

University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Immigration in Willa Cather's work
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Bachelor Thesis

2020

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2017/2018

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

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Osobní číslo: **H16207**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi**
Název tématu: **Přistěhovalectví v díle Willy Catherové**
Zadávací katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na otázku přistěhovalectví a života na americkém středo-západě v díle americké spisovatelky Willy Catherové.

V úvodu práce studentka charakterizuje tvorbu zvolené autorky a zasadí ji do širšího literárně-historického kontextu. Dále stručně popíše oblast amerického středo-západu (uvede pojmy jako prairie culture) a nastíní dějiny jeho osídlování. Svůj výběr konkrétních románů (O, Pioneers, My Antonia, případně další) Catherové krátce zdůvodní.

Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolených děl, v níž se studentka soustředí především na způsoby zobrazení prostředí, krajiny, farmářských společenství amerického středo-západu a přistěhovalectví. Své vývody bude vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o způsobu zobrazení přistěhovalectví na americkém středo-západě v tvorbě Catherové.

Rozsah grafických prací:

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná**

Jazyk zpracování bakalářské práce: **Angličtina**

Seznam odborné literatury: **viz příloha**

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

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Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

30. dubna 2018

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

31. března 2019



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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2018

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, doc. Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D., for her guidance and her helpful advice. Many thanks also go to my family and friends for their endless support.

Annotation

The presented bachelor thesis examines the depiction of nature, landscape and the life on the Midwestern prairie in the selected works of Willa Cather. The theoretical part introduces Willa Cather as an author and focuses on terms such as regionalism, local colour, Midwest and immigration. The analytical part of the thesis focuses on the depiction of nature and immigrants in the selected works.

Keywords

Willa Cather, immigrants, American Midwest, depiction of nature, regionalism, immigration

Název

Přistěhovalectví v díle Willy Catherové

Anotace

Předložená bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením krajiny, prostředí a života přistěhovalců na americkém středozápadě ve vybraných dílech Willy Catherové. V teoretické části je představena Willa Catherová společně s pojmy jako jsou regionální literatura, local colour, americký středozápad a imigrace. Praktická část bakalářské práce se bude zabývat analýzou zobrazení krajiny a přistěhovalců ve vybraných dílech.

Klíčová slova

Willa Cather, imigranti, americký středozápad, zobrazení krajiny, regionální literatura, přistěhovalectví

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Introduction

Immigration is the movement of people from their native country into another country of which they are not natives. The motives for immigration vary depending on the person, however, some of the most common factors include economic gain, safety, freedom, better environment, educational purposes and other. Willa Cather is an American writer known for her portrayals of the settlers and frontier life on the Great Plains. Although Cather was not born in the Midwest, she moved to the region at a relatively young age, and became familiar with the life and struggles of the immigrants on the Great Plains.

The goal of this bachelor thesis is to introduce Willa Cather and analyze two of her most renowned works *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!*. Both the aforementioned novels deal with the troubles and life of the settlers on the Great Plains while also depicting the landscape of the Midwest.

The aim of the first part of the thesis is to introduce terms related to Willa Cather and her work. The terms such as regionalism, local colour, prairie culture and immigration will be discussed. The term immigration will be discussed in more detail hence it is directly related to the second part of the thesis.

In the second part of the thesis, the focus will be put on the analysis of *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* The main aim of the analysis is to look into the way Willa Cather describes nature and the immigrants in her novels. In the analysis of *My Ántonia*, the emphasis will be put on the way Cather portrays her Bohemian characters as the novel revolves around the life of a Bohemian family. The analysis of *O Pioneers!*, on the other hand, will concentrate on the portrayal of several groups of immigrants.

1. Willa Cather

1.1 About Willa Cather

Willa Sibert Cather was an American writer known for her works about the Great Plains and immigration in the 19th century. Cather was born near Winchester, Virginia on December 7th 1873. Her father was a sheep farmer and her mother was a Southern lady. Eventually, Cather's family grew in size and she had six more siblings. Cather's family then moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska when she was nine years old and her father tried prairie farming which he gave up after a year to run an insurance business.

Cather was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska to study science and train as a doctor but shortly after that she quit science and studied literature instead. During her student life, she wrote for the *Nebraska State Journal* and was an editor of the university newspaper. After graduating, Cather was invited to Pittsburgh to take on the role of an assistant editorship. She was able to meet notable cultural figures while in Pittsburgh, especially Ethelbert Nevin whom she idolised. It was known that Cather had crushes on women during her university years but it was in Pittsburgh where she first started a mutual relationship with a woman and even though the aforementioned married later on, the two remained close until Cather's death.

1.2 Willa Cather and her work

In 1900, Cather gave up journalism and started writing instead. She already had a few short stories published but after she returned from Europe, she was contacted by a publisher and offered to publish anything she wrote. Her first published collection was seven short stories called *The Troll Garden* published in 1905. After publishing *The Troll Garden* in 1905, she was not to publish another book until 1912. Therefore, Cather moved to New York in 1906 and took up a job at McClure's. Due to her work, she did not have much spare time to write and publish stories as she did before. Cather's friend's advice encouraged her to give up her journalistic career and thus she began writing again. Following the success of her first novel *Alexander's Bridge*, which was released in 1912, she started concentrating more on fiction. Her short story *The Bohemian Girl* was reworked into the subplot of *O Pioneers!*, released in 1913, which is a story about Alexandra, the daughter of a Swedish farm owner. After her father's death, Alexandra is responsible for running the farm and taking care of the rest of her family, which consists of her and her three younger siblings. *O Pioneers!* was very well received and is in fact the first novel in her Great Plains trilogy. The second book of the Great

Plains trilogy is *The Song of the Lark*, released in 1915. The novel is about an artist who discovers her singing voice and her rise to success and fame. The heroine Thea Kronborg is believed to share some of Willa Cather's characteristics as the heroine is fond of the Midwestern landscape and the narrative also takes place in London, New York and Southwest, which are cities Cather had recently visited. The last book in the trilogy is called *My Ántonia* and was released in 1918. The plot of *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* are similar as both novels outline the life and struggles of people living in Nebraska.¹

During Cather's writing period, other prominent authors included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James, Edith Wharton, H. G. Wells, Upton Sinclair or Sarah Orne Jewett, the latter whom she was friends with. Most of Cather's contemporaries either wrote about Europe and its high society, the future or the poor. Although, working in a magazine publishing, Cather knew well what was popular and liked, she still went her own way and wrote about the immigrant life set in the prairie.²

1.3 Willa Cather's death

By 1930, Cather became a national icon and consequently became a target of Marxist critics who said she was "out of touch with contemporary social issues".³ Not only did Cather have to deal with the critics at that time but she also struggled in her personal life, having lost her mother, brothers and her friend Isabelle to whom she dedicated all of her books. Later after the outbreak of World War II, Cather suffered an injury to her right hand which hindered her ability to write. In 1940, Willa Cather published her last book called *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and won a gold medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters for fiction in 1944. Willa Cather died aged 73 on April 24, 1947 in her home in New York due to a cerebral hemorrhage.⁴

¹ "Willa Cather," Longer Biographical Sketch, The Willa Cather Archive, accessed February 21, 2020 <https://cather.unl.edu/life.longbio.html#rn33m>

² Jane Smiley, "Willa Cather, Pioneer," *The Paris Review*, February 27, 2018.

³ The Willa Cather Archive, "Longer Biographical Sketch."

⁴ The Willa Cather Archive, "Longer Biographical Sketch."

2. Regionalism and local colour

When it comes to Willa Cather and her works, she is generally described as a regionalist, however, according to some people Cather's work belongs to the local colour movement as well. In the opinion of Tremaine McDowell, regionalism could be explained by looking back at American literature. It is known that the first literature on the American continent was colonial works written by English men and women and thus once a new nation was created, the demand for national literature only rose.⁵ McDowell then continues to say that the difference between the literature of New England and the South became so immense it was only a matter of time before the literature of New England was not the representative of the entire nation anymore. In addition to that, people mistakenly believed that a Manhattan based writer equalled spokesperson for the whole of the United States. Although, according to McDowell, if one was to become a spokesperson for all the regions it would be someone from New York due to its diversity.⁶ In a like manner, McDowell goes on to talk about a movement called local colour which was a kind of prelude to regionalism. In McDowell's words, the movement was popular but its popularity soon declined "because its roots never struck deeply into American life." The local colour movement supposedly focused on the odd, the curious, and the picturesque of a region.⁷ To describe the link between local colour and regionalism, McDowell chooses to illustrate it on Willa Cather, a writer who rises above both these movements. The author believes that the "descriptive passages which do not advance the narrative or illuminate the characters" are considered local colour. However, McDowell also points out the fact that calling Cather a local colourist and nothing else would be misleading as well. Willa Cather does not tie herself to one region only, her works deal with various regions and especially humans residing in those areas.⁸

In addition to McDowell, Donna M. Campbell points out that "Local color or regional literature is fiction and poetry that focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, topography and other features particular to a specific region." She also states that local colour and regionalism became popular towards the end of the 19th century while some critics have also stated that these two genres "contributed to the reunification of the country after the Civil War and to the building of the national identity toward the end of the nineteenth century." Moreover, Campbell explains that the plot of the stories is often set in an isolated and inaccessible place

⁵ Tremaine McDowell, "Regionalism in American Literature," *Minnesota History* 20, no. 2 (June 1939): 108.

⁶ McDowell, "Regionalism in American Literature," 109–110.

⁷ McDowell, "Regionalism in American Literature," 110.

