CHAPTER-4

CREATIVE POWER OF THE ARTIST

The Song of the Lark is Willa Cather's third of her twelve novels, published in 1915 and belongs to the early stage of her distinguished literary career. After its publication, however, the great literary critic H.L. Mencken said that it placed Cather in "the small class of American novelists who are seriously to be reckoned with."¹ It is the first novel in the western tradition that signifies the physical background of Willa Cather's writing, and its spiritual concern. The spiritual core of the novel is Thea's discovery of the ultimate nature of art. Music as Edith Lewis recalls was for Willa Cather 'an emotional experience that had a potent influence on her imaginative process.'² Cather chose her stories to be of pioneers and artists, men and women of simple passions and creative energies.

Thea Kronborg the main protagonist in the The Song of the Lark which carries her aspiring qualities is a novel rich in homely realism. Like Thea Cather made use of the common things and disciplined effort to influence her art. The Song of the Lark is the story of a young Swedish immigrant girl who comes of age in a pioneer western town, maturing through several stages of awakening into a woman and later becomes a famous singer. It is what the Germans call a Kunstlerroman,³ a novel depicting the growth of an artist. The story is set in Moonstone, Colorado, a small western town that resembles Cather own hometown, an exact facsimile of Red Cloud, Nebraska where Cather spent her youth.

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Much of Thea’s story concerns her struggle to bring the artist within her to life—something that would take hard work, discipline, perseverance and passion.

Thea is one of seven children growing up in an overcrowded little house in Nebraska. Her parents recognize and respect their daughter's unusual gifts, but her siblings and neighbors think of Thea as ‘spoiled, rebellious and stuck-up’. Her refuge is only a tiny room in the high-windowed gable of the attic, a rose-papered bower where she can read, write, and dream in peace. Thea a little girl of eleven ‘could sense something very strange and extraordinary’ She had moments of excitement when she felt that something unusual and pleasant was about to happen (10). Thea a tall, fair girl with ‘two yellow braids,’ grave, candid eyes hid her restless depths of thought and feelings due to her shy awkwardness. Her face was ‘scarlet and her eyes were blazing’ (298). The daughter of the Swedish Methodist pastor, Thea Kronborg was raised in the small town of Moonstone, Colorado. Her father Peter Kronborg, came from a lowly, ignorant family from a poor part of Sweden. His great grandfather married a Norwegian girl and this strain of ‘Norwegian blood’ expressed itself in each generation of the Kronborgs. As in the words of the narrator “Both Peter Kronborg and his sister Tillie were more like the Norwegian root of the family than like the Swedish, and this same Norwegian strain was strong in Thea, though in her it took a different character” (309).

Thea’s household includes Gus, Charley, Anna, Axel, Gunner, and Thor the new arrival in the family. Tillie Kronborg, her aunt was the only member that seemed to comprehend her. The young Kronborgs headed for Sunday school and their ‘communal life was definitely ordered.’(309) Thea had the ‘curiosity for reading’ Later some among
Thea's favorite poets were that of 'Byron's poems.' and Anna Karenina; these are Cather's own memories of books she read while growing up.4

Having a 'curious passion for jewelry' too, Thea wanted every shining stone she saw, and in summer she was always going off into the sand hills to hunt for crystals and agates and bits of pink chalcedony. She had two cigar boxes full of stones that she had found or traded for. Imagining that they were of enormous value, she was always planning how she would have them set (305)'.

Very sensitive about being thought as a 'foreigner', Thea was proud of the fact that, in town, her 'father always preached in English' (19). Resented fiercely the demands of family and school during her childhood days she committed her self for her artistic performance. Thea had no friends among children of her own age in the hometown of Moonstone and as "even her own family has so little to offer her, she seeks out and chooses her own community."5 Thea, who had a rather sensitive ear, until she went to school never, spoke at all, except in monosyllables, and her mother was convinced that she was tongue-tied. She was still inept in speech for a child so intelligent. Her ideas were usually clear, but she seldom attempted to explain them, even at school, where she excelled in "written work" and never did more than mutter a reply.

Thea's childhood friends are a handful of adult men who appreciate her qualities and are themselves restless or unhappy in Moonstone. All have counterparts in Cather's life: Ray Kennedy, who loves to explore cliff ruins, combines features of her brother Douglass and his railroading friends, the wild mandolin player Spanish Johnny was
inspired by the musical Mexicans Cather had met in Arizona. Thea’s most important childhood friend, Dr. Howard Archie, was modeled on Dr. G. E. McKeeby, with whom Cather assisted as a teenager on prairie housecalls.6

Dr. Howard Archie, the town physician barely thirty was one of Thea’s closest friends who saved her life when she had an ‘attack of pneumonia’. He was a ‘distinguished looking man, tall, with massive shoulders and a large, well-shaped head’ in small Colorado towns. Having no children and unhappily married, Dr. Archie loved the young girl and often wondered what would become of a girl ‘so passionate and determined’.7

Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor’s life in Moonstone” (301). A little girl of eleven, has a croupy cold lie wide awake Dr. Archie could not help thinking how he would cherish a little creature like this if she were his. Her ‘hands were so little and hot, so clever too’ (12). He looked intently at her wide, flushed face, freckled nose, her defiant brows, fierce little mouth, and her delicate, tender chin in “hard little Scandinavian face he wonders if some fairy grandmother had given it to her as a kind of a “cryptic promise” (12). Dr. Archie thought to himself what a beautiful thing a little girl’s body was,—like a flower. It was so neatly and delicately fashioned, so soft, and so milky white. Thea must have got her hair and her silky skin from her mother. She was a little Swede, through and through.

Thea’s illness alarms Doctor Archie because he feels she is no ordinary child. “There was something very different about her,” he reflects, and in a moment of annoyance with the other members of the family he says to himself “she’s worth the
whole litter” (10). Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor's life in Moonstone. Doctor Howard Archie detects her difference from other Colorado girls. Thea bestows on the doctor all the ‘greedy affection’ expressed in a private code of winks and grimaces, secret glances and shy caresses which she cannot feel for her father.

Doctor Archie lends her his books who is certain that the immigrant child Thea Kronborg is an unusual child. Thea with her insight and intelligence could title the book Dr. Archie was reading as "A Distinguished Provincial in Paris." As Doctor Archie had passion for reading Thea thoughtfully remarks "Nearly every time I come in, when you're alone, you're reading one of those books" (50). Howard Archie was "respected" rather than popular in Moonstone. Thea often consulted Dr. Archie for advice. When she wanted to know about the window in the upper wing, he told her that a girl who sang must always have plenty of fresh air, or her voice would get husky, and that the cold would harden her throat. The important thing, he said, was to keep your feet warm (344). He further remarks that Thea is always ‘curious’ about people and could find the difference among the city and country people.

As Linda Huf opines:

Doctor Archie realizes that although he has achieved all that he thought he wanted-money and power- he has acquired very little. The moments spent with her, an eleven -year old child in Moonstone, had been closer than anything else to what he had dreamed of finding in the world but had not found."
Doctor Archie professes to Thea, life would have been pretty bleak without her. He further comments: I’m a romantic old fellow underneath. And you’ve always been my romance" (252). Thea to be a noted Scandinavian-American singer works her way up from the dusty desert town of Moonstone, to the boards of the Metropolitan Opera house. Thea’s professional life, is presented from the career of the Wagnerian soprano Olive Fremstad, who was the kind of artist Willa Cather still aspired to be. Cather’s passion for opera had survived her Lincoln days, and once settled in Bank Street she and Edith went to the Metropolitan as much as they could; Edith’s retrospective letters are full of opera-going memories. Personally, Fremstad attracted her because of her familiarity. She had grown up in a small town in Minnesota, in a poor, religious family of Swedish immigrants, and had to battle her way out of a hard childhood in a ‘new crude country where there was neither artistic stimulus nor discriminating taste’. She was just like the “immigrant women on the Divide—with suspicious, defiant, far-seeing pioneer eyes.”

