

A Study on Willa Cather's *One of Ours*

Shunji TSUNODA

When her cousin G.P. Cather died a heroic death in Europe in the First World War, Willa Cather saw the letters he wrote home and was surprised at this country boy's intellectual maturity. And also, she had a chance to see a bunch of letters which David Hutchstein, a New York violinist blown to pieces in the same year in Europe, wrote to his mother. She was so impressed by how the war had changed them that she decided to venture into "the exclusively male preserve of war."¹ The book she thus undertook required four years' struggle and it came out as a full-length novel of 500 pages, almost twice as long as *My Antonia*. The book, named *One of Ours*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1922, but it was underestimated severely by the critics including such great writers as H.L. Mencken, Ernest Hemingway and Sinclair Lewis. Hemingway said as to the battle scene, "Poor woman, she had to get the war experience somewhere."² Even Mencken, one of Willa Cather's ardent admirers, was dismayed at the war scene. Though he estimated her skill of style squarely, he remarked that "good writing is not sufficient to conceal the underlying unreality."³ Thus, criticism has been centralized on the latter half of this novel where Claude Wheeler, the hero, goes to the First World War in France and dies a heroic death. Even now *One of Ours* has often been rated by critics as "the least attractive"⁴ of her writings.

Willa Cather, on the other hand, insisted that *One of Ours* was her best novel and Claude Wheeler her favorite hero. In 1925 she said:

"I like the best of my books the one that all the high brow critics knock. In my opinion, *One of Ours* has more of value in it than any one of the others."⁵

Willa Cather even said that the creation of Claude Wheeler was her tribute to Nebraska. She admitted later that the book has a few "faults," but she

never doubted its value as a work of art.

Critics thought that Willa Cather's treatment of the war is too casual, as is seen in Sinclair Lewis' remark:

The whole introduction of war is doubtful.⁶

But now we know that before the book reached the bookshops she changed the title with great reluctance from "Claude" to *One of Ours* because of the publisher's insistence. Disheartened by its unpopularity among critics in spite of its large circulation, Willa Cather deeply regretted that she had not been tenacious of the original title "Claude", saying she did not mean Claude Wheeler to be a representation of the American soldiers. This fact tells us that her intention was not to write a war-novel but to try to follow a psychological trace of a young, sensitive but frustrated country boy. Indeed, most of the story is seen through Claude's perception and viewpoint. Willa Cather articulates the motive:

How had a Nebraska farm boy, with little education and slight experience of life, and how had a New York musician of solitary and pessimistic temper, changed so much and so quickly? How could war and the army and France produce such effects? These were the questions that led to the writing of *One of Ours*.⁷

She undertook this work in 1918 when the war was still going on. She had such a great confidence in the novel that she said to the media before publication to the effect that she wanted her public "to judge her by her new book, *One of Ours*" which she considered "her best."⁸

As a matter of fact, however, this novel is too long and often it nearly comes to being dull, stagnated and even unrealistic. Still, when one has a closer look, one finds intriguing qualities lurking under the story. D.P. Stevens says:

Even today, when Cather's work is receiving so much renewed attention, this novel seems to have been largely neglected.⁹

This comment tells the motive to prompt our reexamination of this work of art.

The story is about Claude Wheeler, an ill-fitted loser in a Midwest town in Nebraska. He is almost dead in a stagnated town of the West. He goes to the European front and paradoxically revives in the war feeling "perfect bliss" there. He fulfills, or believes to have fulfilled, his life, and dies a gallant death in battle.

Claude, the introvert, is frustrated by everything that surrounds him including materialism, machine-oriented society, religious fanaticism and bigotry, philistinism, and also by the dissatisfactory human relationships which we will look over in this paper. Actually the whole situation of the West isolates him. In this paper, however, we will survey Claude's frame of mind mainly through his human relationships, and grope our way to understanding why Willa Cather created this seemingly unrealistic situation of linking the farm with the European front to provide a farm boy with the place for self-realization.

