



# Putting Myra into Orders: Locating the Operations of the Lacanian Orders in Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*

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**Abstract**— Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* features Myra Henshawe as its central character, whose romantic relationship affects her overarching relationship with material wealth. Critical works focusing on these two concepts – wealth and love – to analyze this novel is not difficult to find but such critical lenses never incorporated Jacques Lacan's notions regarding the human psyche. This paper intends to provide insight into this opening by analyzing the character Myra Henshawe in light of Lacan's psychoanalytic theories. The purpose is to find out how different stages of Myra's life correspond with specific Lacanian orders, i.e. – the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the 'Real'. Thus, the theoretical framework is provided by Jacques Lacan's theory of the three orders and some conceptual understandings on the Mirror Stage, the Desire of the Mother, the Name-of-the-Father, the 'objet petit a', lack, desire, 'jouissance' and the Death Drive aid in this regard as well. The discourse of *My Mortal Enemy* has been analyzed and the findings have been viewed in light of such theoretical and conceptual understandings to assess the nature of Myra's dysfunction as an individual within society. This paper's investigation of *My Mortal Enemy*'s Myra Henshawe through the Lacanian orders shows that – wealth & romantic love structure her life into different segments, which if situated varying into the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders, engenders varying interpretations that serve as explanations for Myra's gradually decreasing capacity to function in society, and how within these orders, Myra's encounter(s) with the 'Real' can be specified, which sheds light on Myra's traumas & her tendency to repetitively cycle back to such traumatic experiences and also further accounts for her dysfunction.

**Keywords**— Cather, Imaginary, Lacan, Myra, Real, Symbolic

## I. INTRODUCTION

*My Mortal Enemy* is a novel by Pulitzer winning American writer Willa Cather (1873-1947) which tells the story of Myra Henshawe who - was brought up in wealth, loses that wealthy life due to her love, attempts to recreate that wealthy lifestyle, but eventually falls into poverty. Myra's wealthy & luxurious life in the town of Parthia with her great-uncle John Driscoll gets left behind when she elopes with Oswald Henshawe to go live in New York. This creates a new life for her in which the wealth of her previous life doesn't exist and she tries to cope with it by putting on airs of wealth by heavy spending, getting wealthy friends & other such actions. But as the plot progresses, Myra goes through a gradual decrease in wealth, which corresponds with a gradual increase in lack of social functionality. And when she finally enters poverty, this lack of functionality becomes the most

prominent. Therefore, wealth and love are two fundamental elements in the analysis of this novel and these two also dominate the most crucial junctures of Myra's life. Most critical readings of this character usually communicate the notion, or speak in line with it, that Myra is "a woman who chooses love over all other possibilities, and who suffers for it" (Klein, p. xvii). This common critical view rises from the juxtaposition of the two mentioned crucial concepts of wealth and love, and from analysing how these two operate in Myra's life and also in relation to each other. This paper, similarly, will attempt to understand the relationship between her decrease in wealth and her decrease in the ability to function socially, and how her love for Oswald plays a role in that relation, with the aid of the theorizations provided by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, specifically - his partitioning the human psyche in three structures – the

Imaginary, the Symbolic & the 'Real' - will be central to this study's analysis.

According to James Woodress, in contrast to Cather's other novels, *My Mortal Enemy* has "the most obscure provenance" (Woodress, 379) This, along with some of the open-ended details found in the narration of Nellie Birdsye, provided the space in which a number of research has been done on this text. However, no research has put the text or its characters through a Lacanian lens, which presents an opening. This opening is a space in which fresh and intriguing notions regarding *My Mortal Enemy* can be provoked. The aim of this paper is to seek such notions by investigating the characters – chiefly Myra – of *My Mortal Enemy* with Jacques Lacan's concept of the three orders. According to Marcus Klein: "the story of Myra Henshawe must have been [the product of] a personal crisis" (p. xxiv). And, it is evident in the novel that Myra always seems to be in crisis as she deteriorates in her functionality as an individual in society. Putting Myra into the three orders of Jacques Lacan will provide insight into the nature of that dysfunction. It is a library research and therefore, data will be collected from printed books and journals as well as online resources. Also being an analytical research, it will employ the method of critical discourse analysis in its study of the life of Myra Henshawe as it is narrated in the novel.

As discussed, Jacques Lacan's theory that human psychological development can be structured into three orders named the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the 'Real' will provide the theoretical framework for this research. Furthermore, a conceptual understanding of notions that are related to these orders – such as the Mirror Stage, the Desire of the Mother, the Name-of-the-Father, the 'objet petit a', lack, desire, 'jouissance' and the Death Drive - is crucial for this research's analysis. The section titled "Theoretical & Conceptual Framework" will extensively elaborate such key theories & concepts relevant to this research, and the section titled "Discussion" will analyse the discourse of *My Mortal Enemy* in light of these theories & concepts. Wealth is an ever present incidence throughout this novel and Myra's ability to function in society is significantly influenced by it. As such, wealth can be used to partition Myra's life into various divisions, the starting points of which are the crucial points that strongly influenced the course of her life. This study will explore more than one interpretation of such linearly connected points of Myra's life in which - she enters into a world of wealth, when she leaves this world & enters the world of romantic love and finally, when she is put into poverty, and then these interpretations will be analysed to find out - how the Imaginary, the Symbolic & the 'Real' operate for Myra, and also how for each interpretation,

these orders of her life interact with one another. In order to better understand the operations of the Lacanian orders in Myra's life, some additional characters, e.g. – John Driscoll and Oswald Henshawe will also be put under the analytical lens to provide some contrast to the analysis of Myra..

## II. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theories are heavily based on the work of Sigmund Freud which he modified/further developed with the influence of structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. This paper focuses on how characters - primarily Myra Henshawe - from Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* can be analysed to identify the operating orders as postulated by Lacan. Thus, Lacanian structure of an individual's development will be used as the central theoretical lens for this study and as such, Lacan's theorization on the Imaginary & the Symbolic, and the Real is essential for a comprehensive understanding this research.

In Lacanian theory, the 'Imaginary' is the initial preverbal order of a person's psychological development and is experienced at infantile age. It is initiated by what Lacan called the 'Mirror Stage'. According to Lacan, the infant cannot distinguish itself from its surroundings in its earlier months after birth and so - it experiences itself and its environment as an inseparable formless mass. At this point, the child doesn't have a sense of its own body, and its sense of self is nothing but a fragmented notion. This neonatal state is informed by the child's need and the child satisfies or seeks to satisfy those needs from the inseparable environment it deems to be whole with. Then the Mirror Stage occurs when the infant is between six to eighteen months old and in this phase - it sees its own image in the mirror, which could be an actual mirror or the mother's reactions to the infant, and this reflection gives the child a sense of itself as a whole – an understanding of itself as a separate being from the environment - in contrast to the previous formless state. This mirror or the mother and the mirrored images of self gives the child an illusory sense of unity, plenitude control in which it feels it has complete control over its environment. This sense of control stems from the seemingly inseparable unity and wholeness with the mother that is formed by the fulfillment of its desire for the mother and the belief - perceiving itself as the mother's only object of attention - that it itself fulfills the mother's desire as well, which Lacan named 'Desire of the Mother'. This dyad of wholeness with the mother is quite powerful and will play

a crucial role in a person's whole life. Also consequentially, this sense of unity and wholeness renders the Imaginary order a realm of completeness and delight. What Lacan noted here is that the realization of the subject (the infant) of its selfhood happens based on images or reflections of reality, not based on unadulterated reality itself. So, this 'self', which Lacan denotes as the 'ego', is something that exists outside the subject. Therefore, there is a gap in the person's psychology between the actual self and the 'ego'. Ego is the version of the subject that experiences the state of completeness & delight, whereas the subject strives for that state, but is separated from the 'ego' & is fragmented from the pre- 'Mirror Stage' state. So, the function of the ego is to maintain the illusory image of control and unity, while refusing to accept the truth of the subject's fragmented and separated state. And on the other hand, the subject, in essence, is a lack of being as its realization of self lies outside its actual being and this lack of being lacks & strives for what the 'ego' maintains. These lacks establish the 'ego' as a rival other – a rivalry which would play out for the subject in future social situations. The Imaginary order continues until the infant acquires language.

When a person (subject) acquires language, s/he is initiated into the 'Symbolic' order. Language denotes the realm of symbols, in which meaning is created by a symbolic system of signification, i.e. – a signifier/signified model. For Lacan, the Symbolic is an order of totalization in the sense that it demarcates the boundary of human existence. The human world, according to Lacan, is a world of language or discourse. A person is born into language – language that consists of symbols and language that contains all the social rules, social constructs, and desires of others. Thus, society and the human world in general, function as the Symbolic order. Human beings function in this order by its meaning-making processes. And, to be fully 'human' in the societal sense, one has to be subjected to and be functioning in the Symbolic order.

One of the first meanings that are made for a person in the Symbolic order is that the term "I" refers to him/herself, that is – "I am 'me'", and not "you" or anybody else. Thus, the initiation into the Symbolic order is accompanied by the separation from others, and the most crucial separation experienced is separation from the mother, with whom the infant believed to have a union of wholeness in the preverbal Imaginary order. In other words, the Mother becomes an 'other' who is not a part of "me". This separation will constitute the most important sense of loss for the subject – a loss that will linger and haunt him/her for the rest of his/her life. A person, unconsciously, will continuously endeavour to find substitutes in the Symbolic order for that lost union of

wholeness s/he experience with the mother in the Imaginary order. These substitutes could have to do with gaining wealth, forming different sorts of relationships, attaining a particular standard or way of living, obtaining certain social standings, gaining access to some social circle, converting to a particular religion, improving how one looks, or whatever the Symbolic order implies a person should want. But while these substitutes might provide a sense of completeness, they will never be successful and that sense cannot be sustained for long because the sought sense of unity, plentitude & wholeness with the mother is preverbal and is lost indefinitely with the acquisition of language which has turned the mother forever into an other. Furthermore, the infant realizes that it itself is not the necessity in fulfilling the mother's desire, i.e. – the Desire of the Mother is directed elsewhere. In other words, the infant realizes that the Mother does not belong to it, but to someone else – who in most cases would be the Father. As such, for Lacan, the 'Name-of-the-Father' replaces the Desire of the Mother in the Symbolic order. Name-of-the-Father denotes the rules & regulations of society that were formed by the patriarchy which prohibit the person's desire for the Mother while also influencing the Mother's desire. This engenders a gap between the person's own desire for the mother and the Desire of the Mother that is fulfilled by the Father. This gap will have a significant impact on the person's life moving forward, by motivating him/her to fill that gap, albeit unsuccessfully - which is very similar and can be tied to the subject's lifelong endeavour to regain the sense of completeness of the Imaginary that was lost in the Symbolic. It is important to note that Lacan denotes desire as something different from need - need (e.g., hunger) is something that can be satisfied and desire is something that cannot. 'Objet petit a' is a phrase that Lacan uses to denote the lost union of plentitude with the Mother, which can be translated to 'small other object' with the smaller cased 'a' (autre) referring to a small personal 'other', in contrast to the bigger cased 'A' of the general Other which would be the Symbolic order. Additionally, 'Objet petit a' can be anything that puts a person in touch with the repressed desire for the lost preverbal union of wholeness – which can be objects, events, or entire periods of his/her life that act as replacements for that lost union or lost object of desire. It is important to note that the Imaginary doesn't simply cease to exist with the initiation into the Symbolic but becomes latent in the background of consciousness and serving as a source of creativity, can manifest itself in ways that do not go along the lines of the Symbolic.

The third and final order in Lacanian theory is what he simply called 'the Real' and it is "a very difficult