⁸ McDowell, "Regionalism in American Literature," 111.

while the characters might be stereotypical and distinguished by a particular feature such as dialect, personality traits of the region or the old ways. Furthermore, the female protagonists in local colour are likely to be unmarried women or young girls which is both the case in the novels *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!*. Campbell also notes that in order to evoke authenticity of regional characters the writer often uses dialect, hears tales about the region or describes the region in a very detailed manner.⁹ The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture defines regionalism as follows “...regionalism implies recognition from the colonial period to the present of differences among specific areas of the country. Additionally, regionalism refers to an intellectual movement encompassing regional consciousness beginning in the 1930s.” In addition to that, The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture mentions that it was not until the 19th century when regional literature started to dominate over national literature, beginning with authors depicting the life on the southern plantations. Although regionalism has spread to New England and the Midwest as well, it was still mainly located in the southern part of the United States owing to its abundant stories of plantation life and exotic characteristics.¹⁰ In the words of B. A. Botkin, not only did regionalism initiate a new period in American literature but it enriched literature with its stories about the landscape, local customs, character, speech, expression, style, symbolism etc.¹¹

Similarly to what The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture discussed, according to Mary Austin, what gave way to regionalism was the fact that people of the South were disinterested in reading about New York constantly and people of the Pacific Coast wished to read about literature located in the region.¹² Apart from that, Austin notes that in order to recognize regionalism in literature, one must meet certain conditions, one of them being the region entering the story as “another character, as the instigator of the plot.” This means the region must be introduced in a way that is not obvious or conspicuous. As an example Austin talks about Willa Cather and her novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Based on Austin’s words, Cather “selects her background with care, draws them with consummate artistry, in this case perverting the scene from historical accuracy,..., the tragic implications of its most significant

⁹ “Regionalism and Local Color Fiction 1865-1895,” Donna M. Campbell, last modified October 10, 2017 <https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/lcolor.html>

¹⁰ “Regionalism and Local Color,” DocSouth, accessed March 3, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/regionalism.html>

¹¹ B. A. Botkin, “Regionalism: Cult or Culture?,” *The English Journal* 25, no. 3 (March 1936): 184.

¹² Mary Austin, “Regionalism in American Fiction,” *The English Journal* 21, no. 2 (February 1932): 100.

item and so makes it convincing for her audience.”¹³ It is believed that works concerning regionalism take time to write since the land must be lived in and absorbed to understand it.¹⁴

In short, although the terms regionalism and local colour do have their own differences, the differences are so negligible that these two terms could be used interchangeably.

¹³ Austin, “Regionalism in American Fiction,” 105–106.

¹⁴ Austin, “Regionalism in American Fiction,” 107.

3. Geography of the Midwest

The region of Midwest is located in the north-central part of the United States and borders with Canada in the North. The states which are considered Midwestern include North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.

As claimed by Cynthia Clampitt, the first people to discover the area of Midwest in the mid-1600s were French explorers which were then followed by European trappers, traders and soldiers. The French discovered that the region of the Ohio River Valley was suited for growing corn and thus immigration from the British colonies began despite the resentment from the French and Native Americans.¹⁵ In 1783, in the terms of the Treaty of Paris, France gave up all its territories in North America and therefore the United States gained its independence. In 1803, the United States bought the region west of the Mississippi River from France, this act is better known as the Louisiana Purchase, which essentially doubled the size of the United States. The Louisiana Purchase allowed people like Thomas Jefferson to dream of a country with farmers growing corn across the whole continent. In order to make the dream a reality, a migration would be required. This would soon open up new possibilities for the people of the Old World and the wish of land ownership could eventually come true.

Although the area around the Great Lakes had rich and deep soil, it was mostly left untouched for the settlers mistakenly thought that a treeless plain equaled infertile soil. Be that as it may, the settlers soon found out the truth about the soil and once they did, another obstacle awaited them. The sod was a “deep, almost impenetrable layer of tangled roots that had not been disturbed in centuries.” Thus the settlers dealing with the sod were called the “sodbusters”.¹⁶ Moreover, people in Nebraska even used sod cut into bricks to build their homes since the amount of wood in the area was so scarce.¹⁷

The authors Birdsall and Florin state that the majority of Midwest is covered with grasslands which the Europeans, who settled in the region, had to deal with.¹⁸ The authors then continue to explain that not only did the Europeans have to deal with unfamiliar grasslands which were not present in Europe, they also had to deal with violent storms, high winds, hail and tornadoes. The storms often came with hail and some of the pellets were so

¹⁵ Cynthia Clampitt, *Midwest Maize: How Corn Shaped the U.S. Heartland* (USA: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 27.

¹⁶ Clampitt, *Midwest Maize*, 28–29.

¹⁷ Clampitt, *Midwest Maize*, 29.

¹⁸ Stephen S. Birdsall, John W. Florin: *An Outline of American Geography: Regional Landscapes of the United States* (4th ed. S.I.: United States Information Agency, c1992), 120.

big they could completely destroy the whole crop of wheat. Similarly, the winter was often very cold with blizzards while the summer was scorching hot and dry with clouds of dust being carried away by the wind.¹⁹

3.1 The Great Plains and prairie culture

Furthermore, Birdsall and Florin go on to explain that The Great Plains are located in the interior lowlands with an altitude varying from 500 meters to 1500 meters. The central and north western Nebraska is covered in sand dunes, some over 30 meters high, created by the sand blowing. This region with sand dunes is called The Sand Hills.

Although most of the original grasslands in The Great Plains have been destroyed, the grass on the eastern side grew anywhere between 30 centimetres and 1 meter in height and grass on the western side of the Plains was called bunch grass which was shorter than the grass on the eastern side.²⁰ According to the Encyclopedia of World Geography, the grass found in the North American prairies could grow anywhere as it could adapt to both hot and cold weather.²¹ As mentioned before, the prairie grass is rooted much deeper in the soil which allows its roots to make use of the water in the soil and because of its deep roots the grass was difficult to plow and difficult to break as well. This sod was in fact occasionally cut and used to build sod houses during the early days of settlement.

When it comes to agriculture, one of the most important crops of the Great Plains is wheat and corn. There is also a difference between winter and spring wheat. Winter wheat is planted in the fall and harvested in May or June while spring wheat is planted in early spring and harvested in late summer or fall. These days, however, wheat is grown in most places in the United States but the main producer of wheat is still northern Texas and southern Nebraska. For that reason the Midwest is often called the nation's "bread basket". Another crop, which is largely grown in this region and appeared only recently, is sorghum. Both Nebraska and Texas now have more land growing sorghum than wheat because of its ability to withstand dry growing conditions. Other crops grown in this region include barley, oat and sunflowers.²²

A term which is often associated with the prairies is prairie culture. The word culture is generally described as a characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people. Based on the words of sociologists, culture can be made up of both material and non-material

¹⁹ Birdsall, Florin, *An Outline*, 120.

²⁰ Birdsall, Florin: *An Outline*, 120–126.

²¹ R. W. McColl, *Encyclopedia of World Geography* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2005), 747.

²² Birdsall, Florin: *An Outline*, 120–126.

things. As for the material things, they include buildings, technological gadgets, traditional clothing, music, literature, art etc. The non-material things, on the other hand, comprise of language, beliefs, morals, norms and laws as well as symbols and concepts. Culture is “encapsulated in how we walk, sit, carry our bodies, and interact with others; how we behave depending on the place, time, and ‘audience;’, and how we express identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others.” Sociologists, in fact, see the material and non-material sides as connected because the things one makes are based on one’s beliefs values and knowledge.²³

Based on Mimi Yang’s words, “pertinent to place are the history, the heritage, the environment, and the ecological condition, which constitute a cultural identity – that is, a home base for existence.” Yang goes on to say that different groups of people at different times have given meaning to the Midwestern prairies and made it a place to fit their needs to belong, grow and thrive. It appears that the Native Americans, also known as Plains Indians, were the first people to be born in and bred by the prairie which they inherited from their ancestors. In times of need, the prairie offered the Plains Indians home in the sense of regeneration and growth. To show their connection to the prairie, the tribal chiefs often named themselves after “the powerful forces pertinent to the land and the nature,” such as Red Cloud or Black Hawk.²⁴ During the colonial days, as stated by Yang, the prairie became home to the European settlers. The Midwestern climate, livestock, flora and fauna were in fact similar to those of Northern Europe. The European settlers thus adapted at a rapid speed and eventually found a new sense of home which bore some resemblance to the old one. As a matter of fact, “the second, third, and fourth generations of the off-shore immigrants would know no other homes than the ones in the American prairie.”²⁵

Having said that, the prairie was still an area of life and death for the settlers. There were conflicts, according to Yang, between the Plains Indians and the European immigrants regarding resources, territories and possessions. The European settlers, having the technological and military advantage over the Plains Indians, transformed into the dominant culture and thus built homes in the way with which they were familiar with. The Old World also brought about many styles which were later borrowed to forge the American homes.²⁶

²³ Nicki Lisa Cole, “So What Is Culture, Exactly?,” *ThoughtCo.*, August 2, 2019.

²⁴ Mimi Yang, “The Prairie Style: Rethinking the American Identity,” *South Atlantic Review* 81, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 83.

²⁵ Yang, “The Prairie Style,” 83.

²⁶ Yang, “The Prairie Style,” 84.

On the basis of Mimi Yang's words, it could be said that prairie culture is a kind of melting pot as a consequence of numerous ethnicities settling down in this area. Before the area was settled by any of the citizens, immigrants or former slaves, it was, without a doubt, land without character, prejudices and routines. It appears that each ethnic group left behind a part of their culture and thus allowed prairie culture to evolve into a rich culture it is today.

3.2 The tornado alley

The term tornado alley is not an official term, however, it is used to refer to an area in the US where tornadoes are most frequent or have high potential of development. The areas affected are located between the Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains as well as Florida, the latter due to the high occurrence of rainstorms. As specified by the website Live Science, the border of the alley starts in Central Texas and affects states such as Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.²⁷ The National Geographic claims tornadoes can cause up to 80 deaths and 1500 injuries every year.²⁸

3.3 The corn belt

Cynthia Clampitt states that the region of Midwest is second to none when it comes to growing corn. Undoubtedly, the Midwest is not the only region to grow corn but, as Clampitt notes, all the top ten states to produce corn are located in the Midwest area with Iowa and Illinois taking up more than one-third of the U.S. corn crop. Not only does corn have a tremendous significance when it comes to agriculture of this region but the term "Cornhuskers" has also been used as the name of the University of Nebraska's football team and surprisingly a poet named Carl Sandburg won the Pulitzer Prize with the poetry collection called *Cornhuskers*.²⁹

As explained by Clampitt, before any of the Europeans came and settled the Midwest, Native Americans roamed the continent before finally deciding to settle and plant the corn in the area around the Great Lakes. As a matter of fact, some of the so called "virgin prairies" the European settlers found were areas which the Native Americans cleared for hunting or later growing corn.³⁰ In the late 18th century, an adequate amount of people have come from the Old World and made profit through growing corn and farming. As a result of people

²⁷ Kim Ann Zimmermann, "Tornado Alley: Where Twisters Form," *Live Science*, December 19, 2012. <https://www.livescience.com/25675-tornado-alley.html>

²⁸ "Tornadoes, explained," National Geographic, last modified August 28, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/natural-disasters/tornadoes/>

²⁹ Cynthia Clampitt, *Midwest Maize: How Corn Shaped the U.S. Heartland* (USA: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 26.

