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Portraits of Artists and Musicians in Willa Cather's Fiction

Portréty umělců a hudebníků v próze Willy Catherové

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Abstract

The aim of the diploma thesis is a presentation of the detailed portraits of fictional artists and musicians in selected short stories and novels by Willa Cather. The diploma thesis contains three main chapters. The first chapter is focused on the delineation of the context of Willa Cather's writing. The chapter presents the author's biography focused on the musical impulses and crucial turns of Cather's authorship development as well as brief biographical facts about the real artistic personalities who inspired Cather's fictional characters. The second chapter concerns with the analysis of the fictional artistic characters in selected short stories by Willa Cather. The third chapter deals with the analysis of the fictional artistic characters in selected novels by Willa Cather.

Anotace

Cílem diplomové práce je představení detailních portrétů fiktivních umělců a hudebníků z vybraných povídek a románů od Willy Catherové. Diplomová práce obsahuje tři hlavní kapitoly. První je zaměřena na nastínění kontextu literární tvorby Willy Catherové. Tato kapitola předkládá životopis autorky zaměřený na hudební impulzy, klíčové mezníky ve vývoji tvorby Willy Catherové a stručné biografické údaje skutečných uměleckých osobností, které inspirovaly Catherovou ve tvoření beletristických postav. Druhá kapitola se zabývá analýzou fiktivních uměleckých postav z vybraných povídek Willy Catherové. Třetí kapitola se zabývá analýzou fiktivních uměleckých postav z vybraných románů Willy Catherové.

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1. Introduction

“It does not matter much whom we live with in this world, but it matters a great deal whom we dream of.”¹

This quote prototypically characterizes Willa Cather’s notion of an artist, for the artist is the embodiment of human ideals. The artist is a kind of means for the author on her journey to reach her own personal ideals. The actualization of beauty, the creation of aesthetic values these are the only artist’s devices in the struggle against the superficial consumer society. Artist’s dreams are the motivation for achieving transcendent values, which really matter. For Cather, the artist is not a mere source of pleasure and entertainment, but a strong personality with the vision of a world based on the highest standards. One should be faithful to his or her dreams.

1.1. Willa Cather’s Biography

Willa Sibert Cather (christened Wilella) was born on December 7, 1873 in Willow Shade Farm not far away from Back Creek Valley, Virginia. In 1883, Willa Cather’s father, Charles Fectigue Cather, decided to move his family, including Willa, her siblings (sister Jessica, brothers Roscoe and Douglass) and their mother, Mary Virginia Boak, to Webster county, northwest of the township of Red Cloud, Nebraska where the rest of Cather’s had already established their homestead.

There, in the pioneer Nebraska, Willa Cather encountered many European immigrants living in the neighborhood of her family. The most numerous were settlers from Germany, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Bohemia, Denmark and France. Many of Cather’s characters originate at or near the frontier and are of foreign nationality. Moreover, the reflection

¹ Cather, Willa: “The Gold Slipper” In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 122

of Nebraska and Red Cloud is a typical feature of Cather's fiction. If we focus on the fiction under study in this diploma thesis, we find this setting in almost all works, i.e. in the novels: *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *Lucy Gayheart* and in the short stories: "A Wagner Matinee", "The Sculpture's funeral", "A Death in Desert".

Willa Cather witnessed many unsuccessful attempts of her neighbors to adapt to the cruel conditions on the frontier. As a result, many of them had to leave their places and return to the East, defeated by the wildness of the country. Even Cather chose the more comfortable alternative of living and moved to the small prairie town Red Cloud, Nebraska just one year after arriving in the prairie.

Willa Cather's interest in music appeared there in Red Cloud during her childhood. She was given the opportunity to visit the local Opera House and watch the performances of the road companies that came to the prairie town. The passion for art remained with Willa Cather throughout her life.

After graduation from the local high school in 1890, Willa was "eager to extend her horizons beyond Red Cloud, and her first step toward doing so involved a hundred-mile rail journey east to Lincoln, where she hoped to be accepted by the state university".² Willa Cather switched Red Cloud to the substantially bigger and more developed metropolis of the prairie region and the capital of the state of Nebraska. She attended the preparatory class there; and in the following year, 1891, Willa Cather was accepted to the first proper semester at the University of Nebraska.

Cather discovered the cultural opportunities that the Lincoln of her time offered - two theatres (the Funke and the Lansing) that "could

² Gerber, Philip: "Chapter 1: From the World to Nebraska" In: *Twayne's United States Authors Series 258* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975)

accommodate three thousand spectators".³ One could watch even six plays every week there. It was given primarily by the optional location of Lincoln on the railroad net. The top-class travelling theatre companies, orchestras as well as touring opera companies often stopped in Lincoln to perform there before they continued to San Francisco or Denver.

Cather's literary career originated in campus' literary magazines, the *Lasso* and the *Hesperian* which admitted Willa Cather to the position of associate editor; later she became the managing editor of the *Hesperian*. Thanks to one of her instructors, the *Nebraska State Journal* printed an essay written by Cather during her freshman year at the college. Soon afterwards, her essay "Shakespeare and Hamlet", appeared on the pages of the Nebraska leading newspaper.

However, Cather successfully experimented also with fiction, e.g. "Peter" (1892), during her student's years. The short story was printed in the *Mahogany Tree*, a small magazine in Boston. Thus Willa Cather, at the age of eighteen already had her first fiction work published. The *Hesperian* published the following short stories by Willa Cather: "The Peter", "Lou, the Prophet", "A Tale of the White Pyramid", "A Son of the Celestial", and "The Clemency of the Court" within 1892-1893.

Since the November 1893, Cather contributed to her first regular column "One Way of Putting It" in the *Nebraska State Journal* and the following December she started there the drama criticism "The Passing Show". This weekly column comprises the origin of Willa Cather's career of art reviewing. Two years were satisfactory to work her way up among the best western drama critiques of that time. Cather contributed to "The

³ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 51

Passing Show” “until 1900, long after she moved to Pittsburgh”⁴ as the column was moved to the *Courier*.

Willa Cather graduated in June 1895, she desired for a career as fiction-writer but she had to earn a living by journalism. Nevertheless, “during her stay at home early in the year she realized that she did not want to live in Red Cloud, even if she could have made her living there as a fiction writer.”⁵ Willa Cather, besides publishing in the *Nebraska State Journal*, became the associate editor of the *Courier* and her reputation extended beyond Nebraska.

One year after her graduation at the Nebraska University, in 1896, twenty-two-year old Willa Cather got her new opportunity as she applied for the offer of the magazine *Home Monthly* in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The post of the assistant editor engaged Cather fully. Pittsburgh turned into Cather’s home for the next ten years. The author’s production of short stories increased. Cather used her experience with this city of business for example in the short stories: “A Gold Slipper”, “The Gospel of Wealth” and “Paul’s Case”.

The great advantage of Pittsburgh was its splendid cultural life. The Carnegie Music Hall became an inseparable part of Cather’s fiction. If we focus on the fiction under study in the diploma thesis, we find that the Carnegie Music Hall appears even there. Firstly, in the novel *The Song of the Lark*, the character of Andor Harsanyi, Thea Kronborg’s piano teacher from Chicago, gives a concert in the Carnegie Music Hall. Secondly, in the short story “A Gold Slipper”, the character of the operatic diva Kitty Ayrshire gives a recital in the Carnegie Music Hall. Thirdly, in the short story “A Death in Desert”, the character of Katharine Gaylord asks the

⁴ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 65

⁵ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 72-73

character of Everette Hilgarde: "Who has your brother's old studio now, and what misguided aspirants practice their scales in the rookeries above Carnegie Hall?"⁶. Fourthly, in the short story "A Wagner Matinee", the music hall where the Wagnerian concert takes place may presumably be based on the Carnegie Music Hall. Lastly, in the short story "Paul's case", the protagonist Paul works an usher in the Carnegie Music Hall.

For her interest in art and cultural events, Cather decided to take the part-time in the *Leader* for she wished to write the theatre reviews for the paper. Cather "reviewed concerts, recitals, musical comedy, as well as the legitimate theatre"⁷. Among many significant musical events of Cather's Pittsburgh period belong the performances of Dvořák's *New World Symphony* given by the Pittsburgh Symphony (Cather inserted the reference to this symphony in the novel *The Song of the Lark*), the operas: *The Barber of Seville* by Gioachino Rossini (the reference to this opera appears in the novel *Lucy Gayheart*) and *Lohengrin* by Richard Wagner (the reference to this opera appears in the two novels *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*).

After one year in the *Home Monthly* and after the summer stay in Nebraska, Willa Cather decided to take full-time in the *Leader*; she became an assistant telegraph editor in the magazine. However, at this time Cather's life aim yet did not reside in writing for journals. For that reason she "dared to quit her job on the *Leader* only after she had broken into the eastern magazine market."⁸ The success happened when the prestigious magazine *Cosmopolitan* in New York bought Cather's short story "Erick Hermanson's Soul", and it was published in 1900.

⁶ Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 73

⁷ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 84

⁸ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 95

Willa Cather wished to discontinue her journalistic activities. The turn of the year 1900, which she spent in Washington, should have been the last time she was engaged in writing to the newspaper. When Cather returned to Pittsburgh, she made living by teaching Latin, later English at the Central High School and in 1905 she transferred to Allegheny High School. Teaching meant a lucrative and reliable source of money for the author.

Willa Cather travelled to Europe in 1902. She made a journey throughout England and France which lasted three months. After her return from the European tour to the Pittsburgh Central High School, Cather published her first book *April Twilights* (1903) wherein the author presented her not so accomplished poetic side. However, she was given the chance to publish her short stories. Paradoxically, the interest for Cather's fiction arose from Samuel Sidney McClure, whose magazine rejected the short stories Cather had previously presented. Nevertheless, the *McClure's Magazine* published Cather's second book *The Troll Garden* comprising of the short stories: "Flavia and Her Artists", "The Sculptor's Funeral", "The Garden Lodge", "A Death in the Desert", "The Marriage of Phaedra", "A Wagner Matinee", "Paul's Case" in 1905. Besides other works of fiction, this thesis is focused on the artistic characters of the short stories of *The Troll Garden* (i.e. Harvey Merrick, Adriance Hilgarde, Hugh Treffinger, Georgiana Carpenter, Charley Edwards and a German soprano soloist). The collection fulfilled two aspects of Cather's production. It projected "the tension between the need to support herself and the deep urge to dedicate her life to art"⁹

The *McClure's Magazine* became Willa Cather's employer in 1906, where she held the editorial post in the periodical. As a consequence, Cather moved to New York which remained her home until the last days

⁹ Gerber, Philip: "Chapter 2: From Nebraska to the World" In: *Twayne's United States Authors Series 258* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975)

of her life. Willa Cather cooperated with *McClure's Magazine* until 1912. During this period she became one of the most significant editors of that time, in spite of the fact that the field of journalism was securely the male domain. However, the work meant that she could not devote all her energy to the fiction writing as she was overburdened by magazine's duties.

Owing to the business trips Cather was obliged to make under the *McClure's Magazine*, she met the writer Sarah Orne Jewett in 1908. Their encounter in Boston had a crucial effect on Cather's perspective toward writing as Jewett recommended Cather to end her career in journalism and devote all her creative potential to the development of novel writing. However, it took four more years until Cather followed Jewett's advice. Nevertheless, she had managed to spare her time to write her first novel even before she left the *McClure's Magazine*. Cather's first novel *Alexander's Bridge* appeared in 1912 and it was almost immediately followed by her second novel *O Pioneers!* in 1913. It is obvious that Cather's career of a writer of fiction fully evolved after her break with journalism. Since then Cather, as she was a very prolific author, wrote ten more novels. Our interest concerns three of them, namely *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918) and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935).

The vacation in Winslow, Arizona in 1912 was the source of inspiration for Cather's writing of the novel *The Song of the Lark*. It strengthened Cather's conviction about her vocation. *The Song of the Lark* belongs to Cather's Nebraska novels together with *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*. The material, which Cather used while writing them, springs in her childhood that she spent in the prairie. Cather was unsatisfied with the publisher of *The Song of The Lark*; the yield on the novel did not fulfill Cather's vision. She changed the publisher to Houghton Mifflin who took the charge of Cather's novel *One of Ours*, a World War I novel (1922); this

novel won the Pulitzer Prize. Cather continued with the production, within five years she published four novels: *A Lost Lady* (1923), *The Professor's House* (1925), *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) and *Death Comes for Archbishop* (1927). The last three novels Cather wrote after she reached the age of fifty-eight: *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940).

Willa Cather breathed her last on 24 April, 1947.

1.2. Models of Cather's Fictional Artistic Characters

Cather's life passion toward art is reflected in her writings. Many artistic protagonists of Willa Cather's fiction are based on the models of real artists who Cather met throughout her life. She admired artists for their uniqueness, determination and endowment which enabled them to create art either in the form of music, sculpture or paintings. Cather put into her fiction a lot of biographical issues, thus it is not any exception that she put her own experiences into the characters. This chapter concerns with the artistic personalities who comprise the inspiration for Cather's fictional artistic protagonists.

Mary Garden (1874 - 1967), who stood as a model for the fictional operatic diva Kitty Ayrshire in Cather's short story "A Gold Slipper" (1917), was a coloratura soprano of Scottish origin who came to the USA in 1883 to study in Chicago. She was engaged in the Opéra-Comique in Paris after her studies. She made her debut by performing in *Louise* by Gustave Charpentier, in 1900. She was so brilliant that Claude Debussy appointed her to the role of Mélisande in the premiere of his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902. Mary Garden performed at the Royal Opera House in London in the seasons 1902 and 1903. She sang the role of Marguerite in *Faust* by Charles Francois Gounod there (for the role of the fictional character, Kitty Ayrshire sings at the Carnegie Music Hall during her recital). Jules

Massenet wrote the role of Cherubin in his opera *Cherubin* exclusively for the soloist at Monte Carlo. Since 1910 she won America's favor and became associate with the Chicago Grand Opera. She held the post of director of the Chicago Opera Association in 1921. Mary Garden left opera stage in 1934 and taught young talented singers for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in California. She died in 1967 in Scotland.

Charles Stanley Reinhart (1844 - 1896) is a model of the fictional character of Harvey Merrick in Cather's short story "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905). He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The illustrator studied in Royal Academy, Munich. Reinhart participated on the production of "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" by Thomas Hardy. For the *Harper's Monthly* he co-illustrated "The First Countess of Wessex" in 1889. *Gathering Wood*, *At Close of day* are fine examples of Reinhart's watercolor paintings; however, he is also known for his black-and-white works. The most significant part of his artistry consists of many oil canvasses. Reinhart exhibited at the National Academy of New York and created numerous illustrations for journals in America and England.

Ethelbert Nevin (1862-1901) was the result of Cather's inspiration when she wrote "A Death in Desert", the short story whose chief musical character, based on the composer and pianist Nevin, is Adriance Hilgarde. Ethelbert was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His first published composition was *Lilian Polka* at his age of eleven. He studied piano in Pittsburgh, Dresden, Boston and Berlin. Nevin was an impressionistic miniaturist and he performed many of his compositions during the recitals he gave in Pittsburgh, Boston, New York where he established himself as a virtuoso pianist. His best known composition is obviously *Water Scenes* (1891)

Olive Fremstad (1871-1951) created the model for the fictional character of Thea Kronborg in Cather's novel *The Song of the Lark*. Olive

Fremstad was a mezzo-soprano soloist born in Stockholm, Sweden. She was an orphan adopted by an American family of Scandinavian origin who took her to Minnesota. After her studies in New York and Berlin, Fremstad debuted with Cologne Opera in the role of Azucena in the opera *The Troubadour* by Giuseppe Verdi in 1895. She sang the role of Brangäne in the opera *Tristan and Isolde* by Richard Wagner in Vienna. Fremstadt was engaged in the Munich Opera since 1900 where among her most popular parts appeared the role of Carmen in the opera *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. However, she established herself as Wagnerian soprano during the period 1902-1903 when she sang at the Royal Opera House in London. For eleven seasons Fremstad was the prima donna of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, since November 1903 when she sang the role of Sieglinde in the opera *The Valkyrie* by Richard Wagner (equally to the fictional protagonist Thea Kronborg who breaks through the role of Sieglinde in New York Metropolitan Opera House). Olive Fremstad successfully performed many lead roles during her New York engagement. Willa Cather knew Olive Fremstad personally and interviewed the diva in 1914.

“One day Willa Cather made an appointment to interview Fremstad. According to Miss Lewis, she went to the singer’s apartment and waited a long while until Fremstad returned from a motor ride. There had been some slight mishap, and the prima donna came in late. She was tired, pale, drawn. She also looked old, and her voice was only a husky whisper. Willa Cather excused herself and said she would return another day. That night she, Edith Lewis, and Isabelle McClung, who was visiting, had tickets for *Tales of Hoffman*. The second-act curtain was unaccountably delayed, and after a long while the management announced that the soprano had been taken ill. Mme. Fremstad, however had agreed to finish the opera. Then the curtain went up, and there before Willa Cather’s astonished eyes was the woman she had left a haggard wreck several hours before. She now was

singing “in a voice so opulent, so effortless, that it seemed as if she were dreaming the music, not singing it.””

“‘But it’s impossible,’ Willa Cather kept saying, ‘It’s impossible.’”¹⁰

The episode from *The Song of the Lark* in which the fictional character of Thea Kronborg stands the role of Sieglinde as no other singer appears available is directly inspired by the occurrence Cather experienced.

¹⁰ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 163

2. Fictional Artists and Musicians in Selected Short Stories

2.1. “A Death in Desert”

Willa Cather pursues destinies of three artistic personalities: Adriance Hilgarde, Katharine Gaylord and Everett Hilgarde, in the short story *A Death in Desert*.

Adriance Hilgarde is the central figure of the three musicians presented in the short story. The perspective from which readers encounter the composer Adriance Hilgarde is definitely distinct as Cather indicates his self-centeredness, deriving from the artistic component of his personality, from the point of view of the not so lucky ones whom Adriance Hilgarde left behind him during the route of accomplishing his high musical goals and fame. While self-centeredness may be regarded rather as a negative quality, it is justified by its necessity in the life of a brilliant artist and never considered unacceptable by Adriance’s surroundings.

Serving Cather’s model for the character of Adriance Hilgarde, Ethelbert Nevin (1862-1901), was an American virtuoso pianist and composer. Ethelbert came from a large family of eight children and his sibling Arthur Nevin was also a musician. The character of Everett Hilgarde may be based on Ethelbert Nevin’s sibling Arthur. James Woodress in his book *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* states:

“He is a brilliant composer just reaching the pinnacle of his creative powers, a character inspired by Ethelbert Nevin, whom he resembles in many details.”¹¹

The character of Adriance Hilgarde became famous for the Spring Sonata from the cantata *Proserpine* which he composed in his youth. The

¹¹ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 114

fact that Adriance's composing utterance matures is reflected in his latest sonata that he sent to Katharine Gaylord, one of his best students, who, while waiting for her end, finds her tragic destiny revealed in the piece.

"What the three last years have done for him! He used to write only tragedies of passion; but this is the tragedy of the soul, the shadow coexistent with the soul. This is the tragedy of effort and failure, the thing Keats call hell. This is my tragedy, as I lie here...."¹²

The sonata by Adriance Hilgarde expresses personal defeat. Katharine Gaylord used to be a famous singer, a brilliant artist just like Adriance Hilgarde, but at this moment; sunk into oblivion, forgotten by her artistic idol and her life-love Adrince Hilgarde; she is now dying far away from her dreams and desires in a remote ranch in the proximity of Cheyenne, Wyoming. She is one of the people who Adriance abandoned for he devoted everything to composing music; and could not afford to be stuck on any individual for it would in all likelihood preclude his career. In addition, Adriance Hilgarde has a volatile temper for constantly gaining new experience, visiting new places meeting new people, e.g. during his stay in Algiers "he had quite made up his mind to adopt the Mohametan faith and become as nearly an Arab as possible."¹³ This behavior is rather the manifestation of his eccentric personality than a decision of a serious significance, for it is not presented as a rare incident.

If we focus on the relationship with his family, we could describe it as a misfortune for all members except Adriance. Adriance Hilgarde was dissociated from his mother when he was "absurdly young" for he "went abroad to study"¹⁴. Although his mother didn't cope with detachment

¹² Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 81

¹³ Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 75

¹⁴ Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 75

from Adriance, she used his brother Everett as a substitute. She made a concession for the benefit of Adriance by which she manifested her support and comprehension toward art. In the comparison with the character of Harvey Merrick in the short story "The Sculptor's Funeral", from this perspective, i.e. comprehension of art by the family of an artist, the character of Adriance Hilgarde appears as the fortunate one. As a consequence of their mother's attitude, Adriance's younger brother Everett sustained his inferiority complex and a feeling of insignificance. Moreover, it was the fate of living in the shadow of his more prominent, successful, genius brother remained Everett for the rest of his life. Since the resemblance between the two brothers and subsequent "sudden recognitions"¹⁵ from Adriance's admirers or acquaintances became a curse following Everett around. Everett was left with no other alternative but assuming his marginality. Nothing, not even his own family, would disturb Adriance Hilgarde from absorption by music except the illness he suffered in Florence after which he composed the aforementioned masterpiece sonata.

In comparison with the manner of presentation of Thea Kronborg's in *The Song of the Lark* who found it a necessity to sever the ties with her family and hometown community and to stay self-centered during the whole period of her artistic blooming; together with the character of Harvey Merrick in "The Sculpture's Funeral" who had become estranged from his home Sand City and his family to become a world-famous sculptor; Adriance Hilgarde's selfishness appears in more negative way since there is no allusion to Adriance having any sympathy toward those people he abandoned. For this reason it would be inappropriate to consider Adriance's egocentrism to be a kind of sacrifice to the art as it is with the cases of Thea Kronborg and Harvey Merrick.

¹⁵ Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 67

Despite his self-centeredness, Adriance Hilgarde is a famous, charming artist adored by numerous people. His success is even more obvious because Cather put him in contrast with the fading soprano Katharine Gaylord. In the course of one night, Katharine Gaylord died while Adriance Hilgarde was performing on his "opening concert in Paris"¹⁶.

Three artists with three tragic fortunes are followed in the short story. In the instance of Adriance Hilgarde it is the feasible loneliness that derives from his inability to feel compassion, his selfishness and the tendency toward alienation from his friends and family. Katharine Gaylord's tragedy lies in her fatal disease and separation from what she desires for, i.e. her former successful artistic life and the iconic Adriance Hilgarde. Finally, Everett Hilgarde's similarity with his brother Adriance causes Everett's loss of identity. The inescapable awareness of inferiority toward Adriance makes Everett's life a tragedy.

2.2. "A Wagner Matinee"

Willa Cather presents the character of Georgiana Carpenter, a former musician, in the short story "A Wagner Matinee" as a defeated figure. Georgiana suppressed her artistic part of personality and terminated the life of a music teacher in the Boston conservatory to become a pioneer in the Nebraska frontier. Cather evinces that Georgiana's choice was wrong for she, through the character of Clark - Georgiana's nephew, describes the crude conditions that the pioneers had to cope with and their devastating effect on an artistic personality. Finally, Georgiana Carpenter is capable of realizing that she lost the best years of her life for perpetual travail that wrecked both her physical condition and her life perspective.

¹⁶ Cather, Willa: "A Death in the Desert" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 85

At her age of thirty, Georgiana Carpenter visited her home village where she, for the first time, met her husband Howard Carpenter, “the most idle and shiftless of all the village lads”¹⁷ who was nine years younger than Georgiana. Georgiana’s destruction was initiated at this point as, owing to her romantic nature, she succumbed to the passion that she felt for the young man. As a result, despite her family’s objections, she abandoned her music career and blindly followed her love to Red Willow County, where nothing but labor, hardship and isolation welcomed her. According to the observation of Bruce P. Baker, in his critical essay *Nebraska's Cultural Desert: Willa Cather's Early Short Stories*, Cather does not consider the unfavorable Nebraska frontier to be the place where a musician can realize his or her artistic predestination.

“... in much of Cather's early written response to the Great Plains, Nebraska is portrayed as a cultural desert, a setting often hostile to those of artistic bent, a place indifferent if not actively hostile to man's creative spirit.”¹⁸

Georgiana raised her nephew Clark, the narrator of the short story, on the Nebraska farm. In defiance of her all time consuming labor, she trained Clark to play the organ and taught him Latin. Georgiana suffers from the separation of music that she caused by her life choice and she wishes Clark to not make the same mistake.

“Don’t love it so well, Clark, or it may be taken from you. Oh, dear boy, pray that whatever your sacrifice may be, it be not that.”¹⁹

Probably as the atonement for the betrayal of art to which she was predestined to devote her life; Georgiana inserts the rest of her life energy

¹⁷ Cather, Willa: “A Wagner Matinee” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 108

¹⁸ Baker, Bruce: „Nebraska's Cultural Desert: Willa Cather's Early Short Stories“ In: *Midamerica* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2002)

¹⁹ Cather, Willa: “A Wagner Matinee” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 110

to her nephew. Marilyn Arnold, in her critical essay *Refining the Gift: 1901-1905*, notices that the character of Georgiana Carpenter tries to compensate the fault she transgresses by giving similar opportunity she had missed to her nephew.