concept he had trouble explaining" (Tyson, 2006, p.32) – as it is not a thing and exists outside what we know as reality. Reality is, for Lacan, constructed by language and associated with the social reality or the Symbolic order and the previous nonverbal state of coherence with the Mother is the Imaginary order. 'Real' is the brute reality that is beyond the reality of these orders. Both the Symbolic order and the Imaginary order try to evade or control the 'Real'. A person experiences the 'Real' in his/her neonatal state before the 'Mirror Stage'. But the effects of the 'Real' are more profoundly felt in the Symbolic order. 'Real' is that which is beyond any sort of human meaning-making system and exists at the cusp of socio-symbolic reality & is in continual tension with it. "We sense that ideology is like a curtain upon which our whole world is embroidered, and we know that behind that curtain is the Real. But we can't see behind the curtain." (Tyson, 2006, p. 32) We know that the 'Real' exists because it enters our discursive world as various signs, e.g. – the infant's crying, the sudden feeling we get that life has no purpose, a sudden momentary realization that ideologies are not concrete truths, etc. These events can be put into systems of signification but the place where they originate from evades such meaning-making – that pre-symbolic place is the 'Real'. 'Real' is also associated with trauma. Trauma, in psychoanalytical terms, denotes psychological scarring from events that cannot be assimilated or an experience of crisis or anxiety. Trauma is something that cannot be put into a meaning-making system – whatever can be made meaning of, there is always some residue left which is part of the 'Real'. Also, facing the existence of the 'Real' but not being able to make meaning or have knowledge of it creates anxiety, the experience which Lacan called the 'trauma of the Real'. This trauma makes us realize that the reality beneath the societal ideologies is beyond our capacity to know or explain and as such, certainly beyond our control. Its association with trauma associates the 'Real' with the Death Drive. Freud, in theorizing the Death Drive, posited that the main purpose of life is to find the correct path to death, but Lacan modified the concept of Death Drive to posit that human beings are driven by death, not towards it. The source of this tendency lies in the 'Real' and when a person encounters the 'Real', the Death Drive influences him/her in the Symbolic order to repetitively act out painful or traumatic experiences – this is done in a bid by the human being to find or re-find his/her place in the Symbolic and avoid the impossible void of the 'Real'. In Lacanian postulations, Death is that which is beyond meaning - something inaccessible, the definitive edge that cannot be overcome. Lacan introduces another term 'jouissance' in his theory which can be roughly translated to mean pleasure and thus is opposed to desire. But desire

is something that cannot be satisfied and so, a person's 'jouissance' is never really whole – no matter what we achieve, there is always an emptiness that makes us desire for more. That 'more' is 'jouissance' and it is difficult to pinpoint because it is not something that exists or existed but rather its absence engenders its search – we think it must be there because we are always left dissatisfied. And because it is not something that exists, it is beyond meaning-making and thus exists in the 'Real'. A person always feels that 'jouissance' belongs to the big Other, as in – other people integrated into the Symbolic order, which also creates a lack in the person that drives him/her.

In an individual's psychic development, initiation into the Imaginary creates a separation from the neonatal wholeness with the 'Real' which is further compounded by the separation from the Mother in the Symbolic. Thus, lack is created in the individual. This lack creates desire, and the desire creates an aspiration for 'jouissance' which can never be reached as it exists in the 'Real' and this shortcoming adds to the already existing lack which adds to the existing desire. Thus, the purpose of desire is to desire and to function as a human in the Symbolic order, one needs to be a desiring being in accordance with the rules of the Symbolic. Failure in such functioning exposes the individual to the impossibility of the 'Real'. Jacques Lacan, thus, structures human life or psyche into three separate orders in which lack and desire play key roles. Now, the task of this paper is to apply Lacanian theory of the three orders to Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*.

### III. DISCUSSION

In *My Mortal Enemy*, the central character Myra was orphaned at a very young age and had been adopted & brought up by her wealthy great-uncle John Driscoll in Parthia. Thus, the infant Myra enters a life of wealthy luxury and this entry marks a very crucial point in her life. Then when she reached adulthood, she eloped with Oswald Henshawe to New York – which cost her the inheritance of John Driscoll's wealth as well as the wealthy life she had been brought up in. This point in her life is another one that is very crucial. The other crucial point in her life is her entry into poverty. Examining these points in Myra's life, it is evident that material wealth plays a prominent role in how the trajectory of her life is moulded and thus wealth influences her psychological development more than anything else apparent within the plot. This study will, therefore, focus on how or in how many ways wealth might decide as well as influence the Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic for Myra while also attempting to locate where or how she encounters the 'Real' and understand how she deals with it. As numbers

are not specified within the plot regarding her age and it was only narrated that she was orphaned and taken in by John Driscoll when she was a "very little girl" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I), the point of her entry into wealth can be open to more than one consideration, as a result of which - other evidential elements can also have multiple interpretations. The characters of John Driscoll and Oswald Henshawe will also be examined to see how they function in relation to these orders, and the findings will help in shedding further light on how these orders operate in *My Mortal Enemy*.