Thea, like Olive Fremstad, comes of Swedish-Norwegian stock and is the musical daughter of a Methodist pastor, grateful to give lessons and play and sing at the prayer meetings and revivals. Professor Herr Wunsch, the old German romantic, wandering piano teacher, a crony who lived with Mrs. Kohlers, played in the dance orchestra, tuned pianos, and gave lessons. She was going to the Kohlers’ to take her lesson, where Professor Wunsch lived, psychically lame like the other Moonstone friends, has the most to do with Thea’s artistic preparation. Professor Wunsch gives Thea all he can was the first of her childhood friends to recognize that Thea’s talent, and committed himself to teach her. Being ‘careful with his scholars’; and his ‘language’ Thea’s mother approves
him as her tutor. ‘Gruff, disreputable’ drunkard but talented pianist, is a sympathetic portrait of Herr Schindelmeisser, a traveling musician Cather knew in Red Cloud.

He gives Thea a first glimpse of artistic endeavor. The characteristic musical trait runs in the family as Mrs. Kronborg and her three sisters had all studied piano, and all sang well, but Thea being an exception was the only one who had ‘talent.’ Thea’s mother, shrewd and practical in all matters, knows that her daughter is different in a special way, She instinctively realizes this means hard work, not recitals for the local ladies’ groups. Wunsch looking quizzically at Thea shook himself as he listens to Thea singing “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal,” as the song died away he comments: “Such a beautiful child's voice!” “That is a good thing to remember,” It was his pupil’s “power of application, her rugged will,” that interested him (318).

A. Wunsch (whose name means desire) introduces Thea pupil to Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice, the score of which in German translation is his most prized possession. He plays and sings for Thea the haunting aria, “Ach, ich habe sie verloren [Oh, I have lost you]” (84). He had lived for so long among people whose sole ambition was to get something for nothing that he had learned not to look for seriousness in anything. She reminded him of “A yellow flower, full of sunlight, perhaps. No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbor, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood”—Wunsch felt ashamed and dragged his slippers along the path to the kitchen, his eyes on the ground (38).
Thea's self identity is also being recognized by her uniqueness in her voice: "Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember". Having a strong sense of separate identity, Thea does not settle for being molded or shaped by family or community pressure.11

Thea with both 'imagination and stubborn' will... there was something unconscious and unawakened about her. She hated difficult things and yet she could never pass one by. ... she had no peace until she mastered them... She had the power to make great effort, to lift a weight than herself ... her broad eager face, so fair in color, with its high cheek bones, yellow eyebrows and greenish-hazel eyes. It was a face full of light and energy, the unquestioning hopefulness of first youth. Wunsch compared her to the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open in the desert; thornier and sturdier than the maiden flowers ... not so sweet but wonderful" (379).

Mrs. Kronborg had no faith in the women in her society as she rightly opined: "these women that teach music around here don't know nothing. I wouldn't have my child wasting time with them." Mrs. Kronborg thus supports her daughter to unveil her talent and march ahead. Thea's Aunt Tillie delights in telling the neighbors that some day Thea will make them all sit up and take notice. But it is Professor Wunsch who defines and gives direction to Thea's "promise." One morning he startles her most secret thoughts when he says that she will some day be a singer: 'Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires' (95). As observed by Lee, "almost all Thea's watchers are male, but they are
all carefully disqualified from being sexual partners; instead, they prepare the way for the voice that is going to outsoar them like an eagle."\(^{12}\)

Thea comes nearest to the elemental impulse of the earth with Spanish Johnny, the unreliable alcoholic. The music Johnny makes on a mandolin is frenzied and exceptionally skillful, but its strength and beauty reside in the racial consciousness which is at the heart of his songs. After Thea returns from a year of formal study in Chicago, she identifies the emotional freedom she enjoys with the Mexicans through the ethnic current in their music.

Among Mexicans, an especially with Johnny, music is felt reality and common expression. Even their movements have "a kind of natural harmony". When she sings before a "really musical people" like the Mexican neighbors, Thea receives "the response that such a people can give" pleasure and affection (292), when she lifts a seashell from Spanish Johnny's garden to her ear, she hears a voice calling her from afar. For Thea the summons from the world of art is like a call to heroic action. She is stirred by the "piece - picture" on the Kohlers' wall of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

"Music unites Thea with emotional allies for whom society provides no regular means of exchange." Among the Mexicans she unearths a collective human feeling through songs of joy, love, riches, and delicate swallows: "Ultimo Amor," "Noches de Algeria," "Fluvia de Oro," "La Golondrina." The spiritual transfer with simple people is important. During her operatic career, Thea constantly draws from the deep reservoir of basic human yearning. At the close of *The Song of the Lark* the final measurement of her brilliant Sieglinde is the "Brava! Brava!" of "a grey haired little Mexican" perched in

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the top gallery. His excitement assures us that Thea Kronborg's voice reaches the sympathetic center of those from whom she first learned music's primitive energy (572).

The railroad is the town's only lifeline to the larger world and as a powerful representation of monstrous but thrilling progress and Westward expansion. It was Thea's twelfth birthday and it was Ray Kennedy the "chivalrous, self-instructed" railroad brakeman a worthy man in Moonstone was a conductor on a 'freight train' was planning to marry Thea. Thea liked Ray for reasons that had to do with the adventurous life he had led in Mexico and the South-west, rather than for anything very personal. She liked him, too, because he was the only one of her friends who ever took her to the sand hills. The sand hills were a constant tantalization; she loved them better than anything near Moonstone, and yet she could so seldom get to them.

Thea's journey out into the desert along with Ray Kennedy and her brothers Gunner and Axel sitting behind in the wagon with Spanish Johnny and Tellamantelz followed the faint road across the sagebrush; they heard behind them the sound of church bells, which gave them a sense of escape and boundless freedom. As they went farther, the illusion of the mirage became more instead of less convincing; a shallow silver lake that spread for many miles, a little misty in the sunlight. Thea ran about among the white stones, her skirts blowing this way and that, the wind brought to her eyes tears. This call toward creativity with its accompanying frisson of desire is like an epiphany which brings Thea closer to her inner voice. As they drove homeward the stars began to come out, pale yellow in a yellow sky, and Ray and Johnny began to sing one of those railroad ditties that are usually born on the Southern Pacific and run the length of the Santa Fe and
the "Q" system before they die to give place to a new one. This was a song about a
Greaser dance, the refrain being something like this:--

"Pedro, Pedro, swing high, swing low,

And it's allamand left again;

For there's boys that's bold and there's some that's cold,

But the gold boys come from Spain,

Oh, the gold boys come from Spain!" (70)

Like Cather, Thea is an adventurous girl who loves to explore the land beyond the
town. The creeks canyons gullies and sand hills all appealed to her. Ray realized that
Thea's life was 'dull and exacting.' He knew she worked hard, that she put up with a
great many little annoyances, and that her duties as a teacher separated her more than
ever from the boys and girls of her own age. He did everything he could to provide
recreation for her. He brought her candy and magazines and pineapples--of which she
was very fond from Denver, and kept his eyes and ears, open for anything that might
interest her.

Thea, stirred by tales of adventure, of the Grand Canyon and Death Valley, was
recalling a great adventure of her own. Early in the summer her father had been invited to
conduct a reunion of old frontiersmen, up in Wyoming, near Laramie, and he took Thea
along with him to play the organ and sing patriotic songs. There they stayed at the house
of an old ranchman who told them about a ridge up in the hills called Laramie Plain,
where the wagon-trails of the Forty-niners and the Mormons were still visible. The old man even volunteered to take Mr. Kronborg up into the hills to see this place, though it was a very long drive to make in one day. Thea had begged frantically to go along, and the old rancher, flattered by her rapt attention to his stories, had interceded for her (67).