Willa Cather says:

A violent temper and physical restlessness were the most conspicuous thing about Claude when he was a little boy. (35)¹⁰

Claude Wheeler is 19 years old when the book starts and the description of his childhood is very scarce. Still, there is an important episode about a cherry tree his father cuts down with his "coarse humour" when Claude is 5 years old. Claude feels the stump "bleeding" and becomes "a little demon" in anger. As it turns out, this episode forms a counterpart to a scene in the last chapter where he is impressed by French people who cherish a cherry tree under the deprivation of war-time. It is clear from this episode that Claude's disposition above comes not from a crooked, ill-tempered character but from his sensitive, romantic and visionary nature.

He has always trained himself physically, the author says, and therefore he is in an unbalanced condition of mental dejection and physical energy. He cannot adapt himself to the surroundings including his own family in Nebraska where the frontier days are gone and commercialism and mechanization are dominant. Here, "people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down." (455)

An unfortunate thing about Claude is that his dissatisfaction is directed

not only to the surroundings but also to himself. First of all he dislikes his own name which, when pronounced by certain people, sounds like "Clod." Moreover, he dislikes his own appearance.

He was exactly the sort of looking boy he didn't want to be. He especially hated his head—so big that he had trouble in buying his hat, and uncomplacably square in shape. (22)

He lives in a society that regard a person having a "big head" with fear and suspicion. The following shows his own outlook about himself at the age of 21.

He had no skill, no training—no ability that would even take him among the kind of people he admired. He was a clumsy, awkward farm boy. (118)

He thus suffers self-aversion or, rather, self-pity. To put it in Tom Quirk's words, his souls are "self-defeated."¹¹

His greatest misfortune is that he is alienated from his own family although, it should be kept in mind, no one deliberately tries to hurt him. Each of his family members represents a certain disagreeable aspect of the present society, and therefore to look over their character with relation to Claude's life is crucially important in interpreting the nature of Claude's frustration. At the very opening scene, Claude Wheeler is baffled by his own father. Knowing his son hates to drive the mule to town, Mr. Wheeler, the father, tells him to go to the circus with a wagon load of "stinking cowhides." This spiteful behavior is, for Mr. Wheeler the extrovert, only "his idea of a joke." He, the author says, came to this part of Nebraska "when Indians and the buffalo were still about." That is, he belongs to the first-generation who founded this town. Now that he has become prosperous he is deteriorated to a money-pursuing philistine. When the news of the war in the other side of the world begins to come fragmentarily to this farthest town deep inside the New World, his sole concern lies not in the progress of the war but in the expectation of a "jump" in the grain market. The irony is, he never imagines that he is destined to have his son killed in this war.

Moral degradation caused by financial success, namely, by what Catherians call "the paradox of success," is thus embodied in the character of Mr. Wheeler. The following passages strike the keynote about the change of the

West.

Claude felt sure that when he was a little boy and all the neighbours were poor, they and their houses and farms had more individuality. The farmers took time ... to set osage orange hedges along the borders of their fields. Now all these trees were all being cut down and grubbed up. Just why, nobody knew; they impoverished the land ... With prosperity came a kind of callousness; everybody wanted to destroy the old things they used to take pride in. (117-18)

The creation of Mr. Wheeler, who is authentically delineated, is the author's exemplification of a man degraded morally by financial success. Claude holds nostalgia and yearning toward the first generation in the pioneering days, and in that sense his personality is closer to Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!* and Antonia Shimerda in *My Antonia*. His father keeps no spiritual legacy as a pioneer and consequently Claude cannot recognize any delight or any interest in his father's character. Thus his filial relationship to his father is hopeless.

How about Mrs. Wheeler, the mother? She is a loving, cultured but fervently religious woman who loves Claude to the extent of "physical ache." It is a well-known fact that Willa Cather placed no great value on a relationship through sexuality including marital relation. This tendency casts effects on the relationships depicted in this novel. Cather's description of the poignant relationship between Claude and his mother is sometimes misleading and ambiguous. In some scenes they are portrayed as if they were lovers. In the early stage of the novel Mr. Wheeler leaves for Colorado with Rolph, the younger brother, to manage a new farm, leaving his wife and Claude and Mahaily.¹² When they are alone, his mother often says to Claude;

"It is almost like being a bride, keeping house for just you, Claude." (92)

Also the following description appears when they are talking in the dusk.