For Myra, in locating the specific Lacanian orders, the point of her entry into a life of wealthy luxury provides two possibilities: this point marks her initiation into the Symbolic order, which would make wealth the regulator within the Symbolic with her actual unnamed mother, resembling Lacan's postulations in an orthodox manner, acting as the Mother of the Imaginary order and the Mirror Stage taking place at an unspecified point prior to the plot of the text. And the other possibility is - this point marks her initiation into the Imaginary order, in which case the entry itself would constitute the Mirror Stage with wealth acting as the reflecting Mother and the point at which she elopes would mark her entry into the Symbolic. This paper will consider both these possibilities in locating the operations of the three Lacanian orders in Myra's life.

When Myra entered the wealthy life inside John Driscoll's house, she was introduced to a world of meaning-making in which wealth delimited the signification of seemingly everything in her life. In simpler words, she entered a world in which - as the idiom goes - 'money talks' or money is the language of society. And since Driscoll was the only relative mentioned by the narrator Nellie Birdseye and since Myra apparently had no other source of inheritance, it can be inferred that her previous life prior to the said entry was far less affluent. Therefore, her entry into John Driscoll's world & its "great splendour" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I) signified her as someone who is functioning in a world run by material wealth. This signification caused her psychological separation from the previous less affluent state of life, in which her deceased m(M)other existed and thus, the Mother became an 'other'. No mention of Myra's mother in the text connotes the preverbal nature of the Imaginary order, thus further evidencing Myra's life prior to her entry into wealth as such. The life of wealth or the Symbolic places the patriarchal John Driscoll as Myra's Father of the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father and Myra's words - "the nature our strain of blood carries is inside there, waiting, like our skeleton" (Cather, 1926/2005, part II) - supports this. According to John: "It's better to be a stray dog in this world than a man without money. I've tried both ways, and

I know. A poor man stinks, and God hates him" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). Such ideas along with how he lived his own life served as rules and regulations of the Symbolic, and it is evident from these words that there is an element of humanization & dehumanization in accordance with the amount of money/wealth a person possesses. In other words - a person's functioning ability as a human within this Symbolic order is moderated by his/her wealth and Myra's adherence to this notion is reflected by her words: "it's very nasty, being poor!" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). Myra's attempts to function within the Symbolic can be observed in her life - in Parthia, she lived luxuriously, she "had everything" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I), arranged expensive balls and parties, she had "courtesy from people of gentle manners" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II); this mode of living or attempt towards it can be observed in her life in New York and the West-Coast city as well. In Nellie's words, "she was a good deal like [John Driscoll]" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). So, her attempts to function as a human in society or the Symbolic order are heavily influenced by the rules and regulations set out by John, the Father. Her elopement is a significant point as that marks her deviation from these rules and regulations of the Symbolic. In Nellie's words: "there was never a serious disagreement between them until it came to young Henshawe" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). But Myra's functioning in the Symbolic or society, as discussed, is moderated by material wealth as per the ideals set out by the Father. As a result, her tendency towards overspending and materialistically showing off while in New York is also an inclination provoked by these ideals. The farther she is away from those ideals, the less socially functioning she seems to become which can be profoundly seen past the point in her life when she enters poverty - she becomes "unable" to "bear things" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) and in the words of Oswald Henshawe: "it's as if she had used up that part of herself" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) to be able to maintain friendships & by extension, to function in society. This lack of functionality and its connection to a lack of wealth is all but confirmed by Myra when she says, "I should have stayed with my uncle" and "it was money I needed" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II). Another attempt by Myra to function in this Symbolic order can be seen in her attempt to stay connected to religion, the Church of which she left behind along with her life of wealth in Parthia. Her not participating in Church affairs but acquaintance with Father Fay points towards this. In order to function as a human being as decided by the Symbolic order, Myra needed to follow its rule & regulations and that is done by going along the trajectory of the "insane ambition" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I) which can be "never satisfied"

(Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) instilled in her by the Name-of-the-Father.