³⁰ Clampitt, *Midwest Maize*, 27.

enjoying the success and the profit, letters were sent back east which encouraged and contributed to the rapid increase of population around these easily accessible areas.³¹

³¹ Clampitt, *Midwest Maize*, 29.

4. Immigration

The theme of the thesis is immigration in Willa Cather's works, therefore, the word "immigration" ought to be explained. The words "immigration" and "emigration" are frequently used incorrectly. While both denote the act of moving and settling down, there is a slight difference to them. Immigration is used to describe the act of someone entering a country whereas emigration is used to describe the act of someone leaving a country. Due to that slight difference, these two words are often misused.

As mentioned by Roger Daniels, modern studies of migration have introduced a few expressions to describe the key factors which play a role in migration. Those expressions are "push", "pull" and "means". Push speaks about forces which motivated a person to emigrate. Those forces can be catastrophic, political or most often economical. Pull calls attention to those forces, which are attractive and set a goal which the migrants go after. Some of these forces may include political and religious freedom or freedom from military forces. Means refer to the ability to migrate. The ability to migrate consists of "affordable transportation, the lack of restraints on mobility in the place of origin, and the absence of effective barriers at the destination."³²

Before and during the Age of Discovery, according to Daniels, Europeans set out on voyages to discover the world. However, no matter where they went, the land was already inhabited by people who came before them. Before the Age of Discovery, Marco Polo travelled to China and spoke about it from the perspective of someone who came from an undeveloped country. Two centuries later, the mindset of Europeans changed. They think of themselves as superior and wherever they go, they disrespect the cultures they have encountered. This would soon progress into something known as modern racism.³³

As linked by Roger Daniels, the key forces which supported one's decision to move across the globe were faith, empire and economic gain. Apart from that, labour policies which were established by the colonizing powers also forced hundred thousand of Europeans to come to the New World.³⁴

Donna R. Gabaccia adds that Americans did not use the term immigrant until after 1820, which is more than half a century after America became a nation. The immigrants were labelled as "aliens" instead and they only stopped being labelled as "aliens" after they

³² Roger Daniels, *A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 17.

³³ Daniels, *A History of Immigration*, 4.

³⁴ Daniels, *A History of Immigration*, 5.

acquired citizenship and became an American citizen. The so called nativists, natives in the past, have been trying to reduce the number of immigrants in the USA since the 1880s and they also promoted the term immigrant.³⁵

Donna R. Gabaccia further states that about five million immigrants set foot in the USA between the years of 1815 and 1860 and just prior to the Civil War, the immigrants formed about thirteen percent of the entire population of the USA.³⁶ By 1910, fifteen percent of people born in the USA were of foreign birth.³⁷ Steam engine, railroads and ships began to be widely used and for that reason, travelling long distances at a low cost was made possible.³⁸

Moreover, Gabaccia points out that the immigrants which came from Europe naturally chose to settle down amongst their own kind instead of Americans. Even though the newcomers typically chose to settle down amongst their own kind, the communities still faced cultural, religious and regional differences. As a result, the newcomers had to learn how to ignore and respect those differences to lead a conflict-free life in the community.³⁹ Among the newcomers, for example, the Germans built houses, churches and barns with the design they were familiar with back in Germany and they brought new crops with them such as rutabagas or gooseberries.⁴⁰ A passage from Donna R. Gabaccia's book *Immigration and American Diversity* gives an example of what a German farmland looked like:

German farms in Texas often boasted extensive orchards, and farmers foddered their cows year-round in order to have fresh milk ... Germans brewed and made wine at home and drank it after Church on Sunday; migrants from New England baked beans on Saturday night so as to avoid all work and devote Sundays instead to worship and Bible study.

By the 1850s, a typical German settlement in the Midwest was a cluster of 50 or more farms around a village with a church, one or more general stores, and perhaps a creamery, mill, or granary.⁴¹

Taking into account the cost of migration to America, large numbers of immigrants came because they were forced to or due to their economic condition. Frequently, the

³⁵ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity: A Social and Cultural History, Problems in American History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 5.

³⁶ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 75.

³⁷ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 138.

³⁸ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 76.

³⁹ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 81.

⁴⁰ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 81.

⁴¹ Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity*, 81–82.

immigrants were indentured to a planter or a company who paid for their voyage to the US and they often had to work for them for as long as four or seven years.⁴²

According to Bruce Garver, the immigration to the Great Plains during 1865 to 1914 was the result of six large wars which led to the expansion of freedom, economic growth, new technical inventions and expansion of world markets. These changes were facilitated by the fact that education was made compulsory in the United States, Canada and most western and northern European countries. In addition to that, the Great Plains were transformed in only forty-nine years during which Europe and North America were on placid terms.⁴³ The victory of the union during the American Civil War was essential to making Texas and Kansas into free states and therefore enabled the states to have representative government, free labour, corporate enterprise and mass immigration from continental Europe and other parts of North America.⁴⁴

As stated by Garver, The Great Plains owe a part of its fast transformation to rising mass immigration and improved industrial technology such as steam railways, telegraphy, internal combustion engines and electrical power generation and distribution. With that said, the settlement and urbanization of the Great Plains came at a great price. The European wars in the mid-nineteenth-century affected the settlement of the Great Plains and the American economy. Europe, in contrast to the Confederacy, chose not to fight till the end but instead made peace in order to “preserve as much of their privileges as possible while conceding to liberal-led constitutional monarchical governments the rule of law, state encouragement of industrialization, and enlarged civil liberties,” the last of which allowed emigration and thus enabled millions of Poles, Italians, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Ukrainians, Russians and Hungarians to relocate to the United States, as well as France, Germany, Argentina, Brazil, and improve their economic opportunities.⁴⁵

Before the year 1865, the majority of European settlers had emigrated predominantly from western, northern, and central Europe and settled in the north-eastern and midwestern states. That being said, since that date up until 1914, the location from which the Europeans emigrated changed to eastern and southern Europe and hence the area to which they emigrated changed along. The immigrants no longer opted for the states where free labour prevailed, instead they preferred to settle on the Great Plains and the West Coast. In fact, the

⁴² Daniels, *A History of Immigration*, 34.

⁴³ Bruce Garver, “Immigration to the Great Plains, 1865–1912: War, Politics, Technology, and Economic Development,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 179.

⁴⁴ Garver, “Immigration,” 181.

⁴⁵ Garver, “Immigration,” 181–182.

Great Plains and the West Coast became attractive due to the rapid expansion of the world market, industrialization etc. but this too was put on halt because of the depressions in the early 1870s, late 1880s, early 1890s and 1907.⁴⁶

The European immigrants at that time were divided into the so called “old immigrants” and “new immigrants.” This racial division, as reported by Jean Griffith, occurred with the arrival of the new immigrants such as Slavs and Mediterraneans into the United States. The new immigrants were viewed as “being biologically, psychologically, and intellectually distinct from ‘old’ immigrant groups like Anglos and Scandinavians.”⁴⁷ Ellwood P. Cubberley’s adds the new immigrants were often largely illiterate, docile, lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, and public decency.⁴⁸ Griffith further reports that the new immigrants’ aptness was estimated based on their religion and their European class position. While some of the Bohemians were defined as the most advanced, others were spoken of as being feudal throwbacks, constitutionally incapable of democratic citizenship and blamed for being a host of social ills such as labour unrest. The northern Europeans, on the other hand, were described as warriors, sailors, pioneers and explorers gifted with high political ability all the while being predisposed to life in the New World.⁴⁹

However, despite being categorized as the new, illiterate immigrants, Griffith reveals that all European immigrants “benefited from their status as members of one or more ‘white races’ in that, unlike Asians, they were permitted entry into the United States at all.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Garver, “Immigration,” 183.

⁴⁷ Jean C. Griffith, “How the West Was Whitened: ‘Racial’ Difference on Cather’s Prairie,” *Western American Literature* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 393.

⁴⁸ Renee M. Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad, And the Ignored: Immigrants in Willa Cather’s ‘O Pioneers!’,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 102.

⁴⁹ Griffith, “‘Racial’ Difference,” 394.

⁵⁰ Griffith, “‘Racial’ Difference,” 393.

5. Specific features in the works of Willa Cather

For the analytical part of the thesis, the focus will be put on two of Willa Cather's novels, namely *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* The first reason for choosing these two novels is on account of the Bohemian and other European characters who play a significant role in the novel and the second reason being the characters' relationship towards the land, the community and the actual description of the land by Willa Cather. To give background information for the analysis, a short summary of the plots of *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* will follow.

The plot of *My Ántonia* revolves around a boy, also the narrator, Jim Burden and his life after he moves to Nebraska after losing both his parents. Upon arriving to Nebraska, Jim is introduced to Ántonia, a girl whose family has just moved to the prairie from Bohemia, and subsequently Jim builds a strong friendship with Ántonia despite her shaky English. The book is divided into 5 parts with each part focusing on a period in Jim's life. Following the death of Ántonia's father, she becomes the head of the family and has to fend for the farm. Jim eventually moves to town and Ántonia follows him soon after. While in town, the two continue their friendship and enjoy their teenage years to the fullest. Later on, Jim moves away to go to college and the two do not see each other for some time. When Jim returns during a break, he finds Ántonia has gotten herself pregnant and is living on the farm once again. Jim is angry at Ántonia at first, but when they meet again he cannot help but remember their old days and the affection he has always felt for her. In the last part of the novel, Jim returns to the prairie once again to find Ántonia, a successful woman now, with a big family and although she looks fatigued from all the work, Jim realizes that Ántonia has always been a special someone to him and he also realizes that the life he had on the prairie made him who he is today.

