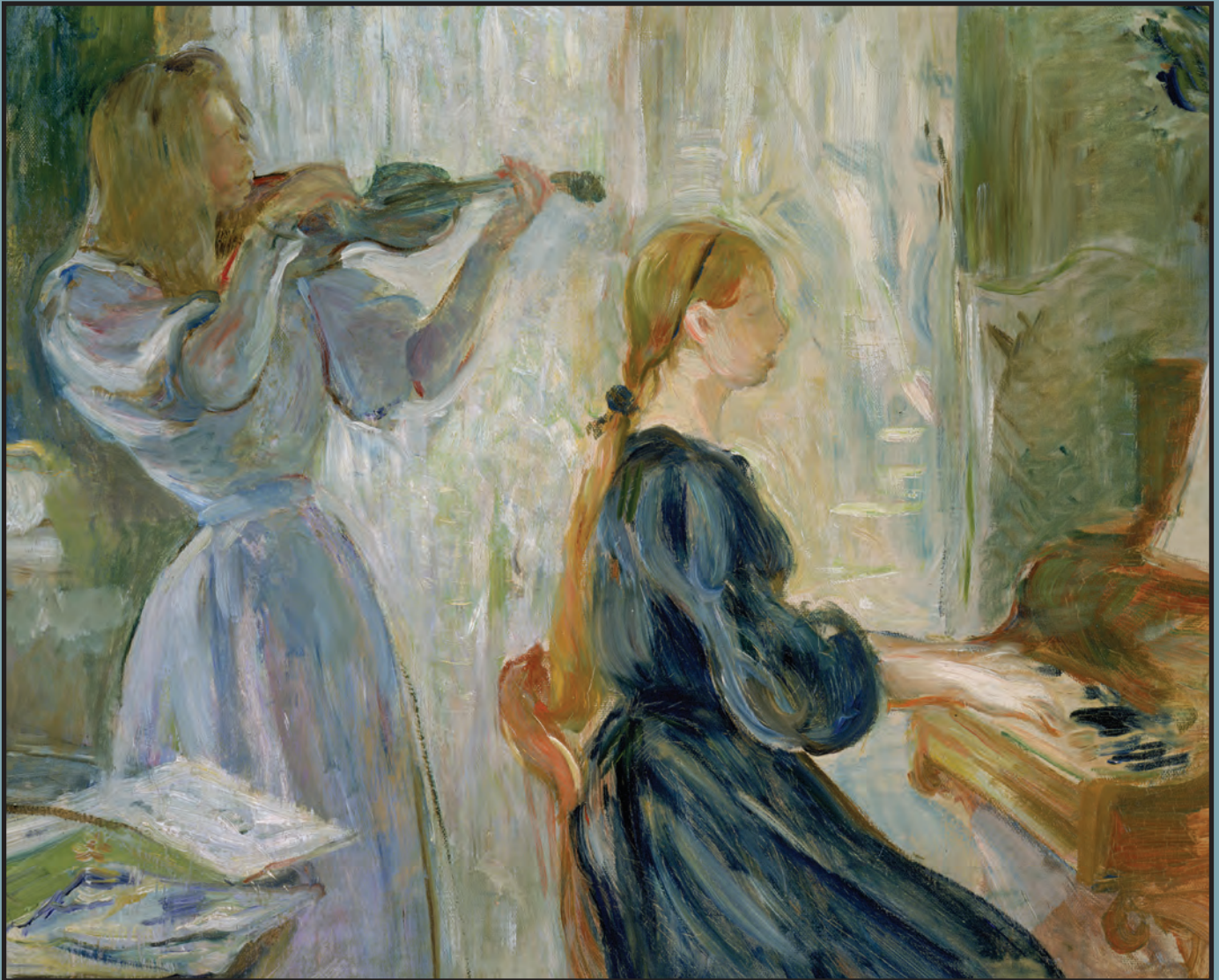


WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

VOLUME 55, NO. 1

SUMMER 2011



Lucy Gayheart and On Chesil Beach

JOHN J. MURPHY



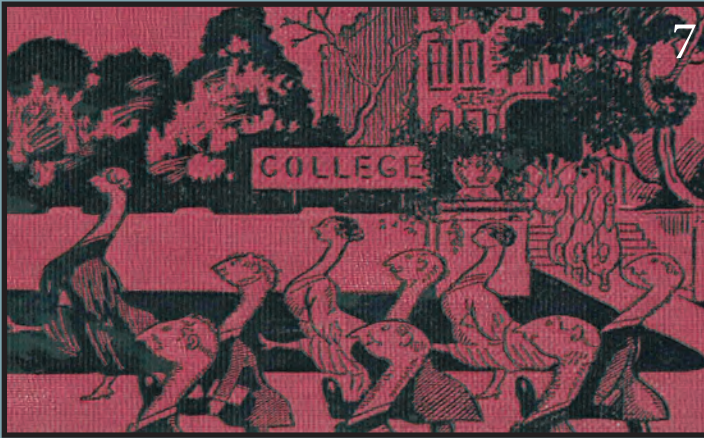
The Professor's House as Academic Novel

STEVEN TROUT



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On the cover: Berthe Morisot, *The Mozart Sonata*, 1894. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. Oil on canvas, 18-1/8 x 21-15/16 in.; Bequest of Mrs. Robert S. Tangeman (E. Clementine Miller, class of 1927); SC 1996:24-2.

Letter from the President

SUSAN MAHER

When last year I left the open skies and rolling country of Nebraska for a new position in Duluth, Minnesota, I felt deep ambivalence about widening the distance between me and Red Cloud. One of the pleasures of my work at the University of Nebraska-Omaha was the three-hour drive to Red Cloud. Up in Duluth, I am many more hours away from the rolling hills of Webster County, living now in a rugged, forested landscape that curves along the shores of Lake Superior. At first I felt severed from Catherland, from the beehive of the Cather Project in Lincoln, and from the larger Great Plains landscape that I love and study.

But Cather herself healed my sense of separation. In the seventeenth century, Duluth was an important connecting point for the Northwest Company's fur trade out of French Canada. Duluth itself is named after Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut, one of the greatest of the fur traders and adventurers. This is voyageur country and is thus a significant backdrop to Cather's lyrical historical novel, *Shadows on the Rock*. The fragile order and unity of what she calls "Kébec" in that novel depends upon the entrepreneurial spirit of the *coureurs de bois*, including the "hero of the fur trade" Pierre Charron. Cather writes, from boyhood on, Pierre "shot up and down the swift waters of Canada in his canoe; who was now at Niagara, now at the head of Lake Ontario, now at the Sault Sainte Marie on his way into the fathomless forbidding waters of Lake Superior." In the wilderness of the northern Great Lakes, Pierre Charron "had a name among [Native Americans] for courage and fair dealing, for a loyal friend and

a relentless enemy." My new home country had once stirred Cather's imagination as she projected her fictional hero into the interior of North America.

While at Smith College for the International Cather Seminar, I wondered again about Cather's ability to connect to many lands. Her complex sense of geography ranges over time and space, and thus brings together many people, ardent readers and scholars, who every two years travel from many parts of North America and the world to discuss her literature and consider new perspectives and arguments on her *oeuvre*, her correspondence, and her biography. Participants at Smith had come from as far away as Taiwan and Japan to share in a different kind of exchange than Pierre's, one grounded in knowledge, textual evidence, and historical curiosity. It was a memorable meeting that included a trip to wooded, mountainous Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where Cather wrote of other places and other times.

On my way home from Northampton, my flight happened to take a more northerly route following the St. Lawrence River into the Great Lakes. I could see from up high much of the country that Pierre Charron traversed in canoe. There was Michilimackinac and Sault Saint Marie below me. In the seventeenth century, a journey of this scope was epic; now it takes only a few hours. So much seems telescoped at 36,000 feet. Cather provides me with the long view that I need to understand such journeys and larger humanity.



Welcoming Our New Executive Director: Leslie Levy



The Cather Foundation is proud to welcome Leslie Levy of Lincoln, Nebraska as our new Executive Director. Originally from Grand Island, Nebraska, Leslie holds B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and since 2002 has been

Assistant Attorney General and Chief of the Consumer Protection and Antitrust Division of the Nebraska Department of Justice. She has worked with a diverse constituency, including nonprofit and community organizations, and is well-qualified to meet the challenge of leading the Foundation in its work of promoting Cather's work and preserving her legacy.

Leslie began her duties August 1, 2011. We invite our readers to join us in welcoming her to the Foundation and wishing her all success.



The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship

VIRGIL ALBERTINI

At every annual Cather Spring Conference, many attractive sessions are offered for members to attend. One began in 1987 when Norma Ross Walter left a generous bequest in her will to help a female high-school graduate from a Nebraska high school achieve her career goals by majoring in English at an accredited college or university. So for the past twenty-four years, stellar students have been honored at each spring conference.

Selection by five judges is based stongly on the applicants' intellectual promise, creativity, commitment to an English major, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, grades, a personal essay, and an original essay on a Cather work. Norma Ross Walter, a former newspaper editor, held both a bachelor's and master's degree in English and was an avid reader of Cather, frequently visiting Red Cloud and Catherland.

Every year the three finalists for the Scholarship present their original essays, answer questions from the audience, and are recognized by the media. As usual, this year's three did not disappoint, for their meaningful words enhanced the audience's understanding of works like *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, or *Obscure Destinies*. This past April there was an extended anniversary session, one in which five of the past recipients helped make the occasion an especially rewarding one. They made comments about their lives, careers, future plans, and how Ms. Walter's legacy did so much to launch them on their successful paths. They felt honored to be back in Red Cloud. Their discussions generated warm responses from the conference attendees.

Among the five past recipients present was the initial winner, Karen Hartmann Roggenkamp (1987), Minden high school graduate. She called the scholarship a "life-changing event," saying that "before that scholarship I planned on majoring in history, not English." It all led to "following the path which led to graduate school and becoming a professor." After graduating from the University of Michigan with high honors, she later received a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. A prolific writer and researcher who has published one book and is completing another, Karen teaches American literature and Children's and Adolescent Literature at Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Lynn D. Lu (1989) a Lincoln East graduate, was

another one of the early winners to return. Lynn said that she "felt honored to be part of that impressive group!" and said that "thanks to the scholarship," she went to Harvard University, where she graduated *summa cum laude* with a degree in women's studies. Lynn earned a master's in English Literature/Critical Theory from Sussex University. Many honors have come her way including Phi Beta Kappa, Rotary Scholarship, and Dean's Scholarship at New York University, where she received the J.D. degree. She has worked as a book editor and publisher, and has authored many essays on feminism and Asian American culture. An advocate for reform in the areas of criminal justice, child welfare, and poverty law, Lynn now teaches at the New York University School of Law.

Erin Duncan (1992), from the Franklin high school class, was delighted that her mother, Carol Duncan, accompanied her. She happily came not only as a mother, but as Erin's former high school English teacher. Carol, incidentally, also taught Alicia Dahling, another Franklin graduate (2002) and scholarship awardee. Since Alicia is currently finishing her second year of teaching and researching in Spain with a Fulbright Scholarship, she could not be present. She, however, sent a letter stating that "receiving recognition from the Willa Cather Foundation as a high school senior was and remains one of my most cherished honors." Erin, recognized as a Phi Kappa Phi Outstanding Scholar, received a B.A. with highest distinction from Nebraska Wesleyan, majoring in French and English. She was awarded an M.A. in English from Iowa State University, receiving its Research Excellence Award for outstanding master's thesis. She first served as Congressman Bill Barrett's legislative assistant and later held the same position in Congressman Tom Osborne's office. Since 2006, Erin has been a lobbyist for the National Education Association, contributing significantly to numerous pieces of education and social services legislation, federal legislative process, policy, and strategy.

Tuesday Metcalf, who graduated from Beatrice in 2000, told the audience that a "major highlight of her senior year was winning the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship." She majored in English and French at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and before receiving her degree studied in France for a semester. A former editor, Tuesday has worked



Left to right: Lynn D. Lu, Erin Duncan, Karen Hartmann Roggenkamp, Tuesday Metcalf, Laura Sunderman, Emily Burns, Jaime DeTour, Virgil Albertini. Photo by Barb Kudrna.

for several years for Assurity Life Insurance Company as an underwriting assistant. She concluded by saying she is “excited to see us again and to revisit all of the wonderful memories I have from that spring day in 2000.”

Jaime DeTour from Hastings not only received the 2011 award but automatically became the anchor for the previous ones. Recognized earlier during the first half of the session, when she and first runner-up Emily Burns from Blair and second runner-up Laura Sunderman, also from Hastings, presented their original Cather essays, Jaime felt special to associate with her successful predecessors and “loved the fact” they returned to discuss their goals, lives, and careers, and to reminisce about the day they themselves received the award. Majoring in English and minoring in Spanish, Jaime will attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and will follow the Humanities in Medicine program to help prepare her for medical school. A very involved individual, she loves to read and write and passionately wants to help people.

All of Norma Ross Walter’s Scholarship women could not participate themselves, but many sent meaningful messages. Some of those who replied include Kristin Guild (Lincoln East 1988), Kara Choquette (Minden 1990), Michelle Dowd (Omaha Central 1993), Kelly Bare (Lincoln Southeast 1994), Lacey Worth (Ralston 2001), and Annie Sloniker (Bellevue West 2002). Kristin says she rediscovered Cather at age thirty and enjoys her from a different perspective. Her bachelor’s degree with a major in English came from Carleton College, and three years later she earned a Master of Regional Planning at Cornell. As a student, Kristin received numerous honors and awards and studied in France. Subsequent positions took her to New York where she worked as City Planner for New York City. For the past several years, she has been the Director of Development for the city of Minneapolis.

Kara Choquette, who graduated from Minden three years after Karen, planned to join the others in Red Cloud

for the occasion and “to celebrate the prairie in the spring.” Her preparations halted when she had the “last-minute opportunity to visit France,” the country she enjoyed as an exchange student during her junior year of high school. She joyously exclaimed that “Willa Cather would certainly approve.” After completing her bachelor’s in English and mass communications and a master’s in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia, she began her career as a newspaper copy editor and business reporter. After working for the Xerox Corporation as its public relations manager, Kara is now Director of Communications for Power Company of Wyoming LLC and Trans West Express LLC. She feels that her 1990 Scholarship “enabled me to start graduate school and my career on solid financial footing, and I remain forever grateful for the support.”

Michelle Dowd majored in English and history at the University of Rochester in New York, received a master’s in both English and philosophy, and a Ph.D. in English from Columbia University. She is author of numerous articles as well as *Women’s Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, a study for which she won the Sara A. Whaley Book Award for 2009 from the National Women’s Studies Association. As Associate Professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Michelle teaches courses in Renaissance literature and early modern women’s writing.

Kelly Bare graduated from Northwestern University with a bachelor’s degree in journalism, plus a double major in English literature. She, in addition, she earned a master’s in journalism there and started her media career, which has been divided between magazines, book publishing, and digital work, and includes both writing and editing. Between internships, full-time jobs, and freelance work, Kelly has contributed to an eclectic list of magazines. (She caught the attention of many Nebraskans with a piece she wrote for *The New Yorker* concerning the University of Nebraska’s decision



to move from the Big 12 to the Big 10.) She has worked as an editor for Harper Collins and authored two books, one a memoir and another a “how-to.” Working in Manhattan and living in Brooklyn, Kelly serves as the special projects editor for *The New Yorker*, helping the 86-year-old magazine navigate the digital age.

At Ralston High School, Lacey Worth was valedictorian of her senior class, a Regents Scholar, a Peter Kiewit Distinguished Scholar and one of only eight high school seniors in the state to receive the Nebraska Coaches’ Scholar Athlete Award. Before she finished her double major in English and French literature at Kenyon College, she studied in France and liked it so well she returned for one year after college to serve as a language assistant at a French high school. A Phi Beta Kappa, Lacey graduated *summa cum laude* and received significant honors at the college’s Honors Day Convocation. Before long, she expects to receive her Ph.D. in English literature at the University of Iowa, where she teaches composition and literature classes. She emphatically states “the Scholarship gave me the opportunity to grow as a writer, reader, and future educator. It definitely played an important part in developing our careers.”

Annie Sloniker gathered many academic honors and

awards, and her achievements have been noteworthy. At Bellevue West, she ranked first in her class and was named a Nebraska 2002 Scholar. (Only two scholars per state are selected. She traveled to Washington D.C. to receive the honor.) Annie graduated from Harvard University with a B.A. in English and worked in publishing in Boston for two years before attending the esteemed Iowa Writers’ Workshop, from which she graduated in 2010 with an MFA in fiction. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa.

Karen Hartmann Roggenkamp summarized these past twenty-five years of Scholarship giving: “I can only imagine that Norma Ross Walter would be overjoyed to know how many lives she touched by her generosity. She must have been an incredible woman to have left such a legacy and I wish I could have known her.”

The legacy endures. All of the honorees are ideal representatives, and Ms. Walter must have been thinking of scholars like these twenty-five when she created her splendid endowment. The Silver Anniversary has now passed. The Scholarship awaits the many future recipients, and one can only look forward to many more years and anniversaries for this enormously productive venture.

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Center for Great Plains Studies

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Hamilton and Higher Education: Revisiting Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* as an Academic Novel

STEVEN TROUT
University of South Alabama

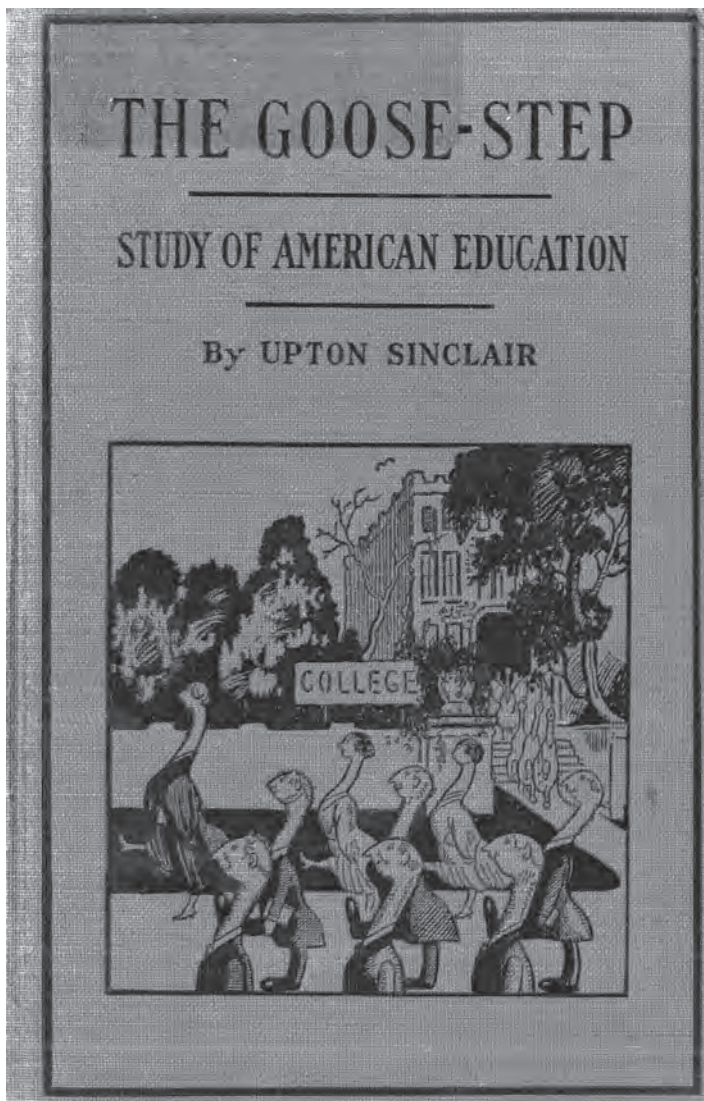
As Edith Lewis remarks in *Willa Cather Living*, the story of Godfrey St. Peter, set in the fictional college town of Hamilton, “has always been a favorite among professors” (137). My own experience with *The Professor's House* confirms this assertion. Regardless of discipline, every fellow academic to whom I have ever loaned or recommended this novel has identified in some way with Cather's protagonist—and often on a professional as well as personal level. Such a response is remarkably high praise given the fact that Cather, unlike most authors of academic fiction, never worked inside a university. How she managed to capture *homo academicus* with such precision and plausibility is an intriguing mystery. But just as intriguing is the question, *why?* Why write of a professor at all? And why do so in 1925? This essay will contend that *The Professor's House*, a highly topical novel (then as now), mirrors a cultural wave of post-World War I concerns about the health of American universities. Indeed, once examined alongside other early twentieth-century critiques of academia, such as Thorstein Veblen's *The Higher Learning in America* (1918) and Upton Sinclair's *The Goose-Step* (1923), Cather's novel emerges as one of her most culturally engaged and politically charged narratives.

From a biographical perspective, references to academic issues in Cather's novel have long held secondary importance. *The Professor's House* may be the teacher's pet, but only rarely have critics located teaching and research at its thematic center. Instead, scholarship on the novel has tended to focus on Godfrey St. Peter *as* Cather, noting the correspondences between the two in terms of age, number of published volumes, and general outlook. Within such a reading, St. Peter's vocation serves primarily as a disguise, a mask behind which Cather could safely express her personal angst as a creative writer, now in her fifties, surrounded by a world broken in two. However, three things should give us pause before we move St. Peter's professorship to the margins of the text: first, Cather's well-documented anxiety regarding the waning status of the Humanities at the University of

Nebraska (an issue to which we will turn in a moment); second, the emergence between 1918 and 1925 of higher education as a subject of national attention and debate (the focus of this essay); and, third, the sheer variety of academic issues touched upon in the novel.