This Name-of-the-Father or the way of the patriarchal materialist society, incidentally, stifled the part of Myra which had any connection to the stage of her life preceding her entry into or acquisition of wealth, which also severed Myra's connection with the Mother. And as such, Name-of-the-Father replaced the Desire of the Mother and all that remained for Myra from her Imaginary order is the loss of the union with the Mother which constituted her 'objet petit a'. Myra's most prominent replacements for the 'objet petit a' are - attaining expensive items, e.g. - her porte-monnaie, dresses, jewels, horses, velvet curtains, silver tea things, etc. which also ties her functionally to the Symbolic and romantic love - which lead her to eloping with Oswald - that marks the second crucial point of her life listed in this study. One common denominator for both replacements mentioned above is that they placed Myra as the centre of attention as evidenced by Myra's painting by a "famous painter" and also by Nellie's aunt Lydia's statement that "everything is always for Myra...and all the attention is for her" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I), which bears resemblance to an infant's perception of itself as the centre of the Mother's attention. Thus, these work as Myra's replacements for the lack that is the 'objet petit a' and as Lacan suggested, they fail to make up for the desired lost union of plenitude Myra had with the Mother; and therefore, we see Myra keep wanting expensive things & pressuring Oswald towards such high expenditure that he couldn't be "saving anything" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I) and also gradually growing "strange and dark" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) toward Oswald. Myra had friends of two kinds in New York: "artistic people...with whom she was always at her best because she admired them" and "moneyed" friends with whom Myra was at her "loftiest and most challenging" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). While her interaction with the wealthy people clearly exemplifies her attempt to function within the Symbolic order, her inclination towards the world of arts suggests manifestations of the Imaginary order - which is a source of creativity - within the Symbolic. Her admiration not only for artistic people but also for various artworks, e.g. - theatre productions such as Hamlet, various songs such as the Casta Diva aria, or plays like Richard II and the effect(s) these works have on her bear indication to the Imaginary's operations, which was pushed into the background when Myra entered wealth. Her take on and practice regarding religion & the Church which differ from her notion of those very concepts when she was living luxuriously in Parthia also, for similar reasons, suggest the manifestation of the Imaginary. Myra's words that "light and silence: they heal all one's wounds--all but one, and

that is healed by dark and silence" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) points towards her fixation with the Imaginary order of a world without words. Thus, taking the point in which Myra enters John Driscoll's life of wealth as her entry into the Lacanian Symbolic order, this paper showed how Myra's Imaginary order was subsided - which manifests in the Symbolic through her inclination towards the world of arts & through her own way of participating in religion - and how wealth functioned as the controller within this order, setting the rules & regulations of the Symbolic and the proximity of adherence to these rules and regulations for Myra predisposed her measure of functionality within the society, which is the Symbolic order itself. It was also shown how Myra tried, and failed, to use expensive items and overspending as well as romantic love as substitutes to fill the lack/gap of the 'objet petit a'.

Now this paper will focus on discerning the operations of the three Lacanian orders for Myra by focusing on the point of her entry into John Driscoll's wealth as her entry into the Imaginary order. Taking this perspective into consideration, the entry would mark the beginning of the Mirror Stage in which she becomes aware of herself as a part of Driscoll's wealth which functions as the Mother and Myra's immersion within this wealthy luxury constitutes the oneness with this Mother. It is important to note that this oneness is experienced by the 'ego', not the 'self' that remains fragmented since prior to the Mirror Stage. This establishes the 'self'-ego rivalry which, for Myra, can be seen played out in her jealousy towards Oswald's female acquaintance, in her disdain for the woman in the carriage, in her hatred towards "those animals!" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II), and even in her attitude towards Oswald & Lydia. This rivalry is more clearly identifiable in the later of stage of Myra's life when she bears the notion that her younger self - her 'ego' - was happier. That can be particularly observed in her words: "I was crying about things I never feel now; I'd been dreaming I was young, and the sorrows of youth had set me crying!" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II). The second crucial point of her life, in which she elopes with Oswald, marks her separation from the Mother and initiation into the Symbolic. In this Symbolic order, she understands herself as 'not wealthy', i.e. - not a part of the wealth of Driscoll and thus, the Mother becomes an other. The masculine Oswald acts as the Father in this case, and romantic love becomes the regulator of meaning-making, and thus, of social functionality as well. But functioning as such makes the feeling of lack from the lost union with Mother - the 'objet petit a' - more profound. Therefore, Myra is forced to find substitutes such as expensive items, wealthy friends, expensive parties etc. which, again, are unsuccessful. Her entry into poverty and her becoming

