

**An Examination of the Mythical Structure of *The Song of the Lark*:
An Artist's Professional Journey**

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Abstract:

Both folktales and classical myths are combined in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915) as the sources of her art of writing. She refers several times to the folktales of the early cliff dwellers of Panther Canyon and to the myth of Orpheus as a means to pave the way for the artistic initiation of the protagonist; Thea Kronborg. But because the structure of the story is rather based on the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, this is what will be proven in accordance with Northrop Frye's theory of displacement.

The objective of this study is to make use of some of Frye's ideas, one of the most influential modern myth critics, in the examination of this story to show that this approach can widen the scope of such a novel as well as deepen our understanding and appreciation of the story.

Keywords: Displacement and structure.

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دراسة البنية الأسطورية لرواية أغنية القبرة: مشوار الفنانة المهني

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ملخص

كتبت الكاتبة الأمريكية **ويلا كاثر** رواية **أغنية القبرة** عام (1915) بناء على الأساطير والقصص الشعبية تشير فيها ولمرات عدة إلى القصة الشعبية المتعلقة بالسكان القدامى في منحدرات بانثر كانيون، وكذلك إلى أسطورة أورفيوس، في محاولة منها لتمهيد الطريق للمشوار الفني الذي تخوضه بطله الرواية، **ثيا كورنبورغ**.

ولكن يرى الباحث أن بنية رواية **كاثر** هي نفسها بنية أسطورة جيسن والصوف الذهبي، بناء على ما يسميه **نورثروب فراي**، أحد رواد النقد الأسطوري الحديثين، "التقريب". وبالتالي تهدف تلك الدراسة إلى بيان أن قيمة رواية **كاثر** تزداد مع تطبيق أفكار **فراي** المتعلقة بالتقريب عليها وذلك لاستحداث تفسيرات جديدة، مما يجعل الرواية الحديثة نسخة ممكنة من الأسطورة الأساسية.

الكلمات الدالة: التقريب والبنية.

Introduction:

The focal point in an artist's professional journey is accomplishment. Achievement is a fulfillment of desire, and this desire is strongly related to the survival of the human race because without achievement there would not be any kind of progress or prosperity. In fact, the value of one's life is measured by one's achievements and contributions. The importance of one's life is judged by one's accomplishments and how one reacts in certain crucial historical or social circumstances.

The pursuit of achievement in *The Song of the Lark* will be highlighted in light of its mythical structure. The story which takes place in the imaginary town of Moonstone in Colorado, traces Thea's professional journey and her diligent pursuit of becoming a recognized diva in the world of singing. The story illustrates how a female with a potential is capable of defying social restrictions in America toward the end of the nineteenth century by eventually succeeding in life.

The problem of the study:

Most readers of Cather's fiction have merely noted that there are references to Graeco-Roman myths in some of her novels. But none of the scholarly critics has thoroughly examined Cather's works in terms of mythical displacement presented by Frye, one of the most influential myth critics. In myth proper one does not seek explanation or logic. In modern times, however, one is no longer satisfied with stories without explanations. In this respect, Frye says in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1957) that even though modern writers base their literary works on specific myths, they make use of techniques such as logic or morality to make their stories plausible. Frye terms this indirect mythologizing "displacement" (36).

Despite the fact that there is no complete correlation between the original myth and the displaced story, there are parallel structures functioning as archetypes that keep on recurring in literature. Occasionally a critic has focused on the importance of a specific myth to a single work; however, no full length study has explored how references to classical mythology work together to provide direction for and an insight into Cather's thought.

The significance of the study:

The intention of this paper is to show that Frye's ideas are applicable to modern fiction and that applying them is useful to our appreciation of such a novel by Cather. Few studies have been devoted to a selection of Cather's novels but none has benefited from Frye's ideas. Frye is credited with establishing an important approach to literature and presenting a solid theory about its sources. The four essays in his *magnum opus*; *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) focus mainly upon Western literature, through which he tries to prove that literature derives its material from either mythology, folktales, or the Bible. Therefore, the study will show how *The Song of the Lark* shares the same structure with the original myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece.

Frye holds that literature builds on structural models of experience frequently found in the classics. In *Fables of Identity* Frye says that literature utilizes recurrent structures that have their origins in primitive cultures. These structures are linked with certain archetypes that keep recurring in various literary works (12). In other words, Frye is of the opinion that literature is based, consciously and unconsciously, on mythic structures that embody essential principles of storytelling. Therefore, in *Anatomy of Criticism* the term "mimetic modes" means that the story to be discussed is similar in terms of structure to an archetypal myth (34).

Frye borrows the word *mythos* (story) from Aristotle. However, in *Fables of Identity* he uses the term in the sense of plot (22) and uses myth to mean story or a certain type of story used to account for the world. In *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (65) Frye says that myth tells a story and that a diversity of narratives is produced in literature based upon mythical structures (61).

The objectives of the study:

The objective of this research is to show that Cather's *The Song of the Lark* can be studied from a mythical perspective. In light of such a perspective, this novel becomes richer. The intention of this study is also to show that *The Song of the Lark* is strongly based on the classical myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece in terms of structure and theme rather than on the myth of Artemis or the myth of Orpheus as thought by other critics.

Consequently, this study will attempt to link Thea with the archetypal mythical figure of Jason in light of Frye's myth criticism, with particular emphasis on his concept of displacement.

