

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After making the analysis, the thesis writer concludes how Willa Cather represents herself in her main characters, Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye, in her novel, *My Mortal Enemy*. Myra Henshawe represents Willa Cather's mature self. Myra stands as the reflection of Willa who has undergone many ups and downs in life. She has moved out from her hometown to struggle and live an independent life in the city. She has learned about hardships and triumphs in life. She has explored both failure and success and everything that comes in between. She is the reflection of the well-experienced novelist, both in life-events and spiritual contemplation. Nellie Birdseye, on the other hand, is the reflection of the novelist's past self. She is the representation of Willa Cather's youth. Though young and naïve, she is intelligent, brave, honest, and eager to learn. The representations of Myra and Nellie show the past and present self of Willa Cather at the time she wrote the novel. The intimate friendship between Myra and Nellie points out that these two characters are actually the two images of the novelist's inner self which are entwined to one another. Myra is the result of the maturity process, while Nellie is the person Willa used to be before she underwent the process of maturity.

Through Myra and Nellie, Willa Cather expresses her pioneer spirit, depicting the two women as strong female characters who would stand tall through the difficulties and challenges in life. Through Myra, especially, Willa depicts her

spiritual search and strong, domineering character. Through Nellie, she reflects her youthful intelligence and eagerness to confront and subdue the challenges in life. Through both, she conveys her disappointment of the growing materialism, the declining morality, and the fast-pacing mechanization and technology post World War I, which change the face of the world, making the society a much colder, more competitive, less co-operative and less comfortable place to live in.

Willa Cather expresses her opinions and ideas of life in her characters. In Nellie (her past), she conveys her former opinion that love is wonderful and ideal. People who love one another should be happy in their marriage for the rest of their lives. She is very optimistic of the future and has high hopes for success. She believes that people should follow the calling of their hearts to find ultimate satisfaction. She is willing to struggle for making her dreams come true – which is an obvious trait of a pioneer woman.

However, after undergoing the process toward maturity, Willa expresses her opinion through Myra (her present) that love is not as wonderful as most people imagine it to be. It contains many flaws and disappointments. Love, as most people regards it, is actually the mask of the id's desire for sexual fulfillment. In reality viewed by the ego, people cannot truly be happy in their marriage. In that case, Willa (through Myra) states her opinion that it is better for people to remain unmarried than to hurt and destroy one another in marriage. That is why she prefers friendship than marriage. Willa believes that friendship is purer and more lasting than marriage. It is more worthy to be trusted and the bond will not expire though one has deceased. Through Myra, Willa also expresses her point of view

that – though in her younger days she would struggle to gain success and money – money is not everything. There are more things of greater importance than money. Money can buy people protection and comfort, but it cannot bring happiness or satisfaction. In the end, knowing the deepest part of one's self is the point that counts the most. Living in a refined superego helps people to finally understand what the most important things in life really are. Happiness and peace can only be obtained through reconciling one's self with God. Willa shows this through Myra's last struggle with the power of death consuming her from within (her mortal enemy) before she finally passes away. Willa wants to point out that, at the last step of every person's life, it is not money, love, or friendship that matters the most, but the redemption of one's soul through reconciliation with God. This is Willa Cather's religious point of view expressed in the inner struggle of her main character.

The thesis writer also sees that Myra and Nellie's way of thinking and way of life are also influenced by the society. Their superegos are shaped up by the society in which they were raised. The two characters were brought up in the country, and both were nurtured in the way of the West. This also represents Willa Cather's former life, where she grew up among the pioneers. Her father was also a pioneer. He started his business from zero to success. The way of the West is the way of the pioneers. Willa was brought up among the pioneers, where she learnt of the pioneers' traits: courage, struggle, sensitivity to the land, adolescent restlessness, etc. She reflects it in her main characters, depicting them as women of great motivation and determination, who would struggle through any hardship

to reach their final aim. Although Willa then moved to the city, as do her characters, and was influenced by urbanity, the former traits never disappeared from her inner mind. Just like Myra and Nellie who are exposed to city life and have learnt of the urban way of living but never forget the ways of their people back in the West, Willa points out that the values, norms, and spirit implanted in a child's mind and heart through his/her first education at home can never disappear. As a matter of fact, it is the root of one's personality. Though life can go on, people may move from one place to another and get their minds and opinions influenced by the society in which they live, it is that initiate values the parents and family plant in their soul which last. In the end, when they reach down into their inner self, they will find that the initiate values are there, implanted in their superego – it is their root. It can never be abolished, though many times forgotten. Willa Cather has moved from one place to another, lived her life as a Western girl, a teacher, a journalist, and a novelist. Now, when she looks back, she realizes that after so many experiences, after so many times she changes communities, through all the twists and turns in life, she knows that the pioneer woman inside her is the root of her entire being. Careers, social circles, economic condition, and neighborhood may change, but the pioneer traits implanted in her by her parents can never change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY