new-found land of America. Cather’s novels evoke the struggles of the pioneers, their trials and tribulations and the theme of loss of innocence, their frustration in the growing mercantile society.

Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1913) is a powerful novel depicting the themes of nostalgia, illusion and the loss of old glorious past of America. *O Pioneers!* is a poignant tale of the settlement of the American frontier. The plot of the novel depicts the pains, hardships and existential despair of the pioneers in a heart-rending language. Willa Cather took the title of the novel from the famous poem by Walt Whitman who sings the glorious achievements of the pioneers of America. In her essay *On Writing*, Cather states that “her *O Pioneers!* was a nostalgic endeavour and an account of tragic experiences in the life of the pioneers who experienced neglect, indifference and humiliation of the Nebraska society” (Willa Cather 93). She evolves her own pessimistic vision depicting the traumatic experiences of the pioneers and their absurdity. They begin their journey with hope and ambition, with the energetic spirit of the frontiers but end with nightmarish traumatic experiences. John’s dreams remain unfulfilled and on his death bed he gives instructions to his children for running the farm and puts on Alexandra’s shoulders the responsibility for her brothers. Nature destroyed the happiness of Henchard in Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Alexandra

Bergson also becomes the victim of the calamities of Nature as a drought hits the Divide forcing the families to sell their lands to migrate to other places in search of food and shelter. Alexandra Bergson had fallen in love with Carl Linstrum who also moves away with his family. She feels dejected and leads a lonely life with her two brothers Lou and Oscar. Her brothers also urge Alexandra to sell the land and leave the Divide. Cather's "Wild Land" alludes to the "waste land" of Eliot as the characters are in the whirlpool of struggles and failures and are forced to migrate to other areas in search for security of life.

Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* deals with the themes of illusion and disillusion of many people of the Divide. The waste and barren land is symbolized as a source of endless troubles; nausea; depression and nightmares. Cather observes thus in *O Pioneers!*, "although the land, in itself, is desirable it is an enigma" (27). Cather has used the words "develops", "tames", "masters", "controls", "mortgage" "flood" depicting the rat race of the pioneers. Cather took up the primitive stand that the trees are connected with the lives of the settlers. The life of the pioneers was pure and simple; natural and unpretentious.

Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) is enshrined in the culture of the pioneers. Cather puts faith in the eternal values of life dramatizing the loss of innocence of the pioneers who were forced to assimilate in the money culture of America. The novel is based on the memory of relationship of Jim and Antonia and their friendship; the web of memories and love affairs form the texture of the plot of *Antonia*. All these hardships are realistically depicted by Cather exploring their inner turbulent life. The present study is a fruitful attempt to dig out the inner landscape of her characters.

Cather's novel *One of Ours* depicted the loss of innocence of the Americans in a post-World War I American society. Her novel *One of Ours* gives an insight into the existential vision of Willa Cather; it provides an overview of the tools used by the writer in her novels. The major concern of Willa Cather is to reflect the epical struggles of the pioneers of Nebraska and to explore the mystery of depression, terror of life and death. Her characters are involved in existential struggle for survival.

Death is depicted as inevitable as her novels depict a connection between the dying and their natural environment. There is a conflict between the culture and the values of the pioneers and the changes brought by science and technology in Nebraska society. The theme of illusion of war and disillusionment dominates the plot.

The main focus of Willa Cather is to excavate the inner turbulent life of the pioneers in her novels. Each of her novel presents a character afflicted with the psychological ailment. In this study, all the major novels of Willa Cather are analyzed from the psychoanalytical perspective of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth and Karen Horney. Judith Herman (1992) in her book *Trauma and Recovery* observes that the physical wounds are curable but the wounds on the psyche remain incurable and give endless torments to man. In her book, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy (2002) observes that alienation is the main cause of depression and trauma. Alienation is a common factor in the hectic life of modern man; "the anxieties and stress often compel a man to withdraw from his environment." The theory of trauma became very popular after the World War. Sigmund Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure*

Principle (1920) expressed his interest in trauma and gave his theory of trauma and the death consciousness thus: “Trauma is a result of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli” (Freud 35). Thousands of pioneers were the victims of psychological ailments as the society was changing and their values were declining. *Oxford Dictionary* defines trauma thus: “Trauma is a personal trauma like the death of a child; soldiers who come after the war also suffer from trauma; emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis” (123). War results into moral, psychological and paralysis of thoughts. Aggression, sexual abuse, depression and anxiety disorder bring deflation of self. In this study the theories of Freud are applied to investigate the causes and symptoms of psychic wounds of the pioneers as they struggled with the new culture of America.

Chapter – 1

Brief Candle

In the modern society, there is an upcoming trend of being rich and prosperous in no time. Life is getting stress-ridden due to up surging money –culture and deterioration of moral values which leads to disintegration of relationships. People of today feel isolated and depressed. There is an increase in the decline of mental health of people. The most important issue in the modern times is the psychological ailments of the people. The hospitals today are full of the patients suffering from depression, neurosis syndrome and many more diseases related to mental health. These mental disorders lead to chaos and unnatural & untimely deaths. Willa Cather is a prominent American novelist known for her deep study of the early pioneers who migrated from Europe and other parts of the world to settle in America. She keenly observed the pioneers struggling to build cities and railways turning uncultivable prairies into fertile land. The pioneers who migrated to Nebraska prairies were the real American heroes but they also experienced depression and frustration as nature was very destructive and many of them lost their lives.

Born in Virginia on December 7, 1873; Willa Cather spent her major portion of life in Nebraska with her family. Both in her life and in fictional worlds, Cather explored the causes of the psychological tensions of the life of the pioneers who built Nebraska. Willa Cather witnessed “the world broken into two” and she was caught up in this rift (Sergeant 114). Her experiences as a settler and as a writer is a microcosm of the spirit of the time.

She was rooted in the past and adored its certainty and stability. She was always haunted by the fear and terror of losing the old values and the fall of the old order and yet she was sensitive to the promise of the future in the new-found land of America. Such ambivalent ambience shaped Willa Cather “with her creative force, as in an iceberg, the greater part of her load submerged” (Sergeant, *A Memoir* 148). Cather’s novels and stories chronicle the plight of the pioneers. For Willa Cather, the American Midwest, her birth place was her inspiration and the deepest source of her art. In all her life, Cather looked to the prairies from fresh perspective to highlight the struggles, challenges and the uncertainties of life. Cather’s novel *One of Ours* made her an international celebrity since it got her Pulitzer Prize and inspired Cather to focus on American cultural history depicting the loss of innocence of the Americans in a post-World War I American society. All her novels evoke the struggles of the pioneers, their trials and tribulations and the theme of loss of innocence in the growing mercantile society. Her novels give an insight into the psychological vision of Willa Cather. The major concern of Willa Cather is to reflect the epic struggles of the pioneers of Nebraska and to explore the mystery of death. She is not pessimistic but her characters are involved in an epic struggle for survival. Death is depicted as inevitable as her novels depict a connection between the dying and their natural environment. There is a conflict between the culture and the values of the pioneers and the changes brought by science and technology in Nebraska society. In this study, all the major novels of Willa Cather are analyzed from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

In the postmodern literary criticism, psychoanalytical criticism has

gained tremendous popularity as most of the scholars take interest in applying the psychoanalytical theories to explore the psychological ailments of the characters. *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines psychoanalysis thus: “any of a number of the theories of the human personality that attempt to examine a person’s unconscious mind to discover the hidden causes of their mental problem” (123). *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines psychoanalysis thus: “a system of psychological theory and therapy which aims to treat mental disorder of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind by techniques such as dream interpretation and free association” (366). In both the definitions, the important issue is the investigation of the working of the conscious and unconscious mind of the characters. The study and investigation leads to the exploration of the mental disorders of the pioneers. Psychoanalytical theories including the explication of the theories of death consciousness, depression, anxiety disorder, repression and sexuality have been applied in the present study. The study also sheds light on the concept of trauma because the Freudian theory of depression and neurosis has got its origin from the concept of trauma. In this study, the texts of Willa Cather are explored and investigated applying the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud. In the thesis entitled: “*Analyzing Psychological Trajectories of the Characters in the Selected Novels of Willa Cather*”, serious efforts are made to explore the traumatic experiences of the characters of Willa Cather, their confrontations with uncertainties and tensions of life and their psychological ailments.

Sigmund Freud’s dialogue is between a psychoanalyst and a patient to

understand, analyze, and treat the latter. Freud got influenced by Charles Darwin, Jean Martin Charcot, Josef Breuer, and Friedrich Nietzsche whereas he left his great impact on the life and the works of Alfred W. Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, Anna Freud, Jacques Lacan, Erik Erikson, Jacques Derrida, Dominik La Capra, and Zizek Slavoj.

Sigmund Freud developed his psychoanalytical theories under the influence of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) who wrote *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Freud differentiated himself from Darwin on the basis of instincts. Darwin states that “several distinct mental actions are governed by instincts” (185). Darwin exemplifies that instinct is a desire that “impels the cuckoo to migrate and to lay her eggs in other birds’ nests” (185). Darwin accepts that he has “nothing to do with the origin of the primary mental powers” (185) of birds, animals, and human beings but Freud especially talks about the mental powers of humans and categorizes their instincts into life instincts and death instincts. In life instincts, Freud includes the Ego (self-preservation) and the Id (instincts and drive) whereas in death instincts he includes human aggressive tendencies (Abel 1989). Friedel Weinert advocates that “only an intelligent designer could have created the world and its beauty, order, and regularity” (102), Freud proposes that the beauty, mental order, and regularity of scheduled actions of a subject get affected when it’s attacked externally. The subject becomes unconscious though “it also remains unconsciously active” (*The Unconscious* 47). The author Talvitie states that in “the pre-Darwinian times, the processes taking place in Nature and in the traits of animals and plants were seen as designed by God” (124). Darwin revealed that species have developed themselves

gradually from their ancestors. In a nutshell, Darwin focused on the “physical traits and behavioral dispositions of species from the historical and functionalistic perspective” whereas Freud implemented the Darwinian philosophy in the field of psychoanalysis. Freud studied the “psychical traits and behavioural dispositions” of the patients of hysteria and trauma from the perspective of “deferred action” (*The Standard Edition* 356) to know what traumatized them and then he treated them. After Charles Darwin, Freud also got influenced by Jean Martin Charcot.

The connection between trauma and mental illness was first examined by the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893). During the late nineteenth century, the main focus of Charcot’s study was on hysteria “a disorder” (Ringel and Brandell 1) often found in women. Freud was actually influenced by Jean-Martin Charcot’s research that if a patient is not convinced to release his/her repressed emotions or he/she is not hypnotized, hysteria turns into the psychological trauma. The term ‘hysteria’ denotes an extreme fear or anxiety that can’t be controlled. In his essay entitled *On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: A Preliminary Communication—A lecture*, Freud considers hysteria as a branch of psychological trauma (*The Standard Edition* 365). Freud further adds that “every case of hysteria can be looked upon as traumatic hysteria in the sense of implying a psychical trauma” (*Freud – Complete Works* 34).

Josef Breuer (1842-1925) also influenced Sigmund Freud. Breuer was an Austrian physician who “demonstrated the role of the vagus nerve in the reflex nature of respiration This finding was a departure from the previous

physiological understanding and changed the way scientists viewed the relationship of the lungs to the nervous system” (Chowdhury and Schaller 40). Breuer distinguished himself by developing the ‘talking cure’ methodology to treat the patients of hysteria. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud put the theory of hysteria and depression and the revivification of a traumatic incident stating as:

The disproportion between the many years’ duration of the hysterical symptom and the single occurrence that provoked it is what we are accustomed invariably to find in traumatic neuroses. Quite frequently, it is some event in childhood that sets up a more or less severe symptom which persists during the years that follow (*The Standard Edition* 4).

Freud learnt a number of psychoanalytic techniques from Josef Breuer while he was the protégé of the latter. The psychoanalytical cognizance that Freud gained particularly from Breuer helped him to develop his theory of hysteria and neurosis. He wrote the essay *The Psychotherapy of Hysteria* in which Breuer and Freud claim the successful treatment of their patients having hysterical symptoms. The psychoanalysts state as:

For we found, to our great surprise at first, that each individual’s hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words (*Freud – Complete Works* 227).

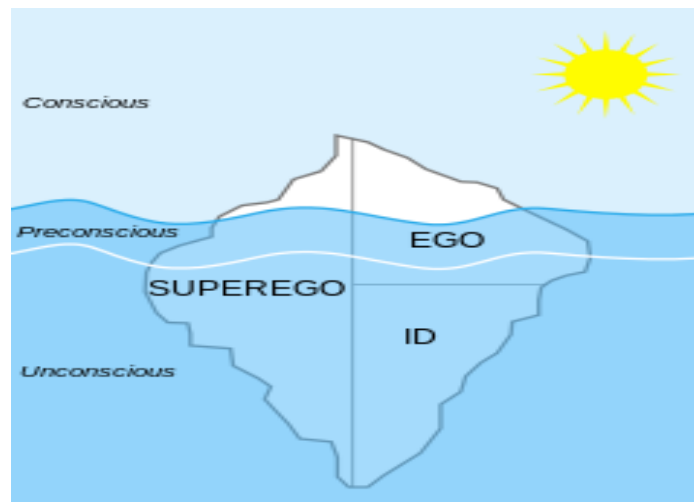
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) also impacted Sigmund Freud through

his works. Freud himself acknowledges the Nietzschean influence on his life when he states: “I merely take Nietzsche where I would, I hope find words for many things that remain mute inside me” (19). Nietzsche was a German philosopher, cultural critic, and philologist who developed the concept of nihilism which explicates that life is meaningless. The various forms of nihilism are: metaphysical nihilism which states that “there is a possible world where there are no objects at all” (Francis 4), existential nihilism which marks that “life has no intrinsic meaning or value (5), moral nihilism which clarifies that “morality does not exist (5), epistemological nihilism which emphasizes that “all knowledge is denied” (5), and metrological nihilism believes that “objects with proper parts do not exist” (5).

Nietzsche interprets the unconscious differently than Freud. Nietzsche considers “the unconscious as a stake than a central concept. It is found somehow along the path to the capital problem . . . but to a secondary degree” (114). For Freud, ‘the unconscious’ is the “object of a meta-psychological codification, a double point of view, at once topical and dynamic” (114). For Freud, “the unconscious is asystematic part of mind like the other psychic co-systems namely the conscious and the preconscious” (114). The unconscious mind holds repressed feelings, hidden perceptions, concealed phobias, automatic reactions, blocked memories, thoughts, and desires that impact human behaviour.

Freud divides the mind into the conscious mind (the Ego) and the unconscious mind (the Id and the Superego). Though the Superego is a part of the unconscious but it controls the Id (instincts and drive). In the Freudian psychoanalysis, the preconscious is the state of mind that exists beneath the

conscious but above the unconscious mind. In the preconscious, though the thoughts remain unconscious, but they are not repressed and they can be easily recalled unlike unconscious traumatic thoughts or memories. The Freudian division of the psyche can be seen through the following image.



Freud uses the concept of ‘the unconscious’ for developing his theory of ‘deferred action’. To Freud, when a subject is attacked externally, it becomes unconscious, but “it also remains unconsciously active” (*The Unconscious* 47). Freud states that the “repressed does not constitute the whole of the unconscious. The unconscious is the more extensive; the repressed is part of the unconscious” (47). Sigmund Freud shaped the personalities of a number of psychoanalysts such as Alfred W. Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, and Anna Freud who reinterpreted the concept of the unconscious.

Alfred W. Adler (1870-1937) was an Austrian psycho-therapist who discussed the psychoanalytical issues with Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung at his apartment in 1902 but Adler rejected Freud’s theory of sexual instincts leading to personality difficulties, mental disorder, and unconsciousness. Adler

argued that sexual harassment and unfulfilled sexual desires and inferiority complex lead to trauma. Adler documents that “all forms of neurosis and developmental failure are expressions of inferiority and disappointment . . .” (Adler VI). Firstly, Adler differentiates himself from Freud on the formation of the unconscious due to ‘inferiority complex’. Secondly, Adler also argues in his theory of “individual psychology” (23) that an individual alone isn’t accountable for becoming a victim. Adler focuses on the people who create disorder in the life of an individual. Adler considers an individual as a whole when he states that “we may regard the demand for a complete and unified understanding of man for a comprehension of his (undivided) individuality” (24). Adler also talks about the aftermath of a traumatic incident when he states that the neurotic “feels himself a criminal, all the time his attitude is determined by the fiction that he is really wicked, dominated by uncontrollable sex desire, given over to unlimited self-indulgence, capable of any crime or license” (86).

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) who was a Swiss psychiatrist, interpreted the Freudian concept of the unconscious in terms of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. To Jung, “the personal unconscious is the same as the Freudian description of the unconscious and it contains forgotten information and repressed memories whereas the collective unconscious is a part of the unconscious that’s often shared with the other distressed humans and it has latent memories from the past” (Jung 123). It’s “a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience” (*The Archetypes* 42). Jung states that “the form of the world into which a person is born, is already

inborn in him, as a virtual image” (*Psychology and Alchemy* 188). So, it’s natural for a traumatic person to transform his/her troubled experience to other subjects and inherit their harrowing feelings whenever a situation arises. Jung opines that childhood experiences affect our present if they are really upsetting. Jung observes thus:

When we return to the memories of childhood we find bits of our personality still alive, which cling round us and suffuse us with the feeling of earlier times, these fragments are very powerful in their effect (62).

Jung disagrees with Freud who associates the libido with sexual energy only. To Jung, the libido is not only sexual energy but also inventiveness, piety, and acumen. The libido is a “much more generalized life energy source serving to motivate the individual in a number of different ways including spirituality, intellectuality, and creativity” (Carducci 135). Furthermore, Carl Jung distinguishes himself from Freud stating that the archetypes such as mother, father, child, tree, and water etc. structure the collective unconscious. For instance, if a subject loses its mother, it associates this loss with other people when it witnesses them losing their mothers. Thus, the archetypes transcend personal traumatic experience to the universal collective unconscious.

Anna Freud (1895-1982) was an Austrian-British psychoanalyst and the sixth and last child of Sigmund Freud. She also reinterpreted the Freudian concept of “the unconscious further in terms of parapraxes, the transference, the id, the ego, the superego, and the mechanisms of defence” (7). Firstly, Anna Freud names “the Freudian slip of tongue as parapraxes which is an error in memory, speech or physical action. Parapraxes take place when an unconscious

impulse . . . is suddenly reinforced” (17). Anna Freud documents that transference is not a new experience of a subject. It’s just a revivification “under the influence of the repetition” (18) of early distressing experiences. Further Anna Freud reinterprets the id, the ego and the superego in terms of treatment and barriers to treatment. She adds that the id impulses always tend to come out of the unconscious and enter into the conscious for their treatment but the ego institutions barricade the id impulses to leave the unconscious. Anna recommends that a psychoanalyst should help a neurotic in the upward tendency to bring out the “repressed elements in the id” (29) for his/her effective treatment. Furthermore, Anna states that the superego is not only moral standard or ethical component by which the ego operates, but also the root of all neurotic diseases. Anna records that “neurosis is produced by the severity of the superego” (65) because the latter prohibits the ego to achieve the instinctive gratification (i.e.the id), and “if it achieves its aim, it will certainly stir up trouble between the ego” (55) and itself. Notably, it is Sigmund Freud who first used the word ‘defence’ psychoanalytically in 1894 in his study *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence* and in *Aetiology of Hysteria* and *Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence*, but Anna Freud used the word ‘defence’ in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* in the context of “motives for defence against instincts” (54). Secondly Anna protects neurotic patients from anxiety that originates owing to the superego that has been explicated above.

Jacques Lacan has also been under the influence of Sigmund Freud. Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychiatrist who has been “the most

controversial psychoanalyst since Freud” (Murray 151) because of his writing style. Lacan has re- interpreted the Freudian concept of psychoanalysis as the concept of the unconscious, the repetition, the transference and the drive (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 19). Lacan’s understanding of the unconscious is similar to Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of structuralism defined in his book *La Pensée Sauvage* ‘The Savage Mind’. As signifiers and signified objects give rise to a language, similarly they are responsible for making a victim an unconscious which further leads to trauma. The signifiers “control the human relations giving them shape and structures. They can be creative or terrifying. For instance, when signifiers are signified, they structuralize a language but when an unconscious subject witnesses a distressing signifier, it can take the subject back to the original disturbing incident” (20). Lacan also uses the metaphor to highlight the turbulent state of mind. Likewise signifiers are the causes of unconscious and neurosis as pointed out by Lacan:

Surprise, that by which the subject feels himself overcome, by which he finds both more and less than he expected—but, in any case, it is, in relation to what he expected, of exceptional value. Now, as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss (Lacan 25).

Both Freud and Lacan accept that ‘signifiers’ can lead a victim to trauma or “loss” (25) that can’t be repaired at any cost. The subject loses its certain faculties in the unconscious stage.

Erik Homburger Erikson (1902-1994) was a German-American

psychoanalyst and psychologist famous for his theories of identity-crisis and psychosocial development of human beings, also gives new versions of the Freudian concept of unconscious i.e. the word 'crisis' doesn't have any negative connotation for E.H. Erikson, but it denotes a stage of constructive development. Erikson writes that "each (component) comes to its ascendance, meet its crisis, and find its lasting solution . . ." (*Identity* 95). Erikson "bifurcates the life span of an individual into eight psychosocial stages namely: "basic trust vs. basic mistrust"(4), "autonomy vs. shame and doubt" (6), "initiative vs. guilt" (8), "industry vs. inferiority" (10), "identity vs. role confusion" (12), "intimacy and dissociation from self-centeredness" (14), "generativity vs. stagnation" (16), "integrity vs. despair and disgust" (18). Unlike Freud and Lacan, Erikson states that the unconscious can lead to personal recovery and creativity if it's treated timely otherwise it leads to vulnerability and total destruction of the psyche of a victim of trauma. Erikson records as:

In the unconscious ideas, lies much power for personal recovery and creative activity, which cultural institutions can augment with the healing factor of artistic or ritual form. But in these ideas also lies our greatest vulnerability and exploitability because no matter how rational we are, our unconscious seeks ways in which it can manifest itself (*Young Man Luther* 142).

Freud advocates that a victim of trauma goes back immediately to his/her primary traumatic incident when he/she is invoked but it creates unexpected impact on his/her life. Similarly, Derrida believes that a word or a text has limited meanings when they are coined or composed but after a deferral, the same word

or text can be interpreted from different perspectives creating various meanings. As each interpretation is different, so are traumatic cases in the Freudian psychoanalysis. If the victims are analyzed after the 'deferred action' of trauma which is basically, the repetition of trauma, it creates a serious aftermath in the lives of casualties. Derrida makes the best use of Freud's 'deferred action' to breakdown the superficial and linear systems. Derrida further adds that "it is within its logic that the possibility of deferred action should be conceived, as well as, no doubt, the relationship between the primary and the secondary on all levels" (266).

Derrida expressed his views on unconscious in his own style. He observed thus: "The centre is not the centre. The concept of centred structure; although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science - is contradictorily coherent" (252). Similar is the case with the traumatized patients. The need is not only to grasp the mental condition of traumatized patients, but also to understand the milieu and the perpetrators that victimize victims because "presence is absence" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 198). Whatever is visible isn't true whether the case is of a victim (the Freudian case) or a text (the Derridean case).

Sigmund Freud psychoanalyses the patients of trauma through hypnotherapy so that their psychic pains could be curtailed. Similarly Derrida emphasizes to analyze a text from the perspectives of conception, formation, gestation, and labour. That's how an idea gets initiated, formulated, developed and publicized. Derrida justifies that he hasn't purely used these words in the

context of the development of an infant but how an idea or a text should be interpreted so that the best possible interpretations can be evolved. Derrida suggests different centres of thought when he says:

I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity (*Writing and Difference* 370).

In this study, the texts of Willa Cather are explored and investigated applying the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud. In the thesis entitled: “*Analyzing Psychological Trajectories of the Characters in the Selected Novels of Willa Cather*”, serious efforts are made to explore the traumatic experiences of the characters of Willa Cather; their confrontations with uncertainties and tensions of life and their psychological ailments. Following psychological ailments are found in the characters of Willa Cather:

Anxiety Disorders

In Latin language the word “anxietas” means “to choke or throttle” and is directly linked with the behaviour of man. Anxiety disorder is an emotion that predates the evolution of man. The anxiety disorder excited great interest among the psychologists who explored the causes and symptoms of anxiety syndrome. Anxiety is a normal human emotion. Anxiety often stimulates an adaptive

response to stressful events. In excess, anxiety leads to the loss of balanced thinking in an individual and he becomes dysfunctional. Anxiety is considered pathological when it arises in the absence of challenge or stress. The stress of anxiety impairs the rational thinking as it results in depression. In the middle ages, the word anxiety was used for danger and uneasiness of mind. The word anxiety is taken from Latin and it means “anguish, solicitude” In 1660, anxiety was considered a pathological condition. The phrase “Age of Anxiety” was used by John Auden in his poem written in 1947. In the modern times, the term anxiety means “distress and mental instability”. Freud observes that feelings of anxiety and fear disturb the normal working of mind. C.S. Hall (1954) in his *A Primer of Freudian Psychology* observes that anxiety refers to the fear of danger that seems impending. Freud outlines three types of anxiety; the “Objective Anxiety”, “Neurotic Anxiety” and “Moral Anxiety”. Marian Forrester is the victim of “Objective Anxiety” but Niel Herbert suffers from “Neurotic Anxiety”. In the modern times, a lot of research has been done to explore the gradual decline of rationality in a neurotic person. Neurotic disorders are related to stress and the poor response of the individuals prone to neurotic disorders. Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* depicts the plight of the characters as they are bound by the wheel of time. Culture also plays vital role in treating anxiety disorders. The *American Psychiatric Association* (DSM 1V) has given out four major types of anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, stress disorder and obsessive disorder. Each type of disorder is detrimental to mental health of the individual. Marian Forrester of *A Lost Lady*, is anxious to pay off the debt of her husband and has an obsession to become rich. Her obsessive anxiety is a major cause of her stress-ridden behaviour.

Depression

The word depression is taken from astronomy; in 1400, in old French, it was used for the depression when “there was an angular distance of a star below the horizon.” In literal sense, it means “an act of pressing down” In 1881, in psychology it means a melancholy leading to depression. The word depression is very popular in these days as life is very fast and people often feel sad about certain things which they can't do satisfactorily. Francis Mark Mondimore (1990) in his latest book: *Depression, the Mood Disease* observes that depression is nothing but an expression of mood. Each individual in this world is moody and mood may be good or bad. Human beings are moody and their moods affect their behaviour toward others. If the mood is good, he feels energetic but if some loss or death occurs, man feels depressed. Mondimore contends that natural or unnatural events that bring unhappiness to man often lead to depression. Some people are strong in mind and they overcome depression and regain their natural sunshine easily but those who are fragile and weak remain sullen and depressed. In depressed state, the blood pressure is adversely affected and the brain cells are disintegrated. This causes abnormal change in mood and behavior of the individuals. In the Greek world, depression is called as “black bile”. Sadness is the beginning of depression and sometimes sadness assumes a serious form and becomes depression. An individual under depressed state of mind becomes negative, nihilistic and pessimistic. He loses love and charm of life and always thinks bad and other mental complications develop in him. The modern psychologists take depression seriously as the clinical depression is a serious psychological ailment. Beckett and Ionesco suffered from clinical depression and

remained in the hospital for a long time. Memories also cause depression. Cathy Caruth has discussed in detail the psychological ailments in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996). She contends that “the horrifying old memories can occur as a nightmare, flashback or intrusive memory. The difference between a flashback and an intrusive memory is simple. In a flashback, man loses his touch with his current situation” (Caruth123). With intrusive memories, man knows where and when his old memories keep intruding and disturbing his mind. Willa Cather’s *Shimerda* suffers from depression as he commits suicide in the novel. John Bergson cannot withstand the pressure of debt and dies, leaving all the responsibilities to his daughter, Alexandra Bergson.

Hysteria

Andrew Scull (2000) in his book *Hysteria* explored the causes and symptoms of hysteria and observes that hysteria often leads to the loss of self in an individual.

The connection between trauma and mental illness was first examined by the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1825- 1893). Freud was actually influenced by Jean-Martin Charcot’s research that if a patient is not convinced to release his/her repressed emotions or he/she is not hypnotized, hysteria turns into the psychological trauma. The term “hysteria” denotes an extreme fear or anxiety that can’t be controlled. Freud considers “hysteria as a branch of psychological trauma” (*The Standard Edition* 36). Freud further adds that “every case of hysteria can be looked upon as traumatic hysteria in the sense of implying a psychical trauma” (*Freud – Complete Works* 34). For Freud, hysteria is “a psychodynamic disorder” (Scull 10), its history is a “tale of fallacious medical

materialism” (10). Thomas Szasz clearly stated that hysteria is not a disease. Women were more prone to hysterical fits than men as Hippocratic text reads “the womb is the origin of all diseases.” In hysterical state, women often behave like an abnormal being. The main symptoms of hysteria are the loss of rational thinking, extreme emotional outburst, dizziness and respiratory distress. In hysterical state, the metabolic order is disturbed; man is cut off from the outside world. Andrew Scull observes that in the fit of hysteria, the brain and the nervous system is disturbed and man is seen trembling expressing his restlessness. The Italian scholar Giovanni Ballista explored the real causes of hysteria; He opines that in case of hysteria, the chief disorder is the nervous system. The study on hysteria explores that not just women, men also suffer from hysterical disorder. The men, who lead a sedentary life and study hard, are all afflicted with hysteria. Marian Forrester, the heroine of *A Lost Lady* suffers from hysteria as her husband dies and she is left alone to confront the harsh realities of life. She is in debt and is penniless; she has to sell her body to a business tycoon in acute depression.

Neurosis

In 1776 Scottish physician William Cullen coined the word neurosis to describe “abnormal condition.” Dr. Karen Horney is a famous American psychologist who propounded new theories of neurosis. She wrote *Our Inner Conflicts: Neurotic Personality of our Time; Neurosis and Human Growth* and explores the various causes and symptoms of neurosis found in human beings. Plum (1991) defines consciousness as “the state of awareness of self and the environment” (146). Two physiological factors control human behaviour; “arousal and awareness” (146). Man in a state of stress loses his balance of mind

and rational thinking; he becomes neurotic when the external forces put heavy pressure on his psyche. Edward Albee and Beckett depicted the neurotic characters in their dramas. Willa Cather's novels deal with the theme of death and despair; in each of her novel the characters feel frustrated. Wheeler is shocked to note down the rigid and uncompromising behaviour of his wife Enid. He decides to leave his family and to join war knowing well that he will not survive. According to Dr. Horney, neurosis is the product of chronic distress. Neurosis is not in any way a form of psychosis but it implies the loss of touch with reality of life. The majority of characters of Willa Cather are the victims of neurosis. Shimerda and Niel suffer from neurotic tensions of life. In neurotic despair, Shimerda commits suicide.

Death Consciousness

The term death consciousness was coined by Freud for the first time. Death consciousness is a common theme in literature and is common in culture and society. Mind and consciousness are closely connected and the cessation of which defines brain death. It is a common theme in society and culture in the modern literature. Death consciousness is closely connected with functioning of the brain. All biological functions of man cease with death. In antiquity, death was defined as the cessation of heart beat or the breathing. Death is defined by various names, it is called "the great Unknown" and "the gravest of all misfortunes". Human beings react in different ways towards death. In Greek literature, death was considered as a sign of deliverance from sufferings and pain. The Greek war heroes were not scared of death; they loved adventures and romanticized death. Dr. Laing in his book *The Divided Self* observes that death

doesn't exist in man's unconscious and there is no reason to fear death. Freud observes that when man fears death, he fears from abandonment, castration and unresolved conflicts. Freud further argues that in his unconscious, each individual thinks that he is immortal. Death is inevitable and is a part of life; without death there can be no birth. Birth and death is cyclical and death consciousness rings from the negative feelings. When a man is sick of life or is tired of the repeated failures of life and prolonged sickness, he thinks of death. In the novels of Willa Cather, death is a reality of life; most of the characters get killed by one reason or the other. The external forces also bulldoze the characters as they are too fragile to confront the realities of life. John Donne in his poem called death as a reliever of pain and a friend of man. Vickroy (2002), defines "trauma narratives" as "fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience" (1). Ironically Freud called death "the aim of life" and it is found that many psychologists have expressed their views on death which is "the gravest of all misfortunes". In the novels of Willa Cather, there are many situations where the characters want to end their life because they are terrified by the sufferings of life. In this study the main focus is to explore and investigate the traumatic experiences of the characters of Willa Cather relying on the theories of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth and Karen Horney. The textual analysis of the texts of Willa Cather reveals that the pioneers of America struggled to cultivate the barren and uncultivable land of the prairies of America. They had to endure all forms of physical and psychological pain during their struggle. Death, trauma, depression and anxiety are the main concerns of Willa Cather in her novels. The application of the psychoanalytical theory is fruitful in understanding the texts of Willa Cather.

Willa Cather wrote novels such as *O Pioneers!* (1913), *My Antonia* (1918), *One of Ours* (1922), *A Lost Lady* (1923), *The Professor's House* (1925) and *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) evoking the feelings of depression and alienation. She followed the techniques of Mrs. Virginia Woolf to depict the inner turbulent world of her characters. All her major novels deal with the episodes of disillusion and the loss of innocence of the pioneers and the destructive nature of the mercantile culture that ruined the old values turning

American Dream into nightmares. The pioneers of Willa Cather are alienated from society; they experience pain and feel tormented. All their struggles with the wilderness of the prairies result into loss of innocence, starvation and death. They feel depressed and often lose interest in life since they feel that life is meaningless. They are cut off from their roots with the rise of science and technology; the onset of fashion, sexuality and modernism. They stand naked in the cruel and mysterious universe. They realize that their epic journey is futile. Everything becomes absurd for them, even their consciousness. This study is primarily focused on the dilemmas, anxieties, and neurotic life of the characters of Willa Cather. She believes that dehumanization and repression are the chief forces that lead to the loss of self of the individuals living in the farms. Freud "insisted that our civilization is a repressive one. There is a conflict between the demands of conformity and the demands of our instinctive energies, explicitly sexual" (Quoted in R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* 13). Shimerda commits suicide because he is too fragile to confront new culture and values in the farming community. Freud observes: In a fit of severe depression or repression the individual behaves in an unprecedented deviant manner and

resorts into an action considered unconventional by the society. (*Interpretation of Dreams* 123). Cather's novels depict the mental sickness of her characters. She narrates a gradual disintegration of self of her characters and their desperate struggles in the farms of Nebraska. Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, Willa Cather's novel *One of Ours* is set during World War 1, presenting the depression, disillusionment, anxiety, neurosis and death of the protagonist. Cather has investigated the dissociation of mind of the pioneers. She took up the serious themes of depression and despair in the life of the pioneers. Cather's concern for the problems of pioneers settled in the Nebraska prairies and farming communities has made her an international celebrity. The critics and reviewers of Willa Cather have expressed their divergent views on the themes of Willa Cather. Willa Cather gives an insight into old American culture and depicts the plight of the pioneers of Nebraska and their struggles and sufferings. Willa Cather has taken up the themes of broken friendship, disruption of family and the loss of freedom in her novels that led to their disintegration and mental depression. Cather's characters, settled in the Nebraska prairies, lead a miserable life. Their epic struggles are vividly dramatized in her novels by Willa Cather. It is pertinent to note that each of Cather's novels is a document of their despair, depression and physical and psychological ailments. The critics have identified Willa Cather as a great American writer who used psychological perspective in portraying her characters. Her main concern is to depict the psychological ailments of the pioneers settled in the Nebraska prairies. The critics and reviewers of Willa Cather have eulogized her for unmatched "clarity, beauty and simplicity" in dramatizing the heart rending woes of the pioneers. Each of her novels is identified as an epitome of a heartrending tale of disillusionment and of

the loss of their pristine innocence. Joann Middleton in *Willa Cather's Modernism* (1990) avers that "Willa Cather's famous novels *A Lost Lady* and *One of Ours* depict the plight of the pioneers and the collapse of American Dream" (41). Bernice Slote (1966) observed that Cather "learned the great epics so well that all the seas and islands of the ancients are living and real" (35). She has discussed her love for nature and her concern for the growth of American culture and values. James Woodress observes that Willa Cather was passionately interested in the classics and her love sparked at the age of thirteen. Her teacher William Drucker inspired her to read classics and old American history. Cather continued her interest in the classics and became a "well trained and capable classicist" (Drucker 117). Theodore Ziolkowski (1993) and Donald Sutherland (1974) contend that Willa Cather came under the influence of Virgil. In her *My Antonia*, "Virgil clearly informs the whole" (Sutherland 150). Ziolkowski in his book *Virgil and the Moderns* clearly traces the influence of the Roman poet on Willa Cather; she wrote novels to explore the sufferings of Americans, their loss of innocence and sense of disillusionment. In her novels, she has expressed her cosmic vision and a new sense of history. Her plots describe the Virgilian allusions, longing of characters trapped in the destructive money culture and their nostalgia for bygone days. John Murphy (1989) in his *My Antonia: The Road Home* observes that Willa Cather uses Virgilian allusions to filter details of Nebraskan landscape through the lens of classical tradition. Murphy even sees Cather as explicitly adopting "techniques shared with Virgil" (42).