Frye explains in *Anatomy of Criticism* that because the presence of a mythical structure in realistic fiction poses some technical challenges to attain plausibility, certain devices are employed to overcome such challenges. Frye says that these devices may be given the general name of "displacement" (136). He argues that a good deal of displacement is required to make a story realistic and consistent and that it is only after a comparative study of the story type had been conducted that the mythical structure within it begins to emerge. Consequently, the structure of *The Song of the Lark* will be examined and compared with the structures of the myths of Artemis, Orpheus, and Jason and the Golden Fleece.

Review of related literature:

Mary Ruth Ryder discusses in *Willa Cather and Classical Myth: The Search for a New Parnassus* (1990) that Thea in *The Song of the Lark* is a devotee to Artemis and is presented as a goddess armored against the forces that threaten her art (141). Dorothy Van Ghent in *Willa Cather* (1964) points out that Cather wanted to liberate Thea from the mediocrity and commonness that surrounded her by improving the quality of her voice and by seeking distinction through hard work and perseverance (19).

In "The Cather Thesis: The American Empire of Migration" in *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather* (2005), Joseph R. Urgo states that Cather portrays Thea in such a way as to shed light on her highly individualized gift which turns her into a recognized icon (42-44). Thea becomes a soprano who challenges tradition and achieves worldly success by becoming a star in the professional world where power, control, and creation are normally reserved for men. Guy Reynolds says in his article entitled "Modernist Space: Willa Cather's Environmental Imagination in Context" that Cather is thought of as a "sophisticated modifier of an American female tradition of the home and the domestic". Women at the time were assigned stereotypical tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and embroidering. Through her portrayal of Thea, Cather implicitly attacks the notion that links femininity with stereotypical subordination and passivity. Sharon O'Brien states that Thea embodies Cather's idea of the artist as a

person who “possesses traits conventionally divided between the sexes: intellect, discipline, and control as well as intuition, passion, and self-abandonment” (425).

The novel deals with Thea’s artistic growth as an ideal trajectory for the discovery and expression of all sorts of art. That is why some critics view this novel to be semi-autobiographical. David Harvey says in “Time-Space Compression and the Post-modern Condition” that:

As spatial barriers diminish so we become much more sensitized to what the world’s spaces contain. Flexible accumulation typically exploits a wide range of seemingly contingent geographical circumstances, and reconstitutes them as structured internal elements of its own encompassing logic. (294)

Cather, like Thea, had six brothers and perhaps saw herself as the chosen one. Jean Schwind states that this work investigates the origins of Cather’s own art (90). Ryder argues that *The Song of the Lark* is actually based on the memories of Cather’s trip to the Southwest. Cather found that such a story about the struggle of a small-town girl of artistic abilities is, in a number of ways, her own story. But the inspiration behind the portrayal of Thea came from Cather’s acquaintance with the famed opera soprano, Olive Fremstad (129).

Richard Giannone says that despite the fact that Cather had taken piano lessons as a child, she was much more interested in the stories that her piano teacher used to tell her. He states that Cather listened to music to add to her dreams. The most prominent people who influenced the mature Cather had a musical background such as her Aunt Frank, who promoted signing groups, and Peorianna Bogardus Sill, who studied music under the famed Russian pianist-composer Anton Rubinstein in Europe and who related to Cather the elegant world beyond hers (3-4).

Methodology:

The study will adopt myth criticism in light of Frye’s ideas because this kind of criticism can illuminate relationships between the present and the past and can highlight ways of thinking that appear to be recurrent (if not permanent) in human culture. This particular kind of criticism looks for larger narratives, recurrent themes and archetypes. This will be conducted through showing that Frye’s ideas are helpful in understanding modern

fiction and that applying them is useful to our appreciation of literature. Because an original myth is a way to account for the world, Cather uses displacement to both reveal and relate her own vision of the world around her.

Murray Krieger says that Frye has come up with a revolutionary theory by observing a downward movement from a particular work to the world at large. Krieger explains that this movement is an echo of the downward movement toward displacement because stories become more realistic as literature flows from unencumbered myth to mimetic modes with the promise to return (11). Based on this downward movement, Frye divides his fictional modes into five categories that are mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic.

It would be useful to define the general characteristics of each mode so as to relate Thea to her relevant mode. In the mythic mode, the hero is divine. He is superior in kind to other men and the environment. This type of hero is found in myth proper as a god. In the romantic mode, the hero is human but he is superior to other men and the environment by being aided with magic or special powers. Frye argues that this kind of hero normally appears in legends and folktales. In the high mimetic mode, the hero is superior to other men but not to the environment. He is a leader who displays authority, eloquence, and passion. This kind of hero is mainly found in epics and tragedies. The low mimetic hero is one of us because he is subject to the same weaknesses that we encounter and struggle with. Frye finds this kind of hero in comedies as well as some realistic fiction. The hero of the ironic mode is inferior to us because he suffers from either a certain kind of defect which might be physical, psychological, mental, or moral. This hero appears in stories of frustration and absurdity (*Anatomy* 33-34).

In light of the five modes, Frye relates their structural classification to five structures of meaning by developing what he terms “*mythoi* or generic plots” into representations of the rising movement of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Frye poses that the *mythos* of spring is comedy, the *mythos* of summer is romance, the *mythos* of autumn is tragedy while the *mythos* of winter is irony and satire. Frye examines the elements of each season with the hero and his desires which he achieves or does not achieve.

