

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

The Willa Cather Society

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In late July Mr. Koichi Takeyama (front row), Mrs. Takeyama (left), and interpreter Sachiko Yonemura (right) enjoyed lunch and conversing with WCPM Director Pat Phillips (back row, left to right), Red Cloud Mayor Kay Jacoby, and Mayor Phil Odom from Hastings, Nebraska.
— Photo Courtesy of Red Cloud Chief

News from the WCPM Director. . .

One year since implementation of the management contract between the Nebraska State Historical Society and the WCPM, we have seen a marked increase in visitation to the Cather sites in Red Cloud — a 46% increase, in fact, to 8,304. What has made the difference? Is Cather better known? Have the two tele-

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Key Modulations in Cather's Novels About Music

Merrill M. Skaggs
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In her journalist days just before the turn of the century, Willa Cather bemoaned "too great a tendency to interpret musical compositions into literal pictures, [plus] . . . caring more for the pictures than the composition in itself."¹ In spite of her preference for composition over picture, however, we have read her two novels about music by their pictures of the heroines. We have seen *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart* as portraits of talented Midwestern smalltown girls who travel to Chicago to study music and meet opposite destinies there. The young women have mirrored each other enough to seem opposite sides of a rug — or contrapuntal inversions. Instead I'd like to suggest that the compositions which resonate in these two novels move in different chord progressions. Rather, the *artists* who are most interestingly counterpointed in polyphonic lines are Thea Kronborg and Clement Sebastian.

No discussion of music in Willa Cather's fiction could begin, certainly, without voicing the gratitude all Cather scholars rightly feel toward Richard Giannone for his truly original critical study published in 1968.² He showed the way for many excellent textual studies to follow by demonstrating the subtlety, density, allusiveness, and coherence of Cather's whole work. Further, he proved that Cather never really dropped a subject or a device; rather, she redeployed her theme or allusion to serve different purposes in successive works. "Music becomes a strategy" (5-6), Giannone said: "a study of music should offer a way into the evolution of her art" (13). With many thanks for the method Giannone marked out, I would like to use the music made by two fictional singers to study some modulations of this evolution.

The most significant thing about Thea Kronborg, it seems to me, is not that she's a girl like Lucy Gayheart who knows enough about the piano to justify studying music in the big city. Rather, Thea is a born artist who fights to realize her full gift for expressing art that achieves greatness. She is told, "When you find

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your way to that gift and to that woman, you will be at peace."³ She is most usefully compared to other professional artists. I take *The Song of the Lark* to be Cather's "full-blooded"⁴ description of a true artist — defining what part is genetic, and what part derives from nurture, luck, will, talent, connections, and raw physical endurance. Further, Cather elaborates in this novel the traits, reflexes, values, behaviors, and vices a great artist will develop as she becomes her greatest self. When we absorb all Thea's observations as well as the narrator's aphorisms, we are pretty sure we will know how to recognize a true artist when we see or hear one.

Probably we — or at least I — have exaggerated our cognitive skills here. I for one did not see until recently the likelihood that these novels exist not to release contrasting pictures of two musical females, one strong and one weak, but to compose studies of two kinds of art, one good and one bad. Or perhaps the books remind us that to do one thing, as Cather liked books to do, she automatically drew her compositional circle around two opposites — as the yin-yang symbol does. Both Lucy and Clement are Thea's opposites. Thus, one can use generalizations from *The Song of the Lark* to assess the art of Clement Sebastian in *Lucy Gayheart*. And once Clement Sebastian is judged by Kronborg standards, one sees why Cather killed him off first.

The Song of the Lark describes an artist who strives for something "so far away, so beautiful . . . there's nothing one can say about it" (SL 395). That is, the artist strives for perfection, a word for God. Sebastian, conversely, doesn't strive at all: "In what stretched out before him there was nothing that he wanted very much."⁴ As a result, "He had renounced life" (LG 87).

Thea believes, "A child's attitude toward everything is an artist's attitude" (SL 395). We register that a child has faith, trust, and instinct. Sebastian, conversely, "dragged the bottom, and brought up nothing worth remembering. . . . He remembered Macbeth's "Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (LG 79). At the least, this is not the mind of a child. Yet the true artist must also remember the essential thing Thea learned from Panther Canyon — "the inevitable hardness of human life" (SL 398). Sebastian knows no such thing. He wishes, instead, for evasive "escape . . . from everything he was and had" (LG 126).

Of hardness Thea thinks, "No artist gets far who doesn't know that. And you can't know it with your mind. You have to realize it in your body; deep. It's an animal sort of feeling" (SL 398). It gives one an animal spring. But Sebastian is springless, being "bored to death" (LG 58). Instead, he appears to feel "it's a waste, living your life out" (95). Bored and springless, he's "a man who rose late and did not go abroad until noon" (47).

Most of all, a great artist is distinguished in *The Song of the Lark* by "being able to care so much. That, after all, is the unusual thing" (SL 398). That unusual thing is missing from Clement Sebastian. He hides behind a professional manner "so perfected that it could go on representing him when he himself was either lethargic or altogether absent" (LG 49); the key trait of that manner is "amiability" (49) and "an easy, if somewhat tolerant, enjoyment of life" (52).

Fred Ottenburg congratulates Thea "for what you demand from yourself, when you might get off so easily. You demand more and more all the time, and you'll do more and more" (SL 398). Thea recognizes this task to push her voice and body as hard as possible as her vocation; and Fred recognizes that "after the one responsibility you do feel, I doubt if you've enough left to feel responsible to God!" (400). Gripped by such dedication to her vocation, Thea possesses that musical power her sponsors have craved like a glimpse of the divine. They describe that power variously as singing for the idea (347); as simplifying a character and then surrendering to that musical idea so totally that "the score pours her into all those lovely postures" (367); as at last developing enough voice and talent and beauty and power and style (408) to do parts just right; as embodying passion which is inimitable in cheap materials (409); as refining the sense of truthfulness (409). Echoing Biblical promises about entering Paradise, Cather writes of Thea at the height of her powers, "she entered into the inheritance that she herself had laid up, into the fullness of the faith she had kept before she knew its name or its meaning" (410).

Interestingly, however, there's a negative side to Thea's art and power, too. Thea also refines a capacity "to hate the cheap thing. I tell you," she hisses, "there is such a thing as creative hate! A contempt that drives you through fire, makes you risk everything and lose everything, makes you a long sight better than you ever knew you could be" (394). Considering an inferior artist who doesn't make such demands on herself Thea spits out, "If they like her, then they ought to hiss me off the stage. We stand for things that are irreconcilable, absolutely. You can't try to do things right and not despise the people who do them wrong. . . . If that doesn't matter, then nothing matters. Well, sometimes I've come home as I did the other night . . . so full of bitterness that it was as if my mind were full of daggers" (395). And minds full of daggers bring us back to Sebastian, whose mind was full of scorpions. I think that the portrait Willa Cather painted of Clement Sebastian, the artist of bad faith, is fueled by creative hate and contempt. After twenty years of considering bad artists, Cather is as vitriolic as Thea. Having sacrificed so much for art herself, she finally punishes the "cheap thing" she makes Sebastian represent. He is everything opposite Thea Kronborg, and Cather's contempt for his type sears her pages. It is strong enough to drive her through the fire of this novel's

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Pat Phillips

— Photo by Robert Graning

vision movies and the national magazine articles stimulated interest, or is it the increased advertising in state newspapers and in "Midwest Living" and AAA's "Home and Away" magazines? All of these are probably factors, and whatever the cause, we are pleased to share Willa Cather's world and look forward to larger numbers of visitors.

A small but special entourage from Hastings, Nebraska, brought three Japanese Cather enthusiasts from Hastings' sister-city, Ozu, to Red Cloud to satisfy Mr. Koichi Takeyama's life-long dream of coming to Nebraska to see the land Willa Cather wrote about and which he had been introduced to 46 years ago when he first read *O Pioneers!*

This summer's "Pioneering Women" tour, featuring three women authors (Cather, Sandoz, and Wilder), was a first for Pete Brown's HISTORY OF AMERICA tours. Noted guide, author, historian, and expert on the Old West, Jack McDermott prepared the twenty participants from across the country for their trip to Red Cloud. McDermott then led the group to northwestern Nebraska, through Mari Sandoz country, where they met and talked to Mari Sandoz's sister, Caroline Pifer. The trip concluded with a visit to Desmet, South Dakota, to experience Laura Ingalls Wilder's country.

We continue to attract college, high school and elementary school groups, as well as elderhostel classes, family reunions, clubs, and interested individuals. Fifty junior high age students from the Nebraska Scholars Academy spent a day visiting the town sites and prairie. The week-long enrichment program examined *My Ántonia* and was led by Betty Kort, Hastings High School teacher and WCPM Board member. Our surprise tour this summer began when twenty-five Austrian honor students arrived by bus with their interpreter/guide. They were very bright and interested kids, and had just completed reading *My Ántonia* and were ready to see it all!

The arrival of Drs. Martin and Myron Monty, Nebraska natives and collectors of Great Plains and Cather memorabilia, was expected. Both are veteran teachers: Martin at the University of Chicago and Myron at Drake University. Dr. Martin has also been a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has written over forty books; he is currently writing the third volume of his collection *Modern*

American Religion. He has a five foot shelf in his library filled with Cather material. A former commencement speaker at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, he will be a guest lecturer in March 1996 at Hastings College.

The new exhibit at the Burlington Depot, "The Burlington Railroad and the Settlement of Webster County, Nebraska," emphasizes four themes: disposition of the land and town planning in Webster County, colonization and settlement, markets, and the political upheaval of the 1890s. Exhibit curator, Terry Sheahan, University of Northern Illinois, Dekalb, tells the story through narratives, photographs, maps, letters, and posters. Bill Fogg of Corporate Image Design, Red Cloud, built and installed the exhibit.

The March 25 screening of *My Ántonia* prior to its television debut on March 29 was held in the Red Cloud gymnasium. Ron Hull, Associate General Manager of Nebraska Public Television and WCPM Board member, hosted the event. Approximately 400 attended the screening and reception funded by Classic Cable Television (Plainville, Kansas), USA Network, and the WCPM. Classic Cable and USA Network also furnished fifty copies of the Washington Square Press edition of *My Ántonia*, a nice reward for those who arrived first. Antonette Kort, the only surviving child of Annie Pavelka (Ántonia), was honored and spoke to



This summer the 1895 Opera House building got a clean-up. The old Coast to Coast sign on the lower portion of the building was removed; upper story windows were replaced where needed, glazed, and primed, and the old, dirty venetian blinds were removed. The building front looks more attractive and its primed face much cleaner. Removal of the sign exposed the pretty columns which had been covered for years. This is a WCPM property; one which we want to restore.

the very attentive audience. About twenty others of the Pavelka family were introduced. Several "extras" in the audience were presented and identified the scenes they appeared in. Members of the Mari Sandoz Board of Directors also attended. Three gentlemen, headed by Dale Smith, Grand Island, warmed the audience prior to show time, and the Smith Family Band, Hastings, entertained throughout the reception. It was a memorable experience to watch the first screening of the movie with the Pavelkas.

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torturous composition⁶ until she can bury the sleaze and feel, once again, her pencil fly across the page.

A few comparative facts will clarify our contrast here. For starters, Thea Kronborg is a Wagnerian soprano; and singing Wagner's "noble, mysterious, significant dramas" requires "a brilliant piece of virtuosity" as Cather suggests in her preface to Gertrude Hall's *Study of the Wagnerian Romances*.⁷ In fact, John March's useful compendium of Cather allusions reminds us that Wagner believed opera combined the arts of music, drama, poetry and philosophy⁸ — not to mention religion, mythology, and the occult. Wagner, in short, melded into his titanic operas almost everything worth knowing and preserving. In mastering Wagner's female roles, Thea drives herself toward an aesthetic absolute and demands of herself every imaginable effort. Setting out, she thinks, "[I]f she failed now, she would lose her soul" (SL 336).

The initial glimpse we get of Clement Sebastian performing makes a staggering contrast. He is in recital; he requires himself merely to make a melody without pouring himself into any singular postures. Further, he sings memorably only one kind of song. Though at a subsequent recital he sings all of *Die Winterreise*, a whole Schubert song cycle, in his first recital Cather remarks only a first occasional piece by Schubert plus "five more Schubert songs, all melancholy" (LG 35). She describes Clement, in short, as Johnny one-note. And in her essay "On Escapism" Cather describes Schubert, in turn, as one who "could easily write a dozen songs a day."⁹ The word *facile* might be buzzing somewhere hereabouts.

