Generational Influences and Patterns in the Making of Americans in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*

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To my mother Susan Fifield Nauss who taught me the joy of reading

To my husband Jan de Wit and my children, Franklin, Arthur, and Melinda, whose understanding and patience helped me with this challenge and to my family for their support.

“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there”.

The Go-between 1953

L.P.Hartley

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Introduction

Immigration from Northern Europe to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries provided families and individuals with the opportunity for a better life. For the various generations of immigrants, the different social and emotional baggage that each carried with them affected the process and extent of their Americanization. Moreover, immigrants often assumed that they would be able to live their lives as they had at home, but this was not the case. Also, aspects such as language, ethnic prejudice, and social exclusion made it necessary for immigrants to change the accepted ways of the Old World and incorporate New World ways into their lives. Willa Cather's prairie novels, *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918) provide fictional interpretations of the confusions and complications of immigration and show that settling in a new land was a challenging process.

Similar to studies by early immigrant historians such as Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932), Randolph Bourne (1896-1918), Marcus Lee Hansen (1882-1938), and Oscar Handlin (1915-2011), Cather's two novels suggest that each generation dealt with immigration differently. Foremost for immigrants was that without the extended family and village of the Old World, husbands, wives, and children had to form a stronger unit working together to keep the family intact. At the same time, each family member needed to adapt to fit into new social and cultural situations and did so differently depending on their age and memories of the Old World. In addition to the various generations within the family unit, factors including gender, education, and language offer insight into the patterns needed to adapt to the New World. Although Cather's prairie novels show representations of various immigrant backgrounds, her main focus is on northern Europeans moving to Nebraska farm communities in the late nineteenth century.

In "Cather Criticism and the American Canon" (1997), Phillis Frus and Stanley Corkin consider the importance of recognizing the historical value of Cather's work. In referring to Joseph Urgo's *Willa Cather and the Myth of Migration,* they point out that in his view Cather "rather than responding to historical events …anticipates and serves as a device for ordering them" (215). They suggest that Cather's way of ordering historical events in her novels shows different generational patterns. Through exploring how her immigrant characters reflect patterns of adaptation within the family unit, it is possible to see one way in which she orders historical events.

O Pioneers!, and *My Ántonia* reflect the distinctive ways in which the different generations of Northern European immigrants struggled to adapt to the Nebraska prairie. Though patterns vary depending on the situation, some distinctions are characteristic for each generation and play a role in immigrant characters' Americanization in each novel. Furthermore, it is possible to consider that her characters represent not only individuals but also are representative of groups of historical migrants in similar situations.

In their 1997 article, Frus and Corkin claim that "Cather's works have consistently been read in a way that contributes to the reproduction of the cultural myths that have come to stand for historical truth--a strain of myth resistant to alternative criticism because of its quintessential 'Americanness'"(208). This claim suggests that instead of contributing to the "myths" of Americanness Willa Cather's manner of storytelling exhibits historical and cultural realism. Frus and Corkin argue that, in Cather's works, her characters are representative of individuals or groups of immigrants. Therefore, they suggest that it is possible for them and other critics to read in Cather's work a representation reflective of history. Later in their 1999 article "Willa Cather's 'Pioneer' Novels and [Not New, Not Old] Historical Readings*,"* Frus and Corkin

consider further the distinctions between myth and history concerning Cather's works. They argue, "myth hides its origins," while "reflective history calls attention to the story of the past" (39). These definitions suggest two things. First, they suggest that Cather's works are not mythical as the cultural origins of her characters are essential to how they develop in the process of Americanization. Secondly, they indicate that Cather's work gives a historical representation of the immigrant pioneers' lives on the Nebraska prairie that can help us understand the process specific to time and location.

Though they are "obviously not asking Cather to be a historian," Frus and Corkin argue that her novels provide a realistic representation of historical events and developments. By reading novels from a historical perspective, "as though they were historical novels," they suggest in their 1999 article that Cather's novels are historically relevant (37). In their 1997 article, Frus and Corkin argue that ignoring the historical relevance of Willa Cather's work would be "a lost chance to engage a body of significant historical issues of Cather's period all implicit in her fiction including Western settlement [and] immigration" (209). In her article "Becoming Noncanonical: The Case Against Willa Cather" (1988), Sharon O'Brien provides further support for Cather's "preoccupation with the historical past" (110). In *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, Cather engages with similar themes as the early immigrant historians, focusing on the difference that generation and place within the family unit, gender, education, and language make in the process of Americanization that her characters undergo; thus her novels contribute to the historians' insights into the experiences of the characters' historical counterparts.

My analysis of the two novels that serve as a case study will focus on the differences in representation among the various generations of immigrant characters and will identify patterns comparable to those detected in the abovementioned historical studies and essays on Northern

European immigration at the end of the nineteenth century. My discussion in chapter one will form the historical framework for my interpretation of the factors in Cather's two prairie novels that influence each generation differently in the process of Americanization. The starting point for my discussion on the patterns in the two novels will be Frederick Jackson Turner's essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Randolph Bourne's essay "Transnational America" (1916), Marcus Lee Hansen's book *The Immigrant in American History* (1942) and article "The Third-generation in America*"* (1952), and Oscar Handlin's book *The Uprooted* (1951).

Additional historical studies and essays will add further interpretations of the influence that generation, gender, education, and language played in the process of becoming American. Scholarly studies on migration such as Werner Sollors book *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986) and Glenda Riley's book *The Female Frontier* (1988), will provide additional historical, generational, and gender perspectives on migration to the Midwest. Also, scholarly studies on Willa Cather's work, such as several articles in John J. Murphy's *Critical Essays on Willa Cather* (1984), and Joseph R. Urgo's book *Willa Cather and the Myth of the American Migration* (1995), will contribute further insight into generational patterns specific to her novels.

Chapters two and three will focus on the patterns of Americanization in the two prairie novels which will be discussed in their order of publication date. I will investigate to what extent Cather's representation of the different patterns of adaptation of each generation of immigrant corresponds to those identified by Turner, Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin.

Chapter 1: A Historiography of Early Immigration Studies: Turner, Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin as a context for two of Cather's prairie novels

In this historiographical chapter, I will give an overview of the concepts on patterns of Americanization in the works of the four historians referred to in the introduction. In his highly influential essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Frederick Jackson Turner describes the settlement of immigrants in the West and the consequent transformation of the frontier into farmland. Randolph Bourne's essay "Transnational America" (1916) provides a critical perspective on the process of Americanization, the failure of the "melting pot" and his idea of America as a federation of cultures. Other classic historical studies of the early twentieth century, that study the immigrant experience in the United States, are Marcus Lee Hansen's posthumously published collection of essays, *The Immigrant in American History* (1942) and his essay, "The Third-generation in America*"(*1938), followed later by Oscar Handlin's' book *The Uprooted* (1951).

Frederick Jackson Turner

In his late nineteenth-century essay, Frederick Jackson Turner explains his view on the development and importance of the Midwest. Although Turner does not consider patterns specific to immigrants, he does establish a starting point for the idea that there were different phases to the immigrant and migrant movements. He describes the different phases of movement of pioneers in terms of "waves" in the development of the American West (26).

The first wave that he considers is the migrant class. They were the pioneers who moved west and were the first to settle and develop the land. Turner also describes the type of farmer who "gathers around him a few other families of similar tastes and habits" to form farming communities as a way of creating settlements that later develop into towns (26). The second

wave, Turner distinguishes is “the next class of emigrants [who] purchase the lands, add field to field” and create a “plain frugal, civilized life” (27). The second wave implies the start of the process of creating roots as immigrants developed the land, built farms, and created small communities. During the third wave, Turner observes that “[t]he small village rises to a spacious town or city” in which “men of capital and enterprise come” and join migrants and immigrants in developing the West (27). This final wave of immigrant movement represents integration and the completion of the process of Americanization. Turner further claims that “[a] portion of the first two classes remain stationary amidst the general movement, improve their condition, and rise in the scale of society” (27). While Turner does not consider specific cultural groups of immigrants, generations of the family unit, gender, education, or language in any detail, his concept of development for each wave suggests similarities to the immigrant’s stages of integration as described by the works of Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin.

Randolph Bourne

Randolph Bourne’s essay “Trans-National America” reflects critically on the immigrants’ assimilation into American society and the popular idea of America as a “melting pot” of cultures. Like Turner, Bourne focuses on the American perception of the immigrant while the later works by Hansen and Handlin address settlement from the immigrants’ perspective. Bourne’s article generally focuses on the factors of generations, education, and language, while he does not explicitly address the family unit or gender.

Bourne, a student of Turner, emphasizes the importance of the role and the influence that immigrants had on the formation of American culture and society. He points out that in contrast to the assumption that “Americanization [will] take place only on our terms,” in reality “America shall be what the immigrant will have a hand in making it” (2). He admits that

although the "melting pot" was a failure and "our great alien population" has not assimilated, to some extent Americanization is evident (1). Although he points out that "we are all foreign-born or the descendants of foreign-born," his use of terms like "them," "us," "these people," and "aliens" suggests a clear distinction between Americans and immigrants (2). This distinction shows the dividedness between Anglo-American society and immigrant society. He argues that the reason for the failure in assimilation was that the newcomers finding "no definite native culture …looked back to their mother-country" using what they knew for cultural support (5).

What they did find, Bourne indicates, was a process of Americanization that entailed the imposition of the "Anglo-Saxon" culture on immigrants as the norm. Bourne argues that the use of the singular Anglo-Saxon culture as the foundation for Americanization contradicts the idea of America as a 'melting pot'. Through this concept of single cultural integration, there was no room for the influence of the cultural backgrounds of immigrants or other ethnic groups, and therefore America was not a 'melting pot'. Bourne claims that the lack of recognition of immigrant cultures has resulted in "dual citizenship [that] we may have to recognize as the rudimentary form of [an] international citizenship" (13). In their more recent book *Ethnic Historians and the Mainstream* (2013), Alan Kraut and David Gerber also recognize the continued importance of immigrant cultures and "positive value of retaining one's ethnic identity and customs" (196).

While Bourne remains general in his discussion of cultural adaptation, he does indicate that the process of integration is "not a process of decades of evolution" but seems to assume that the children of immigrants (the second-generation) will already be socially equal to the American-born (3). At the same time, Bourne voices his concern that masses of immigrants have become "cultural half-breeds, neither assimilated Anglo-Saxon nor nationals of another

culture" (6). These cultural half-breeds have not been completely Americanized; "letting slip from them whatever native culture they had, they have substituted for it only rudimentary American" (7). Bourne points out that, by being neither one or the other, the second-generation of immigrants has lost valuable qualities of their culture, while not completing the process of Americanization. In other words, he claims that the process of "Americanizing, that is Anglo-Saxonizing the immigrant has failed" and that therefore the "melting pot" is, in fact, a failure (5).

Bourne also acknowledges the importance of education as necessary for the second-generation of immigrants. He claims that education helps immigrant children to "start level with all of us". His concern is that even though it is assumed that immigrant and American children have the same starting point, the immigrant children had to deal with the two distinctly different cultural ideals of home and school. According to Bourne, education is an influential factor in creating the half-breed, as the "public school has done its work" in helping the immigrant lose their cultural ways and replacing them with a limited American way of life (7).

The aspect of learning the English language is another factor evident in the process of Americanization that Bourne addresses. He points out that learning English offered the newcomer, along with citizenship, a means of integration into the ways of the established community. Immigrants' understanding of the importance of linguistic assimilation showed that "[t]he common language made not only for the necessities of communication but for all the amenities of life" (5). Bourne recognized that the opportunity to learn and understand English differed between immigrant men and women in the rural Midwest. The first-generation women, who lived on isolated farms, had limited access or need for English while the men learned American farming and agricultural terminology important to their work. Immigrant children of

different ages and generations had differing opportunities depending on their home situation and schooling. Some children continued speaking with a culturally distinct accent that separated them from their American peers.

While education and learning English were important, Bourne felt that it was vital that the distinct qualities that form each immigrant's culture remain intact. According to him, immigrants will thus enhance and enrich American culture and prove that the United States is ultimately "a federation of cultures" (8). He also understood the value of cultural diversity in the development of American society and believed that the future of America "will be what we make of it together" (9).

Marcus Lee Hansen

In his 1942 book, *The Immigrant in American History,* Marcus Lee Hansen expanded on factors comparable to those that Bourne discusses in the process of Americanization. He points out the changes that occur to the land and the people as the first-generation immigrants die out and the second-generation takes over and is followed by the third-generation. Published ten years later, Hansen's 1952 essay "The Third-generation in America: A Classic Essay in Immigrant History" adds further insight into the complexities of immigration and the role of each generation as the preserver of cultural identity. Hansen's essay was initially presented to the Augustana Historical Society in 1938. Oscar Handlin, in his 1952 introduction to this essay, points out Hansen's ability "to see immigration in its larger perspectives as one of the dynamic trends that shaped American culture" and his "insights into the process of cultural transplantation" (492).