O Pioneers! follows the life of the Bergson family in Hanover, Nebraska. The story begins with the scene of Alexandra, Emil and Carl Linstrum in a nearby town. That same night John Bergson, Alexandra's father, passes away and leaves her in charge of the farm for she is the oldest and wisest. Whilst Alexandra is in charge of the farm, she comes across a problem and seeks out Crazy Ivar for advice. Her brothers are sceptical towards Ivar's advice but Alexandra decides to follow it anyway. After Alexandra follows Ivar's advice, the farm is prosperous for a few years but then the land suffers three years of drought. In the meantime, Carl Linstrum has moved away as their farm was not prosperous and while Alexandra was upset to see her only friend moving away, she understood the decision. Alexandra's brothers

desperately want to sell the farm as it seems like everyone else is doing so, but Alexandra convinces them to keep it and buy even more land. Ten years later, Alexandra's farm is the most successful one on the Divide and Emil and Marie, his childhood friend, have grown close. Although Marie is married to Frank Shabata, Emil and Marie still have a friendship that is dangerously too close. Carl Linstrum returns for a visit and notices the relationship between Emil and Marie but is too distracted to warn Alexandra about it as Alexandra's brothers are making him leave fearing the fact that he returned to marry Alexandra because of money and land. When Carl leaves for Alaska again, Emil decides to leave and go to Mexico City, perhaps to escape from his forbidden relationship with Marie. Later on when Emil returns and meets Marie, their feelings rekindle and when Emil decided to visit Marie one day, he finds her sleeping in the orchard and joins her. Marie's husband Frank Shabata returns home in a drunken state, finds the two sleeping next to each other in the orchard, misunderstands the situation and shoots them both to death. At the end of the novel, Carl returns home and finds Alexandra, who is still unmarried. They both decide to get married despite her brothers' objections and Alexandra tells Carl she is sure they will be happy together for their marriage is based on friendship more than love.

As mentioned before, Willa Cather moved to Nebraska from Virginia when she was just nine years old. While she lived in Nebraska, she became familiar with its land and her Bohemian neighbour whom she adored and admired. The narrator of *My Ántonia* is Jim Burden, who moves to Nebraska at the age of ten. Hence for this reason many people speculate the novel *My Ántonia* is in fact Willa Cather's story. John P. Hinz talks about the similarity between Willa Cather and Jim Burden in his journal article *Prairie Spring* as listed below:

Perhaps the congruence between the biography of the author and that of the hero of *My Ántonia* seemed hardly worth pressing. The parallels between Willa Cather's experience and Jim Burden's are readily recognizable: the narrator, Jim, when ten years old, is sent from Virginia to his grandfather's farm in Nebraska; there he rides a pony, does errands, gets the mail, visits the immigrant neighbors; after three years on the farm, the family moves to the near-by town of Black Hawk, where Jim is sent to school; later he goes to Lincoln to attend the state university....Ántonia herself, Willa Cather once related, "was a Bohemian girl who was good to me when I was a child. I saw a great deal of her from time I was eight until I was twelve...." Herbert Bates, then, became Gaston Cleric, and, coyly, Red Cloud became Black Hawk. The masquerade is much too arch to go unchallenged.⁵¹

⁵¹ John P. Hinz, "Willa Cather – Prairie Spring," *Prairie Schooner* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1949): 87.

Thus it is quite clear that *My Ántonia* might in fact be the story of Cather's own childhood and possibly adulthood. The resemblance between Cather's and Jim Burden's move, friendship with Ántonia and them going off to University of Lincoln is too uncanny to be considered a coincidence.

Moving on to the symbols of Cather's work, perhaps the most prominent and significant symbol of Cather's Great Plains trilogy is landscape, most notably Nebraska's landscape. Willa Cather puts a great deal of effort into describing the land and nature in her books. The land which is described at the beginning of the book is not the same as the land which is described at the end. It would seem that the land is changing and evolving alongside the characters. Based on the words of David Murphy, the land in the novel evolves "from the natural land to the modified land or landscape – from raw material to cultural artifact – as the land is settled by Europeans."⁵²

To understand why Willa Cather chose to describe the relationship between nature and the individual character in such detail, John Ditsky points out the poem entitled "*Prairie Spring*" which is presented at the beginning of the novel *O Pioneers!*⁵³:

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and sombre and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
The toiling horses, the tired men;
The long empty roads,
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
Against all this, Youth,
Flaming like the wild roses,
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
Youth with its insupportable sweetness,
Its fierce necessity,
Its sharp desire,
Singing and singing,
Out of the lips of silence,
Out of the earthy dusk.⁵⁴

As Ditsky suggests, this poem provides 3 main points of Cather's use of the nature. Firstly, Cather talks about the embodiment of history and the past ("toiling horses", "tired

⁵² David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie: Czechs, The Land, Cather, And The Pavelka Farmstead," *Great Plains Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 96.

⁵³ John Ditsky, "Nature and Character in the Novels of Willa Cather," *Colby Library Quarterly* 5, no. 7 (September 1974): 391.

⁵⁴ Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), no pagination.

man”, “eternal, unresponsive sky”). Secondly, she talks about the source of hope and human dreams, namely the youth whose necessity and desire resemble the flaming of the wild roses, the song of lark and flashing of a star. Lastly, the shaping of the individual character, specifically “the synthesis of the other two: the moral process by which the ‘strength and harshness’ of life upon the land inevitably yield to the ‘insupportable sweetness’ of the near-inexpressible song.”⁵⁵ It is obvious that both *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* comprise of these 3 previously mentioned points. Both novels essentially come from a land, which is relentless and harsh but with the hopes and dreams of the farmers, the land soon transforms and bring the farmers above cited insupportable sweetness.

5.1 Nature as a symbol in My Ántonia

The novel *My Ántonia* begins with Jim Burden’s narration of his journey to Nebraska and his first memory of Ántonia. Right from the beginning, the nature and landscape of Nebraska is described as following:

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land – slightly undulating, I knew, because often our wheels ground against the brake as we went down into a hollow and lurched up again on the other side. I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man’s jurisdiction.⁵⁶

Here, Nebraska is described as a place which is dull with nothing but land stretching as far as the eye can see. It is emphasized that Jim Burden did not say his prayers that night because he felt like “what would be would be.”⁵⁷ Jim even doubts his own existence as “between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out.”⁵⁸ Regardless of the fact that the story is told from Jim’s perspective, it could be assumed that Ántonia felt similar to the way Jim did. In consideration of this description, the land of Nebraska can be expected to be harsh and play an essential role in the characters’ lives and possibly cause and bring inevitable struggles to their daily lives. But despite the land being rough, harsh and unforgiving, Cather still dedicates a generous amount of the book to the description of the land and its beauty which lies in the simplest elements.

Jim Burden, however, is not the only person who felt that the land was empty and all it was was the material out of which countries are made. Willa Cather herself thought the

⁵⁵ Ditsky, “Nature and Character,” 392.

⁵⁶ Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (London: Virago Press, 1980), 10.

⁵⁷ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 11.

⁵⁸ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 11.

country “was mostly wild pasture and as naked as the back of your hand....So the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn, that shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion I have never been able shake.”⁵⁹ In fact, the shaggy grass country became such a passion for Cather that Rose Rosicky believes Cather’s portrayal of the country is genius and in his own words “one can see the very thing through them.”⁶⁰

According to Evelyn J. Hinz, the land in *My Ántonia* is “less ferocious but not less wild.”⁶¹ At the beginning of the novel, Jim Burden and Ántonia get to know each other through their outings to the prairie. In Jim’s eyes, “the great land had never looked to me so big and free.”⁶² John L. Selzer points out the fact that Ántonia was most likely just as open and mysterious to Jim as his new surroundings which he came to discover.⁶³ In a certain way it could be Cather’s way of comparing Ántonia and the prairie seeing as in the future, Jim becomes fond of both of the aforementioned.

The land in the novel is often described as though it was moving or in motion. One early September morning, Jim is out with his grandmother and recalls the land as demonstrated:

I can remember exactly how the country looked to me as I walked beside my grandmother along the faint wagon-tracks on that early September morning. Perhaps the glide of long railway travel was still with me, for more than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it heard of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping...⁶⁴

Jim feels this way about the land more than on one occasion. Perhaps Jim felt this way about the land due to the way the tall grass, which is native to the prairie, was moving and swaying about. Another explanation could potentially be about the characters’ development. The land in motion may symbolize the sequence of the farm life and the necessity of staying hopeful and moving forward with the farm. One more example of the land in motion can be found at the beginning of the book when Jim is just beginning to get to know the landscape.

⁵⁹ David Murphy, “Jejich Antonie,” 87.

⁶⁰ Murphy, “Jejich Antonie,” 89.

⁶¹ Evelyn J. Hinz, “Willa Cather’s Technique and the Ideology of Populism,” *Western American Literature* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 50.

⁶² Cather, *My Ántonia*, 42.

⁶³ John L. Selzer, “Jim Burden and the Structure of ‘My Ántonia’,” *Western American Literature* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 48.

⁶⁴ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 17.

As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea. The red of the grass made all the great prairie the colour of wine-stains, or of certain seaweeds when they are first washed up. And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running.⁶⁵

Not only does this paragraph show the land in motion, it also compares the land to the sea. Perhaps Cather decided to liken the land to the sea as the sea can influence peoples' lives in many ways as well. It can bring about new hopes and opportunities but it can be unexpected as well much like the land itself.

One of the main symbols and equally one of the most memorable parts in *My Ántonia* is the scene with the plough.

Presently we sae a curious thing: there were no clouds, the sun was going down in a limpid, gold-washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes towards it. In a moment, we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance 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, a picture writing on the sun.⁶⁶

In David Murphy's opinion, the appearance of the plough against the setting sun is perhaps the most provocative because it may symbolize the developing way of life.⁶⁷ Indeed the plough Jim and Ántonia see might potentially symbolize the harmony and connection between the humans inhabiting the land and the landscape itself. When Jim and Ántonia notice the plough, it is positioned right at the heart of the setting sun. The two were in perfect harmony, perhaps much like the way humans ought to respect and be in harmony with the nature. Be that as it may, as the sun continues to set, the plough becomes smaller and smaller in size, possibly demonstrating the domination the landscape has over its inhabitants.

Another way to explain the meaning of the plough scene could be through Jim's childhood. The plough is vanishing against the setting sun just as Jim is nearing his adulthood and getting ready to leave for university. When Jim leaves, the area is still unindustrialized and it is more or less just a vast, undisturbed land. When Jim returns to the prairie twenty years later, he notes how the land he used to know and was so familiar with has now completely changed. The houses are no longer shabby, the land is industrialized and the farmers who used to struggle with the land have now become successful. It is as if the land

⁶⁵ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 16.

⁶⁶ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 196.

⁶⁷ David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie," 97.

was paying them back for all the struggles they had to go through when they first came and settled the unforgiving land.

Apart from the land in motion, Evelyn J. Hinz observed that the seasons in Cather's novels are given personalities as well.⁶⁸ In fact, Hinz points out that all Cather's prairie novels start out in the winter, which is the time of sleep and death. The time of spring and summer are predominant in the middle of the novels as it is the time for growth and maturation. Lastly, autumn brings each story to the climax and conclusion as it is the time of fruition.⁶⁹ The winter is described as a visitor that is both too old and who stays too long: it is "stale and shabby, old and sullen."⁷⁰ The winter also "comes down savagely over a little town on the prairie" while the wind "that sweeps in from the open country strips away all the leafy screens that hide one yard from another in summer, and the houses seem to draw closer together."⁷¹ The summer, on the contrary, is described as: "impulsive and playful like a big puppy that pawed you and then lay down to be petted."⁷² Hinz then goes on to mention that even non-natural objects are personified as well.⁷³ For case in a point: "the road ran about like a wild thing"⁷⁴ and "the engine was panting heavily after its long run."⁷⁵

Similarly to the cycle of the seasons, Cather follows the pattern of the human cycle as well. In both *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!*, on grounds of Hinz's words, the novel starts with the death of the representatives of the older generation. In the middle of the book, there are no deaths relevant to the central characters of the novel. Ultimately, the novels end with the idea of maturity and age as well as passing down the work to the younger generations; such as the description of Ántonia growing old and tired but "Cuzak's boys will carry on her work."⁷⁶

Although Willa Cather does pay surplus attention to the description of the landscape in the novels, nonetheless, the main purpose of the novels is to show the struggle and hardships these immigrants, whom she so admired, have to go through in their daily lives. Cather explores the topic of suicide, hunger, homesickness and more. The stories capture both the distressing and joyful parts of their lives.

⁶⁸ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 50.

⁶⁹ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 58.

⁷⁰ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 146.

⁷¹ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 140.

⁷² Cather, *My Ántonia*, 98.

⁷³ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 50–51.

⁷⁴ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 20.

⁷⁵ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 9.

⁷⁶ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 58.

5.2 Portrayal of Czech Immigrants

As was pointed out before, the main characters of *My Ántonia* have come to the United States from Bohemia. The former Bohemia is today's Czech Republic. It is speculated in David Murphy's journal article *Jejich Antonie* that when Willa Cather moved to Nebraska, she was neighbours with a Bohemian family and that is how her admiration for the immigrants came about. The supposed neighbours of Willa Cather are Jan Pavelka and Antonie Sadílková Pavelková. Cather pays significant attention to the portrayal of Czech culture in *My Ántonia*. She mentions "fringed and embroidered shawls, lacework, and feather-beds, mushrooms, poppy seeds, and koláče, and numerous references to Bohemia and its language." Because Cather's admiration towards the Bohemian people was truly broad and deep, a majority of Czechs saw *Ántonia* as their own or as *jejich Antonie* [their *Ántonia*].⁷⁷

The response to *My Ántonia* at the time was wonderful. In fact, the presidents of the Czech Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Eduard Beneš, both liked the book. Even Nebraska's historian Rose Rosicky liked the book and as a matter of fact, he wrote Cather a letter stating the following: "When I heard that you had written a book about Bohemians, my first thought was that...you took for a theme something you thought would be novel, but when I read the book...[e]very little detail you described about them is so true to life." He then continues on to say "it is very unusual for an American, be he or she ever so kindly and broadminded, to entirely grasp the psychology of a foreign people, but Miss Cather has done it thoroughly."⁷⁸

Besides, based on Murphy's words, Cather's knowledge about Bohemians comes from keen observation. She visited the immigrants at every opportunity she got and found the Old World, their customs and language captivating. Cather even favoured the Anglo-American ways over Anglo-centrism. In her own words, which she uttered during an interview in 1921, Cather emphasizes the following:

They have come here to live in the sense that they lived in the Old World, and if they were let alone their lives might turn into the beautiful ways of their homeland. But they are not let alone....It wasn't so years ago. When I was a child, all our neighbors were foreigners....We let them alone....They finished their houses as they had in the countries from which they came. Beauty was there and charm....nobody interfered with them.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie," 85.

⁷⁸ David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie," 86.

⁷⁹ David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie," 87–88.

It could be speculated that Cather was hinting at the way some Americans treated the immigrants. The reason why the immigrants were not let alone could also stem from the fact that in between 1900 to 1915, more than 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States, which is more than the number of immigrants in the previous 40 years combined. Another potential factor could be the language barrier between the immigrants and the Americans. It is believed that some people feel inferior and small when they cannot understand a language that is being spoken around them. Moreover, the newcomers tended to settle in cities, which resulted in overcrowding. As a result, this could turn into competition for employment, although the newcomers often settled for jobs a native-born American would not settle for.

Aside from the Czech immigrants, Willa Cather gives space in her novels to other immigrants as well. As has been stated before, the immigrants were divided into the so called “old immigrants” and “new immigrants.” The old immigrants were more favoured by the American government because they were thought to adapt rather quickly and were also more intelligent than the new immigrants. As specified by Sally Allen McNall, the characters in *My Ántonia* who represent the old immigrants are the Harlings, Mrs. Gardener, Mr. Jensen and Lena Lingard, who is Norwegian. The three aforementioned are regarded as “upright and cosmopolitan,” while the last of which is regarded as having a “dubious reputation” resulting from the fact that Lena Lingard desired to find the “success American-style.” McNall then goes on to say that even though many Czechs arrived at the same time as the old immigrants; their reputation differs from the one of the old immigrants.⁸⁰ In *McClure's* issue from the year 1910, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant illustrates Czechs and the rest of the old immigrants as stated below:

During the last thirty years seventeen millions of foreigner have poured into our midst from central and southern Europe and Asia Minor: Italians, Hebrews, Poles, Russians, Bohemians, Rumunians, Greeks, Syrians, and many other races – most of them, except in the case of the Hebrews, passive, inarticulate, and illiterate, agriculturalists by inheritance. These people differ fundamentally from the more intelligent and efficient Northern races that preceded them hither before 1880 – the English, Scotch, Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians, who, as we know, not only made their fortunes in our cities, but dared to become also the hardy and successful settlers of our distant Western Plains.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Tim Prchal, “The Bohemian Paradox: ‘My Ántonia’ and Popular Images of Czech Immigrants,” *MELUS* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 5.

⁸¹ Prchal, “The Bohemian Paradox,” 6.

Although what Sergeant is saying may be true for the majority of the new immigrants, it shall not be concluded that all Poles, Russians, Bohemians etc. are inarticulate and illiterate. *Ántonia's* family indeed does not know English as they arrive in the United States, however, that does not make them illiterate or inarticulate. The characters in *My Ántonia* showed interest in learning English and *Ántonia's* mother even asked Jim to teach *Ántonia*.

Additionally, the contrast between the old and new immigrants is shown in a paragraph where Jim is describing a curious situation in Black Hawk. He is describing the differences between the older and younger generation of the new immigrants as well as the differences between the daughters of immigrant farmers and daughters of American farmers.

The Bohemian and Scandinavian girls could not get positions as teachers, because they had had no opportunity to learn the language. Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service. Some of them, after they came to town, remained as serious and as discreet in behaviour as they had been when they ploughed and herded on their father's farm. Others, like the three Bohemian Marys, tried to make up for the years of youth they had lost. But every one of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for ploughs and reapers, brood-sows, or steers to fatten.⁸²

This paragraph shows that no matter how hard the daughters of the immigrants try, they might never get on a level where they do not have to compare themselves to the daughters of the native-born Americans. Nevertheless, as was mentioned in the paragraph above, the girls are reconciled to being the backbone of the family. Although some of them feel like they missed out on the opportunity to enjoy life and be carefree, they still work hard and never fail to send the money they earned by their sweat and tears to their family to provide for them. Jim even mentions that the young men were always more fascinated with the immigrant country girls but at the end of the day, they would go back to their conservative and well dressed girlfriends or wives. Compared to the country girls, Jim criticizes the girls of well-to-do families saying physical exercise was not something considered appropriate for them. Subsequently, he goes on to admit that some of the girls were “jolly and pretty, but they stayed indoors in winter because of the cold, and in summer because of the heat.” When dancing, their bodies “never moved inside their clothes; their muscles seemed to ask but one thing – not to be disturbed.”⁸³ Prchal points out that later in the book there is a mention of the first Scandinavian girl who got a position in the high school and thus “creating the impression

⁸² Cather, *My Ántonia*, 161.

⁸³ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 160.

that this group is gaining access into the dominant culture in ways that Czechs might not be.”⁸⁴

A term which appears in *My Ántonia* and may create confusion is the term “Bohunk.” The term Bohunk is used to describe the Czech language when Jim and Ántonia come across a snake while out on the prairie. Ántonia, having been scared by the big snake, started shouting at Jim in Czech without realizing it.

I was walking backward, in a crouching position, when I heard Ántonia scream. She was standing opposite me, pointing behind me and shouting something in Bohemian. I whirled round, and there, on one of those dry gravel beds, was the biggest snake I had ever seen...

Ántonia came after me, crying, ‘O Jimmy, he not bite you? You sure? Why you not run when I say?’

‘What did you jabber Bohunk for? You might have told me there was a snake behind me!’ I said petulantly.⁸⁵

It goes without saying that Ántonia still switches back to her mother tongue when she gets scared or comes across an inconvenience. Although Jim gets angry at Ántonia for shouting at him in Czech instead of English, he cannot expect Ántonia to get fully accustomed to English in such a short amount of time. Ántonia then proceeds to apologize to Jim, saying she was scared, hence why she shouted in Czech instead of English.