bound to a wheelchair further intensifies this feeling of lack or unfulfillment. Romantic love was the cause of the separation from Mother and the consequential 'objet petit a' renders functioning in accordance with that regulatory love increasingly difficult for Myra. As a result, she becomes "strange and dark" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) towards Oswald and comes to the realization that "people can be lovers and enemies at the same time" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II). These changes and notions bear the reference of her dysfunction within the Symbolic and eventually, she says: "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II), dubbing Oswald as her enemy and also denoting how she feels alone – i.e., not whole - with him, her loved one. Taking the position to consider Myra's life of wealth as the Imaginary order Creates a problem: according to Lacan, the Imaginary is preverbal but Myra's life in Driscoll's house was clearly a world of language. This paper circumnavigated this impasse (or pseudo-impasse) by considering the union theorists' notions of love in which lovers are considered as a separate union, a 'we', and by also considering writer Gary Chapman's idea that the language between lovers is a meaning-making system beyond the usual worldly languages. So, Myra entered this meaning-making system which rendered the meaning-making system of the world of wealth unpalpable, thus entering her into the Symbolic order of life with Oswald but love, as a regulator, did not provide suitable functioning means for Myra which increasingly intensified her lack of the 'objet petit a', which eventually rendered her unable to function socially.

At this point, the study will analyze the characters of John Driscoll and Oswald Henshawe to investigate how the Lacanian orders operate in regards to them. As not much of their lives are disclosed that is not related to Myra, it can be inferred that for them both – the world of material wealth, similar to this paper first consideration regarding Myra, functioned as the Symbolic order as evidenced by John's lifelong pursuit of wealth and Oswald leaving Parthia to gain better standing in life as well as his life of heavy spending in New York. It can be also said that for both men, Myra was the substitute 'objet petit a'. This is supported by Nellie's view that when Myra left the Driscoll house, "Love went out of the gates" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). Also, Oswald called her "Mollie Driscoll" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) even after being married for so long, though her name became Myra Henshawe when he married her. This references his fixation on his desire for her when they were young and in love before the elopement and indicates the value of her, as 'objet petit a', to him. Interestingly, as narrated by Nellie Birdseye, both men lived peacefully just before

their deaths. This 'peace' can be inferred to be a result of their complete devotion – in their own particular ways – to meet the Desire of the Mother element imbedded in the 'objet petit a': John Driscoll took care of her prior to her elopement & before his death, he left her space and allowance in the retirement home he financed, and Oswald, on the other hand, spent everything he had for her to be happy. Both men did their best for their 'objet petit a' and in accordance with the regulations of the Symbolic order. This analysis highlights how unsettled Myra was prior to her death which was, at least in part, caused by her guilt. This guilt is evidenced by her associating herself with the "poor-sinner's-flower" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) and favouring dawn because "that is always such a forgiving time" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II). This guilt is caused by her failure to dedicate herself to meet the Desire of the Mother in her own various 'objet petit a' as well as her failure to function in accordance with the regulations of the Symbolic.

The encounter with the 'Real', for Myra, can be perceived through Nellie's observation of how she reacted when the *Casta Diva* aria – which tells the story of a woman who caused the burning at the stake for herself with her lover - was sung. She held her head and crouched in the shadow, and according to Nellie, this reaction was caused by "a compelling, passionate, overmastering

something for which" there was "no name, but which was audible, visible in the air that night" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part I). This something, for which there was no name or signification, strongly resembles the 'Real' of Jacques Lacan and Myra's reaction exhibits her experience of 'trauma of the Real'. The trauma from the neonatal experience with the Real can also be observed when she refers to the "old, lonesome tear" as belonging to her, a tear that belonged to "a long dead time" and was an "anachronism" for which there could be no account, "yet there it was" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II). Speaking of trauma, Myra obviously had various forms of trauma, e.g. – separation from John and his wealth, not being happy in life with Oswald, being bound to a wheelchair, etc. Her "violent [nature]" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II), shifting moods which can be seen throughout the whole plot and the illusions in the last stage of her life is a result of such trauma. The residue of these traumas resided in the 'Real' and hence, could not be signified according to any meaning-making systems which could be regulated by either wealth or love. This residue and the lack of functioning means within her Symbolic order further intensified her 'trauma of the Real' which attributed to her decreasing capability to function in society. For such reasons, she could not bear the insensibility of her neighbours upstairs. These neighbours bring to attention