Influenced by his cultural background as a second-generation immigrant with Scandinavian parents, Hansen focuses on Swedish immigrants who in general moved to farming

communities in the Midwest at the beginning of the twentieth century. In both works, he discusses factors in the process of Americanization, concerning generations in the family unit, education, and language. Hansen does not directly address gender; his focus is on aspects of adaptation related to generations of male immigrants. In his essay, Hansen highlights the responsibilities of the third-generation of immigrants in cultural preservation. Furthermore, like Bourne, in his essay, Hansen is concerned with the need to "interpret the mentality of the millions of persons who had not entirely ceased to be Europeans and had not yet become accepted Americans" (500). Through interpreting the mentality of the immigrant, he hopes to "give American history its new and significant social interpretation," which is suggestive of Bourne's federation of cultures (499).

In his essay, he argues that the problem of the immigrant is that in the first two generations, the distinct cultural traits disappear through the process of Americanization. According to Hansen, as immigrants "accommodated themselves" and "reconciled themselves to the surrounding world of society" by becoming Americanized, "the problem of the immigrant was not solved; it disappeared" (493-494). Hansen points out the importance of cultural traits and the necessity for the third-generation immigrants to recognize their value and provide a solution to preserve their culture.

The first-generation immigrants expected that the conventions and values of the patriarchal society of the Old World would continue in the New World. In his book, Hansen claims that the immigrant father "insisted that family life, at least, should retain the pattern that he had known as a boy [and that] language, religion, customs, and parental authority were not to be modified simply because the home had been moved" (494). According to Hansen, although the family unit was the only institution immigrants brought with them, they "carried the seeds of

institutions: likes and dislikes, personal and community customs and habits and a language or dialect" (11). He thus suggests that this cultural baggage creates a potential for the immigrant to influence his surroundings. Hansen suggests that the problem for the first-generation was the need to adapt and overcome the confusions and complications of immigration and the transition into a new society. At the same time, his use of words like 'accommodate' and 'reconcile' suggests a need for the immigrant to change and become more like the Americans.

Because of the father's insistence that the family continue with the Old World ways, the second-generation struggled with finding a place in the New World. The second-generation's problem was the duality of their lives: "[h]ow to inhabit two worlds at the same time". According to Hansen, both their parents and Americans considered the second-generation foreign. This dualism put a strain on the family unit. "Son[s] and daughter[s] refused to conform" to Old World ways and the more they protested, the more they felt alienated at home, while in American society, they were considered foreign. Hansen claims they solved the problem "by escape," by "forget [ting] everything," and by moving "away from all physical reminders" of their foreign background that their parents tried to hold on to (494). Hansen voices his concern that when the second-generation turns their backs on the first-generation's Old-World values, they lose their cultural differences as they assimilate in their new society. He calls them traitors who, by discarding their cultural heritage, "deliberately threw away what had been preserved by the first-generation in the home" (495).

While the second-generation felt alienated, according to Hansen, the third-generation had "no reason to feel any inferiority when they look about them" because "they are American–born" (495). The ability of this third-generation of immigrant children to establish a connection with their cultural roots, suggests that the process of Americanization is completed and this

generation has become rooted in society. Hansen feels that because of the third-generation's stability and rootedness in their society they can be inquisitive about their family's past, "the history, and culture of the nations from which their ancestors came" (496).

Much like Bourne's ideas for a federation of cultures, Hansen is aware of the importance of preserving the immigrants' heritage. The problem for the third-generation, the grandchildren of immigrants, according to Hansen, is that they have to repair the damage done by the cultural distancing of the second-generation. He hopes that the third-generation will take responsibility and "do a good job salvaging" as they "can probably accomplish more than either the first or second could ever have achieved" (495). Hansen is asking the third-generation to reclaim and preserve the cultural heritage of their immigrant ancestors for future generations.

Hansen explains, in his essay, that education and the educational system caused problems for immigrant children. He argues that American teachers considered them "dullards". He claims that "in the schoolroom, they were too foreign [while] at home they were too American" (494). This duplicity resulted in additional challenges and alienation between children and parents. However, by the third-generation, the cultural distinctiveness of the immigrant children was no longer evident. These American-born children, spoke the English language, understood the culture and the education system and were no longer different from the other American children. Therefore, Hansen believes that the third-generation should feel free to educate themselves on the cultural heritage of their ancestors and be eager to preserve their language and history for future generations.

Hansen contends in his book that language was "the most obvious sign of permanence of a non-English-speaking immigrant society" and a crucial factor in the process of Americanization (145). It was a constant challenge for the first-generation of immigrants to both

learn a new language and keep their home country language alive in the family. Hansen points out that there were differences in language development among family members due to various degrees of contact with the English-speaking community. An example that Hansen gives is that in rural areas, like Nebraska, women who were often isolated on the farm remained the force that kept the home language alive. Like Bourne, Hansen argues that these women's opportunities to learn English were sometimes limited. In contrast, the husband "readily picked up a vocabulary of English phrases" due to his need to understand local farming and through interaction in the community (134). For both men and women, there was a necessity for change because "the mother tongue was inadequate to deal with relationships and tasks unknown in the country of origin" and as a result immigrants learned to use "the vocabulary of the life they lived" (145).

In his essay, Hansen also points out the language problems of the second-generation. One problem was that their accent remained a constant reminder of their foreignness. Although they tried to lose their foreign accent, it was "the foreign language that left an unmistakable trace in his English speech" (494). Furthermore, Hansen claims in his book that for the immigrant children language was an issue concerning both the home country language and in learning English. "When they began to forget the language of their parents and absorb the culture of their American contemporaries," this was an essential step in the process of Americanization, but also posed a threat to the Old World values and the family unit that parents were desperately trying to preserve (120). Hansen points out in his essay that by the third-generation, children's "speech is the same as that of those with whom they associate" implying that there is no longer a difference in language between immigrant and non-immigrant Americans (496).

Hansen pleads for the third-generation to preserve the heritage of Swedish immigrants. In his essay he expresses the need for an understanding of "the hundreds of immigrant communities in America that formed the human connecting link between the Old World and the New" and calls for more historical studies on the topic (500). He proposes that "the inheritances from the Old World continue to add richness and variety to the sum total of American life" (150). Hansen makes clear his view that various generations of immigrants should appreciate their heritage and preserve it before it is lost forever. He feels that the problems of the immigrant "will not be known until their history is written with realism as well as sympathy" (493). Hansen considers this "not only the great opportunity but also the great obligation of the third-generation historical activity" (500).

Oscar Handlin

Oscar Handlin's book *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration that Made the American People* provides an insightful study of the immigrant experience in both the United States and the life they left behind. Like the works of Hansen, Handlin's book focuses mainly on the immigrant experience of northern Europeans. His study of the continued influence of the Old World communities on immigrants in the New World shows how what they left behind continued to affect each age group. While many immigrants assumed that in the New World, they would find life similar to what they had experienced and be able to live as before; this expectation would prove to be unrealistic. Much like other historians, Handlin explores the role of the various generations within the family unit as well as gender, education, and language in the process of cultural adaptation.

A significant factor Handlin discusses is the role of each generation in the family unit. In the Old World, this unit was a component within a larger entity, that of the extended family and

the village community. Handlin explains that immigrants were looking back on the life they left behind: in the villages in their native country where "everything was knotted into a firm relationship with every other thing" (9). Within the extended family unit, there were also explicit firm relationships between each of the members. At the center of the family unit were the husband and wife. The wife was responsible for the family's domestic life, and the husband was responsible for the farm. Children and members of various generations also each had clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the extended family.

In the New World, Handlin suggests "the difficulty was that formerly the family had not been a thing in itself" and "the day they turned their back on the old home, the relationship began to change" (203,208). By leaving, the uprooted family became a smaller, isolated unit mostly compiled of only parents and their children. Within this smaller unit, it was necessary to adapt to fit the needs of the New World, and each generation within the family adapted differently, as "individually its members in going out would make each their own adjustments to the society about them, and coming back would be less alike" (207).

It was primarily a challenge for the older generations who clung to the memories and ideals of their home communities. In contrast, children had to adapt and help the family in different ways. For example, parents sent their girls out into domestic service as a means of earning money for the family, while in the old country they would generally have remained at home to help and learn from their mothers. The relationship between husbands and wives changed as well as they had to depend more upon each other without the support of the village community or the extended family. As Handlin explains, "[t]hough they clung to the vestige of home and urged their children to hold together, they would never recapture the essential solidarity" of the extended village community in the New World (228).

The main reason for this disruption within the family was that, depending on their age, each generation brought away a different perspective of the Old World and its values. Similar to Hansen, Handlin separates these perspectives into three age groups of children. The first group consists of the older children who, along with their parents, have a vivid memory of the Old World and an understanding of the morals, language, and traditions that continue to influence them. The second group are the infants who grew up with little or no memory of the Old World as "their early childhood had passed under the unsettled conditions of the transition" to the New World. These children grew up feeling alienated as they felt they were "neither one thing nor another," neither European nor American (216). The third age group of children was comprised of the youngest children who were born after their family arrived in the United States. They were considered "the citizens," and the "more fortunate ones [who] had been born into their environment;" "American from the start" without the ideals or physical and emotional ties to the Old World of their siblings and parents (217).

Along with their siblings, the youngest children struggled with their place in the family unit having "no shared experience of coming," and at the same time no sense of belonging within their society (217). Also, there were "assertions that the immigrants were separate from and inferior to the native-born" (262). This separation divided the different generations and created conflicts within the family unit. A more recent article by sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut titled "Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second-generations in the United States" (2004), expands on the role of generations in the immigrant experience. Rumbaut points out that, while it seems "simple and straightforward," upon closer examination, there is no clear division and generational distinctions become "complex and elusive" (1161). While the earlier historians consider the complications for each generation

separately, Rumbaut argues that “none of these conventional usages accurately captures the experience of youths who fall in the interstices between these groupings” (1165).

Another factor of generational disruption was the lack of certainty some parents had concerning the future of their children. Handlin suggests, that, on the farms, the family unit could remain intact, limiting the disruption for the first-generation. This stability in the family unit was due to their need and ability to “call on the support of communal sanctions analogous to those of the Old World” from their older children (229). As time passed, however, both the older and younger children raised in rural areas increasingly distanced themselves more from their parents due to the lack of social connections with others from the home country. Their attempts at assimilation meant children moved away from the Old World ways of their parents. Also, some immigrant boys and girls, married outside of their cultural background, creating further distance and alienation from their parents’ Old World ideas.

Handlin also considers gender as a factor in the confusion and complication immigrants experienced in the process of adjusting to the New World. In the old country, the different genders each had their place within the extended family and village community. He is explicitly considering peasant families from farming communities. In the patriarchal society of the Old World, the wife had an essential role in the family and the village community. Her primary responsibility was to take care of the home, bear and raise children, ensure moral values, provide clothing, and with the husband, form the center and stability of the extended family. Whereas, in the home country the men within the family and community would help each other out with hunting and farming. In the United States, the hunting and farming duties were limited to the smaller family unit, which out of necessity included women and children. The new

smaller family unit was forced more to "depend upon each other because there was no one else upon whom they could depend," blurring the traditional gender roles for its members (206).

Education, Handlin points out, is another factor requiring the immigrant's adaptation as they transitioned, settled, and created communities. For both boys and girls, education was not only going to school but also learning a new language and understanding their new society. The result being the educational system unintentionally created a gap between children and their parents. The children of immigrants found it difficult to see a connection between their own experiences and what they were learning (219). For immigrant children, "nothing in it [the books] touches on the experience of its readers, and no element in their experience creeps into its pages" (220). Handlin explains that there was no connection between what immigrant children learned at school and what was expected of them at home.

Furthermore, children were confronted with "a rival source of authority" in their American teachers (218). The teacher's authority and life at school contrasted home life and made it necessary for children to "develop a kind of life of their own, an intermediary ground from which they could enter when necessary both the life of school and this life of home" (222). Both Hansen and Handlin identify the duplicity in immigrant children's lives as they attempted to fulfill the expectations of both the home and the American school environment. This duplicity in the life of immigrant children formed an additional disruptive component in the changing relationships between parents and children.

An additional factor that complicated the lives of both immigrant children and adults was the difference between the home language and English. Handlin points out that for immigrants, the experience of learning a new language differed for husbands, wives, and children. Like Bourne and Hansen, Handlin indicates that husbands, for example, learned the language related

to farming and agricultural methods and materials. Women, who were regularly more isolated at home, on the other hand, often learned less and "remained ignorant of the rudiments of English" (210). For most immigrant children, school was the natural place for them to learn English. However, the older immigrant children "spoke their mother's language, and their unaccustomed English bore a heavy accent" which "united them with their past" and their parents. At the same time, their accent defined them as foreigners and distanced them from others in their new community (216). These differences in experiences in the process of Americanization formed further evidence of patterns in the changes each generation in the family unit made as they adapted to life in the United States.