Another example of the word Bohunk appears towards the end of the novel. Jim has come back to visit Ántonia and is about to meet Ántonia’s husband, who was away. As Ántonia’s husband arrives back home, the family comes out to greet him. It is mentioned in the book that Ántonia’s husband decides to speak Czech when he starts describing his adventures while he was away out of respect for Jim. Ántonia’s second oldest child, Rudolph, who went with his father, starts describing a big dance they went to the night before saying “I never saw so many pretty girls. It was a Bohunk crowd, for sure. We didn’t hear a word of English on the street, except from the show people, did we, papa?”⁸⁶ The word Bohunk in this part also refers to the Czech language. It is indicated in the book that Ántonia talks to her family in Czech when they are at home and she also makes sure they know their roots and Czech traditions. For reference, Charles Sabatos comments on the term Bohunk and points out that the term was mainly used as an ethnic slur at the peak of immigration before World War I to describe Bohemians, who were seen as aliens to Anglo-Saxon culture.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Prchal, “The Bohemian Paradox, 10.

⁸⁵ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 39–40.

⁸⁶ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 287.

⁸⁷ Charles Sabatos, “A Long Way from Prague: The Harlem Renaissance and Czechoslovakia,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 44–45.

The Czech immigrants in *My Ántonia*, but in general as well, are attributed certain traits. Naturally, like in every ethnic group, there are specific traits which show the people in a favourable light but sometimes it cannot be helped and their ominous shadows come out as well. According to Edward Steiner, whom Tim Prchal mentions in his journal article *The Bohemian Paradox*, there are certain traits which are attributed to Czech immigrants in writings. The traits which are in Czech's favour are musical proficiency and their determination to retain their mother tongue. On the other hand, the traits which affect the Czechs negatively include Freethinking philosophy and religious scepticism, violent nature and materialism.⁸⁸

Cather, as specified by Tim Prchal, chooses to avoid some of the negative traits in her novels. Rather than assigning the Czech immigrants with the Freethinking philosophy, she turns them into Catholics instead. This would avoid any potential troubles, should they arise.⁸⁹

Another negative trait attributed to Czechs is violent nature. Although Cather chooses not to display much of the Czechs' violent nature in *My Ántonia*, with that said, there are still some scenes present which could be connected to this negative trait. For instance, one day Jim and Jake decide to head over to the Cuzak's farm to retrieve a horse-collar which Ambrosch, Ántonia's brother, borrowed and has not returned yet. It also has to be mentioned that Ambrosch is described as someone who is mean, aggressive and rough. When Ambrosch brings out the collar, Jake is furious as the collar is muddy and in a bad condition causing them to end up in a quarrel.

Ambrosch dropped the collar on the ground. 'All right,' he said coolly, took up his oil-can, and began to climb the mill. Jake caught him by the belt of his trousers and yanked him back. Ambrosch's feet had scarcely touched the ground when he lunged out with a vicious kick at Jake's stomach. Fortunately, Jake was in such a position that he could dodge it.⁹⁰

Ántonia later apologizes to Jim in a way saying "If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us."⁹¹

Moving on to the good traits attributed to Czechs, musical proficiency is the first one. Music is a common theme in *My Ántonia* and Cather does not link musical proficiency with Czechs only. As noted by Tim Prchal, Cather links music to many ethnic groups including Otto Fuchs who sings, Russian Peter who plays the harmonica, the Italian Vannis who bring

⁸⁸ Prchal, "The Bohemian Paradox, 11.

⁸⁹ Prchal, "The Bohemian Paradox, 11.

⁹⁰ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 105.

⁹¹ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 114.

dance music to town and the Norwegian Harling family with a piano as a centrepiece of their home. Along with these characters, Mr. Shimerda is often associated with the violin, though, he stopped playing when he moved overseas. Before he committed suicide, *Ántonia* told Jim her father used to play at weddings back at home but he does not play anymore as he has a distaste towards the country. Even *Ántonia* herself is associated with music, the chirp of crickets in particular, as the mere chirp alone can bring back memories of the Old Hata who sang old song to her back in Bohemia.⁹²

Yet another positive trait associated with Czechs is their ability to retain the original language and traditions, including food. It has already been mentioned before that *Ántonia* makes it a point that her children know the Czech language and Czech traditions as well. In fact, *Ántonia*'s children do not learn about English until they go to school. When Jim comes inside the house during his visit to *Ántonia*'s farm, he is offered coffee and kolache, or koláče in Czech, which are a traditional Czech puff pastry introduced towards the end of the book as one of the traditional Czech foods. The boys are oblivious to the fact that Jim has had kolache before and are mocking him while the girls are pointing at jars filled with fruit such as cherries, strawberries or crabapples. This scene is in fact one of the amusing scenes in the book.

‘Show him the spiced plums, mother. Americans don’t have those,’ said one of the older boys. ‘Mother uses them to make kolaches,’ he added. Leo, in a low voice, tossed off some scornful remark in Bohemian. I turned to him. ‘You think I don’t know what kolaches are, eh? You’re mistaken, young man, I’ve eaten your mother’s kolaches long before that Easter Day when you were born.’ ‘Always too fresh, Leo,’ Ambrosch remarked with a shrug. Leo dived behind his mother and grinned out at me.⁹³

It is safe to say that *Ántonia*'s household is a Bohemian one. From the way she talks with her children and husband, to the way she runs the household and her perspective at life. When Jim informed her that he indeed does not have any children, she seemed to be embarrassed about it and naturally, she expected him to have children of his own since that is what is expected from couples in Bohemia once they get married. Even though *Ántonia* has become more or less an American citizen, she does not want to lose the connection she has with the Old World and hence why she keeps her household bicultural.

⁹² Prchal, “The Bohemian Paradox, 17–18.

⁹³ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 271–272.

5.3 The landscape in *O Pioneers!*

While some critics may say the novel *O Pioneers!* is about the conflict between men and women against nature, Susan Rosowski denies this statement. According to Rosowski, if the novel was concerned about men and women against nature, the novel would be completed in its first quarter. Rosowski argues that the novel is instead about the growth of the main character Alexandra Bergson. In her words “in the initial section, ‘The Wild Land,’ Alexandra develops her impersonal, creative self in a relationship to the prairie; in the later sections, she develops her personal, human self with the community.”⁹⁴ Reginald Dyck, on the other hand, describes Ántonia as a “female protagonist who is single, independent, entrepreneurial, managerial, strong willed, wealthy and in love with the land of south-central Nebraska.”⁹⁵

Right at the beginning of the book, Alexandra is faced with a tribulation. While her father John Bergson was on his deathbed, he passed down the responsibility of his land to her. Alexandra, at a young age, still quite inexperienced found herself in the middle of two worlds. The future of the land was still very much uncertain and the future days were not looking any brighter. Alexandra “had a serious, thoughtful face, and her clear, deep blue eyes were fixed intently on the distance, without seeming to see anything, as if she were in trouble.”⁹⁶

Although it was only four o’clock, the winter day was fading. The road led southwest, toward the streak of pale, watery light that glimmered in the leaden sky. The light fell upon the two sad young faces that were turned mutely toward it: upon the eyes of the girl, who seemed to be looking with such anguished perplexity into the future; upon the sombre eyes of the boy, who seemed already to be looking into the past. The little town behind them had vanished as if it had never been, had fallen behind the swell of the prairie, and the stern frozen country received them into its bosom. The homesteads were few and far apart; here and there a windmill gaunt against the sky; a sod house crouching in a hollow. But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes. It was from facing this vast hardness that the boy’s mouth had become so bitter; because he felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness.⁹⁷

This paragraph is located right at the beginning of the novel and shows the Divide at the beginning of the year. The Divide is described as frigid, bleak and depressing. The houses were few and located far apart from each other. Carl Linstrum himself feels that the land

⁹⁴ Susan J. Rosowski, “The Pattern of Willa Cather’s Novels,” *Western American Literature* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 246.

⁹⁵ Reginald Dyck, “Willa Cather’s Reluctant New Woman Pioneer,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 161.

⁹⁶ Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 2.

⁹⁷ Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 5–6.

should be left alone and no men can leave a legacy here on the Divide. But despite the gloomy description of the land, at the end, it is still regarded as beautiful and fierce.

Six months after John Bergson's death, Alexandra decides to visit Crazy Ivar to buy a hammock and potentially ask for advice about the land. On the way to Ivar's homestead "the Bergson wagon lurched along over the rough hummocks and grass banks, followed the bottom of winding draws, or skirted the margin of wide lagoons, where the golden coreopsis grew up out of the clear water and the wild ducks rose with a whirr of wings."⁹⁸ When Alexandra visits Ivar, there are a lot of passages describing the land as Ivar is someone who dedicated his life to the land, loves it and makes an effort to understand it. In fact, Ivar's dedication to the land resulted in him living in a sod located at the bottom of a shallow draw, making it seem like he is, figuratively, living in the land.

In Crazy Ivar's country the grass was short and gray, the draws deeper than they were in the Bergson's neighborhood, and the land was all broken up into hillocks and clay ridges. The wild flowers disappeared, and only in the bottom of the draws and gullies grew a few of the very toughest and hardiest: shoestring, and ironweed, and snow-on-the-mountain.⁹⁹

As explained by Evelyn J. Hinz, "harmony with the environment, kinship with nature, is suggested by Cather through the extremely simple and subtle presentation of the farmer as a part of the natural scene..." Hinz indicates that the farmer does not only belong in the natural setting, he is of it as well.¹⁰⁰ To set an example, Hinz chooses a sentence describing Crazy Ivar's appearance stating "his ruddy face is withered, like an apple that has clung all winter to the tree."¹⁰¹

Alexandra's personal relationships, as claimed by Reginald Dyck, get further complicated by her relationship to the land. Cather depicts "Alexandra as creating a reassuring life story for herself."¹⁰² The years following her father's death are laborious and challenging as she is faced with her brothers' confrontation regarding the way she runs the farm alongside the times of depression. As pointed out by Dyck, during the times of depression, Alexandra experiments with silos, tries to grow new crops and find new ways of raising hogs.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 13.

⁹⁹ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 51.

¹⁰¹ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 33.

¹⁰² Dyck, "New Woman Pioneer," 169.

¹⁰³ Dyck, "New Woman Pioneer," 163.

