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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

The Willa Cather Society

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326 N. Webster Street
Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970
Telephone (402) 746-2653

CATHER'S CANADIAN AND OLD WORLD CONNECTIONS

Sixth International Willa Cather Seminar

JUNE 24-JULY 1, 1995
Laval University, Quebec City, Canada

Papers on any aspect of Cather are invited for possible presentation in special sessions. Papers which employ interdisciplinary approaches are especially encouraged, as are those which connect the life, work, or critical reputation to the theme. Three copies of manuscripts (2500-5000 words, 20 minutes maximum presentation time) or a 300-word abstract should be submitted by April 15; for those submitting abstracts, the completed paper should be received by May 15.

Also being planned is a separate pre-trip to Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick, June 20-23 (embarking from Quebec City and returning there for the seminar). Space is limited, and there will be an additional fee for travel, meals, and housing.

Papers and proposals, as well as requests for further information, should be sent to:

PROFESSOR MICHAEL A. PETERMAN
Department of English, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7B8
• Phone: (705) 748-1491 • Fax: (705) 748-1630 • E-mail: MPETERMAN@TrentU.ca

PROFESSOR ROBERT THACKER
Canadian Studies Program, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York 13617
• Phone: (315) 379-5970 • Fax (315) 379-5802 • E-mail: rtha@music.stlawu.edu

Sponsored by St. Lawrence University, Trent University, the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

News from the WCPM Director . . .

The Sixth International Cather Seminar in Quebec City, the Cather University Days centennial celebration, the annual Spring Conference, and the new Prairie Institute are happening very soon. A pull-out brochure describing the 40th annual Spring Conference is included in this issue of the Newsletter.

Complete information on the Prairie Institute, a new endeavor with the University of Nebraska-Kearney, will be available under separate cover. The Institute, an intensive week of

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Willa Cather and the Cult of Masculinity

Domna Pastourmatzi
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Willa Cather launched her career as a novelist in a masculine cultural and political climate, yet the degree to which Cather's imagination was colored by the tradition ideals of manhood and the implications of the portrayal of her male characters is a matter of critical dispute. Early reviewers and critics praised Willa Cather's work for its historical and aesthetic value, ignoring her subversive vision in gender issues. In fact, gender was hardly a category of critical analysis in Catherian scholarship before the 1980s. The bulk of criticism perpetuated the myth that Willa Cather was "a conscious traditionalist" whose aim was to "elegize the tradition of pioneer energy and hardihood" (Kazin 161, 162). The conservative labels (moralist, allegorist, elegist, lamenter of the lost old values, romantic-turned-recluse) that this criticism has bequeathed us are still widely used to discuss work written by a woman who refused to submit to fixed standards of thought and behavior in a variety of contexts.

In the 1990s, it is hard to accept without qualification that Cather "had consciously built her life upon a structure of traditions" (E. and L. Bloom 237) and that she followed in the footsteps of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and James; one would have to ignore the fact that their tradition was aggressively masculine and frequently hostile to women. In addition, one cannot be blind to the fact that gender is an integral part of Cather's work; to claim — as the Blooms have — that Cather's characters are "flat surfaces" lacking the depths of human personality and psychological complexity, that they merely represent a "broad outline of human destiny" (14), is to reduce them to mere allegorical figures and to render gender irrelevant. By perceiving them primarily as embodiments of either abstract and aesthetic ideals or of heroic values rather than as human beings, critics have managed to divest Cather's imagination of its subversive elements. David Stouck's emphasis on the "universal dimensions" (2) of Cather's imagination overlooks the fact that the assumed universality of imagination is to many a patriarchal myth that usually implies an androcentric literary vision. Approaching Cather as a universal artist can amount to desexualizing and rendering her work innocuous and thus compatible with the masculine tradition. However, feminist theory has demonstrated that we cannot strip an artist's imagination of the cultural dimensions of a given historical period or assume the neutrality and purity of any creative act, that we have to consider factors such as gender, class, nationality as participants if not determinants in a work of art.

Although there is still no critical consensus as to whether Cather's initial immersion in the male-dominated American and European tradition produced a masculine or a feminine imagination, I cannot accept John H. Randall's proclamation that Cather was "a child of the [eighteen-] nineties" whose "concept of art and of the mission of the artist did not change" but remained the same "for the rest of her life" (1). In order to provide a plausible conclusion favoring the masculine, most of Cather's biographers and critics have turned to her "masculine" adolescence and college years during which Cather wore her hair short, dressed herself in boyish attire, and expected to be addressed as Will, Billie, Dr.Will, or William M.D. But while this focus on her masculine phase has led to various conclusions, it has not solved the matter of her imagination. Only recently through the efforts of feminist scholars have we recognized that a radical transformation had happened to Cather's consciousness between the 1890s and 1910s, a transformation that tempered her strong attraction to masculinity.

Susan J. Rosowski states in *The Voyage Perilous* that "[w]e have become sensitive to ways in which Cather broke hidebound conventions regarding women, yet generalizations about Cather's male characters remain largely unexamined" (112). Focusing closely on the portrayal of several *ladies' man* or *lady-killer* character types, I will illustrate Cather's exploration and criticism of the masculine ideology of her era. While Cather exploits the cultural definition of manhood in order to delineate the identity of the lady killer, she questions the viability of the masculine paradigm by exposing the dangers of the traditional heterosexual love hunt. Cather may have not been a militant feminist, but her imagination was undoubtedly gendered.

Historically, according to one theorist, the manly ideal in the United States "has oscillated sharply between these two poles: on the one side a sort of hard-working, hard-fighting 'puritan' hero who adheres to a production ethic of duty before pleasure; and, on the other, a more aristocratic 'playboy' who lives according to an ethic of leisure and indulgence" (Hoch 118). The caliber of the playboy's manliness is measured by one or a combination of the following criteria: monetary success, number of sweethearts, sexual conquests; furthermore, the playboy adheres to a consumption ethic and reduces sex to a commodity. Cather's ladies' man falls into this category and exhibits many of its characteristics. Beginning with the portrait of young Frank Shabata in *O Pioneers!* (1913), Cather's preoccupation with this type spans more than twenty years. The caricatures of Joe Giddy in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and Larry Donovan in *My Ántonia* (1918), the elaborate portraits of Fred Ottenburg in *The Song of the Lark*, of Frank Ellinger in *A Lost Lady* (1923), and of Harry Gordon in *Lucy Gayheart* (1935)[1] show a persistent concern with the ideology represented by these masculine characters. They help Cather castigate male sexism, reject male possessiveness, and deflate the myths that justify male domination. The progressive fates of these characters also

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NEWS FROM WCPM DIRECTOR
(Continued)

Pat Phillips
— Photo by Robert Graning

hands-on instruction at Red Cloud Elementary School, the Man and the Land Building, and the fossil beds south of Red Cloud and the Republican River, will be held June 5-9. This interdisciplinary course, linking Plains literature, history, geography and paleontology, offers three hours graduate or undergraduate credit from UNK. Teachers are Dr. Charles Peek (English), Mark Eifler (history), and James Fitzgibbon (geography). Peek and Eifler both teach at the University of Nebraska-Kearney; Fitzgibbon teaches science at McCook High School and directs summer workshops in paleontology. Mailing on the Prairie Institute will be regional so if you are from outside Nebraska and interested, please contact WCPM for information on registration, tuition, lodging, and meals: (402) 746-2653.

May 16-18 brings "Pastimes and Playthings" to the Cather Childhood Home. This involves a day of old-fashioned games and tours of the Cather House for fourth graders. Games and equipment for the activities are on loan from the Kennard House, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. Another WCPM opportunity for fourth graders is a day at the Little Red School House, a day to be spent learning as the pioneer children learned and which will include a short tour of some of the Cather properties. Both programs, Pastimes and Playthings and the selection of a pioneer school day, require advance arrangements.

The biggest news (from my point of view) of late '94 and early '95 for Cather's Red Cloud is the town's selection as one of the first four communities in a statewide competition to participate in Nebraska's Lied Mainstreet Program. "Mainstreet" is a national program sponsored by The National Trust for Historic Preservation. The application acknowledged the significance of Willa Cather, her writing, and the preservation which must be ongoing in Red Cloud. The Lied Foundation (Las Vegas) made it possible for Nebraska to become a part of National Mainstreet, which the state has been trying to participate in for several years. The Nebraska State Historical Society, the State Department of Roads, the State Department of Economic Development, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Architecture are partners in this endeavor with National Trust and Mainstreet and contribute to the four communities.

Our renegotiated relationship with the Nebraska Historical Society has been working well since its inception in July, 1994. Previously, the WCPM entered a management agreement with the State Historical Society. Two accomplishments of this have been our ability to participate in a special advertising supplement to *Midwest Living* (with an overprint of 250,000 copies to be used by the Nebraska Tourism Office) and the underwriting of Joel Geyer's Nebraska Public Television production of Willa Cather's short story "The Sentimentality of William Tavener." Geyer previously wrote and produced a thirty minute award-winning public television documentary about the late Mildred Bennett, "Singing Cather's Song."

Since July, I have been looking through the various collections we house, including letters of particular interest collected by the Cather Historical Center since 1978.

Two letters written by Cather to a Dr. Wood were donated by Beverly Cooper of Hastings, Nebraska. The letters were typed in 1941 and 1942 in response to letters from him. Cather comments on family relationships and recollects various sites of her early Virginia years, noting how his photographs of these sites are the same as or different from her memories. She remembers the road from Gore to Timber Ridge as one of the loveliest in Virginia. Miss Cooper also owns and has given a copy of an 1896 Cather letter from Pittsburgh to Mariel Gere. Cather inquires about a mutual friend, Katharine, one whom she feels may be snubbing her.

Ellen Fitzgerald, Prescott, Arizona, has donated a typewritten letter from Cather to Fitzgerald's mother, Mrs. Carstens of Fremont, Nebraska. The November 1932 letter responds to Carstens's inquiry why Cather had never written anything sympathetic about religion. Mrs. Fitzgerald and her sister Jean A_____ also contributed a note from Cather's secretary, Sarah J. Bloom, and a handwritten note of acknowledgement from Cather.

Alice Woodbridge, Morristown, New Jersey, and Helen Sackett, granddaughters of Helen Louise Stowell (Mrs. Eugene Alexander Stowell), have provided four wonderful letters. Three are written prior to Willa Cather's high school graduation in 1890 (1888 and 1889) and talk about everyday activities; one includes a grade report and comments made by her teacher — when transcribing her teacher's remarks, Cather changed her handwriting. The fourth was written in 1928. In it she describes her father's peaceful death. (Mildred Bennett wrote about these letters in *Western American Literature* [Nov. 1988, Vol. XXIII, No. 3].)

We have also collected a touching exchange between Mrs. Sidney Mattison and Cather (December 1935 and January 1936), involving Mattison's request for a message from Cather for a seven year old daughter named after Cather. Cather's response to

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(Continued)

reveal the tempering of Cather's stance over the years, that she has found the strength to forgive and absolve.

In "The Cult of Masculinity," Michael S. Kimmel points out that compulsive manhood "was never written out of America's cultural drama," that a swift glance at American history and literature reveals "a marked national preoccupation with masculinity," for the United States has been, and in many respects still is, "the archetypal male society" (245, 238). Primarily a nineteenth century phenomenon, the cult of masculinity had permeated American life to such a great extent that its impact could be felt well into the twentieth century. Any threat to the distinct masculine identity had the potential to create a deep psychological crisis as it did with the official closing of the frontier — when the white American male "found himself trapped between two barriers, one geographical, the other psychological" (Pugh 16). But whereas Henry James's character, Basil Ransom laments the fact that "the whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world" (290), Cather — well aware of the psychological impact — did not share the identity crisis of the American male during the period of 1880-1920. Prowess, vitality and energy may have been the hallmarks of manhood in the competitive society of early twentieth century America, but for Cather neither the possession of virile features nor the adoption of masculine behavior necessarily makes a man admirable or desirable.

Using the popular cultural assumptions of her time, Cather distinguishes her macho males (from their androgynous counterparts) with a conspicuously masculine appearance. An examination of physical attributes shows that these characters are endowed with muscular bodies, considerable height, and are hairy: some are given moustaches, some whiskers, some beards, others goatees and thick eyebrows. Physically, the ladies' man dispels any suspicion of an effeminate nature. Fred Ottenburg's "very short" hair is matched with eyebrows "thick and yellow, like fleece" and with a "long closely trimmed beard" (SL 335). In the elaborate description of Frank Ellinger's face, Cather exploits male aggression, accentuating a "beaked nose — a nose like the prow of a ship, with long nostrils." The visible "purple veins," the "deeply cleft" chin, and the "thick curly lips" (LL 46) are unmistakable signs of virility. To preclude any indication of physical softness or passivity, Cather stresses the ladies' man's physical restlessness and overflow of energy. While Shabata and Ottenburg are "full to the brim with a savage energy," Ellinger can "bite an iron rod in two with a snap of his jaws," and his body is "very much alive under his clothes, with a restless, muscular energy" (LL 46). Likewise Harry Gordon, "the heavy-weight boxer type," is "full of energy which moves quietly, but always moves" (LG 8, 189). Since the image the type projects is a matter of utmost importance, Cather enhances it with distinctly male clothes and accessories (hat, gloves, cane), and adding a cigar, cigarette or pipe in silent affirmation of indisputable masculinity.

In 1909 the *Independent* noted that the football field was the "only place where masculine supremacy is incontestable" (Dubbert 446). Conscious of the fact that young men of her time resisted the threat of feminization by turning to athletics because it offered a "ceremonial reenactment of manhood" (Pugh 110), Cather associates her masculine men with various sports, but not so much to express her admiration of male prowess than as a useful demarcation of traditional male identity. It is also important to note that none of these male characters is a football jock. Fred Ottenburg is actively involved in many "sporting clubs and hunting clubs"; he is a "good boxer"; he frequents "ball-games, prize-fights, and horse-races" (SL 354). Harry Gordon, too, loves horses, guns and hunting, and proves himself on the baseball field and skating rink as well as the dance floor. He has a taste for "rather violent, jumpy dances" during which he puts "much lift and spring behind his partner" (LG 98) in a show of strength. The choice of baseball — established as the national game in the nineteenth century and based less on physical aggressiveness and more on skill — over football is crucial. Football had began to rival baseball in popularity in intercollegiate competition but soon became tainted with professionalism. Perhaps the abuses and excessive violence associated with football led Cather to reconsider her favorable view. Indeed, Cather's novels lack the unqualified comments and the sheer admiration for brute force that characterize her essays on football in 1893 and 1894.

Part of the ladies' man identity is his involvement in activities such as smoking, drinking, cussing, fighting, and gambling. Being "one of these wild fellows" (OP 120), Frank Shabata plays cards, patronizes saloons, smokes and drinks excessively, and is constantly in the mood for a fight. Also hot-tempered and foul-mouthed, Ottenburg has the tendency to break into "an eruption of profanity" (SL 528), while Joe Giddy delights in "gallant speeches of a not too-veiled nature" (SL 142). Cather adheres to the social prescriptions as long as they help her bestow a masculine identity to her characters, but closer examination of the ladies' man's behavior demonstrates a persistent critique of such masculine conduct in her novels. Her stance is manifested in the delineation of conduct blemished by conceit, vanity, arrogance and conspicuous opportunism, and in the problematics of interpersonal relationships. The ladies' man not only lacks an admirable personality, but is also tainted with contempt for the effeminate male characters and masculine female characters that populate Cather's texts.

Among the unflattering traits of the lady killer is his psychological insecurity. He suffers from a superiority complex coupled by the fear of being effaced in the crowd. The "buck of the beer-gardens," Frank Shab-

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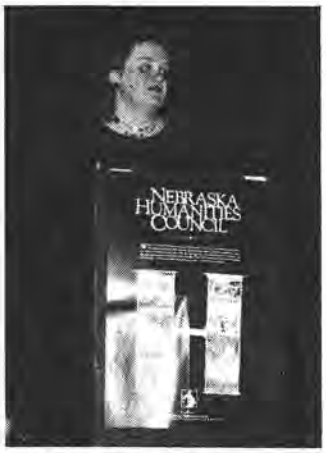
her "Namesake" admonishes her to be sincere about what she liked and didn't like. In a February 5, 1940 response to Pendleton Hogan's letter of appreciation for and questions about *My Mortal Enemy*, Cather tells Hogan (who donated the letter to the Cather Historical Center) who Myra's mortal enemy is and that she was painting a picture of Myra.

And last, there is a letter dated September 24, 1937 to Willa Cather from Alexandera Fechin, wife of Nicolai Fechin (a Taos, New Mexico, artist who painted a portrait of Cather). Mrs. Fechin remembers their meeting in 1927 and the fact that she did not speak any English then. Willa Cather gave her an inscribed copy of *My Ántonia* in French, which meant a lot to Mrs. Fechin. Ten years later she thanks Cather for her kindness and sends her own book, *March of the Past*, written in English. Cather, in turn, sent this book to her friend Carrie Miner Sherwood with an inscription that she thinks Carrie will like the book and that Mrs. Fechin's stories are true.

As for visitors at the WCPM last year — they increased by just over 1,000 (total attendance 7,090). We expect the numbers of people wanting to see the world of Willa Cather will continue to increase. This year, besides the small travel article and advertising in *Midwest Living*, we know that articles and pictures will appear in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's March-April issue of *Historic Preservation* magazine, and in spring issues of *National Geographic Traveller*, *Woman's Day* and *The Friendly Exchange* magazines. Also, USA Network's airing of *My Ántonia* (Wednesday, March 29, 8:00 p.m. CST) is sure to stimulate interest in Cather's novels and stories as well as awareness of and interest in the land and environs she revered.



Betty Jean Steinshouer at "A Tribute to Willa Cather," December 4.

We had an especially fun Christmas-time celebration of Willa Cather's birthday this year. Betty Jean Steinshouer and Burns Davis introduced several days of activities by welcoming guests at the Victorian Tea at the Childhood Home on Sunday afternoon, December 4. That evening they premiered a weeklong traveling "Tribute to Willa Cather" at the Cather Center's Grace Episcopal Church. Performances here and at York, Lincoln, and Omaha were sponsored by a $2,000 grant the WCPM received from the Nebraska Humanities Council. On Wednesday, December 7, Nebraska Public Radio used daytime hours to celebrate Cather's birthday by broadcasting a reading of *My Ántonia* in its entirety. In Red Cloud, Rev. Dr. Charles Peek celebrated noon Mass at Grace Episcopal Church.

The WCPM was very pleased to be the recipient of two bequests last year: one for $15,000 and the other $3,400 from the estates of Martha Artist of Omaha, Nebraska, and Helen Sagl of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Foundation also received $2,000 from the Hastings (NE) *Tribune*, KHAS-TV, and Don and Nancy Seaton (Hastings, Nebraska) to help underwrite a new edition of Mildred Bennett's book, *The World of Willa Cather* (University of Nebraska Press). Bernard and Nancy Picchi, owners and restorers of the Harling House (*My Ántonia*) contributed a year's end gift of $1,000, and Tim and Robley Garrigan of Blair, Nebraska, contributed $500 at the end of the year in honor of their employees at Great Plains Communications (the telephone company serving our area). Evelyn Helmick Hively donated 20 copies of her new book, *Sacred Fire: Willa Cather's Novel Cycle*, to be sold as a means of contributing to WCPM for cooperating on her project. These thoughtful yet unexpected gifts extend the influence of Cather's work. We thank all for their contributions, and we remember Martha and Helen fondly.

July 4, 1995 marks the debut of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial/Willa Cather Historical Center's Burlington Railroad exhibit at the restored Burlington Depot. Terry Sheahan, designer and curator of the exhibit, will be on hand for its opening. The Republican Valley Arts Council also plans an old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration. Mark your calendar so you can be present for these events.

I hope we will see you in Red Cloud at one of the special upcoming Cather events. — Pat Phillips

Burns Davis and Betty Jean Steinshouer at Nebraska Humanities Council/Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial's "Tribute to Willa Cather," Grace Episcopal Church, Red Cloud.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. C. Bertrand Schultz
(Board Member)

June 17, 1908 — March 7, 1995

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ata, not only wears a "slightly disdainful expression," he also expects people to shower him with constant attention. In order "to get on with him," people have to "make a fuss over him" and behave as if he were "a very important person all the time, and different from other people" (OP 120). To preserve his reputation as a "professional ladies' man," Larry Donovan assumes an "air of official aloofness" (MA 223) and treats people in a condescending manner, Cather mockingly labelling him as "one of those train-crew aristocrats" (MA 304). Similarly, Harry Gordon dons "a certain self-importance as if he were afraid of being ignored in the crowd" (LG 45-6). What Cather insinuates with such details is that the masculine man fears being taken for granted and his compulsion toward public visibility turns him into a pompous snob.

The conceited self-image these characters harbor fuels their unrelenting antagonism toward other men, who are despised either as potential rivals or for not fitting the perceived masculine model. Fierce antagonism and unfounded suspicion characterize Frank Shabata's relations with his hired hands, whom he confronts as his wife's suitors. Believing Ray Kennedy "a fluke as a ladies' man," Joe Giddy cultivates a hostile attitude and grabs every opportunity to mock his co-worker's domestic inclinations and at every turn pokes fun at Kennedy's persistent cleanliness and diligent housekeeping, sarcastically calling him "the bride" (SL 139). In an effort to retaliate for the domestication of the caboose, Giddy masculinizes his space, exhibiting a gallery of "half a dozen" female sex objects. Threatened by the presence of an androgynous man, Joe Giddy asserts his virility with the contemptuous prediction that Kennedy is treading the road toward emasculation: the "man that gets [Thea] will have to wear an apron and bake the pancakes. Well some men like to mess about the kitchen" (SL 141). Giddy's attempt, of course, is pathetic, because behind his macho facade lies a coward. This brief episode helps Cather pinpoint the difficulty macho males have relating to men whose conduct does not fit prescribed standards or is perceived a challenge. Similar scorn characterizes Fred Ottenburg's attitude toward male rivals; to secure the competitive edge, he diminishes other "jolly fellows" as unimaginative, domineering, and shallow. In his words, "jolly fellows have no imagination. They want to be the animating force. When they are not around, they want a girl to be — extinct" (SL 393). Ottenburg's most feared rivals are the so called "straight" men for whom he harbors the strongest contempt; these men are "the most dangerous of all" because they "lie between windowless stone walls" and hide under "their unquestioned regularity . . . every sort of human cruelty and meanness and every kind of humiliation and suffering" (SL 424). Through verbal degradation of the members of his own sex Ottenburg asserts his superiority.

The pattern of male antagonism is evident in the other novels as well: Larry Donovan is "usually cold and distant with men" (MA 304); Frank Ellinger resents Marian's fondess for Niel Herbert, a lad he sees as "a trifle stiff" (LL 63). When Harry Gordon senses that Lucy shows interest in another man, he reacts in a hostile manner, although boys of Lucy's age idolize him as a model of manliness and give way to him "good-naturedly" (LG 8). Jim Hardwick withdraws immediately from the skating ground with a typical male reaction of acquiescence to a popular womanizer when Harry Gordon cuts in: " 'Sure, Harry. I was only keeping her out of trouble for you' " (LG 8). But the competition grows serious when Gordon has to deal with adult males. When Lucy is thrilled to find Giuseppe in the audience at the opera *Lohengrin*, Gordon demeans the Italian's enthusiasm. According to Gordon, to react emotionally to things that are "sentimentally sacred" is natural and befitting for a woman, yet the same reaction is "ridiculous in a man." His hostility is captured in denigrating labels like "that little dago," and "the mischief" (LG 106). Capitalizing on the historical fact that since the early nineteenth century "the American male has attempted to define himself in an adversary relationship with other men" (Pugh 46), Cather demonstrates that the competitive nature of masculinity is an impediment that pits one man against another and creates unnecessary friction.

If contempt and rivalry plague his relations with other men, egocentrism, possessiveness, and sexism mar the lady-killer's relationship with women. An "enlightened" Ottenburg thinks he is purged of sexism when he confesses to Thea: "Even I wasn't always so wise. I've had my time of thinking it would not bore me to be the Apollo of a homey flat, and I've paid out a trifle to learn better" (SL 393). In vain he tries to detach himself from the ideology of his rivals, but deep down he fears Thea will yield to an offer of connubial bliss; he wants to make sure that only he possesses her heart, and thus offers her exactly what he accuses other jolly fellows of doing when they want to domesticate a woman: "a comfortable flat in Chicago, a summer camp up in the woods, musical evenings, and a family to bring up" (SL 394). Rebuffed by her exclamation — "Perfectively hideous!" — Ottenburg saves face by asserting how "unusual" he is and taking back his offer: "Well, don't be frightened. I won't offer them" (SL 394). To prevent any possibility of her marriage to another man, he acknowledges that he "would deceive" Thea gladly not once "but a hundred times, to keep her free" (SOL 424). Ottenburg's illusion that his deceptive methods and protective embrace would derail Thea's steps toward the marriage trap rests on his egocentric desire to reserve her for himself. That such ulterior motive is hidden under his mask of chivalry, Cather discloses in an extensive but insightful passage. Ottenburg's secret nightmare that Thea could somehow marry another man throws him into an indignant outburst revealing his

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Willa Cather at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Deborah Eisloeffel
College of Arts and Sciences, UNL

This spring's Commencement at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the graduation of one of the University's more distinguished alumni, Willa Cather. Cather has been described as "the primary voice by which Nebraska and the University are known to the World." Four of her twelve novels include the University among her settings, and she herself once described her time at the University as "one of the happiest in my life."

Several groups at UNL are planning activities to commemorate this centennial in the spring, the focus of which will be "Cather's University Days: A Centennial Celebration, 1895/1995," on April 6-8 at UNL. The festivities will include presentations about Cather's connections to the literary, musical, social, scientific, and political life of the times; exhibits at the University Archives and the Nebraska State Historical Society; readings; musical events; and local tours.

In conjunction with the centennial festivities, the University of Nebraska's Center for Great Plains Studies is publishing a booklet, *Willa Cather's University Days: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1890-1895.* This collection of articles, edited by Elizabeth Turner and Kari Ronning, both of UNL, discuss Lincoln and the University in the 1890s and Cather's life during that time.

When Cather first came to UNL in 1890, she was planning to pursue scientific courses in the hopes of becoming a surgeon, according to Ronning, who contributed the essay, "Cather the Student" in *Willa Cather's University Days.* "Fortunately for American literature," says Ronning, "the required Rhetoric class taught by professor Ebenezer Hunt changed the direction of Cather's life."

Hunt had a reputation among students for being tough and eccentric, but was also willing to recognize good work. Cather, who had her share of run-ins with Hunt, one day turned in an assigned essay about Thomas Carlyle that so impressed him he sent it to the student newspaper, the *Hesperian*, and to the forerunner of the Lincoln *Journal*, the *Nebraska State Journal.* The sight of her own work in print was a heady experience and, as Cather later explained to Will Owen Jones of the *Nebraska State Journal*, "Up to that time I had planned to specialize in science . . . . But what youthful vanity can be unaffected by the sight of itself in print!"

Charlotte Peterson, Sayra Cather Wagner, and Betty Jean Steinshouer at the Christmas-time Victorian Tea celebrating Willa Cather's 121st birthday.

Although Hunt changed the direction of Cather's life, another teacher, Herbert Bates, influenced Cather's early development as a writer, says Ronning. The antithesis of Hunt in personality, Bates was shy and sensitive, giving his students gentle encouragement. He had a passion for literature and, according to Ronning, "must have recognized Cather's quality, for he sent her first published story, 'Peter,' to *The Mahogany Tree*, a literary magazine published by some of his former Harvard classmates."

Ronning describes, in "The University of Nebraska in the 1890s," another article in *Willa Cather's University Days*, what life was like for Cather and her fellow students at UNL:

> "A typical student day began with a walk or streetcar ride from a lodging house to University Hall on campus. Coats and hats were hung on pegs in the hallway while students checked their mailboxes and the bulletin board. Attendance at morning chapel exercises was strongly encouraged; chapel typically consisted of a Scripture reading and a brief talk by a minister, a professor, or some distinguished visitor, announcements from the chancellor, and a prayer — the student papers noted disapprovingly how many students slammed their seats up and were out the door as the Amen was being said.
>
> "Most classes met daily, with a general break at noon when students returned to their boarding houses for dinner. The grading system was simple; students passed, failed, or were given a 'condition' in their courses, which meant they had to make up work and retake exams.
>
> "Late afternoon was the time for drill for the cadets, gym for some women, practice for the newly organized football or baseball teams (supported entirely by dues from the members of the Student Athletic Association), class meetings, or study."

One distinctly non-academic activity enjoyed by the younger crowd at the University was the ever-popular cane rush, a form of hazing that was copied from eastern colleges: "The freshmen would issue a challenge to the sophomores by carrying canes to chapel," explains Ronning, "initiating a rush outside and a free-for-all fight as the sophs tried to break as many canes as they could; in the process clothes were torn, teeth knocked out, and bones broken."

Cather's literary legacy at UNL continues to be felt to this day, particularly in the amount of scholarly work her own writings generate. Approximately fifteen permanent courses at the University are devoted entirely or in part to an exploration of her work,

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(Continued)

obsession for total control of the woman and the situation:

> If it were not he, it would be someone else; someone who would be a weight about her neck, probably; who would hold her back and beat her down and divert her from the first plunge for which he felt she was gathering all her energies. He meant to help her, and he could not think of another man who would. He went over his unmarried friends, East and West, and he could not think of one who would know what she was driving at — or care. The clever ones were selfish, the kindly ones were stupid.
>
> "Damn it, if she's going to fall in love with somebody, it had better be me than any of the others — of the sort she'd find. Get her tied up with some conceited ass who'd try to make her over, train her like a puppy! Give one of 'em a big nature like that, and he'd be horrified. He wouldn't show his face in the clubs until he'd gone after her and combed her down to conform to some fool idea in his own head — put there by some other woman too, his sweetheart or his grandmother or a maiden aunt. At least, I understand her. I know what she needs and where she's bound, and I mean to see that she has a fighting chance." (SL 423-24)

This caustic barrage is but an indication of Ottenburg's own buried sexism. No matter how desperately he tries to convince himself that he is not "some conceited ass," Cather does not credit him with a progressive view of heterosexual union. Although he seeks an egalitarian relationship with Thea, his experiences with "lovesick girls or flirtatious women" fail to help him transcend his possessiveness. His illusion that he is keeping Thea "free" is contradicted by the very fact that he is willing to commit either adultery or bigamy to secure his claim on her.

Sexism and egocentrism also permeate the psyches of Ellinger and Gordon. So deeply engraved is the assumption that beauty is inextricably tied to femininity that Frank Ellinger has a hard time understanding the reasons that motivate some men to marry an "unpardonably homely" (LL 44) woman, especially when she has no fortune to compensate for her poor looks. Trapped in the same mindset, Harry Gordon sees beautiful Lucy Gayheart as woman par excellence and despises all other women who do not fit this mold. Despite Harriet Arkwright's good style, ease, independence, "money and social position," he finds her "plain" if not monstrous. Her resemblance to "the men of her family" (LG 20) terrifies him. The vocabulary Gordon uses to describe Harriet is revealing: she had a "hard, matter-of-fact voice, which never kindled with anything; slightly nasal. Whatever she spoke of, she divested of charm. If she thanked him for his gorgeous roses, her tone deflowered the flowers" (LG 21-2). Gordon's mind is replete with sexist preconceptions which he projects onto Harriet to justify his aversion. His double standard is obvious, however, in that he does not hesitate getting sexually involved with a plain, masculine-looking woman as long as the relationship remains ephemeral and nonbinding. He confesses that he has "carried things along pretty far with Miss Arkwright" (LG 21) and that he must "use diplomacy" to get himself out of the delicate situation. When it comes to marriage, Gordon has made up his mind to "commit the supreme extravagance and marry for beauty"; he wants "a wife other men would envy" (LG 23). Incriminating Gordon for reducing Lucy to a show-piece, Cather proceeds to teach her male character a lesson by yoking him with the very same woman he despises.

Aggressive sexual behavior has long been a hallmark of masculinity. In the early decades of this century, according to D'Emilio and Freedman, "erotic life was assuming a new, distinctive importance in the consciousness" of men (173). As the famous sexologist Havelock Ellis had put it, "a man's sexual constitution is part of his general constitution" (quot. by D'Emilio and Freedman 226). Cather knew the increasing emphasis given to sexual activity and did not flinch from exposing problems created by identification of compulsive sexuality with healthy manhood. From Fred Ottenburg's casual and reckless flings to Frank Ellinger's illicit affairs and Harry Gordon's ephemeral escapades, the reader gets a clear picture of rather free sexual behavior. These characters are depicted as womanizers or consumers of hot journals, their sexuality established either through their "taste for the nude in art" (SL 140) or through active sexual involvement. Joe Giddy is a voyeur; he indulges in a "picture gallery" of female sex objects and worships his pet one — "a naked girl laying on a couch with her knee carelessly poised in the air" (SL 140). The "notoriously wild" Frank Ellinger is a consumer of the female body; he parades openly "with a prostitute in broad delight" (LL 50) and could care less about the "scandalous chronicle" he creates. Likewise, Harry Gordon escapes unscathed from his sexual escapades, even though during "the two winters Lucy had been in Chicago, he had played with lots of girls in the cities where his father's business took him" (LG 21). For Cather it is not the overt sexual behavior of men that is problematic but their sense of smugness and exploitation of women. Regardless of whether an escapade will lead to marriage or not, womanizers reduce women to pawns in the sexual game. Having satisfied their desire, they discard either the women (Larry Donovan abandons Ántonia and Frank Ellinger dumps Marian Forrester) or, having married them like Shabata and Ottenburg, treat women as their possessions.

Peter N. Stearns points out that aggressive sexuality has its roots in "a larger pattern of competitive behavior that hark[s] back to another kind of tradition, the virtues of the hunt" (81); indeed, "the advocate of the male ethos is a hunter of one kind or another" (Pugh 135). Cather's masculine man is a hunter of

(Continued on Page 10)

Discussion Topics for Spring Conference 1995

SONG OF THE LARK

(1) A major topic of discussion is the relationship/antagonism between the artistic life and the personal life. Cather has written about that conflict: "The further the world advances the more it becomes evident that an author's only safe course is to cling to the skirts of his art, forsaking all others, and keep unto her as long as they two shall live. An artist should be able to lift himself into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and believe and argue, but he must create." Keeping in mind Thea's life and career, how did Cather's philosophy show itself in Thea? Must the artistic life be a denial of the personal?