A list of these issues reads like a table of contents for an issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Academe*. Cather may have cleared away much of the furniture in this text, but a surprising amount of academic clutter remains. Admission standards, for example, figure into the novel (at least obliquely) since St. Peter is convinced that his current students do not measure up to their predecessors. And so do competing definitions of scholarship. While St. Peter and Dr. Crane conduct “pure” research—what educationist Ernest Boyer would decades later call the “Scholarship of Discovery”—their more pragmatic colleagues write textbooks, a scholarly pursuit welcomed by the state legislature because of its direct benefit to students. Likewise, the integrity of the Liberal Arts, a perennially contentious issue at most public universities, defines campus politics on St. Peter's campus. Note the Professor's quixotic efforts to keep his institution from becoming a trade school. Even the issue of academic freedom finds its way into the novel. Both Catholics and Methodists, we are told, object to St. Peter's secular musings in his classroom. And, finally, the intrusion of state-level politics and commercial interests into publicly funded universities rounds out Cather's set of campus concerns, as seen in her depiction of Horace Langtry and Louis Marsellus, each of whom represents a threat to the integrity of the Academy. While the incompetent Langtry, who counts a report on *Tom Sawyer* as research on the Missouri Compromise, offers a grotesque portrait of nepotism in action—Langtry owes his position to his uncle who happens to be the “president of the board of regents”—Marsellus's acquisition of Outland's laboratory equipment (presumably in exchange for the scholarships that he endows in Outland's name) illustrates the perils of privatization (55).

As one might expect, given such a density of academic



Upton Sinclair's 1923 indictment of a system dedicated to graduating students "fitted with appropriate reverence for the free-market economy and the virtues of consumerism."

material in *The Professor's House*, considerable evidence suggests that Cather had been thinking about American higher education for years before writing her 1925 novel. Indeed, college life figures prominently in both *My Ántonia* (1918) and *One of Ours* (1922). Narrated by a non-academic who concludes that he "should never be a scholar," *My Ántonia* has mercifully little to say about falling admission standards, compromised definitions of scholarship, or the embattled Liberal Arts (254). What the novel does share with *The Professor's House* is a focus on the university as a catalyst for stimulating, life-changing relationships. Arguably laced with homoeroticism, Jim Burden's friendship with a faculty member, the erudite (and decadent) Gaston Cleric, looks ahead to Tom Outland's equally intense bond with Godfrey

St. Peter. In each case, Cather presents a campus romance of sorts that both underscores the "mental excitement" offered by a university environment (to pupil and professor alike) and hints at things not named that operate beneath the surface of faculty-student interaction (*My Ántonia* 254). (We perhaps come closest to penetrating these depths when we see Cleric jealously encourage Jim's breakup with Lena Lingard, that "handsome" and "perfectly irresponsible" Norwegian [280]).¹

In *One of Ours*, Claude Wheeler's tragedy—or, rather, one of his many tragedies—is that he never develops a deep friendship with a compatible academic mentor. He isn't given the chance. At Temple, the lackluster denominational college (or, rather, anti-college) selected for him by his mother, Claude concludes that his instructors are mostly "just preachers who couldn't make a living at preaching," and he longs to transfer to the University of Nebraska (24). Not surprisingly, his parents and older brother quickly crush this ambition by evoking the worst stereotypes of flagship institutions. Jessie Wheeler raises the specter of "those fraternity houses where boys learn all sorts of evil" (25). Bayliss sourly equates state-funded higher education with "over-done" athletics and the "fast football crowd" (26). Yet Claude's family, his mortal enemy, is unable to control him completely, and in a rare moment of rebellion he signs up for a class in European History at the state university. Significantly, Claude selects this particular course after hearing its instructor "lecture for some charity" (37). Thus, like Jim Burden and Tom Outland, he is drawn to an especially accomplished and charismatic teacher—to his own version, one might say, of Gaston Cleric or Godfrey St. Peter. Since this section of the novel passes all too quickly—in a cruel twist, Claude's parents soon force him to drop his studies altogether—one might easily overlook the sheer joy and contentment that Claude feels while engaged, for once, in real study at an institution where he belongs. Indeed, the stirring language used to describe Claude's academic idyll resembles that of Book V, where his love affair with France and with military life unfolds: he "usually came out from [the professor's] lectures with the feeling that the world was full of stimulating things, and that one was fortunate to be alive and to be able to find out about them" (38). This sounds suspiciously like a description of someone born to be a professor. With more support and understanding from his family, might Claude have attained through an academic career the happiness that he so ironically achieves as a combatant in the Great War? Perhaps so.

In different ways, *My Ántonia* and *One of Ours* set the stage for Cather's depiction of higher education in *The*

Professor's House. Yet her works of fiction are hardly the only places where she spotlights American academia; some of her most significant essays grapple with the subject as well. In her 1919 essay “The Education You Have to Fight For,” she offers a nostalgic—and, in places, rather implausible—sketch of higher education in the era of the one-room schoolhouse. At that time, she writes, a college education had been “hard to get,” and so “it took on the glamour of all unattainable things” (70). This glamour supposedly reached out well beyond the 18-21 year-old demographic. Cather recalled from memory (or so she claimed) an “old neighbor” who left his successful farm to pursue his dream of attending the state university. Years later, she supposedly encountered this white-bearded figure in “an open buckboard” returning home in triumph with a framed diploma displayed on his lap (54). This dubious vignette, which sounds like an optimistic rewriting of Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (in this version, Christminster opens its doors to an unlikely rustic scholar), is hardly the only instance of Cather’s romanticizing at work. In the late 1800s, she would have us believe, students on the Great Plains cared nothing for vocational training. “In those days,” Cather writes, “the country boys wanted to read the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*; they had no desire to do shop work or to study stock-farming all day. They hadn’t left the home pig-pen to go to the college pig-pen, but to find something as different as possible” (70).

The myth established here should seem familiar to readers of Cather’s fiction: As in *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *A Lost Lady*, the pioneer era stands as a more generous and enlightened phase in Nebraska history. In this attractive once-upon-a-time elderly farmers saw the value of a college education, and young men went to the university to study the classics, not to prepare for careers. Students in this Golden Age felt an overpowering “thirst for knowledge” that “must have been partly a homesickness for older things and deeper associations, natural to warm-blooded young people who grow up in a new community, where the fields are naked . . . and the struggle for existence is very hard.” As for current conditions in higher education, Cather notes, with obvious regret, the comparative ease of access. Gone are the days when a college education seemed all but impossible for most Nebraskans; gone is the “glamour of unattainable things.” And she closes her essay with a question that looks ahead to the mostly mediocre students in St. Peter’s classroom: “In this present time, which Bishop Beecher once called ‘the era of extravagance that came in with the automobile,’ does that fine seriousness still persist in youth whose paths are made easy?” (70).

Cather would wait four years before answering that query with a resounding “No.” In her rather notorious essay

“In those days,” Cather writes, “the country boys wanted to read the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*; they had no desire to do shop work or to study stock-farming all day.”

“Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle” (1923), the novelist tarred post-World-War-I youth with a wide brush, castigating “farmer boys who wish to be spenders before they are earners, girls who try to look like the heroines of the cinema screen; a coming generation which tries to cheat its aesthetic sense by buying things instead of making anything” (238). Needless to say, such odious young people, swept up in “the frenzy to be showy,” have little interest in reading *The Aeneid* and *The Odyssey*. Indeed, Cather notes with horror that the University of Nebraska, a once “fine institution,” now faces the danger of becoming “a gigantic trade school” that caters to the New Materialism of the young. But small-minded students, she observes, are only half of the problem. Anti-intellectualism in the state government has also played a role in defining practical application as the end-all, be-all of higher learning: “The men who control [the university’s] destiny, the regents and law makers, wish their sons and daughters to study machines, mercantile processes, ‘the principles of business’; everything that has to do with the game of getting on in the world—and nothing else.” As for the fate of disciplines like English or Art History in this brave new world, Cather employs an appropriately apocalyptic cosmological metaphor: “The classics, the humanities, are having their dark hour. They are in eclipse” (238).

As constructed in these two essays, Cather’s conception of higher education’s decline and fall in Nebraska reflects her personal mythology of the American West (within which noble pioneers give way to decadent materialists), her veneration for the Liberal Arts tradition (whose classical and medieval roots she held sacred), and her grumpiness toward the “coming generation,” with its embrace of the automobile (a technology that Cather condemned at every opportunity), movies, and jazz. In a way, that fanciful portrait of the



MR. VEBLÉN'S GAS ATTACK ON OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

By BRANDER MATTHEWS

Thorsten Veblen's 1918 "Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men" was greeted dismissively by The New York Times.

elderly pioneer returning to the prairie with his diploma says it all: Significantly, the triumphant scholar rides in a horse-drawn wagon, an image of the Old West set in opposition to Beecher's "era of extravagance," and his delight in learning for learning's sake—note that there is no mention of how he will *use* his degree—could not be further removed from the career-orientated mentality now ensconced at the University of Nebraska. One indication, perhaps, of just how much this quaint vignette meant to the novelist appears in "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle." Here, in the midst of a jeremiad aimed at—what else?—the automobile, Cather reverses the imagery from her earlier essay, imagining college-age boys and girls, "the generation now in the driver's seat," "scudding past those acres where *old men* used to follow the long corn rows up and down" (238 my emphasis). The pioneer-scholar in his wagon is replaced by a scene of shallow modernity: young Nebraskans whizzing through a landscape that means nothing to them while bound for an education that is little more than a stepping-stone to wealth.

Shaped by nostalgia, as well as a curmudgeonly distaste for current fashion, Cather's views on education might seem idiosyncratic. However, she was not the only observer to note that something disturbing had happened to American universities in the early twentieth century. And her criticism was not as unique as we might think. In 1918, the radical economist Thorstein Veblen anticipated many of Cather's points in his study *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*. For Veblen, who unlike Cather knew academia from the inside, having bounced from campus to campus for the better part of two decades, the problem with American higher education in the modern era rested in the notion of running a university as a business. As Veblen explains, increased demand among prospective students (a result, in part, of America's explosive population growth) combined with a sudden rise in the number of available institutions had produced a competitive marketplace, something that did not exist in higher education for much of the nineteenth

century. University presidents and governing boards, Veblen observed, responded to this competitive environment just as capitalists would in any sector of the economy—by devising products that would appeal to as many customers as possible. Thus, Ivy League institutions secured their market niche by cultivated an image of gentility—i.e., snob appeal—designed to entice students of means. State institutions, anxious to attain higher prestige, followed the same formula, while simultaneously expanding their clientele by developing professional schools and programs—what Veblen dismissively termed "Vocationalism."