Furthermore, Frye expands his theory to a much more comprehensive view of literature linking natural movements together with literary archetypes. Frye correlates the solar cycle of the day with the seasonal cycle of the year with the organic cycle of life on one hand together with the types of myth and their archetypes on the other. Because he believes that the true hero of any story is the sun, he associates the rise of the sun in dawn or early morning with spring and birth or youth as in creation myths or myths of the birth of the hero.

He links the sun at the time of zenith or noontime when it is at its utmost energy with summer and marriage or triumph as in the apotheosis myths or myths of the entry into paradise in comedy. He relates the sun at the time of sunset or evening time with autumn and death and he combines the darkness or night time that exists after the departure of the sun with winter and dissolution (*Fables* 15-16).

Thea's artistic quest is like the personal transformation that Cather had gone through in her own life. Thea's piano teacher in Chicago, Andor Harsanyi, tells her that "[e]very artist makes himself born.... That you must bring into the world yourself" (447). So Thea is born with an artistic talent. Thea in the novel has a voice, which can lead nowhere unless trained by expert teachers. So the seed dies unless provided with the proper environment and care that would allow it to grow. Without these, the seed dries up or rots.

Mary Bagley claims that Cather tried to break free from the world of the female short story writers. O'Brien argues in her introduction to *Alexander's Bridge* that "since the short story was the dominant local-color genre, moving to the novel also meant leaving the domain of nineteenth-century women's writing" (qtd. in Bagley 29). Both folktales and classical myths are combined in *The Song of the Lark* as the sources of Cather's art of writing. She refers several times to the folktales of the early cliff dwellers of Panther Canyon, when Thea embarks on the visit to Frederick Ottenburg's ranch, as well as to the myth of Orpheus, when Thea starts taking voice lessons, as a means to pave the way for Thea's artistic initiation.

Ryder says that the Orpheus myth provides the structural basis for Thea's quest as a singer in *The Song of the Lark* (61). Orpheus sings so sweetly that he enchants not only other gods but also animals and trees. He loses his wife, Eurydice, a couple of times to the underworld. He tries to rescue her

and in his second trial, he gets himself killed. In light of this, the only similarity between Thea and Orpheus is the rare quality of an outstandingly wonderful voice that is a source of pleasure to others.

Looking at matters from a different end of the spectrum, Ryder later on hints to a potential relationship between Thea and Artemis, who is taken to be a symbol of “aesthetic beauty” (195). Artemis is one of the major Greek Olympian goddesses, who devotes her life to hunting. Ryder seems to have considered that the sense of devotion and achievement that strongly determines Artemis’s life is the same as the one that defines Thea’s, who avoids any opportunity of settling down until much later in life and after the fulfillment of her dream. But this aspect alone in the Artemis myth is insufficient to link the structure of the two stories together.

Because the greatest part of Thea’s story is devoted to the ordeal of becoming a successful soprano, *The Song of the Lark* is similar in structure to the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece because it shares with it stronger structural parallelisms than with either the Orpheus myth or the Artemis myth. According to Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, the paradigm of success is one in which the hero returns with gold, builds a city, establishes a state, or reaches paradise with the help of others. For Frye, one myth is not better than another if the basic structure is maintained. Jason’s adventure in finding the Golden Fleece is traced by a challenging quest that leads to a difficult ordeal which is finally crowned with success through the help of others. Likewise, Thea’s story, which revolves around a quest that takes the form of success as a diva, comes to fruition only through the assistance of a number of helpers and after enduring struggles in her ordeal.

Jason is identified by *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (1937) as the son of Aeson, who is a native of Iolcos. The child Jason was threatened with death by his uncle Pelias, who usurps Aeson’s throne. Jason escapes his uncle and grows under the care of the centaur Chiron, who provides him with both safety and education. When Jason is fully grown, he leaves Pelion, where the centaur lives, and returns to his native Iolcos with only one sandal. Pelias becomes alarmed because an oracle has warned him to beware of a one-sandaled lad. In order to get rid of Jason, Pelias sends him on a quest to fetch the Golden Fleece. In this quest, Jason goes through a trying ordeal and eventually succeeds in finding the fleece initially with the help of the centaur Chiron and later on some fifty of the chief heroes of

Greece, who sail with him on board the *Argo* when undertaking the adventure (41).

Frye claims that romance is the structural basis of all fiction because it directly descends from folktales. He argues that the conventions of prose romance showed minor changes over the course of centuries which is a mark of a stable genre (*Secular*, 4). He states that the romance is the nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream and that the plot's essential element in romance is a processional and sequential form (*Anatomy*, 186-187). Similarly, Thea's story, which consists of sequential adventures, is an illustration of a dream come true.

Professor Wunsch, Thea's German piano teacher, whose name means wish in German, is the first to help in the fulfillment of Thea's dream by detecting her talent in spite of her young age. He, therefore, introduces her to melodies other than those sung in church. He relates his discovery to Mrs. Kronborg, who fully appreciates how important her daughter's talent is:

Professor Wunsch went to the houses of his other pupils to give them their lessons, but one morning he told Mrs. Kronborg that Thea had talent, and that if she came to him he could teach her in his slippers, and that would be better. Mrs. Kronborg was a strange woman. The word "talent," which no one else in Moonstone, not even Dr. Archie, would have understood, she comprehended perfectly. To any other woman there, it would have meant that a child must have her hair curled every day and must play in public. Mrs. Kronborg knew it meant that Thea must practice four hours a day. A child with talent must be kept at the piano, just as a child with measles must be kept under the blankets. Mrs. Kronborg and her three sisters had all studied piano, and all sang well, but none of them had talent. (314)

Thea is described in the novel as not "meant for common men. She was like wedding cake, a thing to dream on" (424) and that she "will do nothing common. She is uncommon, in a common, common world" (479). Van Ghent says that Cather wanted to liberate Thea from the mediocrity and commonness that surrounded her by seeking distinction through hard work and perseverance (19). It is Thea's singing that distinguishes her from the rest of the characters after all. She comes rapidly to understand this, and that

is why she does not commit herself to any prospect of settling down with a potential husband until later on in her life.