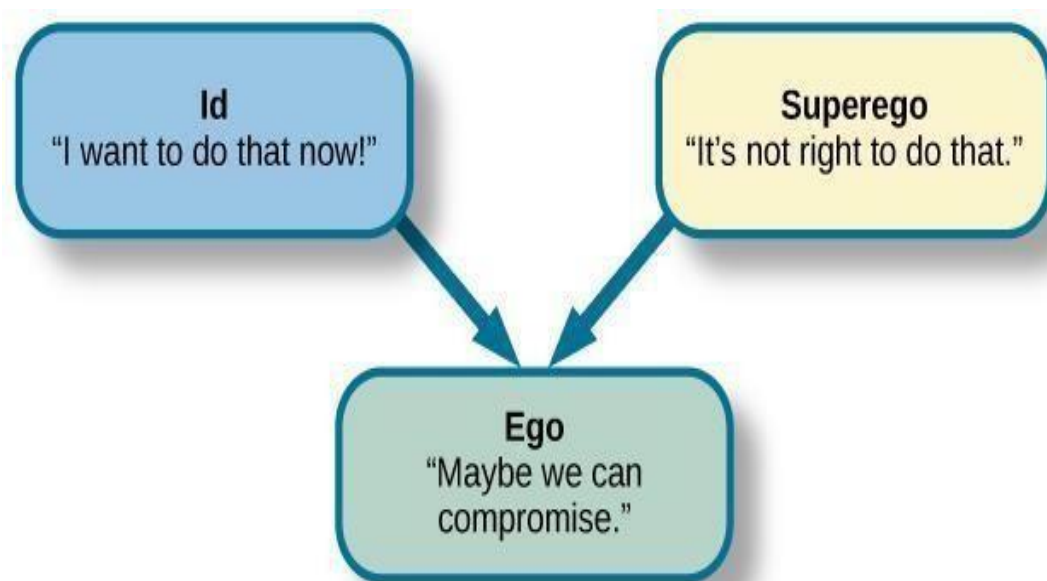
Most of the research articles and books written on the works of Willa Cather are about her idealism, mysticism or feminism but no critic has explored

the psychological trajectories of the characters of Willa Cather. In this study, the causes and the symptoms of alienation, depression, neurosis and loss of self are explored relying on the theories of Freud, Lacan, and Dr. Karen Horney. In the present study, the main focus will be on the psychoanalytical perspective; the socio- cultural forces will be investigated that brought about the collapse of values of the pioneers and forced them to lead an alienated and traumatic life. Sigmund Freud published his famous books *Studies on Hysteria* (1895),

The Interpretation of Dreams (1899), *Civilization and its Discontent* (1930) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud has explored and investigated the mind of man and propounded many theories about depression, mental instability and dissociation of mind. Dr. Karen Horney in her *Our Inner Conflict* and *Neurosis and Human growth* observes that anxiety and restlessness of mind results into the loss of rational thinking. It is a fact that every human being has a conscious as well as an unconscious life. While the conscious aspect of man's life is that which he has absolute knowledge and possible control of, the unconscious aspect controls him without his consent or even knowledge. The unconscious aspect, hidden from the conscious mind, plays a very influential role in the way human beings think, act and feel. Sometimes, the activity of the unconscious finds expressions through dreams and moments of inactivity- like during sleep. The characters of Willa Cather experience disorientation as they struggle to confront the new mercantile culture of Nebraska. Both male and female characters do feel "out of sort" with themselves as depicted in the novels of Willa Cather. Shimerda loses interest in life and starts behaving like an irrational being. Freud originally distinguished between neurosis and psychosis

in the following way: “in neurosis, the ego suppresses part of the id out of allegiance to reality, whereas in psychosis, it lets itself be carried away by the id and detached from a part of reality” (202).

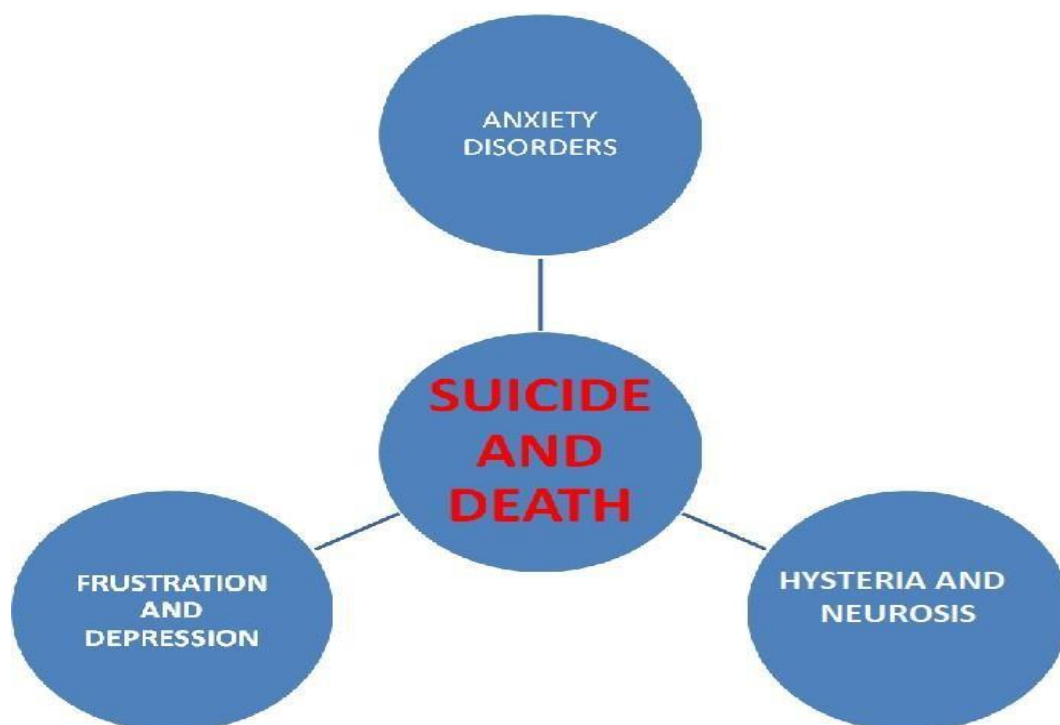
Following image shows the relation between Id, Ego and Superego:



Willa Cather “with her creative force, as in an iceberg, the greater part of her load submerged” (Sergeant, *A Memoir* 148). Cather’s famous novel *A Lost Lady* explores the working of Freudian concepts of Id, Ego and Super-ego. Madam Forrester is from Los Angeles; she is full of energies, lust for money and sexuality. Captain Forrester is a disciplined army officer. He is ego in the novel as he tries to control Madam Forrester. Niel is the super-ego in the novel that is moralistic and always says: “it’s not right to do that”. He is shocked when he observes Madam Forrester selling her body to a business tycoon. Cather’s novels chronicle the plight of the pioneers during the age of industrialization and progress. For Willa Cather, the American Midwest has become a hell for living,

families are breaking, young men and women are lost in the mad race of money culture and the old values are declining fast. The characters of Willa Cather are misfit and suffer alienation and dissociation of mind.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAJECTRIES OF THE CHARACTERS OF WILLACATHER



In this study, all these psychological ailments found in the characters of Willa Cather are investigated and explored for the better understanding of the texts of WillaCather. Willa Cather is at her best in designing the fabric of the novels; the images of stillness, romance and beauty are the essential substance of her novels. The images of action flow like strong currents as the readers watch Mrs. Forrester bringing cookies to the boys in the marsh. She entertains her dinner guests and presides over her own dinner party. Niel has high opinion of Mrs. Forrester and for him, she is a spiritual goddess but he also observes her fading beauty, her fragility, vitality and her void. Tension builds in his mind and culminates; the

climax comes when he discovers her ideal lady indulging in adultery with Ellinger in her bedroom. Freud observes that sexuality is a safety valve to release the tensions of life. Mrs. Forrester commits the sin of moral transgression in her quest to escape from the uncertainties and absurdities of life. Niel becomes aware of the incongruities in her; he becomes aware of her scandalous past and false present respectability. Niel is caught in the whirlpool of illusion and disillusion; reality and romance and the climax comes when he is outside her bedroom window. Marian Forrester is the lost lady for him. Cather's novel *One of Ours* made her an international celebrity since it got her Pulitzer Prize and inspired Cather to focus on American cultural history depicting the loss of innocence of the Americans. All of Cather's novels evoke the struggles of the pioneers, their trials and tribulations and the theme of loss of innocence in the growing mercantile society.

Her novel *One of Ours* gives an insight into the psychological vision of Willa Cather; it provides an overview of the tools used by the writer in her novels. The major concern of Willa Cather is to reflect the epic struggles of the pioneers of Nebraska and to explore the mystery of death. She is not pessimistic but her characters are involved in their struggle for survival. Death is depicted as inevitable as her novels depict a connection between the dying and their natural environment. There is a conflict between the culture and the values of the pioneers and the changes brought by science and technology in Nebraska society. The hero of the novel *One of Ours* is Claude Wheeler, a farm boy whose love relationship with Enid Royce resulted into psychological tortures for Claude. He is very serious and hard working farm boy rooted in the frontier culture. He

seriously confronts the despair of life and soon finds that all struggles of life are futile and end in alienation and depression. In desperation, Wheeler leaves Nebraska and goes to France to fight for the restoration of democracy in France and gets killed there. The title of Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922) clearly states that it is a war novel; the protagonist, Claude Wheeler is a Midwestern boy who went to France in 1917 to "save the world for Democracy." The chief characters of the novel are his father and mother. Claude is a freethinking individual rooted in the culture of the pioneers. The plot of the novel unfolds the journey of Claude Wheeler from his home a farm in Nebraska to the bloody battle fields of France and World War I. Claude Wheeler aspires to join the University of Lincoln but then he has to join the farming with his father. Stuck back on the farm, Claude marries a local woman, Enid Royce, a woman with German background. The couple leads a peaceful life but soon his marriage results into his disorientation of mind. Enid spends most of her time in prohibition work and preaching activities. The dreams of Claude are shattered and the family breaks up, leading to his neurotic state of mind. He wishes to commit suicide because he doesn't find any charm in life. Freud "insisted that our civilization is a repressive one. There is a conflict between the demands of conformity and the demands of our instinctive energies, explicitly sexual" (Quoted in R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* 13).

Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* appeared in 1923 and created sensation in America and established her as a great novelist of America. John Davenport (1966) in *Observer* called it as the finest of Cather's novels. The plot of the novel is concerned with the theme of collapse of the values of prairies of America.

America grows industrial and the capitalist economy is flourishing in Nebraska. The old pioneers are marginalized and they feel dispirited and neglected. The novel begins with the decline of the west and the domination of the money culture in Nebraska society. Cather traces the history of the traumatic life of the pioneers and their struggles with the wilderness of Nebraska prairies. Cather's *A Lost Lady* can be described as an allegory of the loss of innocence and the emergence of alienation. Cather dramatizes the alienation and neurotic experiences of the pioneers in her novel *A Lost Lady*. John Randall has published his *The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value* (1960), in which he discusses the decaying pioneer spirit of Nebraska. He says that the forces of money culture, fashion and new ideas of sexuality were the main causes of the psychological ailments of all the characters of the novel (175). Randall also recognizes tensions in the life of Marian Forrester and Captain Forrester who suffer in the oppressive Nebraska society. The main interest in the novel is the collapse of the social structure of society. Marian Forrester's dreams are shattered with the sudden death of her husband. She is compelled to marry a business man to save her social status and property. The plot of the novel hinges on the conflict between the individual and social self. These tensions form the core of all the major novels of Willa Cather. Captain Forrester fails to understand the real sentiments of his wife Marian Forrester. Ivy Peters is an amoral businessman living in growing money culture of America. He acts like a wolf that preys on the life of innocent pioneers to amass money.

A Lost Lady depicts the loss of old values of society and the growing depression and alienation. Willa Cather has vividly depicted the causes of the

growing depression and neurosis of the youth. Cather introduces her “lost lady” Marian Forrester who enters into the world of Sweet Waters owned by her construction tycoon husband Captain Forrester. Marian Forrester is in crisis as her husband is nearing death and her land and home are slipping from her. Her tale of losing her frontier results into disillusionment and psychological torture. Death is a common theme of most of Willa Cather’s novels. Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) observes that the death is just an opposite of Eros that is man’s struggle to survive in the world. Man wants to enjoy sex and other pleasures of life and death’s consciousness emerges out of fear of such as abandonment. There are many unresolved conflicts which urge man to end his life; often death may be the outcome of guilt consciousness. The main conflict is between the frontier culture and the new fashion and modernity. Captain Forrester feels that life is meaningless and hedges leaving her lovely and beautiful wife Marian Forrester at the mercy of a selfish and money minded Peters. His loss of fortune and health symbolizes the decline of the prairie culture and the domination of materialism of Sweet Waters. Niel Herbert narrates the traumatic journey of Mrs. Forrester who is two generations younger than the pioneers. The core of the plot of *A Lost Lady* is the pervasive conflict between illusion and realities; between romance and realism and the decline of the old frontier culture. Niel’s struggles of life symbolize the growing pessimism, intrusive memories, anxieties and disintegration of self.

Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1913) is a powerful novel depicting the themes of nostalgia, illusion and the loss of old glorious past of America. *O Pioneers!* is a poignant tale of the settlement of the American frontiers. The title is borrowed from the poems of Walt Whitman, who viewed the land as

inspirational and a way to commune with God. Willa Cather has an emotional attachment with the culture and the values of the frontier. Cather wrote *O Pioneers!* to celebrate the legendary and mythological nature of frontier culture in an age when there were conflicts between tradition and modernity. The main section of the plot is devoted to the decline of the frontier and its values and the emergence of violence, corruption, greed and human degradation and frustration of the characters. Willa Cather is at her best in her novel *O Pioneers!* since the plot of the novel is about the allegory of the depression of the youth of Nebraska. The plot of the novel depicts the pains, hardships, neurosis, hysteria and despair of the characters in a heart rending language. In the psychoanalytical terminology, trauma means “wound” but in medical science it implies “external injury”, or a “psychic injury”. Freud and Adler have given their divergent ideas about trauma. It may be the outcome of some repressed memory or the result of an emotional shock. Martin Charcot’s major focus was on hysteria; a disorder commonly found in women. Charcot explored the symptoms of paralysis, amnesia and sensory loss in the patients suffering from hysteria. He investigated that traumatic events induce a hypnotic state in his patients. Women who were raped or mercilessly beaten often experience trauma. Human relations and social structure lose their meaning and women are dehumanized and degraded. Freud followed Charcot and wrote his famous essay *Studies on Hysteria* (1893). Freud made the following observations on hysteria:

We must point that we consider it essential for the explanation of hysterical phenomena to assume the presence of dissociation, a splitting of the content of consciousness. The regular and essential content of a hysterical attack is the recourse of a physical state which the patient has

experienced earlier (30).

Willa Cather took the title of the novel from the famous poet, Walt Whitman who sings the glorious achievements of the pioneers of America. In her essay *On Writing*, Cather states that “her *O Pioneers!* was a nostalgic endeavour and an account of tragic experiences in the life of the pioneers who experience neglect, indifference and humiliation of the Nebraska society” (Willa Cather 93). The main cause of depressing tone is the emergence of money culture, broken families and disruption of human relationships. Lindemann opines that *O Pioneers!* of Willa Cather is about the decline of the agrarian society and the shattered dreams of the farm community. Willa Cather evolves her own psychological vision and put faith in the theories of Freud and Lacan. Cather invented new images and symbols depicting the traumatic experiences of the pioneers and their loss of self. Language also deteriorated and got devalued. The general effect of each novel is despair, collapse of marriage, broken relationships, the rat race of money and deaths. The characters belong to the farming community and they always look confused and bewildered as they are helpless to confront the modern environment of Nebraska. They begin their journey with hope and ambition; with the energetic spirit of the frontiers but end with nightmarish traumatic experiences.

In *O Pioneers!* the main character is Alexandra Bergson who is rooted in her farm of four hundred acres built by her father. She feels that she is a part of her land and this is her life and soul. She achieves success and riches through her endurance and ability to farm the land. Soon she discovers that many European immigrants enter into the New World to seek fortune through land

ownership. The immigrants occupy huge ranches and turn the wilderness along the frontier into a farm for huge profits. Her father John Bergson has emigrated from Sweden and he heroically battles in life for survival and to pay off mortgage in life but in his epical struggle, he dies broken hearted, in debt and in desperation. His long journey of exploration, experiment and battling with the wilderness of prairies ends in a nightmare. Keith Wilhite opines that in her novel *O Pioneers!* Cather has depicted the heart rending sufferings of the immigrants. Cather dramatizes the conflicts that shatter the community of the Divide. Girard contends that extra-marital sex appears as a major threat to communal harmony of the Divide. The problems of Alexandra Bergson multiply when she discovers that Emil and Marie are disturbing the peace and harmony of the Divide by indulging into sexuality and building illicit relationships. Emil and Marie bring disorder in the community as they fail to conform to the age old traditions of the frontier culture and morality.

Cather's *My Antonia* (1913) celebrates human frustration and loss of values of the pioneers. Cather puts faith in the eternal values of life dramatizing the loss and glory of the pioneers who were forced to assimilate in the money culture of America. The novel is based on the memory of relationship of Jim and Antonia and their friendship; the web of memories and love affairs form the texture of the plot of *My Antonia*. Freedom and mobility inspire them to migrate to other prairies and avail of the new opportunities offered by Nebraska. The land is at the heart of the novel and the pioneers are seen struggling to own ranches for prosperity. The settlers have to confront the harsh realities of life particularly during bad years. The pioneers had to fight the prairie land, the packed grass and sod that covered it. It was a challenging job for them to break the sod to plant

corn, wheat and other crops. Since the modern agricultural implements were not available, their real physical and psychological pain began with the outbreak of deadly skin diseases, drought and the attack of the locusts that destroyed their crops and caused severe privation. Drought, prairie fires and frost could also attack their hard-won planted fields. All these hardships realistically depicted by Cather explore their inner turbulent life.

The first seven chapters of the novel *My Antonia* are introductory; the heroine of the novel and her family are introduced along with the prairie landscape. Jim lost his parents and he left Virginia and reached Nebraska after a long journey. He meets his grandparents and the Shimerdas. The neurotic despair of Antonia begins in the opening part of the novel. Jim is shocked to learn that Antonia has been betrayed by an abusive conductor who has promised marriage. He seduces Antonia and impregnates her. Antonia is a frontier girl; she has lost her innocence in the first stroke of her love relationship. Betrayal in love intensifies the tragic mood of the novel. Jim returns to Black Hawk 20 years later and meets Antonia Shimerda. Her loss of virginity is heart-rending as the forces of change and transformation wreck her personality. She becomes a psychic wreck as she endures disgrace in the society. The interesting thing about Antonia Shimerda is her dignity and self-respect and her grandeur of character in spite of loss. Antonia is the tragic heroine of Willa Cather. Jim comments thus: "More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions and the whole adventure of our childhood" (29).

Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), is a complex novel in theme, structure and characterization. Thematically, Cather touches upon the

blending of past and the present. There are two forces: the culture of the pioneers and the growing change and transformation of society and encroachment of a materialistic world upon man's spirit. Cather commented thus in her *A Memoir* (1963) that "the cause of main conflict is the opposition between the personal self and the idealistic, dedicated self; the connection or opposition between youth and age, the way they mutually stirred one another (204)." The main focus of the novel is on Professor Godfrey St. Peter, his conflicts, trials, tribulations and alienation in the mercantile society. Professor Godfrey is passing through a very critical phase of his life as his dearest student Tom Outland had died and he is busy in editing his left out manuscript. Godfrey is experiencing the tensions and anxieties of life; he experiences the malaise of human life. Godfrey's wife, Lillian and his daughter Rosamond are more openly caught up in the race for worldly possessions, but even his younger daughter Kathleen keenly envies what her sister has and she herself does not have. Tom captures this element of society when he speaks of his friend Roddy. In the novel, money and the search for it, destroy and undermine the dreams of both St. Peter and Tom Outland. Professor Godfrey has won a five thousand pound prize and he builds his house with that money but his patent of discovery and the money associated with it becomes a source of tension and worries for Godfrey and his wife Lillian. Friendship of Tom and Roddy breaks off. Tom leads a lonely and distracted life; he has pulled himself away from his family; he spends most of his time alone in his boat, always experiences dampness of spirits and goes to Europe to escape from the life. Prof Godfrey too is so much tense and inflicted with psychological anguish that he spends his Christmas Day alone in the study of his old house. His wife comments sharply on his abnormal behaviour thus: "Your disapproving silence

can kill the life of any company.” The plot of the novel unfolds the traumatic struggles and anguish of all the characters in the novel; there is a rift between husband and wife; between sister and sister; between Tom and Roddy and the gulf between Tom and Professor Godfrey St. Peter. E. K. Brown’s *The Professor’s House* “develops the importance of death in the novel” (237). He remarks in a sad mood thus: “Surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love— if once one has ever fallen in.” St. Peter continues expressing his anguish thus: “Fallen out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed” (Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* 275). The Professor is fully aware that “the design of his life had been the work of this secondary social man, the lover” (265).

Willa Cather’s *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) is her shortest novel. The main focus of Willa Cather is on the growth of her heroine Myra. Cather employs symbols, echoes from point, suggestive details and many allusions to structure the plot. The plot traces the life of Myra Driscoll from adolescence to death, her struggles in a selfish and mercantile society dominated by her mean and greedy uncle John Driscoll. Myra becomes an orphan at the early age and her care has been entrusted on her uncle who happens to be crude, money loving and selfish business man. John Driscoll hates Oswald since he belongs to a lower class and uses all the strategies to separate Myra and Oswald. However, Aunt Lydia helps Myra to court Oswald and arranges their meetings secretly. Driscoll tortures Oswald who has left Parthia and migrated to New York in desperation. He earns money and establishes himself to afford marriage. He comes back in Parthia and asks for the hand of Myra since he has earned a lot of money. Driscoll warns her

that “If she married young Henshawe, he would cut her off without a penny” (Willa Cather, *My Mortal Enemy* 12). Myra has no option but to elope with Oswald. Her uncle dies, keeping his threat to leave her nothing of his vast fortune. Myra is true to her lover as she leaves all property of her father for the sake of her lover Oswald. Her Platonic love becomes the talk of the town. Her elopement, her loyalty and sincerity to her lover don’t give her happiness. She revolts against the established norms of the society and according to the traditional code of the pioneer culture, she has committed the sin of moral transgression in her life. She becomes a legend of true love at her home town but in her married life, she is a psychological wreck. Nellie observes all the changes. Nellie visits Myra and her husband Oswald in New York for the first time and is shocked to observe the miserable life of Myra. She is suffering from a sense of loss. Myra’s vision of life has changed. She believes that all struggles of life are traumatic. Death is the only reality. Nellie finds that Oswald and Myra are leading a wretched life, living in a suffocating hotel. Myra is an invalid; she is a borderline personality tortured and shrieking. There’s nothing left of even superficial glamour in their lives, only bitterness and defeat. Myra’s death at the end of the novel symbolizes the theme of frustration and depression.

Following novels of Willa Cather will be investigated in the recent study:

- 1) *O Pioneers* (1913)
- 2) *My Antonia* (1918)
- 3) *One of Ours* (1922)
- 4) *A Lost Lady* (1923)
- 5) *The Professor’s House* (1925)

- 6) *My Mortal Enemy* (1926)

Objectives of the Research Project:

- 1) To analyze the texts of Willa Cather from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalytical theories.
- 2) Comparative analysis of the selected texts to foreground parallels and dissimilarities.
- 3) To analyze the psychological trajectories of the characters to scrutinize the behaviour and action of the characters of Willa Cather.
- 4) To examine socio-cultural factors referred in the selected texts and psychological impact of these factors.
- 5) To study the historical perspective given in the selected texts and create a parallel between the incidents and psyche of the pioneers.
- 6) To highlight connection between psychological and physiological existence.

Review of Literature of Past and Present

Stephen Tenant discusses in detail the achievements of Willa Cather in the history of American fiction. He reflects on her genius and the epic dimensions of her novels.

Bernice Slote (1966) also discussed Willa Cather's love for nature and her concern for the epic themes. She has taken up the inspiration from the Greek classics. James Woodress observes that Willa Cather was passionately interested in the classics and her love sparked at the age of thirteen. Her teacher William

Drucker inspired her to read classics and old American history. At the University of Nebraska, she continued her interest and became a “well trained and capable classicist” (117). She used the classical allusions to depict chaos and cosmos, nature and human degradation. Theodore Ziolkowski (1993) and Donald Sutherland (1974) contend that Willa Cather came under the influence of Virgil. In her *My Antonia*, “Virgil clearly informs the whole” (Sutherland 150). Ziolkowski in his book *Virgil and the Moderns* clearly traces the influence of the Roman poet on Willa Cather who wrote novels to explore the sufferings of Americans; their loss of innocence and sense of disillusionment expressing her cosmic vision and a new sense of history. Her plots describe the Virgilian allusions; longing of characters trapped in the destructive money culture and their nostalgia for bygone days. John Murphy (1989) in his *My Antonia: The Road Home* also observes that Willa Cather uses Virgilian allusions to filter details of Nebraskan landscape through the lens of classical tradition. Murphy even sees Cather explicitly adopting “techniques shared with Virgil” (42). All these critics have traced the influence of Virgil on Willa Cather and ignored the psychological study of her characters. Joan Acocella published his *Willa Cather and Politics of Criticism* (2000) exploring the themes of lesbianism and sexuality found in the novels of Willa Cather. The learned critic only explores the idealism of Willa Cather.

Sharon O’Brien (1987) in *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* explores Cather’s interest in the frontier culture depicting the hardships of the early settlers. Cather has also expressed her opinions about the role of women in the building of society. She is a modern voice raising the plight of women dominated by men. Her focus is on feminism of Willa Cather and not on the psychological

ailments of the characters of Willa Cather. Shari Benstock in her recent book, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, talks about Cather's stylistic techniques used in the exploration of the plight of the early settlers and immigrants of Europe. She opines that Cather has first hand knowledge of the farm culture of Nebraska and she has used her memories and knowledge in creating the characters in her novels. Edwin T. Bowden(191) has written several important articles on Willa Cather. He opines in his book *The Dungeon of the Heart: Human Isolation and the American Novel* that Antonia's isolation leads not to loneliness but to self-fulfilment and a sense of oneness with the land. Antonia Shimerda suffers from middle-frontier isolation. Like Jim Burden, Antonia finds self fulfilment on the Nebraska prairies. The main focus of this study is on the nature of the farm culture of the pioneers of Nebraska Wallace Stegner (1993) argues that Cather's *My Antonia* gives an insight into the farm culture of the pioneers. The tone in each novel is nostalgic and the tragic events of the life of the immigrants are described vividly. In *My Antonia*, Cather has created the character of Jim Burden who is the foil of the heroine; the clash of the culture of the pioneers and modernism of Virginia is the main interest of the novel but both critics don't mention the psychological ailments of the characters of Willa Cather.

Terence Martin (1969) in his article "The Drama of Memory in *My Antonia*" published in *MLA* observes that Jim's memory crystallizes around the image of Antonia. The learned critic observes that Cather's *My Antonia* is a drama of memory. Returning to Black Hawk after an absence of two years, Jim is "bitterly disappointed" that Antonia is passing through crisis. Jim expresses his concern for Antonia. Antonia and Jim are tied with the layers of memory though

both of them are isolated and alienated. The unity of *My Antonia* may be called a memory novel. The theme of memory is discussed in detail by Martin. The approach of the critic is to investigate the role of memory in her novels.

Blanche H. Gelfant (1971) in her article "The Forgotten Reaping-Hook: Sex in *My Antonia*" published in *American Literature* argues that Jim Burden's narration is the main interest in the novel. His relationship with her old friend Antonia is the main theme of the novel. His relationship with Antonia is quite ambiguous as there is no trace of sexuality. Jim's muddled sexual attitudes are a determining force in the novel. Jim does not exhibit sexual passions for Antonia in spite of the fact she was very close to him. James E. Miller (1974) in his article "My Antonia and the American Dream," published in *Prairie Schooner* observes that Willa Cather's *My Antonia* is a critical analysis of her American experience. Willa Cather documents the last phase of the pioneers when the end of the era of innocence is visible. Willa Cather has realistically depicted the collapse of the American dream and the American reality. Her *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia* are the master pieces. The learned critic talks about the study of Willa Cather's American Dream.

Evelyn Helmick (1976) in his article "The Mysteries of Antonia" published in *Midwest Quarterly* observes that *My Antonia* evokes the fertility rituals of the Greek world. Cather has imitated Virgil and Homer in narrating the pioneer saga in her novels. Her novels *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers* are packed with old rituals and traditions. In this study, there is comparative study of the old and the new and there is no reference to the psychological perception.

Deborah G. Lambert (1982) in her article “The Defeat of a Hero: Autonomy and sexuality in *My Antonia*” published in *American Literature* explores the theme of gender and sexuality in *My Antonia*. In *My Antonia* Cather denies Jim’s erotic impulses and Antonia’s sexuality. Antonia is “a battered woman,” and a “rich mine of life like the early settlers.” Sandra M. Gilbert (1985) in her *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* argues that Cather's vision of Antonia is quite modern and the main focus of the novelist is to depict the plight of the early settlers. The learned critic has considered Antonia as Mother Earth. Jamie Ambrose (1988) is the author of *Willa Cather: Writing at the Frontier*; he compares Cather’s view of the societal decline that produces the “lost generation” in the twenties to a similar decline in Cather’s novel that produces the “lost lady”. Cather’s *A Lost Lady* is symbolical of the moral and spiritual decline of American people. Nina Schwartz is the author of “Dead Fathers: The Logic of Transference in Modern Narrative”. In this essay, Schwartz talks of the modern changes of Nebraska society that ruined the peace and bliss of the pioneers since they were forced to abandon their old values in their false quest for money and affluence. The history of the immigrants is quite thrilling but the approach of the critics is historical.

Patrick W. Shaw (1992) is the author of many articles on nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction. Here, after demonstrating that many of the details surrounding Marian Forrester are suggestive of prostitution, Shaw argues that Niel Herbert’s perspective complicates the novel’s treatment of sexuality. Read through the lens of his perceptions, the novel stages a complex set of gendered psychological conflicts. Joyce McDonald (1998) explores the theme of class

consciousness. McDonald surveys the social hierarchies, the novel presents, examining how these stratifications contribute to Niel Herbert's sense of alienation in *Sweet Waters*.

The Research Gap in the Past and the Recent Research

All these learned critics focus on different themes of idealism, mysticism, feminism, stylistics or allusions to classics in the novels of Willa Cather but no critic has discussed or explored the causes and symptoms that led to the loss of self of the characters of Willa Cather and their eventual neurotic life. The emergence of money culture and urbanization in America brought the pioneers in conflict with the new culture and this led to their alienation since they experienced the destruction of family life, alienation and disintegration of mind. Many experienced trauma and lived with void; many characters of Willa Cather committed suicide. In this study, the main focus will be the psychological aspect as the texts will be examined and explored to dig out the inner conflicts of Willa Cather's characters. In this study, the main focus is to explore and investigate the traumatic experiences of the characters of Willa Cather relying on the theories of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth and Karen Horney. The textual analysis of the texts of Willa Cather reveals that the first and second generation of pioneers of America have to struggle to cultivate the barren and uncultivable land of the prairies of America. They have to endure all forms of physical and psychological pain during their struggle. Death, trauma, depression and anxiety are the main concerns of Willa Cather in her novels. The application of the psychoanalytical theory is fruitful in understanding the texts of Willa Cather.

Research Methodology

In this study, the guidelines of the latest 8th edition of MLA style sheet have been observed. The comparative study of all the important novels of Willa Cather will be quite fruitful for the scholars of Willa Cather who is a modern novelist and very little research material is available. The main focus of the study is on the plight of the pioneers who migrated to Nebraska and other prairies in search of shelter and settlement. Many migrants from Europe and Mexico migrated to big cities like Chicago, Manhattan and New York in search of employment and they had to suffer traumatic experiences. Many of them committed suicide because of depression. Freud and other psychologists are consulted and data has been collected from the famous research library of Osmania University, Hyderabad.

This study explores and investigates the plight of the pioneers, their traumatic experiences, their illusions and delusions and the loss of their innocence depicted in the novels of Willa Cather. In all her major novels, Willa Cather employs new techniques such as classical allusions, images and symbols and the stream of consciousness to depict the psychological ailments of her characters.

Chapter – 2

Plight of Pioneers and Psychological Disorders

Willa Cather's novels depict the plight of the pioneers of Nebraska who became the victims of growing money culture with the rise of industrialization. The pioneers had migrated from the European countries and in the undeveloped forests of America they found life full of challenges and uncertainties. They were very much excited when they landed in the Mid -West America, but after some time they felt lonely and isolated. They had to live in sod houses and were daily confronted with the deadly snakes, blizzards and shortage of the basic amenities of life. The pioneers suffered physical exhaustion, privation, depression and alienation. The local Americans treated them as "outsiders" and the pioneers lost their identity. Ann M. Begley observes that Cather is "an important writer with a wide range of psychological, social, literary, and metaphysical themes" (456).

The term "psychological disorder" refers to mental disease and the symptoms of this disease vary from person to person. The person who is affected by psychological disorder thinks, feels and acts in a different way. Thinking, mood and behaviour is regulated by the circuits of the brain; the brain chemicals called "neurotransmitters" are affected causing psychological disorders. Mental illness is triggered by psychological trauma that happens due to alienation and anxiety. *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Manual (DSM)* defines a mental disorder as:

A syndrome characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an

individual's cognitive emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental process underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities (DSM-5).

Apart from clinical psychiatry, psychological disorders get significant expression in literature too. Sigmund Freud (1856-1940) has worked hard for twenty one years and analysed the human mind. He has formulated the theory to study human behaviour. He is the first to infer that mental disorders result from the individual's history, mood and behaviour. He wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961) and delivered many lectures on psychoanalysis exploring the causes and the symptoms of psychological disorders in individuals. Freud contended that mental disorders could be a result of individual history and not due to physical impairment. Freud developed a comprehensive theory of personality composed of interplay between psychic structures and incidents of loss and death. The scenes of loss and death result into trauma. Paul Valent described trauma thus:

The nemesis of our lives. Sometimes it swamps us; at other times it haunts us. It is the fracture that stops us from running as we would wish. The trauma comes from the Greek word meaning wound, or penetration as in stabbing (3).

Judith Herman who specializes in stress and psychological disorders observes that "a trauma can be either "acute" caused by a single event, or

“chronicle” developed in a response to a prolonged or repeated suffering” (23). Herman further states that in the life of a man, it is too distressing to bear, it is called “double consciousness” (24). Herman further argues that “traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and take on a life of their own” (25). Herman further argues that traumatized persons sustain damage to the basic structure of the very self; they lose trust in themselves, in other words, love, kindness, morality and values are disrupted in the life of a stressed person.

Willa Cather’s novels *O’ Pioneers* (1913) and *My Antonia* depict the psychological diseases of the pioneers. Her novel *O Pioneers* has elicited contradictory readings and reactions of the critics. Cather claims that she was inspired by the great plains of landscape and the epic struggles of the farming community of Nebraska “the land has no sculptured lines or features. The soil is soft, light, fluent, black, for the grass of the plains creates this type of soil it decays” (Willa Cather, *O’ Pioneers* 97). Marybeth MacMahon observes that Cather uses the elements of memory to dig out the hidden parts of character’s psychic life. Cather uses “the images and symbols to explore interiority of her characters” (363). Willa Cather evokes the images from the Genesis to describe the chaos and bleak future: “The earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1). There are conflicting layers in the plot of the novel of regret and hope, tradition and modernity, love and violence, happiness and pessimism, alienation and depression. The characters of the novel struggle throughout their life confronting the internal and external forces and they are seen eager to

embrace progress but are often dismayed by the loss and uncertainty of life. Willa Cather gives an insight to the psychological problems of her characters who confront the forces of change and modernity in Nebraska. The main cause of their depression and frustration is the loss of the old world culture and the novel may be described as the lamentation of the loss.

Like Samuel Beckett and William Styron, Willa Cather also suffered from depression. O' Brien observes in the article 'Willa Cather in the Country of the Ill' that "the grief and physical trauma afflicted Willa Cather seriously and affected her tremendously because in her last years of life, she felt worthless when ill, she could easily descend into depression" (152). The novel *O' Pioneers* dramatizes the scenes of death, suicide, violent killings and loss of love. There are many scenes of death in the plot of the novel as the second chapter of the novel begins with the death of John Bergson: "It is sixteen years since Bergson died." (Willa Cather, *O' Pioneers* 15), the mood of sadness and despair grips the readers. The ending is one of sadness, not of exuberance, one of depression and not of hope as Cather laments over the violent progress depicted in the poem of Walt Whitman from where she took up the title of the novel.

Over the last thirty years, the novels of Willa Cather have been examined from various angles. She has been examined as a renowned feminist, as a nature writer and as an epical novelist. Her novels have been described as an attack on the imperialist frontier ideology and many critics have defined them as the "novels of the soil". Willa Cather begins the plot of *O' Pioneers* in simple and natural manner invoking the imagery from the land and the forest. The growth of the plot is organic and natural as the main story line springs from

the long grasses of prairie. The first section of the novel is entitled “The Wild Land” and Willa Cather gives the image of an “empty landscape,” of failure and doom. Cather refers to the physical and psychological sufferings of Bergson who is forty six years old and is in the prime of life:

One winter his cattle had perished in a blizzard. The next summer one of his plow horses broke its leg in a prairie - dog hole and had to be shot. Another summer he lost his hogs from cholera, and a valuable stallion died from a rattlesnake bite. Time and again the crops had failed. He had lost two children, boys, that came between Lou and Emil and there had been the cost of sickness and death. Now when he had at last struggled out of debt, he was going to die himself (Cather 8).

John Bergson “spent five years on the Divide getting into debt and the last six getting out of it” (8). He owned a huge track of land but land remained an “enigma” to him. “It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness that runs wild and kicks things to pieces” (8). The image of the wild horse is very effective describing the uncertain and enigmatic life of John Bergson and of all the characters of the Divide. Willa Cather begins the novel with the note of sadness, pessimism, the waste of life, depression, sickness and death. Bergson represents all the pioneers who have migrated from different parts of Europe to cultivate the prairies of Nebraska. The pioneers have to struggle against the forces of nature and often get killed by the snake bites, diseases and death. He has lost two children and their sweet memory haunts him day and night making him sick and decadent. He becomes a psychological victim and feels depressed since there is no hope for his survival. Bergson gives his life’s blood

to his homestead but he doesn't get freedom from the resistance of the prairie. He feels "Of all the bewildering things about a new country the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening" (19). In his death bed he gives advice to his children: "Keep turning the land, and always put more hay than you need" (27).

Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) explores the mystery of death; the instincts of death in human beings are inevitable as death is the main destination of life. Freud maintained that "life instincts were opposed by the self-destructive death instincts, known as Thanatos; aggression arises from the death instincts" (23). Freud believes that the happiness available to human beings is the "ordinary everyday unhappiness available" though Freud believes that "the only happiness is associated with trials and struggles of life" (23). David Daiches (1951) observes that "the main theme of the novel is the hardness of the land, which offered its pioneering settlers disappointment and disaster more often than success" (27). Miss. Cather has portrayed the "defeated souls" in *O' Pioneers*" (56). Francis X. Connolly (1951) also observes that in her novel *O' Pioneers*, she dramatizes the mood of depression, despair and despondency of the characters; "there is no hope for them in America and John Bergson symbolizes this defeated attitude" (17). In the novel, even happy marriage of Amedee and Angelique end in despair. Amedee dies after his wedding due to sickness. The scenes of death, decay, defeat and tragic loss are very common in the plot of *O' Pioneers*. The novel is seamed with moments of loss, regret and anxiety.

Alexandra Bergson is the heroine of the novel who afflicted with the psychological diseases struggles in the wildness of the prairies with a passion to

become rich and prosperous. Carl is introduced as four years senior to Alexandra but both of them share the feelings of love and understanding. The symptoms of psychological disorders begin at the very beginning of the novel. She is all the time stressed because of the burden of paying off the loans raised for the cultivation of the barren land. Alexandra Bergson is a physically tough young woman, oldest daughter of a Swedish immigrant family but very sensitive and with weak heart. The first tragedy in her life is the tragic death of her father whom she loves very much. She feels that her world has become barren and dreary with the loss of her father. Willa Cather develops the stages of the psychological disorders of Alexandra Bergson and the first stroke is the death of her father. Kernberg observes that death of a loving one is a great setback to the mental equilibrium of a human being. He observes thus:

The human imagination, in many ways, must be understood as a primary neurotic response to the reality of death, to the existential demand to imagine what cannot be imagined and in so doing overcome death; to bring death back into the orbit of life. It is the manner in which these two forces play out in relation to the dynamics of everyday life that the cultural character of the imagination takes its form. (118)

Alexandra Bergson is shattered by the tragic death of her father; her brothers are young and mother is already passing through a period of mental stress. She is presented rattling through the darkness in a wagon making “a moving point of light along the highway going deeper and deeper into the dark country” (*O’ Pioneers* 18). Cather gives the images of “darkness” “chaos” “emptiness” “loneliness” “distance” in the first chapter to forewarn the events

relating to depression, loss of love and frustration. The plot of the novel begins in the bleakest part of plains and the winter is chilling and depressing. It is mid January and heavy snow is falling and the building in which Bergson lives, is impermanent. Cather has described the desolation of the land thus:

The dwelling houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairiesod; some looked as if they had been moved in overnight and others as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blow under them as well as over them (Cather 1).

Willa Cather presents a woman in Alexandra Bergson who is not confined by traditional gender roles. She enjoys American liberty and acts as a steward of the farm land. She uses her full potential to develop the farm land and occupies the position of a male pioneer. Mary Patricia observes that “farm land” is a character in the novel and all the life of the heroine Alexandra Bergson is spent in cultivating the farm land; paying off the loan and buying new land in Nebraska (Patricia 275). Ivar is another intelligent person in the novel and his advice is valued by Alexandra but ironically Ivar goes into depression. He fails to get success to break the sod and turn the prairie into productive land. He is in deep crisis. Ivar suffers from the inferiority complex because he is a failure as a farmer and has no money; all he has, is a sense of deep depression as he says: “I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I do not cut my hair, and because I have visions” (Cather 34). Even his “buffalo robe” has become a “buffalo coat” (34). He loses his land, his identity. Alexandra tries to resolve his crisis as she takes him to her home; she promises that “she’ll keep him at home” (36). “Let

people go on talking as they like and we will go on living as we think better” (36). Ivar is assigned mundane tasks; “he hitches and unhitches the work-teams and looks after the health of the stock” (37). Ryan claims that Ivar “becomes the human testament to pioneering. As the task of the pioneering is to make nature productive, Ivar must be transformed from unproductive wildness into a productive force and this process is very painful for Ivar” (54). Though Oscar and Lou object to Alexandra for bringing Ivar in their house, she is able to soothe Ivar because she believes that sympathy cleared his mind but ridicule was poison to him” (39).

In the second chapter of the novel *O’ Pioneers* entitled “Neighboring Fields”, Alexandra is seen milking “with her skirts pinned up, her head bare, a bright pail in either hand, and the milky light of the early morning all about her ” (126). Carl walks toward a pasture and see Emil and Mary shooting the ducks. The bloody birds “too happy to kill” (128) prefigure the violent deaths of the lovers. The image of blood given in this part of the section is quite symbolical of the atmosphere of death, decay and destruction. Ivar believes that “these wild things are God’s birds. He watches over them and counts them” (41). Marie and Emil have transgressed the norms and committed the sin of adultery and they are punished in the chapter “The White Mulberry Tree”. Alexandra is proud that she has built a great homestead and has bought huge tracts of land. She tells Ivar the reason for her long years of devoted work: “I really built it for Emil. I’m sure it was to have sons like Emil, and to give them a chance, that father left by saying that Emil is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that’s what I have worked for” (Cather 117). Emil is never able to enjoy the freedom and the land and all the hard work of Alexandra ends in despair. Emil is killed by Frank leaving

Alexandra emotionally disintegrated and psychologically tortured. The land she bought for Emil remains unused by Emil and all her dreams about him are shattered at the end of the novel. Willa Cather depicts the harrowing depression and loss of self of Alexandra after the chapter “The White Mulberry Tree.” Breuer and Sigmund Freud in their collaborative work *Studies on Hysteria* put the theory of Neurosis and psychic depression stating thus:

The disproportion between the many years’ duration of the hysterical symptom and the single occurrence that provoked it is what we are accustomed invariably to find in traumatic neuroses. Quite frequently, it is some event in childhood that sets up a more or less severe symptom which persists during the years that follow (Breuer and Freud, *The Standard Edition* 4).

Alexandra Bergson becomes a psychic wreck after the tragic killing of her brother Emil. He was very dear to her; she wanted to send him to Harvard University for higher education but all her dreams ended in acute despair. She is almost in a trance as she goes to his grave in the night during a storm and is found there in the morning drenched and icy cold by Ivar Czar. He is shocked to find her in a state of trauma, almost half dead:

Ever since Emil died, I’ve suffered so when it rained. Now that I’ve been out in it with him. I shan’t dread it. After you once get cold clear throughout, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back into the dark, before you were born; you can’t see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren’t afraid of them. May be it’s like that with the dead. If they feel anything at all, it’s the old

things, before they were born, that comfort people like the feeling of their own bed does when they are little (Cather 159).

In the first chapter of the novel entitled: "The Wild Land" Willa Cather presents her heroine who is deeply rooted in the farm land. She was "tall, strong girl, and she walked rapidly and resolutely" (2) and her father John Bergson has put high hopes on her ignoring his two grown up boys, Oscar and Lou. John Bergson has recognized in his daughter "the strength of will and the simple direct way of thinking things out" (9). Her fate is to "face something" and Alexandra knows that her future is bleak and the vision of her imagination strains toward it: "her clear, deep blue eyes were fixed intently on the distance" (6). She is married with the land as all other things are meaningless to her but the irony is in spite of her big farm and huge track of land, she feels alienated and isolated from the land, from her friends and from her brothers. She enjoys some moments of love with Carl Linstrum who is "a thin, frail boy, with brooding dark eyes, very quiet in all his movements" (10). He is not interested to work and struggle in the hard land of Nebraska and he leaves the Divide in search for his fulfilment of his dreams. Carl regards Alexandra's friendship in sweet words "You've stood by us through so much and helped father out so many times" (50). Alexandra is also moved by these sentiments and says: "I expect that understanding is the only way one person ever really can help another" (51). Carl refreshes all his old memories before he leaves; he recollects the days that he has spent in her company; her horse doctoring, her comfort when he was homesick and the long walk they enjoyed together on the way home from school. Alexandra also feels the psychological pain of separation from Carl as she says: "We've liked the same

things and we've liked them together, without anybody else knowing. And we've had good times" (52). Willa Cather has depicted the love scene of Alexandra and Carl as they walk together under a pale half moon; they walk down the potato rows and know that they will have the precious memory of "what it was like before". Carl departs leaving Alexandra with her plough and the barren land stretching far away. Alexandra will have to face "what is going to happen" (54). With Carl's departure, Alexandra has to depend on her brothers who are her anti-thesis; they contribute brawn but no sensitivity, no human sympathy. Alexandra's sexual frigidity and repression is a source of her alienation and depression. According to Freud, sexual repression leads to mental disturbance and often leads to neurotic behaviour as stated by Freud:

When we are faced with obstacles to satisfaction of our libido's cathexis, when we experience traumatic events, or when we remain fixated on either phases of our development, the conflict between the libido and the ego (or between the ego and the super ego) can lead to alternative sexual discharge and its absence leads to the neurotic behaviour (*Sexual Repression* 12)

Willa Cather depicts the alienation of Alexandra who drives off alone "the rattle of her wagon was lost in the howling of the wind, but her lantern, held firmly between her feet, made a moving point of light along the highway, going deeper and deeper into the dark country" (Cather 7). Willa Cather gives the images of "violence", "confinement" and "conflict" in the very opening of the novel to describe the interior loneliness of Alexandra Bergson. Her home is a site of friction and potential conflict. Frederick Taber Cooper reviewed the novel as

a “slow-moving and frankly depressing tale” (Murphy 112). Her big house is unfurnished and uneven in comfort. The house is at once expansive and disjointed; here old and new worlds collide. The plot is riddled with confusions and misinterpretations and Alexandra is alone to fight with the hard land and the cruel nature. Her brothers fail to understand her and balk and are uncompromising creating conflict in the family. She fails to protest when Carl says he liked the old Lou and Oscar better, but her reaction is natural “We grow hard and heavy here” (124). The image of “heaviness” is very effective conveying the inner turmoil of Alexandra. She knows that Carl is freer than her but as a farmer her mind “get stiff” (124).

Willa Cather describes the mutual understanding and closeness of Alexandra and Carl. Carl recognizes the strength of Alexandra Bergson and indicates that she will emerge as a great woman in the Divide but at the same time he describes the weaknesses of her: Carl’s loneliness is depicted thus:

He, too, was lonely. He was a thin, frail boy, with brooding dark eyes, very quiet in all his movements. There was a delicate pallor in his thin face, and his mouth was too sensitive for a boy’s. The lips had already a little curl of bitterness and scepticism (17).

Alexandra tells Carl that her survival is very difficult as she has to fight with the external forces and the forces of the family and community. She comments thus: “If the world were no wider than cornfields, if there were no something besides this, I wouldn’t feel that it was much worthwhile to work” (124). She applies family pride and takes a firm stand as she says “We ought to

do more than they do, and see further ahead" (68). Oscar is dull witted who always dampens her spirit but Alexandra tries her best to express sympathy for him: "I don't want you to have to grub for every dollar" (70). In desperation and heavy mood, she expresses adverse effects of her sacrifices in fulfilling her pledge to her father and tells Lou and Oscar admitting her failure: "I certainly didn't choose to be the kind of girl I was. If you take even a vine and cut it back again and again, it grows hard like a tree" (171). Alexandra tries hard to break her loneliness depending upon the company of Emil and Marie. She gives freedom to Emil: "He shall do whatever he wants to do" and tells Carl: "He is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that's what I have worked for" (117). Cather dramatizes brother-sister relationship in a poignant way as Alexandra puts her faith on the future of Emil but he betrays her sister bringing her psychological pain. She sends him to Michigan to study law but he is not interested in study and his priority is Marie and not the future. Alexandra lives in illusion and puts faith on Emil: "She felt no anxiety about Emil. She had always believed in him, as she had believed in the land" (239).

Alexandra fails to understand the love relationship of Emil and Marie. She develops intimacy with Marie to break off the alienation. They enjoy their physical affection and the critics observe that there was lesbian relationship between Marie and Alexandra and this is the only alternative left for the heroine to overcome her sexual repression. She has Marie in mind when she tells Carl: "The young people, they live so hard. And yet I sometimes envy them" (Cather 119). Marie elopes with Frank at the age of eighteen and marries him. Alexandra envies Marie who takes a decisive action but she couldn't decide to marry Carl

because she faces tough opposition from her brothers. She says: “She’s too pretty and young for this sort of life” (121). She further comments expressing her psychological anguish: “We’re all over so much older and slower” (121). When Lou and Oscar suspect Alexandra marrying Carl, they argue her out of property rights and ridicule her to marry “such a tramp at her age” (167). Oscar takes the lead and insults his sister in derogatory language: “Everybody’s laughing to see you get took in... Why, Alexandra you are forty years old” (172). Emil also doesn’t appreciate the proposal of Carl and uses his arguments to dissuade Alexandra marrying Carl:

He was a little ashamed for his sister, though he had tried not to show it. He felt that there was something indecorous in her proposal, and she did seem to him somewhat ridiculous. There was trouble enough in the world, he reflected, as he threw himself upon his bed, without people who were forty years old imagining they wanted to get married. In the darkness and silence Emil was not likely to think long about Alexandra. Every image slipped away but one (Cather 179).

All brothers of Alexandra are insensitive and harsh and don’t recognize the emotional need of their sister who is forty and is leading a lonely life struggling with the hard land. As the novel progresses Alexandra grows emotionally bankrupt and sexually frigid. Freud (1950) recognized that the natural discharge of psychic energy in the drive not only has a sexual aim but also has what might be termed a “deathly aim” that to “reduce, keep constant or remove internal tension” (76). Hey Wilf (2008) in his article “Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Repression” observes that “people have strong

instincts toward sexuality but they are repressed by people in order to meet the constraints imposed on them by civilized life” (22). Alexandra’s sexual repression intensifies and she “pours buckets of cold well-water over her gleaming white body” (206) to overcome her sexual passions. Willa Cather depicts the romantic scene of Alexandra and Carl love affair which gives inner satisfaction to Alexandra for a short time:

I walked up to the pasture corners this morning. I wonder whether I shall ever be able to tell you all that I was thinking about up there. It’s a strange thing, Alexandra, I find it easy to be frank with you about everything under the sun except yourself!

“You are afraid of hurting my feeling, perhaps.”

Alexandra looked at him thoughtfully.

“No, I’m afraid of giving you a shock. You’ve seen yourself for so long in the dull minds of the people about you, that If I were to tell you how you seem to me, It would startle you. But you must feel when people admire you (132).

Alexandra thinks to marry Carl but her love for him is Platonic. In the “WinterSection” of the novel, she expresses her sentiments for Carl but in reality “she had never been, she had never indulged in sentimental reveries. Even as a girl she had looked upon men as working folks” (205). Alexandra’s love for Carl is ambiguous, confusing and deficient. Carl dampens her spirits when he declares that he will not marry for another year since he is not well settled. Alexandra is disappointed and is given to the land only and making huge property and in

sexual terms, she is growing frigid and emotionless. Alexandra becomes the most prosperous woman of the Divide but her material prosperity doesn't give her internal peace and contentment because all the external forces are against her. The brothers misunderstand her, her community is against her as her neighbours are always criticizing her, Ivar doesn't enjoy any honour in the community, Alexandra doesn't recognize the bond between Emil and Marie before their tragic assassination:

If Alexandra had had much imagination she might have guessed what was going on in Marie's mind, and she would have seen long before what was going on in Emil's but that, as Emil himself had more than once reflected, was Alexandra's blind side, and her life had not been the kind to sharpen her vision (79).

All these misunderstandings create complications in the plot and put heavy pressure on the psyche of Alexandra. The entire plot of the novel is devoted to the psychological interior of Alexandra who is the victim of confusion and misunderstandings. Mark D. Noe observes that the heroine Alexandra struggles for thirteen years to bring order out of chaos; she buys huge tracts of land but her material prosperity brings her inner troubles as she continues reeling into depression. Willa Cather has dramatized the inner conflicts of Alexandra, the conflict between old and new foreshadows the more violent and dramatic conflicts that shakes the community of the Divide. She finds her life full of challenges and uncertainties and often in desperation, she thinks of ending her life. Piotr Hoffman comments thus:

Violence looms at the horizon of escalatory social conflicts and

antagonisms, violence is the very counterpart of the inherent fragility of human communities which, unlike the physical phenomena, are sustained in existence not by the operation of some natural laws but by a precarious social consensus, vulnerable to disintegration and collapse (123).

The love affair between Alexandra and Carl is silent and Platonic but in contrast to this love is blazing love of Emil and Marie. Isabel Charles notes: “the passionate love of men and women manifests in Alexandra Bergson” (Charles 144). Marie and Emil love affair is based on passion and is considered as a moral transgression in the Christian code. Hawthorne depicted the consequences of the reckless passions in his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Willa Cather dramatizes the sin and punishment in the love affair of Emil and Marie in the chapter “The White Mulberry Tree.” Marie is presented as a simple, passionate young girl: “Her face, too, was rather like a poppy round and brown with rich colour in her cheeks and lips and her dancing yellow-brown eyes bubbled with gaiety” (Cather 79). Frank is legally married with Marie and their relationship has the sanction of church and society. These intuitions create moral order since centuries but Emil ventures to disturb the moral order. They revolt against the established moral order and are bound to suffer. In this part of the novel, Willa Cather depicts the scenes of depression, anguish, violence and bloodshed. The plot of the novel takes a decisive turn and gives an insight into the collapse of human relationships, death and decay. The legal union of Frank and Marie disintegrates into disgust and failure. Frank emerges as a destroyer. When Emil kisses Marie, they join in natural commitment, “like a sigh which they breathed together, almost sorrowful, as if each were afraid of wakening

something in the other” (225). The scene in the basement reaches its climax. They enjoy love making in the darkness; Emil has brought a beautiful turquoise from Mexico for Marie and she gets lost in her natural love for Emil. When the light comes on, Marie begins “to take down and fold her shawls” (Cather 226). Now this is the best moment for her but she must bear her destiny. In her second meeting, Emil walks Marie home and he fails to understand how Marie could love Frank. Marie also realizes that she has made a mistake in marrying Frank: “When one makes a mistake, there’s no telling where it will stop” (231). She feels trapped in illicit love relationship with Emil. She tells Emil: “You can go away; you can leave all this behind you” (231). Marie doesn’t enjoy freedom like Emil as she expresses her troubled mind thus: “When a girl has loved one man, and then loved another while that man was still alive, everybody knows what to think of her” (249).

In Willa Cather’s novel *O’ Pioneers*, all the major characters are depressed and mentally disturbed. Alexandra, Emil, Marie, Frank, Ivar and Carl are leading hopeless lives. None is happy and satisfied with life. Marie is involved in an unnatural illicit relationship with Emil because she is passionate, impetuous and sexually rebellious. She is suppressed by Frank who dominates her. Marie has eloped with Frank under the impulse of her passions and she realizes later on that her elopement is a blunder in her life. She tries to persuade Emil to leave the Divide, leaving her to her fate. She walks slowly through her orchard enjoying the scent of the wild cotton. The interesting thing about Marie is that she is a victim of natural passion as she says “how terrible it is to love people when you cannot really share their lives!” (248). She has no faith in the

church and her hope lies in natural religion because “they have now only their hearts to give each other” (249). Marie dreams to lead a life of perfect love and her soul longs to lead a life of perfect transcendence: As long as “this sweetness welled up in her heart, as long as her breast could hold this treasure of pain she felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it enriched and swelled with that image of gold” (250), Sigmund Freud wrote three essays on sexuality; “The Sexual Aberrations”; “Sexual Object” and “Sexual Aim” exploring deviations of sexual aims and the perversion of human beings. Freud emphasized that “in neurotics the tendencies to every kind of perversion can be shown to exist as unconscious forces...neurotics is, as it were, the negative perversion” (On Sexuality, 155). Freud also contends that “people who are abnormal in behaviour are sexually abnormal” (155). Marie is abnormal in behaviour as she commits the sin of moral transgression revolting against the established norms of the church. Emil sings a passionate song in the church revealing his justification of his possessing Marie Shabata. Emil expresses his passionate love sentiments for Marie through his song and expresses “a kind of rapture in which he could love forever without faltering and without sin” (Cather 255). Emil also revolts against the traditions of the church and the society and fears nothing. He knows that what he is doing is sinful and may lead to his death but for him, love and death are natural and they come together in his transcendence: “The heart, when it is own earth, and too much alive, aches for that brown earth, and ecstasy has no fear of death” (257). He is jealous of others who enjoy the fruits of love independently. He pours out his life “along the road before him as he rode to the Shabata farm to meet Marie” (258). Marie doesn't believe in confinement of marriage. She allows her to be trapped in the illicit

relationship with Emil. She doesn't like the dominating and aggressive attitude of Frank who is jealous and insensitive. Frank spends more time in reading newspapers and holding political discussions with his other farmers. Marie also grows passionate and impulsive, Frank also passes through confusion and crisis of faith. He has tried to make "her life ugly. He had refused to share any of the little pleasures she was so plucky about making for herself" (259). Frank goes to Saint- Agnes before killing Emil and Marie and spends the day talking with men at the saloon. Marie is inspired by the beauty of the wind in the orchard and declares: "I'm a good Catholic, but I think I could get along with caring for the trees if I hadn't anything else" (56). Joseph R. Urgo observes that the murders of Emil and Marie bring drastic change in the theme of the novel. Cather's "world holds terror from anywhere and at any time, men and women may face death and destruction" (13). When Emil doesn't find Marie after Amedee's funeral, he gets restless. He says: "anything that reminded him of her would be enough, the orchard, the mulberry tree" (103). The natural elements serve as symbols for Marie who feels connected with nature. Frank is acting as a neurotic fired by jealousy and frustration; he takes his murderous 405 Winchester from the closet. Willa Cather depicts his depression and mental anguish thus before his actual murder:

When Frank took up his gun and walked out of the house, he had not the faintest purpose of doing anything with it. He did not believe that he had any real grievance. But it grafted him to feel like a desperate man. He had got into the habit of seeing himself always in desperate straits. His unhappy temperament was like a cage; he could never get out of it; and

he felt that other people; his wife in particular must have put him there. It had never more than dimly occurred to Frank that he made his own unhappiness (148).

Frank's inner psyche is turbulent and his rational thinking is disturbed. He “sighted the gun mechanically, peered again through the hedge” (235). And finally he couldn't “see himself at all after the shots are fired” (237). Frank looks like a monster after the murder as Cather writes “in the bright space between the barn and the house. Frank is facing his own black doorway” (237). Freud and Nietzsche have expressed their opinions on violence. Nietzsche (1886) states that “as a race we have never lost our instinct for cruelty—we have only refined it.” Nietzsche believes “that it is better to express anger and violence than to keep it bottled up.” Freud on the other hand believes that “violence and aggression come from repression of libidinal urges or sexual instincts.”

Frank is in violent mood as he is fired by jealousy and aggression. Frank “hears their conversation a murmuring sound, perfectly inarticulate, as low as the sound of water coming from a spring, where there is no fall, and where there are no stones to fret it” (Cather 103). The blood stains on the grass and fruit write the gory deed of his murder:

The stained, slippery grass, the darkened mulberries, told only half the story. Above Marie and Emil, two white butterflies were fluttering in and out among the interlacing shadows...and in the long grass by the fence the last wild roses of the year opened their pink hearts to die (106).

Frank discovers Marie lying in the grass beneath the white mulberry tree. Frank hears their conversation talking like love birds in the lap of nature. “In

body and blood communion beside him she shifts her head to her lover's breast, takes his head in both her own, and bleeds quietly to death" (269). Freud observes that individuals who are violent do not experience any guilt about a violent act, nor do they have an empathic connection with their victim (123). In his book *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud further observes that "violence is the result of selfish and cruel impulses." Frank murders the lovers to satisfy his violent impulses and to escape from the anxiety disorder. Freud notes that the "greatest threat to civilization is the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another" (108). Melissa Ryan comments thus on murdering of Emile:

Murdering Marie merely liberalizes the violence of taming the wilderness, of breaking her spirit, and if the activity of the pioneer necessarily implies containment, it is then ironically appropriate that Frank is effectively incarcerated by own attempt to cultivate (Cather 284).

Frank's struggle to tame his unruly wife is paralleled with the cultivation of the wild prairie and his violent action symbolizes his own confinement. His attempt to control Marie is an action of his own turbulent mind and a deed committed by a neurotic person fired by jealousy and hatred. Ivar discovers the dead bodies first as he sees the rifle of Frank lying on the path; he falls on his knees seeing the gruesome murder: "as if his legs had been mowed from under him" (106). Meeker observes that relations in the Divide are based on greed and jealousy "leading to murder and suffering". Willa Cather has depicted the discussion of Carl and Alexandra who says: "We come and go, but the land is

always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it for a little while" (122).

The critics observe that Alexandra is also responsible for the tragedy of the lovers. She has been sending Emil to Marie and couldn't recognize the growing bond between Emil and Marie. Alexandra has poor judgment of characters, she fails to understand people and her ignorance is responsible for the tragedy of Emil and Marie. Her own world is so resigned, so turbulent and she herself is so much depressed that she has no time to think about the problems of others. Cather comments thus:

She doesn't even suspect the nature of their relationship until their deaths awaken her. She never knew that there are women who spread ruin around them through no fault of theirs. Just by being too beautiful, too full of life and love. They can't help it. People come to them as people go to a warm fire in winter (304).

Alexandra remains lost in her own turbulent world. She is suffering from acute loneliness as she is portrayed as a fighting woman. She is helpless as she knows that the forces are against her. Cather characterizes her thus:

If Alexandra had had much imagination she might have guessed what was going on in Marie's mind, and she would have seen long before what was going on in Emil's. But that, as Emil himself had more than once reflected, was Alexandra's blind side, and her life had not been the kind to sharpen her vision (79).

The psychological pressure on her mind increases with the tragic murder of Emil and Marie and Frank sent to jail for ten years imprisonment. Girard points out that “the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of misunderstanding” (7). The misunderstanding and the general confusion prevailing in the community lead to the tragic disaster of Emil and Marie. Frank is only able to justify his murderous actions after unequivocally witnessing the coupling of Emil and Marie in his own orchard. This knowledge, though, is symbolically and physically rejected as Frank rides away on Emil's horse:

When Frank was halfway to Hanover, the motion of his horse brought on a violent attack of nausea. After it had passed, he rode on again, but he could think of nothing except his physical weakness and his desire to be comforted by his wife. He wanted to get into his own bed. Had his wife been at home, he would have turned and gone back to her meekly enough (239).

In her novel *My Antonia*, Willa Cather describes the darkness, death, suicide and depression of the pioneers through the nature images, such as cold, shadows, reptiles, light of the winter sunset and the dark clouds hovering on the landscape. Mr. Shimerda is the main pioneer whose tragic life story is heart-rending. In her novel *My Antonia*, the dark shadows, the tragic loss of peace and the mood of tragedy are quite apparent. The novel is a tragic tale of a prairie woman whose entire life is spent in saving the land and in her futile and fruitless hunt for money and material prosperity. Willa Cather dramatizes the agony and frustration of the pioneers who lost their innocence in their desperate struggles in

the alien land. In a newspaper interview, Cather stated that there was drastic change in life, land and in landscape. The new landscape has evoked a sense of “erasure of personality” (Willa Cather, Kingdom48). H.L. Mencken observes that Cather’s *My Antonia* is the most accomplished work of art depicting the alienation, struggle for survival of the pioneers. Cather has depicted the mood of depression and despair afflicting Jim Burden and Antonia. Willa Cather has used the elements of realism as Mencken comments: “I knew of no novel that makes the remote folk of the Western priorities more real and I know of none that makes them seem better worth knowing” (8). In an interview with Willa Cather, Latrobe Carroll asked her from where she got the impulse to depict the tragic struggles of his characters. Willa Cather responded thus:

I grew fond of some of the immigrants, I used to think them underrated and wanted to explain them to their neighbors. Their stories used to go round and round in my head at night. This was, with me, the initial impulse as I had watched their struggles and the tragedies I felt extremely sad and these experiences became a part of my fiction (123).

The structure of the plot of *My Antonia* is tightly woven and central to the plot are the thematic issues and the mood of despair of the pioneers since life and culture is changing very fast. The novel is set in a period of rapid cultural change in America and the plot of *My Antonia* is elegiac in tone depicting the struggles of the pioneers against the forces of nature; the storms and the blizzards and the gradual decline of values of the pioneers. The characters of Willa Cather are rooted in the soil so much that they are not only isolated and cut off from

sustaining human relationships, but also thwarted and frustrated so far as possible. Antonia has no social life and no source of entertainment, she leads a dull and boring life exposed to the blizzards, the droughts, the snakes, the grasshoppers and fires. In the novel, Mr. Shimerda is seen through the eyes of Jim. The main idea in the novel is the friendship between Antonia Shimerda, an improvised immigrant girl and Jim who is an American boy and both find themselves as strangers on the prairies of Nebraska. Both Jim and Shimerda explore a new world and in their journey, suffer anguish, frustration and loss of love. Willa Cather has depicted the heartrending tragedy of Mr. Shimerda in the first section of the novel. He feels the real burden of the social change and is struck to the core by the meaninglessness of his life. He feels that there is a hole in his life, he feels a sense of emptiness, of irony and of absurdity. He feels depressed as the challenges of the prairie land cultivation make him sick and decadent. The poor farmers like Mr. Shimerda feel that he is unfit and has no charm to lie in society. His farming is ruined and Willa Cather depicts the dark atmosphere of loss, tragedy and darkness. The pioneers have struggled very hard to cultivate the land but soon in the turn of the century they find that the farming is no longer a source of happiness. The challenges get multiplied as the farming business has become a source of tensions. New economic policies of the government are not favourable as the bankers are very harsh and it has become difficult for them to survive. Mr. Shimerda is disgusted and frustrated with the forces of economy and capitalism. His plough is again the tool of men in their "littleness" and the worst affected are Jim and Antonia. He is overwhelmed by the depression and kills himself with a shotgun. He kills himself because he cannot confront the sufferings of his family. Being a farmer he is an outsider in

the American land and it seems to him that he is the individual thrown into a strange world there is no escape from the terrors of life. He becomes self-conscious of his failure. For Freud, 'the unconscious' is a systematic part of mind like the other "psychic co- systems" (114) namely 'the conscious' and 'the preconscious'. Erikson states that the unconscious can lead to personal recovery and creativity if it's treated timely otherwise it leads to vulnerability and total destruction of the psyche of a victim of trauma. Erikson records as:

In the unconscious ideas, lies much power for personal recovery and creative activity, which cultural institutions can augment with the healing factor of artistic or ritual form. But in these ideas also lies our greatest vulnerability and exploitability because no matter how rational we are, our unconscious seeks ways in which it can manifest itself (*Young Man Luther* 142).

Suicide of Mr. Shimerda plays an important role in Jim's perception of the prairies and himself. Mr. Shimerda committed suicide. His grave; "the little island" of "tall red grass" becomes a constant reminder of the terror in his life. Jim uses this "grave as a basis by which to measure change" (Cather 57). Shelly Saposnik-Noire argues that "Mr. Shimerda sacrifices his life to nature taking with him a part of Antonia but freeing her to undergo her own rebirth in nature, in the spring of the Nebraskan prairie" (174). Joseph Urgo and Merrill Maguire Skaggs in their book *In Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather* have traced the terror-laden events in the novel which hamper the growth of characters and intensify the dark and depressing atmosphere of the novel. In their words: "there are the few who succumb to terror, but there are many who construct lives without succumbing

to existential terror; exemplary characters who live in cognizance of the closeness of death, who force life from terror” (19). Antonia shares the secret of her father’s life with Jim and tells him that “the marriage between the two was a result of an unplanned pregnancy that created scandal in the neighborhood. He did not have to marry my mother, he lived in his mother’s house, and she was a poor girl come in to do the work” (Cather 115). Jim observes the sullen and negative attitude of Mr. Shimerda as he goes on to say:

I suppose, in the crowded clutter of their cave, the old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left so far behind...His face had a look of weariness and pleasure like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain (Cather 44).

Jim’s primary concern is to consider the suicide of Mr. Shimerda as a gesture of longing for the old world or part of a pathological depression: “I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country” (50). He further states: “Mr. Shimerda had not been rich and selfish; he had only been so unhappy that he could not live any longer” (52). Jim believes that he has a unique understanding of Mr. Shimerda and a connection with his spirit. As he reflects on the spiritual consequences of the suicide, he feels depressed: “it flashed upon me that if Mr. Shimerda’s soul were lingering about in this world, it would be here, in our house, which had been more to his liking than any other in the neighborhood” (50). Later that night, Jim broods over the death and says: “When such vivid pictures came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda’s

memories, not yet faded out of the air in which they had haunted” (51). The response of Jim to Mr. Shimerda’s suicide has two aspects. In the first place, he absolves his family of any guilt. Then he manages to use the suicide to privilege Burden family establishing an air of kinship with Mr. Shimerda’s spirit. When his dead body is found, Jake Marpole suggests that Krajick is guilty of murder but there is no solid evidence of murder: “I seen bunches of hair and stuff sticking to the poles and along the roof. They was blown up there by gunshot, no question” and Mrs Burden attests by saying: “don’t you trying to add murder to suicide” (49). Ian Marsh in his book *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth* discusses the issue of suicide as the representation of the suicidal person as a “tragic and tormented figure” (9). The approach of Marsh is to consider “other meanings of self-accomplished death by providing examples of historical suicides that could be read as relational, philosophical, and political as opposed to internal, pathological, and medical” (9). Jim feels that the spirit of Mr. Shimerda is a part of his spirit as he says:

I love the dim superstition, the propitiatory intent, that had put the grave there; and still more I loved the spirit that could not carry out the sentence; the error from the surveyed lines, the clemency of the soft earth roads along which the homecoming rattled after sunset. Never a tired driver passed the wooden cross; I am sure, without wishing well to the sleeper (Cather74).

Foucault observes that “Individuals are vehicles of power” which means Mr. Shimerda is more than “a point of application of power” (98). When Otto Fuchs relays the news of Mr. Shimerda’s suicide to the Burdens, Mrs. Burden

becomes distraught: “How could he forget himself and bring this on us!” (48). Fuchs responds with: “I don’t think he was out of his head for a minute” (48). Ironically, Mr. Shimerdabathed, shaved, and took care in his dress, traits that don’t support the intention to commit suicide. The last paragraph of this chapter gives the metaphor of grave of Mr. Shimerda which provides a visual account of the events of violence and darkness in the novel. Sigmund Freud has given the theory of drives known as life instincts and stated that these regulate the behaviour of man. Freud maintains that life instincts are opposed by the self-destructive death instincts known as Thanatos. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud states that “the goal of all life is death.” Freud has published *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), and formulated dynamics of melancholic depression and of suicide. He expresses his clinical observation thus:

If one listens patiently to the many and various self-reproaches of the melancholic, we will be unable to avoid a sense that the most intense among them often have little to do with the patient himself, but may with slight modifications be adapted to another person whom the patient loves, or has loved or is supposed to love. Each time we look into the facts the patient confirms this supposition (248).

A careful examination of the text reveals that all the pioneers are overwhelmed by the dark shadows and the very purpose of their life is shattered. The first hint of darkness and dark shadows are referred in the melancholy line of the epigraph: “Optima dies...prima fugit; the best days are the best to flee” borrowed from Virgil’s (*Georgics*, 111 (66)). Virgil observes that “Disease and old age come on and work, the ruthless grasp of death ensnares us all” (*Georgics*

111, 67). Willa Cather gives the imagery of sunset to highlight the mood of death and despair. For Jim the sinking sun symbolizes the passing of a glorious period of his life. Jim's "road of Destiny" is bound with the destiny of America and the collective movement in America seen in the Progressive era that determined the exploration, conquest and settlement of the early settlers. Jim realizes that the whole country "seems running" (42). This race for upward mobility is pitted against stillness, isolation and dissonance. Jim expresses his discontentment and tragic view of life through the image of sunset:

As far as we could see, the miles of copper-red grass were drenched in sunlight that was stronger and fiercer than 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. That hour always had the exultation of victory, of triumphant ending, like a hero's death-heroes who died young and gloriously. It was a sudden transfiguration, a lifting-up of day (Cather 40).

Mr. Shimerda who emerges from the "dark hole", is an old weak man whose tall, thin frame seems shattered in the prairie world. His eyes are melancholy and his face looks "like ashes-like something from which all the warmth and light had died out" (24). Jim comments thus on the impending doom of Mr. Shimerda:

He was a weaver by trade; had been a skilled workman on tapestries and upholstery materials. He had brought his fiddle with him, which wouldn't much use here, though he used to pick up money by it at home (20).

Jim's association with Mr. Shimreda grows as he draws from her father "a wintry wicker of a smile" (41). One evening Antonia and Jim meet the old man at sunset as he returns from hunting: "dragging his feet along as if he had no purpose" (41). Jim picks up the old gun of Mr. Shimreda and he turns upon Jim: "his far-away look that always made him feel as if he were down at the bottom of a well" (42). On the Christmas evening Jim saw Mr. Shimreda in a despondent and sullen mood:

He sat still and passive, his head resting against the back of the wooden rocking- chair, his hands relaxed upon the arms. His face had a look of weariness and pleasure, like that of a sick people when they feel relief from pain. Grandmother insisted on his drinking a glass of Virginia apple-brandy after his long walk in the cold, and when a faint flush came up in his cheeks, his features might have been cut of ashell, they were so transparent. He said almost nothing, and smiled rarely; but as he rested there we all had a sense of his utter content (86).