In this manner, Veblen argued, American universities had lost sight of their real function: namely, to "conserve and extend the domain of knowledge" as "endowed institution[s] of culture" (110). And with this shift from disinterested inquiry to "pecuniary gain" as the main goal of higher learning, the role of the faculty had degenerated as well. Traditional scholarship, Veblen noted, no longer mattered; only those activities that served an institution's economic interests, whether directly or indirectly, received recognition or support. Moreover, professors had become their own worst enemies by practicing "conspicuous consumption," a term for showy spending first introduced by Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Universities demanded no less. Indeed, institutional prestige depended partly on the ability of poorly paid faculty members to invest in status symbols—i.e., "dress and equipage, bric-a-brac, amusements, public entertainments, etc."—while skimping on such inessentials as "heating, lighting, floor-space, books, and the like" (120). For Veblen, this perverse values system insidiously undermined the real work of the university. Once enslaved by the need to keep up appearances, a professor would inevitably move away from pure research in lieu of activities, however dull or demeaning, more directly aligned with institutional interests; he would, in other words, follow the money—or what there was of it since keeping faculty members hungry, while at the same committed to an unrealistic level of bourgeois display, perpetuated

capitalism's grip on the Academy. Thus, according to Veblen, the lives of most contemporary American academics followed a tragic trajectory: "They have entered on the academic career to find time, place, facilities, and congenial environment for the pursuit of knowledge, and under pressure they presently settle down to a round of perfunctory labor by means of which to simulate the life of a gentleman" (122).

For socialist Upton Sinclair, who self-published his own bulky study of American higher education in 1923, the neo-conformity and lack of imagination found on the nation's campuses resulted from forces far more sinister and more blatantly political than the comparatively subtle economic and ideological pressures outlined by Veblen. Sinclair's central metaphor, which he offered as the title for his book, was the Imperial German military march (later revived by the Nazis), known as the "goose-step." The cover illustration for the first edition (see illustration on page 8) sums up its 488 pages: In front of a stone building marked "College," a formation of geese with human heads and textbooks tucked under their wings marches robotically to a rhythm set by big business. It is a grotesque image of lock-step conformity and narrow-mindedness, the goals, as it turns out, of American higher education. Throughout much of the book, Sinclair argues for the existence of a grand conspiracy at the national level—a system of what he calls "Interlocking Directorates"—that both suppresses academic freedom, especially as invoked by left-leaning professors of Political Science or Economics, and strives to guarantee that students graduate (or, rather, goose-step out the door) fitted with appropriate reverence for the free-market economy and the virtues of consumerism.

However, the strength of Sinclair's neglected critique, a once-controversial book now all but forgotten, rests not in its paranoid hypothesis, but in its wealth of anecdotal details, which combine to create a picture of the modern American academic besieged on all sides. In a section devoted to the University of Nebraska, for example, Sinclair emphasizes—just as Cather does—the perils of leaving higher education in the hands of businessmen: The university's board of regents, he observes, consists entirely of "big insiders" such as "Mr. Hall, president of one of the largest banks in the state; Mr. Judson, the largest retail merchant in Omaha; and Mr. Bates, a wealthy rancher and insurance man. All these men know money; they know nothing whatever about education" (334). But big insiders, as it turns out, are hardly a professor's only enemies if he plans to conduct pure research and share his true passions in the classroom. Sinclair notes the growing power of the "fundamentalist movement," which attempted at the University of Wisconsin to

shut down a popular course on evolution. Even this most liberal of campuses, he points out, is "surrounded by a veritable fortification of religious establishments, all carrying on instruction of their own, and all trying to break into the state institution" (236). And then there is the consumer mentality of the average American citizen, who regards college credit as a "commodity" to be purchased, not earned. Anyone reading this article who has ever been confronted by a student claiming, "I pay your salary," will appreciate Sinclair's story of the Wisconsin farmer who "drives up to Madison in his automobile and demands an interview with the dean, saying: 'Here I am supporting this university by my taxes, and here you've gone and flunked my son!'" Finally, the demands of campus boosterism and publicity—today the purview of so-called University Relations offices—create yet another drag on the faculty. At places like the Kansas State Agricultural College, which Sinclair singles out because of its especially obnoxious billboards, the average professor learns that he is expected to "contribute his proper share to the uplift of his institution" (396). Thus, hemmed-in by Big Business, religious intolerance, anti-intellectual students and parents, and an ever growing number of non-scholarly university personnel (such as the campus press agent), the academic of 1923 enjoys a cramped and fruitless existence, which Sinclair anatomizes in the following passage:

The college grows big in body and stays small in soul; while the professor is apt to stay small in body and soul. His salary does not permit a generous diet, and his work is confining and tedious. He teaches three or four classes a day, and corrects compositions and test-papers, and keeps records and makes out reports, and obeys his superiors and keeps himself within the limits of his little specialty. He leads a narrow life, withdrawn from realities. He goes to lunch at the Faculty Club and talks 'shop' with his colleagues, men who live equally empty lives and are equally out of touch with great events. There is gossip and intrigue and wire-pulling; a professor at the University of Chicago heard his colleagues talk for an hour about the fact that someone got an increase in salary of two or three hundred dollars. A professor at Johns Hopkins compared his colleagues to the lotus eaters: 'Peaceful, endowed and dull.' (397)

Cather may never have read these sentences—or, for that matter, a single word in either Veblen's *The Higher Learning in America* or Sinclair's *The Goose-Step*. However, it



St. Peter's is the only classroom discourse that we actually *hear* in Cather's fiction, and it is, by any measure, a remarkable oration.

is doubtful that either of these studies escaped her notice entirely. In the March 16, 1919 issue of *The New York Times*, Veblen's book received a lengthy—and almost entirely dismissive—review under the eye-catching title, “Mr. Veblen's Gas Attack on our Colleges and Universities.” (And, no, I will not argue that this title inspired the mysterious gas that Tom Outland invents or the treacherous stove that nearly asphyxiates Professor St. Peter.) Since Cather's essay “The Education You Have to Fight For” appeared in October, 1919, it seems reasonable to assume that during the months leading up to that publication news items focused on American education—and its discontents—would have been of interest to her. As for *The Goose-Step*, no notice of Sinclair's book ever appeared in the *Times*. But Cather may have seen John Macy's detailed review, titled “Plutocratic Education,” in the April 11, 1923 issue of *The Nation*. Note that her essay “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle” appeared in that same magazine six months later.

One can perhaps make too much of these confluences. After all, neither Veblen's book nor Sinclair's shows up in the index to Janis Stout's calendar of Cather's letters. If nothing else, however, the existence of these fairly prominent works, which so often seem to anticipate Cather's comments on the state of American higher education, forces us to take a second look at *The Professor's House*. And so, in the remainder of this essay, I will focus on three characters who take on greater complexity when examined with the writings of Veblen and Sinclair in mind—Horace Langtry, Dr. Crane, and, of course, Cather's protagonist, a man utterly worn out, as Klaus P. Stich writes, by “the various forces of deconstruction he has had to face at his university, in his marriage, and in his increasingly dispirited private self” (228).

As I have argued elsewhere, Langtry's cavalier attitude toward the distinction between literature and history reflects a crisis in his discipline, as faith in historical objectivity

faded in the aftermath of the Great War, an event so vast and grotesque that it seemingly defied scholarly understanding.² However, Langtry's “dress and equipage” (recall Veblen's use of that phrase)—e.g. his British suits, “bowler hat of unusual block,” and “horn-handled walking-stick”—also carry significance. However absurd in St. Peter's eyes, these flashy accoutrements are perfect examples of Veblen's conspicuous consumption at work in an academic setting (53). In intellectual terms, Langtry contributes nothing to his campus. And yet, Cather tells us, his “standing on the faculty was now quite as good as St. Peter's own” (57). I would contend that Langtry's powerful connection on the Board of Regents only partly explains his surprisingly lofty status. Cather spends the better part of two pages emphasizing that Langtry is admired—doted on, in fact, by the administration—*because* of his foppish affections, not in spite of them. Indeed, St. Peter's “professional rival and enemy” seems to have used Veblen's study of higher education as a handbook (53). Built out of “English clothes” procured during “customary summer[s] in London,” Langtry's costume as a man of leisure and property boosts his institution's image no less than his own (53)—hence, then, the university's eagerness to underwrite Langtry in schemes that spread the illusion of gentility across campus, thereby boosting the institution's social capital. We learn, for example, that Langtry has taken “parties of undergraduates” to London (presumably with financial assistance from the administration) and that they have “come back wonderfully brushed up” (57). In addition, Langtry has introduced a fraternity and a sorority to campus (again presumably with administrative approval and support) as a means of further replicating his model of snobbish dress and faux-English manners.

If Langtry is the biggest winner among the faculty, because of his understanding that style now counts for more than substance at the modern university, then Dr. Crane is the biggest loser. The two characters are antithetical in every way. Oblivious to the art of conspicuous consumption, Crane is instead conspicuously consumed, his body ravaged by disease, while surgeons and attorneys siphon-off his inadequate salary. And as far as style and fashion are concerned, Crane's dingy existence fits perfectly within Sinclair's vision of academic hell. Ironically, while engaged in the most ambitious and potentially significant research in the history of the university—his goal is to determine the actual dimensions of the universe—Crane enjoys none of the administrative support apparently lavished on Langtry. Indeed, the size and quality of Crane's workspace, always a good indicator of a faculty member's value in the eyes of the upper administration, are nothing less than pitiful. His office, Cather writes, “was like

any study behind a lecture room; dusty books, dusty files, but no apparatus—except a spirit-lamp and a little saucepan in which the physicist heated water for his cocoa at regular intervals” (142). Puritanical by nature, Crane chooses to live in “the most depressing and unnecessary ugliness” (140). However, that ugliness is also, at least to some extent, chosen for him by his institution—just one indication, among many in the novel, of what that institution values and what it does not.