In recital, Clement's diction is superior, but his singing is "a rite more than a prayer" (LG 29). That is, he sings with more ceremony than passion (though passion is the secret of such artists as Thea). And though his first song is a mariner's invocation, Cather remarks that in Sebastian's interpretation "there was no humbleness and no entreaty" (29). Rather, he conveys "elevation of style" and "a kind of large enlightenment, like daybreak" (29) — that is, like something familiar and unmissable.

The text establishes that "Sebastian's personality had aroused" Lucy before he uttered a sound. She values his appearance: "Yes, a great artist should look like that" (29). We note here that Lucy labels him a great artist before hearing a note. Her perceptions summon up an impressive presence, but tell us nothing about his singing. Rather than creating art from a youthful body, Sebastian presents a middle aged oval who "took up a great deal of space and filled it solidly" (29).

Sebastian falls back on a talent for projecting a compelling personality from a platform. His songs "made Lucy feel that there was something profoundly tragic about this man" (30). Her sympathy reveals to readers, however, that it is the man, not the music,

who attracts her. "Through the rest of the recital," Cather tells us, "her attention was intermittent" (30). That is, she listened attentively only to the melancholy Schubert songs.

The easiest clue to a Kronborgian assessment of Clement Sebastian comes in Thea's hiss, "I think oratorio is a great chance for bluffers" (SL 233). Sebastian goes on tour to do "two oratorios and three recitals" (LG 60). By the standards of a Wagnerian soprano this is hackwork, the just deserts of a singer who "liked engagements with singing societies" (LG 68) instead of resenting the public's inability to tell the difference between great artists and fakers. But Clement is never one to push himself too hard. Persuaded to sing one encore, he chooses "a sad, simple old air which required little from the singer," though he sang it unforgettably (31).

Music, in short, is used in *Lucy Gayheart* to satirize the singer. Soon after Lucy first becomes aware of him in recital, Sebastian characterizes himself further through the Rossini and Massenet arias with which he auditions accompanists. When a male pianist is trying out, Sebastian boasts before him provocatively as Figaro. But when Lucy takes the keyboard, he flirts with her through Massenet.

Though her presentation of Sebastian's professionalism is laconic, Cather's satire particularly focuses on his private behavior. While Thea is associated with "the cheerful sound of effort, of vigorous striving" (SL 24), Sebastian works fitfully, when at all. In a morning in which he even feels like working, he sings once through a song cycle and then sits down by the fire with Lucy and a bottle of port (LG 68). Telephone calls interrupt both practice and leisure (68, 75); his practice schedule is five weekdays from 10:00 to 12:00, although he often starts late and permits business calls after 11:30 (75). More importantly, after practicing an hour or so, he stops to smoke (69). Smoking is an unthinkable habit for a singer who takes his voice seriously. Yet Sebastian, once depressed, "had smoked until his throat was dry" while "his mind could not find a comfortable position to lie in" (79). The image suggests supine reclining, but also tells us that Sebastian *knows* mainly with his tired mind. He lacks that "animal sort of feeling" about the hardness of life which Thea insists on (SL 398).

Thea's first teacher tells her, "There is only one big thing — desire. And before it, when it is big, all is little" (69). Thereafter she develops the power "to lift a weight heavier than herself" (88), for her desire is equal to her task. Sebastian, conversely, finds "in what stretched out before him there was nothing he wanted very much" (LG 126). By Cather's measure of achievement, he lacks the crucial ingredient of desire. In public, Sebastian is a "remarkable success" (114); but intolerant Thea, serving higher standards, must learn not "to fret about the successes of cheap people" (SL 233). While Fred Ottenburg acknowledges that everything including himself is used as an instrument

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to serve Thea's purpose (283), Sebastian, lacking purpose, uses Lucy as a plaything: "In her companionship there was never the shadow of a claim" (LG 81). While drifting Sebastian decides he has renounced life (LG 87), Thea drifts "like a rifle ball" (SL 283). While Thea learns "every artist makes himself born" (SL 160), Clement reads of an old friend's death "like reading his own death notice" (LG 77). Thea finds in the shards of pottery left by the ancient people an image of desire that makes her feel "one ought to do one's best" (SL 275). Clement feels "the thing he was looking for had gone out into the wide air . . . and he was staring into the empty jar" (LG 77).

So what may we surmise Cather's *Lucy Gayheart* was written for? To what uses does she put the music she records in a new key here? While the book, it seems to me, is basically a satire, the ultimate purpose of satire is to kill. The references to *The Song of the Lark* repeatedly echoing here establish standards which justify killing. Having summarized her case, she kills off the artist who does not take himself seriously but who carelessly uses his talents to produce cheap successes. Having left him with no aesthetic leg to stand on, she drowns him in that kind of accident Thea once avoided because she kept her head in a storm and also because she was heartless and young and strong and wanted things so much (SL 392).

You hear, I am sure, that overtone in the ear which echoes the great penultimate sentence in "Old Mrs. Harris." That story's wonderful final trope, published just before *Lucy Gayheart*, ends "But now I know." What Willa Cather who wrote it appears to know by this point is that some forms of bad faith are worth drowning. But she also kills off Lucy — Sebastian's adoring admirer. It is as if Cather thinks Lucy deserves the same fate for not being able to tell the difference between an artist and a performer. If Thea is once labelled "the savage blonde" (SL 162) who permits herself "creative hate," there's savage hate in her creator, too, as well as knowledge.

Yet Cather leaves Harry Gordon alive at the end, and once Cather got to this section she reported that her ailments had vanished and her creative juices flowed again. In asking what Harry suggests as a character or point of view, we approach the last section warily, aware of the savage satire in the book's first two parts and hearing homophones in *sleigh* and *slay*. The narrator summarizes,

He enjoys his prosperity and his good health. Lucy Gayheart is no longer a despairing little creature standing in the icy wind and lifting beseeching eyes to him. She is no longer near, beside his sleigh. She has receded to the far horizon line, along with all the fine things of youth, which do not change. (LG 224)

Three problems arise in this passage. First, earlier in this novel Sebastian has identified youth, love and hope as "all the things that pass" (69). He discovers

"that when people spoke of their dead youth they were not using a figure of speech. The thing he was looking for had gone out into the wide air" (77). Sebastian tries, of course, to recover an "unclouded faith in the old and lovely dreams of man" (87) through Lucy, but he dies struggling instead of achieving it. His death is a hard fact, as Harry's far horizon line is a metaphor for feeling. The second problem is that the things Lucy represents are barely perceptible to Harry at that far horizon line where one must squint to find them at all. The third problem is that Harry's words so closely echo those of the figure from *Lark* he most resembles — Dr. Archie. Dr. Archie tells youthful Thea, "The things that last are the good things" (SL 126), which Thea later identifies as "the old things. . . . I carried with me . . . when I set out from Moonstone" (395-6). Unfortunately, Archie is identified as a man who "had not the courage to be an honest thinker" (78). And Harry has already realized that even such good things of youth as footsteps embedded in concrete will crumble when he dies and takes his memories with him.

Willa Cather seems to suggest through music two unpleasant heresies in *Lucy Gayheart*. First, grad-grinds like Harry who stick to hard facts must live without music and art except as memories on the far horizon line. They may live longest, but they endure "a life sentence" (LG 221); they might do better to make more room in their environs for bored singers; naughty musicians are still better than none at all. Second, the lasting things of youth are adolescent absolutes which fade, like adolescence itself, no matter how resolutely one tries to shore up a faith in them. But finally, though bad artists like Sebastian are false idols who cannot serve as the door, way, truth, or life for their worshipful admirers (184), standards do exist by which the bluffers can be judged. By 1935 those standards may echo only faintly from 1915, but the echo can still be heard like "the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it." Echoes provide "the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself."¹⁰

NOTES

¹ *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews 1893-1902*, William M. Curtin, ed. (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1970), 376.

² *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press).

³ *The Song of the Lark*, Foreword by Doris Grumbach ([1915] 1937; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 191. Hereafter pages references will be cited in the text and designated SL where necessary.

⁴ Cather uses the phrase slightly in "My First Novels [There Were Two]," *Willa Cather on Writing*, Foreword by Stephen Tennant (1949; Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1988), 96.

⁵ *Lucy Gayheart* (1935; New York: Vintage, 1976), 126. Hereafter page references will be cited in the text and designated LG where necessary.

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⁶Susan Rosowski summarizes the facts of this troubled composition succinctly in *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1986), 219.

⁷*Cather on Writing*, 64, 65.

⁸*A Reader's Companion to the Fiction of Willa Cather*, Marilyn Arnold, ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 803.

⁹*Cather on Writing*, 20-21.

¹⁰Willa Cather, "The Novel Demeuble," *Not Under Forty* (1936; Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1988), 50.



The 1995 Spring Conference speakers/guests pose in front of the Willa Cather Childhood home after touring the house. Pictured left to right are Jane Abbott, Bill Allyn, Sandy Allyn, WCPM Director Pat Phillips, Board Member Ron Hull, and Philip Abbott.

— Photo Courtesy of Beverly Cooper

NEWS FROM WCPM (Continued)

Joel Geyer, Nebraska Public Television's award winning producer, wrote and produced an excellent ten minute NPTV presentation of Willa Cather's short story "The Sentimentality of William Tavener." Mr. Geyer is preparing another Cather piece for Nebraska Public Television this fall. Geyer will speak to those attending the Nebraska Literature Festival at the University of Nebraska-Kearney this fall about producing Cather's works for television. As we all know, Willa Cather did not want her books or stories to be dramatized.

I have had the pleasure of speaking about Willa Cather and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial on several occasions, most recently at the Republican Valley Library System's annual meeting (before they took a tour by covered wagon!), at the Quebec Seminar, and to a regional group of Kansas teachers. In November I will speak to a book group in Grand Island. It has been especially rewarding to reminisce about our forty years. (Which reminds me, have you seen or purchased one of the paperweights especially designed for the fortieth year?)

I will conclude this column with the following recent excerpt from a piece by Mary B. W. Tabor of the *New York Times*: "One sure window into a person's soul is his reading list. Often, it is the books read in youth that influence later years . . . So when Colin Powell, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and potential presidential candidate, was recently asked about the book he remembered most from his early years in the Bronx, the four-star general, who has just completed his memoir, *My American Journey*, didn't flinch. His answer: *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, the coming-of-age story of an orphaned Virginian who moves to Nebraska and befriends a Bohemian immigrant. 'Don't ask me why,' Powell said, chuckling. 'But that's the one that stuck out.'"

— Pat Phillips

Womanhood Distorted: Mrs. Archie as Thea's Foil in *The Song of the Lark*

Evelyn I. Funda
Utah State University

The figure of Mrs. Archie quickly passes in and out of Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, but Cather's deft characterization of her points to an ironic portrayal of sexual repression and distorted passion that offers an important foil to Thea's own femininity and artistic passion.



As early as 1916, H. L. Mencken called *The Song of the Lark* Willa Cather's Cinderella story, and although Cather herself wrote Dorothy Canfield Fisher that the novel was her own fairy tale, *The Song of the Lark* reinterprets and indicts the typical fairy tale plot created for women such as Belle White Archie in which the ultimate goal is to marry and live "happily ever after." The example of Mrs. Archie's trivial life beyond the close of the fairy tale marriage serves as a cautionary tale for Thea — a demonstration that the quest for marriage itself, if marriage is the terminal goal, is an empty quest that corrupts womanhood.

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WOMANHOOD DISTORTED (Continued)

With her very name suggesting a fairy tale association with virginal beauty, young Belle White was considered as "one of the 'pretty' girls in Lansing" (34).² Once upon a time, she had had "a train of suitors," among whom Dr. Archie "was considered the most promising young man in 'the young crowd,'" (34-35). Having chosen the most worthy suitor, Belle achieved the female fulfillment of marriage and ended her striving. The "one aggressive action of her life was over," Cather writes, and "she began to shrink in face and stature" (35). "Her reputed prettiness must have been entirely the result of determination, of a fierce little ambition," because "once she had fastened herself on to some one," her fairy tale beauty vanishes "like the ornamental plumage which drops away from some birds after mating season" (35). The magical spell of the fairy tale disappears, and the virginal "belle" of Lansing is revealed as a mean-spirited crone. As a wife, Mrs. Archie is associated negatively by Cather with numerous domestic, sensual, maternal, vital, fecund images, pointing out how *lacking* Belle is in all these "feminine" qualities, how trivial, unfeminine, barren, and sexually repressed she is. "[N]ow dry and withered up at thirty" (84), Mrs. Archie prefers the dormant promise of spring to a harvest of beauty. When Dr. Archie goes to Denver and thinks he "would have liked to send her flowers if she had not repeatedly told him never to send her anything but bulbs" (86), Cather omits reference either to Mrs. Archie as planting bulbs or looking for signs of their life emerging from the womblike darkness of the earth. Although Thea associates her with Dr. Archie's lush garden, its sensual tea roses and delectable strawberries, Mrs. Archie does not cultivate the garden as other Cather women like Antonia and Alexandra do, nor does she arrange roses and accept flowers as tokens of love and admiration, as Marian Forrester does. Instead, she stands sentinel to preclude the harvest. When, at Dr. Archie's insistence, Thea goes to the house to pick berries, Mrs. Archie tartly warns her not to trample the vines and, ignoring Thea's own large basket, hands her a small butter-basket retrieved from some church supper. She is not saving the strawberries for any purpose; in fact, Cather notes she "doesn't know what to do with them all" (32). Rather, Mrs. Archie is preventing the strawberries from being plucked and savored *at all*, denying herself and others that sensual, sweet pleasure.

Mrs. Archie's miserliness is neither borne of avarice nor thrift but of femininity withering into mere pettiness. When she cannot keep the strawberries from Dr. Archie, she can diminish the pleasure of his experience by apparent trickery. By associating Mrs. Archie with the thin cream the doctor has with his strawberries, Cather suggests her emotional as well as sexual stinginess: "No matter how much milk [Dr. Archie] bought, he could never get thick cream for his strawberries. Even when he watched his wife lift it

from the milk in smooth, ivory-coloured blankets, she managed, by some sleight-of-hand, to dilute it before it got to the breakfast table" (33). The milk of womanly comfort and nurturance is skimmed in a transformation reminiscent of Mrs. Archie's own mysterious transformation from "belle" to skinny-legged, molting hen, "stingy without motive or reason" (33), the woman who has a "sharp ear for racy anecdotes" (34) but rejects her own sexuality.

Often associated with insufficient heat as well as food, Mrs. Archie is notorious for "skimping the doctor" in both (33), so that he must leave home and go to the office to find "a look of winter comfort" (3).³ From this pattern of denial emerges a series of metaphors that express Mrs. Archie's frigidity, a characterization Cather further emphasizes in her attention to the woman's domesticity. Shut tight, enclosed and guarded as Mrs. Archie herself, her house is no welcoming home, and within its walls she becomes a kind of pre-prince, self-enslaved Cinderella, doomed to a mad, perpetual housekeeping inextricably linked with sexuality:

She used to tell her neighbours that if there were no men there would be no housework. When Mrs. Archie was first married, she had been always in a panic for fear she would have children. Now that her apprehensions on that score had grown paler, she was almost as much afraid of having dust in the house as she had once been of having children in it. If dust did not get in, it did not have to be got out, she said. . . . She liked to have her house clean, empty, dark, locked, and to be out of it — anywhere. (33-34)

House becomes womb; dust, sperm; and domesticity, a frantic effort to deny personal sexuality and assure that there will *be* no family to demand maternal comforts. Consequently, Mrs. Archie's creative powers as a woman are limited to delivering to church charities "the little, lop-sided cake . . . the cheapest pincushion, the skimpiest apron" (84), all emblems of perverted domesticity.

This pattern of woman-centered imagery used to show Mrs. Archie's distorted womanhood is continued to her death. Commenting that "The poor woman's fight against dust was her undoing at last," Cather tells us that "One summer day when she was rubbing the parlor upholstery with gasoline . . . an explosion occurred. . . . She must have inhaled the burning gas and died instantly" (389).⁴ It is *fire* — usually associated with passion and intense emotion — that kills Mrs. Archie, the woman who had "skimp[ed] the doctor in heat"; however, Mrs. Archie's own fire comes not from sexual or artistic passion but from a desperate effort to sanitize her house/womb. As Belle White, she had been the epitome of femininity that had attracted male attentions, but as Mrs. Archie her obsessive efforts to sanitize herself of those attentions, and keep the house/womb "clean, empty, dark, locked," are ultimately self-destructive.

(Continued on Next Page)

WOMANHOOD DISTORTED (Continued)

The example of Mrs. Archie's life and marriage poses the perfect foil to Thea's artistic passion. In revisiting the imagery of food, fire, flower, house, and birth in connection with Thea's artistic passion, Cather suggests by contrast that marriage alone can never be the fulfillment of Thea's femininity. Unlike Mrs. Archie, Thea's determination and "fierce ambition" is directed to her art, the "one aggressive action" of her life. Dr. Archie, mindful of how his wife has "withered up" since their marriage, repeatedly warns Thea to have goals other than a Moonstone marriage, and he warns Thea's father that if Thea is to stay in the town, "She'll either get warped, or *wither up* before her time" (151 emphasis mine). But rather than shrink in stature, Thea is "augmented" by the passion of her art (371), becoming "much handsomer" and "enriched" (442). As her future husband, Fred Ottenburg, predicts, "Marriage would be an incident, not an end with her" (340). Indeed, their marriage is only briefly noted in the novel's epilogue, and in the 1937 revisions of the novel, Cather makes the marriage seem even more incidental by revealing it only with a parenthetical reference to Ottenburg as "her husband" (415).⁵



Dr. George Day (left), University of Northern Iowa, chaired the selection committee of the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship (\$8,000 over a four-year period). Pictured with him are scholarship winner Elicia Kaplan from Lincoln, Nebraska, and her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Sandy Kaplan. — Photo Courtesy of Beverly Cooper

The growth of Thea's artistic powers parallels the emergence of her sexuality. While Mrs. Archie's frigidity is expressed by skimmed milk, it is with a reference to Thea's white shoulders and arms — as white "as if they had been dipped in new milk" (224) — that Mrs. Kronborg first begins to notice her daughter's physical maturity and concludes with pleasure that Thea's body was "highly charged with the desire to live" (224). Such energy is cultivated when Thea spends time in Panther Canyon, the garden of the ancient people, where "music had never come to her in that sensuous form before" (300). The canyon landscape, which Ellen Moers says is plainly sexual" (259),⁶ expresses Thea's own artistic passion and foreshadows the sexual awakening she experiences there:

Long, thin streaks of light began to reach quiveringly down into the canyon. The red sun rose rapidly above the tops of the blazing pines, and its glow burst into the gulf, about the very doorstep on which

Thea sat. It bored into the wet, dark underbrush. The dripping cherry bushes, the pale aspens, the frosty *piñons* were glittering and trembling, swimming in the liquid gold. (314)

This is a place that invites Thea to take her fill, to enjoy with abandon the sweetness of experience and, in turn, transform it into the passion of her art.

In addition to reinterpreting the image of Mrs. Archie in the garden, Cather repeats the image of housekeeping in Panther Canyon where Thea finds the houses of the ancient people have a natural order and "were clean with the cleanness of sun-baked, wind-swept places" (298). In the cliff houses, she experiences renewal, comfort, and "desire," a word used so consistently in the "Ancient People" section that it becomes like the insistent sound of the cicadas Thea hears or the continuous beating of Indian drums she imagines, a desire for artistic fulfillment and understanding. In the ruins of these houses, she finds the scattered, broken pots, which communicate the dignity of those ancient artists and the necessity of her own art: "Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art!" (321). For Thea, the cliff houses empower her art by providing a welcome refuge and a place where "the seed of sorrow, and of so much delight is planted" (305), where she can, as Andor Harsanyi had told her, make herself "born" again as an artist (175). In this canyon, too, Thea's artistic passion begins to be associated with fire, as when she reaches up in the cliff house to flake off the evidence of cooking fires from the rock roof and realizes that "they were that near!" (302); from that time on, Thea's performances are consistently described in terms of fire. In a characterization reminiscent of Mrs. Archie's demise, Fred Ottenburg notes that Thea "could be expansive only in explosions" (442); Thea's fire, however, leads to her victory and exultation, not to her destruction.

In Thea's triumphant performance at the end of the novel, Cather describes the passion and "explosive force" (477) of her performance with many of those same images once used to describe Mrs. Archie's distorted womanhood:

She had only to touch an idea to make it live. While she was on the stage she was conscious that every movement was the right movement, that her body was absolutely the instrument of her idea. Not for nothing had she kept it so severely, kept it filled with such energy and fire. All that deep-rooted vitality flowered in her voice, her face, in her very finger-tips. She felt like a tree bursting into bloom. And her voice was as flexible as her body; equal to any demand, capable of every *nuance*. With the sense of its perfect companionship, its entire trustworthiness, she had been able to throw herself into the dramatic exigencies of the part, everything in her at its best and everything working together. (478)

The power of creation, the self-awareness of sensual body, passionate fire, flowering voice and its "perfect companionship" are all discovered not by the "determination" and "fierce little ambition" by which

Belle White Archie had so single-mindedly attained the fairy tale marriage that warps, diminishes, and destroys her, but they are achieved through Thea's devotion to art and result in Thea's fulfillment as "somebody with *enough!* Enough voice and talent and beauty, enough physical power. And such a noble, noble style!" (476).

NOTES

¹Letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, March 15, 1916. Marilyn Berg Callander has recently studied the fairy tale structures of *The Song of the Lark* and called Mrs. Archie "a stock fairy-tale character, a kind of woman ogre" who "burns to death in witch fashion" (17).

²Unless otherwise noted, all references are to the Bison Press reprint of the 1915 edition.

³Dr. Archie only finds complete domestic comfort after Mrs. Archie's death when his housekeeping is done by three Japanese *boys* who, unlike their predecessor, were "devoted and resourceful, who were able to manage Dr. Archie's dinner parties, to see to his engagements, and to make visitors who stayed at the house so comfortable that they were always loath to go away" (389).

⁴Mildred Bennett believes that in addition to Dr. G. F. McKeeby as prototype for Dr. Archie, McKeeby's wife, similar to Mrs. Archie in character and disposition, also served as Cather's model for Mrs. Archie (209). However, as Kari Ronning, Assistant Editor for the Cather Scholarly Edition, has pointed out to me, the circumstances of Mrs. Archie's death may well have been patterned after the death of Red Cloud's Mrs. Cook, well-respected wife of pharmacist Dr. Henry Cook, who was another important influence on young Cather's fascination with medicine. Mrs. Cook died from burns suffered in a household explosion when she was heating a liquid containing alcohol in the house and it suddenly "took fire," as the Webster County *Argus* reports on May 22, 1913 — the same spring that the idea for *The Song of the Lark* was taking shape in Cather's mind. The details of the accident were front page news in both the *Argus* and the *Red Cloud Commercial Advertiser*, and the news was undoubtedly passed on to Cather by her parents. My thanks to Kari for this historical note.

⁵In the 1915 edition, the epilogue does describe Thea descending a stair in a fairy tale-like "wedding robe embroidered in silver, with a train so long it took six women to carry it" (487); however, the description remains deliberately ambiguous because we can never tell for certain if the description is of Thea's own wedding to Fred, the "beer prince," or of Thea performing as Elsa in Act III of *Lohengrin*.

⁶Moers points in particular to the passage that describes the "long horizontal groove" of the canyon (*Song* 297-298) as being one of the first truly feminine landscapes in American literature (256-259).

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The Nebraska State Historical Society's Grace Episcopal Church (the Cather's church) in Red Cloud provided a beautiful setting for the Kugler-Guerriere wedding in September. You don't need to be an Episcopalian or a member of the church to use it for a ceremony or service.

Saying "Goonight" to "Lost" Ladies: An Inter-textual Interpretation of Allusions to Hamlet's Ophelia in Cather's *A Lost Lady* and Eliot's "The Waste Land"

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OPHELIA *I hope all will be well. We must be patient, but I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him i' th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it, and so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach. Good night ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night.*

EXIT

Hamlet, Act 4, Scene 5

*You are a proper fool, I said. 162
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot
gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it
hot —*

(Continued on Next Page)

INTER-TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

(Continued)

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May.

Goonight.

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Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

"The Waste Land" (A Game of Chess)

". Come, my coach!

Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies;

Good night, good night."

A *Lost Lady*, epigraph



Allusion permits an author to highlight an inter-textual relation. In particular with Willa Cather, as John J. Murphy notes, her "intriguing method of allusions and juxtaposition, while apparently natural and sometimes even invisible to the casual reader, can be as provocative as Melville's and T.S. Eliot's" (77). Murphy's own reference to Eliot is felicitous here, for the allusions that this article examines are coincidental in the epigraph to Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) and the final lines in "A Game of Chess" from Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922). While the works are dissimilar in many ways, through these allusions they have in common a portrayal of women and their sexuality in contemporary British and American society.



Cather's 1936 statement in her Prefatory Note to *Not Under Forty* that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" allies her to other modernist writers who similarly envisioned a fracturing of society in the early twentieth century. Cather's statement is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's declaration that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (Kelley 1), in that it postulates a date beyond which the world, human character, society itself irrevocably changed. Eliot felt this as well, calling contemporary history an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" in his 1923 *Dial* essay on *Ulysses*. In line 22 of "The Waste Land" Eliot uses the phrase "A heap of broken images," which calls to mind a breaking, a shattering of that which existed previously, in this case, society (Cather's "world"). All of these catchy phrases ("the world broke in two," "human character changed," "a heap of broken images") are indicative of a collective notion of change and dissolution. Cather's own notion of the world breaking in two in 1922, in particular, was perhaps influenced through contemporary literature, which itself was breaking from more 'traditional' notions of writing.

Given that year's publication of both *Ulysses* and "The Waste Land," Cather may have been referring to a crisis in literature as well as society at large.

While literary allusions to Shakespeare are far from uncommon (and recur in different forms throughout *A Lost Lady* and "The Waste Land"), the fact that Cather's and Eliot's allusions are to the exact same lines from Ophelia's parting speech in *Hamlet* is quite striking. Chronologically the two works mesh well enough to allow the possibility that Cather appreciated Eliot's allusion and decided to appropriate it for herself. Eliot's poem was published in *The Dial* on 20 October 1922, well before January 1923, when Cather began "to put the finishing touches on her novel" (Woodress 337). Cather would have had ample opportunity to remove or change her epigraph before the spring serialization or the September publication of her novel, but apparently she felt no need to. Is it possible that Cather was having a "literary conversation," as Merrill Maguire Skaggs has termed it, with T.S. Eliot? Surely, as an especially avid devotee of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* in particular, Cather would have recognized Eliot's allusion to Ophelia's lines. It is not improbable that she kept or actually added her epigraph because of Eliot's poem, thus making her allusion at once to a source (*Hamlet*) and to another allusion ("The Waste Land").

The placement of the allusions to Shakespeare within the respective texts differs, and this bears upon the meaning implied. Ophelia's speech in *Hamlet* is one of her last — she exits after her "good night," returns in the same scene (4.5.154) to bestow flowers and sing once again before her final exit (4.5.195) and subsequent drowning (reported by Gertrude 4.7.166-182). It is, in effect, her parting speech. In "The Waste Land," these "Shakespearean" lines are also used in a valedictory fashion, for they conclude the "goo" nights of the pub. The people in the pub are parting as well, and their talk, interrupted by the insistent "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" of the pub keeper, concludes with the narrator's voice alluding to *Hamlet*, strangely interweaving the drinker's good wishes with the words of a girl gone mad. Cather's allusion, in contrast, is not placed with the parting of characters, as Shakespeare's and Eliot's uses are. Instead, she uses the lines as an epigraph — a valediction at the commencement.

Compare Cather's epigraph to Eliot's. Eliot takes his from Trimalchio's *Satyricon*; it is in Latin and Greek, and Southam translates it as: "For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she answered, 'I want to die'" (71). Two major themes are raised by these epigraphs. First, the treatment of women: Ophelia has been used as a pawn to try to manipulate Hamlet, and other characters control her life. She regains control, tragically, through her madness and suicide. The Sibyl, as well, is being controlled by men (in an extreme, torturous form) and she too wishes to end her subjection through death.

In both cases, women wish to escape from the situations in which they are entrapped.

The suppression of women in the epigraphs evokes the protagonist of *A Lost Lady*, Marian Forrester, who always remains financially dependent upon men and is disturbingly idealized by Niel Herbert's vision of her as "a bird caught in a net" (61). "The Waste Land" also portrays women in subordinate roles to men; for example, in the passage immediately preceding the allusion to Ophelia in "A Game of Chess," Lil is depicted as dependent upon her husband Albert, who wishes to have sex with her, not realizing the toll that a recent abortion has taken on her body. Both epigraphs indicate that the treatment (suppression) of women will be a part of the respective works. The next question is that of intelligibility: Eliot's epigraph is literally Greek and Latin, but proverbially Greek to most people, thus immediately introducing an element of foreignness and distance to the poem. In contrast, Cather's epigraph reads in understandable English. Yet Eliot's epigraph can easily be translated with a guide, and Ophelia's speech is not so clear in its implications (how does one interpret the words of an insane woman?). Both epigraphs are intelligible and, at once, undefined/open to interpretation. Both epigraphs inform us that these texts must be interpreted, and at the very least their allusions require scrutiny.

Is Cather's epigraph meant to further emphasize the 'lost' nature of the 'lady' of the novel's title — perhaps even to a loss of rationality? Or are we supposed to be sympathetic with an Ophelia, having been used by men, who finds her own method of escape? The ambiguity of this allusion is intentional, just as Cather's title, seemingly simple, leads us to question, what is a lady? what does it mean to be lost? and, possibly most importantly, to whom was the lady lost? When Ophelia addresses Horatio, Gertrude, and Claudius in this scene, Claudius responds to her as "Pretty lady" (41) and "Pretty Ophelia!" (56). Though these terms can be interpreted as affection, it is fairly clear that they reflect a view that Claudius holds of Ophelia as a trivial, inferior woman. By emphasizing her 'prettiness' twice, he de-emphasizes any complex feelings that she may be having. This trivialization of women by men is remarkably similar to the way that Marian Forrester is treated in *A Lost Lady*, for the men in the novel continually attempt to limit her experience to their physical attraction for her.

Sexuality lies beneath the surface in each of these three works. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia is used by Claudius and Gertrude in an attempt to manipulate Hamlet via sexuality. Hamlet rejects her, responds to her sexuality with great distaste, and moves towards sexual abstinence. It is only through Ophelia's death that she is repurified for Hamlet, and he is freed to love her and achieve his own revenge. This logic — that to remain 'pure' (untainted by sexuality) one must die — seems at first very twisted, but in actuality, it is entirely consistent, for it is an ideal that can only be achieved through idealism and not through actual human existence. For

a lover to remain pure, the lover must be eliminated. Besides Hamlet's frustration with the female eroticism of Ophelia, there is also the sexuality of his mother, Gertrude. We learn early that Hamlet is disgusted with the rapidity with which his mother wedded Claudius and bedded him in "incestuous sheets" (1.2.138-158), and throughout the play Hamlet makes sarcastic references in obvious disgust to his mother's sexual relations with his uncle.

Ophelia is used as a sexual pawn relative to Hamlet, and by calling her a whore and ordering her to a nunnery he is "reinforcing earlier lessons about her appropriate role as a chaste sex object . . . projecting onto her his anxiety about his mother's sexuality" (Neely 103). She is in a terrible bind among the roles which she is called upon to play: a temptress, to try and investigate Hamlet; a lover, to whom Hamlet once wrote and with whom he was supposedly in love; and finally, an object of misogynist derision by Hamlet. In each case, whether she is offering herself as a nubile lover or is condemned to an ascetic life, it is a role determined by sexuality and defined and controlled by men.

The final sexual reference in *Hamlet* of importance here is the allusion to abortion. Although Ophelia's distribution of flowers (4.5.174-5, 177-181) is usually, and fruitfully, interpreted as symbolizing emotions and character traits of the people who receive them, these flowers were also, in Shakespeare's time, "well-known abortifacients and emmenagogues," darkening the scene significantly (Monteiro). As aides to abortion, these flowers become a final rejection of sexuality, an anti-sexuality that is contrary to a traditional comedic theme of life-production (and thus in accord with the anti-union, anti-life tradition of the tragic); they can also be viewed as a woman's (Ophelia's) liberation of her body and her sexuality, a control of reproduction which will prevent economic dependence upon men in order to support children. This second interpretation is particularly relevant to Ophelia's situation in *Hamlet*: until now, she has been a sexual pawn of men in the play, yet finally she has achieved (at least symbolically) a sexual independence.

"The Waste Land," too, explores sexuality, as I. A. Richards noted: "it illuminates his [Eliot's] persistent concern with sex" (151). Especially in "A Game of Chess," women are continually portrayed as subservient to male domination through sexuality. Even the majority of the allusions to women in "A Game of Chess" — Cleopatra, Eve, Dido, Philomela, Ophelia, Imogen — are to "doomed women" who "exist as adjunct to male power and as victims of it. Aspects of all of them are distributed throughout the composite portrait of a lady presented by 'A Game of Chess'" (Brooker 115). Though the objection can be made that many of these women were extremely powerful, for we power must be examined within a male context, for we think of all of these women in relation to males. It is only through their manipulation of a male-centered

(Continued on Next Page)

INTER-TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

(Continued)

world, whether political, economic, or sexual, that they can attain influence, and even when they do attain status, its continuation is dependent on further male support. Ophelia, like Eliot's pub women, is a victim of "betrayed or brutalized love" (Williams 53). In general, "A Game of Chess," both through its allusions and its depictions of women, reveals Eliot's awareness of the inequitable position of woman in society, from its beginning (Eve) to Eliot's present (lower-class women speaking in a British pub).

As Ophelia is constructed as an innocent sexual object to be manipulated by Claudius or scorned by Hamlet, the women in the British pub in "A Game of Chess" are viewed (and, in fact, view themselves) as sexual objects. One woman addresses her friend, whose husband Albert is returning from the First World War:

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he
gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
(142-149)

The woman speaking has internalized masculine notions of feminine beauty, sexuality, and submissiveness. She emphasizes the idea that Lil is unattractive to Albert, and that she must beautify herself in order to retain him through her sexuality. She also reinforces the ideas that a man deserves to have sexual favors whenever desired, and that women need to compete with each other to hold men with their sex ("Others can pick and choose if you can't" [154]). Finally, she states her own notions of marriage, in which the husband has a right to have sex with his wife and the wife is foolish for thinking that marriage could be anything else: "You are a proper fool, I said. / Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, / What you get married for if you don't want children?" (162-4). In all, she advocates continuation of a patriarchal system of marriage and, in general, male-female relations in which the male has control over the women, especially in the realm of sexuality.

Lil is criticized for even considering a small semblance of independence from Albert. In fact, it is really no independence at all. She, at age thirty-one, is already physically expended by five pregnancies, one of which nearly killed her. In order to avoid further suffering and possible death, she has taken the money Albert gave her to purchase new teeth (to beautify herself for his pleasure) and gotten an abortion. As a result, despite the chemist's assurances that "it would be all right," she's "never been the same" (161). Like the barren wasteland myth, in which the land becomes

infertile through the sins of the males, Lil has suffered further physiological harm due to her husband's insensitivity, and she will probably suffer further emotional harm because she has not spent *his* money to please him (though, of course, she used it to pay for the effects of having already pleased him, and she continues to pay for those effects through the physical toll on her body). The relation of this scene to the parting lines of Ophelia, which immediately follow are short reminders of the situation of women (and their sexuality) in a society that continues to be (from 1600 to 1922 to the present) overtly and subtly oppressive of women.

Cather's *A Lost Lady* is similarly concerned with the effects of a patriarchal marriage system which encourages, if not forces, women into submissive roles to men through economic power and social norms. Marian Ormsby, though she strives for independence, is continually within the realm of a male-centered world. When she is young, she is engaged to a rich man who is murdered. She is carried down from a mountain accident by Captain Daniel Forrester, soon her husband. Many years later, after Captain Forrester dies, she uses her sexuality to influence the greedy local lawyer, Ivy Peters. When she finally gets enough money to leave Sweet Water for California and eventually Buenos Aires, she marries for the last time, a rich Englishman whose name is Henry Collins. She dies married, and throughout the novel we see her in positions where she must respect and submit to male authority.

The sexuality in the novel is filtered through the young Niel Herbert. Katherine Nichols notes, "like Hamlet (and the novel's epigraph referring to that drama invites comparison), Niel will feel his entire world is out-of-joint when he loses his 'mother' to the sexual woman" (190). The comparison between Niel and Hamlet is very apt: just as Hamlet seems to want a world in which virginity and innocence can be maintained by his lover and mother, Niel wishes to keep himself and those around him he admires free from sexuality. As a boy, Niel "resolved to remain a bachelor" and he observes an almost "monastic cleanliness and severity" (17). His own sexual desires can be controlled and sublimated into literature: Cather notes, almost wryly, that Niel reads *Don Juan*, *Tom Jones*, and the *Heroides*, all examples of idealistic love quests and correspondences. At first, his ideal of celibacy is upheld by his father and mother figures in the novel, Captain and Mrs. Forrester, for they sleep in separate bedrooms and their relationship seems devoid of sensuality. But when Marian Forrester has sexual relations with Frank Ellinger and, apparently, Ivy Peters, Niel is disgusted. Like Hamlet, the absence of the father results in a revulsion with the mother's concupiscence.

These associations are all suggested by the epigraph's allusion to *Hamlet*, but there are more direct connections with Ophelia and her speech itself. While Marian Forrester can be seen as a Gertrude, it is

also helpful to examine her as an Ophelia to Niel's Hamlet. Throughout *A Lost Lady*, it is clear that Niel wishes to idealize Marian Forrester as a woman who does not indulge in sensual sexuality. He tells her that she always seems the same to him, which is "Lovely. Just lovely" (20). He sees her beauty as that of "a bird caught in a net" (61), and thus her sexual vivacity is restrained metaphorically in captivity. When he discovers her affair with Frank, he thinks "it was not a moral scruple she had outraged, but an aesthetic ideal" (48). Essentially, he wishes to aestheticize her in order to protect his own consciousness from sexuality, much like Hamlet cannot stand the sexuality of Ophelia. Both Niel and Hamlet try to transform their objects of desire into transcendent, sexually innocent ideals of female love. Hamlet commands Ophelia to a nunnery, but Niel wishes to go even further: "It was what he most held against Mrs. Forrester; that she was not willing to *immolate herself*, like the widow of all those great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged; that she preferred life on any terms" (95; emphasis added). Hamlet achieves his perfection of love through Ophelia's death, and in a way, Niel does, too, since Marian Forrester Collins is removed from him through geographic distance and, eventually, death. Both can lament the end of lovers whose sexuality they so despised when these lovers were still alive. Cather herself wrote of Hamlet: "Anyone else would have married Ophelia" ("Shakespeare" 430), but Hamlet obviously cannot, and only by driving her to suicide can he appreciate her for what she was. Similarly, because Niel cannot accept Marian Forrester for who she is, he loses "the promise of an ever-blooming joy possessed by Marian and by the Captain through his lovely wife," only to fondly appreciate his memory of her when he learns that she is dead (Nichols 196).

All three texts, then, examine how women are placed in the social world and how they try to work themselves out of constraining relationships with men. Obviously, by focusing on these aspects I cannot pursue a comprehensive study of the inter-textual relations; I've ignored the flower imagery in all three works (play, poem, novel), and I haven't even mentioned the obvious "Death By Water" relations between Ophelia's drowning, Eliot's Part IV of "The Waste Land," and Marian's dangerous journey over a raging river during a storm in order to contact Frank Ellinger. But no examination of these allusions could ever be complete, and therein lies the enjoyment of interpreting similar references in different works.

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CORRECTION

I need to correct an assertion made by Dalma H. Brunauer in her 1993 essay "Teaching Willa Cather in Japan" (*WCPMN* 17:24-27) and one I cited in my 1992-93 bibliographical essay (*WCPMN* 18:1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14-15). My citation reads, "She [Brunauer] talks about her discovery of Cather as a junior at the University of Budapest, where she completed her Masters in 1947, thus qualifying her, she says, as the first student at a Hungarian university to write a thesis on an American author and also the first in the world to complete a thesis on Cather." I hesitantly doubted her claim but unfortunately did not research it. I know now that Brunauer's thesis could not have been the first, and I retract my statement with apologies to Marion Marsh Brown, who wrote her Master's thesis on Cather at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1929, almost twenty years before Brunauer's endeavor. Marion Marsh Brown has long been known to Cather folks for the two books on Cather she co-authored with Ruth Crone: *Willa Cather: The Woman and Her Works* (1970) and *Only One Point of the Compass: Willa Cather in the Northeast*.

— Virgil Albertini, *WCPMN* Bibliographer

Coming Home from Troy: Cather's Journey into Pessimism in *My Mortal Enemy*

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In the final pages of Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, Mrs. Wheeler voices melancholy relief at her son's death in World War I: "He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more" (390). In a world which shatters idealism perhaps death is preferable for those who "hoped and believed too much" (390), those who believe the world to be a better place than it can ever be. But need every idealistic hero play the role of a modern Achilles? Must every hopeful youth forsake the voyage home and, in order to avoid disillusionment as Achilles avoids dishonor, ask of death, "And let me fall . . . I cast all hope of my return away"? (Homer, 18.136-140). Cather seems intrigued by this question, and in *One of Ours* she creates a young hero who chooses to follow Achilles; in *My Mortal Enemy*, however, she proposes an alternative answer. The protagonists of both novels begin with the same romantic notions and attempt to enrich the world with them, yet, while Claude Wheeler must die in order to escape a confrontation between his idealism and the reality of a prosaic world, Myra Henshawe survives to experience inevitable disillusionment and resolve the dichotomy between her ideals and reality. In this context *My Mortal Enemy* can be read as Cather's depiction of one possible mode of survival for the idealist who has the misfortune (or good fortune) to live a fairy tale youth in a world which destroys fairy tales. Over the course of the novel, Myra proceeds through the stages of life from an ascending figure of idealism and personal power, through a period of disillusionment, and finally succumbs to the realization that youth is ignorance and "in age we lose everything" (Cather, *Enemy* 105). In realizing the futility of life, however, Myra attains what is, perhaps, the only incorruptible happiness which Cather believes the world has to offer — the peace of denial.

An approach to both novels, a conceptual framework through which to evaluate Cather's dramatizations of the above conflict, lies in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer. Although both begin from the premise that the world lacks intrinsic meaning for humanity and that people suffer from emptiness, the solutions which they propose oppose each other. Nietzsche suggests that when faced with a valueless world, one simply needs to create a value of one's own: life "evaluates through us when we



establish values" (55). Schopenhauer, on the other hand, suggests a philosophy of pessimism. While Nietzsche proposes to win the impossible game of life by destroying the dead idols of the past and creating new rules, Schopenhauer suggests that the answer is simply not to play. Nietzsche proposes activity while Schopenhauer proposes detachment. Although apparently intrigued by the Nietzschean position, Cather seems to question in *One of Ours* and *My Mortal Enemy* one's ability to create value in a world Schopenhauer describes as a "penal colony" (142).

With Claude Wheeler, for instance, Cather creates an unmistakable Nietzschean hero. Like Nietzsche's Hyperborean (127), who must live among men described by Nietzsche as "the domestic animal" (128), Claude feels disconnected from the world around him, from people who dissipate themselves on materialism and on spite. As a creature unfit for his declining world, Claude receives his salvation through the Nietzschean method — "Not contentment, but more power; not peace at all, but war" (128) — which, whether a physical battle or simply a state of non-complacency, brings action and increasing power. He confesses to David, "I never knew there was anything worth living for, till this war came on. Before that, the world seemed like a business proposition" (356). Claude naively believes that ideals are again "the real source of power among men" (357) and that the Great War will be a turning point in history for the ascending power of man. Fate is good to Claude. He dies with his belief in the power of ideals intact and manages to avoid the challenge of experience and reality. However, Claude's victory rings hollow as Cather expresses the inadequacies of his ideals, and Susan Rosowski describes Claude as "a romantic caught in a nightmarish world of realism" (97). Instead of creating a Nietzschean world in which there are no dualities but only reality, Cather creates the dualistic, suffering-ridden world of the pessimist and peoples this world with a blind Nietzschean hero. Cather asks the question, "What would a life be if subject and object were forever separate?" (Rosowski 97), answering her query with the story of Claude, "a befuddled hero in a landscape of projected desires that turn to dust as he approaches" (107). While Claude may appear to be the Hyperborean as he stands on the courthouse steps lamenting a "waste of power" with his "tense figure copper-coloured in the oblique rays" (Cather 104) like the golden-helmeted Achilles, this deification of mortal power is only an illusion of the sun, and Claude's mode of coping with the world offers the reader little solace.

Having posited a world which can neither be reconciled with nor dominated by human ideals, Cather tries another approach in *My Mortal Enemy*. Like Claude Wheeler, Myra Henshawe begins as powerfully life-affirming, a "brilliant and attractive figure" whose existence is "exciting and varied" (10), a fairy tale of love that "gave the dare to Fate" (25). Once dared, however, Fate is not kind to Myra. In *My Mortal*

Enemy, as in *One of Ours*, Cather poses the question: "Was it not better to get out of the world with such pomp and dramatic splendour than to linger on in it, having to take account of shirts and railway trains, and getting a double chin into the bargain?" (27). Cather creates Myra Henshawe as an answer, as an Achilles who does go home and come to terms with the realities of a world devoid of purpose and providence, which forces one to realize that "We were never really happy" (91).

The novel can be divided into three different meetings between the Henshawes and Nellie Birdseye. In the first Nellie establishes Myra as a hero of the Nietzschean type. However, even as Nellie recounts Myra's glorious youth, the elements of pessimism assert themselves, most obviously in the disparity between illusion and reality. The reader meets Myra through Nellie, whose childhood conceptions of Myra's "runaway marriage" (9) are as naive as Myra's own vision of the world must have been once upon a time. Nellie wraps the story in the garments of a fairy tale, envisioning the Driscoll estate as "under a spell, like the Sleeping Beauty's palace" (25). However, Cather challenges this romanticized image. Where once Venus ruled, now nuns pace "so mildly and measuredly," and the "chanting of devotions and discipline, and the tinkle of little bells . . . seemed forever calling the Sisters in to prayers" (25). Superimposed upon the scene of Myra's wild escape from her uncle's control and her assertion of self-possession are the visions of the denial of earthly pleasures and personal desires achieved through the discipline of the church. Mild and measured, these nuns are perpetually called to forget themselves and earthly desires and to turn their thoughts toward God and the spiritual needs of others. Thus, even in remembrance Myra's strongest Nietzschean assertion is marred by reality and self-denial.

The dissipating effects of time, Schopenhauer's harbingers of disillusionment, become apparent in the initial meeting between Nellie and Myra. Gravity and age have gained their foothold, and Nellie discovers Myra to be a "short, plump woman . . . beginning to have a double chin" (11-12) and hair streaked with "glistening white" (12). In "The Vanity of Existence" Schopenhauer writes, "The scenes of our life are like pictures done in rough mosaic. Looked at close, they produce no effect. There is nothing beautiful to be found in them, unless you stand some distance off" (148). Through the distortion of time and distance, Myra Henshawe appears to Nellie as a mythical princess, but viewed face to face and twenty-five years after the conception of the legend, Nellie cannot help "feeling a little disappointed" (27). This disappointment mirrors Myra's realization that having attained the long-sought Oswald, the two were only "as happy as most people" (25). Both women learn a prominent tenet of the pessimists philosophy.

This disillusionment is hardly new in Cather, however: Claude also began as a youth filled with power and desire but then found that his dreams, once

attained, crumbled. Not until the second meeting between Nellie and Myra does Cather begin to deviate from the pattern of *One of Ours*. While Claude dies without fully realizing that the world offers no hope to the dreamer, Myra survives to be fully disillusioned. During her visit to New York, Nellie begins to see the strain of Myra's struggle, that the woman who gave up a fortune to marry the man she loved "with nothing but her muff and her *porte-monnaie* in her hands" (23) realizes in middle-age that her romantic notions were delusions which cannot be sustained, that Oswald is indiscreet with other women and that the romantic dream is over. As Schopenhauer writes, "In early youth . . . we are like children in a theatre before the curtain is raised, sitting there in high spirits and eagerly waiting for the play to begin" (129). The two lovers Ewan and Esther, whom Myra aids in their love affair, seem to embody this analogy; like Myra and Oswald of twenty-five years before, this young couple believes love will overcome all. However, Myra has seen behind the curtain and realized Schopenhauer's conclusion: "It is a blessing that we do not know what is really going to happen. Could we foresee it, there are times when children might seem like innocent prisoners, condemned, not to death, but to life . . ." (129). Myra parrots this forewarning, explaining to Nellie, "You send a handsome fellow like Ewan Gray to find a girl like Esther, . . . and there isn't anybody, not a tramp on the park benches, that wouldn't wish them well — and very likely hell will come of it!" (41). While Nellie in youth believes that "winter brought no desolation; it was tamed, like a polar bear led on a leash by a beautiful lady" (35), Myra, approaching the winter of her own life, detects the inevitable disappointment beyond the beauty of the "white world" (41) surrounding the young lovers.

Yet Myra does not easily succumb to the pessimist's denial of the will. In New York, Myra is still a woman of high vitality and "insane ambition" (52). Realizing that the world is not the Mecca of happiness she had once imagined, she draws the cloak of Hyperborean tight and sets forth to create a pleasant and exciting world by the power of her own creativity. However, Cather remains faithful to the powerfully pessimistic world, and thus Myra's created world becomes transparent both to Nellie and the reader. Nellie realizes that most of Myra's friends are "artistic people — actors, musicians, literary men" (49), that Myra surrounds herself with people who, like herself, choose to live myths of their own creation. Among them, however, Myra is unhappy, for she must constantly augment their buoyancy in order to keep her created world afloat. Nellie notices that Myra's "account of her friends was often more interesting . . . than the people themselves" (51), and when visiting one of Myra's most idealized friends, a dying young poet, Nellie conceded that "it was Myra Henshawe herself who made that visit so memorably gay" (54).

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COMING HOME

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Myra strives to cushion herself in a bubble of interest in danger of bursting at any moment.

The shortcomings of the real world which offers no reason to exist and no compensation for pain are always evident. While Myra assumes "her loftiest and most challenging manner" (50) to meet with Oswald's wealthy business contacts, her bouyant persona is insufficient and the sight of a lady in a carriage sends her reeling into bitterness, "it's very nasty, being poor!" (53). Likewise, at the theater, a glimpse of a friend who has not fulfilled his expected role in Myra's scheme leaves her vulnerable to disillusioning reality. Nellie realizes "that she was suffering. The scene on the stage was obliterated for her" (56). Not only is the performance which Myra and Nellie are attending compromised, so also is the one Myra directs for her life. At the New Year's Eve party the precariousness of Myra's world again becomes apparent as an actor "arrived in his last-act wig, carrying his plumed hat [and] during the supper his painted eyebrows spread and came over his eyes like a veil" (57). As Schopenhauer suggests, "no one shows himself as he is, but wears his mask and plays his part" (164). But at Myra's party masks fall away, and Myra must run quickly, always "a little out of breath" (67) to keep her fictitious world from shattering at her feet.

At the final meeting between Nellie and Myra ten years after Nellie leaves her in New York, Myra has stopped running. Age and disease have incapacitated her and, no longer able to chase her ideals, she must come to term with the reality of her life. Nellie's description of Myra reveals her as one who knows the "desolating disappointment" Mrs. Wheeler feared for Claude (Cather, *Ours* 390), as one who has resolved the tension between youthful visions and the reality of age. Myra has begun the journey away from the delusions of her expectations of the world; she appears "strong and broken, generous and tyrannical, a witty and rather wicked old woman, who hated life for its defeats, and loved it for its absurdities" (80). She refers to herself as one already buried, "so safely hidden — in earth" (76), and turns her interests from temporal matters to other-worldly concerns, surrounding herself with fortune-tellers, crucifixes, and priests. Much debate surrounds Myra's apparent reconciliation to Christianity. John Murphy describes it as "somewhat ambivalent" (54) and Stephen Tanner insists that Myra does not, in fact, accept Christianity at all (30), asserting that "her final hours are no triumph but only a consummation of her romantically conditioned selfish willfulness" (30). To a pessimist Myra's complete acceptance of Christianity would be unlikely; however, one need not judge Myra so harshly as Tanner. To the pessimist religion would not be truth but a vehicle for truth — as Myra remarks, "*in religion seeking is finding*" (111). Whether scripture is the word of God or whether, as Schopenhauer suggests, there is no God

at all, in the practice of religion one turns one's thoughts away from oneself and toward the habitual consideration of others and a world beyond consciousness. In this denial of the apparent world, one finds solace.

In following the path Cather forges, through Myra, for the disillusioned idealist, a method, other than death, of responding to the world becomes evident. The reader must put aside the closed categories of theist and atheist and accept Myra's actions as motions of denial. While Tanner rebukes Myra for her selfishness in wishing to have kept her uncle's money (33), the pessimist might take note of Myra's motives and perceive transfigured desires. In her last days Myra lives with no delusions about herself and her life, as she explains to Nellie, "I was always a grasping, worldly woman; I was never satisfied" (104). Now Myra realizes the trap of lust and of man's insatiability; she wants money, not for the worldliness which motivated her in New York, but to serve the same purpose as religion, for "unearthly purposes" (102), as "a cloak" to "buy quiet, and some sort of dignity" (83).

Likewise, Myra's wish to reconcile with her uncle need not represent the substitution of greed for lust in a hierarchy of flaws. Myra announces one of the basic truths of the life of denial in explaining the affinity she feels toward her uncle in her old age: "as we grow old we become more and more the stuff our forebears put into us" (98), echoing Schopenhauer's "your individuality is not your true and inmost being: it is only the outward manifestation of it" (159). Beyond the blindness of consciousness, Schopenhauer envisions a world where the force of life spreads equally throughout all beings and the separation and individuality among them is only apparent. Myra expresses such a belief to Nellie: "We think we are so individual and so misunderstood when we are young; but the nature our strain of blood carries is inside there, waiting, like our skeleton" (98-99). Myra's preoccupation with her uncle as well as her regression to the Irish dialect of her forebears (106) represent a milestone on her journey toward peace. In surrendering her individuality, Myra allows the earthly realm and the passions consuming her to drift away. In this context the death scenes of Myra and her uncle take on new significance. Early in the novel Nellie describes John Driscoll's funeral as an act of incorporation into a larger body than personal salvation: "They surrounded, they received, they seemed to assimilate into the body of the church, the body of old John Driscoll" (26). Myra longs for the same release into a larger universe. In the course of Nellie's visits with her in California, Myra slowly relinquishes her sensual ties, avoids external stimuli as she is "acutely sensitive to sound and light" (86), and finds comfort in masses for the dead (102). When Myra pronounces her terrible statement, "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?" (113), the reader can reasonably assume her "mortal" enemy is not only a foe unto death, but the mortal realm itself. Myra cannot attain peace until she rids herself completely

of the worldly lusts which, though thwarted, still threaten her.

Myra does, however, achieve Schopenhauer's happiness of release, the ability to say "My hour has come" (115) without regret or delusion and to proceed into a life of peace without pain (118). Her death, which occurs at a place she has christened Gloucester's cliff, duplicates her uncle's passage into the larger universe. It is significant that Myra's allusion to *King Lear* evokes a place where the blind and the "much deceiv'd" (Shakespeare 4.6.6) go to a death that is not death. Indeed, upon this cliff Myra, complete in her dissociation from the worldly and rid of her mortal enemy at last, rejoins nature. In the end, by focusing on denial, Myra succeeds in coming home from Troy and finding peace in a place without heroes. Thus, perhaps fate is not so cruel to Myra, for she achieves a peace untainted by the delusions of youth and ambition. Unlike Oswald, who continues to believe that he and Myra were "happier than it falls to the lot of most mortals to be" (121), she proves herself to be braver than even Achilles in that she returns from the battlements of youth to face the horror of an unkind world and, in the end, accepts the vanity of her life with dignity.

In its place in the Cather canon, *My Mortal Enemy* delivers Cather's final blow to the doomed Nietzschean and endorses the detachment Professor St. Peter describes in *The Professor's House* as "let[ting] something go" (282), as learning "to live without delight" (282) while feeling "the ground under his feet" (283). *My Mortal Enemy* is a turning point in Cather's fiction, a final rejection of the life-affirmation of earlier characters and an embracing of the surrender of the will which enables the suffering Father Latour of *Death Comes to the Archbishop* to "[blot] himself out of his own consciousness and [meditate] upon the anguish of his Lord" (20). Claude Wheeler is, perhaps, the last of Cather's true individualistic heroes, and it is significant that he cannot survive. As the world of Cather's fiction grows increasingly dark, she turns away from life and finds peace in the apparent oblivion of the spiritual world; in *My Mortal Enemy* she documents the brutality of the transition from heroism to self-denial while maintaining that the transition can be made. A Claude or even an Achilles may return from the glory of the Nietzschean world but cannot carry it home and into the disillusionment of age.

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Pete Brown's Historic America tour group listens to WCPM guide Vicki Bush introduce the Burlington Railroad exhibit at the restored Burlington Depot.

The Subversive Language of Flowers in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

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Willa Cather may have inherited from Sarah Orne Jewett the art of giving a voice to flowers rather than merely considering them as decorative contributions to the environment of female characters. In Jewett's fiction, a rose can begin an illumination, a moment of revelation that brings together past and present to the viewer in a tangible way. For example, in the short story "The Only Rose," Mrs. Bickford sees her three husbands and her life again when contemplating a rose, and this leaves her speechless: "The bright flower was like a face. . . it was not poverty of thought that made her speechless, but an over-



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SUBVERSIVE LANGUAGE

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burdening sense of the inexpressible" (220). Like Jewett, and possibly more than her, Willa Cather uses flowers to signify the unsaid that may not be voiced according to certain social and racial standards, and that only a careful observer can decipher and express subversively.¹

In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, flowers link past and present, the time of the story to that of the narration, and the narrator translates the "language" of Virginia's botanical heritage to express what characters may not. Cather partly uses conventions of the nineteenth century, a time when, as Beverly Seaton explains, "the language of flowers was understood to be a symbolic one. Books explaining the floral language were very popular. There was, however, not one official language of flowers; individual writers chose whatever plants and meanings they wished" (301-02), although most were limited by traditional values. In Cather's last novel, however, the names of flowers are not only more than nomenclature but constitute a real political discourse that the narrator uses to steer our approach to the Virginia of 1856. From the beginning of the novel, Cather makes clear that calling a flower by a certain name reveals race and social class, as for example, when we follow Rachel Blake in her morning walk:

She left the laundry and walked about the negro quarters to look at the multitude of green jonquil spears thrusting up in the beds before the cabins. They would soon be in bloom. "Easter flowers" was her name for them, but the darkies called them "smoke pipes," because the yellow blossoms were attached to the green stalk at exactly the angle which the bowl of their clay pipes made with the stem. (788)

This description gives the angle formed by the slaves' pipes with a nearly geometric precision, showing metaphorically how language structures the speaker's experience and delineates the field of perception. Every social and racial group has its own way of viewing and naming flowers, therefore the narrator determines the reader's viewpoint in her choice of botanical vocabulary. By saying explicitly that the choice of an expression reveals a frame, a particular vision, the narrator underlines the exclusive function of her language. Only the use of several lexical fields will enable her to avoid what Barthes calls "the fascism of language" (Tanner 240) and all her characters to express themselves freely, be they men or women, free or enslaved. I will analyze now how flowers build up a coded discourse on "dangerous" sexual innuendo questioning interracial relationships; demonstrate how, through a discourse on slavery, flowers become a means for a slave woman to express herself; and, finally, how the narrator includes the voices of free slave and women in her own speech through the use of flowers.

Flowers are the weapons that Lizzie, the cook, knows how to use against Nancy when she accuses her of bringing flowers to her master Henry Colbert:

"Runnin' down all times a-day and night, carryin' bokays to him. Oh, I seen you many a time! pickin' vi'lets an' bleedin' hearts an' hidin' 'em under your apron . . . an' you'se always down yonder when you'se wanted."

"'Tain't so! I always hurries. I jest stays long enough to dust the flour away dat gits over everything, an' to make his bed cumfa'ble fur him."

"Lawdy, Lawdy! An' you makes his bed cumfa'ble fur him? Ain't dat nice! I speck! Look out you don't do it once too many. Den it ain't so fine, when somethin' begin to show on you, Miss Yaller Face." (812)

The 'bleeding hearts' clearly carry sexual innuendoes and symbolize Nancy's virginity, which the cook thinks lost, while the violets symbolize unrevealed love in Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's 1829 *Flora's Dictionary*. Subsequently, in a less explicit if not more "innocent" way, the names of the flowers Nancy gathers for the master show a marked narrative subversion of contemporary racial standards.

Once, on a spring morning when the yellow Easter flowers (jonquils) were just bursting into bloom, she had gathered a handful on her way to the mill and put them in one of the copper tankards on the shelf

....
"Good morning, child. I wonder who brought me some smoke-pipes down here?"

Nancy's yellow cheeks blushed pink. (814)

Here the narrator starts from a white Virginian's viewpoint, calling daffodils "Easter flowers" and giving their standard botanic name in parenthesis for non-Virginian readers, but the miller chooses to call the flowers by the slaves' name for them ("smoke-pipes") when he speaks to Nancy. This shows an affirmative conception of language that puts both races on the same footing. Nancy, whose cheeks are described as being of the same color as the yellow flowers, blushes pink like a white woman, and the miller uses her vocabulary for flowers in an exchange of racial idiosyncrasies. The daffodils and their names develop an undercurrent on racial relationships between man and woman, master and slave in keeping with the symbolism of daffodils or "jonquils," which mean "I desire a return of affection" in Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary*.

Some flowers may be understood as symbolical representations of the slaves, and in her description of the slaves' quarter, the narrator implies that vines and creepers symbolize this people's plight:

The cabins, the laundry, and the big two-storey smokehouse were all draped with flowering vines, now just coming into leaf-bud: Virginia creeper, trumpet vine, Dutchman's pipe, morning-glories. But the south side of every cabin was planted with the useful gourd vine, which grew faster than any other creeper and bore flowers and fruit at the same time. In summer the big yellow blossoms kept unfolding every morning, even after the many little

gourds had grown to such a size one wondered how the vines could bear their weight. The gourds were left on the vine until after the first frost, then gathered and put to dry. When they were hard, they were cut into dippers for drinking, and bowls for holding meal, butter, lard, gravy, or any tidbit that might be spirited away from the big kitchen to one of the cabins. (789)

The gourd vine bears the burden of racial oppression. For their masters, the slaves' worth lies in the labor and productivity expressed in the metaphor of the gourd; however, the narrator suggests that the beauty of the gourd flower is not sullied by any material value or food traffic. The poetical application of cloth to the vines at dawn, in expressions such as "draped with flowering vines" and "the big yellow blossoms kept unfolding every morning," reveals value in the flowers themselves, other than in their fruit. If, indeed, the vines, their flowers and their fruit symbolize the slaves, they do so in a polysemia that goes beyond any "local color" consideration, suggesting both a utilitarian conception of human relationships and a gratuitous poetical dimension particular to the aesthetics of the slaves' quarter. The parallelism between the slaves and the plant is both a symbol and a political discourse on a forbidden subject in the South of 1856 — i.e. the emancipation of slaves.

When Sapphira and the "postmistress" exchange a stilted conversation, their political disagreement appears elliptically: "She and Mrs. Colbert greeted each other with marked civility. They held very different opinions on one important subject" (798), slavery, a disagreement which comes out behind their remarks on honeysuckle, also a creeper. The postmistress had to use radical methods to paint her house: "I had to tear down all my honeysuckle vines and lay them on the ground. I'm hoping they're not much hurt" (799). To give a new color to American society, the ties between masters and slaves will have to be severed just as radically, no matter what upheavals such a break will doubtless entail on both sides. The narrator may be hinting at such a struggle in this apparently non-committal remark. The depth of meaning in this coded conversation is contained in the choice of honeysuckle, which stands for "I would not answer hastily" in *Wirt's Dictionary*. And Mrs. Colbert's answer underlines the particular color of the postmistress's honeysuckle, which is not white: "They were a great ornament to your house, especially the coral honeysuckle" (799). Thus the narrator uses creepers and their flowers as a representation of the unsaid: an undercurrent of protest against slavery. Also, by her use of a poetical vocabulary in the word "ornament," she introduces the idea that new aesthetics might spring from the way the slaves look at their plants and their quarter, which is why the reader is invited to look at nature through the eyes of the young slave Nancy.

As the following passage illustrates, the narrator uses vegetation and the flowers to have the reader understand Nancy:

She tiptoed down the long hall and ran out into the flower garden. The sun was just coming up over the mountain. Fleecy pink clouds were scattered about the sky, and the distant hills had turned gold. . . . The tea roses and bleeding-hearts hung heavy, as if they would never rise again. (887)

Nature with its colors gradually gets closer to the character in moving from the pink color of clouds and the golden color of the hills to the deeper red of the bleeding-hearts, a sequence reflecting Nancy's state of mind, as her "golden" color (she is often called "the yellow girl") turns into that of a "bleeding-heart" when she is sexually harassed by Martin Colbert. The use of "would" in the clause "as if they would never rise again" indicates the unescapable aspect of her pain, expressed through the name of the flower. In this passage, the narrator involves the reader by using the second person to penetrate gradually into the character's mind and feel the sensuality of her emotions: "Nobody was stirring in the negro cabins; their overgrowth of trumpet vines and gourd vines was so wet that by running into them you could take a shower bath. It made your skin pretty, washing your face and arms in the dew" (887). This invitation to experience morning ablutions in the gourds' dew is a direct communion with nature such as the young slave experiences it and contributes to the reader's impression of the immediacy of the scene. The subsequent exclamation especially conveys Nancy's feelings:

Oh, this was a beautiful place! Nancy didn't believe there was a lovelier spot in the world than this right here. She felt so joyful that her heart beat as hard as it did last night when she was scared. She loved everybody in those vine-covered cabins, everybody. (887)

Nancy's joy is hyperbolic, celebrating the community of slaves under the symbol of the vine framed by the repetition: "She loved everybody in those vine-covered cabins, everybody."

When the narrator composes her speech with her character's, she reveals that Nancy speaks and thinks with the language of others and has made hers the religious discourse of her mistress's hymns, set in italics in the text: "And down yonder was the mill, '*and the Master so kind and so true.*' That was in a song Miss Sapphy used to sing before she got sick, and to Nancy those words had always meant Mister Henry" (887). We do not know whether the hymns are only applied to her life or if her life is inscribed in them as in a preset frame, but in her mind both are closely linked.

The narrator manipulates the language of her character, using flowers and their "language" to do so, to the point of making her say more than she thinks. When she mentions Nancy's love for the gourd, while drawing our attention to the fact that the Bible provides a frame for the slave's life, we are entitled to read the text as analogically referring to Jonah's gourd. Like Jonah, Nancy sees a protection in the gourd: "And

(Continued on Next Page)

SUBVERSIVE LANGUAGE (Continued)

the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd" (Jonah 4:6, *King James*). But God withdraws his protection from Jonah. In the same way, Nancy is forced from the vegetation of her childhood to escape to Canada. Her escape toward freedom is really an upheaval in her life but foreshadows a new era for her people.

Although Nancy seems unaware of it, the reader is made to understand that the ordeals she goes through bear a religious meaning. In the typological vision of the narrator, the flowers of the dogwood carry both her personal memory and a strange "wildness" that may come from another world:

Their unexpectedness, their singular whiteness, never loses its wonder, even to the dullest dweller in those hills. In all the rich flowering and blushing and blooming of a Virginia spring, the scentless dogwood is the wildest thing and yet the most austere, the most unearthly. (842)

This passage switches to the present tense so that the flowers connect the past with the present act of remembering in the same duration of the text and with a view to a future of permanence. The flowers take on a transcendental quality which makes them all the more symbolic as they stand outside of time. The name Virginia suggests that even if the blossoms are blushing, they will not be consummated or raped, will remain "unearthly" and virginal; significantly, dogwood means "I am perfectly indifferent to you" in Wirt's *Dictionary*.

In this novel, the symbolism of flowers aims at preserving nature from deflowering, just as Rachel Blake plans Nancy's escape to prevent her from being raped. The description of the countryside and its vegetation, when Rachel goes flower picking with her to protect her from Martin Colbert, can be read as a sustained metaphor of Nancy's body. The road curves between hills covered with bushes that represent pubic hair: "It was cut against gravelly hillsides bright with mica and thinly overgrown with spikes of pennyroyal, patches of rue, and small shrubs" (872). Wirt hears in the name "pennyroyal" the order to "flee away," while "rue" expresses "disdain." At the bottom of the ravine, the river is a sign of fecundity: "a mountain stream flowing clear at the bottom of a winding ravine" (873). And finally, the name of the place is "the Hollow . . . road." The description is of the virginity of the countryside, if we consider that there is a pun on "maidenhair" and "maidenhead": "Out of the damp moss between the exposed tree roots, where the shade was deep, the maidenhair fern grew delicately" (873). The narrator then voices her regret that the following generations did not preserve nature's virginity: "In the old times, when Nancy and Mrs. Blake were alive, and for sixty years afterwards, those now naked hills were rich in verdure, the winding ravine was deep and

green, the stream at the bottom flowed bright and soothingly vocal" (873). Cather's artistic aim as a narrator lies in recovering the language of nature in its virginal purity and in rendering authentically voices of the past. In capturing the wonder of the language of flowers as she sees it ("Their unexpectedness, their singular whiteness, never loses its wonder . . ." [842]), Cather connects to her characters in the present tense, which strengthens the reader's impression of seeing through the eyes of the character.

In Willa Cather's last novel, flowers take on a symbolical meaning which has its own language, its own codes, beside which those of the characters are more or less framed in the social, racial and sexual standards of their times. As Susan Rosowski argues, "When we look beyond the antebellum Virginia setting, we realize that Cather's last novel, long dismissed as escapist, may well be the most directly political of all her writing" (244). This is true also when we look *into* the botanical setting. Cather's flowers give a depth of meaning to the surface story and to the stories of the characters; they integrate the complex position of the author toward her Virginian heritage, in moments of communion with her characters.

NOTE

¹See Cynthia K. Briggs's different argument on the topic: "The Language of Flowers in *O Pioneers!*" *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter*. 30: 3 (Summer 1986), 29-33.

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CATHER SPRING CONFERENCE RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA — MAY 3-4, 1996

Featured Text: *My Mortal Enemy*

8-10 page papers invited on the featured novel and other aspects of Cather for May 3 sessions.

Abstracts due 1 February; completed papers due 1 April.

CONTACT: Bruce P. Baker, Department of English, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska 68182

Class of 1995: James Woodress Receives Honorary Doctorate of Letters

Elizabeth A. Turner
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

On Saturday, August 12, 1995, during summer graduation ceremonies Interim Chancellor Joan Lietzel presented James Woodress with an honorary doctorate of letters on behalf of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In her presentation Chancellor Lietzel acknowledged that Professor Woodress' doctorate was given:

in honor of his great contribution to scholarship which has advanced our understanding of one of Nebraska's greatest writers; in recognition of his long and distinguished career which is a model for others pursuing research in the humanities.



Pictured above from left to right: Chancellor Lietzel, Biographer Woodress, and Roberta Woodress.

Professor Woodress has devoted his scholarly career to the study of American literature, central to which has been a series of biographies of American writers, including two Cather biographies. *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (University of Nebraska Press, 1987), Woodress's second Cather biography, remains the basic biographical source for any study of Cather, making Professor Woodress known as "the Cather biographer." Also, his edition of Cather's first book of stories, *The Troll Garden*, is definitive, and his many essays on Cather have charted areas of research from discussions of textual changes in the revisions of *The Song of the Lark* to interpretations of Cather's connections to French writers.

The influence of Professor Woodress, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Davis, continues; he is the founder and editor of *American Literary Scholarship*, an expanded critical bibliography and review that has been a standard guide for almost thirty years. Currently, Professor Woodress serves as co-general editor of the Cather Scholarly edition, a

major research project sponsored by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's English Department and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He is also senior editorial advisor for *Cather Studies* (also published by the University of Nebraska Press).

My Father — Claude Wheeler?

Roy D. Laird
University of Kansas

Will Laird and his three brothers homesteaded on Oak Creek in 1871. They chose Oak Creek (Lovely Creek in *One of Ours*) because it was distinguished by being one of the very few creeks in that part of Nebraska with running water all year around and heavily wooded banks. The trees provided the lumber from which Will built "a good and substantial frame house," in which he reared two daughters and three sons, including Claude Ross Laird (1881-1947), the subject of this essay (Elizabeth Laird Fletcher [1873-1960], *The Laird Family History*). Beyond the Creek lie low rolling clay hills which, prior to the arrival of the sod-busters, were covered with native prairie grasses.

Will became a prominent citizen in Webster County; serving as a local judge and as a county supervisor (commissioner, now) in the 1880s and 1890s, he made frequent visits to Red Cloud. Local press accounts often referred to the Laird brothers. According to one account, they were "outstanding in Webster County history, [and their] exemplary lives meant so much to posterity and of course to the nation." Very likely, the brothers served as models for some of Cather's fictional pioneers. Will's brother Jimmie could well have been the physical prototype for Jim Laird in Cather's short story "The Sculptor's Funeral." Cather describes him as having "burly shoulders" and "an astonishing cataract of red beard that grew fiercely and thickly in all directions." Red hair was a distinguishing feature among the Lairds, including Claude before he became bald.

Like many of the pioneers Willa Cather wrote about, Will and Margaret Laird made great sacrifices to educate their children. All six finished high school in nearby Blue Hill, a village some ten miles north of Red Cloud. Also, most of the siblings had at least some college or university training and at the start of their careers taught school, only later to return to the land and farming. However, Claude (the second to youngest son) had other plans. In 1902, at the age of 21 Claude left the farm and worked his way through pre-med studies at the Kearney State Teachers College. Later (working nights in the Omaha railroad yards) he attended Creighton University Medical School, receiving his M.D. in 1913, when he returned to Blue Hill to set up general practice in Blue Hill.

(Continued on Next Page)

MY FATHER (Continued)

Dr. Claude was one of the last of the old-time country doctors. Perhaps most of the people for miles around Blue Hill are descendants of the babies brought into this world by Dr. Claude, a familiar figure wearing his bull-seal overcoat in winter and carrying his black doctor's bag. As with most of the towns in that part of the world, Blue Hill began as an ethnic gathering of folks from central and Northern Europe. Stromsberg was overwhelmingly Swedish. Deweese was Czech. Blue Hill was German. Claude learned German in high school and was fully accepted in the Blue Hill community. Sadly, he told stories (similar to accounts related by Willa Cather) of the German immigrants who were mistreated during World War I, because they could not cast off their love for "the Old Country." Sometimes gangs of ruffians came down from Hastings and beat up the Blue Hill "Kaiser lovers" and, sometimes for good measure, set fire to their barns or painted them yellow.

Given the prominence of his father Will in Webster County, there is every likelihood that Claude's and Willa's paths crossed many times before he went off to medical school. Clearly, sometime after 1913 Claude and Willa became more than just passing acquaintances. I have no personal memory of meeting Willa Cather; however, an older cousin of mine, Gloria Krula Odenreider (who is nearing eighty), relates that once while she was visiting Uncle Claude in Blue Hill, Willa Cather was there and took Gloria on her knee to talk to her. Most vividly, my sister, Louana Laird Collins, remembers a visit in the thirties to the graves of our grandparents in Oak Creek Cemetery, a country graveyard very much like the one in *Neighbour Rosicky*. Accompanying my parents was Willa Cather, who at one point picked up my tiny sister and kissed her. Louana relates that Father said to "remember always" that she had been kissed by a very famous woman. Perhaps I received a pat on the head, but I don't remember.

Claude was 36 in 1917 when the United States entered World War I. Although he was too old to be drafted, he felt he was needed on the Western Front and so he enlisted in the Army. He was stationed in Texas, and no sooner was he in his lieutenant's uniform than he was ordered, over his protests that as a medical officer he didn't know the commands, to go out and drill a platoon of soldiers.

In 1918 Claude's company was sent to England and encamped on the Salisbury Plain, the home of Stonehenge. The company was attached to an air group. One day, one of the planes did not return, and as the sun was setting, the commanding officer sent out a party, including Dr. Claude, to search the plain for wreckage. At first all efforts were fruitless; then Claude employed a trick he had used at Oak Creek when sent out on the prairie west of the homestead to find the cattle in the early evening. He later recalled: "I got down on the ground and looked westward across the plain for any unusual silhouette breaking the

afterglow on the horizon." He found the downed aircraft. The scene resembles the one in *My Ántonia* in which Jim and the hired girls suddenly see a great black figure appear on the face of the sun.

Although the Armistice on the Western Front was signed November 11, 1918, not all of the fighting was over for the Americans. Claude's company was shipped to Archangel, in Northern Russia, to fight the rebellious Russian Red Army. Having been promoted to the rank of Captain, Dr. Claude was placed in charge of the American field hospitals on the North Pinega Front. When he arrived he found the troops in sad shape because of dysentery. Quickly, he discovered that the source of their drinking water was the untreated flow of the Dvina River, which he described as "the sewer of North Russia." Moreover, just above the place from where the water was drawn lay the bloated carcass of a horse killed in recent action. Dad told me, "My first order was to boil all of the drinking water." Soon the problem was alleviated.

A book co-authored by Claude's commanding officer Colonel Joel R. Moore, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki* (Polar Bear Publishing Co., Detroit, 1920), contains a description of the range of Claude's activities: "Only on the Pinega front did the American medical officer enjoy free action. An interesting story could be told of the American hospital and the two Russian Red Cross (local) hospitals and the city civil hospital which were all under control of [one Captain], the red-haired (where he had any), unexcitable old doctor from Nebraska, who treated one hundred and fourteen wounded Russian soldiers in one night."

According to his sister Elizabeth's *Family History*, Claude had "had no rest, caring for wounded." On the third night of a three-day battle, "propped up by comrades, too exhausted to stand, [he] stayed until the close of battle, comrades fed him" while he remained at the operating table.

While serving in North Russia, Dr. Claude often visited the homes of the villagers near the front. He found especially poignant the fact that during the long winters the Russian peasants were so starved for color that they placed empty tin cans with colored labels in their tiny windows to provide a little brightness in their drab rooms. This reminds one of the fascination in *My Ántonia* that Jim and his friends have for the painted church windows shining along the frozen street.

In 1925 Claude Ross Laird's name was inscribed on the State of Nebraska's Military Service Roll of Honor. I have the certificate of award, embellished by the Great Seal of Nebraska and signed by Governor I. Adam McMullen. I wonder who in Webster County nominated Claude for the citation?

In 1923 Claude married Emma Krula, the daughter of Bohemian immigrants and a graduate of Kearney State Teachers College who taught Czech and Latin in Nebraska high schools. Having learned some Russian during his stint in North Russia and some Czech from Mother, Dr. Claude was able to understand much of

what his Webster County Bohemian patients said in their native tongue. As he told me, among them was Anna Pavelka, who provided the inspiration for Willa Cather's *My Antonia*.

Dr. Claude left private practice in 1930 and joined the medical staff at Ingleside, a state mental hospital located a mile west of Hastings. After completing some advanced work, he was registered as the 15th psychiatrist in Nebraska. Claude was the kindest, most patient man I've ever known. A major reason why he left country practice was that he could not make himself collect bills from his patients, many of whom had little or no money because of the drought and the Depression. An Eastern economist, I think Dad said his name was Babson, wrote that the South Central Nebraska area was the worst hit in the nation.

I regarded Claude as a saint and I still do. Only once did I hear him swear. During a return trip from Sumner, where my mother's parents farmed, the family Ford developed a flat. Emma and the children climbed out of the car while Claude put on the spare. Just as he finished, the car slipped off the jack and his hand was caught under the tire. Frantic, Emma and their two young children ran around the car shrieking. Finally, Claude drowned them out: "Stop that and push the damned car off of my hand." They did.

Claude often spoke very highly about the authenticity of Willa Cather's stories about the pioneers of Webster County. One of her characters, however, was not a pioneer but a black concert pianist. In *My Antonia* Cather wrote: "There was only one break in the dreary monotony of that month: when Blind d'Arnault, the Negro pianist, came to town. He gave a concert at the Opera House on Monday."

Sometimes, in the 1930s, I accompanied Father when he made the rounds of the hospital wards under his charge. On one of them was a blind black man. As I remember, he was known as Mac. I would say that he was at least in his fifties at the time — i.e., I remember some white in his hair. My memory is that that open ward (i.e., its doors were not locked) was the only one in the institution that had a piano and that fact was why Mac was on it. Sometimes Dad, especially if he had an important visitor with him, would ask Mac to play the piano. Mac always sat ramrod straight and played beautiful, complicated music, which was unfamiliar to my youthful ears. Very clear in my memory is that Dad said Mac had toured Europe, playing command performances for royalty. Also, I recall that Father said Mac had been blind from birth, probably the result of his mother having had syphilis.

Early in the century state mental hospitals often housed the indigent as well as the insane. Quite possibly, when Father was still in private practice in Webster County, he played a role in Mac's commitment to Ingleside.

Dad was always reading books, newspapers, magazines and, of course, medical journals. He read every issue of *The Country Gentleman* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, from cover to cover. He was

always asking why and always trying to understand how things worked. Every summer he took the family on a two- or three-week vacation, touring the U.S. Most of the time we camped in an umbrella tent. Every few days, however, we stayed in a cabin (motels had not yet been invented) in order to have a shower. The rule was not to rent a cabin that cost more than a dollar for the entire family. We traveled to almost every part of the then 48 states, excepting upper New England. Always, Claude knew where the historical landmarks were, and where the homes of former great Americans were — e.g., the birth places of famous poets, writers and politicians. Also, the family visited virtually all of the national parks in the West.

On the vacation trips, Claude often sang as he drove the car. He had a fabulous memory for songs and poems. When asked about their origins, often his answer was that he first heard them from a visitor to the Oak Creek community during his childhood. I don't think I ever heard him tell a joke, but he often recited catchy rhymes. One I remember went as follows: "The buffalo the buffalo, he had a horrid snuffalo and not a single Indian chief would lend the beast a handkerchief, which proves how very very far from courtesy some people are."

Think of the Scots, and a word that comes is dour. Claude was almost always serious but never broody or morose. He was kind. He was gentle. But, he almost never showed his emotions. Also, only rarely did he relate to his children the stories of his youth that must have meant so much to him. Clearly, one of the saddest days in his life was when the homestead was sold, probably in 1922 at the time of his mother's death. He never explained the circumstances of the settlement of the estate, although it must have been managed by his older brothers who had gone on to new homesteads in the far West. Still, he passed on his lore. For example, almost as soon as his son could walk Claude took him on the annual New Year's Day Audubon Society bird count (Claude was the president of the Hastings chapter) and on fishing and hunting excursions, teaching him the wonders of the outdoors.

One beautiful fall day in the 1930s the father and son were out hunting pheasants in Webster County. It was late in the afternoon and Claude drove along a hilly, winding, dirt road where the prairie was broken by a wooded stream. This was new territory for the son. They came around a bend. Claude stopped the car and said, "This is Oak Creek. I want to show you something." He led his son down the hill into a grove where there was a very old "good and substantial frame house," but with all of the panes in the windows broken out. The boy looked at his dad, a man old enough to be his grandfather. It was the first of only two times that the son saw tears in his father's eyes. The other time was when Mother died.

In *Shadows on the Rock* Willa Cather wrote: "There are all those early memories; one cannot get another set; one has only those."



Dr. Charles Peck (University of Nebraska-Kearney) stresses a point at this summer's Prairie Institute held for one week at the Red Cloud Elementary School.

WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER

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Willa Cather Newsletter welcomes articles, notes and letters to the editor. Address submissions to John J. Murphy, English Dept., Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602. Essays and notes are currently listed in the annual MLA Bibliography.

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