Two days after his birthday, Mr. Shimerda commits suicide giving the first tragic blow to Antonia. Jim's reaction to the tragedy is stoic; he shows no emotionalism but he tells: "a considerable extension of power and authority" (100). He says: "I was not frightened, but I made no noise" (102). Jim feels upset and homesick as he recollects the old memories: "I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country... Surely his exhausted spirit, so tired of cold and crowding and the struggle with the ever-falling snow, was resting in this quiet house"(64). After the burial of Mr. Shimerda, he sees Antonia

for the first time, she rushes toward him with her impetuous cry: “It seemed to me that I could feel her heart breaking” (115). Mrs. Shimerda was also broken as she cried out in anguish: “The older one was his darling, and was like a right hand to me. He might have thought of her. He’s left her alone in a hard world” (98). After the death of her father, Antonia feels burdened up with the responsibilities. She loves him so much that she recollects the day when her father has gifted her a handmade hat to her. She has tried her best to give strength and confidence to her father in his mood of depression. She informs Jim: “My papa sad for the country. He not look good. He never make music anymore....My papa, he cry for leave his old friends that make music with him” (61). Randall observes that with the death of Mr. Shimerda, the family begins to crumble which is best reflected in the changing mood and attitude of Antonia. Jim notices that “Antonia is wearing the boots of her father “had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap” (80). She informs Jim that “she would work like mans” and made “this land one good farm” (81).

Cather has dramatized the tragic death of Mr. Shimerda who becomes the victim of new money culture of America, his daughter Antonia is haunted by the memories of her father and her friend Jim talks of the traumatic loss thus: “I did not wish to disturb him...Such vivid pictures came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda’s memories, not yet faded out from the air in which they haunted him.” (11). She knows that it is not simple for a woman to work like a man but she is helpless and has no choice. All her dreams and romantic hopes are shattered and she assumes a nihilistic attitude toward life .Willa Cather has used the images of loss and pain to depict the struggles of the pioneers in her novels. The novel *My Antonia* of Willa Cather may be described as a memory novel as

the traumatic experiences of the pioneers are articulated through memory. Cathy Caruth wrote *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* arguing that “the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma” (11) as well as the central problems of “listening of knowing and of representing” (5) that emerge from it, offer the “possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential” (11). Willa Cather describes the dead body of Mr. Shimerda thus: “His body was draped in a black shawl, and his head was bandaged in black muslin, like a mummy’s; one of his long shapely hands lay out on the black cloth; that was all one could see of him” (76). Jim expresses his deep association with the grave of Mr. Shimerda thus:

The road from the north curved a little to the east just there, and the road from the west swung out a little to the south; so that the grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island at twilight, under a new moon or the clear evening star, the dusty roads used to look like soft, grey rivers flowing past it. I never came upon the place without emotion, and all that country it was the spot most dear to me (154).

Willa Cather does not depict the suicide in the novel as “triumphant endings”, but as a grisly act that is selfish and hurt others. The theme of death’s ruthlessness is predominant in the novel.

To conclude, Willa Cather has dramatized the frustration, psychic depression and tragic deaths of the pioneers, who struggled for survival, in her novels *O’Pioneers* and *My Antonia*, Willa Cather has dramatized the frustration, psychological depression, alienation and emptiness of John Bergson and Mr.

Shimerda who fail to adjust with the changing scenario and suffer from psychological disorders and ultimately get died. Both of them leave their responsibilities to their daughters instead of their sons. John Bergson dies heart-broken to escape from the burden of anxieties. Mr. Shimerda commits suicide by shooting himself with a shot-gun not able to see her daughter suffering in the wild prairies.

Chapter – 3

Transitive World Order and Loss of Self

Willa Cather is an American writer whose novels explore the traumatic experiences of the pioneers of Nebraska. Willa Cather started writing at a time when the old world order was fast declining and the new American culture was fast emerging because of the rise of technology and industry in America. Willa Cather has been described as a novelist of transition since she writes about the pioneers of Nebraska. Willa Cather characterized the tensions of American existence in the 19th and 20th centuries. She had witnessed “the world broken into two” and “she was trapped in this rift” (Sergeant 114). Her novels depict the growing currents of transition, the rise of the money culture and the decline of the values of the pioneers who have led a peaceful and hard working life. Her experience as a novelist and a settler is a microcosm of the spirit of the time. Willa Cather was rooted in the past and at the same time she was sensitive to the promise of the future in the new found land of America. She fears the loss of the innocence of the pioneers and erosion of the values of the American Dream. America was a land of opportunity and man could realize his dreams with hard work, honesty and liberty. Willa Cather found that all these values were declining as there was a craze in America to make fast money.

The traumatic experiences often lead to the dissolution of the self of the characters as they experience the loss of boundaries between self and the world. Sense of loss often results into acute psychosis resulting into dissolution of self. R.D Laing in his book *The Divided Self* (1965) explored the causes and

symptoms of a borderline personality. The very title of the book is about the study of self. R. D. Laing in his book *The Divided Self* and Sypher Wylie in *The Loss of Self* discuss in detail the symptoms of the loss of self. Both the writers argue that the main causes of the loss of self are the loss of identity, haunting memories of the past, the loss of a beloved one and the images of the horrible scenes of killings and brutality. Laing comments thus:

Man's whole life has been between his desire to reveal himself and his desire to conceal himself. We all share this problem with him and we have all arrived at a more or less satisfactory solution. We have our secrets and our needs to confess (39).

This chapter depicts the sick and wounded characters and also the causes of trauma, they are suffering from. The chapter also highlights how characters of Willa Cather fail to cope up with new values that emerged after the World War I. They feel disillusioned in the changing culture. The novels of Willa Cather depict the tragic scenes of the pioneers who have migrated from Europe in search of land and prosperity.. Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Lady* is focused on three themes; the psychological anguish, traumatic experiences and the loss of self of the characters. The plot of the novel is full of episodes that bring depression in the life of Captain Daniel Forrester. He struggles against the forces of money culture and the rising trends of machine and technology. Captain Forrester suffers from the physical and psychological tortures. He falls from the horse and suffers severe stroke and becomes invalid. He is confined to bed most of his time and feels lonely and cut off from the active social life. This physical inability becomes the main source of his depression and psychological anguish. His physical

inability results in sexual inactivity and this sexual repression is the main cause of his psychological anguish. Forrester is not satisfied with his life while he shows “a conflict between [his] libidinal wishes and the part of his personality we call his ego, which is the expression of his instinct of self-preservation and which also includes his ideals of his personality” (316). Captain Forrester believes that his wife Mrs. Forrester is shifting her love to other men ignoring him because of his physical ailments. His dream and fantasies haunt him day and night. Captain Forrester is a victim of psychological neurosis as he finds no hope for his survival. His death is the first tragic episode in the novel which gives a great setback to Mrs. Forrester. On this situation, Freud remarks that “the husband is almost always so to speak only the substitute, never the right man; it is another man in typical cases the father who has first claim to a woman’s love, the husband at most takes second place” (203). The appearance of Ivy Peters in the life of Marian Forrester brings chaos in the life of the lost lady. Freud, in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia”, explains that “the distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, and loss of the capacity of love” (244). Harold Bloom calls attention to the “negativistic symbol of machine –made materialism” which appears to be “so significant that all other elements are pared down to allow amplification of the symbol” (67). Mrs. Forrester is trapped between money and duty. There is conflict in her soul after the death of her husband; her property is insecure and the fear of bankruptcy haunts her day and night. Sherrill Grace explains thus:

That this divided self is —not an individual ego, defining itself against its surroundings, but as a place or entity co-extensive with its environment. .

. We are fluid and need not be locked into ourselves. . . The world we perceive is the world we create (2).

Sergeant in *A Memoir* commented thus: “Such ambivalent ambience shaped Willa Cather with her creative force as in an iceberg, the greater part of her load submerged” (148). This creative force impacted her career as a journalist and fiction writer of America. Cather came under the influence of French writers such as Flaubert, Merimee, Maupassant, Tourgeniev and the English poet Swinburne. The critics and reviewers have given their divergent opinions about the writings of Willa Cather. Willa Cather published *Not Under Forty; a Collection of Essays* in which she stated that “the world broke into two in 1922.” She expressed her concern for the future generations and expressed her anguish thus: “Our present is ruined...but we had a beautiful past” (123). Cather’s *A Lost Lady* is the outcome of her ambivalent vision. The novels of Willa Cather are set in pastoral America foregrounding the experiences of American and immigrant women in the prairies and towns of burgeoning country. Her novels and stories chronicle the plight of the pioneers during the age of industrialization and technology. Willa Cather dramatizes the touching scenes of dementia, alienation of Forrester and her loss of innocence. Mrs. Forrester loses her identity as she finds that there is no certainty in the universe. George Herbert Mead argues thus: There are two kinds of selves. First, one has an immediate perception of oneself, as when hearing one’s own voice at the same time respond to these social simulations. The self is relatively in the background and does not play a great part. The “other self is active but it lacks power to achieve equilibrium” (5). Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* (1923) evoked great interest in the critics and reviewers

who expressed their different opinions about the novel. T.K. Whipple in *New York Evening Post* (1928) commented thus: “With *A Lost Lady*, Willa Cather arrived at what can be called perfection in her art” (143). Joseph Wood Krutch (1967) described the novel as “nearly perfect” (48). David Daiches (1976) described Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* as “a flawless classic” (86). A.S. Byatt (1980) in her Introduction to *A Lost Lady* commented thus: Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* is a study of the degeneration of a character and a set of values, the loss of Mrs. Forrester, and her money, to Ivy Peters, the symbolic representative of generation, shrewd, petty, ready to root out the great brooding spirit of freedom” (Byatt xi) The majority of the critics of Willa Cather argued that the plot of *A Lost Lady* is structured around the themes of the fall of the frontiers, the loss of their innocence, loss of self and trauma experienced by the characters. Cathy (1996) explored all the causes and symptoms of trauma. Lacan, Karen Horney, Ihab Hassan, Sypher Wylie propounded the theories of neurosis and trauma to investigate and explore the mental icebergs of human mind. Erik Erikson and Stryker in his *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version* (1980), and Goffman in his *Human Behaviour and Social Processes* (1963) made observations on the abnormal human behaviour. Diane Marcotte in her article *Irrational Beliefs and Depression in Adolescence* (1996) discusses the nature of depression. Willa Cather has dramatized the last phase of the pioneers; their struggles for survival and the experiences of trauma.

The novel *A Lost Lady* is set in the small railroad town of Sweet Water on the western plains. Forrester’s have a summer home in Sweet Water, Nebraska which is visited by important friends of old Captain Forrester and the young

beautiful wife. Men from the world of business and the world of Burlington Railroad visit the house of Captain Forrester. Marian Forrester belongs to a time when there is a failure in the crops, in the small business, in the spirit of the farmers. People are moving away and new values are fast emerging eroding the old values of the pioneers. Mr. Forrester and his beautiful wife Mrs. Forrester are prominent in the town being wealthy and resourceful. Mrs. Forrester is known far and wide for her being a wonderful hostess. The leaders of the railroads often stop in her house to enjoy her hospitality. The novel is narrated by Neil Herbert who is a young boy and one who has closely watched all the activities of Mrs. Forrester. Neil Herbert is the central consciousness in the novel who notices and narrates the harrowing tale of trauma of Marian Forrester trapped in the bog of duplicity, treachery and deceit. Marian Forrester is a tragic heroine of Willa Cather who struggles for survival but her limitations and tragic hamartia brings depression and frustration in her life. Freud observes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that trauma is a “wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (10). The novel *A Lost Lady* is a heart rending tale of the fall of a woman who suffers anguish and traumatic experiences because of the victimization of mercantile forces. She belongs to California but she takes a wrong choice to marry a man much older than her age.

In the first chapter of the novel, Willa Cather describes the romantic and pastoral atmosphere; she provides an explicit clue to her issues of place, sexual betrayal and the process of disintegration and moral transgression of Marian Forrester. When Forrester uses her freedom, frustration usually results. Cather dramatizes a romantic scene when Marian Forrester watches the boys going to

the marsh to celebrate “picnic” and she carries cookies to entertain them. She finds Neil Herbert who is at the age of twelve; the nephew of Judge Pommeroy, Ed Elliot, Gorge Adams and Ivy Peter whose “red skin was flecked with tiny freckles” (18). He is the arch-villain of the novel and Cather gives the images of snake and lizard to depict his personality thus:

His eyes were very small and an absence of eyelashes gave his pupils the fixed the unblinking hardness of snake’s or a lizard’s. His hands had the same swollen look as his face were deeply creased across the back and knuckles, as if the skin were stretched too tight. He was an ugly fellow, Ivy Peters and he liked being ugly (18).

Neil Herbert is charmed by the beauty, grace and glamour of Marian Forrester. He falls in love with her and she also takes keen interest in Neil as she finds in him sincerity, loyalty and a strange attraction of the youth. She is older than him but there is a wave of emotional understanding between Neil and Marian Forrester. Neil visits her house for the first time and Cather has reported the impression on his sensitive mind the charm and personality of Marian Forrester thus:

What soft fingers Mrs. Forrester had, and what a lovely lady she was, inside the lace ruffle of her dress. He saw her white throat rising and falling so quickly. Suddenly she got up to take off her glittering rings- she had not thought of them before-shed them off her fingers with a quick motion as if she were washing hands, and dropped them into Mary’s broad palm (24).

Neil Herbert is a sensitive, intelligent youth comparable to Jim Burden of *My Antonia* and Claude Wheeler of *One of Ours*. He is charmed by the excellent qualities of Marian Forrester and her aesthetic tastes: Something about her took hold of one in a flash, one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words, of her eyes, lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little more mocking (35). Neil Herbert is a “generation younger than Mrs. Forrester and two generations younger than the pioneers who settled in the West. He realizes he lives at the very end of the road making West....It was already gone, that age, nothing could ever bring it back” (Willa Cather *A Lost Lady*, 169). As Neil grows older, he begins observing the imperfections of Mrs. Forrester whom he idealized as the “perfect lady” representing the noble and high virtues of the West. Neil’s point of view is faulty as Mrs. Forrester is a flapper passionate to enjoy all the material amenities of life, love and sex. Willa Cather uses the element of modernism to structure her novel. The plot is not linear as the sequence of the events is not described in a chronological order. There is a sense of fragmentation in plot, characters, themes, images and story line.

The main focus of Willa Cather is on dramatization of the traumatic experiences of Marian Forrester who becomes a victim of growing capitalism, selfishness, greed and sexual perversion. Her traumatic journey begins with the death of her husband Captain Forrester. Mrs. Forrester succumbs to fate and allows the boorish townsfolk to invade her home and ruin her life forever. The theme of loss, human degradation, chaos of life and false illusions are the main concerns of Willa Cather. The tone of the novel is pessimistic, nostalgic as Cather

incorporates an ambiguous ending raising many questions in the minds of the readers. Willa Cather uses sexual imagery to portray the character of Marian Forrester. Cather's language for the ravine in the novel evokes the powerful images of ravines and mountain clefts from the Old Testament *Song of Songs*. Marian Forrester is associated with sierras, where she goes as a young woman to escape sexual scandal. During an adventure with Freud Henry, she persuades him "to take her down the face of eagle cliff" (157). Marian falls and is rescued by Captain Forrester of these mountains. The episode describes her adventurous and passionate nature. Marian says: "The sierras-there's no end to them, and they are magnificent" (156). Neil stands outside her bedroom and listens to the sound of laughter of Mrs. Forrester mingled with that of her lover. All these movements of the novel suggest two things; one the romantic nature of Marian Forrester and the other the symbolic significance of her adventures in the mountains and her symbolical fall from the mountain. The first thirty pages of the novel are in the form of exposition as Willa Cather introduces all the major characters but in the second section begins the real challenges for Mrs. Forrester and her journey leading her to traumatic experiences. The house of "Forrester itself becomes a representative of the female body stripped of its vines and denuded of its shrubbery, the house would probably have been ugly enough" (8). Neil Herbert is attracted and repulsed by her female sexuality. While "Neil lives on the edge of the Prairie, the Forrester home is "placed on the hill, against its bristling grove, it was the first thing one saw on coming into Sweet Water by rail and the last thing one saw on departing" (9). Willa Cather has described the Forrester land central to the experience of Sweet Water:

To approach captain Forrester's property, you had to get over a wide, sandy creek which flowed along the eastern edge of the town. Crossing this by the foot bridge or the ford; you entered the captain's private lane, bordered by Lombardy poplars, with wide meadows lying on the either side. Just at the foot on the hill on which the house sat, one crossed a second creek by the stout wooden road bridge. To get to the Forrester place, one has to cross over out of mundane time and space, into a new location, suspended from the moral and cultural demands of small town Sweet Water (9).

Willa Cather has dramatized the cedar-bough cutting scene to describe the romantic and passionate nature of Marian Forrester. This is the only time when she can enjoy the erotic pleasures with a man of her age. "What a relief to get away! Drive slowly!" She murmured as if she were in sleep "It doesn't matter if we are late for the dinner. Nothing matters" (67). All this shows the sexual passions of a woman living with an invalid person. Cather has depicted natural yearning of a woman and her vigorous capacity for life. Marian and Frank drive through the forest and the only witness is Adolph Blum, a poor boy: "But with Adolph Blum, her secrets were safe...She treated him like a human being. His little chats with, her nod and smile when she passed on the secret, were among the pleasantest things he had to remember. She bought game of him in the closed season, and didn't give him away" (68).

The life history of Marian Forrester has historical and cultural relevance as she presents the age of decline and degeneration of the 1920s. Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* is a study of the traumatic experiences of Marian Forrester, her

traumatic tale symbolizes the end of an era; of the breaking up of the spirit of the pioneer reflected in the life of Mariam Forrester. Miss Elizabeth Sergeant in her *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (1953) observes that she is “heroine who does not preserve the moralities but clings to the amenities, and sometimes surprises us with the nobilities” (186). Her story is filled with the decay of the frontier; Cather gives the trajectory of her wounded soul. Her journey of life is replete with chaos, betrayal and deceit. Sigmund Freud developed the concept of trauma and betrayal in his seminal books *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud rejected Darwin’s theory of instinct and opined that “several distinct mental actions” (185) don’t always govern the instincts. Darwin ignored “the origin of the primary mental powers” (185). Freud propounded his own theory of wound and trauma in his *Essay on Hysteria*. Freud talks of the mental powers of human beings and classified their instincts into life instincts and death instincts. Freud proposes that the beauty, mental order, and regularity of scheduled actions of a subject get affected when it’s attacked externally. The subject becomes unconscious though “it also remains unconsciously active” (*The Unconscious* 47). Freud studied the “psychical traits and behavioural dispositions” (128) of the patients of hysteria and trauma in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*The Standard Edition* 356) to know what traumatized them and then he treated them. After Charles Darwin, Freud also got influenced by Jean Martin Charcot. For, Freud “the ego, despite its origin in the unconscious, is the result of the contact between the internal id and the external world. The influence of the external world is decisive in the genesis of the ego. Hence, it is the imposition of structures on the chaotic unconscious process by the external world that is determinative in the birth of the ego” (123).

The first cause of deterioration and loss of self of Mrs. Forrester is her sexual liberty. She develops intimacy with Frank Ellinger who is a tall and handsome man of her native place. He is well dressed bachelor of forty years of age and Mrs. Forrester is a woman married to an older fellow and she always longs to enjoy fruitful love. The presence of Frank Ellinger thrills her and she experiences romantic sensations in her body. Ellinger exudes a sense of malignancy; he is the main source of trauma in the life of Mrs. Forrester. Tony Tanner observes that two men bring psychological anguish to Marian Forrester; Frank Ellinger and Ivy Peters. Frank seduces and pollutes her body and Ivy Peters ruins her financially and morally. Neil Herbert observes that “the look of a man like Frank could bite an iron rod in two with a snap of his jaws” (58). Neil is considered “wild” in his youth and he was also once infatuated with a whore in Denver. People regard him as “good fellow and a generous and resourceful business man who was devoted to care of his invalid mother”. Nancy Morrow published her article “Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* and the *Nineteenth Century Novel of Adultery* in *Women’s Studies* (1984). She observes that Cather’s *A Lost Lady* represents a “consolidating or drawing together of different stories; here, memories of real people and places combine with memories of fictional portraits and situations” (295). She is a victim of treachery and dishonesty of people who value money more than human beings. Marian Forrester is a sinner like Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, Emma Bovary of Flaubert and Anna Karenina of Leo Tolstoy. Cather has given an insight into the psyche of a woman who is driven by the emotions and the passions. Marian Forrester is like Hester Prynne; she is married but her sexual perversion becomes the main cause of her degeneration and degradation. There is no Boston society in *A Lost Lady* and she

doesn't have to wear a scarlet letter but she suffers divine retribution. Her husband knows all about her adultery. He doesn't expose Marian Forrester but she suffers the loss of herself when her husband suffers the paralytic stroke. Willa Cather has written her first novel on the theme of adultery in imitation of Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The novel *A Lost Lady* is not about families, not it is about unhappy marriages but it is a study as Tony Tanner asserts of "fictional adultery." There is brewing a neurotic storm inside the psyche of Marian Forrester. According to Freud, "sublimated mental activity is chaotic, requiring that order be imposed from without, by the external world, which results in the birth of the ego" (Jiang 9). Marian Forrester's affair with Frank Ellinger and her moral transgression threatens the moral order of the society. Neil Herbert notices this closely and even helps her to save her honour by disconnecting the telephone wire: "Neil lifted the instrument with his left hand and barred her way with his right" (121), and saves her from dishonour. Marian crosses all limits and recollects the old life she has led in California:

Where shall you go for your honeymoon? Oh! I am very sorry! So soon...You must take good care of her. Give her my love...I should think California, at the time of the year, might be right (126).

From the date of her marriage to his death, Marian Forrester has seen multiple phases of life. She has been poor and has suffered from the lack of so many things. The most important thing in her life is the lack of sexual pleasures because she has to live with a man who is twice older than her age. Freud has explored the power of the libido and sexual drives commenting thus: These impulses are either frustrated by reality, or redirected through the artist's

extraordinary capacity for sublimating the primitive instincts or suppressed or reversed reaction formation or over compensations. Of these three endowments, the artist or the writer seems to have a special ability to sublimate. However she looks after him and gives him good care “that drained her and dimmed her and kept her from being all that she might be” (152). Willa Cather clearly gives the suggestion of her moral doom; there is in her heart a sense of regret for having married Mr. Forrester and the circumstances compel her to reject the Christian morality and to follow the new culture of the flappers, she has known in California. After the accident of Mr. Forrester, she is obliged to live with a semi-invalid man who is unable to give her sexual satisfaction. She finds the life in Sweet Water dreary and lonely, and confining herself as if she were a “stranded women” (63). Marian Forrester passes from various stages and has multiple experiences in her life. She keenly observes the lonely and dreary land of the Sweet Water and feels bored and isolated most of the time. Her only companion is Neil Herbert; her lover and at the same time her confidante. As the novel progresses Marian Forrester realizes the effects of her aging. Neil Herbert is quick to note that she is older:

In the brilliant sun of the afternoon one saw that her skin was no longer like white lilacs, it had the ivory tint of gardenias that have just begin to fade. The coil of blue –black hair seemed more than ever too heavy for her head. There were lines something strained about the corners of the mouth that used not to be there (112).

Marian is portrayed as a grotesque character by Willa Cather who looks artificial on physical level. Willa Cather comments thus on her artificial beauty:

“She was a good deal made up...plenty of powder, and a little red, too...Her hair was black, blacker than I remembered it; looked as if she dyed it” (173). Marian Forrester knew the art of presenting herself before the guests; she knew the art of transforming temporal reality: “But the astonishing thing was how these changes could vanish in a moment, be utterly wiped out in a flash of personality, and one forget everything about her except herself” (112). She plays the double role in her desperate attempt to get happiness in life. She wants to overcome the dreary and boring aspect of life. She gets an opportunity when her husband Captain Forrester goes away from home. She sends her servant Mary to visit her mother on the farm for a week and invites Frank to come over. She is not worried at all as she thinks her husband has gone to Denver on a business trip but Captain comes home as a poor man as he tells his wife: “It took about everything there to square up. You’ll have this place unencumbered, and my pension that will be about all” (88). This is a heavy blow for Captain Forrester but Marian simply “smiled” and brought her husband a cigar’s stand. She simply commented thus: “Oh! Well, I expect we can manage, Can’t we?” (88). She is depicted as a false and hypocritical woman who declares: “I never question your decision in business, Mr. Forrester. I know nothing about such things” (89). She accepts his choice as compliment to her: “If Mrs. Forrester is satisfied, I shall never regret my decisions. For the first time his tired swollen eyes, sought his wife’s” (89). Willa Cather has presented Marian as a double dealer. She has just enjoyed sexual pleasures with Frank and when her husband comes back bankrupt, she pretends to be loyal and sincere.

Cathy Caruth observes that “trauma is not simply...the literal threatening

of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind one moment too late” (62). Morrow observes that life before marriage for Marian Forrester was “exciting and full of romantic adventures, variety and excitement” (288). The trauma of Marian Forrester is caused by the loss of her lover at the end of the novel and of her adulterous fantasies and this can be easily explained by linking the psychological dilemma of “knowing” and “not knowing” as Cathy Caruth puts: “If Freud turns to literature to describe the traumatic experience, it is because literature like psychoanalysis is interested in the complex relation between “knowing” and “not knowing” (3). Freud also postulated that a “universal drive in children to establish and preserve an exclusive possessive sexual relationship with the opposite sex parent while eliminating the same sex parent as a sexual rival” (279).

Her decline begins after the second stroke of Captain Forrester, as she becomes restless and experiences trauma. She has an invalid husband and impending curse of poverty; with her financial struggles Marian goes to “pieces”. She feels that everything around her is fast changing and she is bound to face the world alone; without the support of her husband and money. She was feeling weary and exhausted since she was not a financial wizard. She realized that the rug under her feet is slipping and often she felt numb and in the grip of anxiety. Mrs. Beasleys and Molly Tuckers expose her observing that “she was worn out” (132). Drudging in the kitchen “half dressed” and fuelled on coffee and brandy “She had ceased to care about anything” (133). She becomes the talk of the town as the people of the Sweet Water prey on Forrester place “like ants” (132) seeking the spoils of last night’s dinner. Poverty makes her a slave to the kitchen and drives her failing nerve to rely on the stimulations of brandy and black coffee.

The loss of money is a big jolt to Marian; her life passes from bad to worse. Her annual visit to Colorado railroad society is not possible any more. She is in crisis and she tries to overcome the situation as she says to Neil: "Never mind us. We will pass a quite winter, like an old country couple- as we are! She said lightly" (99). But Neil realizes that she is in real trouble and she has lost her balance of mind. Neil realizes that "she faced the winter with terror, but he had never seen more in command of herself.- or more the mistress of her own house than now, when she was preparing to become the servant of it: (99). The real stroke is experienced by Marian Forrester when she finds Frank Ellinger rejecting her and marrying Miss Constance Ogden. She feels psychologically tortured and experiences the real trauma of her life. Her mind is wounded as the world looks weary and lost. Her loss of money is a big setback but the loss of her lover is a real psychological setback. All her dreams are shattered; the hopes are dashed to the ground and she looks confused and bewildered trapped in the abyss of darkness and despair. Caruth writes that to be traumatized is to "be possessed by an image or event" (5) and this is what Forrester struggled with her entire life. Janet (1889) observes that "traumatic events and memories persist as unassimilated fixed ideas that act as foci for the development of alternate states of consciousness, including dissociative phenomena such as fugue states, amnesia, and chronic states of helplessness and depression" (123).

Following the Freudian claim in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it can be argued that Quentin is a victim who is doomed to "repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something belonging to past" (341). The death of Captain Forrester brings the curtain down; all responsibilities fall on her. She doesn't know how to confront the reality of life.

In this part of the novel, Ivy Peter appears and the novel takes a U-turn. Tension builds as Ivy Peter assumes the role previously held by Frank Ellinger. Peter enters the world of Marian Forrester to exploit her financially and psychologically. He “boasts to Niel about the gains of converting Forrester wetlands into wheat”, in the fact that he is “just mean enough to like to shoot along their creek more than anywhere else” (100), in “his careless flirting with Mrs. Forrester, as if she were a kitchen maid” (114). “He starts flirting with Marian Forrester and touches her breasts while she is making pastry” (161). He uses all strategies to entrap Marian Forrester; the elegant wife of Captain but now broken in mind and spirit. Her “properties are splintered mirroring her own division as she transgresses the boundaries of widowhood refusing to immolate herself upon the death of her husband” (161). The cost of her “survival is great and requires that she becomes a woman of exchange between the pioneer men of the Old West and new breed of men like Peters, trained in petty economics by hard times” (102). Marian has no option but to concede to the demands of Ivy Peters who is symbolically poisonous. In his final description, Marian Forrester remains enigmatic. She is aged, has no money to survive; she has beautiful body and sexual charm and she sells her body to marry a man reputed to be “quarrelsome and rather stingy” so she had “come up again” giving her everything to Ivy Peters at last. She has fallen; is gone to pieces but with Ivy Peters also she remains unsatisfied and “marries Henry Collins, a rich cranky old Englishman whom she met in California” (165).

Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth are of the opinion that memory is the main source of trauma. Cathy Caruth holds that an event of the past goes deep

into the psyche of an individual which keeps on torturing him so long he is alive. The traumatic event is buried deep into the psyche and like wounds the old memories appear on the surface and become a source of psychological pain. Their daily life is engulfed by symptoms of trauma, but they are ignorant of the symptoms affecting them. This study investigates the ways in which Willa Cather draws upon James and Sigmund's theories of consciousness.

Willa Cather has dramatized the traumatic experiences of Marian Forrester. The end of the novel *A Lost Lady* is very touching, she died "as Neil meets Ed Elliot who also grew in Sweet Water and knew Mrs. Forrester's fate" (148). "As the two talked about the woman whom Neil had loved, he asked Ed if Marian Forrester was alive, Ed told him that she had died and nobody attended her funeral from Sweet Water. Neil was not at all disturbed, he only thanked God she was taken care of throughout her life" (150). Joseph Wood Krutch (1923) wrote in the *Nation* thus:

Marian Forrester was consciously a lady, and she had devoted her vitality to the creation of a person who was more than a person who was The Lady as a type and as a work of art so that when she failed as an artist...she failed because she was not an artist enough to refuse to do at all what she could not do worthily...the artist must sacrifice himself for the work. Forrester was guilty and lost because she put her own happiness before her art and betrayed her ideal to snatch at the joy of life (2).

Captain Forrester is another major character suffering from the loss of self. He is the last spokesman of the transitional age of America. He is depressed because he firmly believes that he is a misfit in the society. Cather has portrayed

the grace and charm of Forrester, his straight forwardness and “clumsy dignity” (23). He is a gracious host and a fine story teller and he holds that “what you think of and plan for day by day, in spite of yourself, so to speak, you will get. You will get it more or less” (32). All the dreams of his life are shattered as life becomes meaningless for him. He becomes bankrupt and the financial insolvency results into his disintegration of self. He is utterly helpless as he is confined to bed. He is so much depressed that in a traumatic state, he suffers a stroke and becomes invalid. “After the stroke, his health deteriorated, his speech became blurred” (82). He could not clearly find words, so “he avoided talking even more than was his habit” (82). Captain Forrester was losing his ability to speak, the most prominent quality that separates humans from animals. His wife is helpless as the future is dark for her. Her husband has lost all property as his bank has collapsed and Mrs. Forrester is on the road trapped in the bog of poverty after the death of her husband. Marian Forrester “is really tempered steel, a blade that could fence with anyone and never break” (166).

Captain Forrester’s story is also full of painful memories of the decline of the West. He is presented as the last representative of the ideal world who has strong ambitions and dreams. He has started his life as homesteader and rose to the post of a railroad contractor by his hard work. Captain Forrester is a mighty creation of Willa Cather who has successfully climbed to the heights of greatness but gets doomed by the emergence of the money culture:

All of our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteader’s and prospector’s and the contractor’s ...All of these will be everyday facts to the coming generation, but to us-Captain Forrester ended with a sort of grunt. Something forbidding had come into the voice,

the lonely, defiant note that is so often heard in the voices of the old Indians (Cather 55).

Neil Herbert repeats the same thought later as he rides back to the West from his studies at an Eastern School after graduation. He finishes his law and becomes an assistant to his Uncle Judge and starts looking into the legal affairs of Captain Forrester. Neil is also rooted in the culture of the old West and he is shocked to notice the declining trend of the old West. Willa Cather describes the scenes of the declining of the West. Neil Herbert proudly stated thus: "The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventures who were unpractical to the point of magnificence: a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack but weak in defence, who could conquer but could not hold" (106). Willa Cather describes the romantic dreams of Captain Forrester who is extremely happy to settle in Sweet Water with his beautiful wife Marian Forrester. He is a building engineer and he has brought a revolution in construction industry by his innovation, adventurous foresight, his perseverance and diligence. Bureaucrats, Government professional, managers are proud of Captain Forrester who was known for his productive genius:

Anyone but Captain Forrester would have drained the bottom land made it into highly productive fields. But he had selected this place long ago because it looked beautiful to him, and he happened to like the way the creek would through the pasture, with mint and joint-grass and twinkling willows along its banks. He was off for those times, and he had no children. He could afford to humor his fancies (Cather 2).

Captain Forrester suffers like Antonia and Alexandra and like them he suffers alienation and depression as the pioneer spirit is declining with cultural transformation in the West. He has “a deep nature, and a conscience that had never been juggled with” (48). He is true to the code of “a courteous brotherhood” (106). He transcends boundaries through his brotherhood. He protects the marshes for their aesthetic beauty, and he protects “men with no capital but their back and their own hands, to whom bank deposits were above price; money saved to buy a home or to take care of a man in sickness, or to send a boy to school” (91). Cather has depicted inflexibility and sense of complacency of Forrester which becomes a source of psychological depression: “He was a man who did not vary his formulae or his manners. He was no more mobile than his countenance” (48). The novelist has placed Captain Forrester against the backdrop of change and includes his voice of “the lonely, defiant note that is so often heard in the voices of old Indians” (55). The change of time and culture visibly takes its toll upon Captain Forrester. “He met with an accident, fell from his horse: he had grown much heavier, seemed encumbered by his own bulk, and never suggested taking a contract for the railroad again” (32). The main cause of psychological depression is clearly pointed out by Willa Cather in the early section of the novel. That he suffers from physical ailments; he grows bulky, met with an accident, he has no child, he suffers from inferiority complex because his wife Marian Forrester is twenty five years younger than him and above all he thinks that he has become redundant after his huge contribution of the railroad construction. Time is fast changing; values are fast changing; he feels disconnected with the age and spirit of time. All these causes compounded make

Captain Forrester a frustrated man who dies. Freud defines “Mourning as the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty,[or] an ideal. . .” (“Mourning,” *General Selection* 125). The adultery of his wife further gives him psychological trauma as he feels helpless. He finds that the “new age” is entirely different from the old age of the pioneers. Neil Herbert finds him physically immobile before a sun-dial: “Everything about him seemed to have grown heavier and weaker. His face was fatter and smoother; as if the features were running into each, as when a wax face melts in the heat...His brown hands lay on his knees, the fingers well apart, nerveless” (109). He is bedridden, “propped up on three pillows”. All these images of frailty and physical weakness symbolize the degeneration of the “old age of the pioneers” represented by Captain Forrester. His loss of physical agility reflects his inner turbulent world. He has become conscious that in the “new age” he is no more needed. He becomes a helpless spectator of change. He is seen watching the shadows; looking powerless before the time. Once the age of the pioneer gentleman is past, others must come to terms with the present, about which the pioneer felt a “princely carelessness” (106). Mrs. Forrester is different from her husband Mr. Forrester who is committed to the code of the values of the past but Mrs. Forrester believes in adjustability and transformation. Willa Cather writes: “There could be no negative encounter, however slight with Mrs. Forrester. If she merely bowed to you, merely looked at you, it constituted a personal relation” (35). Neil Herbert notices this:

Where Mrs. Forrester was, dullness was impossible. The charm of her

conversation was not so much in what she said...but in the quick recognition of her eyes, in the living quality of the voice itself. One could talk with her about the most trivial things, and go away with a high sense of elation. The secret of it, he supposed, was that she couldn't help being interested in people, even very commonplace people (70).

When Forresters' are trapped in the heavy snow, Neil brought two letters from Frank. Captain Forrester kept his eye on his wife who is reading the letter with excitement and finds her "pleased and happy" (74). In her cheerful mood, Marian stops drinking sherry and on that day Neil tells Captain that "his wife has been sent for in the night to answer a long distance call" (135). Captain Forrester is a victim of circumstances and he suffers the physical and psychological trauma. In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes a pattern of suffering that persistent in the life of an individual. Freud argues that a painful event can be a permanent source of anxiety and psychological disorder. The life of Captain is a long chain of misfortunes which become a constant source of his trauma. It is a chance that he comes in contact with a beautiful girl from the West whom he has saved and got married to. Again, it is a chance that his railroad business collapses and he becomes redundant with the emergence of sophisticated machinery and technology in America. Again he is traumatized because his wife turns into an adulterous. His accident and the subsequent stroke totally disintegrate his self as he is seen lying on the bed all the time. The collapse of his bank and the loss of his property give him an eternal anguish. Karen Horney discusses the cause of neurosis and anxiety thus:

The failures, in conjunction with a feeling of weakness and defeat, lead to

a feeling of envy towards all persons who are more successful, or merely more secure or better contented with life. This envy may be manifest or it may be repressed under the pressure of the same anxiety which led to a repression of, and a recoiling from, rivalry (Horney 6).

It is interesting to note that Captain Forrester looks helpless and a victim of the adultery of his wife. He can't do anything so he simply confesses his secret to Neil Herbert in a mood of despondency:

Neil had often wondered just how much the Captain knew.....Now he felt sure that he knew everything more than anyone else, all there was to know about Marian Forrester (117).