“A nephew discovers a new depth of feeling for an aunt who, in spite of the narrow circumstances of her own life, taught him an appreciation for the fine and the beautiful, gave to him gifts she could not give to herself, opened doors for him that were forever closed to her.”²⁰

During Georgiana’s stay in Boston; which she realized because of “a small legacy”²¹ one of her deceased relatives had left her; Clark takes her to the Wagner Matinee, and as a consequence reawakens the painful recollections of her wasted life in her mind. By taking Georgiana to “the world to which she had been dead for a quarter of a century”²², Clark gives her aunt the opportunity to reunite herself with the music she had originally been living for. Moreover, he gives her the opportunity to meet her substance and nature in the form of the ability to perceive the Wagnerian music. However, after the beating period in the frontier and owing to her desolating physical condition, Georgiana, in all probability, would not be able to produce it again.

“Poor old hands! They had been stretched and twisted into mere tentacles to hold and lift and knead with; the palm, unduly swollen, the fingers bent and knotted...”²³

²⁰ Arnold, Marilyn: „Refining the Gift: 1901-1905“ In: *Willa Cather's Short Fiction* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2002)

²¹ Cather, Willa: “A Wagner Matinee” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 107

²² Cather, Willa: “A Wagner Matinee” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 111

²³ Cather, Willa: “A Wagner Matinee” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 113

The effect of the harsh lifestyle of a pioneer appears as the concert proceeds. For Georgiana Carpenter is not capable of expressing her feelings externally as she responds to the moving melodies of the overtures to the Wagner's operas the *Tannhauser*, *Tristan and Isolde* and "the number from the *Flying Dutchman*"²⁴. Clark's misgivings that his aunt's "taste for such things" is "quite dead"²⁵ seems to be real until "the tenor began the "Prize Song"²⁶ from the Wagner's opera *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. Georgiana's tears function as the evidence of the fact, that she has never really missed her artistic self, however, it would be less tormenting for her to miss it. During the rest of the concert comprising of "four numbers from the *Ring*, and closed with Siegfried's funeral march"²⁷ Georgiana lets her emotions rise. After the concert finished Georgiana explicitly protests against leaving the concert hall for it would mean her returning back to the Red Willow County where she would inconsolably suffer until the end of her life.

The character of Georgiana Carpenter is portrayed as a frustrated figure aware of her life loss and disconsolate destiny to which she has to return, despite her disapproval. Georgiana wasted her artistic potential and endowment and therefore diverges from other artistic protagonists of Cather's fiction as she does not deserve admiration but pity. As an artist Georgiana does not celebrate victory, she rather expresses regret about the pernicious decision she made against her talent.

²⁴ Cather, Willa: "A Wagner Matinee" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 113

²⁵ Cather, Willa: "A Wagner Matinee" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 110

²⁶ Cather, Willa: "A Wagner Matinee" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 113

²⁷ Cather, Willa: "A Wagner Matinee" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 114

2.3. "The Marriage of Phaedra"

Hugh Treffinger is a painter, one of the central characters in the short story "The Marriage of Phaedra" by Willa Cather. Cather chose the painter's unfinished painting for the title of the short story, since it is an incentive to the artist's alienation with his wife, other conflicts in their marriage as well as Hugh Treffinger's contact with his surroundings. The protagonist of the short story does not differ from other artistic characters in Willa Cather's fiction with regard to the motif of the sense of total absorption in art leading to social unconformity and consequent inability to keep human relations. In the case of Hugh Treffinger the incomprehension of his artistic personality, let alone art, comes from his wife. As what at first may appear fascinating for Lady Ellen Treffinger about her husband changes into the reason of her husband's overlooking her. For his misfortune, Hugh Treffinger decided for art which requires personal sacrifices, i.e. the peaceful marriage; although his wife made contradictory decision which appears to be the right one. Since the triumphant figure is not the painter, but Lady Ellen Treffinger at the end.

James Woodress considers Willa Cather's visit in Burne-Jones's studio, London in 1902 to be the source of inspiration for the short story.

"The Marriage of Phaedra," also never reprinted, is the most Jamesian tale in *The Troll Garden* and was suggested by Willa Cather's trip to Burne-Jones's studio in Kensington."²⁸

What enraptured Cather's attention the most in the "Garden Studio"²⁹ was Sir Edward Burne-Jones's picture *The Passing of Venus* which he did not manage to finish; he passed away in 1898.

²⁸ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 115

²⁹ Cather, Willa: London: „Burne-Jones's Studio“ In: *Willa Cather in Europe: Her Own Story of the First Journey* (University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 72



Burne-Jones, Edward: *The Passing of Venus*. c. 1875. Oil on panel.³⁰

Willa Cather applied different classical theme of the painting by the protagonist Hugh Treffinger, i.e. “The Marriage of Phaedra” in the short story. Sir Edward Burne-Jones, as Klaus Peter Stich in his critical essay *Woman as Enemy: Willa Cather's 'The Marriage of Phaedra.'* suggests, is not the model for the character of the painter Hugh Treffinger.

“Despite a few external parallels, Cather's portrayal of Treffinger bears no meaningful resemblance to Sir Edward Burne-Jones, whose work she admired and whose studio she visited in London in 1902.”³¹

Willa Cather’s extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin mythology given by her educational specialization during her studies at the Lincoln University, Nebraska rebounded Cather’s creation of the fictional painting *The Marriage of Phaedra*, which is based on the theme of the Greek myth about the tragic marriage of Phaedra and Theseus. As the real painting *The Passing of Venus*, which inspired Cather, deals with a different mythological theme, the author chose the legend of Phaedra with the

³⁰ Burne-Jones, Edward: *The Passing of Venus*. c. 1875. Oil on panel. The Junior Common Room, Exeter College, Oxford, UK. *abcgallery*. 21 April 2012
<<http://www.abcgallery.com/B/burne-jones/burnejones21.html>>

³¹ Stich, Klaus: „Woman as Enemy: Willa Cather's 'The Marriage of Phaedra.'“ In: *Modern Language Studies* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2002)

intertextual purpose of underlining the theme of a doomed relationship that is also the relevant theme of Cather's short story "The Marriage of Phaedra" and, generally, a typical phenomenon of Cather's fictional artists.

Hugh Treffinger's painting means both the painter's highest artistic accomplishment as well as the destruction of his person and the marriage. After his first health complications, Hugh Treffinger immersed wholly in the creation of *The Marriage of Phaedra*. As a result of her husband's behavior, Lady Ellen Treffinger openly protests against his devotion to the painting. Thereby she indirectly demonstrates her incomprehension toward art and the sacrifices it demands. In addition, the marriage would presumably be misfortunate anyway because of the social differences between the couple. Hugh Treffinger's origin is not noble as his wife's, as he comes from the family of a "small tobacconist".³² Hugh Treffinger appears to be financially reliant on his wife who provides him with more than sufficient financial support; regardless of her denial of artistic attitudes her husband espouses. The fact that Treffinger's painting, as the most important part of his art and reflection of his existence and personality, has no value to his wife is finally demonstrated by the sale of the picture and Lady Ellen Treffinger's ignorance of her husband's last wish not to sell the unfinished picture. Providing that the painting is a reflection of Hugh Treffinger's artistic personality, then the ignorance of Lady Ellen Treffinger may be transferred to her ignorance of art generally; let alone the negative attitude of Lady Ellen Treffinger's sister - Lady Mary Percy - to the profession of her brother-in-law: "Oh, I give him his dues.

³² Cather, Willa: "The Marriage of Phaedra" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 93

He was a colourist, I grant you; but that is a vague and unsatisfactory quality to marry to; ...”³³

The most significant influence on the artistic and personal development of the painter comes from his teacher and friend, the eccentric Italian Ghillini who trained Hugh Treffinger in an unorthodox manner. The painter’s career started with some not so profound paintings in comparison with his last painting *The Marriage of Phaedra* that is considered as the expression of Treffinger’s life perspective, education under Ghillini and Treffinger’s personality.

“Under him Treffinger acquired his superficial, yet facile, knowledge of the classics; had steeped himself in the monkish Latin and mediaeval romances which later gave his work so naïve and remote quality. That was the beginning of the wattle fences, the cobble pave, the brown roof beams, the cunningly wrought fabrics that gave to his pictures such a richness of decorative effect. ... He had always believed that the key to Treffinger’s individuality lay in his singular education; ...”³⁴

As a painter, Hugh Treffinger was very precise and punctual; he desired for perfection and wanted his pictures “to be well made, the same as any other h’article of trade...”³⁵. His demanding character became evident while he started to work on *The Marriage of Phaedra* intensively. He had been reworking the painting many times and experienced many “low days”³⁶ of creative crisis.

An artist’s absolute devotion to the creation of art seems to be inevitable. The character of Hugh Treffinger is evidently not the only

³³ Cather, Willa: “The Marriage of Phaedra” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 92

³⁴ Cather, Willa: “The Marriage of Phaedra” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 94

³⁵ Cather, Willa: “The Marriage of Phaedra” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 89

³⁶ Cather, Willa: “The Marriage of Phaedra” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 102

example, for if one compares the actions of the character of Hugh Treffinger to the characters of Adriance Hilgarde – the protagonist of Cather’s short story “A Death in Desert” – and Thea Kronborg – the protagonist of Cather’s novel *The Song of the Lark* – one finds similar behavior. All of these artists manifest their self-centeredness stemming from their dedication to art. Firstly, Thea Kronborg sacrificed her own family and the Moonstone community, where she originated, to become an operatic diva. Secondly, Adriance Hilgarde sacrificed his family and all possible relationships that would bind him and consequently prevent from his career of a brilliant composer and pianist. Lastly, Hugh Treffinger sacrifices his marriage to the creation of his masterpiece *The Marriage of Phaedra*. Thus Cather emphasizes the isolation and incomprehension as well as the sacrifices of an artist which are indisputably themes frequently reoccurring in her prose. The art is clothed in rather negative attire in the short story “The Marriage of Phaedra” for it is presented as a source of destruction of the painter’s health, marriage and life.

2.4. “Paul’s Case: A Study in Temperament”

There are two artistic characters introduced in the short story “Paul’s Case: A Study in Temperament” by Willa Cather. The first one is the character of the soprano soloist who performs in the Carnegie Music Hall, Pittsburgh. The second one is the character of Charley Edwards, who is a member of the stock company performing in one local theatre. Cather emphasizes rather their function of representatives of art than their signification as concrete artistic personalities. Also Paul is an unrecognized “gifted” pupil, and likely a homosexual. His teachers do not recognize his potential, only his boredom with their instruction. The only way to meet the two artists is the perspective of the main protagonist Paul for whom the world of art symbolizes the refuge from materialistic society

with which he cannot cope. For that reason, the main theme of the short story resides in the conflict between consumerism of society and the world of artists which main focus consists of higher qualities than money and possession; however, even there the necessity of money is inescapable.

The character of the German soloist, in the short story, is from Paul's point of view, defined as a heroine, a part of Paul's dream-world. She appears to be the key to Paul's refuge from the every-day insufferable stereotype in which he is constrained to live with his authoritarian father in Cordelia Street. The real personality of the singer is a component of the mechanism of the money-based society to which Paul feels scorn. However, he is not able to realize it; Paul creates an idealization of the soloist. The one particular personality is not important; the purpose of the character of the soprano is rather being a general prototype of an artist, an incentive to imaginations of a desperate young man, who finds his peace in the romanticized world of art.

"When the soprano soloist came on, Paul forgot even the nastiness of his teacher's being there and gave himself up to the peculiar stimulus such personages always had for him. The soloist chanced to be a German woman, by no means in her first youth, and the mother of many children; but she wore an elaborate gown and tiara, and above all she had that indefinable air of achievement, that world-shine upon her, which, in Paul's eyes, made her a veritable queen of Romance."³⁷

The character of the German soprano operates as a heroine of the imaginary, idealized world. However, being an idol is just one side of the coin, the other one is the fact that even the idol originates in materialistic society and thus as a part of it must follow its rules or be marginalized. The German soprano seems to be obedient to the rules as Cather

³⁷ Cather, Willa: "Paul's Case: a Study in Temperament" In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 121

emphasized her quality of being “a mother of many children”³⁸. Moreover, the unenviable situation of artists who start their families is described with the touch of irony:

“The members of the stock company were vastly amused when some of Paul’s stories reached them – especially the women. They were hard-working women, most of them supporting indigent husbands or brothers, and they laughed rather bitterly at having stirred the boy to such fervid and florid inventions.”³⁹

The second artistic personality of the short story is the character of Charley Edwards, a not yet successful young actor of the “permanent stock company which played at one of the downtown theatres” and an “acquaintance” of Paul. Charley Edwards renders Paul the opportunity to escape from the prison of the materialistic surrounding as he allows Paul to “drop in at the Sunday-night rehearsals whenever he could”.⁴⁰

“It was at the theatre and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting. This was Paul’s fairy tale, and it had for him all the allurements of a secret love. ...he breathed like a prisoner set free ...”⁴¹

The character of Charley Edwards plays a role of Paul’s assistant on the way to reach the desired destination. For Paul mentions the plans to leave Pittsburgh – the place of small-minded consumer community – and go to New York with the actor Charley Edwards.