One of the symbols that represent the novel is orchards. The viewers are introduced to orchards on several occasions. The orchards are not mentioned at the beginning of the novel as the land was truly just wild land, but towards the middle of the book, specifically sixteen years after John Bergson's death, the readers are introduced to the fruitful orchards of Alexandra Bergson and Marie Shabata. Although the orchards are described as fruitful and cheerful, it is, in fact, a place of doom for Marie Shabata. When Marie's husband, Frank Shabata, comes home drunk one day, he finds Emil's horse in his stable. Not thinking straight, he goes into his room, takes his gun and sets out to find Emil. When he finds Marie and Emil lying next to each other, sleeping, in the orchard, he misunderstands and shoots them both to death. As Frank Shabata is originally from Bohemia, this could also be an example of the violent Czech trait which was mentioned before. This scene, as hypothesized by Maynard Fox, is apparently foreshadowed in the earlier stage of the book. According to him, the scene where Emil and Marie go duck hunting foreshadows their death as Frank Shabata shoots them the same way Emil shot the ducks.¹⁰⁴

Following the orchards, according to Maynard Fox, the garden is also one the dominant symbols in the novels of Willa Cather. In Fox's words, the garden is "subject to the cycle of the seasons." In the winter, the garden is in a slumbering passion while in the summer, it is in bloom.¹⁰⁵ Alexandra is often pictured in the garden either taking care of her flowers or picking up fruits and vegetables.

Besides, Cather's description of the land often seems to mimic the character's feelings as well. During a scene at the beginning of the novel, when Alexandra is still having a hard time with her brothers and is unsure about the future of the land, she goes over to the garden to pick potatoes. However, when Carl Linstrum came up to the garden, "she was not working...she was standing perfectly still, with that serious ease so characteristic of her."¹⁰⁶ Maire Mullins explains that Alexandra's "serious ease" indicates both her quiet intensity and focused leisure. While Carl is watching her, he can feel her connection along with her love for the land. As Carl approached her, his vision became identical to Alexandra's¹⁰⁷:

The air was cool enough to make the warm sun pleasant on one's back and shoulders, and so clear that the eye could follow a hawk up and up, into the blazing blue depths of the sky. Even Carl, never a very cheerful boy, and

¹⁰⁴ Maynard Fox, "Symbolic Representation in Willa Cather's 'O Pioneers!,'" *Western American Literature* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 189–190.

¹⁰⁵ Fox, "Symbolic Representation," 188.

¹⁰⁶ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Maire Mullins, "Alexandra's Dreams: 'The Mightiest of All Lovers' in Willa Cather's 'O Pioneers!,'" *Great Plains Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 151.

considerably darkened by these last two bitter years, loved the country on days like this, felt something strong and young and wild come out of it, that laughed at care.¹⁰⁸

5.4 The depiction of immigrants in *O Pioneers!*

Over a decade after John Bergson's death, Alexandra can say she fulfilled her father's wishes as he wished for her brothers to not get discouraged and for them to keep the land. Sixteen years later, Alexandra's farm is considered as one of the richest on the Divide. Evelyn J. Hinz explains that in Alexandra's case, the wealth is not just economic but agrarian as well.¹⁰⁹ This stems from the fact that Alexandra did not give up when her brothers urged her to sell the land and move out of the prairie. Instead, Alexandra saw the land's potential and instead of selling it, she decided to mortgage the farm to potentially become rich land owners.

They drove westward toward Norway Creek, and toward a big white house that stood on a hill, several miles across the fields. There were so many sheds and outbuildings grouped about it that the place looked not unlike a tiny village. A stranger, approaching it, could not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the outlying fields. There was something individual about the great farm, a most unusual trimness and care for detail. On either side of the road, for a mile before you reached the foot of the hill, stood tall orange hedges, their glossy green marking off the yellow fields. South of the hill, in a low, sheltered swale, surrounded by a mulberry hedge, was the orchard, its fruit trees knee-deep in timothy grass. Any one thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, Alexandra Bergson.¹¹⁰

From Renee Laegreid's perspective, the novel *O Pioneers!* explores the nativists' attitude towards the massive influx of immigrants into the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this era, the subject of race and its implications for the future of American culture was often discussed by the politicians, educators, anthropologists, and reformers. Cather's *O Pioneers!* illuminates the assumptions about these immigrants along with their ability to acclimatize to the American society.¹¹¹ Unlike in today's society, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the immigrants were judged according to the country they came from. Laegreid talks about the four groups of newcomers Cather depicted in the novel – Swedes, French Canadians, Bohemians, German Russians – by identifying them as good immigrants, bad immigrants and ignored immigrants.

¹⁰⁸ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Hinz, "Willa Cather's Technique," 54.

¹¹⁰ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 32.

¹¹¹ Laegreid, "The Good, The Bad," 101.

The main protagonist Alexandra, including her family, is part of the good immigrants groups as analyzed by Laegreid. According to him, Cather projects the good side of the Bergson family through her description of the characters. Although the Bergsons arrived in the United States with the new immigrants, they are still considered “solid, sturdy people, industrious, anti-intellectual yet interested in new technology, restrained in actions and emotions, and good consumers.”¹¹² The description of the characters does not focus on their artistic side or accomplishments but rather on their hard working nature and persistence. One of Alexandra’s brothers is described as:

[Oscar] was a man of powerful body and unusual endurance; the sort of man you could attach to a corn-sheller as you would an engine. He would turn it all day, without hurrying, without slowing down. But he was as indolent of mind as he was unsparing of his body. His love of routine amounted to a vice. He worked like an insect, always doing the same thing over in the same way, regardless of whether it was best or no.¹¹³

Although Oscar is reprimanded for his love of routine, it still shows how important work ethic is. He is consistent, steady and does not get swayed with even during the many Catholic religious holidays. During a difficult time like this, Oscar’s work ethic is certainly a good virtue. Similarly, Alexandra represents positive qualities and characteristics that will later turn her into a successful pioneer. As per Laegreid’s words, Alexandra embodies the characteristics of a Victorian woman.¹¹⁴ Cather writes, “Her body was in an attitude of perfect repose, such as it was apt to take when she was thinking earnestly. Her mind was slow, truthful, steadfast. She had not the least spark of cleverness.”¹¹⁵ Laegreid claims this passage, although short, sheds light on a number of key words that held important meaning for this era. For example, a woman who was in repose represented the upper-class and upper-middle class women while the words truthful and steadfast symbolize the Victorian concept of earnestness, a characteristic with the meaning of “no pilgrimage of pleasure, but a scene of toil, of effort, of appointed work – of grand purposes to be striven for – of vast ends to be achieved...”¹¹⁶ It appears that people who are too sensitive, intellectual and artistic like Alexandra’s friend Carl Linstrum generally do not become successful. It is not intended by any means that being anti-intellectual meant refusing education, however, it was more important to gain information that would ultimately be more efficient for market production.

¹¹² Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 105.

¹¹³ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 22.

¹¹⁴ Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 105.

¹¹⁵ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 24.

¹¹⁶ Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 105.

Along with the Swedes, the French immigrants also belonged to the group of good immigrants, according to Laegreid. The French were of wilder nature compared to the Swedes but they also had the privilege of belonging to what was referred to as the old immigrants group – northern and western Europeans. In *O Pioneers!*, Ángelique and Amédée Chevalier are the representatives of the French group. Ángelique is described as someone who “represents the womanly Victorian norms of piety, purity, submission and domesticity” while her husband is a “good Victorian businessman, implementing the latest technologies to help make his farm more productive and profitable.”¹¹⁷

Surprisingly, as opposed to the Swedes and French, Laegreid suggests the Bohemians fall under the bad immigrants category. According to him, the Bohemians in *O Pioneers!* do not fit into the Victorian standards and exhibit regressive, antisocial qualities which may pose a threat to society. A representative for the Bohemian group would be Marie Tovesky, Emil’s childhood friend. While Marie is charming, lovely and full of excitement, these features are also what put her into the bad immigrant category as she did not fit into the Victorian standards.¹¹⁸ A group of Bohemians also appeared at the very beginning of the book as Alexandra enters a store, they are described to be “drinking raw alcohol, tinctured with oil of cinnamon”¹¹⁹ while they “smacked their lips after each pull at the flask”¹²⁰ and “the overheated store sounded of their spirited language as it reeked of pipe smoke, damp woolens, and kerosene.”¹²¹ Similarly, the German Russians are depicted as the ignored immigrants due to their behaviour which, unlike the Bohemians’ sociability, is strange and aloof.¹²²

The main protagonist of the novel, Alexandra Bergson, is seen as a new kind of pioneer. Up until this point, it was only acceptable for men to be pioneers. In Jean Griffith’s words, “Cather’s insistence on the roles women play in maintaining and transmitting cultural distinctiveness explains why her immigrant pioneers are so often women...[and] why those women immigrants differ from one another.” The novels *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* both have a female protagonist and yet the female immigrants differ from each other. Ántonia, the Bohemian immigrant, is portrayed as someone who is tied to home, hearth and to the past. Alexandra, on the other hand, is portrayed as someone who is independent, “a professionally minded New Women who transcend traditional gender roles and succeeds in widening the

¹¹⁷ Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 108.

¹¹⁸ Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 108.

¹¹⁹ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 5.

¹²⁰ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 5.

¹²¹ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 5.

¹²² Laegreid, “The Good, The Bad,” 112.

scope of acceptable spheres for women.”¹²³ Although Alexandra could have gotten married for the fact that owning land alone often improved one’s chances of getting married, she remained single throughout almost the entirety of the book. Alexandra’s brothers were also vying for potential suitors because of the loss to their children’s inheritance. Unlike *Ántonia* who had to do physical labour on her farm, Alexandra hardly ever did physical labour and focused on the intellectual part of the work instead. She directed all of her energy towards reading agricultural papers, visiting other farms, talking to those with experience and experimenting with new crops which left her with no energy for her personal relationships.

At the end of the novels, the wild land has transformed into fruitful pastures because of Alexandra’s application of new technology and practical knowledge which she obtained from her own experience and neighbours. Despite the fact that when the Bergson family arrived on the Divide it was nothing but wild terrain, as a result of the Bergson’s family hard work, Alexandra’s in particular, the Divide flourished into a settled agricultural region.

¹²³ Griffith, “‘Racial’ Difference,” 398.