Cather’s protagonist occupies a middle ground between these two characters. As a defender of the Liberal Arts and “uncommercial” scholarship, he stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Crane. However, St. Peter’s notoriety as a recipient of the Oxford Prize, a rare example of an academic honor that actually carries “pecuniary” benefit, makes him an unwitting accomplice in his university’s pursuit of higher status via conspicuous consumption. Cather makes this clear in what seems at first a throw-away detail: The schedule committee at his university has assigned the Professor an 8:00 a.m. class—his first in years—because, in the words of the Dean, he “can afford to take a taxi over now.” Read one way, this detail points us back to Sinclair’s sketch of day-to-day academic life, a depressing spectacle of pettiness and passive aggression. Like the professors at the University of Chicago, who spend an hour disparaging a colleague because he received a salary bonus, the Dean and his schedule committee cannot forgive St. Peter’s financial success. Thus, they express their jealousy and resentment by sticking him with an early morning class. However, Veblen’s analysis of professorial spending and its relationship to institutional prestige suggests an alternative interpretation: By encouraging St. Peter to indulge in an ostentatious luxury—taking a taxi to work instead of walking—his university seeks to turn the Professor’s academic honor into yet another display of gentility, not unlike Langtry’s bowler hat and cane. To put this into twenty-first-century parlance, unless he is careful, St. Peter runs the risk of serving his university’s “brand” even as he defies its vocationalism.

Yet the complications introduced into St. Peter’s professional life by his receipt of the Oxford Prize go well beyond the various ways in which his status-conscious institution threatens to *use* this academic honor. Ironically, his passion and honesty as a teacher—the very qualities that draw Outland to him and that he shares with Gaston Cleric and with Claude’s would-be mentor at the University of Nebraska—are also imperiled by his success. Early in the novel, Lillian St. Peter and Scott McGregor stop by the university and eavesdrop on one of the Professor’s improvisational lectures, an elegant meditation on science, art, and

religion (St. Peter famously equates the latter two) delivered in response to a comment from an especially bright student. Cather appreciated a good lecture, and she invariably emphasizes the public-speaking ability of her fictional professors. When Gaston Cleric “was tired,” we are told, “his lectures were clouded, obscure, elliptical, but when he was interested they were wonderful” (124). As for Claude’s European History professor, he speaks with “a dry fervor in his voice, and when he occasionally interrupted his exposition with a purely personal comment, it seemed valuable and important” (37). Significantly, St. Peter’s is the only classroom discourse that we actually *hear* in Cather’s fiction, and it is, by any measure, a remarkable oration. However, Lillian responds pettishly to her husband’s words: “I wish you wouldn’t talk to those fat-faced boys as if they were intelligent human beings. You *cheapen* yourself, Godfrey. It makes me a little ashamed” (70 my emphasis). If one reads this passage through the lens of Veblen’s *The Higher Learning in America*, which defines American higher education as a game of constant one-upmanship, with the appearance of gentility as the ultimate goal, the word “cheapen” leaps from the page. Does Lillian intend her remark as a compliment, as a recognition of her husband’s genius and its incompatibility with the young materialists of whom Cather so disapproved? Or does her comment reflect her alignment with the status-centered values that have shifted the university away from its proper mission as an “endowed institution of culture”? The Professor’s acidly sarcastic response—“Thank you for the tip, Lillian. I won’t do it again”—strongly suggests the latter (70). Thus, in this painful passage, which no teacher can read without wincing, Lillian implies that her husband’s *value* as a professional no longer resides in his passionate interaction with students; such interaction is now beneath the winner of the Oxford Prize, whose job, in effect, is to make his institution look good, not to educate.



Filled with errors, the dust jacket copy for the first edition of *The Professor’s House* offered a rather bizarre description of the novel: “To those who do not know or who doubt the American youth, to those who may be interested in the environment which their son’s [sic] and daughter’s [sic] find in college [sic] Miss Willa Cather addresses herself in ‘The Professor’s House’. [sic]” (Porter 43-44). Cather, we now know, actually wrote many of the blurbs for her books. But probably not this one. As David Porter observes, “even if we ignore the egregious punctuation, we cannot imagine Cather herself perpetuating the absurdity of casting *The Professor’s House* as an introduction to college life” (46). True



enough. However, reading *The Professor's House* within the context of early twentieth-century studies of American academia, as well as Cather's own writings on education, does reveal a fresh set of nuances within this intensely analyzed text. Although not a radical, in any political sense, Cather would have agreed with Veblen that "pecuniary gain" and social prestige had replaced knowledge and culture as the main objects of American universities. Her fictional campus reflects this gloomy assessment. And, while possessing little sympathy for Sinclair's variety of muckraking (or his Marxist conspiracy theories), Cather could see that more and more students in the 1920s were goose-stepping past the Humanities and straight into professional programs. Like Sinclair, she questioned the wisdom of leaving the nation's universities in the hands of businessmen and parochial politicians.

But how, one might ask, does Cather's imaginary institution line up with the typical American university of 2011? The answer, for better or worse, is "eerily well." Though much has changed through the advent of distance education, widespread financial aid for students (something unheard of in Professor St. Peter's day), and the cult of accountability and assessment, American universities still grapple with the fundamental questions that Cather incorporated into her narrative. What, ultimately, should determine a university's status? How much control should state government have over academic matters? What is the proper balance between Liberal Arts education and workforce training? And what should matter most to the professoriate—research or teaching? As long as these questions remain unsettled, *The Professor's House* will continue to make its academic readers feel uncomfortably at home.

NOTES

1. For more on Cather's depiction of homosocial and homoerotic relationships in university settings (and elsewhere), see John P. Anders's excellent study, *Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Literary Tradition*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999.

2. See Steven Trout, *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002, 160-163.

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“Archbishop Latour’s” Garden



Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), 049017. Photographer unknown.

This photograph, titled “The Lamy Garden,” is reproduced on a plaque in what remains of Archbishop Lamy’s garden on the grounds of St. Francis Cathedral Basilica in Santa Fe. Dated “1880?” it depicts in the center Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy, the prototype of Cather’s Archbishop Jean Marie Latour; in the foreground on the right is Bishop Joseph P. Machebeuf, prototype of Cather’s Father Vaillant; on the left is J. B. Salpointe, who succeeded Lamy, is referred to in the novel as “Archbishop S___,” and wrote *Soldiers of the Cross* (1898), one of Cather’s historical

sources for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. The young priest and boy on the right are not identified.

This garden is the setting of a major scene in the opening chapter of Book Seven, “The Great Diocese.” In it, Father Vaillant, recovering from malaria, requests Bishop Latour for permission to return to Arizona. Latour, overcoming personal disappointment at this request, breaks off a spray of lilac-colored tamerisk blossoms “to punctuate and seal . . . his renunciation” (Scholarly Edition 218—John J. Murphy).

Remembering James Woodress, 1916-2011



A casual moment at “The Art of Willa Cather: An International Seminar,” held in Lincoln, Nebraska in October 1973, in commemoration of Cather’s centenary. Front, left to right: Eudora Welty, Bernice Slote, John W. Robinson. Rear: Robert L. Hough, James E. Miller, Jr., and James Woodress. Photo by Lucia Woods.

MARGARET ANNE O’CONNOR

Editor’s Note: On May 19, 2011 the Cather community lost James Woodress, who died in his sleep in Pomona, California at the age of 94. A scholar of broad interest and deep accomplishment, Woodress is best known among us as the author of the formidable and still-standard biography, Willa Cather: A Literary Life (1987). The 2011 International Seminar saw a Woodress memorial session in the Jaffrey Meeting House, nearby to Cather’s grave in New Hampshire. Here, Woodress’s friend, colleague, and former student, Margaret Anne O’Connor, offers some thoughts on his significance as a pioneering Cather scholar.

In October 1973 Jim Woodress was one of ten invited speakers at the conference held at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to honor the 100th anniversary of Cather’s birth. The group was stellar—among the headliners were Leon Edel, Alfred A. Knopf, and Eudora Welty. Woodress was there owing to his first Cather biography, *Willa Cather: Her Life and Art* (1970), and he was among an international group: Aldo Celli was there from Italy, Marcus Cunliffe from England, Michel Gervaud from France, and Hiroko Sato from Japan. Among other Americans present were Mildred R. Bennett, James E. Miller, Jr., Donald Sutherland, and conference organizers Virginia Faulkner, Robert E. Knoll, and Bernice Slote.



It was an honor to be among the invited participants myself. I was Jim Woodress's first Ph.D. from the University of California at Davis, and I was then working on a project he had handed me—a description of Cather letter collections around the country for *Resources for American Literary Study* (1974). Along with many others in attendance there, I was beginning what would prove to be a long association with Cather studies, one that continues today. Indeed, along with Edel and Woodress, the names of those who attended the Lincoln conference constitute a roll call of significant and enduring Cather scholars from those years, some happily continuing yet: Bruce Baker II, Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, Warren G. French, Blanche H. Gelfant, Phillip L. Gerber, Richard Giannone, John Hinz, Ellen Moers, John J. Murphy, John Randall III, and David Stouck, just to alphabetize a few.

As this suggests, the Lincoln conference was a gala event. I would argue that it was the first time such a gathering had been held for an American author. The critic Louis Rubin, writing for a Richmond newspaper, lamented the fact that, Cather aside, Virginia had missed such opportunities in getting the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund such an event for *other* Virginia writers! From Thomas Jefferson on, these other Virginians were comparatively ignored in their home state—his words were a congratulation to Nebraska for taking the lead with Cather.

Looking back to the Lincoln conference and to Jim Woodress's presence there, I see just how it gave Cather studies a push into the future, a momentum we feel yet. The gathering produced *The Art of Willa Cather* (1974), a book that continues to reward attention. And Jim Woodress was key to that impulse. Leon Edel there insisted that, unlike Henry James, Cather was lacking “the larger imagination” of the Master. When comments turned to the question of Cather's “theory of fiction,” Edel challenged a room full of listeners by saying, “I don't want to quibble. It seems to me that she had no theory of any kind. She wrote intuitively” (150). To quote his most provocative comments from his prepared remarks, Edel said, “Miss Cather did not have the complexity of art in her; she was an exquisite painter of surfaces . . .” and he continues, asserting that “the depths of the abyss are not in Miss Cather's work” (199). Such characterizations, made seriously then by a significant biographer and scholar who had indeed done some important work on Cather, seem quaint now, almost laughable.

That this is so is largely because of the work of James Woodress. Two generations of Cather scholars have been defending her from such views since the 1970s, and Woodress's biographical work has been bedrock to that

His long and productive life has served as a bridge for the work that is still being done on Cather today—which will continue through the James Woodress Fellowship program. . .

transformation. Returning to Cather with *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, Woodress had read all the letters, knew both their problems and their implications, and always pointed to the complexities inherent. This was no “painter of surfaces,” he demonstrated himself and encouraged others to do the same. We did. Jim dedicated his second biography to “the community of Cather scholars, past and present”([v]), a present extended to this day by the University of Nebraska Press that has kept the biography in print and made it available online—and so searchable. Jim Woodress was a champion of the reputation and stature of Willa Cather, and his work demonstrates, in myriad ways, her conscious control of her craft. His long and productive life has served as a bridge for the work that is still being done on Cather today—which will continue through the James Woodress Fellowship program he established at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. James Woodress was scholar-teacher of the highest caliber, now remembered with both respect and affection by those of us who knew him and, more broadly, by those who know, use, and respect his fine work.