“Not once, but hundred times, Paul had planned this entry into New York. He had gone over every detail of it with Charley Edwards, and in his scrap

³⁸ Cather, Willa: “Paul’s Case: a Study in Temperament” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 121

³⁹ Cather, Willa: “Paul’s Case: a Study in Temperament” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 129

⁴⁰ Cather, Willa: “Paul’s Case: a Study in Temperament” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 126

⁴¹ Cather, Willa: “Paul’s Case: a Study in Temperament” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 126-127

book at home there were pages of description about New York hotels, cut from the Sunday papers.”⁴²

If one draws a comparison of the function of the character of Charley Edwards and the function of the character of the German soloist, one might find that the actor happens to be a kind of Paul’s crutch as he helps Paul to reach his desires and dreams. Thus the singer represents the imaginary, idealistic world as she is a part of Paul’s dreamt refuge. Consequently, the importance of art and music does not reside in the aesthetic quality or creation of beauty but in the ability to arouse Paul’s imagination which comforts him in his discontent with his surroundings. The same comfort Paul finally finds in death as he decides to commit suicide.

2.5. “The Sculptor’s Funeral”

The character of Hervey Merrick performs in the short story “The Sculptor’s Funeral” by Willa Cather. Harvey Merrick is a world-famous sculptor who devotes his life to the struggle against materialistic intolerant people, whose priorities destroy all noble values and ideals that a man may possess; otherwise they mercilessly exclude such a person out of the community. Harvey Merrick is a man of high ideals that are uncommon for the corrupted society from which he originates. He refused to surrender to the community that would wring his ideals from him. He rather remained faithful to his pure value system, despite the consequences of his choice, i.e. a lonely life far away from his home neither understood nor accepted by his home community to which he still feels to be bonded.

⁴² Cather, Willa: “Paul’s Case: a Study in Temperament” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 130

Willa Cather based the character of Harvey Merrick on the personality of Charles Stanley Reinhart (1844-1896), who was an American painter and an illustrator in *Harper's Monthly* from the years 1870-1871. Willa Cather emphasized, in her article *Charles Stanley Reinhart* for the *Lincoln Courier*, the lonely life of an artist who was born into the society in which:

“...art was considered as something frivolous, entirely beneath a brilliant young man of good family; a trivial thing, like play-acting, possibly immortal, certainly not remunerative.”⁴³

The theme of rejection of an artist by the materialistic society plays a central role in the short story. The character of Harvey Merrick appears to be an outcast in his hometown Sand City as the inhabitants of the town excluded him for his noble ideals to which they are not able to understand or accept them. The Sand City community including Merrick's family comprises a major sore spot in Harvey's life. Mrs. Merrick arranged a severe childhood full of punishment and cruelty for her son. The only support would probably come from Harvey Merrick's father who is unfortunately too submissive in the relationship with his wife to resist her. The model of the family in which Harvey Merrick grew up is obviously malformed as well as the community which preferably celebrates corrupted idols rather than righteous ones; moreover, the ones that may bring them world-fame as Harvey Merrick did by his brilliant art.

“The very name of their town would have remained forever buried in the postal guide, had it not been now and again mentioned in the world in connection with Harvey Merrick's.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Cather, Willa: „Charles Stanley Reinhart“ In: *The World & the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902* (University of Nebraska Press, 1970) , 511

⁴⁴ Cather, Willa: “The Sculptor's Funeral” ” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 46

The people who should be adored or pride of are reprobated; exposed to slanders and mockery. Even after his death, brought back home, the community does not display Harvey Merrick any real respect or sympathy.

Due to his eccentric personality and life style, Harvey Merrick involuntarily receives public odium in Sand City. However, he desired to be accepted, first of all by his family; or at least the non-acceptance is a source of his life unhappiness. The bas-relief that Harvey Merrick once brought to his student Henry Steavens may probably be the reflection of his inner desires that the family was not able to realize:

“...suggestive bas-relief of a thin, faded old woman, sitting and sewing something pinned to her knee; while a full-lipped little urchin, his trousers sustained by a single gallows, stood beside her impatiently twitching her gown to call her attention to a butterfly he had caught. Steavens... had asked him if it were his mother. He remembered the dull flush that had burned up in the sculptor’s face.”⁴⁵

Naturally, Harvey Merrick’s life perspective did not remain totally unaffected. He developed the distrust toward people, possibly during the early period of his life; he became distrustful even toward his very own personality. Despite his general skepticism toward people, he tends to keep his pure ideals without any stereotypes or prejudices. He did not succumb to the rancorous society he comes from. It may be considered almost as a miracle that such a cruel treatment by his mother together with incomprehension during his childhood did not prevent Harvey Merrick’s endowment from manifestation and development. Moreover, art became the only activity in which the sculptor absolutely trusted as the expression of his ideals.

⁴⁵ Cather, Willa: “The Sculptor’s Funeral” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 42

The ideals that Harvey Merrick expresses by his artistic works as well as his lifestyle are in harmony with humanity. Marilyn Arnold posited the idea of interconnection of art and humanity in her critical essay *Refining the Gift: 1901-1905* as follows:

“Cather is concerned with a much broader value system than that of art for its own sake. She is talking about both art and humanity, refusing to separate the two, insisting that whatever works against art works also against humanity.”⁴⁶

From this perspective, Harvey Merrick functions as a representative of those human ideals for which he fights, against the inhumane community that rejects his persona as well as the art that he produces. In support of the argument, it would be appropriate to mention the characters of Philip Phelps, Elder and Stark who stand on the opposite side, i.e. the bottom of morality or humanity. Since Phelps financially destroys his own father; Elder tries to ruin one old widow; and Stark “wanted to wheedle old women up in Vermont into investing their annuities in real-estate mortgages that are not worth the paper they are written on”.⁴⁷ Their only motive is the lust for money and possessions.

The community tends to break not only artists, but all brilliant personalities; e.g. the character of Jim Laird who constitutes the antagonist for Harvey Merrick, in the sense of being defeated by the community. Jim Laird’s ideals, which are equal to Harvey Merrick’s, are destroyed; his competence and knowledge are abused by the community. Consequently he becomes morally and emotionally stolid and refuges in alcoholism.

Willa Cather would never allow such a hopeless end for the character of Harvey Merrick. However, his life cannot be designated in

⁴⁶ Arnold, Marilyn: „Refining the Gift: 1901-1905” In: *Willa Cather’s Short Fiction* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2002), 37-67

⁴⁷ Cather, Willa: “The Sculptor’s Funeral” In: *The Troll Garden* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 48

other terms than tragic, the chance for humanity still remains. Since, on the crossroad of life to which Harvey Merrick was exposed, he chose the way of faithfulness to the ideals of honesty and morality, even if it meant rejection and the bitter awareness of his roots. These experiences should be regarded as his personal sacrifice. His relationship toward the place he came from is ambiguous. Although, Harvey Merrick refused to conform to the community and its corrupted, materialistic beliefs; he feels to be bound to it. He demonstrates this feeling by one of his last wishes: to be buried in his homeland, there through he shows his mind-openness as well as overcoming the baseness of the community that had been wounding him his whole life.

Willa Cather presents the story of an artist who is romantic and whose human values do not fit in the consumer society in which he was born, and whose efforts to make his hometown proud of him meet only with incomprehension and dispraise.

2.6. "A Gold Slipper"

Kitty Ayrshire, the main protagonist of the short story "The Gold Slipper" by Willa Cather, is an operatic diva on the height of her artistic career, who gives a recital in the Carnegie Music Hall. Kitty Ayrshire is charged to justify the place of an artist in society. She is the person who refuses conformity and consumerism, and instead establishes an artistic contribution to society. Cather inserts the character of Kitty Ayrshire into the opposition to the character of an anti-artistic hypocritical businessman and consequently lets art win the duel in the very end of the short story.

Willa Cather based the character of Kitty Ayrshire on the real model of Mary Garden, who was a coloratura soprano born 1874 in Aberdeen, Scotland. Cather probably alludes to her origin by the choice of the

singer's surname Ayrshire. As James L. Woodress in *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* mentions:

"Named Kitty Ayrshire (probably for Burn's native heave and Mary Garden's national origin), this singer is riding the crest of her fame."⁴⁸

Kitty Ayrshire is engaged at the Comique, Paris; similarly to Mary Garden who was engaged in the Comique since April 1900.

Kitty Ayrshire's repertoire for the recital she gives in the Carnegie Music Hall consists of "the group of Beethoven and Mozart songs"⁴⁹ for a soprano and piano accompaniment. Thereafter, she continued with "romantic German songs"⁵⁰ and she finished the recital by singing "modern French songs"⁵¹. For the demand of her audience Kitty Ayrshire gives one encore. She performs an aria of Chérubin from the opera of the same name by Jules Massenet. In reality, Jules Massenet actually composed the role of Chérubin specifically for Mary Garden in 1905.

She "gave the people what she of course knew they wanted: the most popular aria from the French opera of which the title-role had become synonymous with her name – an opera written for her and to her and round about her, by the veteran French composer who adored her, ..."⁵²

The next day, Kitty Ayrshire sings in New York, presumably the role of Marguerite in *Faust* by Charles Francois Gounod. Mary Garden excelled in the role of Marguerite at Covent Garden in the seasons 1902-1903. By the means of inserting the character of Kitty Ayrshire into the *Faust* opera,

⁴⁸ Woodress, James: *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 188

⁴⁹ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 111

⁵⁰ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 112

⁵¹ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 112

⁵² Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 113

Cather indicates Faustian themes, i.e. the pursuit of human knowledge not for gaining power, but for discovery of the ultimate meaning of existence. In the short story, Cather renders Kitty Ayrshire, an opera diva, who strives for artistic beauty for which she had to sacrifice her own conformism, similarly to Thea Kronborg, the main protagonist of Cather's novel *The Song of the Lark*. The heroine establishes what should be achieved to make human existence meaningful; i.e. the creation of constant (transcendent) values in the form of poetry put to music.

Youth and physical appeal as the superficial aspects of the notion of beauty are predetermined to decline. Yet, both are Kitty Ayrshire's characteristics; she is young and physically attractive. This is the first side of the concept of beauty which is inconstant and for Kitty not as significant as for Marshall McKann, who functions as Kitty Ayrshire's antithesis in the short story. As a wealthy coal mine owner, distributor and successful businessman Marshall McKann's imperceptiveness and materialistic perspective do not allow him to find more than merely Kitty Ayrshire's external beauty and sex-appeal. Marshall McKann's fascination by Kitty's appearance and charming personality together with his inability to perceive the beauty of Kitty's art indicates his shallowness, which creates a clear contrast with Kitty's personality and purpose of existence.

The second side of the notion of beauty is the beauty of art that Kitty Ayrshire pursues; the beauty that only an artist is able to create. The constant aspect of the notion of beauty should be accepted and desired for. The aesthetic values comprise the crucial point of Kitty's interest, though it is inconsistent with the consumerism and hypocrisy of society as represented by Marshall McKann.

Kitty Ayrshire is aware of the hypocrisy and ignorance toward art by many members of her audience, which may be considered as the extract of society; thus the negative characteristics can be applied for society in

general. This fact does not bother Kitty Ayrshire for she does not expect public's insight toward art and beauty, which she as an artist is able to create. Though, there are many of the audience who understand the beauty of her musical aptitude, she does not care about their appreciation. What concerns Kitty Ayrshire is the other artists' opinion of her performance because they are competent to be objective and realize fully Kitty's artistic values.

In her debate with Marshall McCann in a train, Kitty Ayrshire does not deny that the audience is the source of her income. Moreover, she admits that the only way to gain money does not reside in the production of art itself but rather in becoming a celebrity who shocks people by her manners and provocative image. Kitty Ayrshire tries to trump her audience in a sense of her constant effort to cross the boundaries of their conception of acceptability. The consequent reaction of the spectators inspires her.

