

## **A LOST LADY: A NARRATIVE OF “MANIFEST DESTINY” AND NEOCOLONIALISM**

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### **Abstract**

The greatly examined story of *A Lost Lady* usually depicts Mrs. Forrester's success in meeting and adapting to the challenges of a changing world, a world characterized by materialism and self-fulfilment. However, the overlooked story, one far more disturbing than the privileged story in the text, is the narrative of oppressed groups of people of other races and the lower class. Drawing on some aspects of postcolonial theory, this paper explores Willa Cather's own reactions to real changes in her society, to the waning power of imperialism, and of her nostalgic longing for the western prairies of her youth, without showing any sympathy for the dispossessed Native Americans and other oppressed races. It will also disclose the unmistakable colonial overtones, which remarkably resonate with the common discourse of “Manifest Destiny” during the time period of American expansion to the Wild West.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Imperialism, Manifest Destiny, Neocolonialism, Postcolonialism

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### **Power and Discourse: Lost Lady as Myth**

The relation between power and discourse is manifest in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923). Cather is involved in discursive practices that enable her to exercise power over her readers and her voiceless characters. She idealizes a predominant culture that enacted and legitimized its colonial practices in texts and speeches. She adopts the language of those in power during the American pioneers' era to affect the mentalities of her readers. Cather mythologizes the frontiersmen of the Wild West as "great-hearted," and "courteous" despite the historical fact that such men dispossessed and displaced indigenous people. Moreover, she ignores the history of the "Indian's" displacement despite their presence being greater in number than the pioneers.

Cather's 1923 novel *A Lost Lady* tells the story of a wealthy and prominent family, the Forresters who, after running a successful railroad construction business, goes through financial hardship and decline in social status. It is set at the end of the nineteenth century in the small town of Sweet Water, Nebraska. The story is narrated by Niel Herbert, a young man who admires the Forresters, especially Mrs. Forrester, who is older than him, and much younger than her elderly husband, Captain Daniel Forrester. Niel feels sympathy for the Forresters and decides to assist them in their financial crisis and provide care for the ailing Mr. Forrester. Niel observes that Mrs. Forrester becomes another woman after her husband's death, and he concludes that she is a lost lady.

### **Literature Review: Cather and Native Americans**

Wendy K. Perriman (2009) has attempted to recover Cather from the pro-colonial voice manifested in *A Lost Lady*. Perriman asserts that the novel appears to examine "the plight of the Plains Indians ... through the medium of dance" and through the Forresters' sympathy with "the dying race" (pp. 137-138). However, Perriman's argument is problematic because it is based on historical allusions irrelevant to Cather's intended meaning. Perriman's approach invests her textual analysis with a short-lived plausibility. She affirms that Cather made reference to "the Ghost Dance" to demonstrate her sympathy with the displaced Native Americans. According to Perriman, the Ghost Dance is important to Cather because of its spiritual power to rescue the Great Sioux from their sufferings in the late 19th century (p. 136).

However, Cather did not make this reference to the Ghost Dance in *A Lost Lady*, only in an earlier short story entitled “Tommy, the Unsentimental.” Moreover, Cather’s reference to the Ghost Dance in the story could imply anything but a sign of sympathy with the displaced Sioux. Cather notes: “They just came down like the wolf on the fold. It sounded like the approach of a ghost dance” (as cited in Perriman, 2009, p.136). This analogy portrays the spiritual power of the Sioux as a vicious intruder who invades a place where they have no right to be. Cather compares the process of rescuing the victim to a wolf penetrating a sheepfold to attack them.