She [Mrs. Wheeler] rose like a gentle shadow and rubbed her cheek against his flannel shirt-sleeve, murmuring... For a moment they clung together in the pale, clear square of the west window, as the two natures in one person sometimes meet and cling in a fated hour. (101)

In this misleading scene, however, Willa Cather's intention is to depict their embrace at "the west window." It foreshadows Claude's leaving the West, leaving his mother behind for good. All things considered, Mrs. Wheeler is the

only member of his family to whom Claude keeps an affectionate relationship to the end. But the author says:

Claude had come to believe that the things and people he most disliked were the ones that were to shape his destiny. (37)

Undeniably Mrs. Wheeler's fervent piety plays a considerable part in Claude's dejected situation. It is partly due to her religious prejudice that he is forced to go to the church college while in fact he hopes to study at the State university. Her wish happens to coincide with her husband's interests for the reason that the fee of this college is cheaper than the State. She is the type of religious woman who believes that a man "should learn, not think," and in that sense she has no place or no power in the protagonist's quest for "something splendid about life." She never realizes that her religion has more or less to do with her son's sufferings. She is a learned woman indeed, and yet, as E. I. Thurin points out, "her commitment to learning does not match her commitment to Jesus."¹⁸

Next, we will have a glimpse of Rolph Wheeler, the younger brother, in whom Willa Cather symbolizes her disapproval of the machine-oriented society:

The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything, wants to live and die in an automobile, scudding past those acres where the old men used to follow the long corn-rows up and down. (15)

To Claude as well as to the author the machines stored away in the cellar are not the instruments at all but they only appear "mysterious objects." Claude's apathy to his brother is revealed in the following passages where he makes "a desperate resolve" to clear the cellar, reflecting bitterly:

Money this wreckage cost would have put a boy through college decently. (26)

In the Wheelers household the money for machinery has greater priority than the money for Claude's education. The Wheelers live utterly alienated from the world where "ideas" play a great part. He concludes as proxy for the author:

Machines could not make pleasure, whatever else they could do. (52)

Now we turn our eyes to Bayliss Wheeler, the elder brother who embodies commercialism in which money-making is the only object of life. To the readers he is probably the only disagreeable character in *One of Ours*. He envies Claude for his "fine physique." He runs a successful farm implement business in town and is rapidly gaining power. He recognizes no value in anything that has no relation to money. The following example will be enough to show his character. When Claude talks about his friend who is going abroad for study to become a professor, Bayliss responds as follows:

"What's the matter with him? Does he have poor health." (104)

He is the type of person Willa Cather abhors. She allocates considerable passages for describing his personality, or more accurately, his impersonality. Bayliss's world is totally antagonistic to Claude's. His name appears with crucial importance in the last chapter as we will see later.

As we have seen, Willa Cather applies to each of the family members a certain deniable aspect in the American West; philistinism, religious prejudice, mechanization and commercialism are thus embodied.

At this stage Claude is seeking two things. One is what he calls "something splendid about life," which is one of the underlying keywords in his quest for value. The other is "the need to admire." He wants a person or people whom he can admire and associate with. In the very early stage of the novel two "fortunate things" happen which nearly could have brought Claude to these values. On the occasion of his outstanding play in a football game he makes friends with a student in the State university and comes to enjoy the company with the student's family named the Erlichs. Their way of living, civilized and not materialistic, is exactly the one Claude has yearned for but never experienced. Here the author gives Claude an additional, rather opportunistic chance to meet a famous opera singer. Claude's experience at the Erlichs becomes his initiation to the pleasure in art and human relationships. Thus his "need to admire" almost comes true. The other thing is that he succeeds in matriculating a class on European history in the State university. He decides

on Joan of Ark as his assignment and devotes himself to this study that gives him enormous pleasure. This episode about the martyr, which foreshadows his leave for France for "Mort pour la France," represents his initiation to the world of "ideas".