Willa Cather

Willa Cather received both criticism and praise for her work, specifically for her writing about immigrants and pioneer women. In writing about her, critics often consider her immigrant novels in relation to her place in the literary canon, the extent of the situation of immigrants settling in the Midwest, and her writing about the struggles of immigrants and pioneer woman. Sharon O Brien in "Becoming Noncanonical: The Case Against Willa Cather," points out that while Cather, was considered by some a minor writer, many appreciated her writing and considered her to be a major writer. Joseph R. Urgo claims that she was a "comprehensive resource[...] and one major American writer" (5). O'Brien explains that although over time there have been fluctuations in her popularity and "[a]lthough Cather has won a place in the American literary canon, it is not a high one: she has been considered an important writer and yet somehow not a 'major' one" (110).

In addition, Glenda Riley and Edward and Lilian Bloom emphasize the importance of Cather's works. Riley admires her work for representing "strong frontierswomen" and women's

reality on the prairie (9). The Blooms, in "A Comprehensive View of Cather's *O Pioneers!*" expand on Riley's viewpoint claiming that "she is a commentator on the prevailing American condition (Murphy, 41). In *Willa Cather the Writer and Her World* (2000), Janis P. Stout writes, in contrast, that Cather's contemporary, Frederick Jackson Turner did not appreciate the attention Cather gives to the immigrant in the process of the development of the Midwest because of her "sympathetic, even celebratory attitude towards immigrants" (161). Although Stout considers Cather's works at times limited, she admits that Cather considered a greater variety of non-American people than many others did at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Through her portrayals of immigrants, Cather becomes what Werner Sollors describes as a "translator[s] of ethnicity" in describing the immigrants' experience in her novels (250). "Not organically connected with ethnic groups," Cather could be thus considered what Sollors terms a "fake ethnic [writer]" (252, 258). However, Cather's writing contradicts Sollors' concept of "fake" by bringing immigrants conflicts and confusions to the foreground and her detailed chronicling of historical situations and sympathy for the immigrant experience.

In writing about the struggles and challenges of pioneer and immigrant women, Cather is respected by historians like Riley for her expression of the reality of life on the prairie for women. Because she wrote about gender, Cather was also scrutinized as a women writer who, according to O'Brien, was "a challenge both to the meretricious popular taste and a decaying genteel tradition" (112). In addition, Timothy Parrish in "Willa Cather" points out that she was criticized because she "became the embodiment of the woman writer who could not stay in her place" due to her "choice of subject matter" (86). O'Brien suggests, "Cather was explicitly judged as limited by her gender" and "[t]respassing on the preserve of masculine fiction" (114).

As a woman writer at the beginning of the twentieth century, Cather did not fit the expectations of her time and was "systematically overlooked or excluded" (119).

Although she was scrutinized because she was a woman and because she wrote about issues such as the social conditions of immigrants in the Midwest, it is possible to reflect upon her works in relation to theories about the immigrant experience of her time. By considering *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* in relation to Turner's and Bourne's essays and the works of Hansen and Handlin, I will examine her portrayal of the immigrant experience in the rural Midwest in the late nineteenth century. These works show comparable interpretations of how each generation within the family unit adapted to American culture and society according to distinctly similar patterns. Although the authors consider the problems and process of Americanization differently, clear parallels showing patterns relating to gender, education, and language are evident. The patterns considered from these works form the point of departure for my cloze analysis of Cather's *O Pioneers!*, and *My Ántonia*. As Werner Sollors points out, "American literature can … tell us much about the creation of an American culture out of diverse pre-American pasts" (6).

Chapter 2 The Rooted and the Rootless in *O Pioneers!*

Willa Cather's first prairie novel, *O Pioneers!* (1913), follows the life of the Swedish immigrant Alexandra Bergson from her childhood into adulthood at the end of the nineteenth century. While the novel tells a seemingly simple story, the underlying tale reveals patterns in the immigrant experience that correspond to some extent with those distinguished by the early immigrant historians regarding generations within the family unit, gender, education, and language.

The novel tells the story of Alexandra's immigrant family settling on the Nebraska prairie through a third-person omniscient narrator, although sometimes there is a shift to Alexandra's perspective. The title, borrowed from the Walt Whitman poem "*Pioneers! O Pioneers!,"* implies that the story is about more than the individual characters roles in the development of the West.[1] According to Jessica Rabin, in *Surviving the Crossing*, *O Pioneers!* is "an un-story," a "departure from expectations about what a novel should include" (31-32). As Cather explains in *Willa Cather on Writing, " O Pioneers!* interested me tremendously …. because it was about the old neighbours" specifically "the Swede [that] had never appeared on the printed pages" (93-94). Cather terms her desire to depart from the literary expectations and topics "the other side of the rug" because she explores those not generally focused on in literature at that time (Cather in Person, 77). Moreover, historian Glenda Riley suggests that Cather is one of a few writers of her time whose characters are credible representations of pioneers and specifically frontierswomen (2). Riley claims that women "settlers displayed fairly consistent patterns" which can be seen in the generational patterns of the characters in *O*

[1] For a discussion of the novel's thematic links with Whitman's poem, see Mullins and Murphy, "Comprehensive view".

Pioneers! (2). Much like the works of Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin, in Cather's novels the generational patterns, although distinctive at times, overlap. This overlap suggests that, although there are consistent patterns, early historians oversimplified immigrant generations as further detailed by Kraut and Gerber. In contrast, Rubén Rumbaut's more recent work expands on the traditional generational distinctions by dividing them up into smaller, more specific components.

Generations

Alexandra Bergson, the protagonist of the novel and the eldest child in her family, immigrated from Sweden with her parents and two brothers to a farm outside the fictional town of Hanover, Nebraska. The novel starts after the Bergson family has been struggling for eleven years on their farm on the prairie. Cather's portrayal of Alexandra's parents, the first-generation immigrants, provides insight into immigrants' struggle as go through the complicated process of forming roots in their new society. The situation of the Bergsons resembles that of Turner's first wave of immigrant and migrant pioneers, who establish farms and develop the land.

Although Alexandra's father adheres to the Old World values, he is also capable of forward thinking and adapting to the New World ways. Even though he is aware of the need to adapt and works hard, he is unable to make a complete transition. However, he sees in Alexandra the possibility for her generation to complete what he has started. His death makes way for this to happen. Mr. Bergson's wish that his children will prosper resembles Handlin's claim that the first-generation is driven by the hope that the second-generation will benefit from their struggles (84).

In addition, his decision to let Alexandra take over the management of the farm from him represents a deviation from the Old World patriarchal custom that the eldest son inherits the land and takes on the role of the head of the family. He is "thankful that there was at least one

among his children to whom he could entrust the future of his family and the possibilities of his hard-won land" (24). Mr. Bergson appears to understand that this deviation from Old World customs is necessary for his family to prosper in the New World. In his book *Beyond Ethnicity* (1986), Werner Sollors expresses the "idea of the newcomers' rebirth into a forward-looking culture of consent," "the transformation of old-world into new-world traits" (4, 6).

The omniscient narrator expresses both Alexandra and her father's understanding of the brothers and their roles within the family: "[t]hey did not mind hard work, but hated experiments" (45). The brothers lack the ability to experiment or explore new ideas that, according to the forward-thinking Mr. Bergson and Alexandra, are necessary to be successful in adapting to the new conditions on the Nebraska prairie: "A pioneer should have imagination" (48). By putting Alexandra in charge, Mr. Bergson feels ensured that the family will put down roots after he dies. Throughout the novel, Alexandra considers her father's wishes in her decisions; however, it seems his death is necessary for her to reach her full potential as a successful farmer. As Urgo points out, Alexandra has inherited her father's belief in the land, and ideas about experimental farming needed to succeed. "Alexandra is thus rooted in Old World ideas and practices; however, she is simultaneously adapting to the demands of New World conditions" (45).

Like Turner's description of migrants in the nineteenth century, Cather describes John Bergson and his family and their farm as the "wild land he had come to tame" (20). Like Turner's first migrant pioneers, the Bergson family at the start of the novel have planted gardens, built their farmhouse, plowed their land and after eleven years they have extended it to "exactly six hundred and forty acres" (21). The Bergsons form a small farming community with their neighbors Mrs. Lee, the Linstrums, and the Norwegian Ivar. In her article "Alexandra's

Dream: The Mightiest of all Lovers' in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*" Marie Mullins explains that while the Homestead Act of 1862 offers 160 acres of land, "it was necessary to have at least 360 to 640 acres for a farm to be viable" (148). This similarity to the acreage the Bergson family later held suggests three things: first, that Mr. Bergson had become an American citizen, second that the Bergson farm was large enough to sustain them, and finally that Cather knew how many acres needed to be successful.

Similarities are also evident between Turner's historical migrants and Alexandra and her brothers, who remain on the "Divide" and buy up the land around them. As Mullins points out, the Bergsons belong to "those who were fortunate enough to have the capital and resources to acquire more land" (148). The later addition of more acreage to the six hundred and forty, Mr. Bergson leaves his children upon his death, allows them to divide-up the land and still each have a sustainable farm. In the second part of the novel, which is set 16 years later, the narrator tells us "[t]he Divide is now thickly populated," which suggests further growth in the population and the development of the towns and cities on the prairie, resembling Turner's third wave (76).

Later in the novel, Cather's narrator returns to the importance of Mr. Bergson's forward thinking through his granddaughters, who see in his picture "his wondering sad eyes that looked forward into the distance as if they already beheld the New World" (104). The attention the narrator gives to the interest in the picture implies that the later generations in the family acknowledge that they have benefited from his ability to anticipate what they needed to succeed. While his "wondering" and "sad eyes" convey both the uncertainty of the immigration and the sadness of cutting ties with family in the Old World, they also appear to see the possibilities in the New World.

By contrast, Mrs. Bergson represents those first-generation immigrants who continued to look back, unable to let go of the Swedish ideals. Throughout her life on the prairie, she continues to exhibit her Old World ways and values, showing little ability to adapt to the New World. As the omniscient narrator explains, "She had never quite forgiven John Bergson for bringing her to the end of the earth: but, now that she was there, she wanted to be let alone to reconstruct her old life in so far as that was possible" (30). Through her use of the words "end of the earth" and "let alone," Cather implies both the physical remoteness of the Nebraska prairie and the mental isolation on the farm. Mrs. Bergson is in this respect similar to the immigrant women described by Handlin and Hansen in that their lives revolved around their domestic tasks as they remained predominantly on the farm in charge of the household.

The remoteness of the Nebraska prairie is the backdrop for Mrs. Bergson's attempt to continue "the routine of her old life among the new surroundings" (28). Significantly, her "preserving was almost a mania" and "when there was nothing more to preserve she began to pickle" are all indications that she is continuing her Old World responsibilities as a way of getting by (29). Moreover, as Riley points out historically "[f]rontierswoman's responsibilities … were shaped more by gender considerations than by region" and thus "women's lives focused upon domestic tasks" (2). As Handlin points out, historically an immigrant women's role was to form stability, ensure morals, and to keep the family together. The narrator emphasizes this, claiming Mrs. Bergson had "done a great deal to keep the family from disintegrating morally and getting careless in their ways" (28-29). Mullins indicates that Mrs. Bergson's efforts helped Alexandra and "united [them] in their mutual goal of preservation" of both the farm and the family unit. At the same time, she instilled "respect and tolerance for her ethnic heritage" in her daughter (150).

In addition to the parents, the children in the Bergson family appear to follow generational patterns comparable to Handlin´s three age groups, Hansen's three generations and the process of integration that Bourne describes. Alexandra appears similar to the oldest immigrant children that Handlin describes as she has memories of the community life and family left behind in Sweden. Her telling stories of bringing her father meals and sharing his music suggest her understanding of the life they left behind. Though the narrator gives little information about the Old World, the influence of Alexandra's cultural heritage in her decisions and her use of the Swedish language show she was influenced by her past. At the same time, because of this sense of heritage, Alexandra is unlike Handlin and Hansen's second-generation in that she does not deny her cultural heritage but tries to preserve it while at the same time adapting to the new conditions. As Rumbaut argues, "there are fundamental differences … between persons who immigrate as adults and those who do so as children," making it unrealistic to lump all immigrants into only single generational definitions (1166). Alexandra resembles the more specific 1.25 generation as detailed by Rumbaut, as she appears closer to her parents in her experiences and adaptations. At the same time, more than her younger brothers, she also resembles the 1.75-generation in her forward thinking.