Other critics suggest that Cather was indifferent to the historical plight of Native Americans in a number of her works. To illustrate, Janis Stout (2000) notes that Cather ignores the history of Native American displacement in all her midwestern and southwestern novels and considers it “a major distortion” (p. 157). Similarly, Mike Fischer (1990) notes the absence of Native Americans in *My Antonia* and declares that Cather’s writing seems to justify and purify the conquest of the Native Americans. He argues that Cather deliberately overlooks the dispossession and displacement of the “Indians” because such people and contexts do not “accommodate her textual strategy” (p. 32). Later, Joseph Urgo (1995) declares Cather’s acceptance of America’s imperial stance. Even many years before Fischer and Urgo, Sharon O’Brein (1987) asserts that Cather’s writing is itself an act of colonization. She suggests that Cather herself was aware of this connection: “at times Cather described the writer’s relationship to both reader and subject as a drama of dominance and submission ... if the artist were a conqueror or a warrior, then the reader was his colonized subject” (p. 151). Recently, Astrid Haas (2012) has examined Cather’s celebration of the socio-cultural benefits of U.S.-American annexation of the Southwest in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. The novel defames Mexican Padre Martínez and alludes to the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, by which the United States obtained territory from the Mexicans.

### **Lost Lady as a Cultural Shift in Colonial History**

Although *A Lost Lady* is tinged with colonial and neo-colonial overtones, most critiques of the novel have shied away from exploring the colonial voice of Willa Cather. Sally Harvey (1995) notes that Cather is aware of the importance of the shift from the old culture to the new one, and that an adaptation to a shift is needed. According to

Harvey, Cather seems to embrace the new culture of personality through which an "American Dream of self-fulfilment" is achieved. Harvey also discusses how Cather, through Marian Forrester, demonstrates the dreamer's spirits of the pioneer in action, just as her husband, Captain Forrester, represented that spirit for an earlier time (Harvey, 1995, pp. 70-71). Mrs. Forrester successfully meets and adapts to the challenges of a changing world, a world characterized by materialism and self-fulfilment.

But Cather was discomfited by this new culture that valued materialism over the heroism of the past in America. By 1929, electrification increased which resulted in a wider availability of consumer goods and new mechanical devices at home. According to Stout (2000), Cather was not comfortable with this increased availability of household products. In her letters, Cather noted that the telephone always interrupted her work and that she "would go out and use a telephone elsewhere in the afternoon ... she was keeping her telephone number secret" (p. 194). Obviously, Cather was disturbed by the new culture in which materialism greatly prevails. This disturbance is clearly expressed in *A Lost Lady*. Stout calls Cather's work "dark" and "concerned with the severing of the present and future from the past" (p. 187). Although the novel is about Cather's reactions to real changes in her society, and her nostalgic longing for the western prairies of her youth, she records her feelings about the past and her reaction to the present by employing a discourse that has nuanced colonial overtones. Her novel perpetuates the colonial discourse common in 19<sup>th</sup> century America by romanticizing the pioneers of the Wild West and blocking the voice of indigenous people.

Historically speaking, colonialism had different forms and shapes in different parts of the world. But, according to Ania Loomba (1998), it was identical in locking "the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history." She asserts that colonialism is "the conquest and control of other people's land and goods." It is a widespread phenomenon in human history by which stronger countries dominate weaker ones. In other words, colonialism is not merely specific to the expansion of European powers into several parts of the world (p. 8). According to Loomba, colonialism aims to form and reform communities by involving different kinds of practices such as warfare, plunder, enslavement, negotiation, and genocide. Employing benevolent and noble discourse like "The White

Man's Burden" in justifying colonialism, Europe created the economic imbalance that was essential for its capitalist and industrial growth. It is colonialism that led to the birth of European capitalism; without it, capitalism could not have been realized in Europe (p. 10).

The US version of colonialism, which was driven by a religiously rooted awareness of "Manifest Destiny," was the midwife that helped give birth to the capitalist economy of the United States. This unique form of colonialism was the means through which U.S. capitalism achieved its expansion to the western plains. For instance, the discovery of gold in 1848 in California motivated hungry businessmen and politicians to fulfil the notion of Manifest Destiny. As European Americans moved westward, railroad construction companies were established to open the western plains and connect the east coast to California. New industries emerged such as electrical power, telegraphy, and steel manufacturing. This industrial growth transformed American society in that it produced a new class of wealthy people, referred to as the capitalist class, and a prosperous middle class.

