

Christina's world



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Christina's Cruel World When I first seen " Christina's World," a painting by Andrew Wyeth, I came across a lonely girl, and I wonder. What is she doing lying in the field by herself? Was she laying in the long grass on a hot summer day enjoying a nice summer breeze? It's hard to tell her age. Is she a widowed wife to a soldier lost in the war thinking of days long past? Perhaps she's a teenage adolescent, resting in the grass after a long day of chores? Something caught her attention. She sat up, and twisted to look behind her. I follow her gaze, and notice that she is looking toward a house of Georgian architecture.

The front side of the house has the most detail compared to the three other buildings in the picture. I can clearly see the door, windows, and even the color of the house. This leads me to believe that Christina is focusing on the front of the house. I see what appears to be a typical farm in rural America, somewhere in a Midwestern grassland state. This farm however, has no livestock, or crops. I see a shed to the right, and a barn about fifty yards to the left of the house. If I look closely, birds can be seen flying from the barn. Is this a possible sign of abandonment?

Judging between the rough, tall grass and the smooth texture to the grass around the farm tells me this place is not as deserted as it looks. This tells me that Christina's world has boundaries, and it appears that she is out of bounds. The colors of the painting are very dull and flat. This only enhances the theme of a desolate and nearly dead farm. The vast field and wide open spaces make this place look very empty. The path leading up to the house seems faded by over growth; another sign that Christina's world is a lonely place. When I come full circle, I set my eyes back on Christina.

I begin to wonder, why is she here? Why is she in rough wild grass instead of the smooth tame lawn? As I take a closer look, I notice her rigid hands clutching the earth. It's almost as if she's pulling herself forward; as if she's trying to get to safety. Her body is thin and frail. She looks starved and malnourished. Loose strands of hair are flowing in the breeze. Her dress is pink; a sign of femininity, but it's also faded along with the rest of the scene. The point of view Wyeth gives is as if I'm standing right behind Christina. I can't help but feel tempted to do something to help her.

I want to get her to safety, give her some food, put her in bed, and get her some medical attention. Would she be safe though? When I look closely I can see a pile of lumber on the side of the house, and a ladder propped up on the front. This house needs work done. Maybe this house isn't a sanctuary for Christina. She probably dreads going back, but she has nowhere else to go. I think Christina has accepted her world because she has no other choice. She had to leave the boundaries and explore the outside a little bit before she realized this. Maybe the outside world rejected her so she begrudgingly turned back.

Even though it's a warm summer day; I sense coldness here. The dark looming house has a forbidden feel to it. The barn is equally forbidden; only home to the birds now. It seems Christina's world was left to fade away. When I researched Andrew Wyeth, and his painting of Christina's World I found some interesting facts. Christina is in fact Christina Olsen, one of Wyeth's neighbors. She lived with her brother Aravo Olsen in what is now known as the Olsen House located in Cushing Maine. This is far from what I

originally thought. There is some speculation that Christina was schizophrenic. This however, is false.

On the other hand, Christina did have an undiagnosed muscular disorder. This disease, probably polio, caused her to lose her ability to walk in the late 1920's. This explains why Christina is clutching the ground. She was crawling. It is a fact that Christina regularly crawled around the farm. The Olsen family and farm were inspirations for a few of Wyeth's paintings. They even let him use the third floor of their house as an art studio. Wyeth's father died in a horrible train accident three years before he painted "Christina's World." This had a noticeable impact on Wyeth's art. His colors became more bland and dull.

His landscapes were bare. These traits are highly reflected in "Christina's World." If you look at modern pictures of the Olsen House you can see the place is surrounded by evergreens. In the painting, there isn't a tree in sight. The landscape is almost bare except for the grass. I would say "Christina's World" is Wyeth's way of expressing his grief for his father's death. Andrew Wyeth was inspired to paint this picture when he looked out his window and seen Christina crawling around in the fields. Though Christina inspired the painting, it was Wyeth's wife Betsy who modeled the torso, and head.

The Olsen farmhouse is the most famous model of the painting. It was first built in the late 1700's, then later had a third floor annexed to it. The Olsen house still stands to this day in Cushing Maine, and is a historic landmark. It is owned by the Farnsworth Art Museum. I believe Wyeth was asking his viewers a question in this painting. If your standing behind this woman who is crawling across the field. What would you do? Wyeth is giving us a choice.

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He's showing us a cruel, harsh world. Do you help her, or do you pass her by; letting her fend for herself?