It would seem that Alexandra has three approaches to ensure that her Swedish heritage remains relevant in her household. First, over time, she creates an extended family with her farm hands. Alexandra appears to be creating a unit resembling Handlin's description of the Old World extended family community that is based on solid relationships and trust. Secondly, the fact that she employs "three young Swedish girls [that] chatter and cook and pickle and preserve all summer long" shows her acceptance and continued use of the Swedish language and the mirroring of the traditional Old World ways her mother used in her household. Thirdly, she

retains the Swedish culture and traditions; her furniture, reading, music, "family portraits, and the few things her mother brought from Sweden" along with her later sharing of Swedish music with her nieces are all further examples of her preservation of her Swedish heritage (84). While her brothers Oscar and Lou appear to reject Old World values, Alexandra shows respect for her old Norwegian neighbor Ivar's ways and language.

Alexandra's younger brothers Oscar and Lou appear to have traits that are typical of Hansen's second-generation of immigrants and Handlin's middle group. While Hansen argues that, the second-generation has forgotten the morals and values of their parents, Oscar and Lou represent what Bourne calls "half-breeds". They are neither culturally Swedish like Alexandra nor integrated Americans like their younger brother Emil. Because they express no memory of Sweden, they appear to grow up in between; they are neither American nor Swedish. As they arrived in Nebraska at the ages of eight and six respectively, most of their memories were of the transitions and early struggles while adapting and settling on the prairie. In this respect, they are similar to the second age group Hansen describes in both his book and essay (494, 93). More specifically, Oscar and Lou resemble Rumbaut's description of the 1.75 generation. As they grow up, they abandon the Old World ideals of their parents because they see no connection to them and they feel "it was no fault of theirs that they were dragged into the wilderness" (48). Cather's use of the word "dragged" indicates that their immigration was involuntary and thus creates challenges to their understanding of why they immigrated. They differ significantly from their parents and Alexandra in how they Americanize. Both brothers, resemble Hansen's view that the second-generation distance themselves and neglect the values of their cultural heritage. Another example of alienation from their cultural heritage is Oscar's marrying outside his ethnic group, which according to Sollors, is a factor of consent in the process of creating an American

identity (6). While as Timothy Parrish claims, Cather's novel appears "more sympathetic to immigrant characters living in exile," she at the same times appears, through her character's development, to question the different aspects in the process of Americanization (89).

Carl Linstrum is another character in *O Pioneers!* who represents ideas similar to those of Hansen's second-generation. Unlike most of the Bergsons, Carl does not speak Swedish and is alienated from his culture, but he also does not appear to be American. As a result, he remains rootless. Early in the novel, when Carl moves into town, he admits he hates the idea of leaving but says, "we have made up our minds at last" (49-50). Cather's use of "we" and "our" implies he has had a say in making the decision to go, unlike Oscar and Lou, who were dragged. When he returns years later, he speaks of the prairie as "the old country," a term used by immigrants when referring to their Old World country, which hints at a nostalgia for the settled life he left behind in the past (118). His explanation of his living situation suggests a continued rootlessness: "we have no house, no place, no people of our own" (123). While Carl yearns to become rooted and to settle with Alexandra, he will not do that as a sign of failure but rather wants to be successful first. When he proposes to Alexandra, he says, "I cannot even ask you to give me a promise until I have something to offer you" and "I must have something to show for myself" (181-182). While Joseph Urgo argues that "Cather's best American is restless, homeless, ambitious, with dubious loyalties to ideals of places of origin," Carl's returning to Nebraska contradicts Urgo's view and demonstrates that, while ambitious, he was loyal to his place of origin and Alexandra and will eventually become rooted. (53)

In *O Pioneers!* Alexandra's youngest brother Emil, who is born in the United States, has no connection to the Old World or the struggles of the other family members. As a result, there is a distance between him and the other members of the family, in a way that was typical for the

American-born second-generation, that Hansen and Handlin discuss. He has no shared experience of the immigration and transitions of his siblings. Emil behaves more like a third-generation immigrant than a first- or second-generation one. According to the more recent studies of Rumbaut, Emil would fall into the category of "the native-born second-generation," the child of foreign-born parents (1167). At the same time, Rumbaut argues that "it is technically an oxymoron in as much as persons born in the United States cannot also be immigrants" (1165). Alexandra's description of him as "just like an American boy" suggests that he resembles the third-generation children described by Handlin as more fortunate because they are born in the United States (217). In contrast, Emil's qualities are comparable to the youngest third-generation of children as characterized by Hansen in his essay. However, the narrator's use of "just like" implies assimilation rather than his being an American. At the same time, his cultural heritage is still visible to Alexandra because she feels "he is more Swedish than any of us" (117). Alexandra's idea suggests that Emil will preserve cultural values for the future, and resembles Hansen's claims of the responsibility of the third-generation. The confusion of Emil's place in the patterns of the various historical studies shows that the generational patterns are not clear-cut and "become complex and elusive on closer inspection" (Rumbaut, 1161).

Emil is an example of how circumstances dictate how each generation adapts and provides a further example that are no clear-cut boundaries between the generations. Furthermore, an example of generational overlapping is Alexandra's mothering sense of responsibility for Emil's education and upbringing as she repeatedly calls him "my boy" (54). In his book *Critical Essay's on Willa Cather,* John J. Murphy points out Emil's importance to Alexandra as "she denigrates their pioneer efforts by applying them exclusively to his future"

(119). By taking on the mother role, Alexandra appears to feel responsible for securing success for the next generation through Emil. Moreover, Alexandra's adopting the role of mother illustrates the distance between Emil and his siblings and supports the idea that his place in the family unit is more that of a third-generation child as characterized by Hansen and Handlin.

In *O Pioneers!,* Lou's daughters and Oscar's boys show similarities to Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin's third-generation, the American born of immigrant parents. The narrator describes Lou's daughter Milly in more detail; what stands out is her appreciation of Alexandra and her willingness to instill in Milly an understanding of their Swedish heritage. Milly is especially interested and thus fits Hansen's description of the third-generation's interest in their ethnic culture (Third, 495). Milly's link to the first-generation is indicated by the traits she inherited from both her grandfather and grandmother. Milly looks like her grandmother, and she "learned [from] that book of old Swedish songs that [her] grandfather used to sing" (103). These traits symbolize her connection to her ancestors' Swedish customs and traditions. Alexandra's use of "that book" reinforces the link between Milly and her grandfather through the physically shared songbook. Her appreciation of her Swedish heritage is strengthened by her interest in "reading from the old books about the house or listening to stories about the early days on the Divide" (105). Through songs and stories, Alexandra appears to pass on Old World morals and values to the younger generation as a way of keeping the cultural heritage of her family alive.

Cather's representation of the three generations of immigrants in the Bergson family and Carl Linstrum seems to confirm the generational patterns early historians detected in the process of immigration of Northern Europeans. Although each generation adapts differently depending on their situation, they generally correspond with the patterns discussed by Hansen and Handlin.

The more recent historical works consider detailed sub-categories reflecting more clearly the diversity in the generations Cather portrays.

Gender

From an early age, Alexandra is in charge of the farm, ensuring the crops, jobs, and financial stability for her family. As a woman in a man's world, she faces many challenges, one of which is her brothers' refusal to accept her farming ideas. As Riley explains of some pioneer women of Alexandra's time, "many women resisted the dictates and limitations of the female frontier: [s]ome regularly engaged in 'men's' work" (4). Her trip to the river country to learn from other farmers, buying land around her farm, building a silo, and her success as a farmer are all examples of her efforts despite the disagreements and the challenges of being a pioneer woman farmer. Alexandra thus combines the historical role of women in the home with that of "the millions of women who helped to open, settle, and develop the American West" (Riley, 13). While the novel considers the roles of the men in the Bergson family, the focus is on Alexandra, and it shows that she is capable of successfully taking on the responsibilities of being the head of her extended family.

As Handlin explains, it was the custom in northern Europe for the eldest son to inherit the land and take over as head of the family, "[t]he land descended within the family through the male line, with the holding passing as a whole to a single son" (12). Mr. Bergson, however, decides that Alexandra should take over this role: "so long there is one house there must be one head. Alexandra is the oldest, and she knows my wishes" (26-27). Deviating from Old World customs, he puts her in charge because she is the oldest. Moreover, according to Urgo, "[i]n his daughter he recognizes his own father's strength of will" (45). By making his decision, Mr. Bergson consciously deviates from traditional gender roles. Mr. Bergson's using her age as a

reason for choosing her as his successor appears to make light of the idea that she is more capable than her brothers though he recognizes she was "like her grandfather; which was his way of saying she was intelligent" (23).

Historically Alexandra does not appear to be a unique example. Riley, for example, mentions "[o]ne Minnesota girl, [who] cared for the family's stock because her father considered her more able than her brothers" (53). Both Riley and Cather imply that the conditions on the frontier made it possible to deviate from accepted gender roles. In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather,* Marilee Lindemann further supports the idea that Cather's provides insight into one of her "pioneer heroines [that] defied convention by dressing in men's clothes and performing physical and intellectual work" (3).

Furthermore, Mr. Bergson insists, "the land will be divided fairly according to the courts" (27). This reference to the courts implies that he will make legal arrangements to divide the land equally among his wife and children independent of their gender. As Riley points out, the legal position of women, concerning inheritance and property rights was more liberal in America. In Iowa, for example, "one-third of the value of all real-estate of the husband, in case of his death, goes to the wife" (31). Mr. Bergson's reference further implies his understanding of the law in Nebraska and that his sons would not automatically inherit everything and the women in the family also had inheritance rights. This understanding shows an aspect of his ability and willingness to adapt and integrate into the ways of the New World.

In contrast to the more liberal ideas of their father, Oscar and Lou stick to the Old World customs. They challenge the idea of women inheriting, stating that "[t]he property of family really belongs to the men of the family, no matter the title" (169). By repeating several times that "[t]he property of family really belongs to the men of the family", Cather enhances the idea

that the brothers are unwilling to recognize the work and insight of women and especially their sister (117). Their refusal to recognize Alexandra's business skills and admit they have profited greatly from her intelligence and shrewd land investments is an example of gender conflict within the family. Oscar and Lou minimalize Alexandra's contribution to the success of the family, claiming that she has been "meddling," and that they have done all the "real work" (170).

Early on, however, Alexandra was dependent upon her brother Oscar to carry out her plans for expanding the property. She had to convince him to take out an additional mortgage because as a woman, she was unable to do so. The legal rights of women are a point of discussion again when Alexandra is successful. Though both brothers have significantly profited from Alexandra's clever investments they believe that, as men, they are entitled to decide what happens to her property. Lou comments, "This is what comes of letting a woman meddle in business…We ought to have taken things in our own hands years ago" (168). Oscar takes for granted that men have more rights than women. However, having a title to the land, Alexandra has the legal rights to her farm and can make her own decisions.

Even though Alexandra remains childless, she grows into a matriarchal role as she creates an extended family community around her that is comparable to the one left behind, like the Old World communities described by Handlin. She incorporates the Swedish girls, farm hands, and Norwegian neighbor Ivar into her extended family unit. In *Willa Cather*, Dorothy Tuck McFarland sees in "Alexandra's household, a human community which is ordered and harmonious, and whose harmoniousness depends on the continuance of the right relationship among its members" (23). Urgo argues that as the head of this extended family, Alexandra "is thus rooted in the Old World ideas and practices, however, she is simultaneously adapting to the

demands of the New World conditions, "showing that she also understands the need to adapt to Nebraska and the farming conditions on the prairie (45).

Throughout *O Pioneers!*, Cather portrays strength and independence in Alexandra's dual role as the head of her farm and matriarch of her extended family. Alex Ross describes in his article, "Cather People" Alexandra's strength in his image of her as "a 'tall strong girl' with a 'glance of Amazonian fierceness' wearing a man's coat (36). Another example is that at her home, she is depicted "seated at the head of the long table, having dinner with her men" (85). Her place at the table shows her position of authority in relation to the farm hands. Cather's use of the possessive "her men" further suggests her authority over them as head of the household and farm.

Furthermore, as Emil "slipped into his empty place at his sister's right," this place of honor suggests he holds a unique position within her family unit (85). The old man Ivar, seated on Alexandra's left side, also has a place of honor at the table, which symbolizes her respect for these men and shows their importance to her. Through Cather's placement of these characters at symbolic positions at the table, she suggests that these men are essential to Alexandra, but also that she remains the one in charge, the matriarch. Her ability to manage both the farm and the household enhances her dual role in the family, that of female pioneer farmer and head of the household. As Lindemann points out, Cather's "female characters are prepared to make their own way and deft at taking advantage of economic opportunities" (6). Her success as a farmer further shows her father made the right decision when he decided she should take charge of the family farm when he died.

In the second-generation of Bergson men, gender issues create additional challenges and Carl Linstrum "provides an outside perspective on the changes that have come with prosperity"

(Murphy, 118). One of these challenges Carl acknowledges is Alexandra's relationships with her brothers. Carl tells Alexandra, "it's your fate to be always surrounded by little men. And I am no better than the rest," thus admitting his own failure to succeed (181). The men he is referring to are her brothers Oscar and Lou who see their sister's role as less important. In contrast to them, Carl insists, "I must have something to show for myself" (182).