He feels the world "full of stimulating things" and his future looking "brighter." Then, he comes home for holidays and finds his life still more darkened. For his father discloses the project of leaving the farm to Claude to give him "a chance to straighten things out." Mr. Wheeler regards the farm as the challenge here. The land Willa Cather treated in her former works was the object of challenge and hope and awe. Now that the frontier is gone, however, it has degenerated into the place from which people with ambition should escape. Nebraska is the place from which Claude goes out in order to be saved. When he hears his father's project, he feels as if "a trap had been sprung on him." This is a totally ironical situation in that while his father offers him a chance in his own way he actually deprives his son of the chance. Claude feels that all his "plans and purposes" are "swept away." Claude's choking conditions become worse. Willa Cather's dealing with land has so changed that we even find some passages that are, as compared to the former novels, almost unimaginable:

The people who had it [property] were slaves to it. (94)

In *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* the protagonists find salvation in the land. But Claude is bound to it like "those Chinese criminals who are planted upright in the earth." He finds no pleasure in his relationship either with his folks or with his land.

The scene at the Colorado State House symbolizes the very extremity of Claude's discontent in the Nebraska part that covers 300 pages of *One of Ours*. When he visits the State House he is suddenly overwhelmed by sharp loneliness that comes from "the feeling of being unrelated to anything, of not mattering to anybody." (135) Here he is in despair and almost dead. In this scene, however, we should find an important motif of the novel. Looking at the statue of Kit Carson on horseback "pointed westward," Claude thinks of his father, now a hopeless snob, who went into a new country in the West as a young man. But,

there was no West, in that sense, any more. (137)

This sentence, which practically declares the end of the West as the frontier, means the end of challenge and hope, the total resignation. But for Willa Cather herself, it means the new beginning. When she wrote the former frontier novels with a nostalgic tone toward the old pioneering days, she was criticized by some critics as an escapist who did not face the actuality of the West. In *One of Ours* she starts from the bitter fact that "there was no West" any more. What is important is that the end of the West provides not only the author but her protagonist with a new start although he is not aware of this fact at this stage and has to pass through one more ordeal. At any rate, this episode that happens, symbolically enough, on the State House steps at the heart of the New World foreshadows Claude's quest for value in the opposite direction of Kit Carson. That is to say, if there is no West, the only way to go is in the East.

All his family members including his loving mother more or less dissatisfy and isolate him, and therefore it is no wonder that he tries to find shelter and salvation in a woman to whom he can direct his love and desire. Understandably he tries to seek in the fair sex "the one who would put him right into the world and make him fit into the life about him." (199)

One day he gets seriously injured on his face and neck because his mules ran him into a barbed wire fence, and a miller's daughter named Enid Royce comes to see him every day. As it turns out, she visits him rather for her philanthropic reasons but Claude cannot distinguish the charitable behavior from love between the sexes. Symbolically, she is one of those people who pronounce "Claude" as "Clod" but he is so blind about Enid that he does not notice this. He says to Enid:

"I've never yet done anything that gave me any satisfaction." (163)

He never realizes here that his marriage is to add still more to his dissatisfaction.

Whether he is conscious of it or not, Claude's yearning for Enid Royce is sexual.

... the thought of Enid would start up like a sweet, burning pain, and he would drift out into the darkness upon sensations he could neither prevent nor control. (166)

As a matter of fact, Enid is not only a religious girl but the one so far from physical sensations as to put roosters in a different cage from hens.

He marries Enid Royce despite the admonition of other people including herself. Willa Cather, who is known to have harbored a strong doubt to marital relation, never bestows on Claude the "transformational power" of marriage as Claude expected. Their marriage turns out a failure, as people anticipated from the beginning. Enid manifests her religious fanaticism and becomes all the more frigid, and there is no sex life between the two, as a matter of course.

Incidentally, their marital life without sex is suggested in an unbelievably bungling scene which, as James Woodress says, seems "beyond Willa Cather's capability to create."⁴ Enid locks him out from the berth on the train on their wedding night while Claude, without saying any complaint, stays all night in a smoking car with "the paramount feeling of homesickness," closing his eyes and thinking of his mother and Mahaily.