Things have come to such a pass that Captain Forrester has totally surrendered himself to Marian Forrester in desperation because he is helpless and cannot control the sexual passion of his wife who is young and full of vitality and he has become invalid physically and psychologically: "He looked like a wise old Chinese mandarin as he lay listening to the young man's fantastic story with perfect composure" (136). Being aged and invalid, he allows Marian Forrester to develop the friendship; "To him they seem about the same age. It was a habit with him to think of Mrs. Forrester as very, very young" (75). Joseph Randall observes thus:

The Captain envisaged a different and subtler kind of loyalty which did not have to include sexual faithfulness, which in part at least was based on a more realistic sense of human limitations than he was prepared to admit. For it is certainly true that Neil Herbert, idealistic and adolescent

as he is, will not recognize that human life has a sexual basis (190).

The novel *A Lost Lady* chronicles the rise and degeneration of the machine age in Cather's America. Marian Forrester is the pivotal character who is a survivor, lives in the shadow of men: "It was in relation to her husband that Neil most admired her" (78) and "the right man could save her, even now" (65). Marian Forrester is caught between two men and two forces in society; Captain Forrester, the machine age man and Ivy Peters, the exploitative capitalist. The lady, like society is lost because she moves from one to the other in order to survive. Cathy Caruth advocates some similarities and relations between trauma and history. Caruth states, "History, like trauma is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). Caruth proves that trauma doesn't lie in the first traumatic event but in the repetitive occurrence of identical upsetting events. The author records, "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature . . . the way it was precisely not known in the first instance. . . returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In this case, Caruth circuitously refers to Jacques Lacan's concept of repetition where the latter states that "subject loses itself as much as it finds itself again and in the sense that, in an interjection, in an imperative, in an invocation, even in a hesitation it is always the unconscious that presents you with its enigma" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 26). Neil Herbert's adoration of Mrs. Forrester is the basis of her portrait. He is a sensitive idealist living with his widower father and a spinster aunt. He describes his house as "the worst house in the world". He escapes from his depressing home life and goes to study law

with his uncle Judge Pommeroy. Being the nephew of the Judge Pommeroy, he is inducted into “genteel” society of Sweet Water. Like Mrs. Forrester, Neil Herbert also suffers from loneliness and psychic restlessness. He has no enjoyment, his life is boring and tasteless. He is living in stifling environment but when he comes in the company of Mrs. Forrester, he feels enchanted. He represents the lost generation of the pioneers and a lost pastoral world. He gets excited when he finds the adulterous life of Mrs. Forrester.

Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* (1922) depicts the psychological disorders and the traumatic experiences of Claude Wheeler. The plot of the novel deals with the loss of self of a young American Claude Wheeler who becomes a victim of socio-economic forces. Willa Cather was acclaimed as a great novelist and bagged the coveted Pulitzer Prize for this novel. She achieves prominence in the world of fiction and was elevated to the highest rank of Modern American writers. The critics and the reviewers of Willa Cather has divergent opinions about the themes of the novel. H.L. Mencken observes that Cather’s depiction of war “drops precipitately to the level of a serial in *The Lady’s Home Journal* fought out in France but on a Hollywood movie- lot” (Mencken 99). The famous biographer of Willa Cather, James Woodress (1987) argues that the novel *One of Ours* chronicles the trend of transformation of American culture. Cather depicts the heartrending tale of a soldier who struggles to survive for name and fame and joins the army of France in desperation. Interestingly, the tale is narrated “through Claude’s point of view” (99). The reviewer of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 1922 observed that *One of Ours* should be read in conjunction with *Three Soldiers* of Dos Passos as both the novels dig out the

psyche of the young soldiers trapped in a war situation” (4). David Stouck (1975) observes that “the author’s stylistic intention was not to describe the war in a realistic manner, but to reflect the romantic aura that for so many men gathered around the experience” (92). Jean Schwind is of the view that “Far from extolling Claude’s fulfillment on the battlefield, Cather insists that Claude dies doubly duped” (56). Merrill Maguire Skaggs (1990) saw a war novel of Willa Cather “bathed and saturated in irony” (40). Herman Lee (1989) dubbed the novel of Cather as “painful and unsatisfactory” (40). All these critics and the reviewers focus only on the war situation but in this chapter the focus is on the loss of self of Claude Wheeler due to transitive world culture.

The plot of the novel is not a romantic tale of romance and wonder but a story of frustration, not of fulfilment but of loss and death. Claude Wheeler is the hero of the novel; he is young and an idealist representative of the decline of the pioneering age. The pioneers have ravished the land but in the process they got dehumanized. Claude Wheeler is presented as a Nebraska farm boy; his father is severe and insensitive and his mother is understanding and sympathetic. He is sent to Lincoln College to become a religious minister though he aspires to join the University of Nebraska. The patriarchal hegemony of his severe father is the first stage of the psychological trajectory of Wheeler. He leaves the farm and goes to Lincoln to get higher education. He represents sensitive American youth having all the desires, strength and determination. Wheeler grows in a bewildering world anxious to enjoy love and happiness but the society is fast changing and the values are fast declining. The farming provides little enthusiasm to the second generation of the early settlers. The pioneers have spent many years

to cultivate the barren land but the development of science and technology has transformed the Nebraskan society. The young boys like Wheeler belonging to the second generation of the settlers get depressed and frustrated when they find that those who have worked in the construction business or in the real estate have grown very rich. They are rolling in wealth but the farmers remained backward and poor struggling for the basic necessities of life. The floods, drought, heavy snow and outbreak of diseases psychologically tortured the pioneers.

Materialism is the beast that devours the people who make money, not gardens and orchards. The novel is an indictment of the society which encourages people to own the machine and not the land. The dignity and chivalric courage vanishes in the younger generation represented by Wheeler. The entire life of Wheeler is a long journey for the quest of a meaningful life; his life is dedicated to search the real joy and happiness in the new world of Nebraska, He leaves Nebraska to find out the real meaning of life and this search continues and wherever he goes, his farming background goes with him. The novel is also an interesting case study of a farm boy who embraces his death to keep up his ideals. He is the son of a typical Midwestern family; his father sends him to Lincoln college to pursue a ministerial career against his wishes and aspirations. He has no courage to oppose the will of his father so in the early youth; his spirits are dampened by patriarchal hegemony. Wheeler thinks that he is a misfit in the traditional family of Nebraska; his father Mr. Wheeler is proud of his family, his farm and his ability.

Claude Wheeler belongs to the new generation as he has no inclination to the cultivation of farm. He feels depressed because all the people who have been

in business and construction have made millions of dollars but those who work on land remained poor and backward. He loves modernity, fashion, change, machine and technology. He wants to leave the agrarian narrow world and joins a University. Mrs. Wheeler has high hopes on Claude Wheeler who she thinks, would be a great scholar of religion, art and literature. Claude feels “very uncomfortable in Temple College” (Willa Cather, *One of Ours*, 31). Claude spends two years in the college but he is not satisfied with the methods of teaching. He expresses his disgust about the “professors that are not so much good. Most of them are just preachers who couldn’t make a living at preaching” (24). He desires to shift to the University but his mother and brother Bayliss oppose the idea and Claude Wheeler once again feels trapped in the old traditions and patriarchal set up. He remains lonely and isolated in the college but when he comes in contact with five Erlich boys, he realizes for the first time, the meaning of friendship. He suffers from the agrarian background; he is ashamed of his clothes, his country manners and unshapely large head. “He was exactly the sort of looking boy he didn’t want to be. He especially hated his head, -- so big that he had trouble in buying his hats, and uncompromisingly square in shape; a perfect block- head. His name was another source of humiliation. Claude : it was a “chump” name” (10). Claude Wheeler dislikes his own physical appearance, seeing his unattractive features. He also convinces himself that his name is clumsy and he belongs to the field boy neglected by society. His friends call him “Clod” and this ridiculous name irritates him. He lacks self-determination and confidence. Mrs. Erlich gives him the real love and affection and self- respect that he needed most. He comes back to the farm with no bright career and no future and this makes him depressed, sick and disillusioned. His father Mr.

Wheeler declares that his college education is of no use to him. He fails to get freedom from the narrow rural world and once again he is sent to the farm with his brother Bayliss. Claude is dissatisfied and feels disheartened as all hopes and dreams are shattered and his parents are responsible for his failures. He knows that farm is not his destiny and he is wasting his precious life on the farm. He makes progress by his hard work on the new land but the slightest mishap cuts deeply into his pride. He is disconnected with all; feels discontented and lonely and hopeless. Cather depicts his depression and frustration thus: "He was aware that his energy instead of accomplishing something was spent in resisting unalterable conditions, and in unravelling efforts to subdue his own nature. He had but one conviction that there was something splendid about life if he could but find it" (103). Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1931) says:

We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals, from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction, and finally from our relations to other men (123).

Claude Wheeler suffers anxiety and psychological pain because of his repeated failures in his projects. Family, parents and the farm land gives him psychological tortures since he is not cut out for the farming. He feels like an outsider in the agrarian community. His life is a long record of social and personal failures and his guilty consciousness makes him sick and depressed. His name means "lame"; he suffers from inferiority complex. His father Nat Wheeler is wealthy man of Nebraska who delights in embarrassment of Claude. Nat Wheeler

has poor opinion of Claude who submits to the oppressive will of his father. The first pages of the novel reveal that Claude is a loser. Claude finds himself in a stifling environment and he struggles in his entire life for some meaning of life and fulfilment of his ideals. His father Nat Wheeler is a great success as a pioneer; he possesses a huge tract of land and he lives like a king. He measures life by materialistic standards; he loves his son Bayliss who is materialistic and not an idealist like Claude Wheeler. He fails to see “beyond material measures” (10). Things that cannot be measured or weighed by money is meaningless for him. Claude lacks understanding with his father as he avoids his company and conversation with his father. Claude is dyspeptic, diffident and a neglected young man of the second generation of Frankfort community (9). Wheeler’s mother is a former teacher but she is timid and has no say in the family. Nat Wheeler is despotic and dominating and Mrs. Wheeler is helpless lacking the insight to advance Wheeler’s search for freedom. She teaches Claude that “one should learn, not think, and above all, one must not enquire all too far off the mark for Claude” (24). Claude doesn’t like to become timid and docile like his mother and try his faculties on a “yet unexplained world” (45). The first pages of the novel reveal that Claude Wheeler lives in the wrong place with the wrong people. In his early childhood, he couldn’t bear the sight of cutting down a tree by his father and prayed that “God would surly punish a man who could die”. Claude is a very sensitive child and can’t bear the cruelties of the world. He inflicted punishment on him and imposed tests of fire and cold on him by burning his own finger and running to school without his winter coat (27). Willa Cather gives a catalogue of failures of Claude Wheeler who emerges as a misfit in the mercantile society of Frankfort:

Claude is on his way back to Lincoln.... He has no friends or instructors whom he can regard with admiration, though the need to admire is just now uppermost in his nature. He is convinced that the people who might mean something to him will always misjudge him and pass him by. He is not so much afraid of loneliness as he is of accepting of cheap substitutes; of making excuses to himself for a teacher who flatters him of admiring a girl merely because she is accessible. He has a dread of easy compromises, and he is terribly afraid of being fooled (31).

This portrait of Claude is a poignant tale of a young farm boy who is compelled to live in a stifling environment where people are hypocrite and snobbish. The novel gives the psychological evidence of his prognosis. He has to restructure his present life and find a new meaning outside the agrarian society of Nebraska. He must discover a life that is more than “making money or spending it”. He already knows “if that is all, then life is not worth the trouble” (34). In his third year at a college near Lincoln, he comes in contact with the Erlichs who knew how to live...and spent their money on themselves instead of machines (39). Mrs. Erlich tells Claude that he belongs to the farm (89). Fate brings Claude back to run the family farm; he feels confused to explore whether the “land was made for man or man was created to work the land” (60). His father gives no direction to him. He represents a kind of Everyman suffering for his idealism and reacting against the stifling environment that makes him depressed. Claude is a sick protagonist in the grip of inner conflicts. He knows that no meaning is available to a misplaced man on the farm. He lacks faith in himself because he has no clear vision of what he wants. He experiences no golden

days, no glittering carpets, because it is futile to jump so hard at what “he does not really own” (70). Claude resents the slavish indignity of being a mere tool of his father. He is pitted against circumstances; he becomes moody, aggressive, restless and lonely because fulfilment is impossible for him. Cather has depicted Claude’s descent into an “agrarian hell, his life is stifled here on the farm” (87). Claude has no training and no ability to move “among the people he admires” (89).

Then Enid enters in his life to give more troubles than happiness. His romantic love affair begins away from home. Enid means “spotless purity” and he stands with Enid in “the bright sun to illuminate his freedom search” (106). Unfortunately Enid cannot give him what he seeks for himself. She appears as a spiritual apparition; she has grown in a family that lives apart. Her father is in the mill house, her mother in herself and her sister Caroline in China. She looks like a ghost “all spirit and no flesh” (108). La Capra also reinterprets the Freudian concept of the unconscious stating that the unconscious is the absence of an activity. La Capra writes, “The unconscious and the drives might be apprehended as active or generative absences. They may not be recovered as if they were losses or lacks” (58).

Enid doesn’t prove to be a true farm wife that Claude needs. She thinks “of all those millions who die in darkness” (109). Claude needs spiritual ideal but Enid is not concerned about his psychological turmoil. He expects moral and spiritual satisfaction from a woman. Claude becomes engaged to a girl he really doesn’t know. He lives in the false illusions that after marriage, he will be able to enjoy the real fruits of love and happiness. Unlike Freud and Lacan, Erikson

states that the unconscious can lead to personal recovery and creativity if it's treated timely otherwise it leads to vulnerability and total destruction of the psyche of a victim of trauma. Erikson records as:

In the unconscious ideas, lies much power for personal recovery and creative activity, which cultural institutions can augment with the healing factor of artistic or ritual form. But in these ideas also lies our greatest vulnerability and exploitability because no matter how rational we are, our unconscious seeks ways in which it can manifest itself (*Young Man Luther* 142).

Enid's trip to Hastings reveals how she leaves the country and goes to China to seek her own mission ignoring the comforts of Claude. She is portrayed as a white- antiseptic creature who brings alienation in the life of Claude. Claude-Enid romance further leads to his frustration. Enid hates farming; she repels Claude beyond the reach of fulfilment. His dreams are shattered; his last effort to get happiness in marriage ends in despair. She marries him in a mechanical routine without any love or serious attachment. Cather has described the honeymoon scene of Claude and Enid in the second half of the novel. Claude and Enid's honeymoon train moves into darkness; his wedding day ends without any consummation. His short marriage brings him more psychological tortures and his new awareness of the meaninglessness of life. His house of marriage becomes a sort of confinement for him. He is confident that "he will change her after marriage but in reality Enid is heartless, insensitive, uncaring and selfish. His spirit longs for freedom shrieking with fright like the battered bird that strains toward freedom's higher path" (152). Youth, loneliness and mental illness are the

main traits of the character of Claude. He suffers from traumatic experiences because of the insensitive and heartless nature of Enid. Zizek refers to an irretrievable damage caused by trauma when he quotes Freud and writes,

When the external violence grows too strong, we simply exit the psychic domain. Either the shock is re-integrated into a pre-existing libidinal frame or it destroys the psyche and nothing is left (294).

Claude's romance with Enid appears as a symbol of grace and hope in his depression. In the third Book of the novel entitled: "Sunrise", Cather depicts the ironical life of Claude; sunrise brings the dissolution of marriage and prepares the hero for final death and escape from the agrarian society and its culture forever. Gladys Farmer also fears that if Claude marries Enid he will become "a big machine with the springs broken inside" (135). Enid's father Mr. Royce also feels a kinship with Claude and tells him that he knew he would be sorry to hear that "the old wheel go, and that's Claude Wheeler" (129). Enid often comes in a car, and "car is a symbol of machine" and their train of honeymoon glides into the "summer darkness" (167). Enid's lack of human emotion, her love for the machines and materialism bring disaster in the life of Claude. He at the age of twenty three suffers in his marriage from a nagging "sense of emptiness, from a lack of meaning" (193). After the dissolution of marriage, Claude goes to France and joins war; he begins his life in "the world of machine" the images of the machine will be mainly military: "troop trains, troop ships, machine guns, automatic rifles, submarines and killing of people" (220).

Enid goes to China and Claude goes to war in France to fight the Germans

for the safety and freedom of France. Cather has described the scene of his washing naked in the horse- tank. He cleans the romantic dust of love and marriage with the farm water. He embraces the purest idealism and he emerges as a new man. When his wife goes to China, Claude is left alone and free to fight for a cause. He blames himself for the failures of life and becomes mentally sick. The dissolution of marriage provides him many insights into his own nature and urges him to ponder over the causes of his failures in life. He admits that his life is choking him and finally he takes the decision to go to the army. He closes up his farm house because he doesn't need a family temple. His attempt to salvage his life on the dehumanizing farm brings him untold psychological torments. His fall from the Paradise to hell is a touching part of the novel and a case study of the psychological pain of the farm boy belonging to the second generation of the pioneers. He tries his best to obliterate his thoughts of Enid and the farm, the war enters his consciousness and becomes his last venture. His power of vision turns "inward upon scenes and events wholly imaginary yet" (204).

In the last chapter "The Voyage of the Anchises", Willa Cather depicts the last journey of Claude Wheeler to end his frustration and despair of life. At the time of his death; "He was not bleeding very much. He smiled at them as if he were going to speak, but there was a weak blankness in his eyes." Freud observes that death is the meaning of life and all our struggles end with death:

Our habit is to lay stress on the fortuitous causation of the death- accident, disease, infection, advanced age, in this way we betray an effort to reduce death from a necessity to a chance event. A number of simultaneous deaths strikes us something extremely terrible. To the actual person who

has died we accept a special attitude, something almost like admiration for someone who has accomplished very difficult task (Our Attitude Towards Death, 2).

In book four, his journey to the war becomes death by water and an end of his idealism; his departure from the farm world repeats the old story of youth “sailing away to die for an idea” (235). “The symbolism of the epidemic intensifies the conditions of Claude’s perilous voyage; his sickness ending into death” (263). The story of Claude’s life is a poignant tale of a frustrated youth struggling for peace and happiness in a world of money culture; machine and materialism. His death is viewed by the critics as “beginning over again” (347); his conscious ascent from rebirth to transformation. His life is a tragic tale of the death of a farm boy and symbolizing the end of the age of innocence and farming romance and the beginning of the machine age and materialism as Claude sees “a ruined land, a dead, nerveless country side, sunk in quiet and dejection” (309). Willa Cather gives the message that idealists like Claude live in depression and frustration and die like forgotten heroes.

To conclude, Willa Cather’s novels *A Lost Lady* and *One of Ours* belong to the age of transition; the decline of the age and the conflict between the machine and money; capitalism and bourgeoisie is depicted through the characters of Captain Forrester, his young and charming wife Marian Forrester and Claude Wheeler. These characters become the victims of capitalistic forces. The fall, stroke and the death of Captain Forrester symbolize the end of the age of pioneers and the loss of self. Marian Forrester symbolizes the end of the age of innocence as all the important episodes of the novel are connected with her

loss of self and her traumatic experiences. In the novel, *One of Ours* (1922), Claude Wheeler depicts the psychological disorders and the traumatic experiences which led to his loss of self. He struggles to survive in the American community but all his dreams are shattered first by his father and then his wife leaves him. In desperation, he joins the army and is killed. Thus both the novels deal with the loss of self of the characters which led to their death.

Chapter – 4

Socio-Cultural Turbulence and Psyche

Willa Cather has depicted the socio-cultural and historical forces of the transitional period when the values were fast declining and the pioneers who had struggled to build railways and transports in America experienced alienation. They suffered psychologically and it had a great impact on the psyche of the pioneers. Some of the pioneers were able to survive through these psychological problems but some were not able to do so and became victims of the changing socio-cultural situation. In this chapter, Antonia, Jim Burden and Professor Godfrey will be studied to bring out the impact of changing scenario on their psyche. Willa Cather's novel *My Antonia* is a true reflection of the culture of the pioneers of Nebraska. The novel is regarded as the masterpiece by the critics and the reviewers of Willa Cather. Critics appreciated Cather who used autobiographical material in the creation of *My Antonia* (1918). The editor of *New York Sun* commented that the novel is a "great gift of Willa Cather documenting the cultural and social history of the people of Nebraska". O'Connor admired the novel for its vivid descriptive passages because they are "poetic and excite the imagination" (86). H.L. Mencken claimed that the "novel shows an earnest striving toward...free and dignified self-expression...high artistic conscience and a civilized point of view" (87). The plot of *My Antonia* reveals the story of the friendship between Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda. The novel is replete with the touching scenes of love, loss, fear, tragedy, death and suicide. Blanche Gelfant and Sharon O'Brien opine that *My Antonia* is nostalgic in tone and it is the main cause of depressing atmosphere of the novel.

Jim values his relationship with Antonia because in Jim's mind, she represents the West and its fruitful potential. Willa Cather has documented the changing environment and cultural transformation in America and the plight of the pioneers in her novels. Willa Cather was really shocked to witness the deforestation and urbanization in America. Thomas Hardy in the Victorian era was deeply hurt by the decline of natural beauty, with the coming of industry in England. Willa Cather experienced the same sense of loss as the greenery in Virginia was declining. She wrote- Nebraska was no longer beautiful as the industrial revolution in America was expanding and creating problems for the farmers and cultivators. Cathy Caruth suggests:

That in a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 11).

The familiar, green, closed in Virginia country side was replaced by "landscape of shaggy red grass not a country but the material out of which countries are made" (Willa Cather, *My Antonia* 79). This uprooting gave a cultural shock to Willa Cather and shaped her attitude and perception: "I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction" (11). Jim's narrative traces the spirit of rejection and loss overwhelming Mr. Shimerda, Cutter and Antonia. This study explores the multiple presentation of the world of loss. Margaret Homans states that "Willa Cather's novel is founded on the myth that sorrowfully language and culture

depend on the death or absence of the mother and on the quest for substitutes for her” (4).

This novel presents the atmosphere of dissonance and terror. The first section of the novel ends with a description of a violent summer scene. Jim is shocked to observe drastic change in the landscape: “the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet-iron” (Cather 19). This passage describes about the area of the sky which was “chequered with black thunderheads...the mottled part of the sky was like marble pavement, like the quay of some splendid seacoast city, doomed to destruction” (20). The imagery is threatening implying impending doom. Willa Cather has described the darkness, death, suicide and depression of the characters through the nature images, such as cold, shadows, reptiles, light of the winter sunset and the dark clouds hovering on the landscape. Willa Cather articulates the atmosphere of darkness, death and despair through the images of nature:

On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance 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 molten red. There it was, heroic in size, picture writing on the sun (Cather 14).

In her novel *My Antonia*, Cather symbolizes the soil and spirit of the Middle West of America after the World War I. When Jim Burden, the main narrator of the story arrives in Virginia, he is driven to the ranch under an

unfamiliar sky, across a land. Jim feels so much upset, lost and uprooted that he has no words to explain the momentum of change and transformation of the city and the landscape. He expresses his anguish: "Between the earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night; here, I felt what would be" (Cather 8). David Daiches (1962) believes that Jim's position raises problems which "Willa Cather is never able to resolve" (37). E.K. Brown (1953) in his perceptive study opines that Jim's relations with Antonia Shimerda are "a source of dissonance; mental chaos and bafflement" (204). The dark shadows, the tragic loss of peace and the mood of tragedy and despair are the main elements of the novel *My Antonia*. Willa Cather dramatizes the agony and frustration of the pioneers who lost their innocence in their desperate struggles in the alien land. In a newspaper interview, Cather stated that there was drastic change in life, land and in landscape. The new landscape had evoked a sense of "erasure of personality" (Kingdom 48). H.L. Mencken observed that Cather's *My Antonia* is the most accomplished work of art depicting the alienation, struggle for survival of the characters. Cather has depicted the mood of depression and despair afflicting Jim Burden and Antonia. In this chapter, the sufferings and struggles of Antonia, the suicide of her father Shimerda is investigated relying on the theories of Sigmund Freud. Willa Cather has used the elements of realism as Mencken comments: "I knew of no novel that makes the remote folk of the Western priorities more real and I know of none that makes them seem better worth knowing" (8). In an interview with Willa Cather, Latrobe Carroll asked her from where she got the impulse to depict the tragic struggles of his characters. Willa Cather responded thus:

I grew fond of some of the immigrants, I used to think them underrated and wanted to explain them to their neighbors. Their stories used to go round and round in my head at night. This was, with me, the initial impulse as I had watched their struggles and the tragedies I felt extremely sad and these experiences became a part of my fiction (123).

Jim Burden is a ten year old orphan. Antonia Shimerda belongs to the family of the pioneers migrated from Europe. The novel is structured around five sections and Cather uses her thematic issues, memory and the value of the past to determine the growth of the life of her characters. Book I and II deal with the period of Jim's boyhood and this part constitutes half of the novel. In Book III to V, Cather describes the major social and cultural issues and the challenges faced by the characters. In this section Jim and Antonia relationship is fully developed to "the process of memory-making" (Lee 139). In Book III, Jim leaves Black Hawk to acquire experience of the world beyond his sheltered borders. He leaves his past to move into the future and returns in Book IV and is surprised to find change in environment and in the behaviour of Antonia. Jim spends twenty years struggling to understand the changes of the Nebraska society but he understands the meaning and importance of change in the Book V when he visits Antonia again. The structure of the plot of *My Antonia* is tightly woven and central to the plot are the thematic issues and the mood of despair of the characters since life and culture is changing very fast. The novel is set in a period of rapid cultural change in America and the plot of *My Antonia* is elegiac in tone depicting the struggles of the pioneers against the forces of nature; the storms and the blizzards and the gradual decline of values of the pioneers. In the novel, Shimerda is seen

through the eyes of Jim. Both Jim and Shimerda explore a new world and in their journey suffer anguish, frustration and loss of love. Willa Cather has depicted the heartrending tragedy of Mr. Shimerda in the first section of the novel. He feels the real burden of the social change and is struck to the core by the meaninglessness of his life. He feels that there is a hole in his life; he feels a sense of emptiness, irony and absurdity. He feels depressed as the challenges of the prairie land cultivation make him sick and decadent. He is overwhelmed by the depression and kills himself with a shotgun. He kills himself because he cannot confront the sufferings of his family. Being a farmer, he is an outsider in the American land and it seems to him that he is the individual thrown into a strange world, there is no escape from the terrors of life. He becomes self-conscious of his failure. For Freud, 'the unconscious' is a systematic part of mind like the other "psychic co-systems" (114) namely 'the conscious' and 'the preconscious'. The unconscious mind holds repressed feelings, hidden perceptions, concealed phobias, automatic reactions, blocked memories, thoughts, and desires that impact human behaviour. Suicide of Mr. Shimerda plays an important role in Jim's perception of the prairie and himself. Mr. Shimerda committed suicide and his grave; "the little island of tall red grass becomes a constant reminder of the terror in his life". Jim uses this "grave as a basis by which to measure change"(Cather 57). Shelly Saposnik-Noire argues that "Mr. Shimerda sacrifices his life to nature taking with him a part of Antonia but freeing her to undergo her own rebirth in nature, in the spring of the Nebraskan prairie" (174). Joseph Urgo and Merrill Maguire Skaggs in their book *In Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather* have traced the terror-laden events in the novel which hamper the growth of characters and intensify the dark and

depressing atmosphere of the novel. In their words: “there are the few who succumb to terror, but there are many who construct lives without succumbing to existential terror; exemplary characters who live in cognizance of the closeness of death, who force life from terror” (19). Jim is a foreigner but he makes serious efforts to immerse in the prairie landscape and for this assimilation he has to undergo drastic changes. The scene of the suicide of Mr. Shimerda is depicted to intensify the atmosphere of loss, tragedy and darkness. Mr. Shimerda appears to take place of the transfigured hero, the plough is again the tool of men in their “littleness” and the worst affected is Jim who is all the time, day and night is haunted by the dead body of Mr. Shimerda and his grave. Cathy Caruth defines trauma:

As direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury or other threat to one’s physical integrity or witnessing an event that involves death injury or a threat to the physical integrity of another person or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat (*Unclaimed Experiences* 31).

Jim is an American migrant from the Blue Ridge Mountains and he looks at the new landscape with wonder and terror. The stark contrast between the prairie landscape and what Jim knows, dislocates his subjectivity. He uses his open mind to “re-establish his new relations allowing himself to be something that lie under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, thereby becoming part of something entire; the vast relationships between himself and surrounding territories” (12). Jim recalls: “I had been told that ours was the only wooden house west of Black Hawk...our neighbours lived in sod houses and dugouts”

(10). Jim is the first man to diagnose the symptoms of depression in Mr. Shimerda arguing that he shouldn't have migrated. Jim observes the sullen and negative attitude of Mr. Shimerda as he goes on to say:

I suppose, in the crowded clutter of their cave, the old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left so far behind...His face had a look of weariness and pleasure like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain (44).

Jim's expresses his depression: "I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country" (50). It is pertinent to note that Jim also struggles with an urge toward suicide in the novel. Jim even wishes he had died as a child: when he and Antonia meet as adults near Mr. Shimerda's grave Jim feels "the old pull of the earth which makes him wish he could be a little boy again and that my way could end there" (207). He gathers darkness and leaves the landscape to study law. At college, away from home and Antonia, Jim finds that:

Whenever my consciousness was quickened, all those early friends were quickened within it, and in some strange way, they accompanied me through all my new experiences. They were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how (196).

Jim is leading a traumatic life as all the time his old memories of

Nebraska prairie haunt him but he has to confront the reality being a law student at Harvard. He has been feeling restless and depressed for twenty years because he cannot forget the best days of his life spent in the company of Antonia. The problem with Jim is that he fails to articulate his love for Antonia and remains confused and bewildered watching all the events like an ignorant spectator. Gelfant reads Jim's inaccurate vision of the past as evidence of his traumatized sexuality. Jim fantasizes cultivation and eventual blossoming of the raw and wild into something prosperous and fecund. For Jim, the harvest is the object of interest. This is the case with the hired girls, including Antonia. She loses Jim's interest when she is seemingly doomed to remain a drudge on her brother's farm raising an illegitimate child. She regains his attention as a successful and productive matriarch, epitomizing the change from something fallow into something productive. While Antonia's case is the most important to Jim, he makes the same assertion about all the hired girls: "I always knew I should live long enough to see my country girls come into their own and I have. To-day the best that a harassed Black Hawk merchant can hope for is to sell".

At the university in Lincoln, he comes in contact with a girl Lena Lingard, one of the hired girls. During these days When Jim comes to know about the marriage of Antonia, he feels disturbed at the college, he responds to this news, saying: "I think I'd better go home and look after Antonia" as if she were a child and it was his duty to look after her" (Cather 300). After the marriage, Jim bitterly resents her actions and declares that "I could not forgive her" but Antonia doesn't know what she has done to hurt him. Jim's feelings are unclear to anyone "without his sense of mutual destiny and patronage" (221). Jim fails to establish

his link with Antonia as “sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister” (237). In frustration, Jim abandons both Nebraska and Antonia and goes to Harvard for higher studies in Law. It is only when Lena Lingard coaxed Jim with “a cheerful account” of Antonia’s thriving family life” that “Jim returns to see her after twenty years in the West ”(242). Jim stays away from “a fear of finding her aged and broken; I really dreaded it. In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again” (241). Jim provides a blatant clue to the fallacy of his vision, conflating his memories with illusions. He moves on unaware of the irony in his insistence on the accuracy of his memory and openly prefers his illusions and memories to realities. Jim transforms his fantasies and illusions into cherished past realities. As a young man living in Lincoln, Jim’s old dream about Lena coming across the harvest field...seemed to me like the memory of an actual experience. It floated before me on the page like a picture, and underneath it stood the mournful line: “*Optima dies...prima fugit*” (202). This scene is key to understand the pervasive vogue of nostalgia, depression and frustration in the novel. Jim longs for a past that never was, for a “reality” imagined through wishful thinking about Lena and Antonia and “girls like them without which there would be no poetry in the world” (202). When Jim meets Antonia, he observes her totally transformed and she appears to him a different woman. He says: “It always is to meet people after long years, especially if they have lived as much and as hard as this woman had” (244). The scene of his meeting with Antonia after twenty years is very touching and romantic shattering all his illusions as “he stares at her silently” (244). Jim is

confronted with the reality for the first time as “he confronted her, the changes grew less apparent to him and Antonia returns in the full vigour of her personality” (244). Jim even insists that twenty years of marriage and motherhood have not altered Antonia in Jim’s view, and Antonia’s children “seemed to be upon very much the same terms with Antonia as Jim and the Harling children had been so many years before and her marriage is nothing more than a partnership of easy friend lines, touched with humour” (262). In his mood of frustration and nostalgia, he dictates the roles of others. He prefers static memories to evolving people and their roles.

Jim having completed his undergraduate degree returns to Black Hawk for a summer holiday prior to entering law school. He reconnects his relationship with Antonia to revive his lost past because the old memories are a safety valve for him to get released from the tensions and traumas of life. Twenty years after he finds Antonia married to another Bohemian immigrant Anton Cuzack and the mother of eleven children. He spends two days with her as a member of her family and leaves her seeing in her eyes an emptiness and listlessness. Freud wrote his essay entitled *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: A Preliminary Communication—A Lecture*, and explored all the main elements and symptoms of hysteria. Freud opines that “every case of hysteria can be looked upon as traumatic hysteria in the sense of implying a psychological trauma” (Freud, *Freud – Complete Works* 34). He leaves her and his entire life is spent in erasing the old memories of his life. Jim remembers the day when Antonia has offered him the ring. He has refused the ring: “I didn’t want her ring and I felt there was something reckless and extravagant without her wishing to give it away

to a boy she had never seen before” (3).

The novel is a tragic tale of a prairie woman whose entire life is spent in saving the land and in her futile and fruitless hunt for money and material prosperity. Antonia has no social life and no source of entertainment; she leads a dull and boring life exposed to the blizzards, the droughts, the snakes, the grasshoppers and fires. Antonia compares her life situation with Jim's: "If I live here, like you that is different. Things will be easy for you, But they will be hard for us" (116). Antonia shares the secret of her father's life with Jim and tells him that the marriage between the two has been a result of an unplanned pregnancy that created scandal in the neighbourhood: "He did not have to marry my mother, he lived in his mother's house, and she was a poor girl come in to do the work" (115). Antonia tells Jim: "My mamenka make him come. All the time she say: "America big country; much money, much land for boys. Much husband for my girls" (45). After the burial of Mr. Shimerda, Jim Burden sees Antonia for the first time, she rushes toward him with her impetuous cry: "It seemed to me that I could feel her heart breaking" (115). Jim notices that "Antonia is wearing the boots of her father so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap" (80). She informs Jim that "she would work like mans" and made "this land one good farm" (81). She knows that it is not simple for a woman to work like a man but she is helpless and has no choice. All her dreams and romantic hopes are shattered and she assumes a nihilistic attitude toward life. Randall observes that with the death of Mr. Shimerda, the family begins to crumble which is best reflected in the changing mood and attitude of Antonia. In the essay 'Our Attitude towards Death', Sigmund Freud avers that:

When we lose our loved ones, we bury our hopes, our wishes, and our desires with the dead. We are inconsolable and refuse to replace our loss. This attitude of ours towards death exerts a powerful influence upon our lives. Life becomes impoverished and loses its interest. Life becomes hollow and empty (180).

The tragic death of Mr. Shimerda is a great setback shattering her dreams and peace of mind. She is left alone to struggle for survival and to work on the land alone. She seeks help from Jim who teaches her English and tries to build confidence in her and Antonia in turn shares her Bohemian tales. For Jim, Antonia merely had to “look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last” (342) but this life pure and innocent like earth ends abruptly for Antonia with the death of her father. Jim gradually sees little of Antonia for “she was out in the fields from sunup until sundown...with her plough handlers, clucking to her team...wading on down the furrow, making me feel that she was all grown up and had no time for me” (82). Cather gives the image of Antonia interacting with the wildlife drifting lazily “through the magical light of the late afternoon” (28) and she is seen tilling the land for her survival and to save the family from starvation and death. Antonia struggles to escape from the trauma of her father’s death wearing the clothes of her father and forcing herself to work like a man. She is obsessed to fulfil the legacy of her father. Willa Cather depicts the crude image of Antonia thus:

Nowadays Tony could talk of nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift and endure. She was too proud of her strength. I knew, too, that Ambrosch put upon her some chores a girl ought not to do, and

that the farm-hands around the country joked in a nasty way about it. (84)

Antonia feels the loss of her father and spends the days in the dry and open fields recollecting the sweet memories of her father. She experiences the traumatic turmoil and inner void as she is left alone to fight and struggle in the hard world. Antonia is always haunted by the tragic loss of her father because she has been deeply attached with him.

