

5.3.10 Practice: Critical Interpretation

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May 17, 2015

Cather calls into question many common gender roles in her characterization of Antonia, but also reinforces some of them. When Antonia's father dies, she is forced to give up a lot of her feminine activities and assume a more masculine role. Instead of her previous duties as a young woman, she instead turns to farm labor which is seen as being more masculine. In this way, Cather is challenging the common gender roles in this novel. However, she is also reinforcing the gender roles after the birth of Antonia's children. When her children are born, Antonia is characterized as being more motherly and feminine. In this portrayal of Antonia as a mother, Cather is not challenging traditional female gender roles and instead is reinforcing them. She is showing Antonia to be many things a mother is expected to be. In this way she is reinforcing common gender roles, but in other ways she is challenging them.

The crossroads that are the burial place for Mr Shimerda can be interpreted as a metaphor for both the futures of Antonia and Jim. When they were children, they both spent a lot of time on the prairie when the division between the farms was nothing but a single stake. In later years, they both leave the prairie on different roads. Jim goes to eventually earn a degree at harvard, while Antonia goes to work nearby in Black Hawk. Later on, they meet again on the prairie at those very same crossroads. Mr. Shimerda is now buried beneath the ground at this place. Antonia is back with her husband and many children, with a successful family and a happy life that she has worked very hard for. Jim is back with success too, with his Harvard degree which he has also worked hard and earned. Thus, these crossroads seem to be a metaphor or a symbol for the futures of both Antonia and Jim.