One notable thing is that Claude's frustration is augmented by a totally different kind of dissatisfaction from what he has known, namely, sexual frustration. Willa Cather, as usual, never gives us an explicit, direct description concerning sexuality, but there are some scenes which manifests that Claude's frustration has taken on a sexual nature. When his wife is out for some religious campaign at night he takes off his clothes looking at the "big and magical" moon, which Cather often uses as some symbolization, and stretches himself out in the tin horse-tank. Also, there is another, seemingly casual but insinuating passage to the effect that the only diversion for him is to go to the timber claim and dream the things which "would have frozen his young wife's blood with horror." Thus his marriage only adds to his frustration and, further, deprives him of his freedom.

They have been married a year and a half, when Willa Cather creates an opportunistic plot. Enid goes over to China to take care of her sister who is a missionary, and this man and wife never see each other for good. Marriage does not serve as salvation for Claude Wheeler.

Claude returns home to his parents' house now that Enid has left for China. By this time the condition of the war in Europe becomes the topic of the people in Nebraska who live far from Europe or even from the East Coast facing the Atlantic. Claude and his mother often discuss the progress of the war with a map of Europe, which the people in Nebraska very rarely unfold.

The main purport of this paper is to see through the core of the protagonist's discontent on the basis of his human relationships and to illustrate how his frustration is averted or sublimed in the army life and the war, and, with it, to realize the depth of the author's accusation against the materialistic world.

Now we should turn our eyes to his life after he enlists in the army. Claude crosses the Atlantic over to the Old World as a soldier of the American Expeditionary Force, freed from the choking life. Surprisingly, he makes a transformation in this war and finds what he has been looking for. Such protagonists as Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda come from the Old World to the New and fulfill their lives in the depth of the West. Claude takes his route in the opposite direction, namely, from the New World to the Old.

Book IV in *One of Ours* is named "The Voyage of *the Anchises*" which is based on a story that really happened on a ship during the war, where malignant influenza breaks out and many dead soldiers are buried in the deep sea before they reach France. Incredibly enough, *the Anchises*, in which the soldiers "wished they were...anywhere but here," provides Claude with time and place for his resurrection. Physically energetic, he gives all the care he could for the sick soldiers, and they, as well as the doctor, come to rely upon him in this hellish situation. He becomes the person needed and relied on. The more dangerous the situation becomes on the ship, the greater confidence he feels about his existence. The "tingling sense of ever-widening freedom" from the stifling atmosphere in his hometown flashes in him. The "rain, the grey sky and the lonely stretches of the ocean" are no doubt the author's setting to cleanse his past. Even the depressing "fog", which also serves as a vehicle for his metamorphosis, becomes "a shelter" for him.

The past was physically shut off; that was his illusion. (340)

This is one of the crucial sentence. He begins to live his own life from hence. Significantly, his feeling of being "unrelated to anything" and "not mattering to anybody" ceases to exist.

The feeling of purpose, of fateful purpose, was strong in his breast. (349)

He is no longer "Clod" but becomes the genuine "Claude Wheeler". He finally gives his life a meaning, though, it should be remembered, the substance of that "fateful purpose" is to be known in the last chapter.

The important thing is that his "sense of freedom" from the past comes largely from his freedom from the bondage of marriage. "Enid's pale, deceptive face" seldom rises in him. He walks around on the boat "with the happy feeling" that he is "the least married man." Now that he belongs to the army and is associated with other men out of friendship, he finds this person-to-person relationship more essential to his life. In Claude's eyes, or rather, in the author's eyes, the human relationship Claude finds in the army makes sexual relationship valueless as we will see more clearly in Book V, "Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On."

Having cut off the past, Claude finally comes to France. Willa Cather, a Francophilia, describes France in such grandiose languages that even a French critic like Michel Gervaud feels ill at ease, saying "he [a French reader] is aware that he is presented with an idealized vision of his country."¹⁵ As a matter of course, however, this is Claude Wheeler's story, though, as Willa Cather herself admits, they are so often integrated because of the author's self-projection.

Standing on this ship Claude looks at "a great grey shoulder of land standing up in the pink light of dawn, powerful and strangely still." (356) He participated in AEF from his "Quixotic" idea, the author says. But the landscape of France seen from the sea totally upsets his idea about France and European civilization.