Because he respects Alexandra, he wants to prove his ability to succeed independently from her, to be on equal terms. For their relationship to work, he feels that they must be equals. Carl's insistence on gender equality is in contrast to the dominant view of the time; as Riley explains "women most commonly appeared as helpmates to men" and not as equals in writings about the West (8). In addition, Carl's necessity for his success and economic equality to Alexandra reflects Sollors concept of consent; that both characters appear to be "architects of their own fate" (6). By juxtaposing the roles of men and women, the novel presents readers with variations in gender patterns and represents some of the adaptations needed in transitioning.

Education

Another factor that affected both genders in the process of settling and becoming rooted was education. Throughout the novel, examples of formal and informal education show the development of the various generations. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator gives an example of the difference in possibilities for education of immigrants and those recently settled. The narrator comments that "the children were all in school," suggesting that this was normal. This comment is contrasted by the narrator introducing readers to "a little Swede boy," Emil who is not at school (4). The children being at school, while Emil is not, suggests that there was a cultural difference in education between the American and immigrant children. In addition, Carl and Alexandra do not attend school, at this point in the novel. While they obviously have

some formal education at the start of the novel, it is more important for them, and Oscar and Lou, to help their families than to be at school. Both Handlin and Hansen argue that historically, education for immigrant children was challenging for several reasons. One important reason was the need to keep the children close to help on the family farm, as is the case in the novel with Alexandra and her brothers.

Emil, on the other hand, is an example of the possibility for younger children to acquire a more formal education. He is educated first with other migrant children, such as his friend Amédée, and then later moves outside the community to go to college as the first of his generation in his family. In this respect, Emil follows the patterns of the youngest immigrant children that Handlin describes. His education distances him from the family and the farming lifestyle of his siblings. Before his departure to go to law school, there is a sense "this leave-taking would be more final". It is "[a] definite break with his old home"; "[a]s he went about gathering up his books he felt as if he were uprooting things" (235). Emil's seemingly definite break with the farm through migration to the city, like Turner's third wave, completes the process of Americanization.

Besides the example of Emil acquiring formal education, throughout *O Pioneers!* there are examples of characters who are informally educated. From the beginning, Alexandra has "strength of will, and simple, direct way of thinking things out" and thus further educates herself as she did through her father's teachings in the early years (24). Later, when she takes a trip to explore "the river farms" with Emil, her knowledge of farming is evident in her ability to understand what is right for her family. While exploring the other farms, "[s]he learned a great deal" as she "talked to men about their crops and to the women about their poultry" (64). Her talking to both men and women about their different tasks indicates the thoroughness of

Alexandra's informal education. It also reflects the separation of tasks generally ascribed to each gender. Other examples of informal education in the novel are evening readings of the Bible, the book about the Swiss Family Robinson, and the old Swedish stories (61, 63, 105). The texts that are read indicate the importance of reading both Swedish and English works.

Lou and Oscar's children, the third-generation, display different patterns of informal education. Oscar's boys, raised in an English-speaking household, are an example of second-generation parents' attempt to distance their children from their Swedish heritage as described by Hansen and Handlin. The narrator gives no details on the boys' understanding of their cultural background. This limits the boy's role as examples of the third-generation. As we have seen, however, Lou's daughter Milly's interest in the music and literature of her ancestors reinforces the connection between the first and third-generations. Her interest confirms both Hansen's and Bourne's expectations that the third-generation will be interested in the heritage of immigrants and add to the richness and diversity of American society.

While Cather only applies a link between the first-generation and the women of the third-generation, like Bourne, she appears aware of the implications of retaining cultural identity. The females in *O Pioneers!* who embrace their Swedish heritage, such as Alexandra, Mrs. Bergson, Milly, and Mrs. Lee are positive, strong, and successful characters. These characters are examples of Hansen's claim of the importance that "inheritances from the Old World continue to add richness and variety to the sum total of American life" (150). Both the formal and informal education of the characters corresponds mostly to the patterns as outlined by Handlin and Hansen.

Language

An additional component essential to education and creating an understanding of the value of both cultures is language. According to Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin, language was a crucial factor in the ability of each generation of immigrants to adapt and integrate into a new society. Within the extended Bergson family, there are patterns of generational differences in language development. The necessity for contact within the local community influenced variations in immigrants' need to continue using Swedish and/or learn English. Moreover, Rumbaut considers that the first-generation immigrants, like Mr. and Mrs. Bergson, "are unlikely to shed their native language[s]" while the younger immigrants are more flexible in adapting (1167).

Alexandra's language acquisition appears flexible and to overlap the patterns across several generations. As a young girl, she communicates in both languages, speaking English to Carl, and Swedish at home with her family. Moreover, her conversations with Ivar, the Norwegian, show that she is also able to communicate with him. During a visit to Ivar, "Alexandra translated for Carl," showing that Alexandra is obviously comfortable speaking and translating into English, which suggests a reasonable level of understanding of both languages (39). While Handlin and Hansen's perspectives were that women, in general, learned less English, Alexandra, despite living in an isolated situation on the farm, has a good grasp of the language. While Carl appears to be interested in what is said, he makes no effort to understand Swedish. This lack of interest suggests a second-generation separation from Old World cultural values.

The narrator provides no details of Alexandra's accent but does provide examples of Oscar's and Lou's different uses of Swedish within their families. Oscar's wife, for example,

"was ashamed of marrying a foreigner and his boys do not understand a word of Swedish" (99). When they visit Alexandra, it is necessary that "the conversation at the table [is] all in English" (99). In contrast to Oscar's family, "Annie and Lou sometimes speak Swedish at home, but Annie is almost as much afraid of being 'caught' at it as ever her mother was of being caught barefoot" (99). The words "caught" and "barefoot" imply that Annie sees speaking Swedish similar to doing something wrong or belonging to a lower social class. Though they project a sense of fear or shame in speaking Swedish, they do not deny their daughters opportunities to spend time with Alexandra, though they know that the girls will speak Swedish and learn about Swedish traditions. Though he is less eager to integrate than Oscar, "Lou speaks like anybody from Iowa," which suggests he has acquired an American accent, ironically not a Nebraskan one. Lou's accent implies that though he speaks English, he does not as a local therefore his foreignness remains evident through his speech. In contrast to Lou, "Oscar has a thick accent," which distinctly identifies him as an immigrant (99).

While Rumbaut argues that the 1.75 immigrants "typically learn English without an accent," Oscar and Lou's accents imply that, contrary to Rumbaut, Cather is suggesting that there is a continued influence from Swedish (1187). Handlin also seems to confirm this continued influence as he indicates that language presented several challenges for immigrants: "[t]hey spoke their mother's language and their unaccustomed English bore a heavy accent that united them with their past" (216). As a result, "[t]hey were neither one thing nor the other," which appears the case for both Oscar and Lou (216). Furthermore, both brothers resemble Bourne's notion of the "half-breed" in that they have substituted Swedish for a rudimentary form of English.

Through his language, Frank Shabata, the husband of Alexandra's friend and Emil's lover Marie, represents the failure of some immigrants to root or complete the process of Americanization. He thus confirms Bourne's argument that the notion of the "melting pot" was defunct. "Frank read English slowly," and his use of the English language shows he can speak it, though not well and with a strong Bohemian accent (148). "I go to take dat old woman to de court if she ain't careful… I keep my hogs home. Other peoples can do like me" (140). Later, when Alexandra visits him in jail, he tells her, "'I forget English. We not talk here, except swear'" (294). This reversal of the ability to speak English further indicates his failure to root and finish the process of Americanization. In contrast to Carl's ambition to succeed in America, Frank tells Alexandra, "'If I git out-a-here, I not trouble dis country no more. I go back where I come from; see my mother,'" returning unsuccessful to his home country (297).

There are three ways to view the factor of language in *O Pioneers!*. First, retaining the native language enhances the cultural identity of the characters. Second, having the English language as a common language is connected to the ability of characters to communicate well with others outside their immediate cultural groups. Finally, English is an essential component in the process of Americanization. While focusing on Swedish immigrants, Cather also writes about different immigrants and ethnic groups in *O Pioneers!*, and suggests that there is great ethnic and cultural diversity on the Nebraska prairies. In its obvious celebration of cultural diversity, the novel supports Bourne's idea of the United States being a "federation of cultures" (8).

While at first the novel seems a simple story of a young Swedish immigrant girl growing up on the Nebraska prairie, when we consider it in relation to the aforementioned historical works a deeper insight into the complicated struggles of immigrants can be found in *O*

Pioneers!. Although the novel focuses mainly on Alexandra's development, it also presents the struggles of each member of the Bergson family and the different generations' process in becoming re-rooted as American citizens on the Nebraska prairie. Through her characters, Cather appears to convey ideas pertaining to the various generations within the Swedish Bergson family unit in relation to gender, education, and language.

Stout points out that Turner and Cather were critical of each other's works. However, she indicates that while Turner was "growling about the stress Cather … placed on 'the non-English stocks,'" in contrast, "Cather herself 'recognized' the importance of the work of such men" as Turner (161). Marcus Cunliffe describes in *The Art of Willa Cather* that, Cather "covers all the basic stages of settlement as enumerated by Turner and other historians" (37). This recognition of Turner's and other historians' works suggests that Cather not only expresses ideas based on her observations but was also aware of the historical studies done on pioneers and immigration and the process of Americanization, though Hansen's and Handlin's works were published several decades later. Later immigrant historians such as Handlin, Riley, and Rumbaut show further development of perspective on the process of immigration for both pioneer men and women. Their ideas are founded on the works of the earlier historians yet allow for an expanded understanding of the development of ethnic and cultural diversity in the United States. Further consideration of immigration and analysis of *My Ántonia* will provide additional insight into Cather's view of the immigrants and their process of Americanization on the Nebraska prairie.

Chapter 3: Remembering an Immigrant in *My Ántonia*

Willa Cather's prairie novel, *My Ántonia* (1918), once again, reflects her understanding of the confusions and complications that immigrants experienced in the process of transitioning and Americanization. This novel was published five years after *O Pioneers!* (1913) and it is considered by many to be her best novel. She claims it "came along quite, of itself and with no direction from me, it took the road of *O Pioneers!*" (Cather *On Writing*. 96). Much like in *O Pioneers!* in *My Ántonia* Cather incorporates factors on the immigrant family unit, gender, education, and language that reflect concepts pointed out by immigrant historians such as Turner, Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin. Through Cather's representation of immigrants, she expands on these historians' ideas and suggests that there also may have been variations to these patterns depending on immigrant's abilities and situation.

My Ántonia is mainly written by the native-born American narrator, Jim Burden, who offers his specific perspective on immigration to the Midwest at the end of the nineteenth century. The novel begins, however, with an introduction written by an unnamed fictional female first-person narrator who recalls a chance meeting on a train with her childhood friend Jim Burden. They start up a conversation about Ántonia Shimerda who immigrated with her family to rural Nebraska where the narrator and Jim grew up. The encounter on the train triggers Jim's memories of their childhood together and especially of their mutual friend Ántonia. The narrator, a writer, challenges Jim to put his memories in writing and share them with her. Jim eventually presents her with a manuscript of his, at times, nostalgic and romantic memories of Ántonia. This narrative, focusing on Ántonia and their childhood together, is told from his limited perspective and forms the main part of the novel. His use of "*My Ántonia*" as the title of his work reinforces the limited narrative perspective. The introduction of *My Ántonia* frames the

main story and provides the reader with the understanding that the story offers the narrow perspective of an American outsider on the immigrant experience.

Ben Railton, in his article "Novelist-Narrators of the American Dream" and other critics have called attention to Cather's use of the framed limited narration in the novel and how it affects Jim's position as the first-person narrator. Railton defines Jim's position as that of what he proposes to call "the novelist-narrator". He defines this type of narration as reflecting authors who become "friends with-their subjects," in this case, meaning the friendship that develops between Jim and Ántonia (134). Jim, who is both a character and narrator/commentator, expresses his sometimes idealistic, romantic and occasionally critical, view of Ántonia through his storytelling. Other critics such as McFarland, Ross, and Rabin consider Jim's perspective to be narrow. He admits that the narration is limited to his vision of her as he tells the writer of the introduction, "' [i]t is through myself that I knew and felt her, and I've had no practice in any other form of presentation'" (7). In addition, the narrator of the introduction explains, "the following narrative is Jim's manuscript, substantially as he brought it to me" (8). Her use of the word "substantially" makes it unclear if she has edited Jim's manuscript.