"Her conservative audience did not know exactly how to accept her toilette... Kitty's gown that evening was really quite outrageous... She liked the stimulus of disapprobation."⁵³

Cather uses the character of Marshall McKann, with all his prejudices against artists, as an object for the justification of the position of an artist in the society. Kitty Ayrshire and Marshall McKann confront their life attitudes in the conversation they have in Marshall McKann's stateroom in the New York express train. Each of them represents opposing lifestyles as well as perspective of society. Kitty Ayrshire, who initiates the confrontation, justifies the position of an artist in society. She already noticed Marshall McKann's negativist standpoint toward her and art generally in the concert hall during her recital. Thereafter, Cather gives the

⁵³ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 110

artist the opportunity to establish the purpose of art even human existence. Kitty Ayrshire assures herself of Marshall McKann's hypocrisy while she converses with him. Marshall McKann considers all singers and artists to be useless for the society. For that reason he categorizes all musicians to be "light people"⁵⁴ who emphasize appearance over substance, fashion trends over matters of substance. However, while Marshall McKann criticizes artists for their superficiality and pretense, he is himself pretentious enough to attend Kitty Ayrshire's concert despite the distaste he has felt for artists. Moreover, he would never admit that Kitty Ayrshire attracts him physically because it would be inappropriate for him as a serious businessman.

In addition, Marshall McKann's life attitude is significantly affected by his Presbyterian religion; the pleasure and enjoyment that art offers is irreconcilable with his Protestant belief. The purpose of an artist is giving the experience of delight, which results in the beauty that the art produces while Protestants emphasize the suffering of Jesus on the cross and abstain from worldly pleasures for the most part. Kitty Ayrshire, while of Scottish background, is not bound by any binding church; she appears to be an atheist, for while she is speaking about people who attend church meetings, she does not include herself among them:

"If there were a spiritual pressure test machine at the door, I suspect not many of you would get to your pews."⁵⁵

Besides that, the next crucial difference between Kitty Ayrshire and Marshall McKann is that he is just one among many, for he is easily satisfied by ordinariness; in spite of the fact that he is an outstanding and influential businessman. Kitty Ayrshire's uniqueness, extraordinariness as

⁵⁴ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 118

⁵⁵ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 118

well as self-support and subsequent freedom of behavior outrage him since he prefers conformity to social norms. Her impertinent personality and intelligence could be danger for Marshall McKann's social status and life philosophy of "the golden mean"⁵⁶. Unlike Kitty Ayrshire, he would never be willing to sacrifice more than money or possession for achievement of his life aim. Kitty Ayrshire inserts to the life effort her whole personality, hope and feelings for her audience as well as pupils: "I give to the really gifted ones, my wish, my desires, my light"⁵⁷; because she is sure for the importance of these aspects, and she knows that not all people are capable of investing such a high capital. Kitty Ayrshire is a progressive person who does not accept the life stereotype which people like Marshall McKann maintain. Kitty Ayrshire's open-minded nature desires new life impulses.

At the end the heroine wins the duel between materialistic and artistic world. While, the artistic world may sometimes be connected with artificiality and seeming hypocrisy, the same artificiality and hypocrisy are found in the materialistic world on the same, let alone at a higher level. Moreover, these negative aspects do not originate in true artists but in the people who surround them. Kitty Ayrshire functions as a representative of artists, who are able to live and enjoy their lives; who are strong enough to be true to their words. As a true artist she is able to create qualities that stand above the materialistic world, and that are consequently more constant than qualities of the materialistic world. Kitty Ayrshire's supremacy over Marshall McKann appears at the end of the short story when he remains stuck on the episode he experienced in the New York express train long time ago with Kitty Ayrshire. As an old man Kitty's

⁵⁶ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 120

⁵⁷ Cather, Willa: "The Golden Slipper" In: *A Reader in Commercial Fiction* (Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2003), 119

gold slipper is for him a reminiscence of his wasted life, unlike Kitty Ayrshire, who forgot the unimportant encounter with Marshall McKann.

3. Fictional Artists and Musicians in Selected Novels

3.1. *The Song of the Lark*

Thea Kronborg, the main character of Willa Cather's novel *The Song of the Lark*, is an artist who develops her talent to become an operatic singer. However, she had been planned to become a pianist before her voice talent was discovered. After that, Thea's whole life becomes full of endeavour to achieve her destiny of a singer and fulfilment of her personality. Society at that time did not expect women to be self-supporting or to have any career. Such an unconventional woman would be considered an outsider. To be out of mainstream meant to be constantly exposed to judgments of the community and to cross the boundaries set by the morality of society, even of someone's own family. Thus, Thea is predestined for the life of change and struggle due to her uncommon personality and talent. However, while Thea's community and its rules deeply influenced her and she experiences interpersonal struggle, she is still able to retain and realize her life aim of becoming a music artist.

Thea grows up together with her six siblings in Moonstone, Colorado. This place and her family are crucial factors of the formation of Thea's identity. As a famous and highly regarded singer, Thea does not forget her roots, the same roots that she had to overcome. However, memories of her childhood often help Thea to survive her personal struggles for her artistic aim. In contrast, there is Moonstone with its conventional inhabitants and a tendency to not overcome the set boundaries, and the deficiency of competent music teachers, who cannot offer Thea what she needs to develop her artistic abilities. As a result, she leaves Moonstone to study piano playing in Chicago. She is not aware of her voice talent so far.

The first stay back in Colorado does not fulfil Thea's expectations, though it brings a very important turning point of her life. She not only gets familiar with cultural life and art but also her voice endowment is discovered and consequently cultivated by her first professional teacher. When Thea returns to Moonstone, she experiences great disappointment because of a misunderstanding with her family and Moonstone people. As a result she becomes more compulsive; with this state of mind she travels to Chicago where she diligently studies vocal technique.

Thea meets Fred Ottenburg, a man of culture and wealth, who becomes her life companion. Fred Ottenburg plays a big part in Thea's artistic development. Thea's stay in Arizona, which is arranged by Fred Ottenburg, is a significant event of her personality formation. During this time, she reflects on herself, her life and the concept of art. She completely changes into an artist. This process of modification starts during her first stay in Chicago while she is watching the painting *The Song of the Lark* in the Art Institute. She becomes close to art which is abstract and far away from the material world, though expressed by it. The meaning of life is art for Thea. Therefore, she is capable of sacrificing everything to it, including her family. After her experience in the Panter Canyon, Thea feels ready to go to Germany to study as she assumes her voice will be ready. Thea has always been supported by her friend since childhood, Dr. Howard Archie. As a result, Thea uses the attachment of Dr. Archie for getting the necessary money from him. However, it was not necessary to plead with him since Fred Ottenburg offers Thea whatever she needs. Finally, Thea achieves her aim. She is presented as a successful singer of New York Metropolitan Opera House. She sings the part of Sieglinde in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*. Everyone praises her amazing performance which is significant for Thea's career.

Thea's vocational success is conditioned by several unpleasant occurrences of her essence. These experiences constitute the evolution of Thea's personality, and are the sources of her strong ambition to become an excellent singing artist.

The most important event resides in her family. Thea has always been loyal to her family, and she has always loved it. However, during the summer holidays spent in Moonstone, Thea realizes that her family does not understand her because they count among the other common Moonstone people. Not only that, Moonstone people are not talented and they scarcely understand art, let alone music, but also as a small-town people they dread scandals and non-conformists. Thea is highly in demand for singing in the church and funerals, especially in the funeral of Maggie Evans who was a reputable Moonstone woman. However, because Thea should have rest for her voice and her appropriate feelings of being exploited, she refuses. In spite of the refusal and its justification, she goes to a Mexican ball and sings there. Mexicans are close to Thea in the sense of being talented and interested in art as well as in music. The power of the town's gossip for this slander influences the conduct of Thea's family which betrays her. Thea thought that her siblings "were of her kind"⁵⁸ but her brothers Gus and Charlie as well as her sister Anna instead become her enemies. Her own family hurts her "for fear of tongue".⁵⁹ The disappointment shifts Thea's character considerably. "How much older she was now, and how much harder! She was going away to fight, and she was going away forever."⁶⁰ Thea's family and the Moonstone community completely lose their importance to the extent that Thea does not need the presence of her relatives or almost everyone to whom she has been accustomed. In the end, she is able to see Moonstone

⁵⁸ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 217

⁵⁹ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 114

⁶⁰ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 222

from a perspective of an outsider, though she does not change her attitude toward old friends, particularly toward Dr. Howard Archie or her German piano teacher Professor Wunsch.

Thea's nonconformity is obvious even during her childhood. However, as a child, she is accepted as a part of Moonstone society, though she has always been in a manner at the edge of it. Owing to her individuality and artistic talent, she is separated from her contemporaries. She does not miss their company because their function is presented by Dr. Howard Archie. She seems to be mature, and she has different values. Her sister Anna considers Thea's friendship with Dr. Archie indecorous as she does not empathise with Thea's personality, and as she has prejudices against uncommon matters and behaviour.

Thea is almost never mentioned in the connection with her contemporaries except her rivalry with Lilly Fisher which was caused by one of Thea's natural enemies, Mrs. Lively Johnson, a W.C.T.U. member who ruled Thea out of Christmas Eve concert. For this reason: Lilly Fisher "was willing to be just as big fool as people wanted her to be"⁶¹ unlike Thea who "would rather be hated than stupid, any day".⁶²

There are two people in Moonstone who support Thea's character. The first one is Professor Wunsch who, as an artist himself, understands Thea's talent. The second one is Dr. Howard Archie who understands Thea's special personality. Both play a big role in Thea's life. Professor Wunsch produces the initial push of Thea's artistic development, and he is a significant person of her childhood whereas Dr. Howard Archie accompanies Thea all her life, and he is always ready to help her.

Professor Wunsch is the source of Thea's next disappointment; however, she does not despise him at all. His destiny is similar to Thea's because he is a victim of the gossipy Moonstone community which looks

⁶¹ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 58

⁶² Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 58

at him with scorn because he is a drunkard. After an alcoholic episode, he has to leave Moonstone as well as Thea. If the Moonstone people had not had superficial prejudices, they would have accepted Wunsch for his excellent skills; he would not have left Thea and cause her sorrow. Thea is able to understand and accept Wunsch's individuality as well as his behaviour; she does not blame Wunsch for leaving her; she blames the comfortable community of Moonstone.

Willa Cather frequently used musicological intertextual references in her fiction. Professor Wunsch, before he abandoned Thea, had left her a Gluck's score where he had written the inscription:

*"Einst, O Wunder! Entblüht auf meinem Grabe,
Eine Blume der Asche meines Herzens."*⁶³

The inscription emerges once again while Thea is studying under Andor Harsanyi, Thea's piano teacher in Chicago. The inscription is a couplet from "Adelaïde", a romantic song by Ludwig van Beethoven. It symbolizes Thea's life story. "Eine Blume" is a projection of Thea who "entblüht" and becomes an operatic diva. She blooms after Professor Wunsch left Moonstone. She is the blossoming beauty and her blooming is rooted in Wunsch's heart, it is a seat of emotion, the ultimate romantic work of the genre Lieder.

It is worth noticing that the communication of Thea and Professor Wunsch occurs in the German language. Thea is of Swedish origin and speaks Swedish; Professor Wunsch is German. There is some language barrier, but it does not bother Thea, since Professor Wunsch is the only competent music teacher in town.

Thea is, for the first time in the opening of the novel, introduced at her age of eleven while being ill. She suffers from pneumonia, and she

⁶³ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 333

seems to enjoy her illness as she is not obliged to go to school and practise the piano during this time. She usually spends her days by practising the piano, drilling her playing technique; walking through the desert and Mexican city with her brother Thor and taking care of him; visiting Dr. Howard Archie and her Mexican friends (old women) as well as visiting Kohler's house where she takes piano lessons from Professor Wunsch.

There is too much responsibility with which Thea must deal during her childhood. Professor Wunsch considers Thea to be talented. Accordingly, he treats Thea with the vision of her becoming a pianist. Therefore, he is never satisfied with her performance. Professor Wunsch compels Thea to practise hard to achieve perfection, and he is anxious about every single event that might turn Thea's attention from practising the piano. Thea's attitude toward practising is mature, for she knows that she cannot become a pianist without drill. She knows that talent is necessary for her aim of becoming an artist, but without hard work and resoluteness talent means nothing. Thea has a strong sense of morality which remains even during her studies and professional career. She is never presented as an unrestrained artist but as a highly moral, concentrated, self-critical and rather withdrawn person.