(2) Note Cather's attitude toward marriage — the novel's three unhappy marriages and Thea's career taking precedence over her possible personal happiness with any of the four men with whom she has a relationship.

(3) There are several interesting portraits of teachers in this novel. Comment on Cather's notion of effective teachers.

(4) The Southwest figures largely in this novel. Discuss the relationship between Thea's "epiphany" in Panther Canyon and her development of an artist. The Southwest has a significant impact on *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *The Professor's House* as well.

(5) Thea, as the heroine, should by all rights be a person with whom the reader sympathizes. Yet the reader is asked to admire a person not altogether pleasant. How do you explain this dichotomy?

LUCY GAYHEART

(1) How are Thea and Lucy different? Identify and comment on the very different attitudes with which each novel ends. How is the theme of the artist's life similar and/or different?

(2) James Woodress writes of the novel: "*Lucy Gayheart* . . . is not a cheerful novel produced by a mind moored serenely in a snug harbor. It is instead a story of death and blasted hopes, a tale that explores the dark Gothic underside of life, a novel revealing its author's darkening vision." How does this description show itself in the novel?

(3) Cather herself had trouble with Lucy. Woodress suggests that "Lucy Gayheart was not a character Cather loved, as she did Ántonia or Marian Forrester, and Lucy suffers from this lack of sympathy." What is there about Lucy that prevents us from "sympathy" with her? How is she different from Ántonia and/or Marian?

(4) Lucy seems to be a character always in motion. How is this an important factor in the novel?

(5) Cather seems to be commenting on the futility of romantic love. Where and how is this a common theme in Cather works?

From Mellanee Kvasnicka
and Don Connors,
WCPM Board of Governors

WILLA CATHER AT UNL (Continued)

including Cather seminars for graduates and undergraduates, American literature classes, Plains literature classes, and women's literature classes. In any given year there are about twenty graduate students conducting course-related research on her, and in recent years there have been more than a dozen graduate students writing dissertations on her at the same time. They explore such subjects as the relevance of Cather's drama criticism to her fiction, Cather's understanding of the visual arts, and her positioning of her self in an epic tradition.

UNL's foremost scholar on Willa Cather is Susan Rosowski, Adele Hall Professor of English, whose appointment is in Willa Cather studies. Other UNL scholars who have written about Cather are Frederick Link, Charles Mignon, Frances Kaye, Maureen Honey, Robert Narveson, and Leslie Whipp, all of the Department of English. Rosowski, Link and Mignon are currently working on a set of scholarly editions of Cather's novels, which are being published by the University of Nebraska Press. Each edition includes the text as Cather intended it, an historical introduction and explanatory notes. *O Pioneers!* is in print — and received *Choice*'s award as "Outstanding Book" of the year for 1994 — *My Ántonia* has just appeared, and *A Lost Lady* is in production for the press.

WC AND THE CULT OF MASCULINITY
(Continued)

the most persistent kind, a manipulator of women's emotions who resorts to theatricality to besiege the female heart. The favorite role of Cather's first master of the romantic charade, Frank Shabata, whose erotic pursuits are steeped in melodrama, is that of the heart-broken lover. He woos young women with "an interesting discontent in his blue eyes" and leads them to believe that they are "the cause of that unsatisfied expression" (OP 143); he intensifies his melancholic look with an equally melancholy gesture; he draws his cambric "handkerchief out most slowly" and then lets the match he used to light his cigar drop "most despairingly" (OP 144). The traditional assumption that men captivate women through a magnetizing look and a straightforward familiarity characterizes such flirtation, which often ends with the standard romantic walk in the moonlight.

The masculine and self-serving biases that damage heterosexual relationships are clearly depicted in the way Fred Ottenburg tries to conquer Thea Kronborg's heart. Admittedly a far more positive figure than Shabata, Donovan or Ellinger, Ottenburg is nonetheless a hostage to the masculine mystique. Because he has to deal with a strong-willed and independent woman, his erotic manipulations are unusually subtle and well-planned. Drawing from his experience with other women and secure in the belief that he has "quite a way" with the female sex, Ottenburg begins his act by insisting on calling Thea "Miss Thea" rather than the formal Miss Kronborg. Having discovered very early that such a woman cannot be won by flattery of her femininity, he exalts her talent and praises her artistic commitment. Whereas other men might find Thea "all brain and muscle" with "no feeling," he finds these "masculine" qualities appealing, for he claims to be an "unusual" man. In fact, he feels that Thea Kronborg should feel lucky to have found him. To borrow from Marc Feigen Fasteau, "to deliver oneself a self-congratulatory hug for being astute enough to recognize [a] woman's uniqueness and big and bold enough to deal with her" (69) is but a clumsy attempt to conceal one's sexist ulterior motives. But Ottenburg's duplicity shines through his gallant mask when he tries to play the role of the forlorn lover. His emotional blackmail aims at convincing Thea to engage in an adulterous relationship: "You've got me going pretty hard, I suppose you know. I've had a lot of sweethearts, but I've never been so engrossed before. What are you going to do about it? . . . Are you going to play fair, or is it about my cue to cut away? . . . What do you want me around for? — to play with?" (SL 403). Typically branding Thea a tease, Ottenburg tries to deflect the blame for his erotic manipulation and to present himself as a victim. His accusation that Thea Kronborg has unclear intentions, that he has become the toy of an inexperienced young woman, is ridiculous. Ottenburg is one of those men who view their attempt to subdue "women who are independent and bright as well as attractive [as] simply the highest form of sport, their conquest the true test of manhood. These men are usually aggressive and successful in their professions. What they are looking for most is the reassurance of conquest, and the more worthy the opponent the better" (Fasteau 69). There are ample clues in *The Song of the Lark* to suggest that Fred Ottenburg fits this assessment perfectly.

Cather depicts Ottenburg as a knight in shining armor whose flirtations with Thea adhere to a chivalric pattern of assault and withdrawal. When she is sick with tonsillitis, he sends her pink roses and a fruit basket but refrains from personal contact. After her recovery, Ottenburg reintroduces the question of marriage, despite assurances that his intentions are different: "I'm not going to carry you off, as I might another girl. If you wanted to quit me, I couldn't hold you, no matter how many times you had married me. I don't want to overpersuade you . . . . You are not a sentimental person" (SL 410). Underneath these verbalizations lies Ottenburg's burning desire to place the marital yoke on Thea. The fact that Cather obstructs the easy realization of his goal suggests that she considers his motives suspicious. As a lover, the masculine man is neither sincere nor innocuous and his power has to be neutralized by denying him a solid victory over the androgynous woman.

Cather's adverse reaction to the sexist dimensions of the love hunt did not change over the years; although twenty years separate the portraits of Fred Ottenburg and Harry Gordon, she entraps both men in marriages that they come to regret. The aggressive pursuit of women for personal gratification backfires and makes the men, not the women, losers. Cather teaches Fred Ottenburg a lesson about the destructive consequences of reckless sexual escapades, that being an "Apollo" to a "ripping beauty" and perceiving marriage as a felicitous arrangement that would keep him out of boredom can have serious consequences. While a junior at Harvard and involved with Edith Beers only for three days, Ottenburg plunges into a hasty marriage and lives to regret it. When his rosy picture of wedlock falls apart and his beauty turns out to be unmanageable, he (like Shabata before him), blames her, conveniently forgetting that he had chosen her. With his marriage in shambles but his chauvinistic mentality intact, Ottenburg turns his interest to Thea, claiming to have fallen prey to an attractive woman who holds him captive emotionally but refuses to consummate their relationship.

Like most men, Ottenburg defines the heterosexual union in terms of procreation and fatherhood. Ten years after Thea Kronborg's rejection of his marriage proposal, Fred Ottenburg still feels that his life has been meaningless without a family. He confesses his regrets and accuses Thea of ingratitude: "I might ask you, What have I got? I want things that wouldn't interest you; that you probably wouldn't understand.

(Continued on Page 12)

Catherians gather at the Salt Lake City home of John and Sally Murphy after the WLA Conference.

Report on the 1994 Western Literature Association Conference

Steven B. Shively
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The 29th annual Western Literature Association Conference, held October 5-8, 1994, in Salt Lake City, offered fourteen papers on the literature of Willa Cather, confirming Cather's continuing status as one of the most provocative and productive subjects for scholars of the American West.

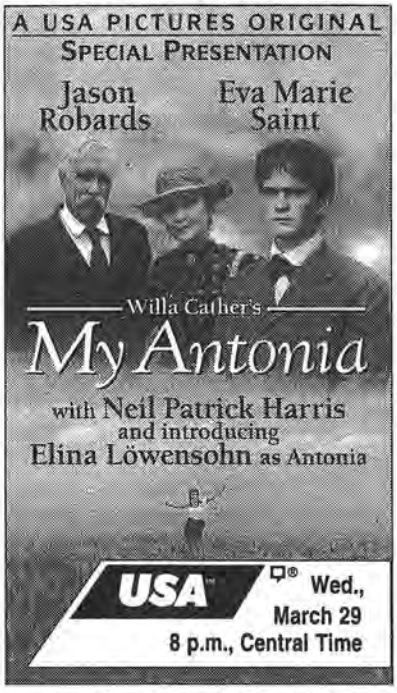
Susan Rosowski of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in her essay "Redrawing Regionalism: Willa Cather's Imaginative Maps," addressed the irony that in defending Cather against the limiting label of "a regional writer," scholars have missed the insights of her regional sensibilities. Rosowski distinguished between *region*, a term defining an area that can be mapped, and *place*, the particular spot known mostly in the consciousness of an individual; it is the difference between the broad sweep of the Divide and the fact of Alexandra in her garden, and for a writer it is like the difference between *language* and *voice*.

Ann Moseley (East Texas State University), in her essay "A New World Symphony: Cultural Pluralism in Willa Cather's Fiction," and Susan Carr (Marshall University), in her essay "The Success of Willa Cather's Other," responded to recent criticism challenging Cather's portrayals of women and various ethnic groups. Arguing that Cather's attitudes toward ethnic groups were progressive for her time, Moseley noted similarities between Horace Kallen's use of the orchestra metaphor in his theory of cultural pluralism and Cather's symphony of diverse cultures in *The Song of the Lark*. Carr argued that contemporary theories of otherness do not apply to Cather's characters. Carr's argument that Cather should not be read with the limited view of "either . . . or . . . " but rather with the broader perspective of "both . . . and . . ." characterized several conference presentations. Among them were "Willa Cather's 'Neighbour Rosicky' and the Agrarian Dream" by Bruce Baker of the University of Nebraska-Omaha and "Cather's Flora: What's Real in Nebraskan Victorian Romanticism" by Carol Bosshardt of the University of Nebraska-Kearney.

Several graduate students from Brigham Young University demonstrated what can happen when promising students are turned loose with Willa Cather's books. Their well-researched papers add significantly to the scholarship on *Death Comes for the Archbishop*: "The Dominguez-Escalante Journal and the Tradition of Cather's *Archbishop*," by Heidi Meyer; "Story Strategies and the Baltazar Legend in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," by Milton Jones; "Henry Adams's Virgin and the Energy Source in Cather's *Archbishop*," by David Pace; and "The Landscape of Conflict in Cather's *Archbishop*," by Patricia Malouf.

