

Cather, “Eric Hermannson’s Soul”
Wesley Advocates

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Who tells the story? How does that narrator influence our views of Eric, of Asa Skinner, of Wyllis and Margaret Elliot? Where do you find authorial intrusions seeking to comment and influence? Do they work?

Who are the “saved and sanctified”? Why do the settlers meet in the Lone Star Schoolhouse? How does Cather describe Skinner’s physical appearance? What did he do before the “call” to preach? Describe Skinner’s theology and preaching. Why does this particular form of religion appeal to these settlers?

Describe Eric’s physical appearance. How is he like the *Doryphoros*? Like Siegfried?

How do Eric’s values and his mother’s values conflict? How do the Free Gospellers regard instrumental music? Why?

Describe Lena Hanson and Eric’s relationship with her. What does the rattlesnake symbolize for Eric?

What does the violin represent for Eric?

Why does Cather include references to Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus? To Lazarus’s resurrection? To Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*?

Where has Wyllis Elliot been? Why does he return to Nebraska? How do he and Margaret regard the typical settlers? What attracts her to Eric? How sincere is she in her relations with him? What does she want from Eric? What does Eric want from her?

When does Eric believe “he delivered his soul”? Why did he? With what result?

Of what symbolic value is the runaway pony Eric must save Margaret from? Why is this scene crucial? Note what Eric does immediately after.

This evening has significantly changed Margaret’s and Eric’s relations—how and why?

Why is Margaret’s letter significant? What details in particular? What does Margaret conclude about prairie life before she goes to bed that night?

What does Eric do at the Norwegian dance? At the dance, watching Eric, what does Margaret realize about her fiancé? Does Eric “lose his soul for this woman”?

How do they part? Do you find their ending credible? Comic? Tragic? Melodramatic?

Why does Eric tell Skinner about dancing? Why is Eric “filled with dreamy exultation”?

What, if anything, do we learn about art? Religion? Romance? Prairie life? The confluence of two or more?