It was like a pillar of eternity. (356)

Claude's quest for values in the Old World begins. In Book V the author depicts Claude's army life, his friendship with other soldiers, his association with French people, French women in particular, his observation of French

people's way of life, and his battle. Though Willa Cather felt mortified about it, this final chapter has been criticized for the reason that it looks as if the author had glorified the war sentimentally, manifesting her latent romanticism about it as is revealed in the patriotic title, "Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On." The chapter, as Susie Thomas points out, invites "precisely the reading she [Cather] was so dismayed to receive," and indicates "how perilously close she was glorifying the war."¹⁶ It is not easy to believe the author's description about Claude's association with understanding French people, women in particular, talking and having dinner all under the sound of artillery! In one unrealistic scene the soldiers feel as if they were "Adam in the Garden" in a village where only old people and sexually frustrated girls "shut up for four years with young men" live. It should be kept in mind, however, that Claude and David Gerhardt, whom we will see later, have no interest in associating with girls. It is on purpose that Willa Cather makes Claude remark:

"I like the women in this country, as far as I've seen."

He "sees" the French women but never touches them. Whether he is conscious or not, "he avoids romantic involvement of any kind."¹⁷

Elizabeth Sergeant said:

In her [Cather's] story there are a few smelly corpses, but no profanity, no sex, no rebellion, no chaos are even hinted at. Avaricious French peasant... are absent... . The sense of order, veracity, and politesse are such that the army as an institution is fully upheld, and Claude's fulfillment in a heroic death suffers no disillusion.¹⁸

What Sergeant says is mostly true with the possible exception that "no sex" is hinted at. But there is one important fact which now all critics know. Willa Cather confessed that she had originally intended to entitle the Book V "The Blameless Fool by Pity Enlightened," while in reality it is entitled as "Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On" which inspires such flag-waving patriotism. When we know this fact and read *One of Ours* as a work of art, we realize that Sergeant's criticism is never enough. Willa Cather's intention is not to describe Claude's battle, as a matter of course. The war described in this novel is not the World War I as it was, but, to put in Susan Rosowski's

words, "a boy's experience of it."¹⁹ The important thing for the author is to depict his encounter with the civilization in the Old World and the people deeply rooted in this Old World values. Also, Claude's friendship with other soldiers shows her ideal human relationship that has no connection with money matters and sexuality. H.L. Mencken's words explain Claude's psychological frame:

War is the enemy of the fat and happy, but it is kind to the lonesome. (20)

What he discovers in war-time France is the world where "ideas" play a great part, and what he obtains is the relationship with civilized people and, also, the friendship with the soldiers including David Gerhardt, who is the second important character in *One of Ours*. None of these he could gain in Nebraska where nothing remarkable happens. But in war-time France he discovers the thing worth living for or, rather, worth dying for.

One of the French women he encounters is "a perfect lady," Mademoiselle Olive de Courcy by name, working for the Red Cross. He admires her gentle, civilized way of living and sees in her an ideal woman. But between them there never occurs an emotion or passion which an average young man and woman will have. Willa Cather deliberately avoids creating man-woman relationship and Claude is utterly content with this non-sexual, non-marital relationship. The author completely erases Claude's interest in the opposite sex and depicts only a soul-to-soul relationship. As is repeatedly said, there is never an erotic love or desire existing in Claude's human relationship in France despite the fact that his associations are so intimate and hearty.

Requested by Mlle. Olive, Claude tells her about his hometown which now seems "centuries away". It should be kept in mind that even in this romanticized scene, the big guns are "booming at intervals" somewhere. He describes everything so minutely that "he would not have believed that he could tell a stranger about it in such detail." (435) One seemingly strange but notable thing is that his wife never appears in his detailed description. It is improbable that he is deliberately concealing the fact about his wife while he is talking with such a great pleasure and respect to this woman. Also it is out of the question to suspect the author's fault or lapse of memory. That is to say, what the author suggests is that Claude has forgotten everything about Enid

in the war. His relationship with Enid, so shallow in the author's eyes, is swept away from his memory. In this connection it will be helpful in interpreting the author's intention if we see an episode which, apparently, has no connection to the main plot except that it suggests Claude's mental frame. In the army, Claude hears from a doctor about a psychopath soldier whose recollection of women is "clearly wiped out" including the girl he was going to marry. As a matter of fact the author suggests that Claude's own memory of women in the past is being affected.