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Reverberations “Exterior—to Time” in *Lucy Gayheart* and McEwan’s *On Chesil Beach*

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The quotation in my title, the last line from Dickinson’s “This was a Poet” (J 448), was chosen to suggest that certain literary subjects transcend the periods we construct for historical convenience. By placing Ian McEwan’s popular 2007 novel against Willa Cather’s frequently maligned 1935 one, certain perennial issues come to light, not so much about the art of fiction as about life itself and human relationships. Such a comparison does date this Cather novel, exposing bits of old-fashioned sentimentality and self-indulgent romanticism, yet it exposes as well concerns about love relative to sex, preserving selfhood in intimate relationships, independence in the pursuit of artistic accomplishment, and music as liberation from the corporeal. Both Cather and McEwan grapple with these, if from

different times and worldviews. In 1992 McEwan described his “spiritual dimension” as “an ill-defined dissatisfaction” but admitted “that the material visible world is not quite all or all that it seems”; more recently, however, he felt it to be “more than enough” and began corresponding with biologist Richard Dawkins, an outspoken atheist (Zalewski 58). In contrast, Cather, in her ongoing battle with materialism, shifted during the Twenties from a belief in the primacy of art to what E.K. Brown terms “a bracketing of religion and art” (247). My juxtaposing of these texts will begin with *Lucy Gayheart*, then introduce McEwan’s novel (with a little more plot summary than customary), compare the codas of the novels, and conclude with some second thoughts on Lucy herself as musician and on music and sex.

I

I can understand why Cather expressed impatience with Lucy, for this character has the same effect on me. She is the only unfinished major heroine of the Cather novels, resembling the supporting one in *O Pioneers!*, Marie Shabata, in being cut from life in the midst of conflicting and fragmentary desires. Lucy is a transient heroine in process, and the challenge for readers is to fathom what she *would* be. She is introduced through motion and flight images, and compared to “a bird flying home” (3), the ends of her scarf floating on the wind “like two slender crimson wings” (8). Such imagery also closes Cather’s text. In the final pages Harry Gordon contemplates the footprints Lucy made as a child in the wet sidewalk cement in Haverford:

The print of the toes was deeper than the heel; the heel was very faint, as if that part of the living foot had just grazed the surface of the pavement. Was there really some baffling suggestion of quick motion in those impressions, . . . that to him they always had a look of swiftness . . . and lightness? As if the feet had tiny wings on them, like the herald Mercury. (227)

There is a strain of otherworldliness in this novel that should remind us that it is among those later Cather fictions in which religion becomes the primary access to another world, although in *Lucy Gayheart* it is art. Two questions arise: is Lucy’s character an adequate vehicle for such beatification, and is her art sufficient to sustain a life? The first hint of her inadequacy comes after the ice-skating scene when Lucy rides home in Harry’s sleigh. After seeing the first star in the darkening sky, which “spoke to her like a signal, released

another kind of life and feeling which did not belong [in Haverford] . . . [and] overpowered her,” she cuddles up to Harry “to escape from what she had gone so far to snatch. It was too bright and too sharp. It hurt, and made one feel small and lost” (11-12). It is to this “eternal thing” (12) that Clement Sebastian awakens her in his recital, “a feeling that some protecting barrier was gone—a window had been broken that let in the cold and darkness of the night” (32). The first song she hears Sebastian sing, a sailor’s salute to Castor and Pollux, the mariners’ stars, is all “calmness and serenity[,] . . . a kind of large enlightenment, like daybreak” (29-30), but in subsequent songs black clouds obscure this light. As the narrator comments, “Sebastian had already destroyed a great deal for her” (32).

As an artist, Lucy never clearly commits herself to this cosmic dimension without its being coupled with the glamour of Sebastian’s lifestyle. Perhaps this is what Professor Auerbach is getting at when he tells her she is not ambitious enough to be nervous about her playing, “that it was her greatest fault” (34). It might also prompt his advice that for an unambitious artist, a girl like her, “[a] nice house and garden in a little town, with money enough not to worry, a family—that’s the best life,” better than “the musical profession” and its “many disappointments” (134). And perhaps such lack of commitment prompts Mrs. Ramsay’s advice to her that “[n]othing really matters but living. Get all you can out of it. . . . Accomplishments are the ornaments of life, they come second” (165). This would be bad advice for a professional, who might well define accomplishments *as* “living.”

In spite of her ethereal nature, or perhaps because of it, Lucy never outgrows a dependency on big, heavy men: on Sebastian for access to the rarified atmosphere of a mountain spur enveloped by mist from which “the trivial and disturbing [are] shut out” (76); and on Harry, whose “fine physical balance” (97) provides the ballast she needs, the anchor for her kite. Her need of balance is evident after her disagreement with Harry in the Art Museum about facts being at the bottom of everything. Looking out over Lake Michigan,





Lucy feels threatened:

And she couldn't breathe in this other [factual] kind of life. . . . If only one could lose one's life and one's body and be nothing but one's desire . . . and . . . float with the gulls, out yonder where the blue and green were changing!

A far-away voice [Harry's] was saying something about lunch. She came back with a start. (102)

Of course, in the climactic second book, when Lucy returns to Haverford and Sebastian exists only in memory, Harry shuts her out of his factual world, and she must struggle alone to sustain the world Sebastian had introduced to her. Well before the singer in *The Bohemian Girl* generates in Lucy a vague commitment to art as her salvation, there is a hint that something positive and hopefully independent of hero-worship is happening in her. "There was only one thing she really liked to do in the evening," we read. "She and her father had been playing some sonatas of Mozart after he came home from the shop" (162).

We are never sure if this enjoyment could have developed into diligence, which is why I refer to Lucy as "unfinished." Cather leaves us hanging in this regard. The worn voice of a road company soprano singing "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls" almost rescues Lucy for that rarified world she has been wandering in since Sebastian's rendition of "When We Two Parted" "destroyed a great deal for her" (32)—the comfortable but no longer satisfying Haverford world. The aging soprano gave freshness to old words, phrased them intelligently, just as Sebastian had: "Until [Lucy] began to play for Sebastian she had never known that words had any value aside from their direct meaning" (95). Such emancipation from the literal, the factual, defines Lucy's "new life" (94). The soprano sang so well, "Lucy wanted to be up there on the stage, helping her to do it. . . . She felt she must run away . . . back to a world that strove after excellence [S]omething that was like a purpose [was] forming, and she could not stop it" (181-82). This amorphous resolve is short-circuited, however, by an increasingly blurred fantasy of "flowers and music and enchantment and love," in which

"Life itself" becomes "a lover waiting for her in distant cities" (184).

II

McEwan's Florence Ponting is a heroine and artist of a different cloth. She defines herself as a musician, and in the novel's coda of *On Chesil Beach* we learn that the Ennismore Quartet she leads as first violinist has become eminently successful, "a revered feature of the classical music scene" (202). Unlike Lucy's Harry, Florence's romantic attachment, Edward Mayhew, is exactly her age, twenty-two, and socially inferior. The Pontings, like the Gordons, are well-to-do. Frequenting the Pontings' big Victorian villa on the outskirts of Oxford is a step up for Edward. He enjoys lolling on Florence's bed while she practices her violin. Dulled by what seems to him a constant erection,

all he could do was watch her and love her bare arms, her headband, her straight back, the sweet tilt of her chin as she tucked the instrument under it, the curve of her breasts silhouetted against the window, the way the hem of her cotton skirt swung against her tanned calves with the movement of her bowing. . . . Now and then, she would sigh over some imagined imperfection of tone or phrasing and repeat a passage over and over again. . . . He was stirred . . . by her obliviousness to him—she had the gift of total concentration, whereas he could pass the entire day in a twilight of boredom and arousal. (148-49)

Florence and Edward happen upon each other at a Nuclear Disarmament meeting in Oxford. Having completed their college courses, both are experiencing suffocation at home and concern over what to do next. At fourteen Edward began to separate himself from his family. Once told that he was "university material," he decided that London was the place to be, and applied to University College. When he meets Florence, he is considering a doctorate and dreaming of writing a series of short biographies on obscure historical figures. Florence had escaped from her family to the other side of London, to the Royal College of Music, practices five hours a day, attends chamber recitals five times a week, and fell in love with Wigmore Hall, where she got a backstage job, turned pages for Benjamin Britten, heard cellist Jacqueline du Pré give her debut performance, and one day experienced the epiphany which sealed her career. She discovered in a

wastebasket performance notes discarded by the Amadeus Quartet:

The hand was loopy and faint . . . and concerned the opening of The Schubert Quartet No. 15. It thrilled her to decipher finally the words, “At B attack!” Florence could not stop herself playing with the idea that she had received an important message, . . . and . . . not long after . . . asked three of the best students . . . to join her own quartet. (52)

Now, at the end of her senior year, she is debating getting a job with a provincial orchestra, playing in a trio for a seedy grand hotel, or remaining at the conservatory to work up her quartet.

Her encounter with Edward represents a welcome relief, and weeks later their relationship develops to the point of their rhapsodizing over love at first sight. Florence is attracted to his wild, unkempt look—he is an oddity in her conservative world:

He always had a paperback book . . . in his jacket pocket. . . . He marked what he read with a pencil stub. He was virtually the only man Florence had met who did not smoke. None of his socks matched. . . . She adored his curious mind, his mild country accent, the huge strength in his hands . . . the way his soft brown eyes, resting on her . . . made her feel enveloped in a friendly cloud of love. (11-12)

In declaring his love, Edward deludes himself that Florence might be “one of those fabled girls from a nice home who would want to go all the way with him, and soon”; however, for her the declaration generates a “vague dread that she had been impetuous and let go of something important” (73). Beyond slight kisses, cuddling, and allowing his enormous arm around her shoulders, she balks. When at the cinema he plunges her hand between his legs, she retreats, becomes “imperceptibly remote” (27).

McEwan’s novel opens on their wedding day, in the honeymoon suite of a hotel on Chesil Beach. “They were young, educated, and both virgins” begins the text. Besides Edward’s being hot for intercourse and fearful of “arriving too soon” (8), both newlyweds have major problems. Edward’s proves the more fatal; with a history of childhood tantrums and prone to fistfights, he mistrusts himself during periods of nervous excitement. “Something like tunnel vision and deafness descended on him,” and “[h]e was capable of behaving stupidly, even explosively” (112-13). Serious appreciation

of Florence’s music might well discipline this madness, if he would let it. When she takes him to a rehearsal of Mozart’s D Major Quintet, his sexual impulses are interrupted by the muscularity of the sound, “and for minutes on end he actually enjoyed the music . . .” (154). Like



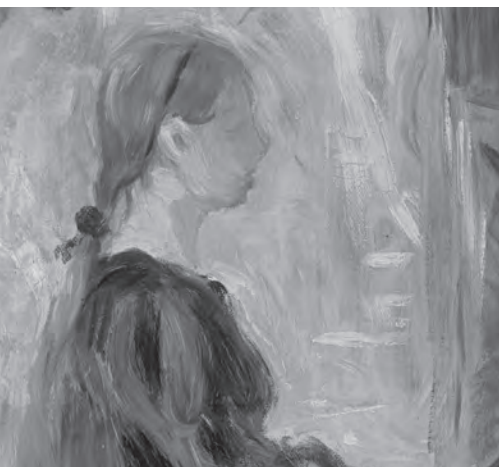
Harry Gordon, he can

be moved by such music and even tries to hum bits of it to Florence, yet his interest in it remains superficial and essentially resides in her. Harry’s comments to Lucy in the proposal scene in Chicago would be characteristic: “Music doesn’t mean much to me without you, except to remind me of you.” “And now isn’t it about time we got down to business? . . . You’ve had your little fling” (108). But getting down to business in the honeymoon suite merely exacerbates Florence’s problem. “[S]he could never have described her array of feelings: a dry physical sensation of tight shrinking, general revulsion at what she might be asked to do, shame at the prospect of disappointing him . . .” (103).

Her problem is primarily a matter of independence. As she tries to fulfill her wifely duties by leading Edward to bed she becomes aware of a phrase from a Mozart quintet, four notes which remind her of that other aspect of her nature, of the musician

who led her quartet, who coolly imposed her will, would never meekly submit to conventional expectations. She was no lamb to be uncomplainingly knifed. Or penetrated. . . . Yes, she needed to speak up, the way she did at rehearsals. . . . She even had the beginnings of a proposal she might make. (99-100)

But she succumbs to his agitation at her restlessness, and in her fumbling attempt to follow her manual’s advice to “guide the man in,” she causes Edward to arrive too soon. Horrified at “being doused in fluid, in slime from another body” (131), she wipes herself frantically with a pillow and runs out to the beach. After the harsh words and accusations that follow on the beach, she nervously delivers her proposal—“[l]ike a skater on thinning ice, she accelerated to save herself from



drowning” (188):

“We could be together, . . . and if you . . . really wanted, that is to say, whenever it happened, . . . I would understand, more than that, I’d want it . . . because I want you to be happy and free. I’d never be jeal-

ous, as long as I knew you loved me. I would love you and play music, that’s all I want to do in life.” (189)

Her speech is no more preposterous than Lucy’s to Harry that she’s gone “All the way; all the way! There’s no going back. Can’t you understand *anything*?” (111). In each case the woman is backed to the wall by an aggressive, impatient, and provisionally rejected man.

III

First noticed similarities and differences in these novels after reading McEwan’s heart-breaking coda. It begins with Edward making his way slowly back to the hotel while Florence checks out and leaves for home. He has rejected her twice, in quick succession. His immediate response to her proposal was to pick up a large stone, toss it from hand to hand while shouting at her, then turn in his fury and hurl it toward the sea. After convincing her of her worthlessness, he remained silent as she whispered her sorrow and paused to wait for a reply which never came:

Her words . . . would haunt him for a long time to come. He would wake in the night and hear them, or something like their echo, and their yearning, regretful tone, and he would groan at the memory of that moment, of his silence and of the way he angrily turned from her. . . . (192)

He remains too proud to follow her or to write, and as the years pass, has a series of women, is married to one for three years, gives up his history project, drifts from job to job. “What had he done with himself?” he asks in his fifties. “He had drifted through, half asleep, inattentive, unambitious,

unserious, childless, comfortable” (199).

Because his “precarious interest in classical music had faded entirely in favor of rock and roll,” he never hears about the triumphant debut of Florence’s Ennismore Quartet, nor reads the reviewer’s estimate of Florence’s performance in Mozart’s D Major Quintet:

Miss Ponting, in the lilting tenderness of her tone and the lyrical delicacy of her phrasing, played . . . like a woman in love, not only with Mozart, or with music, but with life itself. (198)

Into his sixties, Edward is amazed that he had let the girl with the violin go. “At last he could admit to himself that he had never met anyone he loved as much, . . . never found anyone, man or woman, who matched her seriousness” (201-02). While he knew her quartet was eminent, he did not want to see her photograph, wanted to remember her as she was in his memories. He realizes now that

[a]ll she needed was the certainty of his love, and his reassurance that there was no hurry when a lifetime lay ahead of them. Love and patience—if only he had had them both at once—would surely have seen them both through. . . . On Chesil Beach he could have called out to Florence, he could have gone after her. (202-03)

“Love and patience”—how much might they have altered Harry Gordon’s story—and Lucy’s? The final book of Cather’s novel depicts a man who had suffered remorse for his cruel treatment of the only woman he ever loved. He must square with his conscience not only ignoring her plea for patience in Chicago—“I’m not ready to marry anyone. I won’t be, for a long while” (109)—but his treatment of her on the snowy road outside Haverford: “Many a time, going home on winter nights, he heard again that last cry on the wind—‘Harry!’ Indignation, amazement, authority, as if she wouldn’t allow him to do anything so shameful” (221). Unlike Edward, Harry has trapped himself in a hasty marriage but fantasizes before Lucy dies that after *she* has suffered sufficiently for *his* mistake, “something would happen” between them and “he and Lucy Gayheart would be together again” (217). After her death he tries to escape his “life sentence” (221) by speeding in his automobile, but he mellows as time passes. Lucy, he comes to feel “was the best thing he had to remember. When he looked back into the past, there was just one face, one figure, that was mysteriously lovely. All the other men and women he had known were more or

less like himself" (223). Like Florence for Edward, Lucy for Harry "has receded to the far horizon line, along with all the fine things of youth, which do not change" (224).

IV

Finally, a word on Lucy and Florence. Comparing them highlights Lucy's character as musician, as artist, questioning Woodress's claim that "Cather wasn't creating a genuine artist in Lucy, only a country girl with a moderate talent . . ." (462). If Lucy had been insufficiently talented, would she have been selected by Sebastian over Auerbach's other superior students? There is nothing in the text at this point to indicate otherwise. In a letter to a friend, Cather describes Lucy's hero-worship as "a natural feeling in all ardent young people" (Woodress 461). How are we to read the adjective "ardent"? Lucy's passion seems primarily directed toward Sebastian's artistry; as a lover he seems bodiless. When she is pressured by Harry's proposal, she fabricates a "situation" to distance her relationship with Sebastian from anything corporeal: "It was as if [Harry] had brought all his physical force, his big well-kept body, to ridicule something that had no body, that was a faith, an ardour" (112). After Sebastian dies, Lucy recognizes that striving after artistic excellence accesses the ethereal world she associates with his memory. However, she herself dies before we know if she would prove capable of distinguishing that memory from the essence of her discipline. Florence Ponting is able to make the distinction between hero-worship and artistic discipline early on. She is thrilled to be working around Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, John Ogdon, and the Amadeus Quartet, but then inspired to perform on a professional level herself.

The relationship or conflict between music and sex is another issue in these novels. Lucy's training in Chicago and her exposure to Sebastian's art develop in her a distaste for the physical that Cather in her refinement at this stage of her career would never describe as graphically as McEwan does Florence's reaction to the thought of "Edward's . . . engorged penis. . . . [which] had the potency to make her upper lip curl, the idea of herself being touched 'down there' by someone else . . . was as repulsive as, say, a surgical procedure on her eye" (10-11). Instead we get Lucy's distaste for a fully clothed Harry's physical stiffness: Gordon's "things stood out, weren't a part of himself. His overcoats were harsh to touch, his hats were stiff. He was crude, like everyone else she knew" (45). Yet this distaste is temporary and relates to his challenge to her independence, becomes a matter of finding her own way, of protecting her belief "in an invisible,

inviolable world" that "music kept bringing back" (104). When Lucy returns to Haverford after Sebastian dies, she needs Harry's kind and friendly look, "that used to be like a code sign between them" (150). She wants to make him understand that she had told him a falsehood in Chicago.

"And she would ask him if he couldn't feel kindly toward her, for old times' sake, and speak kindly when they happened to meet. That was all she wanted, and it would mean a great deal to her. And why, she wondered, . . . would it mean so much? She didn't know" (174-75).

Of course, it is all a matter of love and patience, as Edward Mayhew learns when an old man, of Harry's waiting for Lucy to find herself, perhaps as a professional artist, perhaps as a piano teacher in a small town. But Harry's hasty marriage has stifled the relationship that would have flourished with time. That "Charity suffereth long, and is kind" (1 Cor.) and that both men lacked it is their tragic vision. What Harry and Edward can never understand are the feelings of their victims. When Harry refuses to give Lucy a lift, "[s]uch a storm of pain and anger boiled up in her that . . . [i]f she let herself think, she would cry" (198). When Edward remains silent, "[h]e did not know . . . that as [Florence] ran away from him, certain in her distress that she was about to lose him, she had never loved him more, or more hopelessly, and that the sound of his voice would have been a deliverance . . ." (203).

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WILLA CATHER, POET: MAKING HERSELF BORN

Call for Papers and Invitation to Participate

Willa Cather Spring Conference
and Scholarly Symposium
Red Cloud, Nebraska
May 31-June 2, 2012

The 2012 Spring Conference and the one-day scholarly symposium preceding it will be focused on Cather the poet, on poetry, and on today's poets from the Great Plains region. Cather's close readers have long noted her sharp presentation of herself as prairie poet with "Prairie Spring" at the beginning of her "real" first novel, *O Pioneers!*, yet her actual first book, *April Twilights* (1903), and its contexts, have received much less critical attention. In much the same way, the scholarly edition of Cather's *Poems*, now in preparation, will be among the last volumes published in that series by the University of Nebraska Press.