Other presenters demonstrated the vitality and variety of Cather scholarship. Phil Coleman-Hull (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) presented "The (Im)mortal Serenade: An Interpretation on Music in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, and *Lucy Gayheart*"; Natalie Stillman-Webb (Brigham Young University) presented "Nelly Deane and Lucy Gayheart: Two Sides to the Same Coin"; and Anne Kaufmann (The Sidwell Friends School) presented "Building Bridges: Willa Cather and Katherine Mansfield." Sharon Hoover of Alfred University presented "Nellie Birdseye: Critic of Life," and Florence Amamoto of Gustavus Adolphus College presented "Movement and Rootedness in Cather's *My Ántonia*."

As usual, the Western Literature Association Annual Conference offered to those interested in the life and literature of Willa Cather opportunities for fellowship, serious discussions, and intellectual stimulation.



Also Sunday, April 2 and Saturday, April 8. Check local listings for time.

WC AND THE CULT OF MASCULINITY
(Continued)

For one thing I want a son to bring up" (SL 556). Ottenburg concludes that he "was an ass" to wait and that he "wouldn't do it again" if he "had the chance" (SL 557). Cather does not allow the reader to sympathize with this selfish complaint; on the contrary, she puts his regrets into perspective by contrasting his view to Thea's. Whereas Cather's heroine talks of the emotional bond that years cannot eradicate, her man talks of the conventional expectations of marriage. For Thea, "who marries who is a small matter, after all." But she would prefer Fred Ottenburg, who has "cared longer and more than anybody else," because she would like to "have somebody human to make a report to once in a while" (SL 559). The humbling of Fred Ottenburg through his first disastrous marriage and the postponement of his dream of fatherhood for ten years without the promise of its ever becoming a reality indicate Cather's negative reaction to traditional male expectations. Her refusal to domesticate Thea and tie her down to a man's procreative needs is adamant. The love affair between Ottenburg and Kronborg is not just another Cinderella story, in which the "beer prince" sweeps the princess off her feet so they can live happily ever after in his palace. The power structure has been altered, and the "offstage marriage is wisely omitted" (Lee 126). Ottenburg is destined to live under Thea's shadow, to share her life and her successful career, not vice versa.

Written twenty years later, *Lucy Gayheart* continues the pattern of male culpability in heterosexual relationships in the affairs of Harry Gordon. Resembling Ottenburg, Gordon is selfish, domineering, and sexist. His preconceptions about love and marriage demand that his woman bow to his desires. Having set his heart on Lucy Gayheart, he plans their future with the assumption that she will comply. The way he proposes to her is as androcentric and self-serving as Ottenburg's:

> "And now isn't it about time we got down to business? We know each other pretty well. You've had your little fling. You want to see the world, but you'll see it a lot better with me. Why waste any more time? This is April; I should think we might be married in May. Oh, June if you like! But we mustn't let another summer slip by." (LG 108-09)

But Lucy surprises him with as firm a refusal as Thea's: "I'm not ready to marry anyone. I won't be, for a long time" (LG 109). Indignant, he replies: "But I am! Just ready. And we've always known we would do it some day, both of us" (LG 109). In this clash of wills Gordon, the loser, turns malicious. As Fasteau explains, "closely related to the question of control is a man's expectation that, once a relationship is established or a conquest at any level is made, a woman will orient herself almost exclusively toward him, will serve as auxiliary or ornament" (64). Gordon's offensive reaction to Lucy's refusal is based on such assumption.

In Cather's worst scenarios, the erotic hunt has tragic effects for both the man and the woman. The deaths of Marie Tovesky and Lucy Gayheart are the result of male vengeance. When his egoism is challenged by her father's staunch refusal of marriage, Frank Shabata, "only half in love," elopes. When his marriage turns sour, bitterness poisons his heart. Marie's unwillingness to play the obedient wife inflames Shabata's hatred and for three years the man tries to "break her spirit" and "make her life ugly" (OP 266). Because his beloved is no longer under his control, Shabata ends up in prison for murder. His conquest in the end is total (he has managed to destroy Marie emotionally, sexually and physically), but his victory is hollow.

Also hollow is Harry Gordon's vindictive triumph over Lucy Gayheart. Seeking revenge for having been jilted, Gordon weds Harriet Arkwright, knowing "that he was hurting himself in order to hurt someone else. He was doing the one thing he had sworn he never would do, marrying a plain woman, who could never feel the joy of life" (LG 214). His motives are as phallocentric as Shabata's. Ironically, the victim is not Harriet Arkwright, who dominates the marriage, but the feminine Lucy and Gordon himself. To Lucy's silent pleas for reconciliation, he turns only a deaf ear, convinced that "she deserved to be punished" (LG 216). Cather makes it clear that Gordon's plight is self-inflicted: "He was in the first year of a barren marriage (barren in every sense; his wife never had a child), and the life he would have lived with Lucy was always in the back of his mind then. She had ruined all that for a caprice, a piece of mawkish sentimentality. Let her suffer for it. God knew he did!" (LG 216). First he makes a scapegoat of Lucy and then he blames her for his discontent, the same way Shabata absolves himself by blaming Marie Tovesky. Cather neither alleviates the guilt of both men, nor presents their revenge as a triumph. Instead, she taunts Gordon with his fate: "How differently life had turned out from the life young Harry Gordon planned in the days when he used to step out on the diamond to pitch his famous in-curve, with all the boys and girls calling to him from the bleachers!" (LG 209). She makes sure that the hunt for the female heart turns against the lady-killer (a label here both literal and symbolic). The defeat of the male erotic schemes is consistent with Cather's subversion of the privileged position heterosexual romance held in nineteenth century fiction. In the words of Rosowski, "Cather incorporated dominant ideologies into her traditional love plots but then subverted those plots by creating female characters who wrote their own scripts in defiance of expectations imposed upon them" ("Willa Cather's Subverted Endings" 84). My point here is that the masculine men find little erotic fulfillment unless they force or abuse women.

(Continued on Next Page)

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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Spring Conference Bulletin

May 5 and 6, 1995

3 N. Webster Street
d Cloud, Nebraska 68970

THE WILLA CATHER SOCIETY

Telephone (402) 746-2653
Fax (402) 746-2652

Stunning Cast of Artists and Scholars Highlight the 1995 Fortieth Annual Cather Spring Conference

"HE PASSING SHOW"

"Music and Willa Cather" will be the topic of lively discussion as nelists come together on May 6 to share ideas about *The Song of e Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*. The panel, to be moderated by WCPM ard member Bruce Baker (University of Nebraska-Omaha), begins 10:00 a.m. with Merrill Skaggs's "Key Modulations in Cather's ivels about Music." Dr. Skaggs's paper will be followed by a scussion of *Lucy Gayheart* by Richard Giannone and Mary Robert's sponse to *The Song of the Lark*. Page 9 of the current *Newsletter* ers ideas for thought and debate at the panel's conclusion.

Professor of English at Fordham University, Giannone authored e first book-length study of Willa Cather and music in 1968. *Music Willa Cather's Fiction* begins with Cather's early journalistic pieces music and musicians and then surveys the entire body of her work. day, over twenty-five years after considering the novel in his book, annone appreciates new dimensions of the wisdom in *Lucy Gay- art*.

As director of Opera Omaha, Mary Robert approaches her ading of *The Song of the Lark* from inside the operatic world. eminiscent of the words of Cather's heroine in the novel are those Robert in an interview with the *Omaha World-Herald* (December 16, 94): "the opera probably formed the center of my life. Anyone who is a position like this has to constantly give up everything you are erested in . . . ."

Merrill Skaggs, Professor of English at Drew University, has eased Spring Conference audiences before as a panelist and as a oderator. Her book *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels Willa Cather* (1990) attempts to answer why the world did break in o for Cather in 1922 and to show how "such a one as Cather" sponded.

ANQUET ENTERTAINMENT

Bill and Sandy Allyn and **Philip Abbott** will address the evening anquet on the problems and delights of preparing and producing a ece of literature for television viewing. In November 1994 the Allyns ished the production of "Spring Awakening," a CBS/Hallmark hour- nd-a-half adaptation of Willa Cather's short story "A Resurrection." onference goers will have opportunities to view the made-for- levision movie on Friday evening and on Saturday afternoon prior to e banquet. Actor Philip Abbott, who plays Mr. Pierson in the movie, ill read from Cather's text and from the movie script at the banquet.

These three bring to their work years of experience in writing, irecting, acting, and producing. The Allyns have collaborated as a usband and wife team on numerous productions, notably "Echoes of e Sixties;" "Once Upon a Time . . . Is Now, the Story of Princess Grace," and "Rich and Famous." Bill Allyn additionally has produced "The Last Child," "And No One Could Save Her," and "Peyton Place." Sandy Allyn wrote the original screenplays for "Devil's Game," "A Real American Love Story," and "Man on the Island." William Allyn Productions acquired the rights to the French film *Cousin, Cousine*, released by Paramount in 1989. Many will recognize Philip Abbott from the popular television series *The FBI*, in which he portrayed the assistant director opposite Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. More recently he starred as host-narrator of PBS-TV's critically-acclaimed "Hidden Places." Besides an impressive history of acting roles on television, Broadway, and film, Abbott, formerly a Nebraskan, is also a writer, producer, and director. His three award-winning series, "Under the Law," "Learning Laws," and "Lessons of Living," are distributed nationally by Walt Disney Educational Media.

SPRING CONFERENCE FORMAT

On Friday, May 5, paper sessions will be held at the Man and the Land Building, 4th Avenue and Franklin Street, from 2:00 until 4:00 p.m. Dr. Virgil Albertini, WCPM Board member from Northwest Missouri State University, will chair these sessions. Several of the Cather buildings will be open for drop-in traffic from 1:00-5:00 p.m. Dinner Friday evening is "on your own" at any of the local restaurants. The Man and the Land Building again serves as the gathering place at 8:00 p.m. for a screening of "Spring Awakening," shown for the first time in Red Cloud. Bill and Sandy Allyn, co-producers, and actor Philip Abbott will be on hand to answer questions after the film.

Saturday's program begins early with coffee and kolache at the WCPM bookstore and art gallery. Mass at Grace Episcopal Church, 6th Avenue and Cedar, begins at 9:00 a.m. with Rev. Dr. Charles Peek, University of Nebraska-Kearney, presiding. Bruce Baker will introduce and moderate "The Passing Show" panel, featuring Richard Giannone, Merrill Skaggs, and Mary Robert, at the Lincoln Elementary School at 10:00 a.m. Lunch served by the P.E.O. Chapter Y follows the panel at 12:30 p.m. An important meeting with the WCPM Director and Board of Governors continues at the Elementary School at 1:30 p.m. After this, participants MUST make choices about how they will spend the rest of the afternoon. Three different options are offered from 2:00-5:00 p.m.: a second showing of "Spring Awakening," a trip to the Cather Memorial Prairie, and a Cather town tour. All participants will meet at the restored Burlington Depot for an exhibit and social hour at 5:00 p.m. The Women's Chamber of Commerce is again in charge of the evening banquet, which begins at 7:00 p.m. at the High School gymtorium, 7th Avenue and Webster Street. Ron Hull, associate general manager of Nebraska Public Television, will host the evening which will feature the Allyns and Abbott.