Socio-cultural situations have a great impact on the psyche of the characters. In this novel, all the characters are suffering from changing situations in one way or the other. The three suicides in the plot of the novel symbolize the theme of death and destruction, despair and frustration in the new world of America after the World War

1. Antonia and Jim are greatly haunted by the past memories of suicide of Mr. Shimerda and desertion of Pavel and Peter. They keep on visiting Mr. Shimerda's grave on the roadside and also feel moved by the story told by Pavel. Pavel and Peter are once returning from a marriage party and get attacked by a pack of wolves. All the members of the marriage party become the victims of wolves except Pavel and Peter and their sleigh in which they are carrying the bride and the groom. When they see the wolves coming near to them, they throw the newly married couple to lighten the burden of the carriage and speed up from there. They save themselves but can never come out of the haunting memories of that tragic scene. Pavel not being able to bear the shock of the shocking incident, gets sick and dies. Peter left alone with this load of burden leaves the place forever in his desperate try to forget the ever torturing event. The suicide of Wick Cutter is another tragic episode in the novel depicting the atmosphere of chaos, disorder,

uncertainty of life and the challenges offered by the new age. Cutter is the villain of the novel who plots to kill his wife and attempts to rape Antonia and to accumulate money by ruining people like Russian Peter. Jim knows that he is not a good person but Cutter manipulates the life of others. Cutter designs his murder-suicide plot to assert his will even after his death. When Antonia's son Rudolph tells the story of Cutter's suicide, he asks: "Did you ever hear of anybody else that killed himself for spite, Mr. Burden?" (233). Cutter's suicide symbolizes the death wish of Jim who has repressed his sexual urges for so many years. Cutter is the alter ego of Jim who has failed to express his love for Antonia. The story of Cutter's suicide-murder illustrates the spitefulness of suicide. Jim is very much disturbed as the memories of Mr. Shimerda's suicide gets fresh in his mind. Jim's ambivalent desire for death has followed him through the novel like his shadow on the prairie. In the first section of the novel, Jim talks of the erasure of identity, as "he dissolves into or is blotted out by the landscape" (14). Jim feels that death is the only way he ever attains the pleasure of selflessness. When he looks at the dead boy of Mr. Shimerda, he feels that death can also be a return to the comfort of the womb. He sees Mr. Shimerda lying in the coffin in a fatal position "on his side with his knees drawn up" (75). Jim has romanticized death, he is visibly disturbed by the three suicides in the novel. No wonder, the suicide scenes go deep into his memory and haunt him day and night. Willa Cather describes the dead body of Mr. Shimerda thus:

His body was draped in a black shawl, and his head was bandaged in black muslin, like a mummy's; one of his long shapely hands lay out on the black cloth; that was all one could see of him. (76).

Jim is forty when he reunites with Antonia, married and settled as a lawyer in New York. Jim has come back to re-establish his friendship with Antonia before joining law school at Harvard. He has become a successful professional but with a void. Antonia has suffered, has lost her innocence, has borne an illegitimate daughter and has returned to the family farm. Jim leads a different life and Antonia leads a different life; their paths are divergent and will continue to diverge till death but both are linked with the sense of loss, depression and frustration and both express a wish to die to escape from the harsh realities of human existence. In a passage filled with longing and nostalgia, they walk in the fields and he tells her: "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister-anything that a woman can be to a man" (321). In *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy cries to Nelly Dean: "Nelly, I am Heathcliff-he's always, always in my mind" (Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Height* 321). Jim tells Antonia: "You really are a part of me....The idea of you is a part of me. The idea of you is a part of my mind" (321). Antonia needs him and feels lonely and alienated throughout her life being haunted by the millions of sweet memories. Jim tells her in a depressing tone that "We met like the people in the old song, in silence, if not in tears" (14). Once while walking in the fields, Jim tells Antonia that he'd like to have her as a mother, a sister, a sweetheart, or a wife creating confusion and expressing his ambiguity. Blanche Gelfant has discussed in detail the sexual repression of Jim and his evasions in the whole plot of the novel. He keeps on deferring his proposal of marriage and goes on showing his compassion and kindness. In fact, he is incapacitated by an infinite and morbid fear of sexuality as he backs away from any real chance to become involved with a woman. Jim frankly confesses that "she is a part of my mind, they walk home for

the last time across the fields.” Willa Cather gives the image of sunset:

The sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cart-wheel, pale sliver and streaked with rose color, thin as a bubble or a ghost moon. For five, perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world. (322)

Jim for the last time calls “my Antonia” and he belongs to the world of death. He remains childless; trapped in a sterile and unloving marriage. He is a practitioner of law that helps the railroads develop in the Mid West but in reality throughout the novel Jim is something like the shadows in Hades as the *Odyssey* describes.

Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* is a case study of alienation and decline of idealism. The novel gives a poignant story of an energetic professor who suffers because of the indifference of the family, wife and children. The plot of the novel *The Professor’s House* reflects a post-war sense of alienation and futility of life; Cather has portrayed the fragmented life of St. Peter who is haunted by old memories stuck in his old attic. The main issue running through the plot is the story of Tom Outland who has a different experience of society and civilization. There is a third world represented by Lillian; the wife of St. Peter and his daughters who are crazy to make fast money. Professor St. Peter is idealistic who wants to transform the world by his new historicity and Tom Outland is the war victim like Claude Wheeler of *One of Ours*. The main plot of the novel *The Professor’s House* is focused on archaeology and interpretation of the artefacts from the dead past. The archaeological dig in the Blue Mesa forms

the nucleus of the novel and this dig involves “the mythical journey of Tom Outland. Both Tom Outland and St. Peter pursue adventures in cultural and personal recollection driven to make “that perilous journey down through the human house” (27). Cather has followed the regressive scheme of plot of organization and the focus of the novelist is to depict the psychological anguish of both the main characters. Professor St. Peter is caught in the ambiguity of life and prefers withdrawal from the domestic and social life. Tom in his adventurous spirit give his life in his quest for idealistic glory and heroism. Willa Cather presents Professor Godfrey thus:

He had a long brown face, with an oval chin over which he wore a close trimmed Van-Dyke, like a tuft of shiny black fur. With this silky, very black hair, he had a tawny skin with gold light in it, a hawk nose, and hawk like eyes-brown and gold and green. They were set in ample cavities, with plenty of room to move about, under thick curly, black eyebrows that turned up sharply at the outer ends, like military moustaches (Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* 2).

Willa Cather gives the metaphor of an old house to depict the hollowness of St. Peter. He has bought a new house for the family but is reluctant to move into a new house. He insists to live in his old dilapidated house for he cannot escape the haunting old memories. The cracks in his psyche are visible as Cather describes the image of a ruined building. St. Peter loves his wife Lillian and daughters who live in a material world and don't recognize the idealistic ideas of St. Peter. They are the main source of his psychological anguish. Willa Cather has dramatized the clash between idealism and materialism in this novel. His

daughter Kitty and Rosamond are given to consumer greed and this is the major cause of frustration and distress of St. Peter. He finds himself misfit as the environment stifles his psyche. Lillian, his wife too has shifted her attention to her son-in law. As the novel progresses, the detachment of the Professor becomes a source of his loss of self and brings emptiness and disintegration in his life. Professor St. Peter gives his heart to his old historical project attempting the mnemonic recovery of his earliest self. Willa Cather describes the apathy of the people for research and idealism. In modern industrial and material America, research and idealism have no place. St. Peter is virtually worn out and is leading a lonely and isolated life because common people have no interest in research and idealism. The novel depicts the process of gradual disintegration of the self of St. Peter. He is on the verge of death as he has lost all charm of life. His wife Lillian and the daughters have no interest in the research project of St. Peter. They are lost in getting and spending of money and enjoying the luxuries of life. Tom is another idealist; a cowboy and a budding archaeologist lost in collecting the Blue Mesa's artefacts Tom is greatly excited on his first discovery of the old relics:

There is something stirring about finding evidences of human labour and care in the soil of an empty country. It comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day (194).

Tom's first daring adventure is crossing into the Blue Mesa serving for his renovative purpose; he is excited and thrilled transporting him into a new world of romance and wonder, adventure and creation and from an incoherent

life to a whole life as he observes:

I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual amber, guarded by the cliffs and the river and the desert (201).

Cathy Caruth says: “Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature

. . . the way it was precisely not known in the first instance . . . returns to haunt the survivor later on” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). Willa Cather’s novel *The Professor’s House* (1925) is focused on the themes of depression, alienation and loss of self. Willa Cather describes the decay of culture of America. The American civilization was considered as a Garden of Eden by the pioneers but after the World War I, it has turned into a “land of the Ashes”. The critics observe that the novel is a religious allegory and the name of Godfrey is religious. Willa Cather imitates Hawthorne and

T. S. Eliot in employing the mythic method; the two modern methods available to her are the myth of the American Dream and the Christian myth of salvation. In her novel *The Professor’s House*, St. Peter progresses backward. Tom Outland is dramatized as Christ figure. Professor St. Peter belongs to the decadent society of America. Both feel that “A work-room should be like an old shoe; no matter how shabby, it’s better than a new one.” (13). The novel depicts the inner turbulent world of Professor Godfrey who is haunted by the activities of his youth and his relationship with his student Tom Outland. Tom Outland and St. Peter’s relationship forms the core of the novel. Tom is excited to discover the old

artefacts: “There is something about finding evidences of human labor and care in the soil of an empty country. It comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day” (194). Tom’s exploration of the Blue Mesa symbolizes a religious journey; it leads him from the rescue of drunken New Mexican gambling bar to the tide of mesa. Tom observes thus:

Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co- ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it a great happiness. It was possession. For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion (250).

Tom is an orphan and his name defines the myth of a wanderer. He has read *Robison Crusoe* and wanted to “see and touch everything, like home-sick they come home” (240). Cather has presented two stories, one linked with young Tom Outland and his discovery of the Blue Mesa and the other with the mundane events that comprise the lives of the St. Peter’s family. The plot is divided into three parts beginning with Godfrey who is an author and professor struggling with grief, conflict and change within his family after the tragic death of his beloved student Tom Outland. He was the fiancé of his daughter and his death gave a severe blow to him. The events of the novel are linked with his arrival in the house where he has written a series of novels. Cather took many years to complete this novel. The plot begins with Godfrey and his wife moving to a new house, which stirs up old memories for Godfrey. He makes efforts to preserve some elements of his old life. Godfrey has two married daughters and an empty home. The opening of the novel presents Godfrey who is deeply depressed and

is in the midst of crisis of life expressing his anguish. A traumatized individual is often haunted by the past and becomes sick because of intrusive memories. A past event repeatedly disturbs him as it shifts back and forth in time and place and in such circumstances the subject cannot realize the difference between reality and fantasy. In “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis”, Freud (1917) defines the concept of psychological reality in which fantasy and reality are fixed. St. Peter realizes the discrepancy between the freedom of youth and the entanglement of the family. Godfrey is a professor at Hamilton, a small Midwestern college. The first part of the novel describes the loss of Tom Outland during the World War 1. Tom has been engaged with his daughter; he has developed a patent for a new type of plane engine that would revolutionize air travel. Tom was killed and left his patents to Rosamond who married another man Louie Marcellus. Professor Godfrey is deeply touched by the tragic death of his best student and throughout his life, he was haunted by the loss of Tom Outland. Freud defines “Mourning as the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, [or] an ideal. . .” (“Mourning,”

General Selection 125).

Louie develops Tom’s engine and sells it for an enormous amount of money. Professor Godfrey hates his daughter Rosamond who has betrayed and insulted the deceased Tom. Willa Cather gives the images of death and darkness in the very first chapter; he looks at “the dismantled house” “slanting floor” and “sagging steps.” Godfrey has developed nihilistic attitude towards life as he finds life futile and all the struggles ending in despair. He recollects his past and feels

depressed as he walks about the “empty, echoing room” (Cather 1). Freud in his essay *Our Attitude Towards Death* observes thus:

Our habit is to lay stress on the fortuitous causation of the death- accident, disease, infection, advanced age; in this way we betray an effort to reduce from a necessity to a chance event (290).

Professor Godfrey feels smothered by marriage than Marian Forrester of *A Lost Lady*. Marriage and family are presented as threats in this novel and Professor Godfrey suffers the loss of self because of his family and his wife. Willa Cather once wrote in *On Writing* that “the sweetness and anguish of our relationships; the “struggle between self and community are not down in the list of subjects from which the conventional novelist works” (*On Writing* 110). Professor Godfrey expresses his anguish thus:

His career, his wife, were not his life at all, but a chain of events which has happened to him. All these things had nothing to do with the person he was in the beginning...One thing led to another and one development brought on another, and the design of his life had been the work of this secondary social man, the lover. It had been shaped by all the penalties and responsibilities of being and having been a lover (Cather 240).

Godfrey is a victim of cultural regression and decline of idealism. He feels depressed because he has lost the meaning of life. He has made huge money through his writing career but even the he feels disillusioned. Willa Cather has depicted the inner void of Godfrey. He is all the time mentally disturbed and feels that he has lost something. There was time when he was full of fire and

enthusiasm but all is lost and he considers his wife, and family the main villains of his life. Family and society have given him psychological tortures; he feels disillusioned by the forces of change and transformation of culture. Professor's middle-aged crisis is related with his weariness of the trivial and petty materialism of his family. He rejects the greedy world being an idealist and a genuine researcher. His alienation expresses itself in a sense of rejection and with the feelings of "fallen out" as Cather says: "Fallen out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family" (275). The social relations mean his warring and greedy daughters; inflexible wife; scheming colleagues of the university full of professional jealousy and common students who call him Mephistopheles. The world "presented the most unsympathetic surface imaginable....It was a dead, opaque, lumpy solidly...no matter how often you bumped up against that torso, you could never believe that contact with it would be as bad as it was" (18). His journey is internal and mental and his memories are conscious that haunt him day and night. He recollects his past thus:

You work like the devil and think you're getting on, and suddenly you discover that you've only been getting yourself tied up. A million details drink you dry. Your life keeps going for things you don't want and all the while you are being built alive into a social structure you don't care a rap about (10).

Four women dominate Godfrey's life. Lillian- his wife, Rosamond and Kathleen- his daughters are the women who give him psychological anguish and Augusta is one who helps him in coming out of psychological anguish. Professor

Godfrey is a dual personality and is caught in the whirlpool of doubt and despair. He is unreliable narrator as he suffers from disorientation of mind. Willa Cather gives explanation of the disintegrating images symbolizing chaos in the life of Professor St. Peter:

In my book, I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things' American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies-until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behavior (32).

The important image is of "stifling atmosphere" in which Professor Godfrey is living. He is physically impotent and immobile and this is described through the description of the old house which is "almost as ugly as it is possible for a house to be" (3). He hesitates to experience the "unpleasant effects of change" (7) related to the move. He insists to remain in the same old and shabby house expressing his disgusting behaviour. St. Peter has no physical strength to move out of his house and he is the least movable person in the novel and Willa Cather describes his old house decaying; the house is "almost as ugly as it is possible for a house to be" (Cather 3). St. Peter is reluctant to experience the "unpleasant effects of change" (7) related to his movements. The desire of the professor is so strong that he wishes to remain in the same place and he loses the potential to move out anywhere. The major cause of his immobility is his harrowing memories of the old house and his physical inertia. Cather describes his physical inertia and lack of movement thus:

St. Peter opts to be alone in the old. He remembers the holidays spent in the old house: When he was writing his best, he was conscious of pretty little girls in fresh dresses of flowers and greens in the comfortable, shabby sitting room of his wife's good looks and taste even of a better dinner than usual under preparation downstairs (85).

St. Peter and Lillian relationship forms the core of the novel. Lillian is full of prejudices as she dislikes his relationship with his student Tom Outland. She is beautiful and an impressive personality and St. Peter comes under her influence. He has been really enchanted when he comes under her contact for the first time. Cather describes the meeting of both thus: "interesting mind...a richly endowed nature that responded strongly to life and art....Before his marriage, and for years afterward, Lillian's prejudices, her divinations about people and art were the most interesting things in St. Peter's life" (38).

Willa Cather discusses the role of money culture and its impact on the individuals of the novel. Willa Cather belongs to the transitional era when America was growing by leaps and bounds. The values of the old pioneers were fast declining and the values of the American Dream collapsed. Now there was a hunt and craze for money and each American was hunting for dollars. Georg Simmel in his book *The Philosophy of Money* avers that money dehumanizes the people. Godfrey loves his daughters from the core of his heart but they give their heart to money. They are the product of the new consumerist culture, Cather was scornful of. Both the daughters are absorbed in making money and St. Peter is extremely upset to know their passion for money. He hates money, his wife supports her daughters and they are engaged in shopping in the malls and their

shopping trips exhaust him. He discovers the jealousies within the family and this stifles his self. Kathleen, the younger daughter is envious of his oldest Rosamond. She uses all strategies to grab the money of Rosamond that she has received from her dead fiancé Outland. He is also extremely disappointed that the discovery of Tom Outland ends in frivolous monetary gains. The influence of consumerism of America is quite visible in the novel. St. Peter never claims that he doesn't love his wife and daughters. Interestingly, he loves them even in his mood of discontentment. When he was writing his ambitious *Spanish Adventures in North America*, he remembers that if the oil in the lamp burned out, he would go downstairs to get more oil but he would become interested "in what the children were doing or in what his wife was doing" (18). He often discusses his problems with his wife and daughters and this would give him temporary psychological relief. He takes the family for the celebrations of Christmas when his volumes were finished. When he opens the lunch box, he is pleased to find out the caring nature of his wife. He recollects the time when he was alone in Paris and had little money. He loved his wife but soon the things change as he feels disappointed by the stifling atmosphere of the university. He wrote eight volumes about *Spanish Adventures in North America* which was not a critical success. They "recommended to him the more even and genial style of John Fiske" (Cather 22). When he finished volumes four to eight St. Peter remembers: "a few young men, scattered about the United States and England, were intensely interested in his experiment and the two last volume brought him a certain international reputation and what were called rewards" (23).

St. Peter had to visit Spain and Mexico to collect the historical data to

complete his project *The Spanish Adventurers*. St. Peter expresses his gratitude to Tom Outland for his support and help that facilitated the completion of last four volumes of his project. He praises Outland who was able to go with the Professor to the Southwest and take “a sentence from Fray Garce’s diary and find the exact spot at which the missionary crossed the Rio Colorado on a certain Sunday in 1775” (234). St. Peter devotes himself wholeheartedly to complete the project ignoring his wife and daughters and spending most of his time with his student Outland. He recalls “the most important chapters were interwoven with personal memories” (Cather 85). He highly praises his student Outland who possessed “the super abundance of heat which is always present where there is rich germination and that he had been able to sense desire and foretell success just once, in his student Tom Outland” (234). In many speeches, St. Peter praises Tom Outland; he states with pleasure that Outland’s “manly, mature voice, low, calm, experienced and that the boy was fine looking, tall and presumably well built”(95). St. Peter shared “interests, sympathies, and enthusiasms; Saturdays spent sailing together on the lake; stories told after a share meal of leg of lamb and steaming asparagus” (Harrell 159). Being lonely and haunted by the old memories, St. Peter finds solace in the company of Tom Outland and this relationship approximates that of *Pygmalion* of Bernard Shaw; “the young boy discovers himself during his time on top Blue Mesa to be in a world above the world while the rest of the world was in shadow after studying Spanish and the *Aeneid*” (Cather 217).

Tom Outland is selected by Professor St. Peter to help him in his history project. He is hard working young guy and who is passing through a critical phase

of his life as he is haunted by the tragic death of his friend who was killed by the snake bite while exploring Cliff City. St. Peter portrays Tom Outland as a pure creature of intellect but in reality he was well aware of worldly affairs and especially money. At the dinner party, Louie Masellus points out to St. Peter that Outland “not only invented the gas, but curiously enough for such a hot-headed fellow, had taken pains to protect it by patent” (30). Tom himself told the Professor once that “there might be a fortune in the gas and spoke to Dr. Crane of using the income for further experiments and that there would be something in it for both of us” (Cather 126). Ironically, St. Peter had never imagined that the money of Tom Outland would destroy the happiness of his family “a sharp pain. Clutched his heart prompting him to wonder was it for this the light in Outland’s laboratory used to burn so far into the night?” (74). This is the main cause of traumatic wounds of Professor St. Peter and this thought makes him sleepless and haunts him throughout the novel. Cathy Caruth comments thus on the role of old memories of an individual thus:

The history that flashback tells-as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurology equally suggest is-therefore a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. In its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is continued by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 7).

Cather deals with the theme of money and the consequential

dehumanization of man and its destructive impact on the genteel family of St. Peter. The life of Professor St. Peter is becoming hellish as his wife “began to be unreasonable about his spending so much time at the lake and on the tennis court” (Cather 5). Thomas F. Strychacz comments thus: “The Professor’s retreat to his bit of ground is valid for the Professor solely at the price of ignoring commitments to local society and as a retreat from an oppressive domesticity” (51). Diana Dufva also agrees and remarks that “cut off from the mundane town, St. Peter creates his own physical and intellectual world” (119). St. Peter embraces isolation to develop his own intellectual world. He does this to escape the terrors of the harsh world. He seeks sense of isolation and becomes the victim of the trauma. He spends most of his time in his garden and attic, away from the violence of history and domestic indifference as his wife and daughters pay no attention to him. His life is limited to his garden and the attic as Gaston Bauchlard writes in his *The Poetics of Space*:

All the places of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desire and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative (10).

A major portion of the Professor’s study of *Spanish Adventures* is written in isolation; he is cut off from the outside world. “The notes and the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here that they were digested and sorted, and woven in their proper place in his history” (Cather 16). He builds the garden at home being around his family and this he did to fulfil the dream of his

wife but in reality when he was working in the attic he allowed his family out of his mind. The house itself becomes “a perilous journey, the Professor must navigate, lest he lose his mood, his enthusiasm, even his temper” (18). In silence and solitude, he can recollect the old memories of his love and youth. Strychacz bluntly remarks that “For St. Peter domesticity and creativity are mutually exclusive” (52). The old house is used as a metaphor by Cather to presenting “the discontents of civilization, the bathroom being an early manifestation of this in the text” (89). Lillian chides the Professor to take the advantage of American’s one contribution to civilization and so “Many a night, after blowing out his study lamp, he had leaped into that tub to give it another coat of some one of the many paints that were advertised to behave like porcelain and didn’t” (4). The tub is a symbol of American civilization and it leads to his distraction to his research project. The Professor is destined to embrace isolation and loneliness while he is in his attic. In his room, one finds only “a single square window, swinging outward on hinges and held ajar by a hook in the sill. This was the sole opening for light and air” (7). The Professor has to use a gas stove to combat the lack of heat:

To remedy this window must be left open otherwise, with the ceiling so low, the air would speedily become unfit to breathe. If the stove were turned down, and the window left open little way, a sudden gust of wind, a sudden gust of wind would blow the wretched thing out altogether, and a deeply absorbed man might be asphyxiated before he knew it (17).

Cather has given the metaphor of the stove to describe the isolation and emptiness of the life of the Professor. The image of the open window describes

the fresh ideas and his confrontation with the outside world. The Professor is involved in his research project and no one is allowed to enter in his attic while he is on his job. St. Peter “keeps a show study for his library and a proper desk at which he wrote his letters and his personal discourse kept separate from his public , academic discourse” (8). Cynthia K. Briggs observes thus:

Cather combines the small room and the expansive space by creating a room with a view. This sacred space, with its insulated view of the world, nourishes the characters, as a parish should, strengthening them for their sojourn in the world. (Briggs 160)

In frustration St. Peter breaks all connections with his family and daughters and the society. He is pitted to live alone and suffer alone as there is no one in the novel with whom he could share his feelings. His wife Lillian and the daughters are lost in their own money world and the Professor has no option but to embrace all the loneliness while working in his attic. In desperation, he drops his original name, he refuses to travel with his wife Lillian and daughters to Paris and he loses his memory in his acute depression. There are visible signs of dementia as he begins to “forget the names of his students” (141). With his loneliness he becomes a neurotic. St. Peter expresses his inner heart in the beginning of the novel thus:

He would willingly have cut down on his university work, would willingly have given his students chaff and sawdust...but his misfortune was that he loved youth; he was weak to it, it kindled him. (Cather 19).

Willa Cather presents St. Peter as a man full of energy and vitality in the

lecture hall. He is passionate about love and youth as is evident in his class room lecture. He is presented as a proponent of radical historiography. He enters in the hall through an almost surreal distance: “observing Lillian St. Peter, the Professor’s wife, and her son-in-law Scott McGregor dropping in on the Professor’s lecture while waiting for him, agreeing that if it’s not interesting, we can come back to a bench outside and sit down for a chat” (Cather 54). St. Peter denounces science “taking our attention away from the real problems and claims that the human mind, the individual mind, has always been made more interesting by dwelling on the old riddles, even if it makes nothing of them” (54). Cather has reported all the ideas of politics, science and philosophy of Professor S. Peter thus:

There is not much thrill about a physiological sin. We were better off when even the prosaic matter of taking nourishment could have the magnificence of a sin....As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing....And that’s what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives....Art and religion have given man only happiness he ever had. (Cather 55)

The philosophical ideas of the Professor are controversial. His students call him “Mephistopheles” (185). The Professor cannot even “learn the names of his students” (247). The ending of the novel is much debated by the critics and the reviewers of Willa Cather. In the final section, St. Peter is nearly killed by the

gas stove in his attic study. He emerges as a noble tragic character symbolizing a cherished world of imagination and aesthetics that cannot survive the money governed world. The sufferings of St. Peter are due to lack of understanding of the real materialistic world represented by his wife and daughters. Rosowski comments thus on the ending of the novel: “a narrow intellectualism is all that is left of St. Peter’s own life....He has neglected his personal life, until it has become as empty as his abandoned house. His scholarly habits become fixed and his intellect hardened” (*A Book of Dreams* 31). The Professor struggles to work on his current project; he is alone most of the time; his wife and daughters away in Paris and he is alone in the “attic lost in memories and retreating to a non-verbal world” (241). In this way Fryer contends thus:

The Professor has to pay for his idealism and for his devotion to his research project. Historical facts go inside his soul and his imagination brings him traumatic sufferings; romance, all domestic and social relations, the human frailty indeed; thus his discovery of the seeming impossibility of finding language to express the things that haunt the mind”.(321)

The novel *The Professor’s House* is full of tensions and in many ways St. Peter is the archetypal character of Willa Cather trapped in the postmodern culture. St. Peter is determined to preserve the old values in the face of change. John P. Andrews describes the tastes of St. Peter thus: “his meals are carefully prepared, his habits are orderly, and his thoughts and impressions are cultivated and refined” (109). E.K. Brown is of the view that St. Peter is misfit in the society because he fails to assimilate in the changing values of the

transitional age. The novel *The Professor's House* of Willa Cather is a study of depression and trauma. Cather has depicted the disorderly life of Professor St. Peter who is an idealist researcher but who becomes the victim of the greedy and materialist wife and daughters who neglect him and he is forced to spend the best years of his life in a solitary attic in the old dilapidated house. He feels weary and tired and sick of social relations and in desperation he withdraws from the active life and embraces all the loneliness and darkness of the world. The novel is a touching and heartrending tale of a Professor who is all the time haunted by the sweet memories of the past and is sick and traumatic.

To conclude, Cather has chronicled the socio-cultural changes after the World War 1 in her novels which deal with the loss of the innocence of the pioneers and the oppressive role of the money culture. Antonia, Shimerda, Jim Burden and St. Peter are important characters of Willa Cather who confront the forces of new culture and fail to adapt to the new values and norms of society. Shimerda in *My Antonia* suffers loss, fear and tragedy because of the emergence of new culture. The tone of the novel is sickening. Mr. Shimerda commits suicide and his grave becomes a haunting place. The dark shadows, the tragic loss of peace and the mood of tragedy and despair are the main elements of the novel *My Antonia*. Willa Cather's novel *My Antonia* depicts the emergence of new society in America and the decline of the values of prairie culture. Antonia represents the culture of the prairie women and their struggle to preserve that culture. Her tragic tale is narrated by Jim who is a rational law student depicting the loss, death, suicide and fracture of identity of Antonia. Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* is the case study of a real researcher. Prof. St.

Peter finds it difficult to adjust in the changing scenario of materialistic attitude and suffers from alienation and depression, he wants to end his life in severe depression but got saved with the timely arrival of Ms. Augusta. Cather has depicted Prof. St. Peter's conflict between idealism and materialism.

Chapter – 5

Moral Decadence and Societal Norms

There is little dispute today over Willa Cather's over depiction of the moral decadence of the American society. She writes about the loss of innocence of her pioneer characters who have failed to assimilate in the growing money culture. The majority of her critics and reviewers such as Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Maxwell Geismar and Percy Boynton have recognized her intellectual intensity, weight of experience and moral perception displayed in her novel. The critics have explored the sound basis of her moral vision; the universality of her themes and her quest for the meaningful patterns of life. Willa Cather writes about the frontier directing her talents in each of her novel to explore the lofty theme of moralistic goal. Her art is associated with the moral purpose as each of her novel is about an issue of social morality. Flapper is the most familiar symbol of the twenties; she is fashionable young woman passionate to enjoy, drink, and gamble and crazy to participate in all the activities of life. Fashion, glamour and grandeur became the main motives of the flappers. Each of her novel is an allegory of the individual's quest for a direction of life. Her novels depict the growing currents of transition; the rise of the money culture and the decline of the moral values of the characters.

My Mortal Enemy (1926) of Willa Cather is a short novel focusing on the character of Myra Driscoll dramatizing her poignant tale from adolescence to her death. Cather employs many unique techniques such as echoes, suggestive details and allusions to structure the plot. The narrative strategies in *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) have confused the critics of Willa Cather. Myra is grappling with

the problem of religion, love and sex. Myra is an orphaned little girl and is brought up by her uncle who is a crude money loving person. Cather has used the elements of folk lore and precious stones, allusions to German and English poets to portray the character of Myra Henshawe. E. K. Brown in his book: (1964) *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (1964) observes that Myra has been “felt to be sharp and original if at points a little mystifying” (748). Joseph Wood Krutch in his book: *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (1967) observes that “the novel is almost elegiac in its softness....The mood is a minor brooding and faintly melancholic” (57). Cather attacks Oswald who represents capitalism with “material objects and their vivid presentation” (35). Cather wants to “separate true realism from the cataloguing of mechanical processes....

manufactories and trades physical sensations” (37). The novel is “an awakening to sentimental notions of love, she argues, and Cather's only novel devoted to romantic love” (146). Within the Cather canon, it represents “a freeing of storytelling from those aspects of romanticism that had reached a dead end” (144). “When Myra speaks . . . it is as if a character from a fairy tale . . . were to . . . step forward . . .and say, Let me tell you what it was really like” (150). Rosowski sees Myra as “identifying in religion a different kind of love . . . in which seeking is finding desire was fulfilment” (151). Cather revealed that *Chicago Tribune* critic Fanny Butcher had written: “Under the flotsam of those lives, [Myra's and Oswald's] there is a steady rhythm of the fundamental hatred of the sexes one for the other” (385). In an application of Eric Fromm's *Art of Loving* Mildred Bennett concludes that Myra and Oswald's union is a “symbiotic” one in which the sadistic and masochistic partners “have fusion without integrity” (18). Myra's anguish is failure to find

“unconditional love (which is God) through her relationship in marriage” (19).
Porte Rapin in her book *Willa Cather* (1930) commented thus in her review of the novel *My Mortal Enemy*:

The narrator, a young girl is absolutely without character and her interposed presence adds nothing to the story. The other characters, except for Myra’s husband, as the husband of such a wife would naturally be, is of too retiring and laconic, nature to have anything much to say or do (114).

John Randall (1960) commented thus: “Myra, who is also unable to solve her problems, attempts to escape by refusing to accept the consequences of her actions and by blaming everyone but herself for the way her life has turned out” (235). James Woodress (1970) complimented Willa Cather for the creation of “sharp, bitter sketch of Myra Henshawe” (215). Nellie Birdsevo is the man narrator who is romantic and highly imaginative. She visits the Henshawes in their comfortable house in New York City. She is highly impressed by the sophisticated attitude of Myra and gentle manliness of Myra’s husband Oswald. The plot is very simple; told in retrospect by Nellie, it deals with two periods in her life. She notices that Myra and Oswald have been married for twenty-five years. Nellie is impressed by the romantic and adventurous life of Myra who has committed the sin of transgression and eloped with Oswald flouting all the norms of society. Ten years later, Nellie is working as a lecturer in California. She is lodged in a run-down hotel and rediscovered Myra. Oswald has a modest job and Myra is ill and bedridden. Nellie and Myra review their friendship and this visit gives Nellie an opportunity to investigate the life and problems of Myra. They

spend many hours to know each other, reading poetry, taking rides along the sea shore. Nellie finds that Myra is too hard on “gentle Oswald” but Myra resents Nellie and their friendship comes to an end. Nellie, however continues to help Oswald and nurse Myra who grows sicker. One day she overhears Myra saying: “Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy!” Nellie is shocked by this phrase but it doesn’t move Oswald. Soon after this, Myra dies facing the sea with a crucifix in her hand and Oswald moves to Alaska after a few days. Oswald dies in Alaska some years later and Nellie continued investigating the mysterious domestic life of Myra and Oswald. Joseph Wood Krutch commented thus:

Its central character, a somewhat spectacular woman, who made in her youth a sacrifice of wealth for love and then found herself throughout life unable to maintain the high mood which would make of such sacrifice a success, is all but flamboyant (58).

Nellie gives valuable information about Myra’s behaviour and character. She observes that Myra is arbitrary, often violent and extremely jealous of her husband. She is unappreciative of her husband’s devotion. According to Nellie, Oswald is gentle, loving, forbearing and selfless. Myra has enjoyed love and romance but after elopement with Oswald, she feels guilty and regards Oswald her mortal enemy. Nellie even reproaches Myra for her jealousy, stubborn attitude and indifference to her husband. Myra mentions to Nellie the suicide of a young man and exclaims:

People are always talking about the joys of youth...but oh, how youth can suffer! I’ve not forgotten; those hot southern Illinois nights, when Oswald

was in New York, and I had no word from him except through Liddy (Nellie's aunt), and I used to lie on the floor all night and listen to the express trains go by. I've not forgotten...I wonder why you are sometimes so hard on him now (102).

Nellie believes that Oswald is a decent person: "He drew on out better than his wife had done, because he did not frighten on so much" (16). Nellie's first meeting with Myra doesn't impress her as she says: "I felt quite overpowered by her- stupid, hopelessly clumsy and stupid"(10). She was fascinated by her "charming fluent voice." She expresses her reaction: "I didn't have half a chance with her" (13). Nellie is surprised at the "kind of feeling between these lovers when Oswald enters and Myra rises to kiss him, clearly glad to see him" (8); Myra gave away because they gave Oswald a bosom. "I can't bear you in ill-fitting things," she says, "not if we go to the poorhouse" (9). Oswald's response "anticipates the quarrel that devastates Nellie at the end of part I: he looks at his wife with amusement, incredulity, and bitterness" (9, emphasis added). Oswald's nursing of Myra in California, Myra's comment that hers "was no head for a woman . . . but would have graced one of the wickedest of the Roman emperors" (63). Nellie is in conflict; she is torn between the Henshawe legend, she has all her life heard and the reality of the Henshawe's life together. Nellie is disturbed by the hellish life of Myra who is all the time expressing her anguish. Her marriage with Oswald is a hasty affair which results in alienation, sickness and mental torture. Myra suffers because of two weaknesses; firstly she has flouted all the norms of the society and practised sexual adventure eloping with Oswald. Her parents and society condemn her rebellious action but ironically she can't

enjoy the domestic happiness. The cracks have soon appeared in her relationship with Oswald. Nellie's relationship with her family is lost. Her father is never mentioned and her sister is mentioned only once. Lydia helps Nellie to build the relationship with Myra: "I want you to come in early, an hour or so before the others, and get acquainted with Myra" (10). Willa Cather has reported the scene of quarrel with Oswald about the keys: "When I felt was fear: I was afraid to look or speak or move. Everything about me scented evil" (64).

Myra's motives are confusing. It is not clear what motivated her to fall in love with Oswald because Oswald's father was "an Ulster Protestant whom Driscoll detested" (13). Her indifference to Oswald after the marriage is confusing. She compels him to leave the city and to run away to New York. Myra transgresses the norms of the Church because Driscoll's money has infatuated her. "A poor man stinks, and God hates him" (15), her uncle has warned her. Thirty years later, Myra laments to Nellie, "I broke with the Church when I broke with everything else and ran away with a German free-thinker; but I believe in holy words and holy rites all the same" (85). Myra condemns herself for her sexual liberty and adventurous spirit. Oswald clarifies this near the end: "It is one of her delusions that I separated her from the Church. I never meant to" (99). In effect, Myra constructs her own alternatives and sets romantic love against God. "The real question," writes Lewis, "is which do you serve . . . ? To which claim does your will, in the last resort, yield?" (122-23).

Myra is living in sin. Aquinas clarifies her alienation: "just as the light would cease at once in the air, were an obstacle placed to its being lit up by the sun, even so charity ceases at once to be in the soul through the placing of an

obstacle [sin] to the outpouring of charity by God” (24). Nellie admits that “John Driscoll and his niece had suddenly changed places in my mind, and he had got, after all, the romantic part” (19).

Lydia makes Myra a celebrity, “the brilliant and attractive figure among the friends of [my mother and aunts'] girlhood” (3-4). When the “short, plump woman” rises to meet Nellie, it is “as if to remind [the girl] that it was [her] business to get to her as quickly as possible” (5); when Myra's eyes search Nellie, she feels “quite overpowered . . . and . . . hopelessly clumsy and stupid” (6). Myra is bewildered: “I felt I didn't have half a chance with her. I was never sure whether she was making fun of me.... Her sarcasm was like being touched by a metal so cold that one doesn't know whether one is burned or chilled” (7). Nellie is relieved by the arrival of Oswald, by his comforting if “perplexing combination” of military durability and soft lunar eyes, “of something hard and something soft” (10). Maxwell Geismar in his book *The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel 1915-1925* (1947) observes that the novel *My Mortal Enemy* is a study of the loss of self of Myra. The heroine is imaginative, romantic and a rebel in the society who has eloped with her lover in her youth breaking all the norms of society. The plot of the novel is focused on Myra Driscoll who foolishly renounces her inheritance being intoxicated by her passionate love and rebellious spirit. She throws away all the norms of the Church and morality in the winds to enjoy sexual liberty.

The brief tale of sufferings and depression of Myra is told in two parts. In the first section of the novel Myra is presented when she is in the middle years after her elopement. She commits the sin of moral transgression like Hyster

Pyrene of *The Scarlet Letter* of Hawthorne. She is worldly woman, full of vanity. The second section of the novel describes the end of the life of Myra when she is passing through the most critical phase of her life. She is under acute depression and is almost on the verge of death being bedridden and the victim of traumatic experiences. She is far from the pomp and glory of New York, crippled, dependent living with her husband Oswald in shabby quarters. It is a matter of chance that Nellie is there too to witness the end of the chapter of glory and sexual exuberance that a young girl has enjoyed breaking all the barriers of the Church and the social morality. Myra gives vent to her psychological anguish thus:

People can be lovers and enemies at the same time, you know. We were....A man and woman draw apart from that long embrace, and see what they have done to each other. Perhaps I can't forgive him for the harm I did him. Perhaps that's it....In an age we lose everything, even the power to love (574).