Notably, racism facilitated the expansion of U.S. colonial capitalism to the Wild West. It was the conduit through which the land and natural resources of the indigenous people were appropriated. The notion of Manifest Destiny linked American national identity to "an elaborate racial hierarchy" in which the white race was supreme (Ostler, 2004, p. 38). Since racism preceded Darwinism, which first appeared in 1859, the idea of Manifest Destiny did not have to wait for Darwin to make its appearance. Indeed, American expansionists had already called upon racial destiny many years before Darwin published his theory. Referring to a speech by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton in 1846, Jeffrey Ostler (2004) argues that the notion of Manifest Destiny was a racialized ideology. In his speech, Benton justifies why the "White race" has the obligation "to subdue and replenish the earth." He explains that "of all the world's races, only the white race had obeyed God's command" to fill the earth with life. In obedience to His "great command," "Whites" expanded their powers into different parts of the world and then to the "New World," where the "Red Race" "disappeared from the Atlantic coast" and had to meet "extinction" because they "resisted civilization." Benton predicted that Manifest Destiny would extend its influence beyond its continental

boundaries into the Pacific and Caribbean basins. Ostler concludes that Benton's speech tells "a history and future of intentional acts of genocide and ethnocide" (pp. 38 -39).

### ***A Lost Lady as the Silencing of Voices***

While many believe that Cather's *A Lost Lady* describes the triumph of the new materialistic civilization over the heroism of the past in America, the novel also blocks Native American voices from confronting or questioning Captain Forrester's integrity as celebrated by Cather. Generally, Cather disregards the history of Native American displacement in all her midwestern and southwestern novels. According to Stout (2000), "To ignore them and to ignore the history of their displacement in novels that avow their historical foundation is a major distortion. Indeed, Cather can well be seen as the lyrical voice of Manifest Destiny" (p. 157). She likely knew what was happening to the natives, yet she continues to praise the pioneers rather than, implicitly or explicitly, showing any sympathy for the dispossessed natives. This major distortion of history in Cather's novels suggests her sympathy with the American Imperialism of occupying and annexing of Native American land. While she was writing *A Lost Lady*, Cather, whether consciously or unconsciously, seemed to invest great effort in covering up the wrongs of the pioneers through presenting them to her modern readers as the most ideal example of moral people. She is not always objective, mythologizing the pioneers, through the words of Niel Herbert, as being "great-hearted," "generous," "unpractical," and "courteous" (p. 102). She also expresses regret over earlier times and the end of the pioneers who had been, she says, "strong in attack but weak in defence, who could conquer but could not hold" (p. 102). So, Cather uses the language of heroes, and heartily celebrates the "higher moral law" of the pioneers despite their shameful, yet indirect, role in dispossessing and displacing Native Americans.

Cather spent her late-childhood and adolescent years not in the south, where she had been born, but in Nebraska, where her family moved to Catherton in 1883. The family moved to Red Cloud, amid the mid-western prairie land. This land had been recently snatched from Native Americans when she moved there. She was at first homesick and felt very lonely, but soon came to love her new home:

"So the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn the shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion that I have never been able

to shake. It has been the happiness and the curse of my life” (as cited in Woodress, 1987, p.36).

So, it brought her great happiness, yet she was more likely to know what had happened to Native Americans with regard to their cruel treatment by the US government. Cather, however, chose to focus her narrative upon praising the pioneers rather than, implicitly or explicitly, showing some sympathy for the natives, who are barely mentioned.

By erasing the Native presence from her narrative, Cather is perhaps denying indigenous people their rights to keep their own lands or express how unjustly they are treated. Cather’s exclusion of “Indians” from *A Lost Lady* resonates with the Congress legislation in 1871, which declares that, “no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty” (Ryser, 2012, p. 54). However, the pioneers broke these treaties when gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1875, forcing the Sioux to be shifted and reduced in number. Stout (2000) links the presence of the European migrants and immigrants Cather admired and the absence, both from the plains and from her novel, of Native Americans to the emergence of railroads, “one of the most powerful forces in the process of immigration into the Midwest” (p. 159). Cather perhaps lived at a time and in a culture that had its assumptions and beliefs about morality, which never question people like Captain Forrester who was involved in the mistreatment of “Indians.” These assumptions embraced by Cather are greatly displayed in *A Lost Lady*. For instance, during Cather’s lifetime, Social Darwinism was at its height and was put in the service of imperial ambitions. It calls for “the survival of the fittest,” and according to Raymond Williams (2005), the weaker or less able race “should not be artificially preserved” (p. 88). Thus, Herbert Spencer’s theory increased the belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Similarly, by ignoring the history of Native Americans, Cather holds that the natives are the unfit who cannot survive, nor they should be artificially preserved.