The 2012 Spring Conference will be a lively celebration of poets and poetry on the Great Plains with readings and performances, discussions, and a "Passing Show" panel devoted to Cather as a writer who began as a poet and then established herself as a writer of prose both luminous and poetic. The one-day scholarly symposium preceding the conference (Thursday, May 31) will focus on Cather as an engaged *fin de siècle* poet-aesthete intent on making her mark in literature. Possible paper topics include:

Cather and 19th Century Poetry and Poetics

Periodical Publication, the Making of *April Twilights*

Cather, Poetry, and Pittsburgh

Cather and Housman or Other Comparisons

Cather's Poetry and *McClure's Magazine*

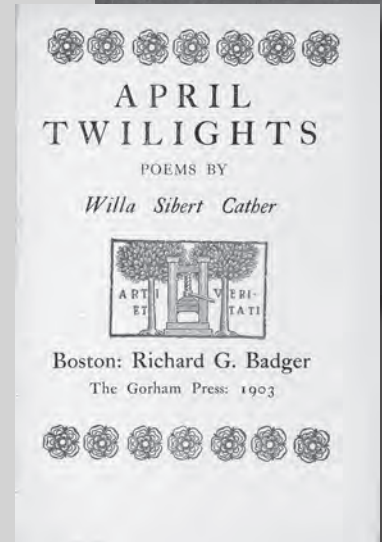
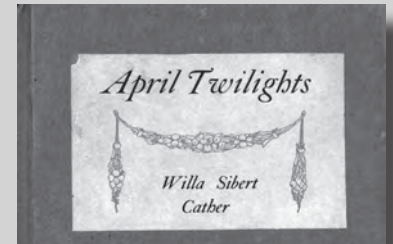
April Twilights as a Richard G. Badger Volume

Revising *April Twilights* into *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923)

Cather and the Poetic Throughout the Fiction

Proposals, inquiries, and expressions of interest should be sent by February 15, 2012 to:

Robert Thacker
Canadian Studies Program
St. Lawrence University
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WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

Volume 55, Number 1

The Willa Cather Foundation

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John J. Murphy, veteran Cather scholar and member of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation, is the author of *My Antonia: The Road Home*, volume editor of the Willa Cather Scholarly Editions of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*. He co-

edited the recently published *Cather Studies 8* collection, *Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds*. Professor Emeritus of Brigham Young University, Murphy retired with his wife Sally to Santa Fe in 2005.

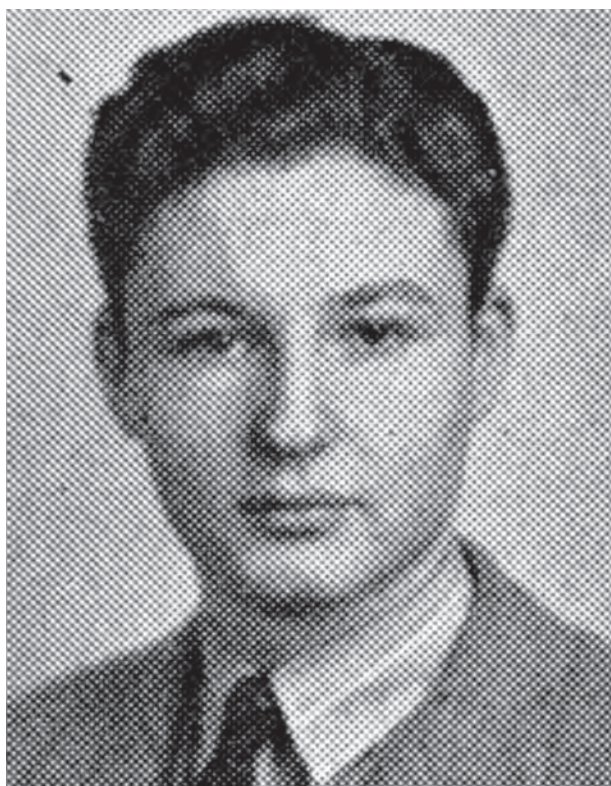
Margaret Anne O'Connor was James Woodress's first Ph.D. from the University of California at Davis. During her thirty-one years teaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill she edited two books on Cather, including *Willa Cather: The Contemporary Reviews* (2001). She retired in 2002 and lives in Mt. San Antonio Gardens in Pomona, California.

Steven Trout is Professor of English and Chair of the Department of English at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. His books include *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War* and *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Memory, 1919-1941*. His articles on Cather's fiction have appeared in a variety of journals, including *American Literary Realism*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, and *Cather Studies*. He is a member of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation and a co-editor of *The Willa Cather Newsletter & Review*.



Charles E. Cather Collection Donated to the University of Nebraska

ANDREW JEWELL



Charles E. Cather as a sophomore at the University of Nebraska, from the 1942 Cornhusker yearbook.

For many Willa Cather scholars, there are certain missing manuscripts that haunt the mind, items known to have once existed in Cather's life that have since vanished: the abandoned Pittsburgh novel, the deleted section of *The Song of the Lark* tracing Thea's training in Germany, the hundreds of letters to Isabelle McClung Hambourg and Edith Lewis. Most of these phantom objects will never be discovered and probably no longer even exist.

But, rarely, something missing does re-emerge into the world.

Thanks to a recent estate gift to the University of Nebraska Foundation from Cather's nephew, the late Charles E. Cather, we can now witness—and study—one of those objects. At her death in 1947, Cather was working on a novel set in medieval Avignon titled *Hard Punishments*. According to all surviving accounts, the writing Cather had completed on this last novel was destroyed after her death, the only exception a short fragment owned by the University of Virginia.

But now, in the new Charles E. Cather Collection in the Archives and Special Collections at the University

of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, there are manuscripts containing two new scenes from this novel, two new glimpses into Cather's last major creative work. One of these scenes, concerning the visit of an old, blind priest to a young man recently convicted of blasphemy and punished with the removal of his tongue, is one that

Edith Lewis described as “perhaps the central scene in the story” (qtd. in Kates).

These manuscripts are thrilling, but even more thrilling are the myriad objects and manuscripts that make up the rest of the collection, many items so idiosyncratic and personal that scholars could not even have anticipated them.

Consider, for example, the Blue Jay notebook. This notebook, seemingly a cheap pad picked up at a dime store, has “Edith Lewis” signed in the top right corner of the cover. Inside, in Lewis's hand, is a day-by-day itinerary of Cather and Lewis's 1925 trip to New Mexico. Following that, there are names of people, places, and animals the two of them presumably encountered in Taos and nearby locales. In the back of the book are Lewis's inscription of Spanish phrases and their English translations. Sandwiched in between are pages in Cather's hand: early drafts of

Edith Lewis's *Blue Jay* notebook, part of the collection donated to the University of Nebraska by the late Charles E. Cather. The notebook contains an itinerary and notes of Cather and Lewis's 1925 trip to New Mexico, as well as draft material in Cather's hand that would make its way into *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Photos on these pages and on the back cover courtesy Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries

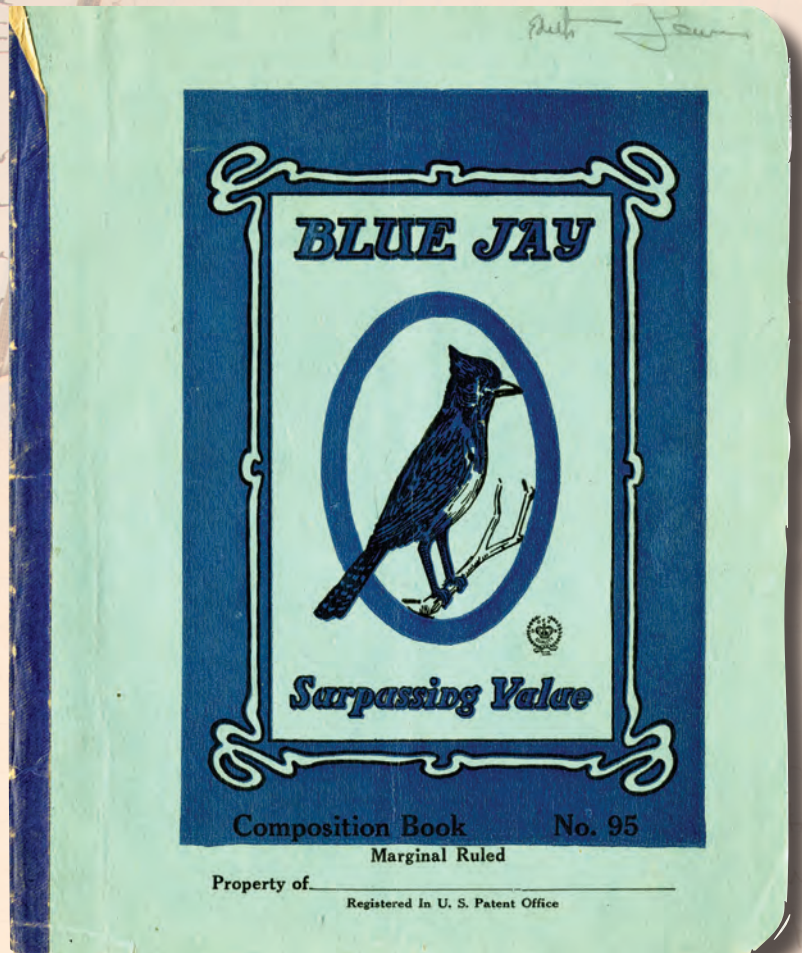
paragraphs that would become *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Or consider the account book. Here is page after page of dates, descriptions, and numbers indicating Cather's income from her writing and investments. On May 1, 1932, she records a six months' royalties check from Alfred A. Knopf that includes her bestselling novel *Shadows on the Rock* totaling \$47,037. Alongside this income, Cather has itemized "Money Given Away," including hundreds of dollars sent to family, friends, and charities like the British War Relief British Aid Fund (\$25 in 1940) or the Red Cloud Red Cross (\$10 in 1941).

Or consider the many inscribed novels: Edith Lewis's copies of Cather's books, with a photograph of Cather carefully pasted next to the title page; Cather's personal copy of *One of Ours* with a newspaper account of G. P. Cather's citation for bravery glued inside the front cover; or Cather's gift of the first deluxe edition of *One of Ours* to her mother, inscribed "To my darling mother, I send the book of my heart" and still surrounded by gold wrapping paper.

All of these items—plus the many, many more in the collection—give us rare and compelling insights into Cather's life and creative processes. As Guy Reynolds, director of UNL's Cather Project and Cather Foundation Board of Governors member points out, the materials in this collection are very personal objects from Cather's working life: "It's like you take a snapshot of someone's office when they pass away, and suddenly those items are transported to another time and place."

This collection joins many other collections at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries to create an extraordinary environment for studying Cather. The distinctive materials in the Charles E. Cather Collection are a terrific complement to other recently donated collections



also very rich in correspondence, photographs, manuscripts, books, family materials, and other ephemera, including the Roscoe and Meta Cather Collection, the Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, the George Cather Ray Collection, and the Susan J. and James Rosowski Cather Collection. Combined with the collections and historic properties of the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, it is clear that Nebraska is the best place in the world to learn about the life and works of Willa Cather.

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The complete guide to the Charles E. Cather Collection at the UNL Libraries can be found at <http://libxml1a.unl.edu/cocoon/archives/catherc.ms350.unl.html>



From the article in this issue: items from the important collection donated to the University of Nebraska by the late Charles E. Cather, Willa Cather's nephew and long-time member of the Board of Governors of the Cather Foundation.



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