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“The Heart of Another Is a Dark Forest”: A Reassessment of Professor St. Peter and His Wife

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The Professor's House is a rich and complex work which can be read rewardingly from many aspects: as a critique of soulless American materialism in the 1920s, as a depiction of male midlife crisis involving steady withdrawal into the self in preparation for death, as the story of the destruction of youthful intellectual idealism and 'letting go with the heart,' as autobiographical parallels of Cather's personal problems, and in many other ways.

This paper attempts to read the work closely from a feminist point of view. As we know, there is no "pure writing" existing in a vacuum outside gender. Although Cather is a female author from whom we would not expect the sexist attitudes, stereotypes and ideology from a male perspective, we notice that in *The Professor's House* she has adopted a third-person omniscient narrator who generally looks at the world through the eyes of Professor St. Peter and Tom Outland. A male gaze often involves a patriarchal attitude, and readers perceiving this attitude in the portrayal of men in the stereotypical roles of idealists and creators (therefore superior) against women as materialists and spenders (therefore inferior), must wonder how a woman writer who presented such affirmative portraits of women in Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronborg, and Antonia Shimerda could have viewed her own sex in this way.

The first thing we notice as readers is that, though the author is female, we are expected to identify with



Professor Jean Tsien at Ellis Island,
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a male subject (the professor) gazing at female objects much of the time — and not usually in admiration. Lillian St. Peter and her daughters are seen through the critical — at times, harsh — gaze of Godfrey St. Peter, who repeatedly offers comments on them they cannot repudiate; for, as objects of a male gaze, they are not given a chance to reveal their thoughts. While the two male protagonists (Tom Outland and St. Peter) are depicted as idealists, their women (Rosalmond, according to Louie, "virtually [Tom's] widow") are cold and hard and seen either quarreling or spending money wastefully. This alienates St. Peter to such an extent that he initially wishes that children never had to grow up and become worldly (126) and later finds women so unbearable that he sympathizes with Euripides

who moved to a cave by the sea to escape from them (156). Of all his ladies, however, he seems to find his wife, Lillian, most unbearable. We learn that the idea of living in the same house with her again has become repulsive to him.

As the omniscient narrator almost never gives us access to Lillian's thoughts, as readers we need to obtain a more sympathetic view of her and uncover the true reason for this estrangement. To do so, we need to reconsider the work from a woman's angle of vision, pushing aside the obstructing male prejudice and carefully analyzing the reasoning of the male protag-

(Continued on page 2)

A REASSESSMENT

(Continued)

onist in the "evidence" provided in the text, paying particular attention to what he evades and fails to say.

Let us, therefore, take another look at *The Professor's House*, wrenching ourselves away from St. Peter's vantage point in order to see things from Lillian's perspective. Since the text postulates a male reader, we need to read against the grain by postulating a female reader who will question St. Peter's negative assumptions concerning his wife and who will seek assiduously for evidence buried in the text and in St. Peter's silences in order to reassess his wife. In the process, our opinions of the professor and his wife will be subverted and a completely different side of each revealed.

We can start by reconstructing how St. Peter first viewed his wife as a young man in his student days in Paris. He had been struck by her "really radiant charm" and her "very interesting mind" (49). "Before his marriage and for years afterward, Lillian's . . . divinations about people and art (always instinctive and unexplained, but nearly always right) were the most interesting things in St. Peter's life" (50). In those days they had been happy. It is clear that there had been mutual admiration, that they had enjoyed each other's company. But what has made him change his attitude toward her from admiration to resentment and hostility? And why does Cather present Lillian in such an unfavourable light?

St. Peter's prejudice against Lillian is conveyed to us primarily in the form of biased assumptions. For instance, he suggests that their married life has been happy only because Lillian had some money of her own enabling small comforts, without which she would have become resentful and bitter (257), implying that she cares too much for material comfort and not enough for him. Other than saying she was irritable when she had to do the servants' work herself (not surprising, considering her birth and education, and that she had two small children and a three-storey house to take care of), St. Peter does not produce any evidence that Lillian was either resentful because he had not provided her with material comforts or had complained about the countless inconveniences in the old house, like the tin bathtub and leaking taps (12). On the contrary, we find that Lillian has quietly done her best to rescue her home from shabbiness and make it comfortable, putting her own money into the household allowance to do so. As they never owned a house before St. Peter has given her the money to build a new one, she can hardly be blamed for excessive spending. Other than such gadgets as an electric bell under the dining table, the house is neither showy nor opulent, though it contains modern conveniences. And it is not as if St. Peter were spartan himself. While he can put up with selected hardships, such as the tin bathtub, he is fastidious about fine linen and beautiful flowers and is quite a gourmet. He goes to

Chicago with the intention of buying himself a new fur coat, and he admits that "he [is] by no means an ascetic" (26). He has little right to be biased against Lillian, for many of the small comforts she pays for out of her inheritance are enjoyed by him.

Moreover, we never hear St. Peter complaining of Lillian's interference with or obstruction of his work during the fifteen years he was working on the history of the Spanish adventurers in North America. We must conclude that she kept the children quiet and out of his way and saw that the house was run smoothly while he worked in his attic room. When he went away on sabbatical or during the holidays to France, Spain or the Southwest, she never burdened him herself or with her children. He did not seem to appreciate the sacrifices she obviously made for him so that he could concentrate on his work. Perhaps he could not recognize them because of his narrow male-bound perspective; perhaps he merely took them for granted, feeling that as she was a woman, it was her natural duty to make sacrifices, which would have been a very common view at the time. He seemed to grudge the time spent with her — three evenings a week — though he reserved the other four evenings, his weekends and holidays for his writing. In the past, before he knew Tom, St. Peter had not had close friends in Hamilton, due to his idealism and intolerance of others, and consequently, he "was thrown upon his wife for company" (50). Lillian's companion after her marriage was her husband; thus we can imagine how hard it must have been for her to be abandoned and isolated after Tom became her husband's companion. She must have been horribly lonely — "virtually his widow" — yet St. Peter does not recall any complaints, which speaks volumes for her understanding and devotion. Her loneliness, as well as her determination to go on living and adapt herself to new conditions, may have accounted in part for her strong interest in and affection for her sons-in-law. St. Peter's male egotism can also be seen in other aspects. Owing to his terror of the loneliness of death, he used to wish his wife could lie in the same coffin with him (272). He unconsciously turns his wife into an object he can use of for his own convenience or dispose of when he no longer needs her.

His strongest complaint about his wife at this period of their relationship is that she had "vehement likes and dislikes which were often quite out of all proportion to the trivial object or person that aroused them." In their early years together, however, he had found these likes and dislikes "nearly always right" and had regarded them as "the most interesting things" in his life (50). How, why, and when did he change his views of Lillian's likes and dislikes so radically? His only example of her "violent likes" seems to be her fondness for her son-in-law Louie Marsellus, while her "violent dislikes" seem related to her sudden change of attitude to Tom Outland. However, we as readers notice that she is careful to bestow her affections equally on both sons-in-law, and we never find any-

thing improper in her words or behaviour to them. It is perhaps Louie's extravagant manners and behaviour towards Lillian that arouse St. Peter's disapproval (even jealousy, as he considers Lillian his possession), though they may be merely part of Louie's Frenchified temperament. As for her dislike of Tom, St. Peter remembers that at first "he had been almost a member of the family for two years, and she had never found fault with the boy" (173). On the contrary, she showed him great concern and treated him with delicacy of feeling. It was only after his senior year when the professor "began to take Tom up to the study and talk over his work with him, began to make a companion of him, then Mrs. St. Peter withdrew her favour" (173). Only after that, when Tom forgot his manners at table did "Lillian's face . . . become positively cruel in its contempt" (79). St. Peter dismisses her with this acid comment: "She could change like that; friendship was not a matter of habit for her. And when she was through with anyone, she of course found reasons for her fickleness" (173). As readers, we feel that St. Peter's harsh assertion that she is fickle in her friendships is without grounds. Her real reason for suddenly withdrawing her friendship was her jealousy at her husband's changed attitude toward Tom and herself. Formerly he had kept the boy at arm's length, and he and his wife had been all in all to each other, and now he was making Tom his confidante. She was willing to give him up to his research but naturally unwilling to be replaced by someone else in her husband's affections. Her jealousy arose from the fear that she might never again regain her husband's confidence and companionship, and that she might be left entirely alone. Her fears were not groundless as we know, for Lillian's divinations about people were "nearly always right." St. Peter had transferred his intimacy to Tom. "People who are intensely in love when they marry, and who go on being in love, always meet with something which suddenly or gradually makes a difference," he rationalizes. "In [his] own case it had been, curiously enough, his pupil, Tom Outland" (49). Henceforth, he spent his spare time with Tom and sent his wife off with his daughters so that he could concentrate on his book. Yet he found time to go swimming with Tom on fine afternoons and they "were often together in the evening." Every Saturday, "he and Tom went to the lake and spent the day in his sail-boat." Sometimes, when he cooked something nice, "he asked Outland to dinner" (176).

The next year he and Tom went to the Southwest together and stayed till the autumn (259). The summer after that they went to old Mexico (259). They planned to go to Paris together the summer after that but the war began and Tom joined up (259-260). "To this day, St. Peter regretted that he never got that vacation in Paris with Tom Outland" (260). It never occurs to him to revisit the city where he fell in love with Lillian. He regards himself as lucky for having had two romances: one of the heart with his wife when he was young; the other of the mind and imagination

with Tom: "[J]ust when the morning brightness of the world was wearing off for him, along came Tom Outland and brought him a kind of second youth" (258). It was clear that Tom had completely supplanted his wife, doing everything together with St. Peter, while Lillian was left out in the cold and subordinated to the role of housekeeper and nursemaid. Even the latter would have been praised and remunerated for her work, but Lillian's work went unnoticed and unappreciated by her husband. It is not surprising that she was hurt and resentful. Yet the professor blamed her for their alienation and refused to accept responsibility himself.

Even though Tom is dead, he lives in St. Peter's memory. The latter cannot move into the present because of his obsession with that memory, although his wife is constantly urging him to live in the present, which would mean letting go of his precious companion. St. Peter resents Lillian's urging and bears her a grudge for trying to come between Tom Outland and himself. He is always secretly studying her features to justify his dismissal of her as cold and hard, though it is more likely they have hardened with weariness. Most of all he finds her "intolerant," or rather intolerable, for finding fault with him, for "doing her duty" (94) as a wife and pointing out that he himself needs to be more tolerant to his sons-in-law (35) and show more interest in them. Like many men, he expects his wife's support but not her criticism, and he despises her a little for showing too much interest in the sons-in-law — his male vanity may even be a little hurt — believing that she "dressed for them, planned for them, schemed in their interests" (79). In fact, he is resentful that she is so ready to adapt herself to the future, when he himself is unable to tear himself away from the past and Tom. We hear a note of resentment in his contempt for her: "It was splendid, St. Peter told himself. She wasn't going to have to face a stretch of boredom between being a young woman and being a young grandmother. She was less intelligent and more sensible than he had thought her" (79).

How little he understands Lillian can be best seen in his surprise that she can be so tolerant of Louie's faults when she was so intolerant of Tom's. He "began to think he understood his own wife very little" (78) because he fails to realize the difference for her: Tom's enshrined memory has ousted her place in his heart, while there is no danger of Louie or Scott doing the same. Prior to seeing Tom as a rival, she had been tolerant of him. At one point, when he and Lillian are watching an opera together, one they had seen before in Paris as students, St. Peter has a moment of recognition and almost grasps her situation. She lets drop a few words that make him realize how much she too has suffered, and he is momentarily touched and feels "he had been mistaken" in his harsh judgment of her. He concludes that it is impossible to understand anyone's feelings because "the heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been

(Continued on page 4)

A REASSESSMENT (Continued)

to one's own" (95). Because of his typical egotism, he had never considered how she must have felt. Nevertheless, his interest in and sympathy for her are short-lived. Noticing the beauty of her face softened by tears, he immediately speculates, "If only she knew how much more lovely she was when she wasn't doing her duty!" (94). Again we see his interest in her as an aesthetic object rather than as a human being like himself with human sufferings. Thus, the recognition that he has misunderstood his wife cannot bring them any closer, and when he imagines himself in a shipwreck that night, it is not his wife whom he envisions as his companion, but a male sea captain.

The opportunity for reconciliation gone, his prejudice against her continues to mount. It worsens after she leaves for Europe and he is left alone with Tom's journal and his recollections of him. He does not want her to come back to tear him away from the past; her very return is dreaded. It is clearly his love for Tom which has antagonized his wife, alienated them, and biased him against her. This is why he cannot forgive and why he paints her in his imagination much worse than she really is.

The portrait of St. Peter that emerges from this kind of reading is unflattering but textually convincing and presents a fuller portrait of the man in both his strengths and weaknesses. As for Lillian, we get a fuller view of her, too. We see her as a neglected housewife, keeping her sorrows to herself and doing her best to balance the traditional roles of wife, mother and mother-in-law. Cather's presentation of the two allows for different perspectives, not just static images. Seen from his own point of view, St. Peter seems to be the injured party and his wife the tiresome burden he would like to cast aside. Yet evidence in the text invites us to read differently. Learning about the two characters from that evidence is like peeling an onion; layer after layer is made manifest so that each is revealed to us at different times and under different circumstances in all their complexity. Cather displays an unerring understanding of human nature with its flaws and evasions. Her protagonists are seldom, if ever, perfect and often blind to their own faults, blaming others to justify personal weaknesses. Such examples as Claude Wheeler, Myra Henshawe and Sapphira come to mind. Sometimes it is the narrator's view which is flawed. Niel Herbert, for instance, insists on equating beauty with perfection in Mrs. Forrester; expecting too much of her, he is bitterly disillusioned when he finds that his idol has feet of clay.

We still have not touched upon Cather's reasons for presenting Lillian in such unfavourable light, even if it is only St. Peter's biased view. Cather hints at her husband's misunderstanding and invites the reader to read against the grain in a poignant moment in the text. But why did she depict the couple thus? She seems to have favoured a male gaze on an unfavourable female object for various reasons. For one thing,

she had served her apprenticeship under male authors and constantly adopted for her own purposes a male narrator's point of view or a third-person limited point of view restricted to males, even though Sarah Orne Jewett had hinted delicately to her in 1908 that she should stop masquerading as a male writer. In the case of *The Professor's House*, this could have been because the scholar/artist needed for other purposes in her text would almost certainly have been male in a patriarchal society. Very few women taught college in those days, and while men made money, women were expected to spend it to direct attention their husbands' wealth. Moreover, by making St. Peter male, Cather could better hide her own love of women. For the male protagonist's object of admiration here is not his wife, Lillian, whom he finds repugnant, but Tom Outland. Cather's personal sexuality is particularly well concealed in this work for it is not depicted in her usual manner of masquerading as a male protagonist attracted by the female protagonist (i.e., using a male identity to shield the nature of her female love for a woman), but in a more roundabout way, by depicting both female lover and object of love as males in a double masquerade less obvious because American fiction is full of male friendships. Still another reason, perhaps, for portraying Lillian in an unattractive light may have been Cather's desire to show the many obstacles a married scholar/artist faced in his career and that a happy marriage and independent artistic or professional achievement were incompatible. The professor could not have his cake and eat it. Cather makes him reflect on "the penalties and responsibilities of being and having been a lover" (265), which may refer to the cycle of falling in love, marrying, having children, making money to support the family — all responsibilities and distractions to work. In *The Professor's House*, the family crowds in on the writer, the troubles of domesticity plague him and divert his attention from his work. St. Peter would prefer to work by the light of the naked bulb in his study than go downstairs for kerosene and have his thoughts distracted by family matters. Cather believed that marriage and family demanded too many sacrifices, and a number of her stories deal with artists who chose to remain single so that they could dedicate themselves to their art without compromise. As to the issue of concealed "deviant" sexuality, St. Peter himself may have tried to evade the thought of "the thing not named" evident in the close bonding between the two men, his self-indulgent recollections of Tom which cut him off from the present, his realization that the affair with Tom was a "romance of the mind and the imagination" which had excluded his wife and made his marriage a mistake — all suggest a love for Tom which has not ended, though the latter has been dead many years.

Oddly enough, heterosexual and homosexual love are juxtaposed in this novel, as if to contrast them, just as romantic love (or rather passion) and companionship between the sexes are juxtaposed in

O Pioneers! Cather does not believe in romantic love between the sexes and makes St. Peter her mouthpiece, stating her view that the romance of the heart is not lasting: "People who are intensely in love when they marry, and who go on being in love, always meet with something which makes a difference . . ." (49). In short, those who fall in love passionately are bound to fall out of it; they cannot sustain such an intense relationship. In her fiction, Cather usually lets the passionate love affairs end in violence (as in the tragic love affair between Emil and Marie in *O Pioneers!*) or makes the couples fall out of love (as in the case of Myra and Oswald Henshawe in *My Mortal Enemy*). When she depicts a successful heterosexual union, it is usually based on companionship rather than love, as in the marriages of Antonia Shimerda and Anton Cuzak and of Alexandra Bergson and Carl Lindstrum.

As for the same-sex love between St. Peter and Tom, it is depicted idealistically as harmonious and sharing, with close bonds of support, and characterized by devotion and understanding. There is no interference of individual achievement and no inequality. This is perhaps somewhat similar to the only form of successful marriage Cather can contemplate in her novels, that of companionship between the sexes. Here, Cather subtly conveys her belief in the kind of relationship that would support independent careers for artists and professionals. She perhaps also works out her own loss of Isabel McClung in the depiction of St. Peter's mourning for Tom Outland and decides, like him, to learn to live without delight and face the future with fortitude.

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The Impure and the Pure in Cather's Female Artists

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When Lucy Gayheart sets out across the ice to escape from all that existence in Haverford had in store for her, to "get away from this frozen country and these frozen people, go back to light and freedom such as they could never know" (198), she finds herself suddenly submerged in icy black water. And so, her destiny, unlike that of her counterpart Thea Kronborg appearing some twenty years earlier in Willa Cather's career, ends not with a departure for unknown heights and fulfillment of her youthful artistic yearnings, but in a fatal plunge into the frozen deep of the Platte. Can we discern, in examining a number of the personal and environmental factors in Cather's two portraits of female artists, the one fully drawn and detailed from childhood to maturity with its heroine achieving the pinnacle of artistry, the other sketched in broad strokes with the promise of its heroine aborted and the life cut short, those elements of personality and conditions the author believes necessary for artistic fulfillment? Do any patterns or characteristics emerge in Cather's depiction of the more successful, or what I will term "pure," female artist? (For the purposes of this study, the word "pure" is used to connote the true or absolute artist, while "impure" is used to connote the less true or the imperfect.) Have any of these patterns or characteristics been cited by artists or by those who have studied the lives of artists? Among the factors I will be considering are support from family, community members, and mentors; love relationships; response to nature; artistic sensibility; career dedication; professional instruction; and chance. In addition, in order to evaluate Thea's success, I will emphasize here the ways Lucy does not measure up from an emotional or psychological perspective in Catherian terms.

Perhaps few of Willa Cather's novels have encountered such an array of differing critical responses as *Lucy Gayheart* (1935). Hermione Lee states sparsely that even Cather herself wasn't much taken with it (346). Edith Lewis reports that Cather "felt that whatever its faults, the story had reality" and "was rooted deep in her experience" (173). To David Stouck, it is "perhaps her most complex novel philosophically" (214), yet to James Woodress, it is merely very "interesting without being a superior piece of fiction" (461). In *The Voyage Perilous*, Susan Rosowski discusses its Gothic elements and resemblances to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (223); a Draculan element was suggested earlier by John J. Murphy (27).

Several critics including Rosowski and Stouck call attention to a forerunner of *Lucy Gayheart* in Cather's short story of 1911 "The Joy of Nelly Deane," but Stouck sees an even "more direct clue" to "the novel's form and theme" in the earlier "A Death in the

(Continued on page 6)

THE IMPURE AND THE PURE

(Continued)

Desert" of 1905 (215). In her discussion of *Lucy Gayheart*, Merrill Maguire Skaggs points out Cather's "inclination to pair novels," writing "one story and then its opposite" (151). Skaggs begins by briefly comparing *Lucy Gayheart* and *The Song of the Lark*, but for her purposes finds it more germane to compare *Lucy Gayheart* and *Shadows on the Rock* (151). Few critics consider Lucy Gayheart seriously in Cather's pantheon of female artists, although Rosowski and Marilyn Arnold are exceptions. Arnold acknowledges Lucy as an artist in an analysis of Cather's short story "Coming, Aphrodite!" (1920): "No less important, in her desire for art Eden [Bower] also resembles Thea and Lucy" (113). In "Willa Cather's Female Landscapes: *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*," Rosowski compares Cather's "treatment of the relationship between gender and consciousness" (233) in the two heroines.

It becomes evident early in the novel that Lucy lacks a key figure in her development: a nurturant maternal or paternal figure along the lines of Thea's mother who recognizes that Thea is the special and "most interesting one" of her brood and protects and encourages her individuality. Lucy's mother died years before the novel's opening, and while her father is supportive, he is too weak a figure to encourage her musical talent or serve as her teacher over the long run. The kind of nurturing and mentoring Thea receives has often been noted in the family backgrounds of artists. W. H. Auden points out that "those in which one of the parents, usually the mother, seeks a conscious, spiritual, in a sense, adult relationship with the child, are probably the commonest" (121). In "Writing Against Silences: Female Adolescent Development in the Novels of Willa Cather," Rosowski states that the absence of a mother "may be the most significant factor in Lucy's development" (73).

Lucy also lacks the non-family mentors Thea enjoys: Doctor Archie, music teachers Wunsch and Harsanyi, Ray Kennedy and Spanish Johnny. These men are not necessarily even artists, but each in his own way offers a dimension of himself as a source of identification to Thea. Thea's suitor Fred Ottenburg displays selfish qualities, but his generosity, musical knowledge, and social contacts are beneficial in offering Thea entry into a more privileged world and in advancing her career prospects at an early age. There are only two townspeople who recognize Lucy's creative potential. One is her suitor Harry Gordon who idealizes her after she dies but is too short-sighted and self-serving while she lives. The other is Mrs. Ramsay who remains basically on the periphery of Lucy's life.

In analyzing aspects of her personality, it is clear that Lucy is unable to determine and express her artistic aims herself. While in this respect she bears a strong resemblance to Thea, Thea has the benefit of sustained professional instruction from Harsanyi, who helps her to articulate her aims and points her in the

right direction in terms of discovering that her talent lies in her voice. Harsanyi provides Thea with proper advice concerning voice instruction when she leaves his tutelage and also continues to offer sustained spiritual support.

Auerbach, the only music teacher portrayed in *Lucy Gayheart*, and the person who links Lucy to the baritone Clement Sebastian, helps Lucy to a limited degree but on the whole is too negative and derogatory. At one critical turning point, when Lucy appeals to Auerbach for professional advice, his words to Lucy correspond eerily to those of Wunsch to Thea. However, while Wunsch cautions Thea about the dangers inherent in marrying some Moonstone "Jacob" and keeping house for him (95) instead of following her desire, Auerbach encourages Lucy to reject the musical profession in favor of "a nice house and garden in a little town . . . a family — that's the best life" (134). When Lucy wonders "if there were not more than one way of living," he responds, "Not for a girl like you, Lucy; you are too kind" (134). Certainly, no one ever suggests that Thea is too kind or selfless. As Fred astutely recognizes, she has no compunction about using him or anyone else for that matter as an "instrument" to advance her own ends.

Lucy gets her first big break when she begins to work as Sebastian's accompanist. Thus, she enters the hallowed halls of art relatively soon after her arrival in Chicago. As their practice sessions in the rarified atmosphere of Sebastian's studio continue, Lucy develops a new self-awareness. She senses that the changes in her were "all in the direction of becoming more and more herself" (94), indicating that Lucy inherently possesses artistic endowments and is responsive to a stimulating medium. Lucy's impassioned response to art in the absolute sense and her vulnerability are evidenced soon after the novel's beginning as she observes the first star of the evening:

That point of silver light spoke to her like a signal, released another kind of life and feeling that did not belong here. It overpowered her. With a mere thought she had reached that star and it had answered, recognition had flashed between. Something knew, then, in the unknowing waste . . . That joy of saluting what is far above one was an eternal thing . . . The flash of understanding lasted but a moment. Then everything was confused again. Lucy shut her eyes and leaned on Harry's shoulder 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)

This passage reveals Cather's Platonic stance *vis à vis* art as well as Lucy's unarticulated artistic yearnings, but Lucy does not answer the lure of their call with Thea's fierce determination and unbounded energy exemplified in her joyful and victorious salute to the golden eagle in Panther Canyon. Instead, they enervate Lucy and cast a shadow over her initial sense of radiant jubilation.

A significant characteristic that Thea senses in herself from an early age is a second self-image which

she identifies as "it" or her sturdy "little companion." This sense of another self is not uncommon in creative individuals as discussed by psychoanalyst Phyllis Greenacre (584). This second or artist self serves to provide Thea with a feeling of power and security no matter what obstacles come her way. Lucy doesn't possess a distinct second self-image. However, she is attuned emotionally to art as a realm apart from life's more mundane aspects, even though its prospects may frighten her as previously evidenced. Also, during her mourning period in Haverford, Lucy is inspired to resume her pursuit of excellence when she hears the performance of an aging soprano and senses in herself "something that was like a purpose forming . . . beating like another heart" (181). Thus, there are several suggestions that Lucy possesses at least the vestiges of the artist self, and in fact, Lucy and Thea share many of the same characteristics with regard to artistic sensitivity. Both possess the "quivering nerve," and inner "vibrating," and a degree of expressiveness as powerful at moments as a machine. Such innate characteristics are related to what Greenacre terms "the peculiar vibrancy and capacity for near ecstasy from his own body states" (494) and "an especial range and intensity of sensory responsiveness" (578) in creative individuals. Greenacre continues that this heightened degree of responsiveness encourages the "formation and utilization of symbols" and that such "capacities draw the potential artist into an early relationship with collective figures and forms in nature" (578).

In grouping Cather's characters of "a mythic dimension" — Alexandra Bergson, Antonia Shimerda, Thea, Lucy, and Eden — Arnold suggests their innate connections to nature when she refers to them as "primitives with strong ties to earth's natural rhythms" (113). The significance of nature to Cather's female artists, specifically to Thea and Lucy, may be understood in several ways. In Thea's case, vivid identification with sweeping landscapes and forms in nature as well as an uncanny ability for self-actualization through them are readily seen in early Moonstone years and serve as the cradle for her artistic affirmation in Panther Canyon. In other words, for Thea, nature provides an additional source of strength and verification of her artistic vocation at different stages in her development. Lucy also manifests a keen response to nature but to a lesser degree, and, in another critical difference, her encounters with nature sometimes operate to her detriment. For example, Thea wanders freely in her native sand hills, "hears a new song in that blue air" (277), glories in the soft warmth of what E. K. Brown terms "brilliance of light" (147) in the landscapes she experiences, while Lucy meets with the icy hardness of wind-driven snow in prairie storms and the tenuousness of wintry violet twilights. Therefore, Lucy is denied the nurturant or beneficial aspects of nature's power, the summery sun-washed landscapes allotted to Thea, and is consigned to experience only the melancholy of winter journeys epitomized in

Sebastian's rendering of Schubert's song cycle, *Die Winterreise*.

Most telling in Cather's use of imagery in depicting these two artist heroines is the imagery she employs with regard to water, particularly when considering its sacramental attributes in Panther Canyon. There Thea discovers the nature of art conveyed in the ancient pottery shards she spies in the eternal stream during her ritual bath. For Thea, water serves as an intermediary in apprehending the meaning of life and art; for Lucy, it is a grim harbinger of death. When Lucy first hears Sebastian perform, several fearful revelations envelop her, the most ominous augury being the discovery of love as "passion that drowns like black-water" (31). Also, while Sebastian may very well have served as mentor to Lucy, his own needs take precedence, and his role may be deemed a parasitic one. Because Lucy is not as inner-directed or self-sustaining as Thea, she becomes too dependent on Sebastian, willing to submerge her vitality in his depression and mourn the temporality of life portrayed in his art. In the process, she loses her will to live after his death, overidentifying with Sebastian and unable to separate herself from him.

In further contrast to Thea's tenacity is Lucy's tendency to exhibit an insecurity or uncertainty as well as a low tolerance for stress. At some decisive moments, Lucy experiences apathy. Her emotions can also rage out of control as was the case in her fateful lie to Harry at the time of his marriage proposal and what would be her tempestuous final exit from home when angered by her sister's actions. In Cather's words, Lucy is "a mercurial, vacillating person" (18). In this regard, she is Thea's opposite, so much so that at one point, Fred notes that Thea "was certainly not mercurial. Her flesh seemed to take a mood and to 'set' like plaster" (267). Thea's stubborn commitment and resoluteness, her "dogged determination" work very much in her favor. Related to Lucy's mercurialness is her impulsivity which Harry reflects upon after her death. With hindsight and a sense of compassion which he lacked as a jilted suitor, Harry understands how Lucy's anger would propel her onto the ice without considering its dangers: "It was that very fire and blindness, that way of flashing with her whole self into one impulse, without foresight or sight at all, that had made her seem wonderful to him" (221). Thea, too, possesses the same capacity "of flashing with her whole self," a quality she would exhibit on and off-stage, but she learns to direct or sublimate her emotions and energies into the service of her art. If anything, as Fred notes about Thea, "she became freer and stronger under impulses" (405).

However, Lucy also displays her independent side when she rejects Harry Gordon's proposal and shows herself unwilling to resume the Haverford lifestyle, even though as Harry's wife she would live on a grand and privileged scale. Despite this attempt at self-assertion in defiance of the social order, Lucy needs

(Continued on page 8)

THE IMPURE AND THE PURE

(Continued)

another person to grant her the grace of artistic salvation because she feels too frightened at the lonely possibilities of art. Sebastian is Lucy's choice, and she continues to use him as a vehicle or spiritual intermediary in her quest even after his death. After a long period of mourning in Haverford, Lucy writes to Auerbach about resuming her studies, but a lack of money detains her. Aside from this unfortunate circumstance, her decision takes on other overtones in that it is not made entirely for its own sake, but in a futile attempt to recapture Sebastian's essence through art. For Lucy, Sebastian embodied art's sublime aspect; he was "in his own person, the door and the way to that knowledge" (184). It seems then that Lucy may confuse desire, a kind of divine love from Cather's perspective, with love in merely human form. Due to this fatal flaw, Lucy remains only an acolyte and forfeits the glory of ordination into the holy priesthood of art.

For Cather, the true artist possesses the will and desire first hand, not through or for another person, and this desire must be present in sufficient intensity to withstand any challenge to the creation and bringing forth of an artist. Lucy has great difficulty in surmounting the challenges placed in her path. For example, prior to Harry's proposal, his very appearance in the city serves as a disruption, a reminder of the narrow perimeter of her Haverford world. "A frantic fear" besets Lucy, and she thinks: "if only one could lose one's life and one's body and be nothing but one's desire; if the rest could melt away . . ." (102). Unlike Lucy, Thea is able to maintain her equilibrium among disrupting forces. Thea also possesses great reserves of physical and psychic energy that she channels and integrates into the fulfillment of her desire. Thea's intensity is readily apparent to those around her who intuit her special qualities. It seems to bubble up in her "as if she were a beaker full of chemicals working" (305), as Doctor Archie expresses it. This is not so in Lucy's case, perhaps because her desire quotient is on the low side. Godfrey St. Peter defines the creative power of desire in assessing Tom Outland's potential in *The Professor's House*: "Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process. If there were an instrument by which to measure desire, one could foretell achievement" (29).

In reviewing the factors cited and others in the lives of Cather's two portraits of female artists, we can formulate a number of conclusions with regard to the elements Cather deems essential to achieve the highest degree of artistry. First of all, the artist must inherently possess certain endowments, such as a "nature-voice" (97) in Thea's case, or, as Wunsch informs her further, "It must be in the baby" (99). In and of themselves, however, such endowments do not guarantee fulfillment, for there is also a converse side to the matter as Thea learns from Harsanyi's words: "Every artist makes himself born" (221). To manage

this feat and "emerge as" herself requires Thea to harness and discipline great storehouses of psychic and physical strength, to maintain a constant level of "vitality and honesty" as Cather terms it in her 1932 preface to the novel. Lucy's vitality is subject to wild swings of mood, and her mechanisms for self-defense are tenuous. Also, in Catherian terms, Lucy's honesty is suspect, and she is unfaithful to the extent that she fails to uphold divine love or desire above all else. As personified by Thea throughout her development in *The Song of the Lark*, the artist must possess a robustness of body and balance of mind in order to create herself as an artist, endure the grueling process, and maintain her integrity and stature in the long run. As Cather phrases the point in her short story "The Diamond Mine" (1920) in regard to Cressida Garnet and her commercial viability, the artist requires "a beautiful soundness of body, a seemingly exhaustless vitality, and a certain 'squareness' of character as well as of mind" (88). Lucy is found wanting in these critical areas.

In Cather's point of view, the artist must also remain the main character in her life, center stage at all times. It is certainly useful for the artist to have a long line of mentors and other supportive people in her life to associate with or "report to," as Thea says, but she must remain basically solitary and forfeit the right to a personal life. Marriage, suffocating emotional attachments, and art do not mix. Testimony to these truths may be found not only in *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart* but in Cather's portrayals of female artists like Eden Bower and Cressida Garnet in her short fiction. While a suitor might provide benefits and entertainment, he should be dismissed or disregarded if he gets too serious or if opportunity knocks. For example, when fate steps in to grant Eden her wish to study in Europe, she simply leaves a note in her dressing gown for Don Hedger to brood over. In sum, it is acceptable for the artist to have suitors as long as she keeps them in their place. Lucy turns down Harry's offer of marriage but she loses her self-control in the process, and even more critically, she cedes center stage to Sebastian.

The artist requires freedom and independence in every sense: personal, emotional, financial. She needs to break away from societal constraints in general and her roots in particular including family, friends, and place in order to find her true artistry and her voice. Like Thea, she also needs to acquire "a new speech," but it helps if someone can supply the financial wherewithal while she does so. As the unidentified girl learns in the opening scene of Cather's short story "Uncle Valentine" (1925) when she questions her music teacher regarding the scant number of song collections by Valentine Ramsay, the artist must avoid the pitfalls of "the things that always prevent one: marriage, money, friends, the general social order" (3).

On the other hand, Cather succinctly summarizes circumstances or conditions that serve the artist in *Lucy Gayheart*: "escape, change, chance" (24), and

I suggest that the element of chance is the determining one in Lucy's case. For Cather's female artists, escape and change are associated with the big city where, as Lucy appreciates, "the air trembled like a tuning-fork with unimaginable possibilities" (24). But while Lucy, like Thea and Eden, sets out fearlessly to seek escape and change in the city, chance never works in her favor, and the events that befall her are unlucky ones. When comparing Thea and Lucy, Skaggs discusses the element of bad luck as one theme among others "consistent with Cather's lifelong preoccupations," and she notes "the fact that if one is among those to whom bad luck happens, then there's nothing much to be done about it" (151).

Is it a question of never having bad luck or is it the ability to survive perilous situations? For example, Thea manages to stay afloat during a storm while rowing with Nordquist on a lake "fed by glaciers," and Eden Bower manages to remain aloft while floating solo through the air in a hot air balloon over Coney Island. But Lucy joins the ranks of Cather's artists, male and female, who meet with disastrous ends: Clement Sebastian drowns in a boating accident during a storm on Lake Como; Cressida Garnet goes down with the *Titanic*, and Valentine Ramsay is hit fatally by a truck as he crosses a bridge in Paris.

Are we to conclude that only the "purest" artists, or as Wunsch terms it, the most "*kunst-ler-risch*," survive the rigors of Cather's trials? Cather provides a significant clue to pondering the question when she writes about Thea in her 1932 preface: "What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape, the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from commonness. She seemed wholly at the mercy of accident; but to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen" (vii). It seems then that the issue for Cather goes beyond one's circumstances or luck. The true artist is graced with good luck by virtue of her character and steadfastness of purpose, she who remains faithful above all to her desire. Such is the case with Thea Kronborg — and with Eden Bower. Each is honored by attaining mythic stature in her time and becoming "*la divina*."

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"To Find a Better Place": Inscriptions of Human Faith in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

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My focus on this paper will be on the dual meaning of two symbols — the road and window — in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Each of these symbols embodies contradictory forces, and through these opposites one can understand why some of the main characters embark on a voyage of discovery, trying "to find a better place" (SSG 781). Duality in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is present in different forms: in structures relating to place, in social roles, in the contrasting alternation between light and shadow, good and evil. The window and the road also express divergent characteristics of our world: stasis versus movement, inside versus outside. But these antithetical features converge, at the end of the novel, in a larger vision of human destiny.

The meaning of the road in American literature is intertwined with the theme of escape and the quest. Since its beginning, the American experience has been characterized by a great mobility, by a profound allegiance to movement. As Janis Stout points out "American history begins with voyages, of exploration

(Continued on page 10)

TO FIND A BETTER PLACE

(Continued)

or escape or migration. The pattern, once set, continued" (4). If the road is a metaphor for life, Americans have understood it as the image of specifically American life. Whitman's poetry, for instance, gives voice to that aspiration: "his insistence on seeing the journey as the right pattern of life and as an act of liberation and community, . . . captured and resoundingly interpreted our best image of American aspiration" (Stout 21). This emphasis on the road may lead us to ask the question — as the cultural geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson did — "which do we value more, a sense of place or a sense of freedom?" (190). Jackson continues:

For untold thousands of years we travelled on foot over rough paths and dangerously unpredictable roads, not simply as peddlers or commuters or tourists, but as men and women for whom the path and the road stood for some intense experience: freedom, new human relationships, a new awareness of the landscape. The road offered a journey into the unknown that could end up allowing us to discover who we were and where we belonged. (192)

Joseph Urgo's similar assessment that "the history of the United States is, in one sense, the history of travel made easier, as if the entire purpose of American civilization were to make escape more convenient, to make flight a repeatable experience" (87) attests to the importance of movement, and consequently of the road, and through it one can explore the deeper meanings in Cather's last novel. As in her earlier works, Cather's characters are trapped between the desire to stay in one place and make it their home, and the attractiveness of the road. Clara Vavrika's destiny, for instance, changed forever after hearing Nils say that

there's nothing so dangerous as sitting still. You've only got one life, one youth, and you can let it slip through your fingers if you want to; nothing easier. Most people do that. You'd be better off tramping the roads with me than you are here. (US 127)

I agree with Urgo's affirmation that "the future is fated only to those who cannot envision it as something beyond the reach of the past. Cather spatializes historical consciousness (imagining it as an American road) to demonstrate that it is essentially reconstructible" (Urgo, 88). But while in Cather's other novels one can find close at hand infinite space in which the characters have to shape their destiny freely, in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* the possibility of shaping one's destiny relies on the road, on the future, on change. Restricted spaces limit the characters' freedom, so when there is a room, there is a window. Cather feels the necessity to give characters a chance, an alternative, or in Cynthia Briggs's words "a room with a view" (160).¹

In "The Novel D meubl " the image of the window appears associated with Cather's credo, her belief in

simplification; the novel should "throw all the furniture out of the window" (NUF 837). In Cather's fiction the window also opens to the realm of the imagination, a world where all the possibilities dwell — interestingly enough, characters tend to look out of the window, which means that the outdoor kingdom is much more attractive and challenging than the tiny rooms of solitude and selfishness. Like the road, the window serves as escape either from narrow places or limited minds, but, inescapably, the window is also a place of acknowledgement where pain and disillusion may occur, as when Niel realizes that Marian Forrester is betraying his ideal and his hope.

Throughout *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the symbols of the road and the window seem to embody different concepts of place; at least they divide what seemed undivided, the love between mothers and daughters. Whereas Sapphira and Till, because of their profound sense of place, tradition and passivity remain attached to the symbol of the window, which means that they feel comfortable living in the fragmentary world of masters and slaves, Rachel and Nancy are searchers and transformers. Because of what they represent, they fit well into the restless and promising world of the road.²

Nancy has to escape from Back Creek in order to achieve freedom and dignity. Nancy's trip is far more noticeable, but both Sapphira and Henry are pilgrims on voyages of their own. Sapphira is trying to escape her tragic condition, the impossibility of traveling freely throughout her domains, so she embarks on an illusionary voyage. The window becomes the key to understanding her world, and Henry's world too. To Sapphira the window means both the impossibility of outdoor freedom and the self-awareness of her loneliness. Her doubts about her husband's fidelity are due to the contingency of her situation. As she is confined to the room and to the window, her vision is partial; what she does not see, she imagines, but her imagination leads her to desperation and suffering. Out of the suffering she conceives a cruel plan to ruin Nancy. The window also represents a way of continuing to narrow the slaves' place in Sapphira's dominion, for the window is part of the house, the main house represents tradition, and tradition means to cherish the slave system. To stay behind the window is a way of perpetuating cruelty and hostility. But the window offers the possibility of crossing over to one world in favor of another.

Henry's world is also attached to the window, to tradition, to passivity. His travels lead him to a place of doubts, and there's no road to lead him to a definite answer. It is no coincidence at all that the book he relies on, besides the Bible, is *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book about roads and the difficulty one has finding a path, the royal road to salvation and happiness. Through the window he sees Nancy's arrival, sometimes with a bunch of flowers to brighten his day. But he is a man trying to escape his confusions and his questions; he has no strength to fight for a light, so his

place is the mill — a place within a place — a place under the power and influence of the main house, that is, of Sapphira. As he has no courage to deliver the money that will open the door of freedom for Nancy, he will leave the window open for Rachel to get it, accepting a passive role. The world of the window implied the restricted province of selfishness, incapacity and cowardice, defining the realm of Sapphira, Till and Henry. The alternative is the road, a place of movement and freedom.

From my point of view, it is extremely relevant that the most striking feature of the novel's main road is called the "Double S." Structurally and thematically central to the novel, "Double S" features are not humanly designed, and this obviously contrasts with the human design white men have shaped for the lives of slaves. There is no even path to human complexities. Henry gives voice to this truth when he observes: "Design was clear enough in the stars, the seasons, in the woods and fields. But in human affairs — ? Perhaps our bewilderment came from a fault in our perceptions; we could never see what was behind the next turn of the road" (SSG 840). As Merrill Skaggs points out: "The beautiful double S in the road to Timber Ridge . . . symbolizes . . . the contrary directions in which the story seems to run, the confusions of delates over slavery, and the twists in each human character depicted here" (179)³. Cather's vision of the future is embodied in this image of the road, a place leading to other places, but a place that represents, at the same time, Nancy's possibility of salvation or damnation. Due to Rachel's presence, Nancy is able to return home; as a result of Rachel's commitment, Nancy walks along the road of freedom. But "Double S" is also a place through which the outside world flows. Cather refers to the possibility of such a natural structure being modified by "the destroying armament of modern road-building" (SSG 873). Cather feels that destroying natural features may lead human beings to ugly places. Threatening evils are a topic of utmost importance in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*: for example, Nancy's imminent violation and the near explosion of the Civil War (and, of course, World War II).

The road means breaking with tradition and the acquisition of a better and more dignified place to inhabit, representing the chance that white society still had to change a cruel system of exploitation. Going North or to Canada gives the slaves hope to evade the pervasive notion of place attached to slavery. Whenever one finds allusions "to people of Nancy's world" (SSG 787) or Martin's complaint about "niggers [that] don't know their place" (SSG 880) or "the separate place coloured people had to accept in the church" (SSG 821) one feels, like Henry, that it was the moment for Nancy "to go out of Egypt to a better land" (SSG 904). But it is not only the road that embodies the transformation. Sapphira, who I see related to the symbol of the window, says just before her reconciliation with Rachel, "We would all do better if we had our lives to live over again" (SSG 926). Affirming this is a

way of admitting that "keeping people in their place" may mean depriving them of liberty and dignity, and that even characters bound both to a physical and a social place may undergo a transformation as well.

Mikhail Bakhtin, referring to the importance of the "chronotope" (an organizing narrative center) of the road, states that "*le chronotope est surchargé des éléments tels que la rencontre, la séparation, le conflit, la fuite*" (269). He also binds the symbol of the road with that of transformation that he sees as represented by the threshold; he observes: "c'est le chronotope de la crise, du tournant d'une vie" (389). Significantly in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* Sapphira's transformation takes place by the window, which shares with the threshold the properties of transition and conversion. Although she turns away from the possibilities of the road, Sapphira in her invalid's chair still accomplishes a voyage to a fairer world. And she does so because throughout the novel one can find opened windows to the exterior world, to other worlds.

It is after Nancy's flight that both symbols — the window and the road — earn a definite connection to freedom and life. The window reveals itself as a structure that gives life, that admits one to see, to acknowledge evil. The opened window is an image of life, of all the possibilities. When Rachel's daughters are ill, the doctor demands open windows, so fresh air may enter. Although, as I have tried to demonstrate, the window represents an indoor world of doubt, passivity and evil, it also illustrates the possibility of change and transformation. The road epitomizes liberty and a potential world of dignity and justice for slaves living in the South. But as the reader acknowledges, for some of Sapphira's slaves, the road of emancipation will lead them to tragedy and loss; they would have preferred a place, even if that place was not their own, but their owner's.

Till's behaviour is hard to understand; as Toni Morrison affirms, the silence between Till and Nancy — between mother and daughter — is "an unbearable violence." In order to understand this relationship, Morrison calls our attention to the fact that "the absence of mother love [was] always a troubling concern of Cather's, [and] is connected to the assumption of a slave's natal isolations" (23). One should add that Till's reaction to Nancy's escape has to be framed against Till's strong perception of place. Throughout her childhood, Till had assimilated a particular notion of place, the South's racial ritual of keeping the negro "in his place." And Till remains faithful to that conduct to the end of the novel, and though one can feel disturbed with her vision,⁴ one has to try to understand it as a consequence of her sense of place: a place and a geography that have cherished a system of injustice and suffering, in which even a relation of ties strong as the one between mother and daughter collapses.

Eudora Welty, to whom place is of vital importance, stresses the relevance of the sense of place in the South:

(Continued on page 12)

TO FIND A BETTER PLACE

(Continued)

I think Southerners have such an intimate sense of place. We grew up in the fact that we live here with people about whom we know almost everything that can be known as a citizen of the same neighborhood or town . . . we have a sense of continuity and that, I think, comes from place . . . A sense of the place. Even if you move around, you know where you have your base. And I just think it's terribly important. (Prenshaw 179-80)

I make use of Welty's words because I think that Cather may have learnt the importance of place — relevant throughout her work — in the South where her roots lay. Cather's vision of life fits the pattern Percy Walker establishes for Southern life: "The South [has] a tradition which is more oriented toward history, toward the family, toward storytelling, and toward tragedy" (Prenshaw 95). With these words as background one can better understand Sapphira's fidelity to the house, to her place, Back Creek, and to the place she inherits. One can also better understand Till's incapacity to see further ahead, towards a better future, and so one can forgive Till's absence of warmth towards her own daughter, Nancy. In relation to Sapphira, Till and Henry, one could say, paraphrasing John Brinckerhoff Jackson, that these characters prefer a sense of place to a sense of freedom.

In the epilogue Cather, as narrator, unites the two symbols, the road and the window, and through her perspective they acquire a final and lasting significance. Through the window she "could watch the turnpike, then a macadam road with a blue limestone facing" (SSG 930). The window and the road are testimonies of a love meeting that was going to take place. In this particular moment both symbols point toward the future, toward a better future. As we are informed "though the outward scene was little changed, [Nancy] came back to a different world." The new generation "was gayer and more carefree than their forbears, perhaps because they had fewer traditions to live up to" (SSG 929). Outside the scene was transformed, but one could feel the change inside the house as well. Where there was coldness and indifference, now, as the sitting women around the fire illustrate, it is a time of community and communion. Parallel to Nancy's trip, the South had embarked on a voyage that, like Nancy's, would change its destiny forever. Both have travelled along an uneven road toward a future in which justice and love would restore human faith.

Although *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is Cather's last novel, I think we should not read it as the end of the road; Cather has traveled back to her place, to the place where she was born and so testifies to the roundness of the path, like the roundness of the seasons. Earlier, in *My Ántonia*, Cather used the road as an important symbol to help Jim find out "what a little circle man's experience is" (MA 937). In *Sapphira*

and *The Slave Girl*, the road simultaneously designs the direction people have chosen to travel along and the route they take in order to accomplish a future destiny. As the South was the place for Cather to inquire about injustice and frailty, the South was also the place where Cather tried to give an answer. Accomplished forms and definite places restrict human liberty; one has to nurture structures that give men liberty, liberty of choice, and that in Jackson's terms means to prefer a sense of freedom to a sense of place. As Yi-Fu Tuan states: "Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act . . . Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition, and this transcendence is most simply manifest as the elementary power to move" (Tuan 52). The vision valuing movement has deep significance both in the American experience and in Cather's last novel; as Joseph Urgo's statement sums up: "*Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is a narrative of how one gets from one place to another, in space, in time, and in terms of intellectual bearing" (96).⁵

Though Willa Cather values freedom, her fiction is grounded in place, in many places. She prizes the richness of each place, its contribution to the lives of those who inhabit it, its implications in a more profound understanding of the human soul. She was aware that in the 1880s the American South lived a distorted sense of place, a vision that endangered human self-esteem. In each of the fictional places she has inhabited she was able to capture the human tragedy, but above all she was able to present the hopeful rebirth: "Humanity has always recovered itself, after its maddest debauches, after most austere asceticism," she said. "Humanity is always rushing to its own destruction, but it never quite accomplishes it" (KA 231). That is the reason why I treasure (and I believe that Cather did too) the symbols of the window and the road; they illustrate the human capacity for regeneration. It is beautiful and touching to imagine Cather looking through the window to a road; it could well be her last image and it compels us to see and to expect a better place.

NOTES

¹Cynthia Briggs expands this vision: "This pattern, creating a private, sheltered place that opens on an expansive view of the world, recurs not only in each stage of Cather's life but also in the lives of the characters she creates" (159).

²Ann Romines makes an interesting point when she argues about Rachel's active role in Nancy's liberation. After Nancy's escape, Rachel manifests doubts: "Maybe I ought to have thought and waited," but Romine opposes: "To think and wait would be to choose the version of the home plot that values continuance above all else" (177).

³For Skaggs, "The looping backward and forward between good and bad, advance and retreat, positive and negative, in all such analogies reminds us of the splendid visual image that comes to symbolize the core of this novel, and perhaps of Cather's entire oeuvre as well" (179).

⁴Morrison finds Till's final words quite disturbing for they "reinforce the slaveholder's ideology, in spite of the fact that it subverts the entire premise of the novel" (28).

⁵From Urgo's final assessment, one is compelled to reflect on racism today, and about the necessity of recognizing the challenge of a multicultural planet.

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Aesthetic Disorientation and the Nature of the "Wagner Matinée"

Nicholas Birns

The New School for Social Research

Most commentators have attributed the discomfiture of Aunt Georgiana at the end of Willa Cather's short story "A Wagner Matinée" to her realization of the cultural deprivation of her Red Willow County, Nebraska home. The "high culture" of Boston as shown to her by her nephew Clark offers vistas of sophistication and aesthetic fulfillment which the farm on which she has labored so long and it seems, so unrewardingly, cannot match. Georgiana's longing for what Edward Wagenknecht terms "what she has missed for all these years and will probably never hear again" (58) surely is the main theme of the story. But what of the nature of the *matinée* itself? It is not a whole Wagnerian

opera, but an assortment of works by Wagner, mainly excerpts from the operas, "the *Tannhäuser* overture" (194), "the prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*" (194) and the "Prize Song" (195), and, finally, Siegfried's funeral march. These are presumably the most spectacular, emotive parts of the operas, taken from the original context for probably two reasons. First of all, a Wagner opera is very long, and would require far more of a commitment from viewers than the *matinée* in question. Secondly, these are the best-known parts of the operas, the most celebrated and memorable. In a way, these are Wagner's "Greatest Hits". But they are not the complete work "in itself" and were not, we may presume, originally designed by the composer to be played together.

Does this matter? It well might matter to Aunt Georgiana. Given the Aristotelian norms that have permeated Western artistic expectations, we are attuned to expect a whole work, to be appreciated in its entirety. Inevitably, a whole work, no matter how sublime *in toto*, is not going to be all crescendo, all spectacular emotion, all peaks and no valleys; it will also contain slow matches, places where emotion is put on hold or left to slowly percolate. But the program to which Clark takes Aunt Georgiana is all overtures, preludes, arias, no recitatives or periods of programmatic narration. It is an assortment of sublime moments ruptured from their context. She may enjoy it, may in fact be particularly moved by it, but deep down there may be the awareness that she has not witnessed what Aristotle would term a "tragic imitation" that has to be whole in order to have a "poetic effect" (Aristotle 1487). Not that Wagner was himself a great respecter of Aristotelian norms; nor for that matter, always, was Cather herself. But the fact that Cather chose, in a way, the most experimental composer of the time for this story illustrates that it is the nature of the music, not just the musical occasion itself, that affects Aunt Georgiana, and it is music whose effect is arguably mediated through its presentation. Because Aunt Georgiana has heard only exciting, memorable excerpts, none of what Wallace Stevens was to call "the beauty of innuendos" (Stevens 20), she is worked up, excited and disturbed without the possibility of aesthetic release within the compass of a whole opera in itself.

Aunt Georgiana's aesthetic disorientation may not be as central a determinant of the story's meaning as her sense of personal loneliness and cultural isolation. But it is surely worth considering as part of her response to the Wagner *matinée*.

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A Nebraska "Mummy" and a Poem: One Source for Mother Eve

John N. Swift
Occidental College

Ann Tschetter
University of Nebraska at Lincoln

In a chapter on Willa Cather's editing career, Mildred Bennett mentions an 1892 University prank, one in a series of high-spirited raids and counter-raids between Roscoe Pound's *Sem. Bot.* and the "Lits": the "borrowing" of a particularly prized piece of *Sem. Bot.* property. "The Botanical Seminar boys had bought a bust of Darwin," Bennett tells us, "to present to Professor Charles Edwin Bessey of the Department of Botany; but that morning when Willa and Mariel [Gere] went into the museum to see a newly acquired mummy of a child, they noticed the bust and conceived the idea of hiding it" (Bennett 189). Later the girls helped the distraught botanists to retrieve it.

Evidently the first literary outcome of this adventure — Gere's short story entitled "How We Stole the Bust of Darwin" — failed to meet Cather's standards two years later when she edited her class's yearbook, the 1894 *Sombrero*; it is now lost. But something else here, the "mummy of a child" — of which Bennett says nothing more — suggests itself intriguingly as a possible early source for Cather's much later fictional mummies: the mummy in the British Museum (a shadowy presence in *Alexander's Bridge*), or the enigmatic "Mother Eve" of *The Professor's House*.

In fact Cather and Gere must have been on their way to see not one but a whole family of "mummies," acquired by the University of Nebraska State Museum in October of 1892 and on display in old Nebraska Hall. The original catalogue entry describes them as "Peruvian mummies (Incas). Presented by Honorable Patrick Egan, United States Minister to Chile. Man, woman, three infants, pouches, pottery, implements, etc., etc." (Myers, personal communication). And, although they have not been displayed for decades, they remain in climate-controlled storage in the Museum's research collection, relocated to the new Nebraska Hall in 1970 (Myers 334).

The "woman" today is a striking figure, as she must have been in 1892: not really a mummy at all, but like Mother Eve simply a "dried human body" dessicated and preserved by centuries of "water-drinking air" (*Professor's House* 214). She appears to have no "great wound in her side," no "look of terrible agony" suggesting an ancient crime, but she is nonetheless both enigmatic and profound. Her skin, darkened to near-black, stretches tight over the bones of legs drawn up and bent at the knees. Her dark-haired head slumps forward at the neck, the empty eyes cast down, the mouth open slightly, revealing white teeth.

Was this Andean mother the eighteen-year-old Cather's first and most memorable inspiration for

Mother Eve? David Harrell makes a convincing case for a different, nearer source: an actual "mummy" found by the Wetherills during the early excavations of Mesa Verde, nicknamed "She" (after H. Rider Haggard's novel), and eventually exhibited at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (Harrell 50-2). But although Cather may have heard about this mummy from friends who visited the World's Fair, or from Clayton Wetherill during the 1915 visit to Mesa Verde that provided most of the material for "Tom Outland's Story," or from both, she presumably never saw her.

She did see the Nebraska mummy, even if her trip to the museum in 1892 was interrupted by the detour into Bessey's lab. And it seems likely that what she saw made a substantial impression. For although the liberation of Darwin's bust didn't make it into Cather's yearbook, the mummies in Nebraska Hall did, and in a peculiar disguise. Worked line by line into the margins of the advertising supplement at the end of the 1894 *Sombrero*, extending across seven pages, is an anonymous poem:

How rapt and still the mummies sit, enclosed in
musee case,
And stare at guests with vacant eyes, or gaze on
empty space.
On Chile's plain once roamed the chief, with
wife and children three,
And when the tyrant Spaniard came, in death
sought liberty.
Before he died, his wife and he besought
the Southern fates,
To take them to a warmer land, such as
United States.
For since a little North is warm, 'tis very plain
to see
Still further North is warmer yet, thus wisely
argued he.
But hearing how divorces grew in that benighted
nation,
They had themselves embalmed to keep from
severing relation.
And thus by Egan's aid they reached the land
of daff-don-dilly;
"A land," said they, with chattering teeth,
"A land that's never Chile."
But so chagrined were they to find a land so
damp and cold,
Where people stare them in the face with
manners rude and bold.
They never spoke nor "smiled again,"
but sit there glum and dry,
With sullen mien and absent orbs, and watch
the passers-by.

We cannot of course conclusively identify this comical doggerel as Cather's — and, as with "The Fear that Walks by Noonday" or "Anacreon," her acknowledged work in that yearbook, there's nothing here that prefigures the champion of restraint and excision who wrote *The Professor's House*. But she was the literary editor who chose the poetry of the 1894 *Sombrero*; moreover, this mummy poem is metrically identical to "Anacreon," also a vaguely mock-heroical satire. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the young Willa

Cather's morbidly delighted interest in life-in-death and death-in-life, expressed in several of her University stories (including "The Fear that Walks by Noonday"), would have made the Andean mummies particularly compelling to her.

For all its lightness and slightness, the mummy poem adumbrates the concerns that Cather would explore repeatedly in her work and perhaps most painfully in *The Professor's House*: cultural expulsion and exile, privacy unbearably exposed, familial failure, the murderous passage of time. It seems possible, in fact, that the museum spectacle of a long-dead human family — plundered, violated, collected, and on display — was something that she could at eighteen or twenty apprehend only through an embarrassed, nervous humor. Thirty years later that family and all of its resonances haunted her still.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to Thomas P. Myers, Curator of Anthropology at the University of Nebraska State Museum, for his assistance in locating the Egan "mummies," and for first directing us to the marginal poem in the 1894 *Sombrero*; and to the University Archives in Love Library, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where we were able to see the year-book and the poem.

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Willa Cather Roadway Dedication Ceremony May 1, 1999

Comments by
Randall D. Peters, P.E.
Nebraska State Department of Roads

It's a privilege for me to be here representing the Nebraska Highway Commission, the Department of Roads and Governor Johanns.

I'd like to thank Pat Phillips and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation for their valuable work and for their sponsorship of this very fitting memorial.

Willa Cather on Mesa Verde: October 20-24, 1999

In the summer of 1915 Willa Cather and Edith Lewis visited Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado and spent several days with the Smithsonian archaeological expedition that was excavating the cliff dwellings built into the walls of the mesa's southern canyons. These cliff dwellings — abandoned since the 13th century — and the story of their "discovery" in 1889 made a lasting impression on Cather. Ten years later she wrote them into "Tom Outland's Story," at the center of *The Professor's House*.

About eighty-five Cather scholars and readers will gather on Mesa Verde for a three-day symposium in October of 1999. Jointly sponsored by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation and Occidental College, the symposium is based in the Far View Lodge, on the mesa about four miles north of the canyon rims whose network of abandoned "little cliff-hung villages" Tom Outland describes. It will provide a forum for new scholarship on *The Professor's House*, Cather's southwest, and her career in general. But it will also be a place for informal discussion and exploration of the extraordinary landscape that she described as "a world above the world."

(A website has been established for the Willa Cather on Mesa Verde Symposium at <http://webhome.crk.umn.edu/~tkelly/cathermesa/Cather.html>

and its full program will be available there. Space is limited at the Far View Lodge, and most participant places have been filled already. Those interested in finding out about remaining places should contact John Swift, ECLS, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA 90041; e-mail swiftj@oxy.edu; phone 323-259-2804.)

Willa Cather and her works are a very special legacy for us here in Nebraska. I want to share some of the personal meaning that Willa Cather has for me.

I am the fourth generation of my family to be born and live in Nebraska. My great-great grandparents were German and Swedish immigrants to Nebraska in the late 1870s. My great-grandparents were born in the state, married, and raised big families on small farms in Knox County.

In many ways Willa Cather introduced me to my great-great grandparents and my great-grandparents

(Continued on page 16)

ROADWAY DEDICATION

(Continued)

and helped me understand and appreciate my own heritage.

I was born and raised in Bloomfield, Nebraska, in the north-east part of the state. Bloomfield is about the same size as Red Cloud. It was created out of open, hilly prairie in 1890 and soon populated with German immigrants. Its reason for being was to serve as a local trade center for the surrounding small farms. My great-grandparents were among those pioneer farmers.

Nearby is Wausa with its predominantly Swedish immigrants. Verdigre was the Czech community. Niobrara was founded mainly by river rogues — I think.

For the first eighteen years of my life, Bloomfield was my world.

I was introduced to Willa Cather in 4th grade. At Trinity Lutheran (Missouri Synod) Parochial Elementary School (my great-grandparents were founding members and my class of twelve included four of my first cousins), we were taught the Nebraska history curriculum and learned that Willa Cather was one of the seminal figures in our cultural history. She was a fact that I needed to know.

I really discovered the gift of Willa Cather's writing in 9th grade English class at Bloomfield High School. We were assigned to read *My Ántonia*.

Her characters were so real and so like those people in my family, my school, my town, and the other towns in Knox County that I was instantly hooked. Her depictions of the land, the wind, the fierce winter, the fickle rainfall seemed to capture their essence. Her stories of the people, their humanness, their strength, their weaknesses, their resilience and their brittleness, their hope, their values and their vision made world-class literary drama out of our common experience.

The novel gave me a new and greater lens to see some of those elemental institutions that I took for granted and that seemed to be eroding away in the crush of 1960s and 70s popular culture.

Willa Cather's writing gave me a more profound appreciation for my place, this prairie state, my family's own epic experience in simply being a common part of Nebraska's story. I know that Willa Cather's legacy is this gift of getting it right, telling the story of those epic struggles in this environment and in this setting, and introducing so many of us to our great-great grandparents.

That is why it seems to me so fitting to dedicate this part of Highway 281 in Webster County to Willa



Ron Hull, Betty Kort (president of the WCPM), Randall Peters (Nebraska Department of Roads), and Senator Bob Kerrey share their remarks with those gathered for the dedication of the Willa Cather Roadway May 1, 1999. The dedication took place south of Red Cloud near the Cather Memorial Prairie and was one of the highlights of the Spring Conference.

Cather. It is a small contribution that the Highway Department gladly makes to perpetuate and spread the recognition of this great Nebraskan.

Hazel Baker Donates to Restoration Fund

The WCPM&EF gratefully announces receiving a \$100,000 Charitable Gift Annuity from Hazel Baker, mother of Board member Bruce Baker, to the Opera House Restoration Fund. The gift is a wonderful boost to the project, and the Foundation thanks Mrs. Baker for her generosity.



Hazel Baker

The WCPM&EF must raise \$508,000 in matching funds by December 31, 1999, to receive challenge grants from the Kiewit Foundation and the Tourism Development Initiative. Mrs. Baker's gift is a step toward that goal. Can you help us reach our objective? Gifts of appreciated stocks have *significant* tax benefits for donors; feel free to contact us for information.

From the Desk of Director Steve Ryan



Steve Ryan

◆ Several scholars have visited the archives in recent months to do research. They are Margaret Payne (University of Oklahoma), Becky Roorda (University of Missouri-Saint Louis), Amy Ahearn (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Evelyn Haller (Doane College), Ann Romines (George Washington University), and Cynthia Griffin Wolff (MIT). Cynthia

as you may already know, is working on her biography of Willa Cather. It is always a pleasure to have researchers here, to learn about their particular interests and projects, and to share in their insights and discoveries.

◆ We have also been contacted by scholars in India, Germany and the United Kingdom who are completing or beginning advanced studies of Cather. In recent months the WCPM has had visitors from Europe and the Far East. Cather's appeal is truly global.

◆ We enjoyed a mild winter in Red Cloud, but endured a chilly, rainy spring. We were blessed with four beautiful days, however, for our annual Pastimes and Playthings and the Spring Conference.

We had a very successful Pastimes and Playthings April 19 and 20. Nearly two hundred children and youths from across the region came to visit the Cather childhood home and to learn and play the games their counterparts enjoyed in days gone by. The event was coordinated by WCPM staff member Vicki Bush, who once again enlisted a crew of local volunteers to supervise the fun. This was my first Spring Conference since coming on board. Truth be told, it was somewhat of an intoxicating experience, with so many old friends in town — many of whom one sees only at this time of year. Mellanee Kvasnicka did an excellent job overseeing the event.

◆ The fall offers a number of opportunities for Catherphiles to assemble and ruminate. Matt Hokom (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Sue Maher (University of Nebraska-Omaha), and Steve Shively (Northwest Missouri State) make up the Cather panel for the Nebraska Literary Festival at Chadron in September. And I hope to see many of you at the WLA Conference in Sacramento

and at the Mesa Verde Symposium in October. Many have expressed how much they are looking forward to the latter; John Swift is putting together a rich experience for those fortunate enough to go. Until then, happy reading and happy trails . . .

“My *Ántonia*” Aster

A distinctive selection of a native prairie wildflower (*Aster fendleri*) has been released as “My *Ántonia*” by the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA) GreatPlants™ program.

Discovered near Red Cloud, the childhood home of Willa Cather, the new release is being made available through Nebraska nurseries this spring.

“My *Ántonia*” aster is a drought-resistant perennial with an 8"-10" compact mounding habit. It is covered with white daisies in August and September and has glossy, fine-leaved foliage. Cather fans can expect to see it in the garden of the library and church in Red Cloud.

A collaborative effort of NSA and the Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association, GreatPlants™ develops and promotes ornamental plants for landscape use in Nebraska and the Great Plains.

For more information, call or write:
Nebraska Statewide Arboretum
P. O. Box 830715
UNL
Lincoln, Nebraska 68585-0715
Phone (402) 472-2971



Children from across the region gathered in the yard of the Cather childhood home in April for the WCPM's annual Pastimes and Playthings. With fine weather and several oldtime toys and games to enjoy, a day of fun was, well, in the bag.

— Photo by Linda Bartels, Courtesy of Red Cloud Chief

Mark Your Calendar

NEBRASKA LITERATURE FESTIVAL

September 17-18, 1999
Chadron State College

WILLA CATHER ON MESA VERDE: A SYMPOSIUM

October 20-24, 1999
Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado

ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE

May 5-6, 2000
Red Cloud, Nebraska

EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

*Willa Cather's
Environmental Imagination*
June 17-24, 2000
Nebraska City and Red Cloud, Nebraska

Diva Salutes Cather with Evening of Music

Joshua Dolezal

Colloquium members and the community at large were treated to a stunning program of vocal performance on March 23. The recital, titled "I Must Have Music: Songs and Arias from Willa Cather's Fiction," featured Ariel Bybee, mezzo-soprano, and six of her students. Bybee has sung at the Metropolitan Opera in New York for eighteen consecutive seasons, totaling over 400 performances. As Artist-in-Resident at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she teaches voice lessons, works with the opera program, and participates in outreach and recruiting activities.

Bybee's students range from undergraduates to doctoral candidates. She chose two undergraduate students to perform the death scene from *Romeo and Juliet* because the two characters who perform the same scene in "The Prodigies" are not yet professionals. This kind of attention to detail characterized the entire production.

The narration of the program was researched and written by Professor James E. Ford, of the UNL English Department. Ford focused the narration around the theme of music as the embodiment of soul, noting that fourteen of Cather's first twenty-five stories revolve around professional or would-be musicians. Each song was introduced in the context of the story in which it appears, with special attention given to its thematic relevance. Ford argues that Cather's "level

of demand" on her readers is parallel to Shakespeare's, as the Bard appealed to the audience both in the pit and in the balcony. One example of this is seen in *O Pioneers!*, as Emil Bergson whistles "The Jewel Song" from Faust. If one is not familiar with Faust, the name of the song is meaningless. Cather's choice to title the song, however, implies an intentional nuance which is affirmed in Emil's and Marie's deaths.

In fact, the entire program was a tribute not only to Cather's exquisite taste in music, but also in her masterful use of music in her fiction. Bybee and Ford, who were married last fall, saw the recital as something they could do together. "'Cather and music' is in the air," Bybee said. "It [the recital] was a way to put literature and music and Nebraska together." The music moved one listener to remark, perhaps inspired by one of the hymns Bybee sang, that he entered the recital hall skeptical about Cather's work and left a "convert."

The recital was Bybee's and Ford's first attempt at synthesizing music and literature in performance. Bybee drew her inspiration partly from her daughter, who once performed a dramatized life of George Sand. Bybee and Ford may "take the show on the road," as it were, with performances tentatively planned for Brigham Young University and possibly Red Cloud, Nebraska. We wish them godspeed.

Joshua Dolezal is an M.A. student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and serves as co-coordinator of the Cather Colloquium and editor of The Mowers' Tree, the newsletter of the Cather Colloquium. Reprinted with permission.



Senator Bob Kerrey, guest speaker at the 1999 Spring Conference, converses with Red Cloud youngsters while they take a break from serving the diners.

News from Director Pat Phillips



Pat Phillips

❖ **The Opera House** — We continue to push ahead seeking funding to complete the Opera House Capital Campaign by the end of the year. We are challenged by both the Peter Kiewit Foundation and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to have \$508,000 raised by December 31, 1999. We *must* reach this

goal, and **WE NEED YOUR HELP**. Response to our Spring mailing has been good, and we thank each of you who has responded to this mailing. While in town for the Spring Conference, U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey went to the Opera House, had a full tour of it, and saw the complete plan for renovation. He liked what he saw. The WCPM's *need* for it and the space and opportunities this restoration offers are so apparent.

❖ **Other activities** occurring around the Spring Conference included the planting of a blue spruce at the Episcopal Church as a part of Arbor Day, April 30. This was the first planting from the Green Spruce grant which is providing the funds for landscape design and planting of this space. The Willa Cather Roadway was officially inaugurated on May 1 at a special ceremony at the south border of the Roadway, across the road from the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Ron Hull emceed the event which included remarks by Randy Peters, State Traffic Engineer; Betty Kort, President of the Board of Governors; and Senator Kerrey. The Roadway was officially designated by the Nebraska Highway Commission on March 26, 1999, and was later approved by Governor Johanns. The Roadway spans a twenty-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 281. It extends from the Kansas border on the south to the fourteen-mile corner on the north. The location fourteen miles north of Red Cloud marks the beginning of "Catherland," as officially proclaimed by the Nebraska Unicameral in 1965. At the evening banquet, Erin Mann from Wayne, Nebraska, was awarded the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship. She is the thirteenth recipient of this \$8,000 award, a scholarship named after its donor and which provides \$2,000 each year to the winner for the four years of her undergraduate study. The winner of the scholarship, as stipulated by Norma Ross Walter, must be a female graduate of a Nebraska high school who plans to major in English.

❖ The Spring Conference received a mini-grant from the **Nebraska Humanities Council** to provide partial funding for participating humanists. As a recipient of an NHC grant, Nebraska Public Radio was able to record "The Passing Show" panel discussion and the evening address by Senator Kerrey. Nebraskans, therefore, will be able to hear the panel discussion and Kerrey's remarks at a later date on NPR.



Senator Bob Kerrey unveils sign marking the Willa Cather Roadway May 1, 1999.

❖ **A new local scholarship** was established last year by Jack and Marilyn Wilson from Clarks, Nebraska, in memory of his parents, Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson. The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial/Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson Scholarship was awarded for the first time this year at Red Cloud High School graduation on May 8. The winner, Nelson Trambly from Campbell, Nebraska, will attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a major in Agribusiness or Ag-Education. The applicants for this scholarship must be residents of the Red Cloud area, must attend RCHS, must be in the upper one-third of their class, and must be enrolled in a two- or four-year course of study in an agricultural or secondary educational pursuit. The area of study pays honor to Mr. Wilson's parents who worked in these fields, he as a county agent and vocational ag teacher, and she as a teacher.

❖ **Visitors and Tours:** Visitation and tours have remained strong so far this year. Through the first four months of the year, as compared to last year, the visitor count is up by 641. Group tours began in March and were booked very densely in May. In April, Grand Island High School brought their whole junior class — it took two different tour days to accommodate the 300 students. Grand Island Northwest High School also brought a large number of students. The tours during these months have come from Nebraska and Kansas. While most have been high school groups,

(Continued on page 20)



Senator Bob Kerrey and Erin Mann at the 1999 Spring Conference Banquet. The Senator presented Erin with the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship. The Wayne, Nebraska, student will attend Rice University in Houston, Texas.

NEWS FROM DIRECTOR PAT PHILLIPS

(Continued)

others have come from community colleges and universities. A group of eight women from Arizona pre-booked a tour in March. They each love Willa Cather's books and "needed" to come to Cather country.

◆ In the winter months, the WCPM hosted a book signing for local author, Anne Myers, and "Business After Hours" to introduce new Director of Education, Steve Ryan, to the business community. Both were well attended.

◆ "Crossing the Border Alliance" is a new tourism group which has been formed by seven historic sites crisscrossing the Kansas/Nebraska border. The first meeting of the group was held in Hanover, Kansas, when we discussed whether or not this was a group who could find ways to work together to promote each other's sites. The second meeting was held in Red Cloud at the WCPM. At this meeting, a formal statement of purpose and goals and objectives were adopted. Both meetings were facilitated by Ron Parks, assistant director of Historic Sites Division, Kansas State Historical Society. Participating partners are, from Nebraska: Indian Cave Park (Shubert), Rock Creek Station (Fairbury), Homestead National Monument (Beatrice), and Willa Cather State Historic Site (Red Cloud), and from Kansas: Native American Heritage Museum (Highland), Hollenberg Pony Express Station (Hanover), and Pawnee Indian Village

Museum (Republic). All are state or federal historic sites along the Kansas/Nebraska border, an area remarkably rich in heritage resources.

◆ From the Bookstore:

Death Comes for the Archbishop, scholarly edition, University of Nebraska Press. Hardbound, \$60.00. Historical essay and explanatory notes by John J. Murphy.

Obscure Destinies, scholarly edition, University of Nebraska Press. Hardbound, \$65.00. Historical essay and explanatory notes by Kari A. Ronning.

Willa Cather: Queering America, by Marilee Lindemann. Paperback, \$16.50

Willa Cather: A Reference Guide Update 1984-1992. An annotated bibliography by Marilyn Arnold, Virgil Albertini, Gary Brienza, and Milton Jones. This is an update from Marilyn Arnold's *Willa Cather: A Reference Guide* which spanned the years from 1895 to 1984. Paperback, spiral binding, \$35.00. Published by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

Tale About Cather Photos Has Happy Ending

Tom Allan

This is a Nebraska tale of two cities involving two world-renowned authors, two foundations memorializing them and the chance preservation of a valuable collection of photographs.

Don E. Connors of Huntington Beach, California, describes it as "a story of graciousness seldom found in the world today."

The cast of characters includes:

◆ The late Willa Cather, Nebraska's Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *One of Ours*, *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!*, who spent her childhood days at Red Cloud and used Webster County locales as settings in her novels.

◆ The late Bess Streeter Aldrich of Elmwood, who gained fame for such novels as *A White Bird Flying*, *Spring Came On Forever* and *Song of Years*.

◆ Connors, a longtime member of the board of the Red Cloud-based Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

◆ Rob Clements of Elmwood, the vice president of the Cass County town's American Exchange Bank and a member of the Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation board.

The tale's plot centers on how a valuable oak-framed collection of photographs of Cather and Red Cloud scenes are prominently displayed in Elmwood, the bastion of Aldrich pride and lore.

No. 30 of a limited edition of 75 collections photographed and written by Gabriel North Seymour of New

York City hangs on the walls of the conference room of the Clement Insurance agency across the street from the bank.

In the opening commentary accompanying the photographs, the photographer-author wrote:

"In the photos of this portfolio, I have attempted to capture some of the places, amenities and hardships that made up life for early settlers of Red Cloud and who forever live in the writings of the town's most unusual and talented daughter."

Included in the series are photos of Cather's childhood bedroom, Anna Pavelka's "My *Ántonia*" farmhouse and the Farmers and Merchants Bank built by former Nebraska Governor Silas Garber.

The accompanying text includes descriptions used by Cather in *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, *The Professor's House*, *Two Friends*, and *Old Mrs. Harris*.

The plot thickens when one asks why Clement, a third-generation Elmwood banker who was raised from the age of 9 amid Aldrich lore in the author's old home, purchased the series dedicated to honoring Cather?

Clements had a ready answer, "I have a love and profound interest in all Nebraska authors. I thought the series needed to be preserved."

That's what drew him, he said, to an auction of all the furnishings of the former South Omaha Packers National Bank last month.

Clement said he did not know at the time that he had outbid a friend of Connors', Leon Fitzpatrick of Omaha, who had attended the auction on Connors' behalf.

The successful bid was not disclosed, but Clements estimated that the museum-quality oak frames on the series alone are worth \$1,600.

Undaunted that he had been outbid, Connors said he contacted the auctioneer for Clements' name and telephone number.

"When I spoke with Clements, I explained who I was and my interest in obtaining the framed series for the Cather Foundation," Connors said. "In an act of graciousness seldom found in business dealings today, he said he would sell them for only five more dollars than he paid for them."

Clements said he told Connors, "It's a good thing you called me pretty quick, because I was really getting attached to the photographs."

Connors said he contacted four other Cather Foundation board members, who readily joined him in the purchase.

"Because Rob had been so gracious in letting us buy the photos, we made an attempt to reciprocate by telling him that he may continue to hang them in his conference room for another two years," Connors said.

That will be a mutually beneficial arrangement. By then, the series can be hung in the old Red Cloud Opera House, which now is undergoing a \$2.1 million restoration and endowment project.

Elmwood also is hoping by then to have completed the refurbishing of the Bess Streeter Aldrich Museum attached to its public library.

Clements expressed satisfaction in the tale's happy ending. "I'm happy the series will be going home."

But Clements and Connors said one more mystery of the story remains to be solved.

"We are still trying to learn why and how the old Packers National Bank obtained the series for its conference room," Clements said.

Pat Phillips of Red Cloud, the executive director of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, described the acquisition of the Cather photograph series as "an incredible story of caring and graciousness on the part of both Don and Rob."

Phillips said foundation members want to share their good fortune.

"Before hanging the series in the old Opera House," she said, "we will place it on a tour of several cities so more Nebraskans can enjoy the wonderful photographs and commentary."

(Reprinted from the Sunday World-Herald,
October 4, 1998.)

American Masterpiece Theatre Premier Will Be The Song of the Lark

Ron Hull, director of Nebraska Public Television and member of the WCPM Board of Governors, reports that filming of *The Song of the Lark* began May 20 in Sonora, California.

The film will be the first of the new *American Masterpiece Theatre* series on Public Television, which will occupy the traditional Sunday night *Masterpiece Theatre* time slot.

Karen Arthur, who grew up in Nebraska near Catherland, directs the adaptation of Cather's *bildungsroman*. The production features Allison Elliott (*On the Wings of the Dove*) as Thea Kronborg, Maximillian Schell (*Judgment at Nuremberg*) as Professor Wunsch, and Arliss Howard.

"*Lark* is my favorite Cather book," Ron confides, "because . . . it is an honest story of the sacrifices a woman must make to succeed in the arts in a man's world. I've given a number of copies to young women I've wanted to encourage. As one friend said, 'Willa Cather understands.' For me, stories of courage and determination are always of interest and, in this case, inspiring."

Air date is projected for late January or early February 2000.

Restoration of the Cather "Second Home" in Progress

Some months ago, Doug and Charlene Hoschouer, editors of *The Red Cloud Chief*, purchased the Cather's second home where the Cathers moved in 1903 and where Willa occupied the upstairs bedroom opening to a small second-story porch.



Upon hearing that Doug and Charlene Hoschouer had purchased the Cather Second Home, Helen Cather Southwick sent them this picture of it. Charles Cather had written on the back: "The Big One [i.e., snowstorm] of 1912."

— Courtesy of Doug and Charlene Hoschouer

On the editorial page of *The Chief*, Charlene reported the following:

"Each day several folks inquire about the progress on the Cather second home. 'Coming slowly,' is the only reply we can think of. We knew it was going to be a gargantuan task when we bought it and guess what . . . the task hasn't gotten any smaller!

"Our primary problem and deterrent toward working on the interior of the house has been the lack of information concerning how it was prior to the hospital renovation. We have talked to tens of people here about the house's early floor plan. No one remembers it.

"Doug and I have begun removing the linoleum and subflooring from the upstairs rooms to try to get some answers. We discovered where the front stairway came up into Willa's room. We also discovered where someone had cut a hole in the floor for a small safe.

"After weeks of frustration, we got a break when Beverly Cooper of Hastings came over one day and took photographs of the house, which she sent to Helen Southwick, granddaughter of Charles Cather.

"One Sunday afternoon, I telephoned Mrs. Southwick to discuss her memories of the house. She astounded me as she spoke of it. It was so wonderful to hear how it really was, when it was a home.

"Shortly after our first visit, Mrs. Southwick sent Doug and me a photograph of the house as it was in 1912. This was the first time we had seen a photo of the south side of the house. Further, there was proof of the window in the stairway! It is a beautiful window with colored glass.

"Since then Mrs. Southwick and I have spoken frequently and each time I learn more about the house and her family. With her help, Doug and I have been able to cipher the original configuration of the house.

"With this new information we are planning to get started on the inside as soon as things settle at the office. There is more flooring to take up, walls to remove and stairways to install before we can begin to see the real Second Home."

The Hoschouers expect that the project will take two or three years to complete, but visitors to the house at this year's Spring Conference were fascinated by the progress made.

— Reported by Bruce Baker

Rare Willa Cather Volumes Donated to NU Foundation

Jena Janovy

A Kansas couple has donated its Willa Cather collection to the University of Nebraska Foundation, including rare works and books once owned by the Nebraska author.

The collection, valued at more than \$30,000, includes more than 40 books. The material will be added to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Love Library and serve as the focus of the library's collection of original Cather works.

The collection, donated by Robert and Doris Mae Kurth of Prairie Village, Kansas, includes books from the novelist's personal library, some of which include her notations. It also includes works about Cather and her own writings.

A rare edition of her first book, *April Twilights*, a volume of poetry published in 1903, is part of the collection donated by the Kurths.

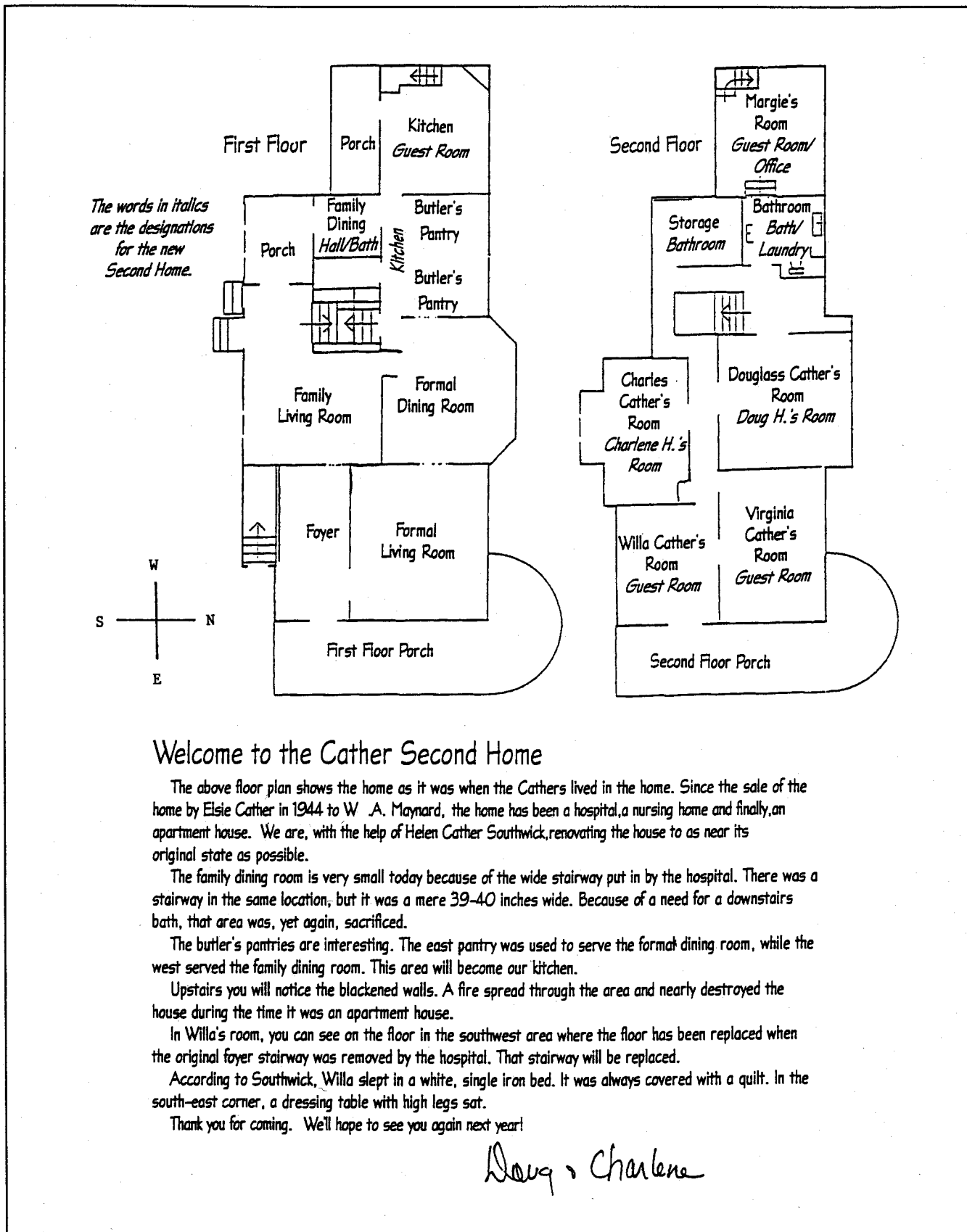
Robert Kurth, 70, said Wednesday that he spent about 25 years collecting the materials.

Susan Rosowski, WCPM Board member and the Adele Hall Distinguished Professor of English at UNL, said in a statement that the gift "makes it possible to peer into Cather's mind."

"Looking into her library takes us beyond generalizations," Rosowski said, "to the very personal world of ideas that Cather awakened to as a student at the University of Nebraska."

— Reprinted and edited from
The Omaha World-Herald

Doug and Charlene Hoschouer treated attendees of the Spring Conference to tours of the Cather Second Home on May 1. A flyer, reprinted here, helped orient visitors to past and future uses of the residence, which sits at the intersection of Sixth and Seward Streets in Red Cloud. More on the restoration can be found on page 22.



Welcome to the Cather Second Home

The above floor plan shows the home as it was when the Cathers lived in the home. Since the sale of the home by Elsie Cather in 1944 to W. A. Maynard, the home has been a hospital, a nursing home and finally, an apartment house. We are, with the help of Helen Cather Southwick, renovating the house to as near its original state as possible.

The family dining room is very small today because of the wide stairway put in by the hospital. There was a stairway in the same location, but it was a mere 39-40 inches wide. Because of a need for a downstairs bath, that area was, yet again, sacrificed.

The butler's pantries are interesting. The east pantry was used to serve the formal dining room, while the west served the family dining room. This area will become our kitchen.

Upstairs you will notice the blackened walls. A fire spread through the area and nearly destroyed the house during the time it was an apartment house.

In Willa's room, you can see on the floor in the southwest area where the floor has been replaced when the original foyer stairway was removed by the hospital. That stairway will be replaced.

According to Southwick, Willa slept in a white, single iron bed. It was always covered with a quilt. In the south-east corner, a dressing table with high legs sat.

Thank you for coming. We'll hope to see you again next year!

Doug & Charlene

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Willa Cather Newsletter welcomes articles, notes and letters to the editor. Address submissions to Ann Romines, Merrill Skaggs, or John Swift. News items should be sent to Bruce Baker. Essays and notes are currently listed in the annual MLA Bibliography.

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AIMS OF THE WCPM

- To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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