The novel centres upon the Forresters, who could be described as part of American colonial history. However, Cather depicts Captain Forrester as being a man of integrity, while he clearly stole land from the natives. He builds his future home on “an

Indian encampment" (p. 50), and later acquired "a splendid land from the Indians" (p. 117). This seems to be a blind spot for Cather who does not appear to see that "Indians" too have rights. Through Captain Forrester, Cather conceals imperial motives, and violent annexation of indigenous people's lands by the American empire, in the language of the American dream:

All our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteader's and the prospector's and the contractor's. We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water. All these things will be everyday facts to the coming generation, but to us— Captain Forrester ended with a sort of grunt. Something forbidding had come into his voice, the lonely, defiant note that is so often heard in the voices of old Indians. (p. 53)

For the Captain, to dream is to take things whether by force or by peace. Imperialism, in the context of both the construction of Burlington railroads and his home on an "Indian" land, is "an accomplished fact" (Gustake, 2008, p. 65). In contrast, Ivy Peters steps in and takes over the land, at first leasing some and then taking it over completely. This is seen in negative terms, despite it being a financial arrangement, rather than stealing. Charmion Gustke (2008) claims that Cather employs "the fact of Native American dislocation in Nebraska" to criticize the presence of the American empire on the frontier. She claims that Cather deliberately interrupted the Captain's "romantic musings" by including "the lonely" echoes of "old Indians" (p. 65). This inclusion, however, is merely meant to stress how inevitable it is that the old culture submits to the new. The important point is that Cather is not comfortable seeing the Western European culture no longer dominant in the newly diverse and multicultural America.

### **The White Man's Burden**

Cather continues the legacy of the White Man's Burden and exemplifies its truthfulness. Written by the British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899, "The White Man Burden" persuades the U.S. to play an imperial role, as British and other European nations did, during the Philippine-American War by placing Puerto Rico, Guam, Cuba, and the Philippines under American control (Schedlock & Patton, 2012, p. 15). The notion of the White Man's Burden entails that the white race has the moral duty to take care of the other races of mankind. Commenting on Kipling's poem, Edward Said argues:



“Behind the White Man’s mask of amiable leadership there is always the express willingness to use force [...] What dignifies his mission is some sense of intellectual dedication; he is a White Man, but not for mere profit, since his “chosen star” presumably sits far above earthly gain” (Said, 1979, p. 226).

Through Captain Forrester, Cather illustrates how the pioneers are dedicated to their moral duty of taking care of the non-White people, the less fortunate, even if this dedication leads to their destruction. After his bank goes bankrupt, the captain, as “a man of honor,” “strips himself down,” and pays all the money back to its depositors. Although some of the depositors are Poles and Swedes, there is also a crowd of Mexicans who Judge Pommeroy, “upon [his] honor,” recognizes as being helpless. Cather uses her writing authority to present Mexican voices in states of fear and beseeching the Captain’s generous assistance: “A lot of them couldn't speak English,--seemed like the only English word they knew was 'Forrester.' As we went in and out we'd hear the Mexicans saying, 'Forrester, Forrester’” (p. 87). It is tormenting for Judge Pommeroy to see that the Captain takes up the burden of another race of mankind by selling everything he owns to compensate their losses.