While in *O Pioneers!* Cather uses a third-person omniscient narrator, in *My Ántonia,* despite the use of the limited perspective, she offers a clear reflection on the underlying complexities of the process of Americanization that immigrants experienced. Some historians like Janet Sharistanian, in her introduction to *My Ántonia,* also consider the authenticity of Cather's characters and find consistency in the patterns of the immigrants and settlers. Sharistanian allows that Ántonia and the Harlings were, for example, modeled after people Cather knew while growing up and living in Nebraska (202, 211). As previously mentioned, Frus and Corkin also argue that Cather's characters give an authentic perspective of the

immigrant and pioneer. Jim's narration offers an impression of the complexities of the immigrant experience as seen from an American's perspective, much as Cather must have seen it, though at times she takes an ironic distance from her narrator.

After the introduction, the novel switches to Jim's memories, which start when he meets the Bohemian immigrant Ántonia, at the age of fourteen on a train with her parents and three siblings who are moving to settle near the fictional town of Black Hawk, Nebraska. They have recently arrived in the United States, and Ántonia is the only family member who speaks any English. With her on the train is the then eleven-year-old and recently orphaned Jim, who is on his way from Virginia to live with his grandparents in Nebraska. As it turns out, Ántonia's immigrant family have bought land near the farm of Jim's grandparents.

Generations

The Shimerda family unit is made up of Mr. and Mrs. Shimerda, the nineteen-year-old Ambrosch, the fourteen-year-old Ántonia, along with a younger brother and sister Marek, and Yulka. For many immigrants like the Shimerda, the family formed a strong and stable support unit while adjusting to the conflicts and confusions of a new society. Rabin claims that immigrants "arrive as a unit and their Americanization (or lack thereof) will take place as a unit" (37). Her argument opposes the claims, previously discussed by Handlin, who argues, "the act of migration was individual" (35). According to Handlin, among immigrants, the relationships in the family unit change as each member adapts differently to their new situation (207). Jim's observations about the Shimerda family suggest that adaptation happens both for the family as a unit and each member separately. While the historians Hansen and Handlin specifically discuss Scandinavian/Swedish immigrants in their writing, the patterns of transition of the family unit in *O Pioneers!* also can be applied to the Bohemian Shimerda family in *My Ántonia*.

Mr. and Mrs. Shimerda, are first-generation immigrants who encounter some of the same conflicts and confusions during the process of Americanization as Mr. and Mrs. Bergson in *O Pioneers!*. Railton argues that "[d]espite the first-generation's seeming inability to cope with the realities of the New World," their children's later success and rootedness "validates their families' decisions to immigrate" in both novels (138). Like Mr. Bergson, Mr. Shimerda hopes for a better life for his children but is unable to complete the transition process. A weaver by trade and a city man, he appears unable to understand what he needs to know and how he must adapt to become a farmer. Jim's description of him coming out of their sod dwelling, which Jim describes as "a cave," enhances the image of their desperate situation and Mr. Shimerda' confusion (20). Jim's observations of "how white and well-shaped his own hands were," his "dignified manner," and "his silk scarf" with its "red coral pin" indicate that he is unfit to be a farmer. Jim's awareness that Mr. Shimerda's "eyes were melancholy" and his face looked "like something from which all the warmth and light had died out" makes it clear that the man is unable to make the transition (20-21).

Jim is also aware that Ántonia sees her father's inability to adapt when she explains to him that her father is "sad for the old country" and "don't like this kawn-tree" (53). As Rabin points out, "Mr. Shimerda will not Americanize- he does not want to be an American" (37). Mr. Bergson, on the other hand, though unable, was willing to Americanize. Moreover, Anne E. Goldman indicates in her article "Rereading *My Ántonia*" that Mr. Shimerda's eventual suicide, during the first winter, is a result of his inability to adapt and his mourning for his homeland (171).

Grandmother Burden feels that his desertion of his family and specifically of Ántonia was unkind as "[h]e's left her alone in a hard world" (58). She recognizes Mr. Shimerda's

importance to Ántonia when she says that she "was his darling, and was like a right hand to him" (58). Moreover, he also does not appear to have made any legal arrangements for the family. His failure to make arrangements assumes the Old World practices; as Handlin explains, "everywhere the land descended within the family through the male line" (12). While according to Handlin, the first-generation hopes to see their children benefit from their struggles, Jim sees little of Mr. Shimerda's hopes for his children (84). In both *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, the deaths of Alexandra's and Ántonia's fathers appear to be necessary for each woman to achieve their destiny. As Rabin puts it, for Ántonia "to move forward, she has to lose her only real parent" (37).

Although she tries, Jim appears to suggest that Mrs. Shimerda is unable to fulfill the role of parent when he writes that she is incapable of teaching Ántonia or her sister Yulka to be good housekeepers (150). While Rabin agrees with Jim's opinion, it is important to remember the reader's understanding of the situation is limited to Jim's descriptions of his childhood memories. Jim shows his negative perspective of Mrs. Shimerda when he describes her inability and confusion after he and his grandmother first go to the Shimerdas' farm. He describes her as resentful when she "laughed scornfully" and 'shook [the empty coffee-pot]… with a look positively vindictive,'" as if she reproaches Mrs. Burden for not being more helpful to them (45). Her behavior contradicts Handlin's claim that immigrants knew they were alone in transitioning and "could expect no help" from others (149). In addition to her show of emotions, she shows them frozen rotting potatoes and gives Jim the impression that she lacks good housekeeping skills, and the ability to comprehend what she needs to do to adapt and ensure her family can survive. In contrast, Mullins points out how in O Pioneers! that Mrs. Bergsons is a

positive influence on Alexandra because she is “disciplined,” “careful,” and “complete[s] tasks” (150).

It is essential to recognize that while Jim may have a clear memory of what happened, he is an outsider and as a male child may have not fully comprehended the situation or the emotional impact. Although both Mr. and Mrs. Burden, and other neighbors, help with a house-raising and assist the newcomers, Mrs. Shimerda appears according to Jim to be stuck in her Old World perspectives.

Although critical of Mrs. Shimerda, Jim appears sympathetic to his grandmother. He sees her, “head thrust forward in an attitude of attention,” as if having a forward-thinking mentality. He implies that he recognizes that she represents those who had to overcome separation and migration “because she was so often thinking of things that were far away”. While she is now settled and rooted on her farm, Jim’s awareness of her thoughts acknowledges his beliefs that she still thinks back on her past in Virginia. This thinking back could be why Mrs. Burden appears to sympathize with Mrs. Shimerda’s situation, later claiming, “a body never knows what traits poverty might bring out in em” (54).

Despite the fact that her mother could not help Ántonia to adapt or teach her housekeeping skills, Mrs. Burden and Mrs. Harling provide her with the tools that will later allow her to be a successful farmer’s wife. Jim recognizes Mrs. Burden’s positive influence when he remembers that, besides her help in teaching Ántonia domestic skills, she got “her a place to work with our neighbours, the Harlings” as a way of ensuring she will acquire good housekeeping skills (83). Near the end of the novel Ántonia confirms how important her time at the Harlings was when she admits to Jim, “I’d never have known anything about cooking or housekeeping…I learned nice ways at the Harlings” (181). The influences of these more

established women show the importance of the role of women in the family unit on the prairie and are an example of how traditional morals and values were passed down to the younger generations of women. While their "lives focused upon domestic…tasks," according to Riley, pioneer women "used traditional female values as their guides" (2, 4).

In addition to the influence of other women, Ántonia appears to follow the aforementioned generational patterns for the children of immigrants. Both Ambrosch and Ántonia immigrate at the ages of nineteen and fourteen and have a clear memory of the life and family they left behind. They appear to be between both first and second- generation immigrant children. In one way they show traits similar to those of the older second-generation children discussed by both Hansen and Handlin. In another in his more recent study, Rumbaut explains that defining generations is complicated. "Similarly problematic is the definition and measurement of the immigrant 'first-generation, a large segment of which is composed of persons who migrated as children and who are often regarded as members of the 'second' generation" (1161). The age of children at the time of immigration influenced their memory of life in the Old World and their ability to adapt, build the farm, and provide for the family in the New World.

Much like Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*, both Ántonia and Ambrosch resemble the criteria of the 1.25 generation which Rumbaut explains as the third life stage of immigrant children. They are closer to their parents than the true second-generation through their "experiences and adaptive outcomes" in transitioning (1167). Whether defined as 1.25 or second-generation immigrants, both children show the duality of their situation as they adapt to the New World situation while continuing to be supported by the Old World values they brought with them.

Jim's description of Ambrosch as a "far-seeing fellow" implies that he is forward thinking and understands he will need to adapt to the different ways in the New World. (132) Ambrosch hard work on the farm is an example of how some children had to take on different roles for the good of the family, as explained by Handlin (228). Jim relates that Ambrosch establishes himself as the patriarch of the family "[s]ince the father's death, Ambrosch was more than ever the head of the house, and he seemed to direct the feeling as well as the fortunes of his women-folk" (72-73). Jim's use of the phrase "more than ever" implies that, even before his father died, Ambrosch took charge, and appeared to know how to adapt and be a successful farmer on the Nebraska prairie. He assumed the responsibility of the head of the family, much like Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*.

In contrast to Alexandra, Ambrosch bullies the women while Alexandra tries to help her brothers understand the best course of action. Jim's reference to "his [Ambrosch] women-folk" implies an Old World patriarchal possessiveness towards Ántonia and Mrs. Shimerda. His possessiveness is also evident in his insisting on the Harlings giving him Ántonia's wages when she is working for them. As is the case in *O Pioneers!*, and as Riley describes, "[f]emales were then looked upon as a reserve labor force"(53). Ambrosch insists that Ántonia and their mother take over the working of the farm while he is off hiring himself out to a neighbor. Jim relates, for example, that Mrs. Shimerda "drove the second cultivator" and "the two women were running the place alone" while Ambrosch was away (75). These examples reflect Riley's observation that, although women usually had domestic tasks, "numerous women worked in fields ….both while the men of the family were present and while they were absent" (3).

Similar to her brother, Ántonia appears to resemble both Handlin's older age group and Rumbaut's adolescents because the Old World morals, language, and traditions still influence

her. Jim gives us examples of her dual cultural status: she is no longer Bohemian, nor does she ever later truly become American. In this respect, she resembles Rumbaut's description of the "mid-adulthood immigrant" as she does not assimilate into American society (1167). Her inability, for instance, to understand her neighbors results in the Shimerdas and the Burdens distancing themselves from each other for a time. At the same time, Ántonia remains in contact with Jim's grandfather and calls on him for support because she appears to understand that she must accept advice, and depend on others in order to learn and adapt successfully. Both Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*, and Ántonia appear to need the support of men to accomplish their goals. As Martha C. Carpentier puts it, "they are buoyed and sustained by familial and communal support without which they would not be able to achieve all that they do" (144-145). Although neither woman shows a complete integration into their new society, they live peacefully alongside others and thus represent what Bourne calls a "federation of cultures" (8).

Much like Hansen's description, in his essay, of the second-generation of children, Ántonia attempts to turn her back on her cultural roots but never truly succeeds. Ántonia's development makes her what Bourne terms a "cultural half-breed" as she is neither any longer completely Bohemian, nor does she become fully Americanized. Also, Rabin recognizes that culturally "[s]he keeps one foot in the World World" (31). Her struggles,misunderstandings and the duality of her life remain evident when she moves into Black Hawk to work for the Harlings. Although she remains friends with Jim, she is a hired help at the Harlings and thus belongs to a different social class. Jim's descriptions of her life at the Harlings household show the duality of her immigrant situation and her social as well as cultural separation from the Harlings and Burdens. Her time in Black Hawk after she leaves the Harlings and when she moves away to

marry are examples of her unsuccessful attempts at transitioning. Her return to the family farm when she becomes pregnant marks her failure to assimilate.

In chapter IX, "The Hired Girls" Jim shows his awareness of the situation of the "well-set-up country girls who had come to town to earn a living," such as Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball (109). He gives a detailed description of their struggles as the older children in immigrant families: the hardships, lack of education, hard work, and need to provide financial support. These girls also exemplify the three factors Bourne discusses as to what it is to be an American: they take responsibility for their destiny, they take pride in their culture, and they represent what it is to be a part of a federation of cultures. Both Lena and Tiny show further variations to the patterns of how these older 1.25 or second-generation immigrants developed as they grew up between two cultures.

At the end of the novel, after twenty years, Jim visits Ántonia. She has married Anton Cuzak and they have a large family and built up a farm. As Bohemian immigrants, both Ántonia and Anton appear similar to Handlin's idea that immigrants "could call on the support of communal sanctions analogous to those of the Old World" and that "the family might survive a generation in its traditional form" (129,229). They thus reflect some of the patterns of first-generation immigrants who do not complete the process of Americanization. Because of Jim's attention to the harmony in the Cuzak family, he seems to understand its importance, much like Hansen, who argues in his book that the family unit is the only institution immigrants brought with them (11). Also, Jim appears aware that Ántonia is preserving her cultural heritage by passing on the Bohemian language, family history, and traditions of the Old World to her children. Although similar to Hansen's idea of the third-generation, this is an example of a second-generation immigrant preserving her cultural heritage.

Gender

Besides, the different generations, patterns of both men and women's gender roles are evident in the novel. While immigrants' reflect mostly Old World gender roles, at times, however, they also deviate from the usual patterns described by the early immigration historians. Jim's narrative reflects an awareness of the importance of the roles for both immigrant men and women in building a society. Furthermore, the novel displays a sensitive understanding of the situation of immigrant women, which, as Lindeman points out, was "not typically the subject of art" (12).

Like Mr. Bergson in *O Pioneers!* Mr. Shimerda understands that his daughter is intelligent, and he puts her and not her older brother Ambrosch forward as the one that will take on the role of interpreter for the family. Jim remembers her father asking his Grandmother to "Te-e-ach, te-e-ach my Án-tonia!" (21). His decision resembles Handlin's view that the first-generation sometimes "gave the second-generation its role as mediator" (226). Because of his decision, Mr. Shimerda enables Ántonia to assist the family in communicating with their neighbors and in the transition into a new society. Another sign of a break with traditional gender roles is Jim's regular reference to Ántonia as "Tony". His use of a boy's name contradicts his conservative opinion that she should behave in a more feminine way. Ántonia, however, takes pride in her ability to "work like a man" and brags to Jim about "how much ploughing she had done that day" (70). These examples show a blurring of the gender distinctions and suggest Ántonia's active contribution to the success of the farm, is similar to Alexandra and the historical women on the frontier discussed by Riley.

Ántonia's blurring of conventional gender roles is also symbolized by her wearing her father's clothes. Her learning English and working on the farm supports Lindeman's observation

that "pioneer heroines defied convention by dressing in men's clothes and performing physical and intellectual work usually considered 'masculine'" (3). Later when she grows up and moves into town, and after she is married, she takes on a role that is similar to Handlin's descriptions of women as responsible for domestic tasks and the moral values in the family. Jim, notes that as she grows up, she evolves away from the tomboyish young girl and into the mature motherly figure.

Another example is that although it was not unusual for men to live together, Jim appears to realize that neighbors Pavel and Peter's household is different. His description of Peter fulfilling the role of a wife: taking care of the household, washing, and tending a kitchen garden, make him an example of a deviation from male gender patterns. Jim's childhood recollection of there being one bed and Peter's drying vegetables subtly suggests that while he is unaware of the possible implications, he notices a difference in usual gender role patterns (24-27). According to Rabin, Jim describes "this gender-crossing…in terms that might well refer to a gay couple" (31).

Other women who represent gender patterns in the various generations of women in the novel are Mrs. Burden, Mrs. Shimerda, and Mrs. Harling. The strength of these women lies in their power to overcome the challenges and support each other as a means of adapting and succeeding on the prairie. Goldman calls attention to the fact that "[w]e can see Cather as modeling a variety of middle-aged and elderly female characters to depict all the nuances of quiet strength" (164). In addition, Goldman points out that Ántonia is not the only representation of immigrant girls' struggles on the prairie and in the towns. She presents only "one illustration of feminine strength and dignity" while other women in the novel represent "essentially different variations on a theme" (164, 162).

Jim, as a male commentator, often seems aware of the issues women were dealing with. He uses a variety of examples of the challenges of various generations of women to show that he is aware that women had an essential role in establishing farms, settling and the process of Americanization on the Nebraska prairie. He remembers hearing Lena and Tiny consider the challenges of past generations of the older women in their families and the struggles they overcame moving West. They were very much aware that "'[i]t must have been a trial for our mothers … coming out here and having to do everything different'" (130). While Lena and Tiny succeed by leaving the prairie, they recognize the challenges the first-generation immigrants had to overcome.

In Book II, called "The Hired Girls," Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball and other immigrant's daughters, also present patterns that show class conflicts between the settled women in Black Hawk and the immigrant pioneer women. As Jim observes, "[t]here was a curious social situation" among the townspeople (109). McFarland recognizes that Jim is aware of "the class distinctions:" while the "hired girls" are employed in town, they differ in social class and are seen as "[p]hysically a race apart" (44). Jim admires their "positive carriage," and a "freedom of movement" (109). Stout points out that the immigrant girls Jim describes "are liked but they are not equal" (162). Jim expresses this inequality as he compares the "hired girls" to the Black Hawk daughters, who had the "belief that they were 'refined'" and felt that the "country girls that worked out were not" (109-110). His use of the word 'belief' shows Jim feels that "the attitude of the townspeople towards these girls [was] very stupid" (110). An older Jims comments that though townspeople felt they were a "menace to the social order," he is glad to see that his "country girls," are ultimately more successful and that their children are better off than the families they worked for (110).

Jim depicts Lena and Tiny as strong immigrant women, and through his descriptions of them, shows how they develop as they Americanize. In this way, Cather's novel expands on Turner's singular focus on the role of men in the settlement and transformation of the prairie (26-28). Jim looks back and expresses his awareness as an adult of their challenges when they move into town to help support their families. He explains that they had a responsibility to help "clear the homestead from debt" and "pay for ploughs and reapers," and because of their work, they enabled their family farms to become prosperous (110). While Turner only considers men's role in developing the prairie, Rabin points out the importance of young women and "the money that will help their parents and their younger siblings to get ahead" (27). Jim admires the immigrant girls' strength of character, independence, and ability to become successful women. As an adult, Lena refuses to marry, as "[i]t's all being under somebody's thumb," which suggests she does not want a man to tell her what to do (157). Furthermore, Tiny is an excellent bookkeeper, and after working in hotels and prospecting in Alaska, becomes a very wealthy woman.

Ántonia and Lena show two sides to the patterns of the immigrant female experience on the prairie. Whereas Ántonia at the beginning works "like a man," and wants to "be like a man," and remains rooted, Lena hates the farm life, goes into dressmaking, and becomes rootless as she moves West. Both women are variations on the successful pioneer women who become independent, defy conventions, and are successful each in their own right. Unlike Lena and Tiny, Alexandra, however, achieves success together with her husband, Anton. Together these examples show variations in situations affected by the pattern of women's role in the process of Americanization.

Another example that shows that Cather contradicts expected gender patterns is, as Bourne explains in his review of the novel that "[t]he stiff moral molds are fortunately broken" (Murphy, 146). An example of a broken "moral mold" is that Ántonia has a child out of wedlock. The younger Jim, who feels he has the right to judge her, commenting on her behavior, he acknowledges that he "was bitterly disappointed in her" and [he] could not forgive her for becoming an object of pity" because she "had come home disgraced" (159,167). As Ellen Moers points out in *The Art of Willa Cather*, "Cather chose to celebrate a figure that is sexually not respectable". However, Ántonia "vindicates herself by becoming a true mother" when she marries Anton Cuzak (Moers 63-64). When Jim visits the Cuzaks twenty years later, he recognizes "something which fires the imagination, could stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture," her feminine behavior (186). His changed viewpoint suggests he is no longer disappointed in her. According to Sollors, Ántonia appears to be 'reborn' when she marries; as Mrs. Cuzak, she is "a free agent," and an "architect of [her] fate" (6-7).

Like Alexandra's, Ántonia's place at the head of the table symbolizes her position in the family and her responsibility for the moral upbringing of her children. In Ántonia's role as a mother, there is nothing left of her earlier role of a farmhand, wanting to work as hard and 'be like a man.' She is very much the mother figure with her children; Jim, during his visit, sees "a kind of physical harmony" that suggests a strong family unity reflective of the Old World (184). Rabin explains that while Ántonia "maintains the traditions from both places," she focuses especially on Bohemia, "remembering it in all its details and keeping these memories alive for the next generation" (31). The Cuzaks contradict Hansen's idea that only the third-generation will feel the obligation to preserve its cultural heritage that the first and second have neglected. Cather appears to be conveying that the Cuzak children are clearly taking on the role, as Hansen

hopes, of the third-generation in preserving their cultural heritage. Some of the examples Jim observes are the pride they all have in Ántonia's orchard, the "new fruit cave," her fruit preserving, the pictures, and Mr. Shimerda's old violin. Immigrant women typically kept alive Old World customs and passed on family heirlooms to their children, just as Ántonia does. Her daughter, Anna's use of the word "cave" for the root cellar is a further symbol of the distance between Ántonia's first primitive home on the Nebraska prairie and her success in her current settled and rooted condition (178).

As in *O Pioneers!*, in *My Ántonia* Cather repeats patterns that show women ensure stability in the family unit and household. While Alexandra has her "Swedish girls" in the kitchen, Ántonia's daughters are further examples of women training their daughters in kitchen tasks, as they "finish the dishes quietly" and "bring fresh plates of *kolaches* and pitchers of milk" (176,183). Another similarity between the two women is that in *O Pioneers!* Carl admits to Alexandra he knows "you belong to the land," while Ántonia's tells Jim, "I belong on a farm" (*OP* 307, *MA* 181). The farm in both cases represents each family's stability and shows their success in settling and establishing themselves within their community. Both women instill similar forms of stability within their family units and provide evidence of Cather's "reworking of the old story" of women's role in the immigration process from different perspectives (*OP* 307). Furthermore, Ántonia's oldest daughter, who is married and has a child of her own, exemplifies the prospects for the success of the American-born children and future generations. In depicting women who play a crucial role in the development of the prairie, Cather's novels reveal gender patterns that compare to those of her historian contemporaries and are confirmed by more recent historians like Riley, Rumbaut, and Sollors.

Education

In *My Ántonia*, formal education is a luxury for both genders in the process of Americanization and not an option for most of the immigrant characters. However, informal learning provides an opportunity for immigrants to acquire the essential skills they need for farming and housekeeping in the United States. In contrast to Ántonia's informal education, Jim is an example of a person who has the luxury of learning and acquiring a formal education. As Rabin points out that education provided opportunities and was considered a "path to Americanization," while at the same time "learning for its own sake [was] a luxury" and not always a possibility for immigrants (36-37).

Jim represents the white middle-class American who has the luxury of formal education; as Rabin points out, his "family can afford for him to spend his days at school," both financially and because he was not needed to work the farm (37). At first, he attends the "country school" and later at the age of thirteen his grandparents move with him to town so he can continue his education (81). Even though little is said about Jim's education before he goes to college, from time to time, we are reminded that while "the hired girls" are working, he is at school or studying. Formal education in the novel reflects the characters' social status and whether or not they are fully Americanized and accepted in the Black Hawk society.

Much as Jim represents the middle-class American, the Bohemian Anton Jelinek represents immigrants who tried to get some form of formal education. Anton, in his twenties, worked on his homestead during the farming season but went to school in the winter "to learn English, along with the little children". He does not appear to be bothered by the age difference and tells Jim, "he had a nice 'lady-teacher' and that he liked to go to school" (61). Much like Anton, the hired girls also had to make choices about their education. Often the older girls

worked to allow their younger brothers and sisters the opportunity to have an education and to Americanize, just as Alexandra in *O Pioneers!* made it possible for Emil. This advantage for the younger siblings is also an example of families that have become more settled and have accomplished the process of transitioning.

While it is unclear if Ántonia ever had any formal education in Bohemia, throughout the novel she appears inquisitive and acquires an informal yet functional education. As Goldman points out, Cather's "most admired characters never stop trying to live richly … simply by remaining alert to the possibilities of learning" (164). Reading is an example of an aspect of Ántonia's informal education in the novel. When Jim and his Grandmother first visit the Shimerdas' farm, Mr. Shimerda insists that Mrs. Burden teach Ántonia to read. He gives Mrs. Burden a book with both the English and Bohemian alphabets and asks her to teach his daughter "with an earnestness which I [Jim] shall never forget" (21). Through Jim's use of the word "earnestness," he emphasizes the importance of education for the family.

Besides the example of reading, Jim observes, "Ántonia loved to help Grandmother in the kitchen and learn about cooking and housekeeping" (23). Jim points out that in addition to learning household skills, Ántonia and the hired girls have learned from the experiences of immigration and transition in the United States: they "learned so much from life, from poverty, from their mothers and grandmothers; …and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to a new" (109). Ántonia's further informal learning at the Harlings provides the foundation for the skills she later passes on to her daughters.

In addition to helping Ántonia learn English and household skills, Mrs. Burden also tries unsuccessfully to help her acquire some formal education. Through Jim, she suggests that Ántonia go to school "at the sod school-house,'" because "there's a good teacher, and you'd

learn a lot'". His grandmother recognizes that Ántonia is intelligent and feels that formal education would be good for her (70). Mrs. Burden's good intentions reflect Bourne's argument that education provided for immigrants is intended to Americanize them. This "Americanization [is] to take place only on our own terms," that is, on American's terms and not in a way acceptable or possible for many immigrants (2). Jim's grandmother appears to want Ántonia to adopt white middle-class customs and values through education. However, Ántonia's claim "'I ain't got time to learn'" suggests that besides the need for her to work on the farm, the conditions are not right for her to move forward in the process of Americanization. Her crying about Grandmother Burden's request indicates that although she does not have the luxury to go to school, she understands she is missing out on something important (70). Ántonia's staying at home to help is similar to the situation of the older Bergson children in *O Pioneers!,* and to the patterns described by Hansen and Handlin indicating that formal education was less crucial to immigrants than the need for children to help on the farm.