The wind never slept on this plain, the old man said. Every little while eagle flew over. When she sighted down the wagon tracks toward the Blue Mountains. She told herself she would never, never forget it. “The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles” (69).

As rightly opined by David Stouck:

Thea’s vision of human courage soaring above the world like the eagles over the Laramie tableland culminates an excursion into the sand hills with Ray Kennedy and Spanish Johnny which has a kind of mythic shape and purpose. The whole sequence is like a ritual of initiation into the world of the imagination: the journey out to the desert (a flight into the world of freedom), the warning from the mentor (Wunsch) against commitment to the ordinary world, the amphitheatre in the richly colored hills, the storytelling, the music and singing, the play – acting of the children, and the final vision of the indomitable human spirit coursing westward.13

Thea’s eyes kindled when Ray Kennedy talked about creative ideals. As a child she instinctively comprehends the timelessness of man’s fight for the civilized things which make him man, because she has within herself a yearning to create and because she
requires direct contact with the vital source of life Ray speaks of. Later of course she
does live fully by the natural pull of things in the Southwest—actually immersed in the
life-water of the earth—and the conception of art which Thea achieves during this baptism
is an enlargement of Ray’s idealism. As Ray comments “When you look at it another
way, there are a lot of halfway people in this world who help the winners win, and the
failures fail” (156). Ray Kennedy was thinking of the future, dreaming the large Western
dream of easy money, of a fortune kicked up somewhere in the hills,—an oil well, a gold
mine, a ledge of copper... and that by the time she was old enough to marry, he would be
able to keep her like a queen (340). When Ray Kennedy encounters a railroad accident it
claims the life of Thea’s friend Ray Kennedy.

As Thea grows from childhood to adolescence, there are a good many episodes
that mark her growth. Thea is able to take over Wunsch piano students. She drops out of
high school and becomes self supporting. She also sings in the church choir and plays the
organ for services. Thea learns about human nature from her encounters with the mean-
spirited Mrs. Archie and the envious Mrs. Loultry Johnson whose untalented protégé
Lily Fisher upstages her in a Christmas talent show. It was the first time she had ever
played in the opera house, and she had never before had to face so many people. Thea
wore her white summer dress and a blue sash, but Lily Fisher had a new pink silk,
trimmed with white swans down. Tillie Kronborg belonged to a dramatic club that once
a year performed in the Moonstone Opera House such plays as "Among the Breakers,"
and "The Veteran of 1812." Tillie played character parts, the flirtatious old maid or the
spiteful Intrigante this motivated Thea to get into her profession.
A scourge of typhoid broke out in Moonstone and several of Thea's schoolmates died of it. She went to their funerals, saw them put into the ground, and wondered a good deal about them. But a certain grim incident, which caused the epidemic, troubled her even more than the death of her friends. Thea had always found everything that happened in Moonstone exciting, disasters particularly so. She read sensational Moonstone items in the Denver paper. Thea had three music pupils now, little girls whose mothers declared that Professor Wunsch was "much too severe." They took their lessons on Saturday, and this, of course, cut down her time for play. She did not really mind this because she was allowed to use the money--her pupils paid her twenty-five cents a lesson--to fit up a little room for her upstairs in the half-story.

Thea had a few enemies one of them was Ms. Livery Johnson. Out of the others was her rival Lily Fisher. Mrs. Johnson disapproved of the way in which Thea was being brought up, of a child whose chosen associates were Mexicans and sinners, and who was, as she pointedly put it, "bold with men." She so enjoyed an op opportunity to rebuke Thea. Frowning, Thea turned away and walked slowly homeward. She suspected guile. Lily Fisher was the most stuck-up doll in the world, and it was certainly not like her to recite to be obliging. Nobody who could sing, ever recited because the warmest applause always went to the singers (76). However, when the programmer was printed in the Moonstone gleam, there it was: "Instrumental solo, Thea Kronborg. Recitation, Lily Fisher" (76).

His orchestra was to play for the concert. So Mr. Wunsch imagined that he had been put in charge of the music, and he became arrogant. He insisted that Thea should
play a "Ballade" by Reinecke. When Thea consulted her mother, Mrs. Kronborg agreed with her that the "Ballade" would "never take" with a Moonstone audience. She advised Thea to play "something with variations," or, at least, "The Invitation to the Dance" (76).

It was the first time she had ever played in the opera house, and she had never before had to face so many people. Wunsch would not let her play with her notes, and she was afraid of forgetting. Before the concert began, all the participants had to assemble on the stage and sit there to be looked at. Thea wore her white summer dress and a blue sash, but Lily Fisher had a new pink silk, trimmed with white swans down. Lily Fisher was pretty, and she was willing to be just as big a fool as people wanted her to be. Thea Kronborg wasn't the same (81).

One may have staunch friends in one's own family, but one seldom has admirers. Thea, however, had one in the person of her addle-patted aunt, Tillie Kronborg. The dramatic club was the pride of Tillie's heart; always attended rehearsals and urged young people to 'stop fooling and to begin now' (85). Tillie's mind was a curious machine; when she was awake it went round like a wheel when the belt has slipped off, and when she was asleep she dreamed follies. But she had intuitions. She knew, for instance, that Thea was different from the other Kronborgs, worthy though they all were. Her romantic imagination found possibilities in her niece. When she was sweeping or ironing, or turning the ice-cream freezer at a furious rate, she often built up brilliant futures for Thea, adapting freely the latest novel she had read (83). Tillie could predict that she would make all her audience to 'sit up' when it comes. She further comments: 'her time to show off ain't come yet...I guess they would be glad to get her in Denver Dramatics'.
Thea had always found everything that happened in Moonstone exciting. Thea was 'haunted' by the figure of the tramp, Dr. Archie, honestly and leniently puts forth his advice as seen in this episode:

Well, Thea, it seems to me like this. Every people have had its religion. All religions are good, and all are pretty much alike. But I don't see how we could live up to them in the sense you mean. I've thought about it a good deal, and I can't help feeling that while we are in this world we have to live for the best things of this world, and those things are material and positive. Now, most religions are passive, and they tell us chiefly what we should not do (175).

"But poor fellows like that tramp--" she hesitated and wrinkled her forehead. The doctor leaned forward and put his hand protectingly over hers, which lay clenched on the green felt desk-top. He further narrates:

Ugly accidents happen, Thea; always have and always will. But the failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten. They don't leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don't affect the future. The things that last are the good things. The people who forge ahead and do something, they really count. (175)

Dr Archie saw tears on her cheeks, and he remembered that he had never seen her cry before, not even when she crushed her finger when she was little. He rose and walked
to the window, came back and sat down on the edge of his chair. Dr. Archie further remarks

Forget the tramp, Thea. This is a great big world, and I want you to get about and see it all. You're going to Chicago some day, and do something with that fine voice of yours. You're going to be a number one musician and make us proud of you. Take Mary Anderson, now; even the tramps are proud of her. (176)

Thea escapes into the unknown 'world beyond Denver' after the death of Ray Kennedy, as he dies in a railroad accident, leaving Thea his six hundred dollars life insurance policy with the stipulation that it be used to study music in Chicago. Dr. Archie accompanies Thea, after much discussion, convincing her parents "that she's a most unusual child, and she's only wasting herself" (427).

Mrs. Kronborg felt the more at ease about letting Thea go away from home, because she had good sense about her clothes and never tried to dress up too much." Dr. Howard Archie takes the responsibility of Thea, as she ventures into the new world. Now in Chicago, Thea is introduced to the Reverend Lars. Larsen like Peter Kronborg was a 'reactionary Swede.' He got well in the ministry, he made the most of his skill with the violin he played for women's culture clubs (438). Later he helps her find a piano teacher, a place to live, and a job singing in a church choir.

Thea feels she is a part of this community, Thea finds 'purpose and meaning for her own individual endeavors' Thea's sense of membership in the community is now
focused on these ancient artists to her present-day fellow artists and audiences, that inspires her, helping her to define herself and giving meaning to life. She fulfills herself through a sense of duty to these other lovers of art- “an obligation to do one’s best.” (550)

Thea finally takes control of her own life, as advised by Dr. Archie that she must someday do. Thea during her teens at that time she was a believer in the Standard American Dream. She was of the understanding that money was “the only thing that counts” because “to do any of the things one wants to do, one has to have lots and lots of money” (504). But when Dr. Archie responds: That Thea could make money, “if you care about that more than anything else,” Thea replies to that “I only want impossible things. The others don’t interest me” (505).

Archie answers to that “if you decide what it is you want most, you can get it” (505). This makes her to recall Wunsch’s earlier advice. “There is only one big thing –desire.” Just as Cather had seen the material success of the early pioneers as merely an outward sign of “a moral victory,” Thea rejects the shallow goals that clouded her vision and hid her real self in order to fulfill her dreams:

There was certainly no kindly Providence that directed one’s life; and one’s parents did not in the least care what became of one, so long as one did not misbehave and endanger their comfort. One’s life was at the mercy of blind chance. She had better take it in her own hands and lose everything than meekly draw the plough under the rod of parental guidance (555).
Thea had to drop out from school at the young age of fourteen as her parents realized that 'she's far along for her age'. And she can't learn much under her principal As Mrs. Kronborg stresses. "She frets a good deal and says that man always has to look in the back of the book for the answers. She hates all that diagramming they have to do, and I think myself it's a waste of time" (382). Before Thea's fifteenth birthday she had four pupils of her own and made a dollar a week, Thea gained popularity as the 'best musician' in town. As aptly noted by Philip Gerber:

Hard work is no obstacle, for Thea quiet fully understands what will be demanded. for her fierce self assertion points her always towards that single final goal: "a great many trains... carried young people who meant to have things. But difference was that she was going to get them!... As long as she lived that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it work for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height."

Thea at seventeen leaves home to study music in Chicago. Thea's first teacher in Chicago, a sensitive, one-eyed Hungarian violinist named Harsanyi, discovers her voice:

Andor Harsanyi had never had a pupil in the least like Thea Kronborg. He had never had one more intelligent, and he had never had one so ignorant. When Thea sat down to take her first lesson from him, she had never heard a work by Beethoven or a composition by Chopin. She knew their names vaguely. Wunsch had been a musician once, long before he wandered into Moon-stone, but when Thea awoke his
interest there was not much left of him. From him Thea had learned something about the works of Gluck and Bach. (219)

Harsanyi the violinist found in Thea a pupil with sure, strong hands, one who read rapidly and intelligently, who had, he felt, a richly gifted nature. But she had been given no direction, and her passion was unawakened. She had never heard a symphony orchestra. The literature of the piano was an undiscovered world to her. He wondered how she had been able to work so hard when she knew so little of what she was working toward. She had been taught by Professor Wunsch according to the old Stuttgart method; stiff back, stiff elbows, a very formal position of the hands. Thea studied some of the Kinderzenen with Wunch her music teacher, as well as some little sonatas by Mozart and Clementi.

The best thing about her preparation was that she had developed an unusual power of work. "He noticed at once her way of charging at difficulties. She ran to meet them as if they were foes she had long been seeking, seized them as if they were destined for her and she for them. Whatever she did well, she took for granted. Her eagerness aroused all the young Hungarian's chivalry. He usually kept her long over time; he changed her lessons about so that he could do so, and often gave her time at the end of the day, when he could talk to her afterward and play for her a little from what he happened to be studying. It was always interesting to play for her. Sometimes she was so silent that he wondered when she left him, whether she had got anything out of it. But a week later, two weeks later, she would give back his idea again in a way that set him vibrating. All this was very well for Harsanyi; an interesting variation in the routine of
teaching. But for Thea Kronborg, that winter was almost beyond enduring. She always remembered it as the "happiest and wildest and saddest of her life" (221). Thea fought her way across the unprotected space in front of the Art Institute and into the doors of the building. She did not come out again until the closing hour. In the street-car, on the long cold ride home, while she sat staring at the waistcoat buttons of a fat strap-hanger, she had a serious reckoning with herself. She seldom thought about her way of life:

What she ought or ought not to do; usually there was but one obvious and important thing to be done. But that afternoon she remonstrated with herself severely. She told herself that she was missing a great deal; that she ought to be more willing to take advice and to go to see things. She was sorry that she had let months pass without going to the Art Institute. After this she would go once a week (247).

Whenever she visited the Art Institute she found escape from Mrs. Andersens' tiresome overtures of friendship. The building was a place in which immigrant Thea could relax and play, and she could hardly ever play now. Some of them she knew;

The Dying Gladiator she had read about in "Childe Harold" almost as long ago as she could remember; he was strongly associated with Dr. Archie and childish illnesses. The Venus di Milo puzzled her; she could not see why people thought her so beautiful. She told herself over and over that she did not think the Apollo Belvedere "at all handsome." Better than anything else she liked a great equestrian statue of an evil, cruel-looking general with an unpronounceable name.
She used to walk round and round this terrible man and his terrible horse, frowning at him, brooding upon him, as if she had to make some momentous decision about him. (248)

There she liked best the ones that told stories. There was a painting by Gerome called "The Pasha's Grief" which always made her wish for Gunner and Axel. The Pasha was seated on a rug, beside a green candle almost as big as a telegraph pole, and before him was stretched his dead tiger, a splendid beast, and there were pink roses scattered about him. She loved, too, a picture of some boys bringing in a newborn calf on a litter, the cow walking beside it and licking it. The Corot which hung next to this painting she did not like or dislike; she never saw it. But in that same room there was a picture oh, that was the thing Thea ran upstairs so fast to see! That was her picture. She imagined that nobody cared for it but herself, and that it waited for her. That was a picture indeed! she exclaimed. She liked even the name of it:

"The Song of the Lark." The flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl's heavy face--well, they were all hers, anyhow, whatever was there. She told herself that that picture was "right." Just what she meant by this, it would take a clever person to explain. But to her the word covered the almost boundless satisfaction she felt when she looked at the picture (249).

Thea on her return from Chicago participates herself in Mexican out-door parties. Thea's singing with the Mexicans object her family members she is severely criticized for going to a dance in the Mexican Town, and again feels a conspiracy in the world.
against her. She had sung for churches and funerals and teachers, but she had never before sung for a really musical people, and this was the first time she had ever felt the response that such a people can give. She felt as if all these warm-blooded people debouched into her.

Thea's artistic soul rises against the disapproving conventionality of the little towns when she sings for the music-loving Mexicans. Thea momentarily has become their artist-priestess, and Spanish Johnny follows her performance with a teasing song which is a comic variation on that idea. When she finished, her listeners broke into excited murmur. The men began hunting feverishly for cigarettes. Famos Serranos the barytone bricklayer, touched Johnny's arm, gave him a questioning look, then heaved a deep sigh. Johnny dropped on his elbow, wiping his face and neck and hands with his handkerchief. "Senorita," he panted, "if you sing like that once in the City of Mexico, they just-a go crazy. In the City of Mexico they ain't-a sit like stumps when they hear that, not-a much! ...Come, sing something with me. El Parreno; I haven't sung that for a long time." Johnny laughed and hugged his guitar. "You not-a forget him?" He began teasing his strings. "Come!" He threw back his head, "Anoch-e-e --"

'Anoch me confesse

Con un padre Carmelite,

Y me dio penitencia

Que besaras tu boquita.' As the author translates it:

161
(Last night I made confession

To a Carmelite father,

And he told me to do penance

By kissing your pretty mouth.) (293)

When time comes to leave Moonstone Thea felt the pain to leave all behind her. She comments: Living's too much trouble unless one can get something big out of it (305). Thea's commitment to art is defined as both heroic and irrevocable: At this point Thea's obligation to art and isolation is motivated by revenge as well as self-discovery. That evening, talking with Doctor Archie, she asserts as seen in this episode:

"I hope you will; awfully rich. That's the only thing that counts." She looked restlessly about the consulting-room. "To do any of the things one wants to do, one has to have lots and lots of money." Thea shrugged. "Oh, I can get along, in a little way." She looked intently out of the window at the arc street-lamp that was just beginning to sputter. "But it's silly to live at all for little things," she added quietly. "Living's too much trouble unless one can get something big out of it."...You can make money, if you care about that more than any-thing else." He nodded prophetically above his interlacing fingers. "But I don't. That's only one thing. Anyhow, I couldn't if I did." She doesn't mean money--"I only want impossible things," she said roughly. "The others don't interest me" (305).
The Swedish minister Mr. Larsen in Chicago is a happy, contented man, but he is
remarkable for his soft, indolent habits and his laziness. Thea's physical strength and well
being are most sharply accented by glimpses of sick and dying girls: on the train back to
Moonstone she sits in front of a girl who is dying of tuberculosis, and when she arrives
home she is told almost at once that one of the sickly girls from prayer meetings has just
died. But as Thea's sense of heroic purpose grows stronger, the gap for her widens
between the claims of ordinary life and the desire to be an artist. When Thea and Doctor
Archie look for lodgings they are depressed by the sleazy, unkempt, wastes of Chicago
and the ill-favored aspects of boarding houses.

The Swedish church where Thea sings is in "a sloughly, weedy district, near a
group of factories," and her lodging is an unpainted, gloomy-looking place in a damp
yard where there is no running water; Thea has to carry both water and fuel to her room.
But particularly when she is filled with the ecstasy of an imaginative experience she feels
life around her becoming ugly and hostile.

As rightly observed by Richard Giannone:

Thea's mind is haunted by an indefinite "tale of past times." Though
the facts of the tale are in the future, "Die Lorelei" foreshadows a
journey beset with danger. It will be Thea's journey on the Rhine of
artistic ambition,. The strange splendors and exquisite allurements
which in the end destroy the voyager are the countless obstacles
hindering her journey.\textsuperscript{15}
In Willa Cather’s treatment of Thea’s response, however, the Walhalla music bodes her destiny as a distinguished Wagnerian soprano. Wagner mingles with Dvorak to create Thea’s New World of Music, suggestively, Willa Cather announces a thematic image that recurs throughout her fiction in various forms and at the end of The Song of the Lark with complex associations: “The cold, stately measures of the Walhalla music rang out, far away; the rainbow bridge throbbed out into the air, under it the wailing of the Rhine daughters an the singing of the Rhine” (252).

She finds out what she is not and comes generally to sense what she must be. Ironically, when she begins formal study of voice, her progress seems slow. The bitter part of every Orpheus’ “bitter struggle” (221), shows itself in the acquisition of control. She meets difficulties with “imagination and a stubborn will (254). But Thea’s demands and ambition are beyond Bowers’ reach or interest, Thea took her lesson from Madison Bowers every day from eleven-thirty until twelve. Then she went out to lunch with an Italian grammar under her arm, and came back to the studio to begin her work at two.

Madison Bowers had first been interested in Thea Kronborg because of her bluntness, her country roughness, and her manifest carefulness about money. The mention of Harsanyi’s name always made him pull a wry face. For the first time Thea had a friend who, in his own cool and guarded way, liked her for whatever was least admirable in her. "I may cut my lesson out to-morrow, Mr. Bowers. I have to hunt a new boarding-place" (317). The immigrant Thea is unable to put up with her friends. She comments "The studio Club's all right for people who like to live that way. I don't." "I can't work with a lot of girls around. They're too familiar. I never could get along with
girls of my own age. It's all too chummy. Gets on my nerves. I didn't come here to play kindergarten games” (317).

In Chicago, along with her study of piano and voice, she meets – and dismisses – several young men whose interest might have distracted lesser girls from their goals. The first such fellow, a “toughest young Swede.”, he finds Thea disappointing at best, because she neither grows faint nor clings to the arm he keeps offering her. Instead she asks a lot of exacting questions and shows impatience because he knows so little of what goes on outside his department (340). Madison Bowers’s cynicism and slovenly standards make her depressed and surly. She finds both a champion and a romantic interest in the musical amateur Fred Ottenburg.

Fred Ottenburg son of a rich brewer and an amateur musician, met Thea Kronborg for the first time at the studio of Madison. Bowers. When Fred Ottenburg pleaded Thea to sing, “He wanted to have some ‘German words’ He further comments can you really sing the Norwegian? but is disappointed to know that she don’t know either English or Swedish very well and Norwegian’s still worse....She further adds I understand. We immigrants never speak any language well” (526).

As observed by Richard Giannone:

Philip Frederick Ottenburg, a “florid brewery magnate,” entertains her in a style to which she is unaccustomed and introduces her to the Nathanmeyers, whose knowledgeable approval of her singing and personality momentarily cheers her; but Ottenburg’s interest is only
ostensibly musical. The Bowers period when she tries to emerge as herself is filled with irritations intense enough to embitter Thea and to make her cynical of everyone's motives or aspirations. Everywhere about her she sees compromise, contempt and vanity. The warmth and idealism of Moonstone and her first Chicago teacher have vanished, leaving the life of art merely another way of meeting daily hardness with comparable artistic obduracy\(^\text{16}\) \((139)\).

In such a hostile community, Thea recounts her frustrations with its society. In this atmosphere of struggling, competitive people, Thea herself begins to become harsher, a success-motivated individual who wants no ties, no encumbrances. She cannot make friends with the other girls in her boarding house.

I dislike so much and so hard that it tires me out. I've got no heart for anything." She threw up her head suddenly and sat in defiance, her hand clenched on the arm of the chair. "Mr. Harsanyi couldn't stand these people an hour, I know he couldn't. He'd put them right out of the window there, frizzes and feathers and all. Now, take that new soprano they're all making such a fuss about, Jessie Darcey. She's going on tour with a symphony orchestra and she's working up her repertory with Bowers. She's singing some Schumann songs Mr. Harsanyi used to go over with me. Well, I don't know what he would do if he heard her" \((324)\).
It is Thea’s ‘sweetheart’, Fred Ottenburg, a wondrously cultured, rich, generous, affable, music-loving brewer’s son, whose only disqualification is his secret marriage to an ‘insufferable’ woman he can’t divorce. So he too becomes one of the chivalric spectators, like Dr Archie ‘watching her contemplatively, as if she were a beaker full of chemicals working’ (305). In their love scenes in Panther Canyon, Fred and Thea are seen as ‘two boys’ playing together, throwing stones and making camp in a cave and climbing perilously down the rocks in a thunderstorm. Similarly, the only offstage detail of her later romance with the Teutonic singer Nordquist is an adventure story of their rowing for their lives through a storm on an icy lake. Close up, Fred treats Thea like a savage young Amazon: “I’d like to have you come at me with foils; you’d look so fierce!” he chuckled’ (386). But she gets away from him, climbing to the horizon:

This delving beneath personal identity to something elemental and universal about life prepares Thea for her vision of art as a sacred trust for the whole of mankind, rather than a struggle for individual achievement and recognition. Fred knew where all the pleasant things in the world were...and the road to them...and that he had the keys to all the nice places in his pocket and being young “Thea want him for a sweetheart” (540).

Through Ottenburg’s influence Thea was given singing engagements at the parties of his fashionable friends. Ottenburg in this episode is seen turning over to Bowers.

If you’ll lend me Miss Thea, I think I have an engagement for her. Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer is going to give three musical evenings in April,
first three Saturdays, and she has consulted me about soloists. For the first evening she has a young violinist, and she would be charmed to have Miss Kronborg. She will pay fifty dollars. Not much, but Miss Thea would meet some people there who might be useful (528).

Thea went upstairs with the maid and had enjoyed the Nathanmeyers and their grand house, her new dress, and with Fred Ottenberg, her first real carriage ride, and the good supper (353). She spoke Swedish with Ottenberg who was interested to hear that Thea's mother's mother was still living, and that her grand-father had played the oboe (347). Thea could sing with her melodious voice some of her favorite songs by Schumann which she had premeditated with her music mentor with rigorous practice; it was Harsanyi who had all the patience for it and that delighted him.

When Fred Ottenberg introduces Thea to Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer, for an musical evening, Fred liked to hear her sing one of her favourite childhood song which she sung at nineteenth the aria from 'Gioconda' and some songs by Schumann which she studied with Harsanyi and it was Tak for dit Rad he liked the most. It was also much liked and appreciated as the musician Mrs. Nathanmeyer quotes: “that's the real voice I have heard in Chicago.” She further comments about her contemporaries whom she fiercely hates and remarks “I don’t count that stupid priest woman”. The song speaks for Thea’s spiritual courage which must combat storms of hostility. With the dauntless sailor in Grieg’s air, she must carry on the struggle for guidance which comes only from the friendly spirit inside. Thea takes a high ideal to be a hard command. Her burning desire made her feel that in singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on
one’s and held it on one’s breath” (304). Defeat is more usual than victory on the concert or operatic stage, and she has yet to meet anyone who has succeeded in the way total dedication deserves. The models have been negative. Two things do work in favor of her taking the risk, however. She cannot forget how their responsiveness to her singing gave an entrée into the “second selves” (273).

Thea not afraid of Ottenberg, and had a good reason for her refusal to bow down to him. Yet she feels that “he was not one of those people who made the spine like a steel rail” but he was the one who made her ‘venturesome’ (338). “The failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten,” Thea is told; “they don’t leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don’t affect the future.” Because her own aim at perfection is never deflected, Thea manages to identify and avoid every temptation, while the disasters around her comment ruefully on the pitted and boulder-strewn obstacle course an artist must travel alone. Yet the solitary way is the only sure way. Cather had written admiringly of Fremstad that no other singer had “managed to live in such retirement,” an island of self in the city’s flood; “work is the only thing that interests her.”

Thea, after an exhausting and depressing second winter in Chicago, takes Fred Ottenburg’s advice and with his help withdraws to the desert in the southwest to be completely alone. Her two years in Chicago had not resulted in anything. She had failed with Harsanyi, and she had made no great progress with her voice. She had come to believe that whatever Bowers had taught her was of secondary importance, and that in the essential things she had made no advance. Her student life closed behind her, like the forest, and she doubted whether she could go back to it if she tried. Probably she would
teach music in little country towns all her life. Failure was not so tragic as she would have supposed; she was tired enough not to care.... Thea’s life at the Ottenburg ranch was simple and full of light, like the days themselves.

In Willa Cather’s view of artistic growth the reposeful hill is a crucial moment. It is particularly restorative for Thea Kronborg. Thea’s experience in the spacious, powerful canons of the Southwest incorporates the early excitement of childhood among the open sand hills; and intellectually it goes back further, to the nature of history. Contact with the earth removes data from history to leave only the basic thing: man’s continuous fight to achieve something beyond himself. Thea fight holds value, and it repeats itself in everyone at every stage of human development. The contest is the basis and embodiment of art. Thea achieves this understanding among rocks, air, birds, and sky, the first things which tested man’s power to control and shape.18

Thea spends long stretches of time in the ancient cliff dwellings of one of the canyons, where she feels released from the tiresome sense of her individual personality and becomes attuned to a more primitive, fundamental sense of life and creativity. This sequence in the book is another imaginative ritual: the journey into the brightly painted desert, the canyon, cliff dwelling and stream as locus dramatis, and the culminating vision of art Thea experiences standing in the stream. While Thea is physically immersed in the “precious element” that she gains the deepest knowledge of art. Not when she practices or performs but when she bathes in a stream comes the understanding that art is the giving of human shape to physical nature. Thea does become a great singer until she returns to the land she knew and dreamed of as a child. Thea leaves Moonstone because she feels confined by the narrow conventions that were imposed on women at the time. In
Chicago, she has difficulties supporting herself while working constantly to become a singer. Feeling exhausted and discouraged, she makes a trip to Panther Canyon, Arizona.

Thea's full artistic awakening does not take place in the cold gray canyons of Chicago, where she labors at her music lessons, but in a brilliant desert canyon where Fred sends her to rest and recuperate. There she comes upon an isolated gorge sheltering silent prehistoric ruins and spends weeks lying alone on the sun baked rock ledges and in the shade of ancient pueblo rooms. Enfolded in the shelter of the canyon she sheds restrictive clothing and mental debris, bathes naked in the stream at its base, naps under an Indian blanket, and opens every pore until her body becomes completely receptive, a vehicle of sensation. Thus poised, she suddenly recognizes the spiritual connection between the shards of ancient Indian pottery she finds in the stream—vessels designed to bear life-giving water—and her own throat, a vessel which carries song: "what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment, the shining, elusive element which is life itself?. . . In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals."

Thea leaves Panther Canyon; she is all set for the long struggle to become an opera singer which necessitate years of study in the enriching Old World atmosphere of Germany. Thea's re-entry into the mainstream of life comes when Fred Ottenburg joins her in Arizona and persuades her to run off to Mexico with him. He tries all his stunts to get close to win her that he may have pleasure with her. Eventually she discovers that Ottenburg is already married; had a neurotic, invalid wife. Thea upset and stunned; refuses Ottenburg offers of assistance.
Thea values her dignity; so borrows money from Dr. Archie her good old Moonstone friend, to leave America for further studies in Germany. At first it appears that Thea has been betrayed by her renewed contact with her fellow men, but, as Ottenburg himself finally makes her recognize, the experience was essential to Thea for further defining herself and determining her course. Their love affair never involved the submission of one to the other, but was more like camaraderie; they were equals in all their adventures. Thea admired Ottenburg's physical energy and vied with him at throwing stones in discuss fashion; to Henry Biltmer, the lodge keeper in Arizona, they look like two boys moving about nimbly on the cliffs. On one of their expeditions Thea climbed to the top of a cliff, and Ottenburg, seeing her from below, thought of her as some wild creature from early Germanic times.

After Thea has broken off their affair, Ottenburg tells her that by going to Mexico with him "you'll always drive ahead.... It's your way"(444). Thea loves Fred Ottenburg, but her desire to be a great artist is still strong. Their love has enriched her experience of life, and the fact that he is already married leaves her free to continue music and mesh that experience with her art. On the eve of Thea's departure for Germany he notices that her excitement, eagerness "to get it," is no longer colored by memories and personal struggles, but is now "unconscious,"- something selfless and instinctive. With her mother Thea travels to Pedro's Cup, "a great amphitheatre cut out in the hills, its floor dotted with sagebrush and grease wood. On the surface of this fluid sand, one could find bits of brilliant stone, crystals and onyx, and petrified wood as red as blood" (402).

As significant as the metaphor that links Thea's growth to her world is the beauty of the description, by which Cather affirms her character's growth in terms of her
developing female body. Gradually, she becomes aware of a larger world, are
metaphorically linked with the female sexuality that underlies a woman's creative
passion. Becoming an artist means being able simultaneously to abandon her body to
sensuous experience and to control that experience, keeping it from contamination. "The
condition every art requires," Cather would later explain, is "freedom from adulteration
and from the intrusion of foreign matter," and at this point, Thea severs those human ties
that threaten to compromise her. It is in experiencing this emotional pain that she
discovers her strength as a woman and ultimately as an artist.

Her family, mentors, and suitors serve Thea the woman only as they serve Thea
the artist. She is completely obsessed with the intellectual and physical rewards of her
craft. Her regimen is grueling, and her exacting standards make her arrogant and lonely.
She is sometimes frightened, and more than once the idea of marrying and being taken
care of tempts her. She grieves at the conflict between personal and professional needs,
particularly when choosing an important European debut over a journey home to see her
dying. From time to time reported reached Dr. Archie of Thea's progress abroad, Fred
Ottenburg, still her admirer, realizes that only the challenge of her art brings back her
vitality and zest for life: "It was only under such excitement, he reflected, that she was
entirely illuminated, or wholly present. At other times there was something little cold and
empty, like a big room with no people in it" (500), and that "new understanding" has
been the goal toward which Thea has been moving all her life.

The admiration derives from series of Wagnerian roles which Madame Kronborg
interprets. The principal ones are: Elizabeth (Tannhauser), Elsa (Lohengrin), Venus
(Tannhauser), Fricka (Das Rheingold), and Sieglinde (Die Walkure). The list of appearances suggests a general movement from the more lyrical to more complex and dramatic, which hints of Madame Kronborg's style, but the important thing is that it shows the soprano's range, her rapid ascent at the Metropolitan, and her indefatigable energy.

The first important role was sung in Dresden where, thanks to the 'lucky chance' (485), every daughter of music needs, Kronborg got to sing Elizabeth. The role and the circumstances of her debut are brought to mind during Archie's visit to the ailing Mrs. Kronborg. The doctor notices a "photograph of the young woman who must have been singing 'Dich, theure Halle, gruss' ich wieder', her eyes looking up, her beautiful hands outspread with pleasure" (492). Willa Cather's music allusion is perfectly clear and perfectly appropriate. The song, refers to Elizabeth's entrance and praises music itself, doubles as Madame Kronborg's artistic entrance into her personal "Hall of Song. It is a joyous symbolic debut, this salutation of the hall.

Oh, hall of song I give thee greeting!
All hail to thee thou hallowed place!
'T was here that dream so sweet and fleeting,
Upon my heart his song did trace.
But since by him forsaken
A desert thou dost seem-
Thy echoes only waken
Remembrance of a dream,
But now the flame of hope is lighted,
Thy vault shall ring with glorious war,
For him whose strains my soul delighted
No longer roams afar! 19

One of the final questions considered in the novel is the relation of the artist to the people in his past. Doctor Archie always regretted that Thea did not get home when his mother was dying. Her failure to return appears callous and neglectful; and yet Oliver Landry, Thea’s friend, tells Fred Ottenburg that the special in Thea’s Interpretation of Elizabeth in Tannhauser derives from the anxiety and grief she felt over his mother’s death: “The last act is heart-breaking. It’s as homely as a country prayer-meeting: might be any lonely lady ready to die. It’s full of the thing every plain creature finds out for himself, but that never gets written down” (540). Among other things we are reminded of those humble faces at the mournful prayer meetings which, for Thea, were so tedious, but promised to mean something some day. Through the “new understanding” of her art Thea appreciates those faces as she could not before; they are part of that passion, that vital enrichment in her art.

Kronborg’s move form the opera house in Dresden ... to the Mettopolitan signifies her arrival at the top. Too many sopranos are tussling for too few roles When Cather remarks that Kronborg sings Elsa in Lohengrin the first time that Dr. Archie sees her in New York; she conveys both the competitive state of affairs in opera and her heroine’s capacity to cope with its demands.20 Soon she is scheduled for a Sieglinde of her own. It is a command performance. “On Friday afternoon there was an inspiring audience; not an empty chair in the house” (565). Fred Ottenburg, along with the soprano’s benefactor Howard Archie, Andor Harsanyi, back from a successful engagement in Vienna, and his
wife also are in the house. Of all the grace gifts the artist possesses, the most magical is
the power to vault the barriers between time and place and person and construct a
rainbow bridge to them all. Willa Cather does not count the curtain calls, but the fierce
"clamour" (569) of the audience makes it unmistakably clear that Thea Kronborg is the
kind of singer who leaves beautiful memories behind her. As Andor Harsanyi turns to his
wife at the opera "'At last,' he sighed, 'somebody with enough! Enough voice and talent
and beauty, enough physical power. And such a noble, noble style!'' (569). A soul has
touched a soul. 21

For Thea art always comes first. It takes every ounce of strength, leaving her
drained, aged, and often unfit for company. When urged to take more time for her
"personal life," she replies, "Your work becomes your personal life. You're not much
good until it does." Her work requires the kind of perfect dedication that Nietzsche called
chastity, and its goal is a paradox, the kind of "sensuous spirituality" which is also the
goal of the mystic. As opined by Gerber, "The Swedish heroine marries Fred Ottenburg;
but marriage for her is no more a "panacea" than Alexandra Bergson's union with Carl
Linstrum (87). Thea Kronborg, having achieved success as an opera singer in New York,
she credits Moonstone for giving her a sense of standards and a 'rich, romantic past' "
(552). Thea's talent is a combination of intelligence and fierce originality. Through
tremendous effort she has used both to transform talent into art. Like Olive Fremstad
Thea as a child, had been driven hard and grueling. Through years of disciplined effort
she has learned to do the "impossible." 22
II

Secondary women characters:

Mrs. Kronborg:

She was a short, stalwart woman, with a short neck and a determined-looking head. Her skin was very fair, her face calm and unwrinkled, and her yellow hair, braided down her back as she lay in bed, still looked like a girl's. She was a woman whom Dr. Archie respected; active, practical, unruffled; good-humored, but determined. Exactly the sort of woman to take care of a flighty preacher. She had brought her husband some property, too,—one fourth of her father's broad acres in Nebraska,—but this she kept in her own name. She had profound respect for her husband's erudition and eloquence. She sat under his preaching with deep humility, and was as much taken in by his stiff shirt and white neck-ties (14).

She looked to him for morning prayers and grace at table; she expected him to name the babies and to supply whatever parental sentiment there was in the house, to remember birthdays and anniversaries, to point the children to moral and patriotic ideals. It was her work to keep their bodies, their clothes, and their conduct in some sort of order, and this she accomplished with a success that was a source of wonder to her neighbors. As she used to remark, and her husband admiringly to echo, she "had never lost one." With all his flightiness, Peter Kronborg appreciated the matter-of-fact, punctual way in which his wife got her children into the world and along in it. He believed, and he was right in believing, that the sovereign State of Colorado was much indebted to Mrs. Kronborg and women like her (14).
Mrs. Kronborg believed that the size of every family was decided in heaven. More modern views would not have startled her; they would simply have seemed foolish-thin chatter, like the boasts of the men who built the tower of Babel, or like Axel’s plan to breed ostriches in the chicken yard. From what evidence Mrs. Kronborg formed her opinions on this and other matters, it would have been difficult to say, but once formed, they were unchangeable. Calm and even-tempered, naturally kind, she was capable of strong prejudices, and she never forgave (15). Mrs. Kronborg let her children’s minds alone. She did not pry into their thoughts or nag them. She respected them as individuals, and outside of the house they had a great deal of liberty. But their communal life was definitely ordered (23).