For her natural curiosity, while studying under Professor Wunsch, Thea starts to be interested in opera singing. Wunsch teaches her one aria from Gluck's *Orpheus* "Ach ich habe sie verloren" by which Thea demonstrates her musicality, her sense of hearing and good memory as well as the unique quality of her natural voice that has never been cultivated before. Professor Wunsch relishes Thea's innate gift; on that account, he teaches her a few German songs but he is not able to teach her voice technique because he is not a vocal specialist but a former pianist with the love for opera. Moreover, Thea is planned to be a piano teacher, and her voice talent is uncertain yet. Wunsch utters his opinion: "for a

singer there must be something inside from the beginning”⁶⁴, not only the musicality because all singers and musicians must have musical intelligence but also something that would attract people, the special personality of a singer as well as his notion of music. Professor Wunsch describes this essential quality as “...der Geist, die Phantasie”⁶⁵; later on, during Thea’s engagement in Germany, Mahler as “the idea”⁶⁶. Thea certainly possesses this character quality; however, it displays after she realises the notion of art and she meets “her second self”.

Thea tends to suppress her second self inside herself and from other people. While living in Moonstone, she acquires a spare room from her parents. Thea considers the acquisition to be one of the most important things of her early life. Thereafter, she divides her life into two parts: “During the day, when the hours were full of tasks, she was one of the Kronborgs children, but at nights she was different person”.⁶⁷ The requirements of her family oppress Thea; but when she lives in privacy, she can let her artistic second self develop. She can let her ideas flow and subsequently arrange them to form her life aim but only secretly because her family is still important for her. Afterwards, during her first stay in Chicago, when she realises that her voice is gifted and worth making personal sacrifices, Thea admits that she protected it from herself by doing the duties which were required of her by her family. However, the process was mutual because she was not prepared yet to give everything into art and her career. The reason she studied piano was to fulfil her endeavour required by usual people (her parents, pupils and Moonstone people) because she was not yet determined enough to reveal her real personality and her uniqueness. She would become even more isolated from her

⁶⁴ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 71

⁶⁵ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 71

⁶⁶ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 347

⁶⁷ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 53

community than she already was. Thea did not want her voice, as a part of her personality, to be “caught up in the meshes of common things”.⁶⁸

She tends to hide her ability to sing even from Hungarian-born Andor Harsanyi who becomes her piano teacher in Chicago, and who is an artist as well as Thea; which means that he was similar to her, and would probably understand her better than anyone else. She justifies it by claiming that her singing is unimportant; it is only a manner of making money. Although Harsanyi is not a vocal specialist, he can recognise Thea’s talent, and he is willing to surrender Thea, one of his most skillful pupils, for her benefit and development. He is a significant person of Thea’s life because he is the first one who shows her real potential, and who explains to her that she cannot escape her predestination. He believes that the most powerful need of Thea’s trait resides in her self-realisation; thus, she cannot find herself in the career of a pianist. Harsanyi recommends Thea to the best vocalist teacher in Chicago, Madison Bowers.

While studying under Madison Bowers, Thea realises which kind of singer she does not want to be. Thea earns money by accompanying singers on the piano who study under Madison Bowers; on that occasion she encounters the dullness and plainness of some singers. She hates Miss Darcey because, despite the fact that she is neither talented nor special, Chicago people love her. Thea hates Miss Darcey’s unprofessionalism and natural talent since they are the features that an excellent singer should not possess. The Chicago audience lacks good musical taste and they are snobbish. “Chicago was not so very different from Moonstone, after all, and Jessie Darcey was only Lily Fisher under another name.”⁶⁹ Thea adopts character features from Madison Bowers, though unconsciously.

⁶⁸ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 96

⁶⁹ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 236

She forms her motivation of disdain to a more concrete shape because she is able to see people's hypocrisy from a more mature point of view.

To become a brilliant singer, Thea has one task to complete; she has to find her own notion of art. The holidays, which Thea spent in Arizona, are the most significant period of her artistic development in the sense of Thea's comprehension of art, and the reconciliation with her position in the world and the acceptance of her personality. Thea arrives in Arizona with the feeling that she made almost no progress with her voice. Nevertheless, the holidays should be the time of relaxation from her hectic training and life. She has an opportunity to reflect on music as there is nothing to distract her there. The place has an unusual influence on Thea. She draws artistic inspiration from the thought-provoking atmosphere of the Panter Canyon. She comes to the conclusion that products of art, for example the ancient pottery she found in the canyon or the pieces of art she saw in the Art Institute in Chicago, are expressions of life. However, life is elusive, constantly in motion. As an artist Thea has the chance to be able to take a hold of it and materialize it by her body and her talent. She realises that she cannot wait because "One's life was at the mercy of blind chance."⁷⁰ Provided that she is serious about her life, she must disengage herself from her past and take her future into her own hands. She arrives at the point of being prepared to live her own life because she is not obliged to her parents or the other comfortable Moonstone people at all, but to art. She does not hesitate about her vocation at all; this is the critical point for which she has been waiting all her former life. She has no reason to hide herself as she did it during her childhood and her first stay in Chicago.

Thea is determined to achieve her aim insofar that she does not visit her mother during her illness because she has an important singing

⁷⁰ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 276

engagement in Dresden. She performs the character of Elizabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. It is obvious that if Thea left Dresden she might never have the same opportunity again, and would consequently betray herself. From all members of Thea's family, she had the closest relationship with her mother who apparently understood her more than the rest of the family. Thea and her mother are similar in a lot of aspects.

"The difference was one of degree than of kind. The daughter had a compelling enthusiasm, the mother had none. But their framework, their foundation, was very similar."⁷¹

Thea's mother does not dare to ask Thea to come home to meet her. However, Thea considers the possibility of taking her mother to Germany as she misses the presence of her mother and vice versa. In spite of her feelings, Thea must sacrifice the last period of her mother's life to her vocation.

The death of her mother has a great influence on Thea's character; it taught her how to deal with life's loses. Thea was even absent from her father's funeral. She gave the preference to herself without compromise. The engagement in Dresden meant a valuable experience for Thea's career.

Family is not the only significant aspect of her early life that Thea has to sacrifice. She discovered that she also has to deny herself marriage. Thea tends to escape from all things that may bind her down. As an artist, she needs freedom more than anything else for she must put all her life energy into singing. The fact that Thea is not the marrying type was already observable during her childhood. Thea's parents were aware of it while planning Thea's future of a pianist teacher. Doctor Howard Archie knew it as well; however, his reaction toward this particular attribute of Thea's character was different. He tried to persuade Thea not to settle

⁷¹ Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 352

down in Moonstone for she should make use of all her possible opportunities.

Two men desire to marry Thea. The first one is Ray Kennedy who; however, does not understand Thea's personality, admires her and would do everything for her. He is determined to marry Thea when she is old enough; meanwhile he tries to make Thea's life interesting. Before he dies as a consequence of a train accident, he has a talk with Thea. He can see her as a famous opera singer due to his bad condition. If it did not happen, he would never see who Thea actually was and for what she was predestined, and he would consequently be a burden for her.

The second one is Fred Ottenburg with whom Thea experiences romantic love. They spend the holidays in the Panter Canyon together. Thea is convinced that Fred understands her. Since their meeting in Chicago, during one of Thea's lessons at Bowers, Fred Ottenburg is impressed by Thea. He can see a great artist in her and his contacts among artists might be useful for Thea's career. His behaviour toward her is special as he does not wish to bind her down. Fred Ottenburg, a man of wealth, is interested in artists. As a result, his aim of helping Thea with her career as well as displaying to her all of the opportunities she has, and how she should realize her creative potential. He believes that he can guide her to the height of her career. He knows that Thea needs freedom and he is sure that he can provide it to her. By their marriage he would protect her from other possible burdens she might encounter. Nevertheless, Thea realizes that she must go straight toward her objective. She does not know if Fred is not honest to her because he is already married. Thea must leave Fred because she feels too dependent on him; she refuses the money that Fred offers her for studying in Germany for it would bind her to him. She does not want to be kept by Fred, while at the same time she does not require keeping him. The only thing for which

Thea desires is the feeling of love, but not “owning” someone. For that reason she asks her old friend doctor Archie to lend her money, not Fred Ottenburg. However, Thea and Fred do not marry. She reveals to him that she always regarded him to be her husband, unrealistically, later on. An artist is not the suitable person for marriage. Thea does everything thoroughly; she cannot give all her effort and personality to art and to a proper marriage simultaneously. She does not condemn the feeling of love but regards marriage as a binding institution. Thea knows that what she experienced with Fred Ottenburg was real love, and she would never experience it again. She is reconciled with the fact that she has to give up everything in order to gain what is her destiny. From this point of view, Fred Ottenburg is a significant figure in Thea’s life.

All the endeavour and denials bring Thea artistic self-fulfilment. During her second season at the New York Metropolitan Opera House she accidentally encounters her life chance. As all other singers are out of the question, she is asked by the management to finish the performance of Sieglinde, Thea’s life part. She rehearsed the score for years, but she has never performed it publicly. She meets the challenge with great artistic and popular success. As a result she finally breaks into the top level of opera. Her personality appears in its completeness only under such exciting condition. She proves her musical brilliance by her ability of immediate and appropriate reaction as well as coordination with the orchestra. Her performance is so emphatic that she is chosen to sing in the other performances of the *Ring of the Nibelung*. Thea gives her soul to the part. Her talent, temperament, experiences, determination as well as suffering are reflected in the moment of performing the role of Sieglinde. She reaches her contentment at that instant. She satisfies not only herself but also the people who support her. This performance is Thea’s life triumph.

Thea's individual character and talent leads her to what a common person would never reach. Nevertheless, it causes her isolation at the same time. During her childhood she met with misunderstanding from her family, leading to rejection that becomes an impulse for the formation of her ambition. She proceeds from the state of hesitation, when she hides her voice endowment as well as her real personality from her family, to the state of self preference and firmness of her character. Thea devotes her whole life to art. She sacrifices her conformity with common society, love and family. She has to unify her personal life with the vocation of a brilliant singer to reach the best level of performance. Thea is unique among usual people who live according to the accepted standards. She has the ability and courage to live the real life of an artist, to have her own individual experience that is not vicarious. She "will always break through into the realities".⁷² Her way of life is intensive in comparison with shallowness of the majority. Thea has never believed that only her talent is satisfactory to her career. She works intensively for the development of her voice technique. However, there is one more feature that a singer must possess. It is uniqueness of interpretation of roles that an artist performs. It is provided by Thea's truthfulness, the ability to reflect all her life and personality on the role. It creates the specific conception of character while playing the part.

The fictional character of Thea Kronborg is partially based on the Wagnerian soprano Olive Fremstadt. Willa Cather knew Olive Fremstadt personally and admired her as an embodiment of liberation from the society that subdued women. Thea Kronborg is then presented as an idol worthy of admiration. Her performance of Sieglinde is not only her artistic triumph but the triumph over the society as well. Thea represents woman

⁷² Cather, Willa: *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 319

as a strong and capable heroine rather than an object of the norms of Victorian society.

3.2. *My Ántonia*

Blind d'Arnault, a Black pianist, comes to Black Hawk, Nebraska to give a concert in the local Opera House. His story, narrated by one of the main characters Jim Burden, creates a brief musical interlude to the novel *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather and is the only section of this famous novel under study. The depiction of his character is distinct from the other depictions of artists in the prose of Willa Cather. The first and at the same time the most important aspect of the character is his Afro-American origin, and the second one is his physical characteristics, i.e. his appearance with a certain degree of bizarreness. Both of these aspects as well as the fashion of behavior and mentality of the society where he lived or occurred are tinged with racial stereotypes of the black musician.

The narrator does not mention any details about d'Arnault's concert at the Opera House. He acquaints readers with d'Arnault's musical skills in the informal performance that Blind d'Arnault gives at the Black Hawk Hotel during his stay there with his manager. Thus, his performance is depicted rather an entertaining distraction from the monotonous Black Hawk life, not a musical event of a serious social significance. Blind d'Arnault performed dancing music and southern plantation songs, e.g. "My Old Kentucky Home". The description of his accomplishment does not exceed this undemanding level. From all information that the narrator provides, we cannot define whether Blind d'Arnault had the slightest ambition to overstep the limits set by his own audience. The pianist is presented as a figure that only fulfills expectations which are below the level of quality art. The reason is that Blind d'Arnault as a musician was underrated because of his African origin. Moreover, it is presumable that

he underrated himself due to the manner of his upbringing in the community of slaves. The narrator characterized Blind d'Arnault as a person with "...Negro voice... with the note of docile subservience in it."⁷³ In comparison with the accomplishment of Thea Kronborg, the main protagonist of the novel *The Song of the Lark*, who meets the highest level of achievement of an opera singer by performing the part of Sieglinde at Wagner's opera *The Valkyrie*, the character of Blind d'Arnault appears as a subdued figure.