Later in the novel, when Ántonia has a family of her own, she shows that she understands that formal education will eventually help her children. However, she finds it equally important that they understand their Bohemian heritage and language. Jim relates that, similar to Anton Jelinek, all the Cuzak children will eventually go to school to learn English (177). At the same time, Jim observes that the boys are learning farming skills and the girls' good housekeeping, following traditional gender roles. Comparable to the Swedish girls working and learning in Alexandra's kitchen, Ántonia's daughters are an example that the third-generation immigrant girls are still earning Old World housekeeping skills as a means to get by.

Through the informal cultural education she gives her children, Ántonia and her family represent an exception to Hansen's claim, in his book, that the second-generation will have

forgotten the morals, values, and cultural baggage of the Old World (150). The Cuzaks represent a variation on the pattern that immigrants first cut off the links with the Old World before they can settle in the United States. Ántonia, in contrast, is not ashamed but embraces her heritage and Jim's story shows her children do as well. This pride in her past is in direct contrast to Alexandra's brothers in *O Pioneers!*, Lou and Oscar, who attempt unsuccessfully to hide their foreignness by speaking English with an accent.

Language

More than education, language was an essential element in defining immigrants and in the process of Americanization. The immigrants' native language and English are juxtaposed and symbolic of one of the patterns in the process of Americanization. The better that immigrants spoke and understood English, the easier it was for them to adapt to their new society and surroundings. At the same time, there were variations in the opportunities to learn English, depending on the immigrants' needs and situation. At the beginning of the novel, Jim emphasizes how important it is for Ántonia to learn English to help her family. Jim recalls that when the Shimerdas arrived they "could not speak enough English to ask for advice or even to make their most pressing wants known" (18). As Rabin puts it, "[o]ne index of Americanization which Cather highlights in the novel is language". "The need to learn the language is essential on a practical level, [but] it is also important symbolically" in the process of Americanization (36). Language plays an important role in the process of transition for the whole Shimerda family. As McFarland explains, "[t]he plight of the Shimerdas" is partly a result of the fact they are "ignorant of the language" (42).

While several of the historians discussed point out that women spoke English less because they were often isolated on the farm and therefore did not integrate socially, this is not

the case with many of the female characters in Cather's two novels. Jim notices how quickly Mrs. Shimerda picks up English: "[t]he woman had a quick ear, and caught up phrases whenever she heard English" (47). Learning to speak English enables Ántonia to communicate and learn from those around her in a way that is similar to Hansen's and Handlin's description of pioneer men learning the language needed for learning about American farming. Jim explains how Ántonia takes on a man's role in acquiring information when he explains "she could speak enough English to ask me a great many questions about what our men were doing in the fields" and "she seemed to think" that by understanding what the men were doing, "she might get valuable secrets" (69). That Ántonia sees this information as valuable secrets' suggests her awareness of its importance as well as the benefit of being able to speak English to acquire farming information. Although the patterns to explain immigrants' acquisition of English differ between *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!,* learning English in both novels shows the importance of language in the process of Americanization.

Jim also compares Ántonia's English proficiency and her ability to adapt and assimilate into American culture with those of Lena Lingard. Ántonia ultimately retains much of her Bohemian heritage and language and resembles Bourne's cultural "half-breed," while Lena integrates into American society. Her clothing and language show her awareness of how to integrate and assimilate by speaking conventional English. First, in town, Lena stands out and the young men of Black Hawk are interested in her and other immigrant girls, for "their beauty shone out boldly against a conventional background" (111). Later, when Jim is a student at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and meets Lena, he is impressed by the change she has undergone. "She was so quietly conventionalized by city clothes that I might have passed her on the street without seeing her" (143).

Furthermore, Jim claims that Lena's English proficiency is better than Ántonia's because "Lena had picked up all the conventional expressions she heard" (151). Jim's repeated use of the word "conventional" implies that Lena is aware of what she needs to do to integrate and has adopted the way things are done and said in American society. The attention he gives to Lena's adaptations suggests that he approves of her and her assimilation into American society. In contrast, Ántonia has not assimilated into mainstream society. Jim recognizes that "Ántonia had never talked like the people about her. Even after she learned to speak English readily, there was always something impulsive and foreign about her speech" (151). Her character represents Handlin's view that immigrants' "English bore a heavy accent" (216).

Much like in *O Pioneers!,* in *My Ántonia* language is an example of a pattern defining immigrants. Patterns of language acquisition show that some immigrant women held on to Old World ways while others adapted and integrated into American society. Alexandra and Ántonia appear to do both. They continue to use their native language in the home while respecting the need to speak English out in the community. While it is unclear how good their English was, they understood its importance in the process of Americanization. According to Hansen, the problems of the immigrants disappeared as they "accommodated themselves and reconciled themselves to the surrounding world of society" (Hansen,"Third"496). Cather provides examples of both those that did accommodate like Lena and those that retained their native culture and language even into the second-generation, as do Ántonia and Anton Cuzak.

When years later Jim visits the Cuzak family, his repeated and detailed references to the fact that the family speak Bohemian and not English, which he does not see as a negative thing, enhance the otherness of the family. His details about hearing "a language I had not heard for a long while" and his use of the term "their rich old language" shows respect for their native

language and culture (174,184). Cuzak provides an example of the duality represented through language. At one point Jim remembers, "from politeness he spoke English," and at another moment he "delivered messages in the tongue he spoke fluently" (188). His use of English with Jim indicates that Anton understands the importance of English in the integration and socialization process when outside the family.

Furthermore, in contrast to Hansen's argument that the second-generation is "in a most uncomfortable situation," the Cuzak children respect the immigrant past of their parents and even consider themselves immigrants and appear comfortable with their situation (Hansen,"Third"494). In his book, Hansen also argues, "[a]s long as any community retained its own language amalgamation with American social life was impossible" (203). In *My Ántonia*, the Cuzak family forms a community and appears to understand that the outside world is different and yet seem uninterested in blending in with others. They all take pride in their cultural identity, living peacefully alongside others, and exhibiting Bourne's vision of the United States as a "federation of cultures" (8).

Ántonia highlights her lack of integration towards the end of the novel. She admits to Jim, "'I've forgot my English so. I don't often talk it anymore'" (177). In *O Pioneers!* Alexandra's Bohemian neighbor Frank Shabata's forgetting English is depicted negatively and indicates his failure to transition and become rooted. In Ántonia's case, Jim represents her not as a failure; by identifying with her native culture and language, she is depicted as a successful wife and mother. Through her use of the Bohemian language and cultural values, she creates harmony, stability, and rootedness in her family. Jim suggests that she is leaving it up to the next generation to complete the process of Americanization. In his view, "she was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" (186). In both *O Pioneers!,* and *My Ántonia*, Cather shows her

appreciation for the richness of the foreign languages as well as the need for the immigrants to keep the Old World traditions alive in the New World.

Jim Burden's manuscript, with his sometimes idealistic and romantic memories of Ántonia, pays tribute to immigrants and shows the complexities of the process of settling the Nebraskan prairie as seen through the eyes of a native-born American. While writing about her views on fiction, Cather's description of the writer as "the artist"" "his vision is blurred by the memory of old delights he would like to remember" is both suggestive of her use of her own memories in writing and the limitations of Jim's narration of the story of Ántonia (103-104). In *My Ántonia*, there is evidence of patterns in relation to various generations within the family unit, gender, education, and language. Through Cather's representation of the process of transition, she expands on historians' ideas and shows that there were also variations to the patterns of adaptation, depending on immigrants' situations during the process of Americanization. As Sollors points out, "works of ethnic literature … may thus be read not only as expressions of mediation between cultures but also as a handbook of socialization into the codes of Americanness" (7).

Conclusion

Set at the end of the nineteenth century, Willa Cather's prairie novels, *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* portray immigrants as they attempt to deal with the confusions and complexities of settling on the Nebraska prairie. In comparing Cather's detailed representation of the immigrant experience with the findings of the early twentieth-century historians, I have tried to show that her depiction of immigrants' lives to some extent corresponds with the generational patterns of cultural adaptation identified by Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin. In addition, Turner's essay offers a starting point in understanding the influences of the immigrant movement west on the development of the prairie. In my analysis of the four factors that play a role in het immigrant characters' ability to adapt to life in the prairie, I have found that her characters show similar patterns as, and provide insight into, the experiences of their historical counterparts during the process of Americanization.

Similar to Hansen and Handlin's examples, the novels portray the struggles of each generation as they adapted to American society and culture. In *O Pioneers!* Mr. Bergson, a first-generation immigrant, is willing yet unable to adapt completely to the new conditions, but he dies knowing his children, particularly his daughter Alexandra, will ultimately establish themselves successfully. On the other hand, Mr. Shimerdas in *My Ántonia* is unable to understand and adjust to the ways of the New World and ultimately gives up and commits suicide.

Like the historical immigrants Hansen and Handlin have studied, the second-generation characters in the novels represent the need to find a balance between continuing with the Old World ways and adapting to the needs of the New World in order to succeed. Cather contrasts the older children's experiences of growing up to those of younger siblings who have no

memories of their family's past. Alexandra, an example of an older child, is, aware she must adapt and learn new skills, but she also continues to embrace her cultural heritage, which offers her emotional support. Her brothers Oscar and Lou, in contrast, attempt to distance themselves from their immigrant past yet do not entirely adjust to American society and culture either, thus resembling Bourne's "half breeds". Their youngest brother, Emil, represents the younger siblings, born in the United States, with no understanding of the challenges of immigration. While the early immigrant historians argue that the second-generation turns away from their cultural identity, Cather's Alexandra and Ántonia embrace their cultural heritages as it defines their actions and success. In contrast, Lena in *My Ántonia* is an example of a second-generation immigrant whose foreignness completely disappears as she assimilates into American society.

Cather's character Milly, Oscar's daughter, is a third-generation immigrant, whose interest in her Swedish heritage confirms Hansen's observation that the third-generation takes responsibility for preserving their cultural heritage. However, Lou's sons represent a variation of this pattern because they are not connected to their cultural heritage detected by historians. In *My Ántonia* Cather also deviates from the generational patterns in cultural adaptation: Ántonia's children, the third-generation, have not integrated into American society and consider themselves Bohemian. These variations on how different generations integrated expand on Handlin's view of the complications and duality of life for the second- and third-generation.

Whereas the four historians focus predominantly on the role of men in the process of settling the prairie, Cather acknowledges the importance of the role of women as mothers, wives, and children. Her portrayal of both Alexandra and Ántonia as strong women who are ultimately successful on their farms focusses on their ability to combine the values and traditions of the Old World with their roles as integrated and accepted members of society.

Cather's representation of the role of education in the process of Americanization is comparable to Hansen and Handlin's historical patterns. Both novels emphasize that, in the first place, it was of greater importance for the older children to labor on the farm than to acquire a formal education. Although Cather does not deal extensively with the formal education of her immigrant characters, her descriptions of various characters' learning experiences suggest that both formal and informal education played an essential role in the process on Americanization. Alexandra learns from her father and later through her own experiences, as shown during her trip to visit other farming communities. Ántonia acquires skills in both housekeeping and English from Mrs. Burden. In contrast, Alexandra's youngest brother Emil is an example of an Americanized character who, like the native-born Jim in *My Ántonia,* had the luxury of a formal education.

According to Bourne, Hansen, and Handlin, it was mainly first-generation men who had the opportunity to learn English in order to understand local farming needs. Many of Cather's female immigrant characters, however, speak English well. Jim's description of how easy and quickly Ántonia learns English and how even Mrs. Shimerda is able to quickly pick up phrases she hears shows that these women's developed good English skills. Frank Shabata, in contrast, loses what English he has learned reflecting his inability to Americanize. Cather appears to use immigrants' level of English as a measurement to show the degree to which they complete the process of Americanization.

Willa Cather was aware of the challenges immigrants faced and displays fictional interpretations of their struggles insightfully. This thesis has shown that there are significant similarities between the ways and degrees that the various generations of Cather's immigrant characters adapt to American culture and those of their historical counterparts studied by the

three historians. In addition, in focusing on female protagonists and characters, Cather represents the vital role of immigrant (and native-born) women in the settlement and development of the Midwest, a topic that is mostly neglected by her contemporary historians. Moreover, Cather's novels suggest that the adaptation patterns are more variable and complex than those proposed by the early immigrant historians.

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