Because of the colonialist ideology of both the Judge and the Captain, who believe in their own superiority over the Mexicans, they are aware of the Mexicans’ dependency on them. By 1848, the U.S. had snatched what is today Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Utah, and California from Mexico. Supposing the superiority of their race, the whites had the obligation to expand from ocean to ocean to civilize the Mexicans, the Native Americans and to seize their territories by using superior force (Zinn, 2005, pp. 149 -169). These Mexicans in the novel are either colonized or displaced from their lands by the pioneers. The annexation of their lands and their displacement bring economic success and security for Captain Forrester while establishing economic dependency between the Captain and the Mexicans. Cather illustrates a relationship in which the existence of the colonized is dependent on the colonizer and the colonizer’s gain is dependent on the colonized. However, she does not only illustrate that the notion of the White Man’s Burden suggests uplifting the colonized. Cather also takes one step further to exemplify that the colonizer is ready to destroy himself for the sake of the colony’s security and sustenance.

Indeed, Cather paints a positive image of the pioneers when Captain Forrester returns home in financial ruin after his bank has failed. Because he had felt an obligation to the clients of his bank, "he stood firm that not one of the depositors should lose a dollar" (p. 86). This obligation to rescue the depositors demonstrates a sense of colonial "noblesse oblige," a concept belonging to an idealized time when privileged people had a duty to care and act with generosity toward those less privileged. However, it did not extend to giving equal opportunities to all and, in the colonial context, it deemed it legitimate to control and manipulate colonial subjects as is clear from the way the Captain had treated Native Americans. So, Captain Forrester believes that he has a moral obligation to act with nobility toward those less privileged, such as Mexicans, whose first language is not English and whose skin is brown. But he has "to sell the mining stocks," a shady activity that first stemmed from the exploitation of the "Indians," to pay back his investors. The Captain pays for the depositors' loss, ruining himself both financially and physically. Cather is utilizing a colonial discourse in which she polishes the image of the colonizers and reinforces their superiority. For instance, she hides the atrocious history of people like Captain Forrester and Judge Pommeroy, while predominately presenting them as moralists. Cather only presents the Mexicans as the object of discourse through which Captain Forrester sustains his superior image.

### **The Mythic Pioneer: the construction of race, exploitation and gender**

Cather never stops presenting her readers with purer, yet mythic, images of the pioneers. She also demonstrates the racism of the people she always admires throughout the novel while still believing in their kindness. While Captain Forrester pays for his integrity and for being loyal to his investors, "Judge Pommeroy's loyalty is demystified only by Cather's language." His servant, Black Tom, is a loyal servant, as told by Cather early in the novel; indeed, throughout the novel, Tom is portrayed as a good and faithful servant. But at one point, late in the story, Judge Pommeroy, the "honorable" judge, "also descends into unfaithfulness, on the very site of the presumably 'faithful' bond between his servant and himself" (Meisel, 2007, p. 177). Pommeroy of the purer, older West says, "The difference between a businessman and a scoundrel, was bigger than the difference between a white man and a nigger" (p. 88). Cather here never challenges the judge's denigration of his servant, who is less privileged, but also,

throughout the story, blocks his voice from telling readers whether Judge Pommeroy is really faithful to him or not.

As a matter of fact, Cather displays many of the stereotypes, and much of the ignorance and arrogance common in the views of most white people in the United States in the nineteenth century. She seems indifferent to such racism. Indeed, by idealizing people who believed in racial hierarchy and supremacy, Cather is clearly involved in producing a narrative of Western cultural dominance and white superiority. It was a common practice during the pioneers' era to identify the differences between the white race and other races. Cather seems to be influenced by the fact that Western science was allied with political power. White superiority was the means to colonize others. To justify this superiority, Western science in the eighteenth century had been involved in debating differences in skin colour for centuries. The debate had been revolving around whether blackness was a product of environment or a "sign of sinfulness." Instead of rejecting earlier suppositions about the inferiority of other races, scientists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to defend such inferiority. Out of prejudice, scientists suggested that the skin color of specific races could not change even if its members moved to a different location. Thus, other races were biologically different and immutably inferior (Loomba, 1998, p. 62). This biological difference also entailed inferiority in manners and mores. Although Black Tom is a "loyal" and faithful servant, he is compared to "a scoundrel," not because he is immoral but because he is not white. This is a myth that Cather is blinded by.