Mlle. Olive, the listener, listens to Claude's story with "unusual sympathy and glow of an unusual mind." Claude idolizes her:

What a beautiful voice she had, this mademoiselle Olive. (432)

It should be noted that in this scene Mademoiselle Olive is, practically, Claude's surrogate wife without sexuality. Willa Cather never worries that their relation lacks reality. No doubt she created this idealistic but seemingly unnatural relationship for the purpose of showing their spiritual, soul-to-soul union.

To illustrate the above fact, we should have a glance at the scene of Claude's heroic death in a battle. When he dies catching a bullet in his shoulder Cather depicts Claude's mentality as follows:

He felt only one thing; that he commanded wonderful men. (507)

Then David Gerhardt comes to his mind, with whom he has the ideal human relationship the author intends to show. Never a reminiscence of his hometown nor his family including his dear mother to whom he has frequently written letters from the front, much less Enid's memory, comes to his ever-weakening consciousness. All he recollects in dying are David Gerhardt and "the wonderful men" he got acquainted with and kept company in the war.

Claude's transformation is completed in France. He finally discovers or, rather, believes to have discovered, "something splendid about life" he has long been looking for.

The most important thing he gains is the friendship with Lieutenant David Gerhardt, a violinist, to whom the author loaded the artistic, intellectual world, namely, the world of "ideas". David Gerhardt, a New Yorker or "the

Easterner", introduces to Claude the world of art and ideas in Europe to which Claude has been totally alienated. David knows that his career as a violinist is shut up by the war. His view about the war is entirely different from Claude's. It is not only cynic but realistic, to the readers to say the least. He does not believe anything would come of this war. He knows that they are fighting "not to make the world safe for Democracy or any rhetoric of that sort," while Claude never doubts his cause. Claude is imbued with heroism as is manifested in the following passages

The sound of guns had from the first been pleasant to him, had given him a feeling of confidence and safety... What they said was, that men could still die for an idea; and would burn all they had made to keep their dreams. He knows the future of the world was safe. (470)

He believes that he is fighting for the world of ideas which he could not find in Nebraska and which is now exposed in danger. But what should be noted is that "the sound of guns" assume the cardinal meaning in this novel.

Claude's association with David Gerhardt, in whom civilization is symbolized, gives him a greater pleasure than any other human relationship does, including marriages or "mushroom hunting" with French girls. In Claude Wheeler's eyes, the war has provided him with a chance of creating friendship between the two men, a country boy and an artist, who could not have encountered each other except in the war. Actually David Gerhardt is a typical Catherian character. Claude reflects:

In the years when he [Claude] went to school in Lincoln, he was always hunting for someone whom he could admire without reservations; someone he could envy, emulate, wish to be. Now he believed that even then he must have had some faint image of a man like Gerhardt in his mind. It was only in war-times that their paths would have been likely to cross; or that they would have had anything to do together...any of the common interests that make men friends. (460)

As a matter of fact Willa Cather foretells essential relationship in as early as their first encounter. The moment Claude meets "Lieutenant David Gerhardt's eyes," something like jealousy flames up in him and he feels in a flash "he must be on his [David's] guard and must not let himself be patronized." (385)

The scene in which David plays the violin is the cardinal part in explaining Claude's above feeling both to readers and to himself. David takes Claude to one of his friends' house. The friend, with whom David studied together in Paris Conservatoire, is killed in the war, but his family still live in this house. The climax in *One of Ours* comes in the night. David is requested by the family to play the violin which the deceased friend possessed. Knowing that the war deprived him of everything about his musical career David begins to tune the violin after much hesitation, and then Claude sees:

... in each of his big black eyes a candle-flame was reflected as if some steady fire were actually burning there. (466)

Far away, "the regular pulsation of the big guns" is sounding "through the still night." Willa Cather is tenacious throughout the Book V in connecting the sound of guns with the civilized life Claude experiences in war-time France, never worrying that it will make the passage unrealistic or unnatural. This fact gives the clue in understanding *One of Ours*. The sound of guns Claude and David hear on this night has a special meaning not only to them but also to the readers, because this is the key passage Willa Cather has set in this book. To hear the sound of the artillery David feels "it has killed everything else," while Claude's reaction is totally different. The sound of the guns gives him a feeling of confidence and safety. It tells Claude there still exist ideals that are worth living for or worth dying for.