Six of nine founders of WCPM, March 1955. Left to right: Harry Obitz, Mildred Bennett, Frank O'Rourke, Carrie Miner Sherwood, Helen Obitz, Jennie Reiher.
—WCPM Photo

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Celebrates 40 Years

40th Annual
Willa Cather Spring Conference
May 5 and 6, 1995
Red Cloud, Nebraska

FRIDAY, MAY 5, 1995
A Do-It-Yourself Afternoon

1:00-5:00 p.m. . . . . REGISTRATION
WC Foundation Art Gallery/Bookstore

1:00-5:00 p.m. . . . . OPEN HOUSE
WC Foundation Art Gallery/Bookstore
Willa Cather Museum Building
Willa Cather Childhood Home (3rd and Cedar)
Grace Episcopal Church (6th and Cedar)

2:00-4:00 p.m. PAPER PRESENTATIONS, VIRGIL ALBERTINI, moderator
Man and the Land Building, 4th Avenue and Franklin

Call for Papers on Cather

("Music in Cather's Work" papers especially welcome.) Contact Dr. Bruce P. Baker, Dept. of English, Univ. of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182, Telephone (402) 554-2635. Deadline: April 19, 1995.

5:00-8:00 p.m. . . . . DINNER on Your Own

8:00-10:00 p.m. . . . . FILM AND DISCUSSION
"Spring Awakening"
based on Willa Cather's short story "A Resurrection"

✧ **A Walking Tour Map is available at the Foundation's Art Gallery/Bookstore.** ✧

OPEN EXTENDED HOURS
Willa Cather Bookstore and Art Gallery
Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday
8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

The Cather Foundation thanks the Nebraska State Historical Society for continued preservation and maintenance of the restored Cather buildings.

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 1995

8:00-10:00 a.m. . . . . REGISTRATION
Coffee and kolache — at Cather Foundation Art Gallery/Bookstore

9:00 a.m. . . . . EPISCOPAL CHURCH SERVICE
Grace Episcopal Church, 6th Avenue and Cedar
St. Juliana Choir
Rev. Dr. Charles Peek, Officiant; Steve Shively, Lay Reader

10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. . . . . "THE PASSING SHOW" PANEL
Man and the Land Building, 4th Avenue and Franklin

"The Passing Show"

A Roundtable Discussion of Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*

Bruce P. Baker . . . . . Moderator
University of Nebraska-Omaha
Merrill McGuire Skaggs . . . . . Panelist
Drew University
Mary Robert . . . . . Panelist
Opera Omaha
Richard Giannone . . . . . Panelist
Fordham University

12:30 p.m. . . . . LUNCH
Lincoln Elementary School, South entrance, 3rd Avenue and Cherry
(a two-block walk from Man and the Land)

1:30 p.m. . . . . **IMPORTANT MEETING WITH WCPM BOARD**
Lincoln Elementary School

2:00 p.m. . . . . CHOICES!!!
*Your Choice **MUST** Be Designated on Your Reservation Form.*

Film . . . . . "Spring Awakening"
Man and the Land Building
Cather Tour . . . . . Depart from Lincoln Elementary
Trip to Cather Prairie . . . . . Depart from Lincoln Elementary

5:00 p.m. . . . . EXHIBIT AND RECEPTION
Restored Burlington Depot (last stop on tour)

WCPM BOOKSTORE OPEN UNTIL 6:00 p.m.

7:00 p.m. . . . . BANQUET
BILL AND SANDY ALLYN, PHILLIP ABBOTT, GUEST SPEAKERS/PERFORMER

WILLA CATHER SPRING CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

Registration **MUST** be received by **MAY 3**. Please mail check and registration to: WCPM, 326 N. Webster, Red Cloud, NE 68970 (Call 402-746-2653 or Fax 746-2652).

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR AFTERNOON CHOICE OF EVENTS AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING.

Number Attending
_____ All day, member — $45.00
_____ All day, non-member — $50.00
_____ All day, student — $35.00

Number Attending
_____ Cather Tour
_____ Trip to Prairie
_____ "Spring Awakening"

Number Attending
_____ Daytime Events Only: Member — $22.50, Non-member — $25.00, Student — $17.50
_____ Evening Only: Member — $22.50, Non-Member — $25.00, Student — $17.50

Amount Enclosed: $_____ (Please enclose self-addressed stamped envelope for tickets.)
(Registration on day of conference will NOT include meals.)

Name(s) _____ Full time student's affiliation: _____

Address _____ Phone Number _____

Building Hours of Operation, May 6

- WCPM Art Gallery/ Bookstore
  8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
- Willa Cather Historical Museum
  8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
- Cather Childhood Home
  8:00-10:00 a.m.
  2:00-5:00 p.m.
- Grace Episcopal Church
  9:00-10:00 a.m.
- St. Juliana Catholic Church
  9:00-10:00 a.m.

WC Foundation Art Gallery & Bookstore OPEN All Day on Sunday, May 7
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Midlands Lodge, Hwys. 6 - 34 - 281 . . . . . (402) 463-2428
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Upcoming Events:

March 25 . . . . . Screening of *My Ántonia*, 2:00 p.m., Red Cloud High School
March 29 . . . . . MY ÁNTONIA, USA NETWORK, 8:00 P.M. (CST)
April 2 . . . . . MY ÁNTONIA, USA NETWORK, 7:00 P.M. (CST)
April 6-8 . . . . . Cather Centennial Celebration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
April 8 . . . . . MY ÁNTONIA, USA NETWORK, 2:00 P.M. (CST)
May 5-6 . . . . . 40th Annual Cather Spring Conference, Red Cloud
May 16-18 . . . . . Pastime and Playthings for Elementary School Children
Cather House, Red Cloud
May 26-28 . . . . . American Literature Association (2 Cather Sessions), Baltimore, MD
June 5-9 . . . . . Prairie Institute, Red Cloud
(A 3 Credit Course, WCPM and University of Nebraska-Kearney)
June 24-July 1 . . . . . 6th International Willa Cather Seminar, Quebec City, Canada
July 4 . . . . . Opening of Burlington Railroad Exhibit, Historic Depot, Red Cloud

WRITE OR CALL WCPM FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANY OF THESE!

WC AND THE CULT OF MASCULINITY
(Continued)

The heterosexual union is doomed to failure because the ladies' man tries either to mold the woman into an ideal image or to impose his will. Cather perceived the link between male sexuality and the hunt of the female body as dangerous, to say the least. I disagree with Blanche H. Gelfant's post-Freudian conclusion that Cather was intimidated by human sexuality and passionate heterosexual unions, that in her fiction characters have "a strong intuitive aversion to sex" or "avoid sexual union" (104). I see Cather's negation of passionately heterosexual unions not so much as an aversion to sex or human sexuality but as a reaction against the predatory male attitude encouraged by American culture and institutionalized by the novel of seduction. Characters like Alexandra Bergson, Marie Tovesky, Thea Kronborg, Ántonia Shimerda, Lena Lingard, Marian Forrester, Lucy Gayheart possess a thriving sexuality but they demand sexual gratification on their own terms. On the other hand, it is Cather's male characters who are either afraid of or overwhelmed by female sexuality. When they are denied access to the female body, it is because their intentions are linked to its conquest and not to the establishment of an egalitarian relationship. What Cather finds objectionable is not erotic fulfillment but the link between sexual gratification and the authentication of masculinity at the expense of women. As Elizabeth Ammons points out, "male heterosexual treachery haunts Cather's work. Although the popular view of her fiction usually holds that hers was a pacific even asexual world, it is actually full of heterosexual violence." In fact, "Cather's work contains image after image of deadly male heterosexual aggression" (130). Perhaps for Cather, the only way to combat such aggression is to change the attitude of the masculine man, to purge the sexism constantly fueled by the cultural expectation of man as hunter and of the perpetual warfare between the sexes. The humbling fate of the ladies' man is her literary triumph over these symbols of masculine oppression.

In a sense, Cather's story of the ladies' man comes to a full circle, for Harry Gordon has a lot in common with Frank Shabata. Both marry for revenge; both inflict suffering on themselves and on the women they love; both experience a barren marriage; both are deprived of emotional fulfillment, and both are submerged in years of remorse. While Shabata works "like a demon" (OP 147) Harry Gordon spends most of his time on the road driving "like the devil" (LG 221). Although he does not end in jail like Shabata, Gordon calls his fate "a life sentence" (LG 221). In time, his guilt grows "paler," but it takes him twenty-five years of remorse and eight months in World War I to shed his androcentrism and become a "consistent" and "companionable" husband. By leading Harry Gordon through a change of personality and a long period of retribution and emotional turmoil, Cather humbles and makes more humane a patriarchal symbol. The twenty-two year span that separates the creation of Frank Shabata and Harry Gordon contains a shift in Cather's attitude toward masculine man. Although she utilizes many of Shabata's traits to construct Gordon's character, Cather is more compassionate in *Lucy Gayheart* than in *O Pioneers!*; despite Alexandra's compassion for him, she leaves Shabata rotting in jail with only a hint that he may be pardoned. In 1935, in her "novel of forgiveness," Cather, "having retaliated or punished" those who offended her (Skaggs 164), makes peace with herself and absolves her ladies' man.

Like many white, middle-class women who at the turn of the century struggled to define themselves as serious artists, Cather initially distanced herself from the popular female writers that dominated the nineteenth century fiction market. But her initial identification with masculinity and the Western male tradition was short-lived. Susie Thomas correctly observes that whereas in her youth "Cather swallowed the notion of male supremacy whole," in her maturity she did not "perpetuate a masculine imitation but developed an individual voice" (10) that refused to be confined to the conventional norms. And Sharon O'Brien convincingly argues that by the time Cather wrote *O Pioneers!* (1913), she had resolved her identity crisis and had successfully welded "the formerly mutually exclusive identities, artist and woman" (279). Although not an outspoken feminist, Cather was a quiet and tactful underminer of the patriarchal gender ideology. She not only shattered the mythical image of the West as a male territory and intentionally made "the Western hero a woman" adding thus "a touch of boldness to a conservative tradition" (Murphy 168, 176), but she also challenged in various ways the social norms that governed gender behavior. As she became conscious of "the way men perceive themselves and of the way men project meaning onto women and interpret them in terms of their own needs and fears" (O'Brien 279), Cather began to challenge many of the traditional myths and came to appreciate the virtues of an androgynous human model. Her rebellion against sexual conformity is captured both in the blurring of sexual roles — so essential in her fiction — and in "the theme of disillusion with masculine ideology" (Ammons, "The Engineer as Cultural Hero" 474) which runs through her career. As her lifelong friend Edith Lewis noted, Cather "was naturally a very fearless person, fearless in matters of thought, of social convention" (136); she rather enjoyed defying public opinion.

The contemporary reader cannot overlook Cather's uncompromising vision in the portrayal of the sexes. The gender critique in her novels rests on the consistent exposure of opportunism, chauvinism, and sexism that lies behind the male mask of chivalry. Her ladies' man is only one means by which Cather dissects the problematic psychosexual dimensions of the masculine identity and challenges the patriarchal notion that the

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(Continued)

distinctly virile, aggressive, and sexually active man should stand as the paragon of the male sex. Placed in circumstances that taunt the incontestable "naturalness" of his masculinity, the ladies' man is exposed as an insecure and conceited opportunist whose engagement in illicit affairs bears tragic consequences. Neither his macho tactics nor his hunt of female sexuality is rewarded. And male revenge almost always backfires. In the final pages of *O Pioneers!* the dehumanization of this "self-destructive male chauvinist" (Lee 114) is made explicit: Frank Shabata is transformed into a killer of passion and abandoned in jail to be consumed by guilt. The womanizer Giddy is accused of Ray Kennedy's death in *The Song of the Lark*. The rascal Donovan, burdened with the sexual abuse of a woman and the abandonment of an illegitimate child, is led toward criminality in *My Ántonia*. The "willing stud" (Skaggs 55) Frank Ellinger is reduced to a self-promoting prostitute in *A Lost Lady*; there is nothing he won't do to gain wealth and status. Even the beer prince Fred Ottenburg has to be purged, first by being dragged through a disastrous marriage and then sentenced to a ten-year waiting period before he is finally matched with Thea Kronborg. Likewise the worshipper of feminine beauty Harry Gordon, yoked to a woman he despises, is sentenced to twenty-five years of contrition. With these male characters and the antiromantic endings she devises, Cather mounts a successful critique of the ideological system which produced them. The bitter fruits of the heterosexual erotic hunt are Cather's "corrective to the aggressively masculine tendencies of American literature" (Thomas 3).