Colonialist ideology always creates a social hierarchy and makes great efforts to maintain it. The colonizers are at the top rung of the social ladder, while the colonized occupy the bottom rungs of the ladder. In the case of Black Tom, his inferior status is primarily based on his race. Stout (2000) asserts that the colonizing culture that Cather admires treats Tom as "an appendage" and "a functionary," who must be pressed into the service of his racist masters (p. 223). Indeed, both Mrs. Forrester and Niel ask Judge Pommeroy to "lend" them Tom in order to serve them. For the pioneers, Tom, despite his "unscrupulous soul," is biologically perfect for particular tasks accomplished under conditions of servitude. Since the pioneers colonized and dispossessed Native Americans, it is more likely that they adopted Ernest Renan's ideology of racial differences. Renan believed that "Nature has made a race of workers ... a race of tillers

of the soil, the Negro," and "a race of masters and soldiers, the European race ... Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well" (as cited in Loomba, 1998, p. 109). Tom's masters are "well" and happy as long as he is available to serve them, but the wellness and happiness of Forrester's family are gone after they lose their proper social standing. Cather is sad for the Forresters to lose their "predestined superiority" and insensitive to Tom's inferiority.

Exploitation is a major theme in the novel, but the way it is demonstrated is questionable. Cather depicts Ivy Peters as the novel's villain who was behind the decline of the good Old West, despite the fact that he is not worse than Captain Forrester and Judge Pommeroy, considering the possibility that both men are complicit in exploiting the "Indians." Ivy Peters rents the "meadow-land on the Forrester place," and drains "the old marsh and [puts] it into wheat" (p. 100). Later, he becomes the owner of the Forresters' properties. This is seen in negative terms, despite the fact that it was a financial arrangement, the normal way of doing business, rather than cheating and stealing. However, Ivy Peters is not always a villain; he has done positive things that are barely acknowledged. Still, he is not portrayed as being the equal of the ideal businessmen of the Old West. He rescues Mrs. Forrester while "honorable" men like Mr. Forrester, Judge Pommeroy and Niel Herbert cannot. For Cather, saving a community that embraces imperial ideals is more important than saving individuals.

Indeed, in another scene, Cather demonstrates the importance of the values of the Old West community over the values of individuals. Niel resents the fact that Mrs. Forrester sleeps with Ivy Peters not because she betrays her dead husband, but actually, because she betrays all her "old friends" of the West, who are representative of imperial qualities. Mrs. Forrester is unfaithful to something more than her husband, "she was not willing to immolate herself, like the widow of all these great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged" (p. 161). In other words, Mrs. Forrester should burn herself because no man deserves her after her husband's death. As postulated by William R. Handley (2002), Mrs. Forrester needs to demonstrate a sign of her husband's greatness by immolating "herself upon his passing, given her function as legitimating adornment to his pioneer dream and property" (p. 155). Moreover, Mrs. Forrester's faithfulness to her husband is greatly measured by whom she sleeps with rather than by

her fidelity. She becomes “a common woman” when she sleeps with Ivy Peters, but not when she has an affair with Frank Ellinger, the Captain’s old friend.

Similarly, the women of the town have a particular view of Marian Forrester as the wife of an aristocratic man whose collapse signifies the death of the values of the Old West community. The collapse of Captain Forrester, according to Mrs. Forrester’s old friends, is seen as a “judgment” upon her. For her friends, this was expected after she left the Old West ideals behind and embraced the “destructive” ideals of Ivy Peters. Later, when the friends visit the Forresters’ home after the collapse of the Captain, they find out that life in their home is no means perfect. They believe “they had been fooled all these years.” The place is no longer as attractive as it used to be. Also, “[the] kitchen was inconvenient, the sink was smelly. The carpets were worn, the curtains faded, the clumsy, old-fashioned furniture they wouldn't have had for a gift, and the upstairs bedrooms were full of dust and cobwebs” (p. 132). They have certain expectations, but Mrs. Forrester does not match up to their assumptions, and they react. She makes her own decisions and finally she has to pay for her choices.