Nadeane Trowse says in her article entitled “Disease, Doctors, and Diagnoses as Social Action” that Thea resists a conventional love relationship since she believes it would be an obstacle in the fulfillment of her dream. Bagley argues that Thea embodies all the traits that Cather considers important; she is an artist and she is young. To Cather, youth means imagination and, therefore, the ability to dream (97). We always see Thea as a young artist who is blessed with beauty, charm, and talent. After she reaches her artistic climax, we see her through other peoples’ eyes as still being relatively young and at the prime of her artistic excellence.

The names chosen by novelists for their created characters are sometimes indicative of certain traits and characteristics. Alastair Fowler states that names have great suggestive powers and hence a special place in literature (75). Cather turns to the Greek world in selecting the name “Thea” for her principal character. Thea is regarded as the deity from which all light proceeded. The probable link here is that as gods and goddesses are superior in kind to men due to their nature, Thea is distinguished from other men and women in the novel due to her genuine artistic gift that shines as light.

To illustrate, when Thea decides to leave New York to Berlin for the sake of gaining better voice training there Fred, who is a vocal specialist, tells her: “You know, your leaving me like this – well, it’s almost inhuman to be able to do it so kindly and unconditionally”. She affirms the “inhuman” trait in her by stating: “I suppose it is. It was almost inhuman to be able to leave home, too, – the last time, when I knew it was for good. But all the same, I cared a great deal more than anybody else did. I lived through it” (612). Here Thea is admitting that she went through hard times, which she had eventually survived by making her more focused on the accomplishment of her aspiration in life.

No doubt Cather thought of Thea as being an artistically prominent and outstanding figure in the story in comparison with the other characters like Lily Fisher. Therefore, Cather’s choice of the name Thea in particular works well with the extraordinary image which she is trying to relate to her diva. In another instance when Fred questions Oliver Landry, a co-singer with Thea, about Thea’s voice, he replies:

“Oh, it’s a question of a big personality – and all that goes with it. Brains, of course. Imagination, of course. But the important thing is that she was born full of color, with a rich personality. That’s a gift of the gods, like a fine nose. ... When Thea was studying in Berlin the other girls were mortally afraid of her. (672)

Ryder explains that Thea’s surname is also indicative of her internal strength:

Even her [Thea’s] surname Kronborg, with its Scandinavian origin, referring to both the crown (kron) and a walled city (borg), recalls an abode for kings, if not gods. For Cather the name also surely echoed the Titanic powers of Cronus (Kronos) in his battle against the familial forces that would wrest his kingdom from him. (130)

In any case, Cather chooses this particular surname to foreshadow the prominent professional status that Thea will earn due to her distinguished artistic achievement. This also foretells that she will be crowned as the soprano queen ruling over the throne of opera singing of her time. Fred comments on Thea’s voice to Dr. Howard Archie toward the end of the novel by saying:

[T]hat’s the high voice we dream of; so pure and yet so virile and human. The combination hardly ever happens with sopranos.” ... “You see, Archie, there’s the voice itself, so beautiful and individual, and then there’s something else; the thing in it which responds to every shade of thought and feeling, spontaneously, almost unconsciously. That color has to be born in a singer, it can’t be acquired; lots of beautiful voices have n’t a vestige of it. It’s almost like another gift – the rarest of all. The voice simply is the mind and is the heart. It can’t go wrong in interpretation, because it has in it the thing that makes all interpretation. That’s why you feel so sure of her. After you’ve listened to her for an hour or so, you are n’t afraid of anything. All the little dreads you have with other artists vanish. You lean back and you say to yourself, ‘No, *that* voice will never betray.’ ...”. [author’s emphasis] (647)

Thea's inner artistic ability radiates throughout the story indicating that her talent does not cease to glow. To illustrate, Professor Wunsch describes her face as "a face full of light and energy, of the unquestioning hopefulness of first youth" (379). At a later stage in the novel, Fred asks Dr. Archie about Thea by stating: "Did you notice her when she came down the stairs? Wonder where she gets that bright-and-morning star look?... That, I said, belongs only to the big ones" (649). When she first sings in the opera house in Chicago, "[h]er eyes were brighter than even Harsanyi had ever seen them" (470), and when she performs the leading role in *Fricka* toward the end of the story, [s]he seemed to take on the look of immortal loveliness, ..., the shining body and the shining mind" (671). So the more Thea approaches her artistic climax, the more her radiance glows bringing more pleasure to her audience.