(My sincerest gratitude to Dr. John Serio at Clarkson University for his helpful comments.)

NOTE

[1]All references to these novels will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviations OP, SL, MA, LL, LG.

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Scholars Please Note

The Cather Center Archives will be open for research the week preceding Spring Conference. Arrangements made in advance are required. Please call the WCPM at (402) 746-2653, Fax (402) 746-2652, or write to us at 326 North Webster, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970.

Willa Cather, France, and Pierre Loti: A Spirit of Affiliation*

John P. Anders
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

In *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, James Woodress emphasizes that "Cather always wrote with an awareness of her literary predecessors from the Greeks to the major authors of the twentieth century" (247). A homoerotic literary tradition lies within this spectrum, and Cather's familiarity with it also seems particularly acute. Although efforts to place Cather within a literary mainstream often overlook "non-traditional" sources, the homoerotic tradition, coming of age as Cather herself came of age, significantly broadens her literary inheritance and provides a rich context for exploring her fiction.

One indication of Cather's familiarity with this tradition is her fondness for nineteenth-century French fiction. In part, this interest reflects a cultural fascination for all things French. As a university student, Cather exuberantly upheld the creative energy of France:

> Stopping to think of it, most things come from France, chefs and salads, gowns and bonnets, dolls and music boxes, plays and players, scientists and inventors, sculptors and painters, novelists and poets. It is a very little country, this France, and yet if it were to take a landslide in the channel some day there would not be much creative power of any sort left in the world. Some psychologist said that all Frenchmen are more or less insane, but fortunately it is an insanity that so often takes the form of genius. (W&P 223)

Cather continues this spirited devotion in her reviews of French literature, and in writing about her favorite authors, she transforms France into a cultural ideal.[1]

French domesticity has often been seen as the primary reason for this dedication, and many of the values Cather's fiction endorses have their model in the idealized French home and family. Yet French culture offered Cather other, less conventional fascinations, and French literature, in particular, drew her into a fictional world of unorthodox sexuality. "The French," Cather wrote, "are full of oriental feeling," and in France, "the great passions never become wholly conventionalized" (KA 138). Throughout Cather's commentaries, the enticing word "oriental" evokes the "savage" (KA 138) undercurrents she found in French fiction. Of this literary preference, Sharon O'Brien concludes that "France to Cather was the symbolic location of the Other, the sign for everything repressed or feared in commercial, puritanical northern climes: it was the decadent, liberated realm of the senses" (135).

In sexual matters, French literature vastly differed from that of Britain and America, and Cather's ability to read French admitted her into an uninhibited world. A comparatively tolerant legal system contributed to France's literary freedom. While legal sanction alone does not remove social condemnation of sexual nonconformity, it does provide a larger scope to personal and artistic freedom. In addition to legal tolerance, France's cultural history also conditioned its response to diversity. As John Boswell points out, traditional French love poetry had already established a cultural tolerance for sexual variance, and expressions of homosexual love were unusually refined in France by the Middle Ages (233).

An example of the "exotic erotics" popular in the French novels Cather admired was a sensationalized focus on lesbianism. The presence of lesbianism in this literature presents an interesting parallel to Cather's own depiction of male friendship. Nineteenth-century French literary aesthetes expressed a hostility to middle class morality and frequently used sexual nonconformity to voice their cry of "épater les bourgeoise." Among the most influential literary texts depicting unorthodox sexuality were Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834), "the bible of aesthetic-decadent literature, and whose title character became a prototype of the lesbian in literature for decades afterward" (Faderman 264); Daudet's *Sapho* (1884), a copy of which Cather "owned and valued" as early as 1891 (Slote 38), and Flaubert's luridly sensual *Salammbô* (1862), which Cather admitted to liking the best of all his novels (Cather, "A Chance Meeting" 22).

What can one speculate about the influence of such novels upon Cather's fiction? While Cather did not seek to overtly shock her readers, neither was she timid in her writing. As she had made the British and American literary heritage her own, so too does she appropriate the French tradition, but what is most intriguing about Cather's adaptation is that her handling of homosexuality is significantly less ambivalent. Neither cautionary nor sensational, Cather often idealizes male friendship and links it to traditions of cultural and literary respect; rather than creating "moral monsters" (Faderman 233), Cather affirms same-sex relationships and, in doing so, carefully distinguishes her fiction from the popular French novels she enjoyed.[2]

Neither the "decadent" tradition nor the realism of Balzac, who included a homosexual relationship in his *Comédie Humaine*, provided Cather with a model for her treatment of homosexuality; however, she found a precedent elsewhere in French literature. The death of Paul Verlaine in 1896 gave her an opportunity to comment on the poet in her newspaper column and, at the same time, contemplate the impact the French Symbolists made upon her imagination, and this commentary brings us very close to Cather's connection with the French homoerotic literary tradition. Her thoughts about Verlaine offer a striking contrast to those about Oscar Wilde. Although social historians, such as Max Nordau in his widely read *Degeneration* (1895), considered them to be equally "dangerous" figures, Cather exonerated Verlaine while she condemned Wilde.

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While it is tempting to see Cather's cultural bias toward France as one explanation for these judgments, more substantial reasons lie in her response to Verlaine's artistry and his experiments with poetry. While Cather's "aesthetics of suggestion" (Stouck 52) derive from the Symbolists and Impressionists of the late nineteenth century, her artistic success can be attributed in part to the sexual freedom in their poetry. Walter Perrie explains:

> For English writers the chief gain from symbolism was not, at least until Eliot and Pound, a technical one, though the innovations of Verlaine and others in the use of language as an associative and connotative instrument for the expression of feelings were inseparable from their concern with subjectivity, but was, rather, a new willingness to explore areas of feeling previously prohibited to serious literature. By the 1870's homosexual feelings and relationships had become something of an established feature of French literature. (172)

Anticipating Eliot's and Pound's stylistic innovations by more than a decade, Cather's gain from French poetry is both technical and thematic. Verlaine achieved in his poetry what Cather sought in her fiction, the evocation of "the thing not named," and she praises this skill in her reviews: "His verses are like music, they are made up of harmony and feeling, they are as indefinite and barren of facts as a nocturne. They tell only of a mood" (KA 395). Such praise resembles her later discovery of A. E. Housman, and, as with the English poet, Cather felt toward Verlaine an instinctive understanding and artistic kinship. It would be unlikely that she failed to see the homosexuality in his "feverish, overstrained, unnatural" poetry (W&P 648) and not recognize in it an important source of its haunting beauty.

But it was the French novelist Pierre Loti (pseudonym of Julien Viaud), distinguished naval officer and member of the prestigious Académie Française, who most influenced Cather in this area. Bernice Slote includes Loti among the forgotten or ignored influences upon Cather (32). In Cather's review of *Le Roman d'un Spahi*, her sympathetic response to Loti's language indicates their stylistic affinities:

> But ah, such description! All English description is odious. Careful, accurate, burdened with irrelevant detail, lifeless, leaving no picture in the reader's mind. But with the French it is a different matter. They write as they paint, to bring out an effect. (KA 367)

But while critics following Slote have begun to explore Cather's affiliation with many of the nineteenth-century French Romanticists, Cather's connections with the once popular Loti have suffered the same neglect he and his work have since his death in 1923.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Pierre Loti was perhaps France's most successful and prolific literary figure and called the country's "greatest living writer" by Anatole France (Poggenbury 78). Other readers falling under Loti's evocative spell included Xavier Mayne, who in *The Intersexes* (1908) connects Loti with about a dozen novelists, including Joris-Karl Huysman [*A Rebours* 1884] and Georges Eckhoud [*Escal-Vigor* 1909], dealing with gay themes in French (328-29). In 1907, E. M. Forster entered Loti's name in his diary as part of a growing list of names directed in part "toward discovering a homosexual literary tradition" (Martin 37). But the most curious response to Loti comes from Henry James. In writing to Owen Wister about *The Virginian*, James expresses his dissatisfaction with the ending of that novel. As Wister's hero seemingly betrays his friendship with Steve, in turn, James feels Wister betrays the novel's distinctive mood by having the hero conventionally marry and suffer no remorse for the loss of his friend. James has strong "reserve" and calls the ending "prosaic justice, and rather grim at that" (Edel 233). To improve the ending, James directs Wister to Pierre Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande*, a work Michael Moon describes as "perhaps the most pungently male homoerotic novel about a sailor before Jean Genet's *Querelle de Brest*" (260). The hero of Loti's novel similarly betrays the memory of his young friend and their idyllic life together by marrying soon after his friend's untimely death. His subsequent unhappiness and death at sea have all the splendid nobility James envisioned as due recompense for Wister's hero.

Sub-Lieutenant Viaud, (Pierre Loti), the promising young officer, preferred wearing ratings' clothes on leave; they were one of the many disguises which allowed more freedom for adventures.

Cather read *Pêcheur d'Islande* in 1896 along with her friends the Siebels, for whom she bought a charcoal portrait of its author during her first trip to France (Slote 365). In addition to *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1886), "generally thought to be Loti's masterpiece" (Blanch 180), and *Le Roman d'un Spahi* (1881), Cather was likely familiar with *Mon Frère Yves* (1883), "probably Loti's best-known book" (Blanch 128). She ends her review of *Le Roman d'un Spahi* by recalling Loti's pull upon her imagination:

> I like to think of Pierre Loti, soldier, sailor and artist, sailing among his green seas and palm-fringed islands, through all the tropic nights and orient days. Anchoring at white ports and talking with wild men, now on the high seas and now on the desert, which the ancients quaintly called a sea. We see too much of civilization, we know it all too well. It is always beating about our ears and muddling our

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(Continued)

> brains. We sometimes need solitude and the desert, which Balzac said was 'God without mankind.' Loti is a sort of knight-errant to bring it to us, who gives to [us] poor cold-bound, sense-dwarfed dwellers in the North the scent of sandalwood and the glitter of the southern stars. (KA 367)

If France was Cather's realm of romance, Loti's novels exemplify its imaginative appeal, evoking melancholy, deep mystery, and homoerotic longings through an impressionistic prose style similar to the poetry of Verlaine and Housman. They provided Cather with a stylistic and thematic model for writing about men in love, their dilemma in attempting to name their feelings, and hers in seeking to describe them. Loti identifies this dilemma in the text itself, as what concerns his characters also seems to perplex their creator. Writing to one another when they are separated, the protagonists of *Mom Frère Yves* are at a loss as to how to begin their letters, uncertain of the appropriate salutation signifying their relationship. "Brother" is selected, thus the title of the novel. However, Yves and Pierre's relationship seems more than brotherly, as they live together, travel together, think only of one another when apart, and dream of each other at night.[3]

While safe under the banners of "brother" and "friend," such relationships often push the boundaries of family and friendship into more intimate areas of personal experience. Boswell writes that such banners "evoke a wealth of associations secular and religious, erotic and spiritual, paternal and lover-like" (193). In the absence of an adequate vocabulary to express intimacy between men, familiar expressions assume new meanings. Although Cather typically leaves her protagonists' relationships muted and unspecified, especially in her male-centered novels of the 1920s, words such as "friend," "brother," "son," and "Father" echo the dynamics of ambiguous discourse and participate in the range of emotions Boswell describes.