When he hears David play the violin, Claude, feeling himself "a wooden thing", is torn between "generous admiration and bitter, bitter envy":

If one were born into this world like a bear cub or a bull calf, one could only paw and upset things, break and destroy, all one's life. (468)

His ambivalence comes from his comparison of himself with David Gerhardt. Claude has lived alienated from the world of art and learning while David was born with artistic genius and has lived a sophisticated life. The "artist-intellectual David"²¹ and a non-artistic farm boy Claude react to the sound of guns in an entirely opposite way, but what is crucial is that there is no contradiction between them.

For David the sound of guns is that of destruction. The war destroys both

his art and the civilization. For Claude, however, the sound is that of defending them. To "be on his [David's] guard" means to fight for the civilization itself symbolized in David. This is, Claude believes, what is "worth living for" and worth dying for. When he convinces himself that he has his own role in this world other than David's, he ceased to envy David. He realized that he has come all the way to find this fateful role, and feels "he would give his own adventure for no man's."

he had no quarrel with Destiny. (470)

The role of Claude Wheeler whose idealism had no place in Nebraska and that of David Gerhardt who has "a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power" are seemingly opposite, but actually they are in the relation of defending and being defended, being attracted and united. In Willa Cather's viewpoint this relationship is far deeper and closer than any other human relations.

Significantly enough, Bayliss Wheeler comes to Claude's mind after he heard David's violin.

No battlefield of shattered country he had seen was so ugly as this world would be, if man like his brother Bayliss controlled it altogether. Until the war broke out, he had supposed they did control it. ... But the event had shown that there were a great many people left who cared about something else. (469-470)

The sound of the violin under the distant sound of guns and Claude's revelation after he heard them are the very core of this novel. This is how Willa Cather makes a stand for the aesthetic order against the forces that endanger it. In that sense, the creation of Claude Wheeler, whose initial is the reverse of her own, is Willa Cather's crusade and indictment for art and civilization against the materialistic world which, to put in Claude's words, has become "callous" or either "stingy and grasping, or extravagant and lazy." And this is the reason of the fact that Willa Cather defended this work so strongly and with confidence.

Notes

1. Susie Thomas, *Willa Cather* (Houndmills: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990), p. 44.
2. James Woodress, *Willa Cather: Her Life and Art* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), p. 193.
3. James Schroeter (ed.), *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 12.
4. Maureen Howard (ed.), *Seven American women Writers of the Twentieth Century: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), p. ??.
5. L. Brent Bohlke (ed.), *Willa Cather in Person* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 78.
6. James Schroeter (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 32
7. E.K. Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 215-216.
8. L. Brent Bohlke, *op. cit.*, p. 31
9. D. P. Stevens, *Willa Cather and the Art of Civilization*, (Michigan; UMI, 1992), p. 122.
10. Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1973), p. 35. This edition was reprinted from the original type of the Riverside Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The page references in the parentheses throughout are to this edition.
11. Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture: The World of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 108.
12. Mahaily is an illiterate and stoic old woman living with the Wheelers, who has also an important role in *One of Ours*.
13. E. I. Thurin, *The Humanization of Willa Cather: Classicism in an American Classic* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1990), p. 231.
14. James Woodress, *op. cit.*, p. 194
15. Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner (ed.), *The Art of Willa Cather* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), p. 65.
16. Susie Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
17. E. I. Thurin, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
18. E. S. Sergeant, *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 181.
19. Susan Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 109.
20. Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *Sixteen Modern American Authors* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company. Inc., 1973), p. 65.
21. John H. Randall III, *The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1960), p. 168.