Tillie:

Tillie of Swedish origin was a queer, addle-pated thing, as flighty as a girl at thirty-five, and over whelmingly fond of gay clothes— which taste, as Mrs. Kronborg philosophically said, did nobody any harm. Tillie was always cheerful, and her tongue was still for scarcely a minute during the day. She had been cruelly overworked on her father's Minnesota farm when she was a young girl, and she had never been so happy as she was now; had never before, as she said, had such social advantages. She thought her brother the most important man in Moonstone. She never missed a church service, and, much to the embarrassment of the children, she always "spoke a piece" at the Sunday-School concerts. She had a complete set of "Standard Recitations," which she practiced on Sundays. She belonged to a dramatic club and performed plays such as ‘Among the Breakers’ and ‘The Veteran of 1812’ (84).
Tillie always coaxed Thea to go "behind the scenes" with her when the club presented a play, and help her with her make-up. Thea hated it, but she always went. She felt as if she had to do it. There was something in Tillie's adoration of her that compelled her. There was no family impropriety that Thea was so much ashamed of as Tillie's "acting" and yet she was always being dragged in to assist her. Tillie simply had her, there. She didn't know why, but it was so. There was a string in her somewhere that Tillie could pull; a sense of obligation to Tillie's misguided aspirations (85).

Anna:

Anna the eldest in the family of six was her mother's lieutenant. All the children knew that they must obey Anna, who was an obstinate contender for proprieties and not always fair minded (23).

Mrs. Kohler:

Mrs. Kohler seldom crossed the ravine and went into the town except at Christmas-time, when she had to buy presents and Christmas cards to send to her old friends in Freeport, Illinois. As she did not go to church, she did not possess such a thing as a hat. Year after year she wore the same red hood in winter and a black sunbonnet in summer. She made her own dresses; the skirts came barely to her shoe-tops, and were gathered as full as they could possibly be to the waistband. She preferred men's shoes, and usually wore the cast-offs of one of her sons. She had never learned much English, and her plants and shrubs were her companions. She lived for her men and her garden. Beside that sand gulch, she had tried to reproduce a bit of her own village in the Rhine
Valley. She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned (28).

Mrs. Tellamantez:

Mrs. Tellamantez the somber Mexican woman did not seem inclined to talk, but her nod was friendly. Thea sat down on the warm sand, her back to the moon, facing Mrs. Tellamantez on her doorstep, and began to count the moonflowers on the vine that ran over the house. His wife, Mrs. Tellamantez, sitting on the doorstep, loved to comb her long, blue-black hair. As Cather remarks; Mexican women are like the Spartans; when they are in trouble, in love, under stress of any kind, they comb and comb their hair. When her son Spanish Johnny's health was at risk she rose without embarrassment or apology, comb in hand, and greeted the doctor (52).

Mrs. Tellamantez was always considered a very homely woman. Her face was of a strongly marked type not sympathetic to Americans. Such long, oval faces, with a full chin, a large, mobile mouth, a high nose, are not uncommon in Spain. Mrs. Tellamantez could not write her name, and could read but little. Her strong nature lived upon itself. She was chiefly known in Moonstone for her forbearance with her incorrigible husband.(53-54) but everybody was disgusted with Mrs. Tellamantez for putting up with Spanish Jhonny. She ought to discipline him, people said; she ought to leave him; she had no self-respect. In short, Mrs. Tellamantez got all the blame. Even Thea thought she was much too humble. She could think that 'there is nothing so sad in the world as that kind of patience and resignation' (55).
Old Mrs. Lorch, and Mrs. Andersen:

Old Mrs. Lorch, and Mrs. Andersen, here are two German women, a mother and daughter. The daughter is a Swede by marriage, and clings to the Swedish Church, but Mrs. Lorch, the mother, is a good cook, --. The daughter, Mrs. Andersen, is musical, too, and sings in the Mozart Society (211). Old Mrs. Lorch could never bring herself to have costly improvements made in her house; indeed she had very little money. She preferred to keep the house just as her husband built it, and she thought her way of living good enough for plain people. There was an ingrain carpet on the floor, green ivy leaves on a red ground, and clumsy, old-fashioned walnut furniture. The bed was very wide, and the mattress thin and hard. Over the fat pillows were "shams" embroidered in Turkey red, each with a flowering scroll -- one with "Gute' Nacht," the other with "Guten Morgen." The dresser was so big that Thea wondered how it had ever been got into the house and up the narrow stairs. Besides an old horsehair armchair, there were two low plush "spring-rockers" (213).

There was only one picture on the wall when Thea moved in: a large colored print of a brightly lighted church in a snow-storm, on Christmas Eve, with greens hanging about the stone doorway and arched windows. There was something warm and home, like about this picture, and Thea grew fond of it. Both the widows were kind to her, but Thea liked the mother better. Mrs. Andersen was certainly a depressing person. It sometimes annoyed Thea very much to hear her insinuating knock on the door, her flurried explanation of why she had come, as she backed toward the stairs. Mrs. Andersen admired Thea greatly. She thought it a distinction to be even a "temporary soprano"--
Thea called herself so quite seriously—in the Swedish Church. She also thought it distinguished to be a pupil of Harsanyi's. She considered Thea very handsome, very Swedish, very talented (217).

III

Cather combined various immigrant nationalities into the symphonies which is more prominently observed in The Song of the Lark just as Anton Dvorak’s New World Symphony that appeared in 1915 wanted to “encourage young American composers in the development of their own native [ethnic] sources.” As remarkably opined by Ann Moseley “The strongest cultural movement featuring in this novel is Scandinavian, for Thea’s mother is pure Swedish, her father part Swedish and part Norwegian, and the names of Thea and her little brother Thor originate in ‘Nordic mythology’. All the Kronborg children but Anna have Scandinavian features, but Thea is the most Scandinavian of them all.”

As discussed earlier, her friend Dr. Archie muses that the child ‘was a little Swede through and through’. Moreover, the Norwegian strain is also strong in Thea, though it takes a different direction in her father and Aunt. Moseley further opines that: “Thea receives from the Swedes her determination and love of order, and from the Norwegians her passion and imagination, all of which are qualities essential to the development of any artist.”

Thea absorbs not only her own culture but also those around her. Professor Wunsch her German piano teacher introduces her to German art and music, especially to German opera. These early bonds with European life and art are augmented throughout
her musical career. When she goes to Chicago she studies with Hungarian piano teacher Andor Harsanyi. In Chicago also, she meets and falls in love with rich German Fred Ottenburg, who, in turn, introduces her to the rich and cultivated German Jewish family, the Nathanmeyeres. This interest in German culture is climaxed when she actually goes to Germany to study voice, and after several years returns to America as masterful interpreter of Wagnerian opera. Thea’s music, however, has roots not only in the cultivator and intellectualism of German life but also in her Mexican friends especially with Spanish Jhonny, the young mandolin player. Each in his own way offers a dimension of himself as a source of identification to Thea.

Thea Kronborg, like Alexandra, is a self-conscious, even backward, girl, until she discovers her purpose in life— to absorb and express the people and bring them happiness through her singing. She sacrifices personal life like Alexandra. Thea Kronborg adds to the strong-willed Alexandra Bergson the intellectual and cultural achievements of the artist in the great world. Thus as opined by Glen “Thea becomes the first of Cather’s major figures in whom western and eastern values combine in a sustained and productive relationship.” She belongs not with the pioneers like Alexandra but with the following generation, and like her contemporaries she must “fight her way through the narrow and repressive atmosphere of her western town in order to find the meaning of her own life and ambitions revealed in the life itself.” (178) Thea as a true artist is honored by attaining highest status in her time and becoming “la divina”. As rightly remarked by James Woodress: Cather always believed that the pioneer women on ‘The Divide’ possessed many traits— the drive, the perception, the energy, the creative force. They had created a new country out of an idea.26
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21 John J. Murphy, *Five Essays on Willa Cather the Merrimack Symposium* (Merrimack College North Andover, Massachusetts, 1974) 144.


24 Ibid., 8.

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