Thea is not only a source of pleasure to others, but also an inspiration to them. She is regarded as a heroine, whose story serves as a model of success urging others to follow. For instance, Thea's Aunt Tillie keeps on telling stories about her niece's success until "into all the little settlements of quite people, tidings of what their boys and girls are doing in the world bring real refreshment; bring to the old, memories, and to the young, dreams" (706). Thea is an example for others to follow because she undergoes such a struggle as leaving her town behind, severing her relationship with her unsupportive family, and neglecting matters that are considered priorities in others' lives before she becomes an epitome of achievement. Through her depiction of Thea, Cather shows how a woman can be transformed from a mere farm-town girl to a sophisticated artist. Throughout the novel, Cather traces Thea's artistic quest until she becomes the lark of the song. Harsanyi is impressed by her magnificent singing which reminds him of the natural singing of a bird:

He loved to hear a big voice throb in a relaxed, natural throat, and he was thinking that no one had ever felt this voice vibrate before. It was like a wild bird that had flown into his studio on Middleton Street from goodness knew how far! No one knew that it had come, or even that it existed; least of all the strange, crude girl in whose throat it beat its passionate wings. (457)

In Chicago, Thea seizes the opportunity to visit the Art Institute. Among the artistic displays that she enjoys watching is a picture which she strongly relates to:

[O]h, that was the thing she 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 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. (466)

This indicates that Thea views herself to be the chosen one, the gifted. Nonetheless, her aspiration to become a professional singer encounters a number of obstacles that would have hindered the progress of any artist. For instance, she is the only artist in the story who is able to defy all the limitations put in her path by being able to depart Moonstone at the right time for the betterment of her professional future. Unlike Thea, both Professor Wunsch and Spanish Jonny were unable to leave the primitive Moonstone for a more favorable artistic career.

Despite the fact that Thea is not reassured with moral or constant financial support, she defies her family's social status and leaves her home town to pursue her dream. Frye states that a quest involving a conflict assumes two characters, which are a hero, and his / her enemy. He states that the antagonists in the quest-romance are basically of the same familial origin as the quest hero / heroine (*Anatomy* 186-187). Thea's aspiration to become a diva was looked down upon by some of her family members such as her eldest sister, Anna, and her younger brothers, Gus, and Charley. Her desire to become a professionally recognized singer is not welcome because she comes from a religious family whose head is the Minister of the town. Moreover, some members think of her as a source of shame and disgrace to the entire family. As a result, these members for Thea are among the people whom "she had always recognized as her natural enemies. ...Nothing that she would ever do in the world would seem important to them" (502).

According to Frye, the archetypal theme of romance is conflict (*ibid*). Typically, Thea encounters a conflict with her family and environment. At an early point in the novel, Reverend Kronborg was perfectly happy to have Thea sing at the local church. But this was never what Thea ever wanted. As a result, her situation at home becomes no longer comfortable, her relationship with her sister and brothers becomes strained, and she is left alone to suffer the agony of her wish. So she seriously starts thinking of departing the “primitive” Moonstone, at such a young age, to the more sophisticated Chicago in pursuit of professional vocal training. Because Thea lives in a cultural desert, she is faced with various frustrations in the pursuit of her dream. Therefore, her departure becomes the best option marking the beginning of her quest. Michelle E. Moore states that Cather demonstrates how exposure to art will improve Thea’s evaluation of the world around her by enabling her to escape her previous unsophisticated world (98).

Thea’s generation is to an extent a transitional one still having minor but rapidly fading connections with the land. So she moves backwards and forwards between Chicago and Moonstone, until she realizes that she is no longer welcome in Moonstone and does not actually belong there anymore. Joseph W. Meeker states that like Thea, Cather probably considers that the absence of familiar landscapes will free the artistic spirit (81). In order to burnish her artistic talent, Thea is compelled to leave Moonstone to the much more advanced Chicago. In order for her artistic talent to grow, it is necessary for Thea to leave Moonstone, which is a somewhat primitive town with no future for an artist, as soon as the opportunity arises. Moonstone is looked down upon even by Mrs. Kronborg, who comments that it is not a place for an artist as Professor Wunsch.

Thea would not have been able to reach what she has accomplished in her professional career without the help of a number of her admirers. These admirers have conveniently existed to pave her way toward success and artistic achievement. In other terms, they function as her helpers. The character of the helper takes a variety of forms, but he / she frequently appears to help the quest-hero / heroine on his / her way to accomplish his / her goal. Vladimir Propp states that helpers are divided into universal helpers, partial helpers, or specific helpers (82). The men who love Thea have helped her in order to proceed toward the attainment of her goal. To

explain, Dr. Archie, Professor Wunsch, Ray Kennedy, Harsanyi, and Fred, who have all been enchanted with Thea, help her either socially, financially, or professionally to overcome certain obstacles in her quest so as to proceed ahead toward her ultimate goal.

Some of these characters try to hide behind the roles prescribed for them by society in order to repress their true feelings toward Thea while others are not so successful. For example, Dr. Archie, who could be recognized as a universal helper since he assists Thea in various stages of her quest, tries to hide behind his function as the town's physician at the time that Professor Wunsch attempts to do the same by hiding behind the role of the town's only piano teacher while Harsanyi's interest is purely professional. However, the motives of both Ray and Fred are more predictable regarding to what they feel for Thea.