Myra gives the image of "love" and "loss" since experiences of her love have been very painful. She has lost everything; her name, her identity, her inheritance and the religion because of her madness of love in her youth. In her last years, Myra bitterly regrets the adventure of her youth and this part of the novel is extremely interesting.

Myra Driscoll Henshawe gives up her religion and commits the sin of moral transgression; she marries out of the Church. For her love and to fulfil her sexual needs, she even gives up her fortune. Her uncle has warned her if she marries her lover Oswald Henshaw, he would debar her of her property rights

from his will. The novel describes the depressing circumstances of Myra and her lonely life as she suffers the loss of opportunities being rejected by her uncle and the Church. Myra is suffering from physical decline, isolation, depression and even death. There is crisis in her life and her life changes everyday bringing her a trail of sufferings and mental tensions. She experiences the feeling of loss as she recollects the days of her youth and loveliness. Myra is nostalgic in her bed-ridden situation; she longs for the old house where she has lived a comfortable life under the care of her uncle. Money has not been a problem for her and now she is living under abject poverty. Memory is about her mind and her nostalgia makes her sick and depressed. Myra recollects the old days thus:

But it was Myra Henshawe herself who made that visit so memorably gay. Never had I seen her so brilliant and strangely charming as she was in that sunlit study up under the roofs. Their talk quite took my breath away; they said such exciting such fantastic things about people, books, music—any thing; they seemed to speak together a kind of highly flavored special language (15).

Myra has no identity and her only world is her husband who is her mortal enemy for her. She has lost confidence and has lost the will to live. Nostalgia is also a psychological disease. This real disease “was related to symptoms such as loss of appetite, irritability, anguish, fever, and progressive physical decline” (qtd in Bolaffi and Bracalenti 209). Pinel, a famous neurologist indicates that “a person who is nostalgic might have a gloomy appearance, absent-mind, inattention, or is bedridden. He may suffer from contumacious silence, food rejection, loss of strength and death” (Lowenthal 10). Lowenthal further argues

that “to leave home for long was to risk death” (10). In the earlier times, nostalgia was studied in medical term but in the modern times, it is taken as a serious psychological ailment leading to depression and death. The psychologists and sociologists believe that there are many reasons for being nostalgic. Melotti observes that the mental causes of nostalgia are “breaking of ties with loved ones, uprooting, loneliness, and the difficulties encountered in a foreign, sometimes hostile, environment” (209). Loneliness and depression are the signs of nostalgia and Myra’s sad and dejected countenance is an example of her nostalgia. Geismar Maxwell remarks thus: “For the salons, Myra Henshaw’s group take on a more brilliant and exotic tone here, the musical and theatrical celebrities glitter ever more brightly” (Geismar 189). Nellie supplies the best explanation of Myra’s despondent character:

For many years I associated Mrs. Henshaw with that music, thought of that aria as being mysteriously related to something in her nature that one rarely saw, but nearly always felt; a compelling passionate, overmastering something for which I had no name, but which was audible, visible in the air that night, as she sat crouching in the shadow (Cather 60).

Nellie meets Myra after ten years when she comes back in New York; battered and lost both in body and in spirits. She lives with her husband in a cheap hotel on the West coast. Myra is suffering from a fatal disease as she is confined to the bed. She has become irritable, aggressive and an angry woman being the victim of depression. Her moody and intemperate disposition is the product of her psychological anguish. She curses herself, her husband and feels depressed and alleges that her husband has taken away her religion. She complains of her

abject poverty and recollects the old days when she was young, vivacious and full of sexual agility but all the memories of the old days shatter her mind and she is haunted by all the old memories experiencing trauma of life. She feels that she herself is responsible for her traumatic sufferings since she has been a greedy woman. Myra's heartrending tale of her loss of self is due to her moral transgression. She revolts against the church and breaks her connect with the Church. The follies of her youth bring her untold miseries. She goes to see a priest and she talks with him for hours together. Father Fay tries his best to bring her back to the Church as she has repented for her follies and it is presumed that she has turned that "compelling, passionate, overmastering something" (Cather 111). Nellie leads to this belief: "I wonder whether some of the saints of the early Church weren't good deal like her. She got all the modern in her makeup" (111). Nellie is shocked to meet Myra as an invalid, sick and bedridden and looking like a victim of trauma. She leaves her alone for hours in her meditations; she finds her lost in the old memories.

That is always such a forgiving time. When that first cold, bright streak comes over the water, it's as if all our sins were pardoned; as if the sky, leaned over the earth and kissed it and gave it absolutism. You know how the great sinners always came home to die in some religious house, and the abbot or the abbess went out and received them with a kiss (Cather111).

Myra realizes that love has ruined her life. She gives up her large inheritance to elope with her lover and marry him in the civil court revolting against the laws of the Church. Her impulsive marriage is the source of all her

psychological problems. Myra has become a problem for her husband, she has demanded freedom from her husband for worship. She is often bitter and sarcastic in her conversations with others and looks depressed and traumatic in her daily life. She often expresses her death consciousness because she feels that her life is futile and meaningless. It is a chance that Nellie discovers that the man who lives in her next apartment is Oswald, the husband of Myra. Nellie is shocked to know him “an old man, a gentleman, living in this shabby, comfortless place, cleaning his necktie of a Sunday morning and humming to himself...it depressed me unreasonably” (59). Nellie is further shocked to know that Oswald is passing through a very serious crisis; he has lost his “high- status position with the railroad reorganization process” (60). Mr. Oswald is now a rootless worker “wandering about among the cities of the Pacific coast” (Cather 60). Money is a big problem for Oswald since he is currently working in a “humble position, poorly paid, with the city traction company” (65). Myra is silently waiting for her death lying on the bed for most of the day cut off from the active life of the outside world. She says thus:

I could bear to suffer...so many have suffered. But why must it be like this? I have not deserved it. I have been true in friendship. I have faithfully nursed others in sickness....Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy? (Cather 60).

At the end of her life, she calls her husband “her mortal enemy” and thinks that he is the main culprit who has brought her all forms of psychological ailments. When she dies, Nellie is there:

On the desk lay a sheet of note paper scribbled in lead pencil: Dear Oswald: My hour has come. Don't follow me. I wish to be alone. Nellie knows where there is money for masses. That was all. There was no signature (123).

Myra has chosen her husband Oswald Henshaw in preference to her Church and religion. Like Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* of Hawthorne, Myra inevitably suffers psychic oppression and moral degradation. The death of Myra is highly depressing; she dies alone as she slips away from her husband on the cliff overlooking the sea. Nellie and Myra's husband, Henshaw discover her dead body with her crucifix in her hands. The critics like Geismar and David Daiches observe that at last she has made her peace with God and with her death she has given the message that man cannot be happy without religion and God. Herman Lee believes that Cather's novel is a story of a woman who struggles for spiritual resurrection and the traumatic experiences of Myra who has married outside the church. Myra is the new woman of Cather who challenges sentimental American approaches to mortality and hopes to regain some dignity in rituals at the end of the novel after her death. The guilt of Myra in marrying Oswald is the main source of her trauma. Freud devotes his life to explore repression, dreams and the unconscious. He also takes keen interest in the exploration of the sense of guilt. Freud is of the opinion that fear and loss of parental love are the sources of guilt. In his *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud discusses in detail the force of guilt which haunts a man day and night. The second chapter of the novel establishes Myra's guilt in marrying Oswald and her unbridled sexual liberties that separates her from Church and religion. She cannot forget her loss of Church

and God and in her sleepless nights she experiences her guilty conscience. Myra's court marriage lands her in darkness, she becomes a spiritual derelict and an outcast from God and religion. The end of Myra is tragic like the end of Hester of *The Scarlet Letter*. She dies alone but her death is a great satisfaction to her because it gives her an opportunity to meet her God in heaven.

Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Lady* is another important novel dealing with the issue of moral decadence of the character. The plot of the novel focuses on the moral choice of Captain Daniel Forrester who suffers from the physical and psychological tortures. He meets with an accident which changes the entire course of his life. He falls from his horse and as a result of this fatal accident, he becomes crippled and is confined to bed. His physical inability results in sexual inactivity and this sexual repression shatters his happy domestic life. Forrester is not satisfied with his life while he shows "a conflict between [his] libidinal wishes and the part of his personality we call his ego, which is the expression of his instinct of self-preservation and which also includes his ideals of his personality" (316).

Marian Forrester is a unique character; the representative of a new age and the product of the "flapper culture" of America. The twenties was an age of social and political transformation; it was a time of growing prosperity and a stimulated interest in leisure activities. For example, mass produced entertainment and movies reached all social classes. Flapper is the most familiar symbol of the twenties; she is fashionable young woman passionate to enjoy, drink, and gamble and crazy to participate in all the activities of life. Fashion, glamour and grandeur became the main motives of the flappers. In the early part of the novel, Willa Cather observes thus: "The Forrester place: as every one

called it, was not at all remarkable, the people who lived there made it seem much larger and finer than it was" (10). For Beasley and Molly Tuckers "there was nothing remarkable about the place at all. The kitchen was inconvenient, the sink was smelly. The carpets were worn, the curtains faded, the clumsy, old fashioned furniture they wouldn't have had for a gift, and the upstairs bed-rooms were full of dust and cobwebs" (138). "The same house is transformed by Neil and Mrs. Forrester into a magical dream world" (28).

Marian Forrester is a charming beautiful woman, full of passion and vitality but she married a man twenty-five years older than herself. She settles in a small town surrounded by hills. She is full of sexual attraction and irresistible charisma; she defines what it means to be a "lady" in her milieu. Marian Forrester exemplifies elegance and high class, but she is also able to create an instant feeling of intimacy with the people she encounters. She is very active and smiling receiving the guests in her drawing room and all these qualities spell bound Neil Herbert who becomes her confidant at the later part of her life. Neil Herbert observes thus: "Mrs. Forrester looked at one, and one knew that she was bewitching. It was instantaneous, and it pierced the blackest hide". Unlike her husband, Marian Forrester is depicted as a life force in the novel; transforming temporal and material realities. She is characterized within a framework of change; she grows older physically; gets tortured mentally; transgressing the moral boundaries morally and experiencing trauma psychologically. Willa Cather has explored the role of woman through the character of Marian Forrester who becomes a "woman of exchange" between the social system represented by her husband and capitalism represented by Ivy Peters in the novel. Her body and land suggests that the sex trade is a by-product of commercial development.

Merrill Skaggs (1990) opines that “sweet water is a Greek slang associated with female sexuality; a strayed woman is said to be of the sweet water” (50). Skaggs argued that Mrs. Forrester is viewed as “having strayed once she begins trading sex for financial security; she has crossed the boundaries of social morality into the murky waters of sex life” (50). In Colorado, prostitution was increasing during those days; the technical revolutions in the mining industry brought new money culture in Sweet Waters. The question of moral decadence comes on the surface when Captain Forrester begins believing that his wife Mrs. Forrester is shifting her love to other men ignoring him because of his physical ailments. Mrs. Forrester fulfils her need for sex with Frank Ellinger. Her sexual affair is implied in the early part of the novel when Frank is invited to the residence of Forrester. Just before the two are about to sleep in their separate rooms, “the train of her velvet dress caught the leg of his broadcloth trousers and dragged with a friction cracked and threw sparks” (49). There was something “hidden going on between Mrs. Forrester and Frank; they were romantically involved as sparks symbolize love fire. Frank had a restless and muscular energy that had something of the cruelty of wild animals in it” (37). The love between Frank and Marian Forrester becomes complicated with the appearance of Constance Ogden who is attracted to him. At the dinner party held at the house of Forrester, Frank offers the cherry in his cocktail, giving her only Maraschino cherries but she plays the coquette saying amorously: “I want the one in your glass...I like it to taste of something” (47). “When Neil talks to her, she feels nervous and distracted, kept glancing over her shoulder and crushing her handkerchief up in her hands. Her mind clearly, as elsewhere” (44). Soon they start playing cards and Constance Ogden is intently looking at Frank ignoring Neil Herbert. She even wants to go cedar-

bought cutting with Forrester and Frank getting an opportunity to be near Frank. After the dinner at that night Marian Forrester warns Frank to be careful of Constance. "Be careful", she murmured as she approached Frank: "I have distinct impression that there is someone on the enclosed stairway. There is a wide crack in the door. Ah! But the kittens have claws" (59). And again: "I heard silk stockings on the stairs" (60). Constance is fervently pursuing Frank creating jealousy in the mind of Marian Forrester. Constance is no match so far as Marian is concerned. She is dull like her mother; too homely for Ellinger and her eyes are inexpressive, "her face was not altogether agreeable" (44). Willa Cather writes that "Two dissatisfied lines reached from the corners of her mouth which gave her suspicious, injured expression" (44). Her disagreeable personality turns to a "stubborn piece of pink flesh" (47). In the early part of the novel, Frank frowns upon Constance because her father is a poor man. He doesn't want to marry a poor girl and for him Marian Forrester is a gold mine; more beautiful than Constance and a lady of charms and aesthetic tastes. He keeps on flirting with her; she suits him because she is childless and a lady of excellent charms and vivacity but the tables turn when he finds that she has lost all wealth and has become poor and miserable.

Mrs. Forrester expresses her despondency when she finds Frank marrying Constance to become rich. She expresses her anguish thus: "Play safe! When have you played anything else? You'd have got a safe thing at last, I should think; safe and pasty! How much stock did you get with it? A big block, I hope" (134). Frank gets a "big block" in his marriage with Constance; he proves ruthlessly ambitious; he enjoys the sexual pleasures with Marian Forrester and

when her husband dies, he doesn't even attend the funeral of her husband and leaves Sweet Water forever. This scene of betrayal virtually shatters Marian Forrester who has turned a "lost lady" because she has lost everything. Symbolically, the sexual relationship between Frank and Marian Forrester is animalistic; an expression of carnal desires; the fulfilment of biological hunger and an expression of human degradation. From Christian perspective like Hester Prynne, she committed a sin but from her perspective, Marian Forrester was enjoying the sexual liberty. In Morton D. Zabel's words, *A Lost Lady* of Willa Cather reflects mourning for America's pioneer past, her feeling that "the inspiring landscape of the prairies, deserts, and mountains, no less than the gracious charms of colonial Virginia or old New York, had been obliterated by a vulgar and cheapening modernity" (43). With the rise of money culture in Sweet Water, modern man and woman feel homeless, alienated and decentered. With money as a universal law of gravity, the world of *A Lost Lady* is a wasteland. The life history of Marian Forrester has historical and cultural relevance as she presents the age of decline and degeneration of the 1920s. Miss Elizabeth Sergeant in her *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (1953) observes that she is "heroine who does not preserve the moralities but clings to the amenities, and sometimes surprises us with the nobilities" (186). Her story is filled with the decay of the frontier; Cather gives the trajectory of her wounded soul. Her journey of life is replete with chaos, betrayal and deceit.

Marian is portrayed as character who looks artificial on physical level. Willa Cather comments thus on her artificial beauty: "She was a good deal made up...plenty of powder, and a little red, too....Her hair was black, blacker than I

remembered it; looked as if she dyed it” (173). Marian Forrester knows the art of presenting herself before the guests; she knows the art of transforming temporal reality: “But the astonishing thing was how these changes could vanish in a moment, be utterly wiped out in a flash of personality and one forget everything about her except herself” (112). She plays the double role in her desperate attempt to get happiness in life. She wants to overcome the dreary and boring aspect of life. She gets an opportunity when her husband Captain Forrester goes away from home. She sends her servant Mary to visit her mother on the farm for a week and invites Frank to come over. She is not worried at all, as she thinks her husband has gone to Denver on a business trip. Captain comes home as a poor man as he tells his wife: “It took about everything there to square up. You’ll have this place unencumbered, and my pension that will be about all” (88). This is a heavy blow for Captain Forrester but Marian simply “smiled” and brought her husband a cigar’s stand. She simply commented thus: “Oh! Well, I expect we can manage, Can’ t we?” (88). She is depicted as a false and hypocritical woman who declares: “I never question your decision in business, Mr. Forrester. I know nothing about such things” (89). She accepts his choice as compliment to her: “If Mrs. Forrester is satisfied, I shall never regret my decisions. For the first time his tired swollen eyes, sought his wife’s” (89). Willa Cather has presented Marian as a double dealer. She has just enjoyed sexual pleasures with Frank and when her husband comes back bankrupt, she pretends to be loyal and sincere. Things have come to such a pass that Captain Forrester has totally surrendered himself to Marian Forrester in desperation because he is helpless and cannot control the sexual passion of his wife who is young and full of vitality.

Mrs. Forrester appears to some critic as a shallow and immoral woman; a victim of commercial forces. Marian Forrester passes from various stages and has multiple experiences in her life. She keenly observes the lonely and dreary land of the Sweet Water and feels bored and isolated most of the time. Cather gives full freedom to her heroine Mrs. Forrester who emerges as a New Woman of Sweet Water society. She belongs to California and knows her liberties and democratic rights; she is fully conversant of the second wave of feminism. She is fully aware of the culture of flappers and she follows the code of the flappers. She enjoys sexual liberty, enjoys brandy and coffee and feels excited in the company of men who visits her husband occasionally. Willa Cather doesn't mention Marian's religion and the family background and allows her to grow independently. She is childless and this is another cause of her lonely and secluded life. There is brewing a neurotic storm inside the psyche of Marian Forrester.

The predominant metaphor of "lost" is very significant suggesting the mood of despair, loss of self and of impending doom. The novel *A Lost Lady* is set in the small railroad town of Sweet Water on the Western plain. The title of Mrs. Forrester is a "lost lady" and the critics have divergent opinions about her "lost status." She enjoys the wealth and luxury of the Captain's material life but she fails to comprehend the traumatic experiences of her husband who looks lost and bankrupt of physical and mental energies. Marian Forrester is lost in her own dreams and romantic fancies and she emerges as a weak and shallow woman. She is "lost" when she develops sexual relations with Frank; she is lost when her husband dies and all the property is lost; she is lost when she gives herself to Ivy

Peter for the restoration of wealth and property. Of course, she becomes a victim of the commercial forces in the novel. Her “lost status” gives psychological torture to Mrs. Forrester and the novel is a heart rending tale of a beautiful lady whose sexual aggressiveness, material greed and moral transgression become the main cause of her anguish. She emerges as a wounded soul at the end of the novel; marries three times and remains childless.

The lady, like society is lost because she moves from one to the other in order to survive. She prefers “life on any terms” (169). The journey of Marian Forrester is from “found” by Captain Forrester to “lost” with Ivy Peters. She begins her life as a romantic, voluptuous young girl, romantic and adventurous but at the end of the journey of life, she degenerates into a whore and adulterous experiencing the traumatic loss of self. Sigmund Freud (1896) theory became famous as the “seduction theory” highlighting the abnormal behaviour of his patients including the feelings of being choked and sexual trauma. Breuer and Freud (1893) point out that “any experience which calls up distressing affects, such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain may operate as a trauma of this kind” (6). Her fall from grace to a fallen woman is indeed touching. She is presented as the most charming woman “Compared with her, other women were heavy and dull; even the pretty ones seemed lifeless—they had not that something in their glance that made one’s blood tingle” (41).

Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* also deals with the theme of moral decadence and spiritual bankruptcy. She has depicted the historical forces of the transitional period when the values were fast declining. *My Antonia* is a true reflection of the culture of the pioneers of Nebraska. The novel is regarded as the masterpiece by

the critics because Cather chronicles the cultural transformation of the transitional period. The editor of *New York Sun* commented that the novel is a “great gift of Willa Cather documenting the cultural and social history of the people of Nebraska”. H.L. Mencken claimed that “the novel reflects the moral decline and the scenes of human degradation documenting high artistic conscience and a civilized point of view” (87). The story line of *My Antonia* hinges on the friendship between Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda. Willa Cather dramatizes the touching scenes of love, loss, fear, tragedy, death and suicide. Blanche Gelfant and Sharon O’Brien opine that *My Antonia* is a historical novel describing the decline of moral values laid down by the pioneers. Willa Cather has observed that the main cause of disillusionment is the growth of the industrial revolution in America. The worst hit are the farmers and cultivators who have to compromise with the moral values because of the advent of money culture. Cathy Caruth comments thus:

In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 11).

Willa Cather gives the image of “red grass” observing that red grass is “the material out of which countries are made” (Willa Cather, *My Antonia* 79). This uprooting has given a cultural shock to Willa Cather and shaped her attitude and perception: “I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we got over the edge of it, and were outside man’s jurisdiction” (11). Jim’s narrative depicts

the spirit of nostalgia and pessimism overwhelming Mr. Shimerda, Cutter and Antonia. All these important characters suffer loss, tragedy and moral decadence as the novel is “founded on the myth that sorrowfully language and culture depend on the death or absence of the mother and on the quest for substitutes for her” (Homans 4).

Willa Cather describes the terrifying landscape as the sky which was “chequered with black thunderheads...the mottled part of the sky was like marble pavement, like the quay of some splendid seacoast city, doomed to destruction” (20). The imagery is threatening implying impending doom. Antonia compares her life situation with Jim’s: “If I live here, like you that is different. Things will be easy for you, but they will be hard for us” (116). Willa Cather uses the images of cold, shadows and reptiles to describe the darkness, death, and suicide. The dark clouds in the sky symbolize mortality, loss of values and chaos operating in the society. Willa Cather articulates the atmosphere of darkness; death and despair through the images of nature:

On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance 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 molten red. There it was, heroic in size, picture writing on the sun (Cather 14).

The victim of moral decadence in this novel is Antonia who is a prairie woman struggling to survive in a new community in her quest for money and material prosperity. Willa Cather dramatizes the agony and frustration of the

pioneers who have lost their innocence in their desperate struggles in the alien land. In a newspaper interview, Cather stated that there was drastic change in life, land and in landscape. The new landscape had evoked a sense of “erasure of personality” (Willa Cather, *Kingdom* 48). H.L. Mencken argued that Cather’s *My Antonia* depicts the alienation and struggle of the pioneers to preserve the old values. They observe moral decadence and the loss of human values as the Americans become crazy to accumulate money. Cather has depicted the mood of depression and despair afflicting Jim Burden and Antonia depicting the scenes of moral bankruptcy. Antonia leads a lonely life after the suicide of her father Shimerda. The gradual decline of moral values of the pioneers is the main focus of Willa Cather. Jim, Mr. Shimerda, Antonia are rooted in the soil so much that they are not only isolated and cut off from sustaining human relationships, but also thwarted and frustrated in life. Antonia has no social life and no source of entertainment. Willa Cather gives the images of the blizzards, the droughts, the snakes, the grasshoppers and fires to depict her alienation and frustration. Her struggle is to survive in a harsh society where the main crisis of money and poverty are the challenges. She finds people around her flouting all the norms of society to make money and to cope with poverty.

The main idea in the novel is the moral degeneracy of society and the plight of the farmers living in the transitional period of America. Willa Cather has given a concrete evidence of friendship between Antonia Shimerda and Jim Burden. Jim is an American boy and both Jim and Antonia find themselves as strangers on the prairies of Nebraska.

In the first part of Book I, Antonia appears as a “romantic, adventurous,

and sensitive ten years-old prairie girl who sets out to try her fortunes in a new world” (3) following into the “empty darkness” the same country road that Jim and his family travel on the wagon ahead of him. In chapter III, Jim introduces the Shimerda family and he focuses on the dark side of life. Jim talks of the innocence of Antonia as her physical presence shows openness to life and love. Her eyes “big and warm and full of life like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood” (23). Jim also records Antonia’s response to her father’s call. Two days after his birthday, Mr. Shimerda commits suicide giving the first tragic blow to Antonia. After the burial of Mr. Shimerda, he sees Antonia for the first time, she rushes toward him with her impetuous cry: “It seemed to me that I could feel her heart breaking” (115). Mrs. Shimerda is also broken as she cries out in anguish: “The older one was his darling, and was like a right hand to me. He might have thought of her. He’s left her alone in a hard world” (98). After the death of her father, Antonia feels burdened up with the responsibilities. She loves him so much that she recollects the day when her father has gifted her handmade hat to her. She has tried her best to give strength and confidence to her father in his mood of depression. Antonia tells Jim: “My mamenka make him come. All the time she says America big country; much money, much land for boys. Much husband for my girls” (45). Antonia talks of the rumours that are spread in the society since he has flouted the norms of the society. She tells Jim that his marriage is a matter of discussion in the community. She shares the secret of her father’s life with Jim and tells him that the marriage between the two was a result of an unplanned pregnancy that created scandal in the neighbourhood: “He did not have to marry my mother, he lived in his mother’s house, and she was a poor girl come in to do the work” (Cather 115). She informs Jim: “My papa sad for

the country. He not look good. He never make music anymore....My papa, he cry for leave his old friends that make music with him” (61). Randall observes that with the death of Mr. Shimerda, the family begins to crumble which is best reflected in the changing mood and attitude of Antonia. Jim notices that Antonia is wearing the boots of her father “had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap” (80). She informs Jim that “she would work like mans” and “made this land one good farm” (81). In chapter nineteen of Book One, Antonia exclaims: “Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house!....I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man” (81). Antonia feels the loss of her father and spends the days in the dry and open fields recollecting the sweet memories of her father. She experiences the traumatic turmoil and inner void as she is left alone to fight and struggle in the hard world. Antonia is always haunted by the tragic loss of her father because she has been deeply attached with him. Jim talks of the traumatic loss thus: “I did not wish to disturb him...Such vivid pictures came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda’s memories, not yet faded out from the air in which they haunted him.” (11). She knows that it is not simple for a woman to work like a man but she is helpless and has no choice. All her dreams and romantic hopes are shattered and she assumes a nihilistic attitude toward life. She doesn’t meet Jim who has been a source of friendly strength reliving her tensions and worries. Jim observes her conventional and morose attitude as he says:

Whenever I saw her come up the furrow, shouting to her beasts, sunburned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda,

who could say so little, yet managed to say so much when he exclaimed:
“My Antonia” (84).

Willa Cather has used the images of loss and pain to depict the struggles of Antonia, she is “sunburned”, “dust-plastered” and she moves to Black Hawk with her new identity as “hired girl” of Harlings. She works with full sincerity and dedication and becomes a favourite of Harling children. After sometime, she comes in contact with another hired girl, Lena Lingard. In her company, she begins going out and ignoring her duties as house keeper. To add to the problems, a dance troupe comes to the city. Antonia visits the dancing pavilion and comes back home late. She is threatened by Mrs. Harlings to concentrate on her work or leaves the job. Antonia is involved in new setup so much that she prefers leaving work at Harlings and takes up work at Cutter’s family. Mr. Wick Cutter is known as a greedy money-lender and scrupulous person. With this change in workplace, starts the fall of Antonia. Mr. Cutter makes a plan to trap Antonia. He goes on a trip with his wife and asks Antonia to stay at their house to take care of their money and gold. He comes back home one night leaving his wife on the different train to seduce Antonia but he finds Jim there in place of Antonia as she being afraid to stay alone, asks Jim to accompany her. Thus saved, she spends sometime with the Burdens. Jim recollects the early picture of Antonia in a nostalgic tone thus:

When she first came to this country, Frances, and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she’s led, out in the fields with those rough threshers! Things would have been very different with poor Antonia if her father lived (153).

Willa Cather continues her theme of loss, death and destruction till the end of the novel. The most important event in the novel is the loss of honour of Antonia. She falls in love with a bus conductor Larry Donovan and gets engaged to him but she is betrayed by Larry Donovan. Jim decides to know the reality about the betrayal and to explore the predicament of Antonia. He calls on the Widow Steavens who has supported Antonia during the days of poverty and alienation. Jim comes to know that Antonia has been betrayed by a man who promised marriage. Antonia comes in contact with Larry Donovan, a bus conductor. He persuades her to join in Denver. She nurses him for so many days and becomes pregnant; he deserts her when her money runs out to “get rich...collecting half fares off the natives” (202). He impregnates her and leaves her. She gets cheated and has to go back home to give birth to a child. Jim feels very sorry for her who has become the victim of money culture and false values of the new age. Her loss of innocence is the main interest of Willa Cather in this part of the novel. Jim meets Antonia after two years of the birth of her daughter to re-establish their friend ship. He finds Antonia completely transformed, her beauty and innocence has vanished as she has become a hard and sturdy prairie woman who has lost everything: love, romantic dreams and natural grace. Jim experiences neglect and feels depressed when Antonia expresses her indifference to respond his love and when a chivalrous gesture results in a beating, Jim feels embarrassed and leaves the world of prairie to join the college without bidding her farewell. Jim observes thus:

She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in

common things. (353)

The image of a “battered” woman is very effective in conveying the theme of loss of moral values. Willa Cather compares Antonia with Lena who represents the role of a woman to suit him in adulthood, sexuality and style.

Willa Cather’s novel *O’ Pioneers* is replete with the events of loss, death and suicide. There are four important tragic episodes which structure the plot of the novel. For instance, Bergson dies; Amedee also dies, Emil and Marie are killed in a brutal manner by Frank. David Daiches (1951) observes that “the main theme of the novel is the hardness of the land, which offered its pioneering settlers disappointment and disaster more often than success. Miss. Cather has portrayed the “defeated souls” in *O’ Pioneers*” (56). Francis X. Connolly (1951) also observes that in “her novel *O’ Pioneers* she dramatizes the mood of depression, despair and despondency of the characters; there is no hope for them in America and John Bergson symbolizes this defeated attitude” (17). Willa Cather expresses her concern for the futility and meaninglessness of life. No wonder right from beginning to the end of the novel, the forces of death, decay, defeat and the decline of moral values of society. The scenes of death, decay, defeat and tragic loss are very common in the plot of *O’ Pioneers*.

In the last section of the novel, Cather dramatizes the chaos and disorder in the life of Emil and Mary. They are seen shooting the ducks and the bloody birds “too happy to kill” (128). The images of blood are very effective in this part of the novel as they foreshadow the violent deaths of the lovers. The scenes of moral decadence are dramatized by Willa Cather in this part of the novel. Marie and Emil have transgressed and committed a sin and they are punished in the

chapter "The White Mulberry Tree." Alexandra is proud of her huge farms:

I really built it for Emil I'm sure it was to have sons like Emil, and to give them a chance, that father left by saying that Emil is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that's what I have worked for (Cather 117).

Marie and Emil love affair is based on passion and is considered as a moral transgression in the Christian code. Hawthorne depicted the consequences of the reckless passions in his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Willa Cather dramatizes the sin and punishment in the love affair of Emil and Marie in the chapter "The White Mulberry Tree." Marie is presented as a simple, passionate young girl: "Her face, too, was rather like a poppy round and brown with rich colour in her cheeks and lips and her dancing yellow-brown eyes bubbled with gaiety" (Cather 79). Frank is legally married with Marie and their relationship has the sanction of church and society. These intuitions create moral order since centuries but Emil ventures to disturb the moral order. They revolt against the established moral order and are bound to suffer. In this part of the novel, Willa Cather depicts the scenes of depression, anguish, violence and bloodshed. The plot of the novel takes a decisive turn and gives an insight into the collapse of human relationships, death and decay. The legal union of Frank and Marie disintegrates into disgust and failure. Frank emerges as a destroyer When Emil kisses Marie, they join in natural commitment, "like a sigh which they breathed together, almost sorrowful, as if each were afraid of wakening something in the other" (225). The scene in the basement reaches its climax. They enjoy love making in the darkness; Emil has brought a beautiful turquoise from Mexico for Marie and she gets lost in her natural love for Emil. When the light comes on, Marie begins "to take down and

fold her shawls” (Cather 226). Now this is the best moment for her but she must bear her destiny. In her second meeting, Emil walks Marie home and he fails to understand how Marie could love Frank. Marie also realizes that she has made a mistake in marrying Frank: “When one makes a mistake, there’s no telling where it will stop” (231). She feels trapped in illicit love relationship with Emil. She tells Emil: “You can go away; you can leave all this behind you” (231). Marie doesn’t enjoy freedom like Emil as she expresses her troubled mind thus: “When a girl has loved one man, and then loved another while that man was still alive, everybody knows what to think of her” (249). Marie is not satisfied with life. Marie is involved in an unnatural illicit relationship with Emil because she is passionate, impetuous and sexually rebellious. She is suppressed by Frank who dominates her. Marie elopes with Frank under the impulse of her passions and she realizes that her elopement is a blunder in her life. She tries to persuade Emil to leave the Divide, leaving her to her fate. She walks slowly through her orchard enjoying the scent of the wild cotton. The interesting thing about Marie is that she is a victim of natural passion as she says “how terrible it is to love people when you cannot really share their lives!” (248). She has no faith in the church and her hope lies in natural religion because “they have now only their hearts to give each other” (249). Marie dreams to lead a life of perfect love and her soul longs to lead a life of perfect transcendence: As long as “this sweetness welled up in her heart, as long as her breast could hold this treasure of pain she felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it enriched and swelled with that image of gold” (250), Sigmund Freud wrote three essays on sexuality; “The Sexual Aberrations”; “Sexual Object” and “Sexual Aim” exploring deviations of sexual aims and the perversion of human beings. Freud emphasized

that “in neurotics the tendencies to every kind of perversion can be shown to exist as unconscious forces...neurotics is, as it were, the negative perversion” (On Sexuality, 155). Freud also contends that people who are abnormal in behaviour are sexually abnormal” (155). Marie is abnormal in behaviour as she commits the sin of moral transgression revolting against the established norms of the church. Emil sings a passionate song in the church revealing his justification of his possessing Marie Shabata. Emil expresses his passionate love sentiments for Marie through his song and expresses “a kind of rapture in which he could love forever without faltering and without sin” (Cather 255). The dreams of Alexandra are destroyed as Emil is never able to enjoy the freedom. He is killed by Frank in the farm and all hard work of Alexandra ends in despair. She is emotionally and psychologically tortured by the gruesome tragedy of Emil. She has bought huge tracts of land for Emil but he is killed under the “The White Mulberry Tree” and the land remains unused. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud states thus:

The disproportion between the many years' duration of the hysterical symptom and the single occurrence that provoked it is what we are accustomed invariably to find in traumatic neuroses. Quite frequently it is some event in childhood that sets up a more or less severe symptom which persists during the years that follow (Breuer and Freud, *The Standard Edition* 4).

Alexandra Bergson is emotionally shattered by the tragic death of Emil. She loves him very much and has planned to send him to Harvard for higher education. She is in trance and in desperate condition, she goes to his grave in a stormy night. Alexandra has Marie in mind when she tells Carl: “The young

people, they live so hard. And yet I sometimes envy them” (Cather 119). Marie elopes with Frank at the age of eighteen and marries him. Alexandra envies Marie who took a decisive action but she couldn't decide to marry Carl because she faced tough opposition from her brothers. She says: “She's too pretty and young for this sort of life” (121). She further comments expressing her psychological anguish: “We're all over so much older and slower” (121). Freud (1950) recognized that the natural discharge of psychic energy in the drive not only has a sexual aim but also has what might be termed a “deathly aim” that to “reduce, keep constant or remove internal tension” (76).

Emil also revolts against the traditions of the church and the society and fears nothing. He knows that what he is doing is sinful and may lead to his death but for him love and death are natural and they come together in his transcendence: “The heart, when it is own earth, and too much alive, aches for that brown earth, and ecstasy has no fear of death” (Cather 257). He is jealous of others who enjoy the fruits of love independently. He pours out his life “along the road before him as he rode to the Shabata farm to meet Marie” (258). Marie doesn't believe in confinement of marriage. She allows her to be trapped in the illicit relationship with Emil. She doesn't like the dominating and aggressive attitude of Frank who is jealous and insensitive. Frank treats Marie and his land very badly as he doesn't appreciate Marie. He has no respect for nature as Marie's father characterized him as a “stuffed shirt”. Frank spends more time in reading newspapers and holding political discussions with his other farmers. Marie also grows passionate and impulsive; Frank also passed through confusion and crisis of faith. He had tried to make “her life ugly. He had refused to share any of the

little pleasures she was so plucky about making for herself” (259). Frank goes to Saint-Agnes before killing Emil and Marie and spends the day talking with men at the saloon. Frank's inner psyche is turbulent and his rational thinking is disturbed. Willa Cather narrates the scene thus:

Resting the butt of his gun on the ground, he parted the mulberry leaves softly with his fingers and peered through the hedge at the dark figures on the grass, in the shadow of the mulberry tree. It seemed to him that they must feel his eyes (Cather 235).

Freud observes that “individuals who are violent do not experience any guilt about a violent act, nor do they have an empathic connection with their victim” (123). In his book *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud further observes that “violence is the result of selfish and cruel impulses.” Frank murders the lovers to satisfy his violent impulses and to escape from the anxiety disorder. Freud notes that the “greatest threat to civilization is the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another” (108).

To conclude, Willa Cather has concentrated on two themes in the novels *A Lost Lady*, *My Antonia*, *O' Pioneers* and *My Mortal Enemy*; the theme of moral bankruptcy and the violation of societal norms. Willa Cather's novel *My Mortal Enemy* is a heartrending tale of moral transgression and the punishment. Myra's revolt against the society, church and religion bring untold miseries to Myra. She has eloped with Oswald but she never enjoys domestic happiness as she always considers her husband Oswald as her enemy because he has separated her from religion. Myra's priority is to enjoy freedom and to revolt against the

church and society for material comfort of life. All the characters: Mrs. Forrester, Antonia, Emil, Marie and Myra suffer because of their lack of adjustment with the society and for their moral and social transgression.