6. Conclusion

The land is perhaps the most prominent symbol of Willa Cather's Great Plain trilogy. Both *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!* contain a worthy amount of description of nature. Judging from the analysis of these two novels, Cather tends to start off her novels with the coldest season of the year, winter. It also happens to be the time when the main protagonists either move into the United States or face a challenge which forces them to become the head of the household. Following the cold winter is spring and summer, seasons which symbolize the time for growth, education and maturation. These seasons are usually located in the middle of the book, a part where the main protagonists come into adulthood. Lastly, summer is usually the season which symbolizes the times of fruition. It is the times of happiness, finding love and realization of one's success. Apart from Cather using the same motive of seasons in her novels, her descriptions of the nature tend to be in sync with the character's feelings.

As for the portrayal of the Czech immigrants in *My Ántonia*, one could say it is impeccable. It is clear that before writing such a novel, Cather put a lot of thought and research into the Bohemian ways, customs and language. Although the Czech immigrants are portrayed as poor and not familiar with English at the beginning of the novel, as the story progresses, Cather put an emphasis on Antonia and the rest of her family making an effort to learn English as well as trying to figure out how to tame the wild land. She also chooses to showcase the good traits of the Czech immigrants as opposed to the bad traits. Cather also does not fail to demonstrate that during the Cuzak's family struggles, she is helped out by her neighbours. It is the combination of hard work and compassion that allowed Ántonia to thrive in this brazen country that is Nebraska. Throughout the novel, Willa Cather shows that different experiences will raise different people. Although Ántonia and Jim Burden had different upbringings, at the end of the novel both of them are portrayed as successful adults.

Unlike *My Ántonia*, in the novel *O Pioneers!* the struggle with the land does not affect the Bergson family only. It is indicated that the majority of the farmers gave up and moved to the city to work in a factory instead as they could not deal with the land anymore. Alexandra, on the other hand, who is described as someone who is courageous, resourceful and practical, decided to keep the land instead and despite her brothers' discouraging words, she transformed the farm into one of the richest on the Divide with her love for the land and hard work. Even though the novel mainly focuses on the Swedish immigrants who are depicted as the good immigrants as opposite to the Bohemian immigrants, it could be said that the

Bohemian immigrants are part of the bad immigrants group owing to the fact that Cather chose to highlight the good immigrants' characteristics instead.

All things considered, Willa Cather chooses to illustrate the immigrants in her books in a good light majority of the time. She makes an effort to understand the immigrants' customs and way of life, often doing so by visiting them whenever she had the time. At the end of Cather's books, the immigrants are often pictured as accomplished adults with families and prosperous farms.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje otázce přistěhovalectví a zobrazení obtíží v životě imigrantů a také života na americkém středozápadě v díle americké spisovatelky Willy Catherové, jmenovitě v knížkách *Moje Antonie* a *O Pioneers!*

První kapitola této práce se zabývá životem Willy Catherové. V devíti letech se Catherová přestěhovala s rodiči z Virginie na ranč v Nebrasce, kde strávila většinu svého dětství. Během svého času v Nebrasce se Catherová seznámila s přistěhovanci různých národností, což ovlivnilo její budoucí tvorbu. Catherová se soustředila především na psaní románů a povídek a proslavila se zejména svojí tvorbou románů o přistěhovalcích, mnohdy českého původu. Mezi její slavné novely patří již zmíněné *Moje Antonie* a *O Pioneers!*, ale také *Smrt si jde pro arcibiskupa* a *Lucy Gayheartová*.

Druhá kapitola rozebírá definice regionální literatury a hnutí „local colour“, které předcházelo regionální literatuře. Vzhledem k tomu, že většina literárních děl tehdejší doby byla psána Brity, bylo pouze otázkou času, kdy vznikne literární žánr jako je regionální literatura. Většině obyvatel tehdejšího středozápadu se nelíbila skutečnost, že musí neustále číst příběhy, se kterými nemají úzce spjatý vztah. Přestože spolu regionální literatura a „local colour“ úzce souvisí, neboť se oba žánry zabývají prostředím daného regionu, tamními zvyky nebo dialektem, mnozí souhlasí, že „local colour“ se zaměřuje hlavně na podivnosti a malebnosti daného regionu.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá geografii amerického středozápadu, který se nachází ve středoseverní části státu. Osídlování amerického středozápadu nastalo po koupi Louisiany, během které získaly Spojené státy americké území od Francie v roce 1803. Co se týče krajiny středozápadu, převážná většina území je pokryta travnatými pláněmi, které jsou typické pro severoamerickou step. Hlavním přínosem pro zemědělství středozápadu je pěstování pšenice a kukuřice, přičemž tento region je největším pěstitelem kukuřice ve Spojených státech amerických. Spolu s americkou prérií se také spojuje termín „prairie culture“, jehož definice tkví v tom, že se během osídlování středozápadu střídalo na jednom místě mnoho národů, což způsobilo skutečnost, že se na území nachází mnoho smíchaných kultur a tradic.

Čtvrtá a rovněž poslední kapitola teoretické části se zaměřuje na otázku přistěhovalectví. Dle slov Donny Gabaccia se přistěhovalcům zprvu říkalo „alien“, což v překladu znamená mimozemšťan, ale také cizinec nebo přistěhovalec. Tento termín se přestal používat až v první polovině devatenáctého století, což je více než půl století po tom, co byly Spojené státy americké vyhlášeny jako nový nezávislý útvar. Mezi lety 1815 a 1860,

přistěhovanci tvořili téměř třináct procent celého obyvatelstva, což činilo kolem pěti milionů lidí celého obyvatelstva USA. Většina Evropanů se po příjezdu do Ameriky rozhodlo vytvořit si svá vlastní seskupení, ke kterým se pak pozdější přistěhovanci mohli přidat. Bohužel, jejich cesta do Ameriky však nebyla bez závazků, jelikož většina emigrantů neměla peníze na to, aby si mohli zaplatit cestu tam, tudíž byli zadluženi svým plantážníkům nebo firmě, která jim cestu zaplatila. Mnoho Evropanů se rozhodlo emigrovat do Spojených států amerických mezi rokem 1865 a 1914 a později se usídlili na americkém středozápadě. Tato vlna migrace byla z velké části způsobena válkami v Evropě, které zapříčinili rozmach ekonomiky, nových technických vynálezů a expanzi světového trhu. Mimo jiné jsou evropští přistěhovanci také rozdělení do dvou skupin. Do první skupiny takzvaných „starých přistěhovalců“ patří ti, kteří pocházejí z Britských ostrovů nebo severských zemí. Do druhé skupiny „nových přistěhovalců“ patří lidé ze slovanských národů spolu s lidmi ze Středomoří. Důvodem tohoto rozdělení byl mýtus, dle kterého byli staří přistěhovanci inteligentnější a vhodnější k amerikanizaci.

Analytická část této bakalářské práce se zabývá rozbořem výše zmíněných knih, konkrétně způsobem zobrazení prostředí, krajiny a vyobrazení a charakteristiky přistěhovalců dle Willy Catherové. Informace získané o postavách a jejich okolí jsou konzultovány se sekundárními zdroji, především články z akademických časopisů.

Vzhledem k tomu, že Willa Catherová strávila část svého dětství v Nebrasce a seznámila se zde s přistěhovanci českého původu, mnoho odborníků spekuluje o tom, že kniha *Moje Antonie* je vsutku vyprávěna z pohledu Catherové. Této skutečnosti napovídá i to, že Jim Burden, hlavní postava knihy, se přestěhoval do Nebrasky ve věku deseti let, což je věk, ve kterém se Cather přestěhovala do téhož regionu. První popis přírody, který se nachází v knize *Moje Antonie*, naznačuje, že území středozápadu se nerovná žádné jiné místo na světě. Hlavní postava Jim Burden má pocit, jako by se ocitl na kraji světa. S postupem času se však jeho postoj k přírodě mění, tak jako se mění roční období v příběhu. Popis přírody v knihách Catherové se mění dle závislosti na ročním období. Během zimy jsou její popisy přírody pochmurné, negativní a temné. Naproti tomu její popis letní přírody je plný energie, půvabu a barvy. Není tedy divu, že Catherová začíná své příběhy v pochmurné zimě a na konci svého příběhu se dopravuje k létu, které představuje období sklizně a dozrávání.

Co se týče zobrazení přistěhovalců, v knize *Moje Antonie* jim jsou přisuzovány kladné a záporné rysy či vlastnosti. Mezi zápornou vlastnost českých přistěhovalců patří násilí. V knize *Moje Antonie* není násilí nijak zvlášť znázorněno, avšak v *O Pioneers!* je spojeno s osobou Franka Shabaty, který v záchvatu zuřivosti zastřelí svojí ženu spolu s jejím přítelem,

poté co je najde ležet ve svém ovocném sadu vedle sebe. Na druhou stranu, mezi kladné vlastnosti českých přistěhovalců patří schopnost udržet si svůj mateřský jazyk a tradice. Jak je znázorněno v knize *Moje Antonie*, Antonie nejprve učí svoje děti mluvit svým mateřským jazykem a její rodina stále mluví mezi sebou česky i přestože umí všichni plynule anglicky.

Naopak imigranti v knize *O Pioneers!* jsou rozděleni do tří skupin dle jejich charakteristických znaků. Do první „přínosné“ skupiny patří Švédové a Francouzi. Tyto dvě národnosti jsou označovány za pracovité, inteligentní a vytrvalé. Do druhé „neslušné“ skupiny přistěhovalců patří Češi. Přestože jsou Češi vychvalováni v knize *Moje Antonie*, v tomto příběhu jsou naopak vyliční jako alkoholici a pohoršující lidé vzhledem k jejich společenské nátuře. Poslední skupinou jsou „opomíjení“ imigranti, do které patří Němci, kteří jsou na rozdíl od Čechů odtažití a zdrženliví.

Ačkoliv jsou Češi vyobrazeni jako „neslušní“ imigranti v knize *O Pioneers!*, Catherová ve většině případů znázorňuje přistěhovalce ve svých knihách jako pracovitý, svědomitý a vytrvalý lid. Z jejích příběhů je jasné, že přistěhovalci jsou lidé, kteří se jen tak nevzdají, přestože jim příroda nepřeje a mnohdy jsou na pokraji svých sil. Velká část přistěhovalců je na konci Catherových příběhů znázorněna jako úspěšný lid, který se svou tvrdě pracující náturou dostal na vrchol pyramidy.

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