Laura Dubek argues that the degree to which these male characters succeed in negotiating a compromise between social definitions of masculine identity and their repressed second selves varies (295). From the beginning of the novel, it is evident that Dr. Archie perceives Thea in a different manner from all of his other patients. To her family, Thea is probably just a mere number especially in light of the new addition to the family, her youngest brother Thor, raising the number of its members to seven siblings. She is first introduced as a sick girl who is twelve years old suffering from pneumonia and who is not attended to by any of her family members. Adequate care is eventually given to her only after the barely thirty year old Doctor arrives at the Kronborg's residence and takes matters into his own hands. In accordance with the society's patriarchal standards that require men to repress feelings of intimacy and passion, Dr. Archie functions on the social level as a substitute father-figure to Thea by displaying a margin of rational control over any critically emotional situation that might engage him with her.

Ever since she was a child, he viewed her to be an object of beauty. As a physician, he was unable to keep his mind focused on just his professional task as when she fell ill:

As he pushed back the hair that that had fuzzed down over her eyebrows, he felt her head thoughtfully with the tips of his fingers. No, he couldn't say that it was different from any other child's head, though he believed that there was something very different about her. He looked intently at her wide, flushed face, freckled nose, fierce little mouth, and her delicate, tender chin—the one soft touch in her hard little Scandinavian face, as if some fairy godmother had caressed her there and left a cryptic promise. Her brows were usually drawn together defiantly, but never when she was with Dr. Archie. Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor's life in Moonstone. (301)

Being a child, her affection for him is innocent. But his affection for her is not that innocent. In the first scene of their encounter, he, being a young unhappily married man, is reminded, just looking at her while she is asleep, of how miserable his marriage is. He reflects on how empty his life truly is. As shown in the later episodes in the novel, he is always pleased with her visits to his clinic. He was constantly more than delighted to listen to her accounts to the extent that at one point when their paths were unlikely to cross, he offered to lend her his books to read so that her visits to him would not cease.

As she grows, he remains her confidant. He is very comfortable and happy with her but this relationship develops on his part into something more than mere friendship. Thea's warmth and youthfulness are always contrasted in his fantasy with the strange woman he is married to. As a result, he escapes his unsatisfactory marriage and his personal sense of emotional failure by remaining the devoted Physician of Moonstone. But because he is transferred from Michigan, he never truly belongs. In actuality, he is the most sophisticated character in town whose only source of comfort is young Thea. Dr. Archie is constantly preoccupied with the image of little Thea. Even after the tragic death of his wife, he is incapable of remarrying because to him no woman is able to measure up to Thea's image in his mind. He never spares any opportunity just to be with her and to be infused by her enthusiasm.

For instance, before Thea leaves to study voice in Germany, she writes to him for money and advice. He does not hesitate to give her what she wants. As a result, he immediately buys a ticket to New York just to see her again.

He realizes that at the age of forty, he had not travelled that far in his entire life and that he does not mind it at all since he is doing it for Thea. He is excited to see her again after some time to the extent that he orders his tailor to make him a new suit to meet her in just like a groom, who is looking forward to be reunited with his bride. He looks forward to rescuing her from surrendering to frustration. When he ponders about his life by looking back in time, he asks himself:

...which years of it he would like to live over again, – just as they had been, – and they were not many. His college years he would live again, gladly. After them there was nothing he would care to repeat until he came to Thea Kronborg. ... He realized now that she had counted for a great deal more to him than he knew at the time. It was a continuous sort of relationship. ... but when we look back, the only things we cherish are those which in some way met our original want; the desire which formed in us in early youth, undirected, and of its own accord. (629-630)

Thea's image as a child keeps on haunting Dr. Archie. He looks forward to seeing her professionally perform as a diva at the height of her artistic profession. He anticipates her entry in the opera house which he thinks would evoke feelings of nostalgia. He sits among the audience to attend her performance of Elsa von Brabant. Her performance is wonderful but he realizes that this woman, who stands before him, is no longer his young friend. Here he comprehends that Thea has undergone a kind of metamorphosis because he finds himself applauding the new and wonderful, not the old and dear.

Thea's second helper is Herr Wunsch. He is the instructor, who teaches her how to play the piano early in her life, when she was a little girl in Moonstone. From the very beginning, Professor Wunsch easily recognizes Thea's talent and latent capabilities. He teaches piano to a lot of pupils, but Thea is different because she is the only student who is able to awaken his interest:

It was his pupil's power of application, her rugged will, that interested him. 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. Now that he by chance encountered it, it recalled standards, ambitions, a society long forgot. What was it 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. (319)

It seems that Professor Wunsch's interest in Thea rapidly develops into something more than a mere professional interest. He is unable at first to admit what he exactly feels for her due to his old age. But when he sets his mind on finding an answer, he becomes ashamed of where his emotions are leading him. In accordance with the conventions of society, he attempts to repress his embarrassing feelings toward her. He, like Dr. Archie, starts to look forward to their piano lesson together and the more he tries to neglect his affection for her, the more he becomes preoccupied with her. Due to this inappropriate situation, he becomes troubled and finds no relief except by getting drunk and escaping to live in the Kohlers' garden. Still, his frequent meetings with her are sufficient to keep on tormenting him. This increases his emotional and mental imbalance that is categorized by others around him as insanity.

Shortly afterwards, Professor Wunsch decides to leave Moonstone once and for all to spare himself the disgrace he is subjecting himself to. The help that he offers Thea is partial since he disappears after this stage, but it is crucial in Thea's quest because it functions as the first call to undertake the subsequent quest to her professional career.