### **The abuse of nature**

In the novel, both the pioneers and the new generation are involved in activities that abuse nature. The pioneers seem to be as abusive to nature as Ivy Peters, a fact that Niel fails to observe. He claims that people like Ivy Peters would destroy “[the] space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer,” and cut it up “into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest” (p. 102). He is aware that Ivy Peters and the people of his generation will produce matchsticks from the wood that their ancestors cut. Moreover, Ivy Peters is scorned for destroying the aesthetic beauty of the Forresters’ marsh, while Captain Forrester is hailed for preserving the marsh on his land as a luxury, despite the fact that draining the marsh will turn the land into productive wheat fields. Cather has associated Ivy Peters with those who mercilessly abuse wildlife, including killing animals and destroying the natural state of land despite the fact that Captain Forrester is also involved in subduing the wilderness by building the straight tracks of railroads. She perceives the land of the pioneers as being perfect and well taken care of, until the arrival of people like Ivy Peters. That being said, Cather

seems completely occupied in romanticizing the pioneers without revealing and evaluating their shortcomings.

### **Expansive Imperialism: rupture or continuity?**

Towards the end of the story, Marian Forrester, through her shrewd connection with Ivy Peters, escapes to California. There she meets the next man who will "save her," a wealthy old Englishman who takes Marian to the frontier of South America, a fitting place for a pioneer who has run away from the West, so the imperialistic theme continues with a new site of conquest. Alluding to Edward Said's view on the centrality of England with "a series of overseas territories connected to it at the peripheries," Deborah Karush (1996) argues that Cather relegates overseas territories to the margins of her narrative. In so doing, Cather's narrative "creates a sense of the United States' global centrality" similar to that of England. For instance, in *A Lost Lady*, Cather relegates Buenos Aires to the end as Mrs. Forrester starts a new life there. Thus, Karush concludes that Cather's fiction "has familiar imperial overtones" (pp. 24-25). Moreover, the old Englishman might be, although not explicitly suggested, as genteel and honourable as Captain Forrester. In memory of his late wife, the old Englishman plans "for the future care of Captain Forrester's grave." After hearing this, Niel becomes relieved that Mrs. Forrester "was well cared for, to the very end" (p. 166). The old Englishman is representative of another imperial ambition, having been born in and still living in a developing part of the world where raw materials and opportunities are abundant.

Indeed, Cather's inclusion of a developing part in the world, such as South America, at the end of the novel, raises many questions about the author's motives. Is she hinting at possible expansion southward? Is South America the next fertile soil for imperial expansion? Considering the fact that developing countries have always been attractive to imperialists throughout history, Cather perhaps suggests the importance of such destinations for ambitious people, as were the pioneers. Cather gives Ed Elliot the last word in the novel, holding some hope, perhaps, for the future of a new and different imperialistic ambition. Ed Elliot is "a prosperous mining engineer," "broad-shouldered," frank and generous. He "is an alternative to the noble old Captain whose day is done and the cynical and corrupt Ivy Peters whom Niel fears is taking over" (Thomas, 1990, p.

107). However, his presence in an underdeveloped geographical area like South America entertains the idea that he could be a representative of an imperial ambition. This ambition is now expanding to South America where an imperialist economy is likely to move with the aim of initially creating infrastructure but also optimizing exploitation of raw materials, and eventually persuading locals to buy its products.

Cather paints the period of imperialism as positive, but what followed it, the coming of towns and industrialization, is described in more negative tones. Cather's story is one with a number of twists and turns; characters rise and fall in their relative places in society as modern urbanism takes over the imperialistic past. The fall of Captain Forrester signifies the loss of the moral ideals the Old West celebrated by Cather and the arrival of a new culture whose people are characterized by their great interest in self-fulfilment, but less interested in moral imperatives. Cather attributes the fall of Captain Forrester to the arrival of "ugly," on the inside and the outside, people like Ivy Peters, and to the Captain's loyalty to his investors. However, she never attributes it to the pioneers who started this shift in the first place and paved the way to people like Ivy Peters. In short, Cather nostalgically longs for the colonial past of the pioneers. She is not in favour of the present culture, which is greatly dominated by people like Peters. Instead of extending the imperialistic heritage of the pioneers, Peters is greatly invested in taking over what the pioneers have achieved. Thus, Cather is hopeful that new people like Ed Elliot will revive the pioneers' heritage and move to a non-industrialized country where he can penetrate and control its market.

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