Thea's music is presented as the expression of the artistic part of a talented individual, on expression of emotions, passion and intellect. In contrast, d'Arnault's music arises out of his Afro-American origin: "He looked like some glistening African god of pleasure, full of strong savage blood"⁷⁴ and instincts: "He approached this highly artificial instrument through a mere instinct, and coupled himself to it, as if he knew it was to piece him out and make a whole creature of him."⁷⁵ This fact is reflected on his untrained, rough playing technique, for he played "... barbarously and wonderfully."⁷⁶ His performance is described as loathsome but real with a significant sense of rhythm. The character of Thea Kronborg is presented as a real heroine, a person to be admired. The character of Blind d'Arnault is in contrast a bizarre figure, looking odd while playing the piano, moving in regular sways, back and forth with his head tilted back.

Blind d'Arnault bizarre way of moving while performing evokes image of the personality of contemporary music scene, Stevie Wonder. Both the character of Blind d'Arnault and Stevie Wonder resemble each other in a few aspects. Firstly, both are musicians of Afro-American origin. Stevie Wonder became famous as a singer, composer and instrumentalist;

⁷³ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 118

⁷⁴ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 123

⁷⁵ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 120

⁷⁶ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 121

among other instruments, he masters piano playing. Similarly Blind d'Arnault became a prodigy pianist. Secondly, both musicians lost their sight. Stevie Wonder became blind apparently because of his premature birth; and Blind d'Arnault suffered from an illness and lost his sight at the age of three weeks. Finally, their style of performing with characteristic manner of movement, repetitive swaying in the rhythm and total absorption in music connect the two figures together.

D'Arnault's lowered position in white society results from his Afro-American origin; indeed, it stems from the American slavery period and the mentality of white Americans; it is obvious from the standpoint of his audience that considers him to be only a Negro. "To hear him, to watch him, was to see a Negro enjoying himself as only a Negro can."⁷⁷ However, although Blind d'Arnault is a free Afro-American, he is still excluded from the white community and is never seen as a respected artist. Racial boundaries were not crossed even in the world of art in Willa Cather's time. Thus, Blind d'Arnault, despite being presented as a good musician, possesses inferior qualities. The racial stereotypes strongly pervaded in the West where Blind d'Auranult performed.

According to Blynche Tellefsen, the character of Blind d'Arnault functions in the novel as a reminder of "a history America would rather forget: the story of the forced immigration of Africans who were captured, transported to the United States, and enslaved by solid American citizens who built fortunes upon their laboring bodies." In addition, Tellefsen specifies d'Arnault's social status as follows: "Blind d'Arnault's story reflects the residual effect to the forced "immigration" of Africans-who-became-Americans: the legacy of racial prejudice which remained focused upon those black "immigrants" and continued to exclude such citizens

⁷⁷ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 121

from full participation in the purported national right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁷⁸

As a child, Blind d’Arnault grew up in the black community on the d’Arnault plantation in the South. During his childhood slavery still persisted in the South, as he was born before the Civil War. He was born as a son of one laundress on the plantation. His own mother used to hide him for she felt ashamed of him and wanted to protect him from his contemporaries and other black children who taunted him for being blind. He did not even fit in the community of his own race that excluded him for his handicaps and apparent simplicity. He became blind while he was a child and he suffered from spasms.

He was called “yellow Martha’s simple child”⁷⁹ in his community. This statement refers to Blind d’Arnault’s lineage, and shows us that his mother was only one fourth or one eighth black and was mostly white. The theme of mixture of races is inseparably linked with the issue of American slavery and Willa Cather reminds it with the character of a Mulatto (quadroon) musician. Willa Cather was born in the South after the Civil War to a family of slave owners so she was very familiar with the racist views of Southern whites and the background of slavery as well. Her final novel taking place in the South, *Saphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), though having neither music nor artistic themes, confronts the issue of black female sexual exploitation that was based on Cather’s family history.

Blind d’Arnault’s real first name was Samson, a name with Biblical context; both the child and the Biblical character lost their sight. He was raised to obedience and often threatened and punished by his mother in order not to run out to the house of the owners of the plantation. He awakened in her disgust and sympathy simultaneously. Blind d’Arnault

⁷⁸ Tellefsen, Blythe: „Blood in the Wheat: Willa Cather’s *My Antonia*” In *Studies in American Fiction*, September 1999 (27:2), 238

⁷⁹ Cather, Willa: *My Antonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 119

often broke his mother's orders and escaped to the Big House, in order to listen to Miss Nellie d'Arnault playing the piano.

On one hand, the plantation owners d'Arnaults show their racist perspective:

"...she saw this hideous little pickaninny, dressed in an old piece of sacking, standing in the open space between the hollyhocks rows, his body rocking automatically, his blind face lifted to the sun and wearing an expression of idiotic rapture."⁸⁰

On the other hand, their perspective is moderated by sympathy to a pitiful child: "Often she was tempted to tell Martha that the child must be kept at home, but somehow the memory of his foolish, happy face deterred her."⁸¹

His first encounter with the instrument is set in a forbidden atmosphere; he snuck into the Big House and explored the piano of his mistress. In her critical essay *Blood in the Wheat: Willa Cather's My Antonia* Blythe Tellefsen notices that Cather used sensual language to describe Blind d'Arnault's handling the piano.

"He began to feel it all over, ran his fingertips along the slippery sides, embraced the carved legs, tried to get conception of its shape and size... It was cold and hard, and like nothing else in his black universe. He went back to its mouth, began at one end of the keyboard and felt his way down into the mellow thunder, as far as he could go."⁸²

The passage describes Blind d'Arnault's instincts, i.e. the feature of his personality that is inborn; moreover, "instinct" is generally natural for the rest of people of African descent according to the prevalent racial stereotypes existing among Blind d'Arnault's white audience.

⁸⁰ Cather, Willa: *My Antonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 120

⁸¹ Cather, Willa: *My Antonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 120

⁸² Tellefsen, Blythe: „Blood in the Wheat: Willa Cather's *My Antonia*“ In *Studies in American Fiction*, September 1999 (27:2), 236

The narrator caricatures Blind d'Arnault in the terms of a creature that is more animal than human, his opinion concerns both Blind d'Arnault's appearance and his instincts that apparently predominate his intelligence.

When Blind d'Arnault started to play, his musical instincts naturally emerged. He was able to repeat the melodies that he had heard. When he discovered that Miss d'Arnault and her teacher were listening, he got a hard spasm probably out of fear of getting a big punishment; consequently, a doctor gave him opium in order to calm him down. The unforeseeable musicality of a child, who had always been seen as an incapable and dull creature distrusted by his own mother and the community, emerged in a shocking manner. Blind d'Arnault became a "Negro prodigy".⁸³

Artistic interpretation of a composition had no significance for Blind d'Arnault's performances. His playing is described as based on a plain repetition of what he had heard. His performances seem to be fascinating though, while considering them as a real art would be improper; he rather arouses fascination by his unusualness, grotesqueness and provocation. His most noticeable features of musicality, that were discovered by some music teachers who experimented with Blind d'Arnault while he was a child, were absolute pitch, a very good memory and the ability to reproduce musical pieces. He is not presented as an artist of high qualities, but in reality as a simplification of an artist.

There is no mention of "improvisation", a feature which many black musicians employ in their music (which corresponds roughly to the white European notion of "variations"). Willa Cather should have known this feature about black music but probably eliminated it from the narrator's, Jim Burden's, knowledge.

⁸³ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 121

To sum up, the character of Blind d'Arnault is often referred to in racial terms, i.e. "only a Negro", "Negro prodigy"⁸⁴, "hideous little pickaninny"⁸⁵. The episode of the novel that is focused on his character reveals a place of an Afro-American artist in the society where the history of Southern slavery is still ever present but in decline. On one hand, Blind d'Arnault is portrayed as a person who is handicapped by his blindness, physical dispositions and racial stereotypes that he cannot negotiate. On the other hand, he is capable of acquiring wealth and contentment under the unfavorable circumstances.

3.3. *Lucy Gayheart*

The character of Clement Sebastian is a baritone from Europe, a brilliant singer of classical music in the novel *Lucy Gayheart* by Willa Cather. His moving performance, remarkable personality together with precise singing technique rates Clement Sebastian among Cather's most excellent singing-protagonists, similarly to the character of Thea Kronborg (*The Song of the Lark*) or the character of Kitty Ayrshire ("A Gold Slipper"). The theme of self-sacrifice for art which concerns the majority of Cather's artistic protagonists, inseparably appertains to the character of Clement Sebastian. What should be considered as the distinctive feature of the character of the baritone is the theme of the irreversible process of aging, which is connected with feeling of loss resulting in the melancholic atmosphere that accompanies and characterizes Clement Sebastian.

Clement Sebastian's melancholic life perspective originates in the many disappointments he experienced throughout his artistic life. One of them resides in his marriage. The lack of understanding between the

⁸⁴ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 121

⁸⁵ Cather, Willa: *My Ántonia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 120

singer and his wife was caused by his wife's "jealousy"⁸⁶. As their marriage was childless, Clement Sebastian took a talented youth named Marius under his protection. Mrs. Sebastian expressed her hatred toward her husband's ward with which he could not come to terms. As a consequence Clement Sebastian moved to Chicago while his wife remained in Europe, so they lived separately. Despite the feeling of grievance, Clement Sebastian financially supports his alienated wife. Other disappointments constitute Clement Sebastian's agent Morris Weisbourn and his accompanist James Mockford. The people on whom Clement Sebastian presumably should have relied turn into disloyal cheaters as they "have been putting up some pretty little tricks on"⁸⁷ him.

Clement Sebastian's stay in Chicago, where he meets the protagonist of the novel, the young pianist Lucy Gayheart, is just a temporary station on his way to achieve higher goals of his artistic career. Despite his awareness of the possibility that he might soon abandon her, and his natural tendency "never to come too close to people"⁸⁸ Clement Sebastian allows the young pianist to fall in love with him. Finally, the affection is mutual. On one side, Lucy's callowness, moral purity as well as her devotion to Clement's personality fascinates the singer. Lucy may cause the deceleration of Clement Sebastian's fading youth for she possesses all the values he desires, i.e. youth, beauty and innocence. In his decision to make Lucy Gayheart his new accompanist, Clement Sebastian treats himself to re-experience what he now believes that he is losing. On the other side, the singer becomes Lucy's idol, a prototype of "a great artist"⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 46

⁸⁷Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 71

⁸⁸Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 31

⁸⁹Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935),17

“Sebastian’s personality had aroused her, even before he began to sing, the moment he came upon the stage. He was not young, was middle-aged, indeed, with a stern face and large, rather tired eyes. He was a very big man; tall heavy, broad-shouldered. He took up a great deal of space and filled it solidly. His torso, sheathed in black broadcloth and a white waistcoat, was unquestionably oval, but it seemed the right shape for him. She said to herself immediately: “Yes, a great artist should look like that.””⁹⁰

Clement Sebastian, despite his relatively advanced age of “nearing fifty”⁹¹, appears to be attractive for the young inexperienced pianist.

It is not only his experience and maturity that Lucy Gayheart appreciates but also the fact that Clement Sebastian is a part of the artistic world. Thus the singer forms the antipole to the materialistic world from which Lucy Gayheart comes. Art constitutes a refuge from the small-town lifestyle in Haverford, Nebraska for Lucy Gayheart, who in the presence of Clement Sebastian gains the opportunity to express her real personality. Moreover, Clement Sebastian requires from Lucy no pretention, for he encounters this low human quality frequently as a successful, wealthy man.

After the death of Larry MacGowan, Clement Sebastian goes through personal crisis as he hesitates whether his choice for an artistic career was the right one. He feels “emptiness”⁹² arising from his isolation for he had to sacrifice his relations for becoming a successful singer.

“...he was without a country, without home, without a family, and very nearly without friends. Surely a man couldn’t congratulate himself upon a career which had led to such results. He had missed the deepest of all companionships, a relation with the earth itself, with a countryside and

⁹⁰Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 105

⁹¹Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 45

⁹²Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 45

people. That relationship, he knew, cannot be gone after and found; it must be long and deliberate, unconscious. It must, indeed, be a way of living.”⁹³

However, they had not met with MacGowan for several years, and the death of the friend of his youth strikes Clement Sebastian deeply. Not for the reason that he would never meet a close friend again but because death evokes in Clement his own decline which is increasingly nearer and more realistic than ever before. As a consequence, the singer perceives the character of Lucy Gayheart as a symbol of youth, freshness and incorruption. He believes that with Lucy Gayheart he would be young and full of passion again. Finally, Clement Sebastian admits to himself that the feeling he cherishes toward Lucy is love. However, at first it was a mere nostalgia for “young ardour, young fire”.⁹⁴

Clement Sebastian’s value system is obvious when he chooses to sacrifice even the pure relationship with Lucy Gayheart that had been so important for him before he left Chicago for his “concert tour in the East”⁹⁵ and tasted the pleasure of the success he had after his performance in New York. As he accepts the engagements in England, regardless of Lucy’s feelings, Clement Sebastian manifests his total devotion to art that requires personal sacrifices and selfishness. Clement Sebastian prefers art to the relationship with Lucy Gayheart who apparently nursed more serious feelings toward the baritone as she refused a proposal for marriage by Harry Gordon, the banker from Haverford.

Comparable self-centeredness is the quality of the character of Adriance Hilgarde, the composer in Cather’s short story “A Death in Desert” who in the pursuit of compositional success leaves the character of

⁹³Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 45-46

⁹⁴Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 51

⁹⁵Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 54

Katharine Gaylord. While Katharine Gaylord, the forgotten operatic diva, waits for her death, still maintaining her admiration toward the composer, he in contrast selfishly celebrates his accomplishments.

Cather's usage of Clement Sebastian's repertoire is not random. The author applies concrete musical pieces either to intensify the atmosphere or to emphasize the plot in her prose. Cather used similar intertextual message for example in her novel *The Song of the Lark* where the protagonist Thea Kronborg is followed by the note that her piano teacher, Professor Wunsch left her. It is a couplet from "Adelaïde", a romantic song by Ludwig van Beethoven, by which Cather insinuated Thea Kronborg's artistic blooming. Professor Wunsch even appears in the audience during one of Thea's triumphs as an opera singer in New York. Another example of Cather's usage of musicological reference to accent qualities of her character is observable in the short story "A Gold Slipper". The protagonist Kitty Ayrshire sings in the opera *Faust* by Charles Francois Gounod. Thus Cather indicates the theme of pursuit of beauty, youth and desire to discover the meaning of existence that would emphasize the malignancy of consumer society.

Similarly, Cather uses the Byron's air "When We Two Parted" as a foreboding of the tragic destinies of Clement Sebastian and Lucy Gayheart. Firstly, the air appears as the encore which Sebastian gave at the end of his benefit recital in Chicago. Secondly, the air appears as Lucy's recollection of Clement Sebastian's performance while their meeting before the singer starts his concert tour in Europe. Despite his promise that they will meet each other again, Lucy anticipates the tragedy of Sebastian's drowning and probably her own death.

"Lucy knew what he was thinking. She felt a kind of hopeless despair in the embrace that tightened about her. As they passed a lamppost she looked up, and in the flash of light she saw his face. Oh, then it came back to her! The

night he sang *When We Two Parted* and she knew he had done something to her life. Presentiments like that one were not meaningless; they came out of the future. *Surely that hour foretold sorrow to this*. They were going to lose something. They were both clinging to it and to each other, but they must lose it.”⁹⁶

Clement Sebastian’s repertoire comprises of Franz Schubert’s songs from the cycles *Die Winterreise* (songs: “Die Krahe”, “Der Wegweiser”), *Die Schöne Müllerin* and of the songs: “Die Forelle”, “Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren”, “Der Dopplegänger” and four more unspecified Schubert’s songs that Clement Sebastian performs during the “benefit recital for the survivors of a mine disaster”.⁹⁷ *Die Winterreise*, cycle by Heinrich Heine, underscores rather the character of Lucy Gayheart, i.e. the theme of rejected love and journey. “Die Forelle” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe may evoke the feeling of joy that Lucy Gayheart experiences during rehearsals with Clement Sebastian. However, Clement Sebastian’s repertoire does not consist only of the German romantic Lieder. The singer demonstrates his virtuosity as he sings aria “Largo al factotum” from Gioachino Rossini’s opera *The Barber of Seville*. The aria is very complicated and demanding brilliant technique while the aria “Vision fugitive” from Jules Massenet’s opera *Hérodiade* enables Clement Sebastian to express the lyrical side of his artistry.

Cather presents the character of a high quality artist who, despite his rather somber life attitude and awareness of irrevocable aging, keeps his hope to find an upstanding person to whom he would, perhaps for the last time in his life, reveal his internal self. Having found such a person, he sacrifices the relationship for art and, with the vision that the denial of his

⁹⁶Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 74

⁹⁷Cather, Willa: *Lucy Gayheart*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedbooks.com> (Original work published 1935), 17

own pleasure would be a temporary concession to higher artistic goals,
tragically dies.

4. Conclusion

The most significant impulse for Willa Cather as a novelist arose from Cather's friendship with Sarah Orne Jewett. This experienced author advised Cather to focus on her own experience and knowledge. Jewett knew very well that such individual mind possession, which Cather has owing to her childhood spent in the frontier region, would be an immensely valuable source of material for her novels. Jewett suggested Cather to leave literary models, to be unique for only this sort of conduct would be effective. Jewett's advice changed Cather's perspective and helped her to achieve tremendous success.

Thus Cather discovered the power of her own singularity that she was able to put into her novels. As a result, Cather's most crucial themes cover her experience from the prairie region and her own hometown called Red Cloud, Nebraska, the mentality of people living on the frontier as well as the theme of immigrants. Other notable themes of her novels spring in Cather's passion for art as she has many artistic characters, and many references to artistic pieces of work. These references are incorporated with an intertextual intention in her fiction. Finally, Cather depicts the impressive life stories of artistic personalities.

Cather admired artists who had to struggle for their achievements. She would never choose as a subject of her interest an artist who comes from a metropolis, and as a result whose life conditions are easier or comfortable, whose opportunities to achieve artistic career are considerable, or whose artistic aim do not require personal sacrifices. The majority of Cather's fictional artists come from backwoods far away from all cultural life, suitable educational institutions and place of artistic vacancy. Moonstone (*The Song of the Lark*), Black Hawk (*My Ántonia*), Haverford (*Lucy Gayheart*), Cheyenne ("A Death in Desert"), the homestead in Red Willow County ("A Wagner Matinee") as well as Sand

City ("The Sculptor's Funeral") are all representatives of Cather's hometown Red Cloud, Nebraska.

The rough conditions on the frontier make the fulfillment of the artistic goals impossible. Such setting implies the philistine mentality of its inhabitants who are unable to perceive, let alone comprehend, art. Moreover, the location and the demands to social conformity of the community, which surrounds the artist, impede the accomplishment of artistic goals of Cather's fictional protagonists. The isolation arising from the complicated place of an artist in society comprises an inseparable theme of Cather's fiction.

As art demands absolute devotion, the inevitability to make personal sacrifices in order to achieve the transcendent values that art pursues is the destiny of the artistic characters of Cather's fiction: Thea Kronborg (*The Song of the Lark*) sacrificed the relationship with her family and the possibility of marriage; Clement Sebastian (*Lucy Gayheart*) sacrificed the feeling he cherished in his heart toward the young pianist Lucy Gayheart; Adriance Hilgarde ("A Death in Desert") sacrificed the relationship with his family as well as all presumably binding relationships; Hugh Treffinger ("The Marriage of Phaedra") sacrificed his married life and the peace it should have provided; Harvey Merrick ("The Sculptor's Funeral") sacrificed the relationship with his family; Kitty Ayrshire ("A Gold Slipper") sacrificed her whole life energy, feelings and personality on the altar of art. In more general terms, all the fictional successful artists immolate their conformism to remain faithful to their high artistic ideals.

I was concerned with all the above mentioned themes of Cather's fiction in the diploma thesis. By the study of Cather's three novels: *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918), *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) and six short stories: "A Death in Desert" (1903), "A Wagner Matinee" (1904), "The Marriage of Phaedra" (1905), "Paul's Case" (1905), "The Sculptor's

Funeral" (1905), "A Gold Slipper" (1917) I portrayed Cather's artistic protagonists. To comply with the aim of the thesis, it was necessary to peruse as many critical essays dealing more or less with the suggested themes as I could access. For the most part, Woodress' biography *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* and O'Brien's biography *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* comprised valuable sources of information requisite to become acquainted with the context of Cather's authorship.

5. Resumé

Nejvýznamnější impuls pro tvorbu Willy Catherové vzešel z jejího přátelství se Sarah Orne Jewettovou. Tato zkušená spisovatelka poradila Catherové, aby zahrнула do své literární tvorby vlastní zkušenosti a znalosti. Jewettová si byla velmi dobře vědoma toho, že tak jedinečné duševní vlastnictví, které Catherová měla díky svému dětství strávenému v nově osidlované pohraniční oblasti, by bylo nesmírně hodnotným zdrojem námětů pro její romány. Jewettová navrhla Catherové oprostít se od literárních modelů, zachovat si svou specifičnost, protože jedině takový způsob počínání by mohl být efektivní. Díky této radě Catherová změnila své stanovisko, což jí pomohlo dosáhnout ohromného úspěchu.

Tímto způsobem Catherová odhalila svoji jedinečnost, kterou byla schopna vtisknout do románů. Proto mezi stěžejní motivy tvorby Catherové patří zkušenosti z prérijní oblasti a jejího rodiště Red Cloudu v Nebrasce, také mentalita lidí žijících v hraničních oblastech a motiv imigrantů. Další neopomenutelná témata jejích románů pramení z vášně, kterou chovala pro umění, proto mnohokrát psala o umělcích a jejich imponantních životních příbězích a její tvorba obsahuje mnoho odkazů na umělecká díla, které implicitně podtrhují jak zápletky, tak povahy postav.

Willa Catherová obdivovala umělce, kteří museli bojovat za svůj úspěch. Nikdy by si ne zvolila za objekt svého zájmu uměleckou osobnost původem z nějaké metropole s pohodlnými životními podmínkami a značnými vyhlídkami na uměleckou kariéru, bez nutnosti přinášet osobní oběti pro dosažení uměleckých cílů. Většina postav umělců ve tvorbě Catherové pochází z provinčních komunit, odříznutých od jakéhokoliv kulturního dění, vyhovujících vzdělávacích institucí a míst k uměleckému uplatnění. *Moonstone (The Song of the Lark)*, *Black Hawk (My Ántonia)*, *Haverford (Lucy Gayheart)*, *Cheyenne („A Death in Desert“)* a *Sand City*

(„The Sculptor's Funeral“) v jednotlivých prózách figurují jako zástupné obrazy autorčina rodiště Red Cloudu v Nebrasce.

Drsné podmínky v nově osidlovaných oblastech znemožňují naplnění uměleckých cílů. Situování románu do takového prostředí samo o sobě naznačuje omezenost místních obyvatel, kteří nejsou schopni umění vnímat, natož mu porozumět. Navíc konformita provinční společnosti obklopující umělce brání v naplnění jeho uměleckého potenciálu. Téma izolace pramenící z komplikovaného postavení umělce ve společnosti tvoří neoddělitelnou část tvorby Willy Catherové.

Jestliže umění vyžaduje absolutní oddanost, pak přinášení osobních obětí pro dosažení transcendentních uměleckých hodnot je nevyhnutelné, a proto se stává osudem uměleckých postav románů a povídek Willy Catherové: Thea Kronborgová (*The Song of the Lark*) se vzdá své rodiny a jakékoliv možnosti vdát se; Clement Sebastian (*Lucy Gayheart*) obětuje cit, který chová ve svém srdci k mladé pianistce Lucy Gayheartové; Adriance Hilgarde („A Death in Desert“) se vzdá své rodiny stejně jako všech vztahů, které by ho mohly svazovat; Hugh Treffinger („The Marriage of Phaedra“) obětuje své manželství a zázemí, které by měl tento svazek vytvářet; Harvey Merrick („The Sculptor's Funeral“) zpřetrhá vztahy se svou rodinou; Kitty Ayrshire („A Gold Slipper“) položí veškerou životní energii, city a osobnost na oltář umění. Obecně lze tvrdit, že všechny úspěšné umělecké postavy se zříkají svého konformismu, aby mohly zůstat věrné svým uměleckým ideálům.

V diplomové práci jsem se zabývala všemi výše zmíněnými tématy. Abych mohla analyzovat umělecké postavy v díle Willy Catherové, měla jsem za úkol nastudovat tři romány: *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918), *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) a šest povídek: „A Death in Desert“ (1903), „A Wagner Matinee“ (1904), „The Marriage of Phaedra“ (1905), „Paul's Case“ (1905), „The Sculptor's Funeral“ (1905), „A Gold Slipper“ (1917). Abych

splnila cíl diplomové práce, bylo nezbytné prostudovat také mnoho kritických esejí zabývajících se více či méně navrhovanými tématy. Z velké části byly nejpřínosnějším zdrojem informací nezbytných k obeznámení se s kontextem literární tvorby Willy Catherové Woodressova biografie *Willa Cather: her Life and Art* a biografie od O'Brienové *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*.

6. Bibliography

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