Ray Kennedy, a worker on a freight train who is of the same age as that of Dr. Archie, is the first to acknowledge his attraction to Thea. He tells her about fascinating landscapes so as to create opportunities for spending some time with her. It is not until he tells her about the Indian cliff-dwellers that he really catches her attention:

“I'll tell you, Thee,” he began after a pause, “I'm going to form a camping party one of these days and persuade your *padre* to take you and your mother to that country, and we'll live in the rock houses – they're as comfortable as can be – and start the cook fires up in 'em once again....” Ray had planned such an expedition for his wedding journey, and it made his heart thump to see how

Thea's eyes kindled when he talked about it. "I've learned more down there about what makes history," he went on, "than in all the books I've ever read. When you sit in the sun and let your heels hang out of a doorway that drops a thousand feet, ideas come to you. You begin to feel what the human race has been up against from the beginning. There's something mighty elevating about those old habitations. You feel like it's up to you to do your best, on account of those fellows having it so hard. You feel like you owed them something". [author's emphasis] (398-399)

Ray assumes that this episode brings Thea closer to him. So he finally builds up enough courage and confidence to ask for her hand in marriage. It seems that Cather's female artist must place her artistic aspirations first. This was recognized by Professor Wunsch who was the first to comment that Ray should not marry Thea at this stage of her life because it would hinder the pursuit of her dream, and that she should not marry until marriage would not interfere in her growth as an artist. Anyhow, a few hours before Ray's proposal to Thea, he gets killed by a horrific train accident. But just before he dies, he wills his life insurance in Thea's interest. This is very convenient for Thea because the legacy is more than enough to take her to the long-dreamt-of Chicago seeking professional supervision and training. This makes him a donor helper offering Thea a specific kind of help, which is financial.

Harsanyi is another key helper in Thea's quest. He is the one to discover that with the right kind of training, Thea would be destined to become a great soprano rather than a pianist. In other words, he is the one to put her on the right professional track. He is also considered a partial helper because after such a discovery, this kind of professional supervision is no longer required. When Thea sang to him in Chicago, he was "never quite sure where the light came from when her face suddenly flashed out at him in that way.... At such moments her hair was yellower, her skin whiter, her cheeks pinker, as if a lamp had suddenly been turned up inside of her" (460). Harsanyi does not hesitate to relate his estimation to Thea as soon as he is sure of it in order to spare her losing more time.

Thea is then transferred to Madison Bowers, her voice teacher in Chicago. He negatively influences her because he actually hates artists and prefers farming to singing. This results in her great despair:

Her two years in Chicago had not resulted in anything. She had failed with Harsanyi, and she had no great progress with her voice. ... 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. (545)

At this stage, Thea reaches a tremendous ordeal. She is on the verge of surrendering and giving up her dream, which she worked so hard for so far. This phase in Thea's artistic pursuit signifies a sort of death because she is willing to accept failure if it were not for Fred. Fred, who is young and enthusiastic like her, decides to take her to his family's ranch at Panther Canyon in an attempt to allow her to break away from the tension that has been mounting on her due to constant training and rehearsals as well as disappointments and setbacks. The timing of the visit is perfect because after Thea expects to accomplish a lot in a short span of time, she becomes rather desperate since after two years in Chicago, she feels that she has not been going anywhere in her artistic development. From this time on, Fred is the specific helper, who regards aiding Thea during this critical time as his mission:

"I'll make it my business in life to get her on. There's nothing else I care about so much as seeing her have her chance. She hasn't touched her real force yet. She isn't even aware of it. Lord, don't I know something about them [Sopranos]? There isn't one of them that has such a depth to draw from. She'll be one of the greatest artists of our time. ...I'll get her off to Germany this winter, or take her. She hasn't got any time to waste now. I'll make it up to her, all right". (577)

Fred shows that he understands the psychological and physical strain Thea suffers from after being met with some discouragement in Chicago. The visit that he arranges to Panther Canyon lifts Thea's morale and boosts her ego. She is fascinated by it. One of her basic pleasures there is initiated by her feeling of belonging to the heritage of artistic achievers in line with the early female cliff-dwellers. Thea experiences a personal link with these primitive female Indian artists, and this makes her more determined than ever not to lose faith in her gift. She comes to understand that as the female dwellers of the cliff live forever through their artistic works of pottery, her

professional reputation will be immortalized through her distinctive artistic performance. After this visit, Thea's vision of her future life becomes clearer because the cliff-dwellers have implicitly taught her that "she had older and higher obligations" (555).

Warren Motley argues that Thea exemplifies the woman, who seems able to "escape the limits of the self and ascend to larger human concerns" (156). As a result, the novel is a celebration of her sense of obligation as well as her ability to defy the challenges of a new beginning. According to Frye:

The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages.... We may call these stages respectively, using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero. (*Anatomy* 187)

In her crucial struggle to proceed and develop in Panther Canyon, Thea "had begun to understand that – with her, at least – voice was, first of all, vitality; a lightness in the body and a driving power in the blood" (554). After this realization:

It was while she was in this abstracted state, waiting for the clock to strike, that Thea at last made up her mind what she was going to try to do in the world, and that she was going to Germany to study without further loss of time. Only by the merest chance had she ever got to Panther Canyon. ...The Cliff-Dwellers had lengthened her past. (555)

The visit to Panther Canyon restores Thea's confidence in herself. Susan J. Rosowski claims that by entering Panther Canyon, Thea is restored to creative vitality (111). When Thea sings at Mrs. Nathanmeyer in Chicago, she glows, and the glow cannot be dimmed. But after some time, she does not remain the same. A kind of essential rehabilitation takes place only during this visit with Fred, who:

[s]aw Thea standing on the edge of a projecting crag. She waved to him and threw her arm over her head, as if she were snapping her fingers in the air. As he saw her there between the sky and the gulf, with that great wash of air and the morning light about her, Fred recalled the brilliant figure at Mrs. Nathanmeyer's. Thea was one of those people who emerge, unexpectedly, larger than we are accustomed to see them. Even at this distance one got the impression of muscular energy and audacity, – a kind of brilliancy of motion, – of a personality that carried across big spaces and expanded among big things. (566)

This visit recovers Thea's emotional and psychological balance that is extremely essential for the achievement of success. During this trip, Thea is infused with more determination and energy to achieve her goal. She experiences a kind of rebirth there that comes upon her, according to Bagley, as a religious epiphany (102).

After Thea feels complete satisfaction, she spots a huge eagle in the sky. The appearance of an eagle, which is the king of the sky, symbolizes her desire to be queen in her profession. The existence of an eagle could also serve as a positive omen concerning her future artistic supremacy especially because after it soars upwards, it looks like a golden bird. She thinks: "O eagle of eagles! Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art!" (567). It is evident that Thea's artistic awareness is increasing and expanding with the exposure to various ventures and experiences.

Coming back from this visit, she decides to go to Germany in order to pursue her dream. Thea's perseverance is to be celebrated here because at the time that many simply let go being left with no money, guidance, or hope, she chooses to proceed with her artistic development. Thea's artistic performance climaxes in *Sieglinde* in which she comes into her full artistic powers and becomes entirely illuminated by her artistic supremacy. At this point, Thea becomes an ideal of artistic devotion. It is after this episode that the story of Thea in specific comes to an end. It is at this stage that Thea finally leaves the mortal world and enters the kingdom of art through her exemplary artistic achievement. Cather prefers at this stage to directly communicate with the reader to extend the essence of Thea's story:

Here we must leave Thea Kronborg. From this time on the story of her life is the story of her achievement. The growth of an artist is an intellectual and spiritual development which can scarcely be followed in a personal narrative. This story attempts to deal only with the simple and concrete beginnings which color and accent an artist's work, and to give some account of how a Moonstone girl found her way out of a vague, easy-going world into a life of disciplined endeavor. Any account of the loyalty of young hearts to some exalted ideal, and the passion with which they strive, will always, in some of us, rekindle generous emotions. (699)

What is stressed in this passage is achievement. A girl with a potential and a dream is recognized for believing in herself and in overcoming the obstacles that could have destroyed her or anyone else's aspirations. Ira Siff states that there are a number of sopranos who are loved more than some. These sopranos seem to belong to the public and the public, therefore, belongs to them (26). This is what Thea experiences. The last section of the novel, Part VI, carries her name, Kronborg, indicating that she has become a well-known icon in the world of opera singing. Uργο states that "[t]he final section of *The Song of the Lark* is titled "Kronborg," suggesting that Thea has become an icon, a great fact" (44). In the final performance of *Sieglinde* all of Thea's friends, old and new, come and sit at different floors and levels just to see her perform as a token of great recognition and pride. They are in a way paying a proper tribute to their cherished friend.

After witnessing the uproarious applause Thea receives from the audience at the end of the performance, Mrs. Harsanyi reminds her husband that he once said "she would do nothing common", so he comments: "Just so. She might fail, die, get lost in the pack. But if she achieved, it would be nothing common. There are people whom one can trust for that. There is one way in which they will never fail" (696). Thea's success will increase with time. Her fame, wealth, and professional reputation will increase as she will perform other roles of distinction. Harvey C. Lehman says that the amount of good production does not decrease in middle age for those working in creative fields. Consequently, Thea's artistic performance will continue to rise especially after she proved to herself as well as to others what she is capable of accomplishing.

Consequently, because Thea's quest results in a celebration of achievement and consequent professional success, she represents the quest-heroine in romance, who is committed to the maximum fulfillment of her goal. She is integrated into society and is recognized to become a remarkable icon in her professional domain.

Conclusion:

In light of Frye's ideas, *The Song of the Lark* belongs to the low mimetic comic fictional mode because Thea is one of us. Her strength lies in her determination to accomplish her dream. Because Thea's quest results in a celebration of achievement and consequent professional success, she represents the quest-heroine, who is committed to the maximum fulfillment of her goal. She is integrated into society and is recognized to become a remarkable icon in her professional domain. Frye associates the hero / heroine of the quest theme with order, vigor, fertility and youth because, as in Thea's case, the hero / heroine is at the height of his / her production and contribution.

This work resembles the seasonal cycle of summer because Thea's life is finally blossoming and she is eventually gaining the fruits of her own success. Her achievement also signifies her distinction in the world of opera. This relates Thea's vivacity to the solar cycle of the sun at the time of zenith because she is depicted at her utmost capacity and energy while the novel's organic cycle of life resembles maturity because Thea succeeds in establishing herself as a well-recognized diva in the world of opera.

To sum up, examining Cather's *The Song of the Lark* from a mythical viewpoint has increased the readership's appreciation of the work. Linking Thea with the archetypal mythical figure of Jason in light of Frye's myth criticism, has definitely added more profound dimensions to Thea's overall character in the various stages of her life. This, in its turn, has succeeded in offering a richer understanding of the novel itself.

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