Chapter – 6

Comparative Analysis of the Selected Texts of Willa Cather

Sigmund Freud has investigated human nature from a psychoanalytic perspective. In each individual, hidden aspects of mental life remain unknown. Freud has made several efforts to acquaint the individuals to comprehend the psychological defence mechanisms to cope with the uncertainties and challenges of routine life. In this study, it is found that some characters of Willa Cather use their defence mechanisms in several situations and emerge successful in fighting with the odds of life, but there are characters who remain ignorant or lack inner vitality to use their defence mechanism and as a result suffer the multiple psychological ailments. In this chapter, a detailed analysis is given of all the major characters of the novel instituting a comparative study. The psychological defence mechanisms give potential benefits to the individuals helping them to face the unconscious pain that lies behind them. Joseph Burgo observes thus:

Psychological defence mechanisms are a universal and necessary part of human psychology; they protect and help us to navigate the more difficult aspects of human experience, but often, they stand in the way of growth and satisfaction. Rigid or deeply entrenched defences may prevent us from getting what we truly need in our relationships, from leading a rich emotional life and living in ways that promote authentic self-esteem (8).

It is not easy to confront pain in life but the psychological defence mechanisms help to liberate the pain as individuals are able to probe their own depths. With the help of defence mechanisms, they are able to recognize the rich

psychological complexity of friends and family members. They are able to understand the value of human relationships.

Willa Cather's novels are full of characters who come to understand how certain attitudes or passions have blinded them to their own true nature. In *O' Pioneers* after finally acknowledging the truth of human struggles in life, Alexandra Bergson uses her psychological defence mechanism; she comes out of trauma and confronts the reality of her father's death. John Bergson had committed suicide since he was under stress as he couldn't pay the debt and the financial crisis wrecked his rational sensibility. He was too fragile to confront with the economic worries. Alexandra Bergson finds her life full of challenges and uncertainties and often in desperation she thinks of ending her life. Her father dies and she takes control of the family farm with an ambition to become one of the most successful farmers. Burgo observes thus:

While we assume we have special insight into people around us, we're likely to resent it if someone presumes the same thing in relation to us. The possibility that we're unable to recognize something about ourselves that other people can see is an extremely unpleasant one for most people (15).

In *O' Pioneers*, Ivar is very intelligent person and his advice is valued by Alexandra but ironically Ivar himself doesn't profit by it. He suffers from the inferiority complex because he is a failure as a farmer and has no money; all he has, is a sense of deep depression as he says: "I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I do not cut my hair, and because I have visions" (55). He loses his land "through mismanagement" but he overcomes his emotional

Volcano with the help of Alexandra. Alexandra takes him to her home; she promises that she'll "keep him at home" (33). Ivar is assigned mundane task, he hitches and unhitches the work-teams and looks after the health of the stock" (33). Ryan claims that Ivar "becomes the human testament to pioneering...As the task of the pioneering is to make nature productive, Ivar must be transformed from unproductive wildness into a productive force and this process is very painful for Ivar" (35). Oscar and Lou object to Alexandra for bringing Ivar in their house. Alexandra tries to resolve his crisis as she says: "Let people go on talking as they like and we will go on living as we think better" (39). Burgo comments thus:

Our defence mechanisms are invisible methods by which we exclude unacceptable thoughts and feelings from awareness. In the process they subtly distort our perceptions of reality – in both our personal relationships and the emotional terrain within us (16).

In 1890, Freud started his investigation of the concept of psychological defences in his work *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). Freud wrote in German, but he used words warding off' or "fending off" to describe this mental phenomenon. Freud observes thus:

Sometimes when we're confronted with an idea or feeling that we find too painful or morally unacceptable, we ward it off, pushing it into the unconscious. It's not a deliberate decision; it happens outside of awareness, in ways that are often automatic (19).

God has given the potential to each individual to avoid pain and while a man lives in society, everyone sympathizes with him to avoid pain. Very often individuals try to deceive themselves reluctantly to face the truth of life. Wilhelm Reich wrote *Character Analysis* (1933) and discussed the traits of man's personality.

He believed that one's personality or character traits as a whole [are] a compact defence mechanism with the same warding-off effect as any other psychological defence. Such a defence shows up "in the way one typically behaves, in the manner in which one speaks, walks, and gestures; and in one's characteristic habits (how one smiles or sneers . . . how one is polite and how one is aggressive (21).

Alexandra is proud that she has built a great homestead and has bought huge tracts of land. She tells Ivar the reason for her long years of devoted work: "I really built it for Emil I'm sure it was to have sons like Emil, and to give them a chance, that father left by saying that Emil is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that's what I have worked for" (117). Her defence mechanisms help her to face the real situation and be successful as a brave farmer. Willa Cather describes the mutual understanding and closeness of Alexandra and Carl. Carl recognizes the strength of Alexandra Bergson and indicates that she will emerge as a great woman in the Divide. Carl departs leaving Alexandra with her plough and the barren land stretching far away when her brothers raise objections to her marrying Carl. Alexandra will have to face "what is going to happen" (54). With Carl's departure, Alexandra has to depend on her brothers who are her anti-thesis;

they contribute brawn but no sensitivity, no human sympathy. Alexandra is alone to fight with the hard land and the cruel nature. Her brothers fail to understand her and balk and are uncompromising creating conflict in the family. All brothers of Alexandra are insensitive and harsh and don't recognize the emotional needs of their sister who is forty and is leading a lonely life struggling with the hard land. As the novel progresses, Alexandra grows emotionally bankrupt and sexually frigid. Alexandra tries hard to break her loneliness depending upon the company of Emil and Marie. Alexandra fails to understand the love relationship of Emil and Marie. Her own world is so resigned, so turbulent and she herself is so much depressed that she has no time to think about the problems of others. Alexandra Bergson becomes a psychic wreck after the tragic killing of her brother Emil. He was very dear to her; she wanted to send him to Harvard University for higher education but all her dreams ended in acute despair. She is almost in a trance as she goes into his grave in the night during a storm and is found there in the morning drenched, icy cold by Ivar Czar. She is almost half dead as Cather reports:

Ever since Emil died, I've suffered so when it rained. Now that I've been out in it with him. I shan't dread it. After you once get cold clear throughout, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them. May be it's like that with the dead. If they feel anything at all, it's the old things, before they were born, that comfort people like the feeling of their own bed does when they are little (Cather 159).

After the graveyard incident, there is a transformation in Alexandra. She thinks “more calmly than she had done since Emil’s death” (120). She thinks that “she and Frank had been wrecked by the same storm” (120). She decides to get Frank free from prison and feels lightened. She goes to Lincoln, meets Frank and assures him that she would get him out of prison. She understands that Frank could have done nothing else in those situation. Back home, she finds Carl Linstrum waiting for her which is a delightful surprise for her. She decides to marry Carl leaving aside all fears of society. She says: “when friends marry, they are safe they went into the house together, leaving the Divide behind them, under the evening star” (135).

Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* (1918) is another important novel in which the characters use defence mechanism to confront reality of life. The plot of the novel is loaded with the images of darkness and despair; frustration and depression. The images of the blizzards, the droughts, the snakes, the grasshoppers and fires depict the mood of alienation and frustration. Willa Cather has dramatized the struggles of the pioneers for survival in a harsh society undergoing radical transformation. Antonia has no social life and no source of entertainment. Willa Cather gives the idea that her struggle is to survive in a harsh society where the main crisis of money and poverty are the challenges. She finds people around her flouting all the norms of society to make money and to cope with poverty.

The novel is set in a period of rapid cultural change in America and the plot of *My Antonia* unfolds the struggles of the pioneers against the forces of nature; the storms and the blizzards. Jim, Mr. Shimerda, Antonia are rooted in

the soil so much that they are not only isolated and cut off from sustaining human relationships, but also thwarted and frustrated in life. Antonia has no social life and no source of entertainment. They are rooted in soil as they struggle to sustain human relations. The main theme in the novel is the friendship between Antonia Shimerda, an improvised immigrant girl and Jim who is an American boy and both find themselves as strangers on the prairie of Nebraska. All characters in the novel don't use defence mechanism and Shimerda belongs to this category of people. He is overwhelmed by the depression and kills himself with a shotgun. He kills himself because he cannot confront the sufferings of his family. Being a farmer, he is an outsider in the American land and it seems to him that he is the individual thrown into a strange world there is no escape from the terrors of life. He becomes self-conscious of his failure. For Freud, "the unconscious" is a systematic part of mind like the other "psychic co-systems" (114) namely "the conscious" and 'the preconscious'. The unconscious mind holds repressed feelings, hidden perceptions, concealed phobias, automatic reactions, blocked memories, thoughts, and desires that impact human behavior. Mr. Shimerda symbolizes a major cross roads in the novel and his suicide becomes a major factor in Antonia's identity formation. Antonia uses defence mechanisms to escape alienation and isolation. There is a complete transformation in her in the end of the novel. Willa Cather glorifies her as a source of life and energy who has transformed the barren Nebraska prairie into a rich and fruitful garden. Being a source of fertility, she is mother to eleven children. Antonia has achieved victory over the struggles of her early life and forces of nature with hard work, patience and perseverance. When Jim comes to meet her, he finds: "She was there, in the full vigor of her personality.....She had not lost the fire of life"

(124). Freud expresses the significance of defence mechanisms thus:

Our final goal will be learning to disarm those defence mechanisms, the ones that prevent satisfying contact with important people in our world, and to find more effective ways to express what lies in the unconscious. Not all defence mechanisms need to be disarmed, nor must everything that resides in the unconscious be faced; but when our defences become too rigid or entrenched, profoundly interfering with our relationships, we need to develop more conscious and flexible methods to help us cope (18).

According to Freud “wake up” is the most important defence mechanism. Jim “wakes up” and fully prepares himself to face the truth of death of Mr. Shimerda in the novel. Jim explores the meaning of life and the reality about the emergence of new culture. He understands the challenges of the new culture and tries his best to soothe Antonia helping her to reconcile with the new situation. She bears the burden of the family with courage and candour. Antonia says: “No, I never got down-hearted. I belong on a farm. I’m never lonesome here like I used to be in town..... And I don’t mind work a bit, if I don’t have to put up with sadness. Freud says aptly thus:

Sometimes unconscious knowledge breaks through and we realize what has been brewing unnoticed inside us for a long time. More often, we continue as we were, our defense mechanisms in place and unnoticed. Human beings are creatures of habit and change is difficult (20).

Antonia in the novel *My Antonia* and Professor Godfrey in the novel Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* are important characters in the novels of

Willa Cather who get back to their roots and face the reality of life. Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* is a case study of a learned professor who is a researcher but a victim of the indifference of the family, wife and children. He lives in an old dilapidated house and is always haunted by the old memories. The main idea running through the plot is the story of Tom Outland who has a different experience of society and civilization. Professor St. Peter is an idealistic who wants to transform the world by his new historicity. Both Tom Outland and St. Peter pursue adventures in cultural and personal recollection driven to make "that perilous journey down journey down through the human house" (27). Professor St. Peter knows that he is misfit and an outsider in the new American society. He is withdrawn from the family and the daughters and lives a lonely life in an attic. His pupil Tom is fired with adventurous spirit; he gives his life in his quest for idealistic glory and heroism. Willa Cather has dramatized the clash between idealism and materialism in this novel. His daughters Kitty and Rosamond are given to consumer greed and this is the major cause of frustration and distress of St. Peter. He finds himself misfit as the environment stifles his psyche. He even faces the death. The Professor has to use a gas stove to combat the lack of heat but he is saved: "a sudden gust of wind would blow the wretched thing out altogether, and a deeply absorbed man might be asphyxiated before he knew it" (17). He is rescued by Augusta and prepares to face his returning family. Cather comments thus on his survival:

His temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial. He had let something go-and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably. He

doubled whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to; they would be too happily preoccupied with their own affairs. If his apathy hurt them, they could not possibly be so much hurt as he had been already. At least, he felt the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future. (282)

Cather has given the echo of Lillian's critique of St. Peter's habit of drawing away from people: "I'd much rather see you foolish about some woman than becoming lonely and inhuman....I think your ideas were best when you were most human self" (142). The appearance of Augusta at the critical moment rescues St. Peter. He is "shocked that Augusta had not foreseen growing grey in Lillian's service asking himself what other future could Augusta possibly have expected?" (14). Augusta never tells St. Peter that she has lost money in the stock market and when "Kathleen tells him the story, he is concerned that she should receive money back from the family" (109). St. Peter learns the lesson from Augusta who is a poor maid servant but has rescued him like a real saviour. He must learn the value of social consciousness and re-join the family to end his isolation and learn the real meaning of life. At the end of the novel, Professor Godfrey realizes the reality of life and death and decides to get back to the roots and enjoys the bliss of domestic happiness. Freud observes thus:

Men and women who suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder usually have an inflated sense of their own importance, lack empathy for others and react to criticism with anger or shame. Those who suffer from Borderline Personality Disorder are impulsive, emotionally volatile and

have unstable relationships with other people (22).

This study has explored that there are characters such as John Bergson, Mr. Shimerda, Captain Forrester, Claude Wheeler, Emil, Marie, Marian Forrester, Myra who fail to use their defence mechanism and suffer death and destruction. Mr. Shimerda in *My Antonia* commit suicide. He feels the real burden of the social change and is struck to the core by the meaninglessness of his life. He feels that there is a hole in his life; he feels a sense of emptiness, of irony and of absurdity. He feels depressed as the challenges of the prairie land cultivation make him sick and decadent. He is overwhelmed by the depression and kills himself with a shotgun. He kills himself because he cannot confront the sufferings of his family.

In her novel *One of Ours*, Claude Wheeler lacks moral and spiritual vision. His father gives no direction to him. He represents a kind of Everyman suffering for his idealism and reacting against the stifling environment that makes him depressed. Claude is a sick protagonist in the grip of inner conflicts. He knows that no meaning is available to a misplaced man on the farm. He lacks faith in himself because he has no clear vision of what he wants. Freud observes that there are many individuals who don't bother to use their psychological mechanisms. Freud used the word "resistance" as Burgo says:

Freud and the many psychodynamic therapists who have followed him refer to this phenomenon as *resistance*. You've probably heard that word before; it's not a difficult concept to grasp. If we originally warded off feelings or facts too painful to bear – that is, resorted to a defense mechanism – we will naturally *resist* anything that threatens to revive that

pain. Sometimes we reject an idea (24).

Captain Forrester of *A Lost Lady* is an impressive character in the novel of Willa Cather. Willa Cather argued that the plot of *A Lost Lady* is structured around the themes of the fall of the frontiers, the loss of their innocence, loss of self and trauma experienced by the characters of *A Lost Lady*. The predominant metaphor of “lost” is very significant suggesting the mood of despair, loss of self and of impending doom. Mr. Forrester and his beautiful wife Mrs. Forester are prominent in the town being wealthy and resourceful. The heroine Marian is a beautiful flapper who falls in love with Captain Forrester who rescues her when she has a fatal fall in the mountains. His house Sweet Waters is known for parties as the guests are seen every evening. Captain Forrester is in debt and his paralytic stroke confines him to the bed. He loses his will to live and fails to use his defence mechanisms. His “resistance” attitude virtually breaks his mind as Anna says:

This means that the inroad of the id into the ego has given place to a counterattack by the ego upon the id. The observer’s attention is now diverted from the associations to the resistance, i.e., from the content of the id to the activity of the ego. The analyst has an opportunity of witnessing, then and there (18).

The novel *A Lost Lady* chronicles the rise and degeneration of the machine age in Cather’s America. Marian Forrester is the pivotal character who is a survivor, lives in the shadow of men: “It was in relation to her husband that Neil most admired her” (78) and “the right man could save her, even now” (65). Captain Forrester is a major character suffering from the loss of self. He is the

last spokesman of the transitional age of America. He is depressed because he firmly believes that he is a misfit in the society. Cather has portrayed the grace and charm of Forrester, his straight forwardness and “clumsy dignity” (23). He is a gracious host and a fine story teller. And he holds that “what you think of and plan for day by day, in spite of yourself, so to speak you will get. You will get it more or less” (32). He becomes bankrupt and the financial insolvency results into his disintegration of self. He is utterly helpless as he is confined to bed.

Willa Cather's characters Emil and Marie of *O' Pioneers*, Marian Forrester of *A Lost Lady* and Myra of *My Mortal Enemy* suffer because of moral degradation and sexuality. Willa Cather expresses her concern for the futility and meaninglessness of life. The novel *O' Pioneers* is about death, decay, defeat and the decline of moral values of society. The happy marriages of Amedee and Angelique end in despair because of financial problems. Amedee falls ill and dies less than a year after his wedding because she couldn't get the proper medical treatment. Paucity of money becomes a major cause of her premature death. Ivar is another important character in *O' Pioneers* who is very intelligent but fails to lead a happy life. He loses his land “through mismanagement” and goes into depression. He fails to get success to break the sod and turn the prairie into productive land. He is in deep financial crisis. He fails because he doesn't use the defence mechanism to survive in the society. Ivar is shocked to notice the decay of moral values and disruption of prairie culture of the pioneers. People around him are growing crazy about money and farmers are becoming poor and wretched. Farming is considered to be the worst occupation in the society. They have to cope up with the droughts, flood, low prices of their yield and cruelty of

the bankers and the landlords. In the last section of the novel, Cather dramatizes the chaos and disorder in the life of Emil and Mary. They are seen shooting the ducks and the bloody birds “too happy to kill” (128). The images of blood are very effective in this part of the novel as they foreshadow the violent deaths of the lovers. The scenes of moral decadence are dramatized by Willa Cather in this part of the novel. Marie and Emil have transgressed and committed a sin and they are punished for their sin.

Myra is another important character in the novel *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) who falls victim to psychological disorder. The plot focuses on the character of Myra Driscoll dramatizing her poignant tale from adolescence to her death. Cather employs many unique techniques such as echoes, suggestive details and allusions to structure the plot. Myra is grappling with the problem of religion, love and sex. Myra is an orphaned little girl and is brought up by her uncle who is a crude money loving person. Cather has used the elements of folk lore and precious stones; allusions to German and English poets to portray the character of Myra Driscoll. E. K. Brown in his book: (1964) *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (1964) observes that Myra has been “felt to be sharp and original if at points a little mystifying” (748). Within the Cather canon, it represents “a freeing of storytelling from those aspects of romanticism that had reached a dead end” (144): “When Myra speaks . . . it is as if a character from a fairy tale. . . were to . . . step forward . . . and say, Let me tell you what it was really like” (150). John Randall in his book *The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value* (1960) commented thus: “Myra, who is also unable to solve her problems, attempts to escape by refusing to accept the

consequences of her actions and by blaming everyone but herself for the way her life has turned out” (235). Nellie Birdsevo is the man narrator who visits the Henshawes in their comfortable house in New York City. She is highly impressed by the sophisticated attitude of Myra and Myra’s husband Oswald. The plot is very simple; told in retrospect by Nellie, it deals with two periods in her life. She notices that Myra and Oswald have been married for twenty-five years. Myra has eloped with Oswald transgressing all norms of the religion and society. She has committed a sin of transgression and indulges in sexual adultery. The first impression of Nellie is very impressive as she feels that Myra is the real independent woman in America who enjoys the sexual liberty exhibiting her free spirit breaking the chains of patriarchal domination. She is living in poor quarters of New York with her husband Oswald who has a modest job. Nellie and Myra are old friends and Nellie gets an opportunity to revisit her again to have the insight into the life of Myra after ten years. There has been tremendous change in the culture of America and New York has emerged as the most advanced and smart city attracting the people of the world. Nellie finds Myra leading a simple and backward life. She is lonely, desperate and living in the bog of poverty. However, they spend hours together reading poetry and reviving the old memories. The signs of frustration and depression are quite visible on the face of Myra. Both friends enjoy rides along the sea shore. Nellie is shocked to observe the callous and indifferent attitude of Myra towards her husband Oswald. She tries to investigate the mystery of love and hate relationships of Myra and Oswald. Myra doesn’t like the probing and investigative nature of Nellie and this brings the curtain down of their friendship. Nellie is a committed friend as she continues giving a helping hand to her husband Oswald and finds Myra growing

sicker and lonely. One day she overhears Myra saying: "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy!" Nellie is shocked by this phrase but it doesn't move Oswald. Soon after this, Myra dies facing the sea with a crucifix in her hand and Oswald moves to Alaska after a few days later. Oswald dies in Alaska some years later and Nellie continues investigating the mysterious domestic life of Myra and Oswald. In this novel Willa Cather has dramatized the sufferings of Myra who represent American women taking undue sexual liberty and transgressing the sin of sexuality and adultery. In her deep crisis, Myra is all the time burning with the guilt consciousness. She considers her husband the worst enemy of her life who has actually ruined her life. Anna Freud in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1966) observes thus:

Love, longing, jealousy, mortification, pain, and mourning accompany sexual wishes; hatred, anger, and rage accompany the impulses of aggression; if the instinctual demands with which they are associated are to be warded off, these affects must submit to all the various measures to which the ego resorts in its efforts to master them, i.e., they must undergo a metamorphosis (30).

Life of Myra is a case study of an American woman who is cut off from society and the church because of her sin of moral transgression. Nellie's probe is an interesting part of the novel as the valuable information is supplied by Nellie about Myra's behaviour and character. Nellie's investigation reveals that Myra is aggressive and violent and indifferent as she lives with the burden of guilt and shame. She finds Oswald simple, honest and dedicated husband but Myra is violent, aggressive and jealous of her husband. She is blinded by her own prejudices and fails to get awareness and is helpless to confront the reality of life.

The emotional and psychological trauma ruins her life and the psychological defence mechanisms lie dormant in her psyche. Myra enjoys love and romance but after elopement with Oswald she feels guilty and regards Oswald as her mortal enemy. Nellie even reproaches Myra for her jealousy; stubborn attitude and indifference to her husband. Myra mentions to Nellie the suicide of a young man and exclaims:

People are always talking about the joys of youth...but oh, how youth can suffer! I've not forgotten; those hot southern Illinois nights, when Oswald was in New York, and I had no word from him except through Liddy (Nellie's aunt), and I used to lie on the floor all night and listen to the express trains go by. I've not forgotten...I wonder why you are sometimes so hard on him now (102).

Freud observes that a guilty person cannot enjoy the peace of mind as the guilt always haunts him. Nellie observes the strange kind of "feeling" between Oswald and Myra. Myra's heart is wounded as there is heavy stress on her mind. Bitterness and jealousy is growing in the mind of Myra and psychologically she looks sick and battered broken in mind and spirit. Myra lives with Oswald for twenty five years and each day she feels the psychological pain. At the end of the novel, Oswald is found nursing Myra in California. Nellie is in conflict; she doesn't know how to overcome the trauma of life. Nellie is disturbed by the hellish life of Myra who is all the time expressing her anguish. She has married Oswald in haste fired by love and sexual desires. She has been under the impulse of emotional outburst as she behaves like an irrational child. Her irrational and adventurous elopement results in alienation and mental sickness. Freud observes that those who don't use their defence mechanism really suffer psychological

anguish in life:

When you remember our basic definition of defence mechanisms – lies we tell ourselves to ward off pain – such a reaction might mean that one of your defense mechanisms is at work. The emphatic word but often indicates just that. We tend to become defensive when confronted with something painful (24).

Myra is a case study of a woman who is torn in body and spirit. She suffers the psychological ailments because of her rigid and aggressive behaviour. She is impulsive, passionate and obstinate. She thinks she is always right and has the inborn will to command. She is a born rebel as she has flouted all the norms of the society. Her rebellious action is condemned by all but soon the cracks have appeared in her relationship with Oswald. Nellie tries to explore the mystery of her thoughts and ideas and her tastes and habits. She is disconnected with her parents and sister. In her conversation with Nellie, she has never mentioned her father and sister. Wilhelm Reich explored the deviant behaviour of individuals who are arrogant and rigid. Myra belongs to the category of arrogant and rigid people who fail to use their defence mechanisms and suffer. Burgo reports thus:

Wilhelm Reich (1933) refers in his remarks on the consistent analysis of resistance. Bodily attitudes such as stiffness and rigidity, personal peculiarities such as a fixed smile, contemptuous, ironical, and arrogant behavior—all these are residues of very vigorous defensive processes in the past, which have become dissociated from their original situations (conflicts with instincts or affects) and have developed into permanent character traits, the armor-plating of character (31).

Consider the case of Myra, whose uncle disowns her after her adventurous elopement and illegal marriage with Oswald. She subsequently goes from one short term relationship to another in vain as the church and the society discards her. As a married woman, Myra is a loner who finds it difficult to trust upon anyone. When she gets married, she chooses a lover who could give her love and sexual pleasures. After marriage, Myra leads a cat and dog life in New York. Willa Cather has reported the scene of quarrel with Oswald about the keys: “When I felt was fear: I was afraid to look or speak or move. Everything about me scented evil” (64). Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) took a fresh direction exploring the functions of the ego and was engaged in “depth psychology.” Myra is a confused personality; its not clear what motivated her to fall in the trap of Oswald whose father was “an Ulster Protestant whom Driscoll detested” (13). Her indifference to Oswald after the marriage is confusing. She compels him to leave the city and to run away to New York. Myra’s uncle has warned her. Myra laments to Nellie Over thirty years later “I broke with the Church when I broke with everything else and ran away with a German free-thinker; but I believe in holy words and holy rites all the same” (85). Myra condemned herself for her sexual liberty and adventurous spirit. Anna describes in detail the function and working of the ego thus: That is to say: in relation to the ego, to explore its contents, its boundaries, and its functions, and to trace the history of its dependence on the outside world, the id, and the superego; and, in relation to the id, to give an account of the instincts, i.e., of the id contents, and to follow them through the transformations which they undergo (12). Oswald clarifies this near the end: “It is one of her delusions that I separated her from the Church. I never meant to” (99). In effect, Myra constructed her own alternatives

and set romantic love against God. “The real question,” writes Lewis, “is which do you serve . . . ? To which claim does your will, in the last resort, yield?” (122-23). For decades Freud (1933) regarded himself as “the preferred field of work for psychoanalysis namely the problems which the unconscious sense of guile has opened up, its connections with morality, education, crime and delinquency” (61). It is interesting to explore the neurological foundations of Myra’s sick and wounded mind. J. Sandler (1960) in his article “Psychoanalytic Study of the Child” explored the function of the superego to understand the ego activities, and the role of guilt consciousness in the life of an individual. J. Arlow (1982) observed that “Superego function has been shunted to one side by the current preoccupation with the persistence of the regressive reactivation of archaic idealizations” (230). Donald L. Carveth (2015) argues :

Psychoanalytic critique of the superego has focused almost exclusively upon its destructive manifestations in the life of the individual, in self-punishment, self-sabotage, masochism, depression and suicide, and not upon the morally objectionable internalized socio- cultural ideologies of which the superego is comprised and that are reflected even in its normative, let alone its pathological expressions (12).

Nellie admits that “John Driscoll and his niece had suddenly changed places in my mind, and he had got, after all, the romantic part” (19). Willa Cather has explored the depth of human relationships in her novels and in this chapter a comparative analysis of all the important facts and bonding of relationships is vividly described. The first important relationship is between Alexandra Bergson and John Bergson in the novel *O Pioneers*. The second important relationship

between Mr. Shimerda and Antonia is depicted in the novel *My Antonia*. The dramatization of both relationship highlight Cather's deep study of human nature and her poetic talent to portray the situations. Cather gives an insight to the psychological problems of her characters who confront the forces of change and modernity in Nebraska. *My Antonia* is a historical novel describing the decline of moral values laid down by the pioneers. Jim and Antonia relationship is based on values that pillowed the civilization of the pioneers. Willa Cather has documented the changing environment and cultural transformation in America and the plight of the pioneers in her novel. Willa Cather presents the scenes of deforestation and urbanization in America. Willa Cather dramatizes the touching scenes of love, loss, fear, tragedy, death and suicide. The main plot is structured around the friendship between Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda. The novel chronicles all the historical forces of the transitional period when the values were fast declining. The editor of *New York Sun* commented that the novel is a "great gift of Willa Cather documenting the cultural and social history of the people of Nebraska" (2). The advent of the money culture was the main feature of the transitional period in America. The industrial revolution destroyed the natural landscape and the worst hit were the poor farmers like Mr. Shimerda. Jim's narrative depicts the spirit of nostalgia and pessimism overwhelming Mr. Shimerda, Cutter and Antonia. Willa Cather uses the narrative technique of the Greeks masters borrowing from Homer and Virgil while describing the depths of human relationships. The external landscape of terror and dissonance is linked with the inner turmoil and rupture of relationships between Mr. Shimerda, Cutter, Antonia and Jim Burden. The electric storm at the outset of the novel disturbs all

characters as “the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet-iron” (Cather 19). Antonia watches the scene of destruction with fear. Antonia compares her life situation with Jim’s: “If I live here, like you that is different. Things will be easy for you, But they will be hard for us” (116). Willa Cather uses the images of cold, shadows and reptiles to describe the darkness, death, and suicide. The dark clouds in the sky symbolize mortality; loss of values and chaos operating in the society. Mr. Shimerda is ruined; his farming is on the verge of extinction but in spite of the worst situation he expresses his deep love and emotional attachment with her daughter Antonia. Mr. Shimerda is disgusted and frustrated with the forces of economy and capitalism. His plough is again the tool of men in their “littleness” and the worst affected is Jim. The suicide of Mr. Shimerda symbolizes human degradation and the loss of moral values. Mr. Shimerda is proud of her daughter who uses her psychological defence mechanisms to overcome depression of life. She bears the loss of her father in the true spirit and accepts the challenges of farming boldly and with strength. Antonia is a prairie woman struggling to survive in a new community in her quest for money and material prosperity. Cather develops Jim and Antonia relationships belonging to the generation of the pioneers. Their relationship is fully developed to “the process of memory-making” (Lee 139).

In her novel *O’ Pioneers*, two main characters are Alexandra Bergson and John Bergson. The story is about the struggles of the pioneers of Nebraska and the title of the novel is borrowed from the poem of Walt Whitman. Willa Cather has depicted the value of love and faith in this novel. John Bergson is proud of her daughter Alexandra Bergson and considers her worth of shouldering all the

responsibilities after his death. Alexandra Bergson is the first pioneer afflicted with the psychological diseases. She is presented rattling through the darkness in a wagon making “a moving point of light along the highway going deeper and deeper into the dark country” (Willa Cather, *O’ Pioneers* 18). The images of chaos, darkness, loneliness and distance are in the beginning of the novel. The landscape is depressing as the winter is chilling and heavy snow is tormenting and disturbing the life of John Bergson and Alexandra Bergson. In these changing situations, Alexandra Bergson uses her psychological defence mechanisms to survive and to confront the reality of the prairie life. She is not confined by traditional gender roles. She enjoys American liberty and acts as a steward of the farm land. She uses her full potential to develop the farm land like a true male pioneer. Joseph Burgo has explored the relations between Id , Ego and Super-ego. In the case of Alexandra Bergson all natural instincts are in harmony as Burgo states:

Nevertheless, our picture of the superego always tends to become hazy when harmonious relations exist between it and the ego. We then say that the two coincide, i.e., at such moments the superego is not perceptible as a separate institution either to the subject himself or to an outside observer. Its outlines become clear only when it confronts the ego with hostility or at least with criticism. The superego, like the id, becomes perceptible in the state which it produces within the ego: for instance, when its criticism evokes a sense of guilt (28).

Alexandra Bergson devotes herself to cultivating the farm land; paying off the loan and buying new land in Nebraska (Patricia 275). Her father dies and

she takes control of the family farm with an ambition to become one of the most successful farmers and landowners of the Divide. In his death bed, he gives advice to his children: “Keep turning the land, and always put more hay than you need” (Cather 27). Alexandra expresses her freedom and decides to control and lead the family as she expresses her strong determination overcoming her depression: “Let people go on talking as they like and we will go on living as we think better” (94). She assigns Ivar “mundane tasks; (Cather 33) to help the family. Alexandra takes him to her home; and says: “she will keep him at home” (39). Her first priority is to transform Ivar. Ivar suffers from the inferiority complex as he admits: “I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I do not cut my hair, and because I have visions” (Cather 55). He loses his land, his identity; Oscar and Lou object to Alexandra for bringing Ivar in their house. The strength of Alexandra is her strong leadership qualities and her control over emotions and passions. She is fully aware and conscious of her situation and she uses all her energies to bring prosperity in the family; she clears all the debts; she works day and night like a true pioneer and emerges as a successful farmer.

In the last section of this chapter, the strained relations of Claude Wheeler in the novel *One of Ours* and Professor Godfrey’s love and hate relations with his daughters in *The Professor’s House* are described. Willa Cather’s novel *One of Ours* (1922), depicts the inner conflicts of the hero Claude Wheeler and the main focus of the novelist is on the strained relations between Claude Wheeler and his wife Enid. The novel *One of Ours* is a poignant tale of a soldier who lost everything in his struggle for happiness in the new world of America. Claude Wheeler is young and an idealist representative of the decline of the pioneering age. The pioneers ravished the land but in the process they got dehumanized.

Claude Wheeler is presented as a Nebraska farm boy; his father is severe and insensitive and his mother is understanding and sympathetic. Wheeler is sent to Lincoln College to become a religious minister against his wishes. His father imposed his ambition on him and he remains upset in the stifling environment of his father's house. He wished to join the University of Nebraska. He represents sensitive American youth having all the desires, strength and determination. Wheeler grows in a bewildering world anxious to enjoy love and happiness but the society is fast changing and the values are fast declining. The farming is no longer productive as the system has changed due to the development of science and technology. People in construction business and railway rolled in wealth but those engaged in farming remained backward and poor struggling for the basic necessities of life. The floods, drought, heavy snow and outbreak of diseases psychologically tortured the farmers. Materialism is the beast that devours the people who make money, not gardens and orchards. Wheeler is a big failure in farming and this disheartens him. The entire life of Wheeler is a long journey for the quest of a meaning full life; his life is dedicated to search the real joy and happiness in the new world of Nebraska, He leaves Nebraska to find out the real meaning of life and this search continues and where he goes his farming background goes with him. He is not in good terms with his father and his mother Mrs. Wheeler who wanted her son to be a great scholar of religion, art and literature. Claude feels very uncomfortable in Temple College as he realizes that "things and people he most disliked were the ones that were to shape his destiny" (Willa Cather, *One of Ours*, 31). He leaves the college after two years in disgust as he finds the "professors that are not so much good. Most of them are just preachers who couldn't make a living at preaching" (24). His marriage with Enid

proves disastrous. Enid means “spotless purity” and he stands with Enid in “the bright sun to illuminate his freedom search” (106). Enid fails to give him what he needs. She appears as a spiritual apparition; she has grown in a family that lives apart. Her father is in the mill house, her mother in herself and her sister Caroline in China. She looks like a ghost “all spirit and no flesh” (108). They lead a cat and dog life and Enid, who is more interested in preaching activities, begins neglecting Wheeler. La Capra also reinterprets the Freudian concept of the unconscious stating that the unconscious is the absence of an activity. La Capra writes, “The unconscious and the drives might be apprehended as active or generative absences They may not be recovered as if they were losses or lacks” (58). She goes to China leaving Wheeler alone and this is the end of his domestic happiness. Enid hates farming; she repels Claude beyond the reach of fulfilment. His dreams are shattered; his last effort to get happiness in marriage ends in despair. Being an idealist he wants to do something heroic so he joins the French army and gets killed. Cather depicts the fall of an idealist who wastes his life in his quest for the meaning and happiness of life and suffers because of his strained relations with his wife and parents. Anna Freud observes that it is very essential to maintain harmony with all the instincts; id, ego and super-ego. Men like Claude Wheeler suffer because of their lack of understanding of existential reality. His obsession with idealism led to his downfall as Anna remarks:

Different instinctual impulses are perpetually forcing their way from the id into the ego, where they gain access to the motor apparatus, by means of which they obtain gratification. In favourable cases the ego does not object to the intruder but puts its own energies at the other’s disposal and confines itself to perceiving; it notes the onset of the instinctual impulse,

the heightening of tension and the feelings of unpleasure by which this is accompanied (13).

Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's House* is an interesting tale of conflict between realism and idealism; between the lust for money and lust for research and meaning of life. Professor Godfrey is an idealist and a true researcher whose ambitions and passions come in conflict with his greedy and money minded wife and daughters. The world represented by Lillian; the wife of St. Peter and his daughters who are crazy to make fast money, structure the pattern of the novel. Professor St. Peter is an idealistic who wants to transform the world by his new historicity and his wife and daughters are crazy to enjoy the material comforts by the money of Godfrey. The archaeological dig in the Blue Mesa forms the nucleus of the novel and this dig involves the mythical journey of Tom Outland. Both Tom Outland and St. Peter pursue adventures in cultural and personal recollection driven to make "that perilous journey down journey down through the human house" (27). Professor St. Peter is caught in the ambiguity of life and prefers withdrawal from the domestic and social life and Tom in his adventurous spirit give his life in his quest for idealistic glory and heroism. Godfrey has no charm in life as he lives in his old dilapidated house bound by professional and personal memories. Professor St. Peter has to endure the indifference of his selfish and greedy wife and daughters. His daughter Kitty and Rosamond are given to consumer greed. Lillian, his wife too has shifted her attention to her son-in law. As the novel progresses, the detachment of the Professor becomes a source of his loss of self and brings emptiness and disintegration in his life. Cather has dramatized the conflict between idealism and

materialism in this novel in realistic and heart rending language. Anna Freud explore the cause of the conflicts thus:

Then a fresh conflict arises between id derivative and ego activity, a conflict to decide which of the two is to keep the upper hand or what compromise they will adopt. If through reinforcement of its energetic cathexis the defence set up by the ego is successful, the invading force from the id is routed and peace reigns once more in the psyche—a situation most unfruitful for our observations (15).

To conclude, in this chapter a comparative study of all the characters is done relying on the theories of psychological defence mechanisms propounded by Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud. Each novel of Willa Cather depicts a different approach and he has explored the depth of human relations in lyrical language. Each character from his novel *O Pioneers!* to *My Mortal Enemy* suffers from psychological anguish and each novel of Willa Cather is replete with the images of darkness; shadows; death and dissonance and the reality of the psychological anguish and trauma is depicted realistically. The causes and the symptoms and the fall of each characters is traced in this chapter focusing on the comparative analysis giving an insight to the inner turbulent world of Willa Cather.

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