another of Lacan concepts: 'jouissance'. Myra never felt she attained 'jouissance' and that it remained elsewhere, which is actually the 'Real'. But she felt that this 'jouissance' belonged to other people such as her neighbours, the woman in the carriage, the wealthy friends, various couples in love, etc. In other words, 'jouissance' belonged to the people who she perceived to be properly functioning according to the Symbolic order, or the Other of the Symbolic. This compounded her lack and thus intensified her desire which drove her actions throughout the plot. Speaking of drive, we can see the Death Drive operating in the ways she keeps reliving her loss of fortune as well as the failure of her love. Her borderline obsession with the 'jouissance' attained by the Other also is repetitive experiencing of her traumas, which is also caused by the Death Drive. We can see the Death Drive in full effect in her waiting for "something" (Cather, 1926/2005, part II) which can easily be perceived as death on the headland by the sea, a headland on which she eventually dies and goes beyond the boundary of the human world's reality of the Symbolic order, and enters the 'Real'. Myra's involvement with religion also provides evidence of how she coped to function as a human being. Myra states: "in religion seeking is finding" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) which bears a clear resemblance to Lacan's notion of a human being's function is largely constituted by him/her being a desiring being. Also, she stored away money that was meant for "unearthly purposes" (Cather, 1926/2005, Part II) which shows how she tried to function in relation to the 'Real', an 'unearthly' place, by acting in accordance with the Symbolic - through the use of wealth. Thus this paper showed - how Myra encountered the 'Real' through Nellie's observations and a brief analysis of Myra's traumas as well as how 'jouissance' and the Death Drive operated for her, and how she tried, through religion and wealth, to function in the Symbolic with regards to the 'Real'.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Wealth is a pivotal concept in the trajectory of the life of *My Mortal Enemy's* central character, Myra Henshawe. As such, this paper located some crucial points in Myra's life based on her possession of wealth or the loss of it. Via the demarcations created by those focal points, this study structured Myra's life into multiple segments. Positioning these segments into the structures provided by Lacan produced two separate lines of interpretation: in one, Myra's entry into wealth marked her initiation into the Symbolic and in the other, her entry into wealth could be taken to mark her entry into the Mirror Stage, & by extension, the Imaginary order. Through both lines of

interpretation, this paper demonstrated how Myra's entry into the Symbolic caused her separation from the Mother of the Imaginary, which constituted a profound loss that became her 'objet petit a' and the tale of her life is littered with attempts to, unsuccessfully, find replacements for that 'objet petit a'. This study also showed how, for Myra, the Name-of-the-Father replaced the Desire of the Mother, and how her functionality in terms of an individual in society is highly mediated in regards to her proximity to the rules and regulations of the Father. This research further established, per Lacan's theory, Myra as an individual driven by lack & desire and that her Imaginary manifests within the Symbolic through creative arenas. Myra's repetitive reference to her dilapidated financial state, her Death Drive and an exploration on her 'jouissance' provided evidence towards the existence of the 'Real', and in terms of exactly locating the 'Real', some of Nellie Birdseye's narrative's ambiguous portions were analysed and some events were indeed identified in which this paper located Myra's encounters with the 'Real'. In sum, this paper used the concept of wealth, as well as the concept of romantic love, to demonstrate how the Lacanian orders operate within the life of Myra Henshawe, and how the relation (or rather, tension) between these three orders rendered Myra Henshawe as a person incapable of properly functioning within society.

This paper has its limitations – it is dependent entirely on the printed books and journals available in Bangladesh and/or found online. Furthermore, this study introduced Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory in the study of *My Mortal Enemy*. However, some intriguing postulations of Lacan – such as, how the unconscious is created through repression, the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language and the notion of sexual difference - have not been considered in this research. *My Mortal Enemy* has the potential to be explored in the light of such concepts, and this provides a scope for further study.

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