Loti's influence upon Cather also exemplifies the power of imaginative experience. Haunted by Loti's vast sea spaces, Cather also seems intrigued by the eroticization of that space. The recurrent motif of the French sailor as an erotic symbol is particularly relevant here. A structural feature of Loti's novels is their all-male tableaux, scenes of sailors on the open sea or in groups on shore leave. One example illustrates Loti's pictorial style:

> On the forecastle the men of the watch were singing as they performed their morning ablutions. They looked like statues from the antique with their strong arms as they stood there stripped, washing themselves in cold water, plunging their head and shoulders into the deep tubs, covering their chests with a white lather and then separating into couples, with the greatest simplicity, to rub each other's backs. (MFY 208)

Here, the routine of bathing is transformed into a ritual both spiritual and erotic. Throughout his fiction, Loti's tableaux depict such heightened moments of men together and convey powerful feelings through narrative restraint.

Meeting a group of sailors in the streets of La Seyne during her European tour of 1902, Cather cheerfully sketches her impressions of that encounter in a Lotiesque paean to sailors' youth, vitality, and untroubled intimacy:

> We stood for some moments in the middle of the street surrounded by a crowd of voluble sailors, all chattering gaily in the most perplexing dialect. Edmund Dantes was everywhere, dressed exactly as we have all seen him on the stage, and as we have all imagined him in our childhood. Wide trousers of white duck, a navy blue woolen jacket, the wide braided collar of his light blue cotton shirt reaching outside of his jacket and over his broad shoulders. He wore military moustaches, sometimes earrings, a white cotton tam-o-shanter with a red tassel at the top, and a red sash about his waist. There were scores of him all about us. It occurred to us that some of our friends at home would be alarmed if they knew that we were standing in the middle of the sailors' quarter in a Mediterranean shipping town, quite alone, so late at night. But we saw about us only the most amiable brown faces, and when we asked where we could find a hotel, not one but a score replied. They spoke faster and faster, and inserted dozens of perplexing expletives; they lined up and snatched off their caps and pointed out the direction for us, as the chorus of a light opera point and look expectantly when the strain that introduces the tenor sounds in the orchestra. A fine tableau they made, too, in the red lights from the cafe windows. (W&P 940)

The French sailor is indicative of the overall exoticism of Loti's novels. "The true pleasures of life," the narrator acclaims in *Mon Frère Yves*, "are youth and health, with the simple joys of good animal spirits, and sailors' songs!" (165). Such exoticism unexpectedly surfaces in Cather's fiction. At the church supper in *O Pioneers!*, for example, Marie's Turkish costume and Emil's "conspicuous attire" — his sombrero, silk sash, black velvet jacket, and turquoise shirt studs — provide striking details against the prairie landscape (216); likewise, Captain Pondeven in *Shadows on the Rock*, his appearance, his parrot, even his dinner of Breton pancakes, suggests the exoticism of Loti's fiction. Cather's blending of the exotic with the erotic further recreates the mood of the literature she enjoyed, exemplified by variations of Loti's eroticized sailor in the handsome Marine aboard the troopship in *One of Ours*, in Godfrey St. Peter's sea-faring fantasy in *The Professor's House*, and in the sexual aesthetics shaping *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. And, most importantly, the ambiguities of masculine desire in many of Cather's novels recall the erotic subtleties of Loti's male romances. Slote rightly feels that "to understand Willa Cather we will have to study the French Romantics" (85); such a study

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WC, FRANCE, & PIERRE LOTI
(Continued)

would reveal to us not only the influence of Dumas and Daudet upon Cather's fiction but also the lasting hold on her imagination of the "lost books" of Pierre Loti (32).

*My subtitle comes from Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990) and suggests connections and affinities rather than direct influences.

NOTES

[1]In "Willa Cather and France: Elective Affinities," *The Art of Willa Cather*, ed. Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1974) 65-83, Michel Gervaud observes that "for some mysterious reason France and the French seem to have never disappointed [Cather] or hurt her feelings, whereas she was prompt to pass harsh judgments on her own country and fellow citizens" (65).

[2]Critics have suggested several exceptions to this pattern. For instance, James Woodress, "Cather and Her Friends," *Critical Essays on Willa Cather*, ed. John J. Murphy (Boston: Hall, 1984) 81-95 points out "two overt examples of homosexuality that [Cather] treats very negatively in her fiction: the glimpse of the two American women who cause the accident in 'The Old Beauty' and the relationship between Clement Sebastian and James Mockford in *Lucy Gayheart*" (84). In *Isolation and Masquerade: Willa Cather's Women* (New York: Lang, 1993), Frances W. Kaye adds a third example, arguing that the German sniper episode in *One of Ours* "recognizes homosexuality, even if it condemns it" (188).

[3]In *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexualism as a Problem in Social Life* (1908; New York: Arno, 1975), Xavier Mayne detected a "passional affection for young Yves on the part of the narrator going beyond mere friendship" and felt that "a strong note of sexual relationship at times sounded in the tale" (187).

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Domenico Cimarosa: A Possible Source for *The Professor's House*

John H. Flannigan
Loyola University, Chicago

As Godfrey St. Peter dresses for a Christmas dinner to be hosted in his newly-built house, he hums "his favorite air from *Il Matrimonio Segreto*" (90). Richard Giannone concludes that this *opera buffa* by Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) "has no intimate bearing on the affairs of the novel" other than to underline the essentially *buffa* nature of St. Peter's difficult relations with his family (163). It is possible, however, that Cather relied on Cimarosa's opera in shaping the St. Peter family and that *The Professor's House* (1925) is in effect a re-working of the dramatic situations in the opera.

Cather had little affection for *opera buffa*, and I have found no evidence from her letters or from her critical reviews of music indicating a fondness for Cimarosa's opera. Nor is it likely that, as of the writing of *The Professor's House*, she had ever attended a performance of *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (1792). However, even though the opera was not staged at the Metropolitan Opera until 1937, Cather may have heard its overture as part of a symphony concert or perhaps encountered one of the opera's arias during a vocal recital. Whatever the source of her interest in the work, Cather could easily have found a summary of the opera's plot in a musical encyclopedia or gotten it through a conversation with a musical friend.

If, as I believe likely, Cather adopted the skeletal family structure depicted in Giovanni Bertati's libretto for Cimarosa's opera when she devised her story, she was not content simply to repeat an old formula. Instead, she added important elements — the memory of the Great War, the cultural heritage of the Blue Mesa civilization, Augusta's faith, and middle-age malaise — so that most *buffa* traces of the original source are obscured.

The similarities between the plot of *Il Matrimonio Segreto* and *The Professor's House* seem too obvious to be accidental. Winton Dean, in an essay on the opera's historical importance, provides a concise summary of the action.

> The target of the satire, which often bites deep, is the snobbery of a *nouveau riche* family: the father [Geronimo] who relies on money to buy him everything from a country estate to a titled son-in-law, his dominating and vulgar widowed sister [Fidalma] (one of the originals of Mrs. Malaprop), and his elder daughter [Elisetta], the coarseness of whose mind is rivalled only by the emptiness of her head. The younger, more sympathetic, and secretly married daughter [Carolina] has two admirers from the genuine (but of course impecunious) aristocracy, a peer and a baronet. (103-104)

There are obvious differences between Cimarosa's and Cather's works: I see little resemblance between Lillian St. Peter and Fidalma, the "vulgar" aunt; neither Rosamond nor Kathleen are "secretly married" (although we do learn that Rosamond is the "virtual/ virtuous" widow of the late Tom Outland); nor is Kathleen pursued by two men.

But there are close parallels between St. Peter's new house, the Marselluses' tasteless, "Outlandish" estate, and Geronimo's country house. Rosamond's cruel behavior toward Godfrey and her sister Kathleen echoes the conduct of Geronimo's elder daughter Elisetta. Although Louie Marsellus is hardly a "titled son-in-law," his ostentatious lifestyle and grand manners obviously set him apart from the St. Peter family at the same time they attract Rosamond. Kathleen McGregor, like Geronimo's younger daughter, is distinctly more sympathetic than her older sister, just as her husband Scott resembles the ardent, if somewhat limited, suitor Paolino in Cimarosa's opera.

Moreover, Cather's novel is interesting for the number of "secret marriages" that play a part: Godfrey St. Peter's mysterious attachment to his old house, born of Godfrey's marriage to scholarly studies, which produces apocryphal "splendid Spanish-adventurer sons" (144); Tom Outland and Roddy Blake's quasi-conjugal life on the Blue Mesa; Godfrey and Tom's deep friendship; Lillian's coquettishness with her sons-in-law (which in fact resembles Fidalma's flirtatiousness with her nieces' suitors in the opera); even the intrigue surrounding Scott's blackballing of Louie for membership in the Arts Club is conducted so as to protect Lillian's relationships with both Scott and Louie. All of these "secret marriages" create an undertow that pulls against the happiness of the "public marriages" in *The Professor's House*.

Cather's borrowing from Cimarosa's opera, itself a reworking of George Colman and David Garrick's *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), confirms an approach that she endorsed publicly on several occasions. During a lecture at Bowdoin College in 1925, she reiterated her belief that "great literature has no plot . . . Shakespeare made no plots as such. He took a tale from Plutarch or Boccaccio or Chaucer and he added another plot to it" (*In Person* 163). But Cather detected in Shakespeare's plays the presence of a "spiritual plot" that lay "inside the rough plot of the tale" borrowed from another source (162).

By having St. Peter hum his "favorite air" from *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, Cather is probably giving credit to the source of her "rough plot," something she usually resisted doing publicly when she made use of actual life-stories (for example, her silent use of Lillian Nordica's life in the short story "The Diamond Mine" [1916]). But she also makes it clear that St. Peter has made a discovery about his own predicament that makes the musical allusion deadly right. Cimarosa's opera therefore supplies an important "spiritual plot" as well; it signifies the professor's awareness of his and his family's unfortunate resemblances to some rather absurd opera characters. Godfrey St. Peter is, at an

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imaginative level at least, *re-living* a comical situation from another culture and century. The effect of this realization is to cast in an ironic light a tendency noted by William Monroe, that St. Peter seeks "a story that is gratifying and true enough to the facts so that the future can be anticipated and the world lived in" (308). Unlike, for example, his adoption of the character Valentin in Henry James's *The American* — an elevated role that allows him to rise to eloquence as he apologizes to Louie for Scott's blackballing — St. Peter's discovery of his resemblance to an *opera buffa* character firmly places him in the world of farce.

The greatest irony, however, is that in Cimarosa's opera all ends happily, as it does not in *The Professor's House*. The intertextual counterpoint crafted by Cather suggests that family politics, besides being painfully predictable, are also seldom as *buffa* in real life as they appear. The pathos of Godfrey St. Peter is due in part to the fact that he simultaneously has one foot planted uncomfortably in a family that has grown impossible for him, while another foot is just as uncomfortably planted in a world of historical situations that seem ridiculously remote and trite. His only escape is through the figure of Augusta and her very different stories — the Virgin's composition of the *Magnificat*, for example. For St. Peter, such stories as Augusta tells — unlike the plot of Cimarosa's opera — do not grow trite with retelling.

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Lucy Gayheart: Sounds and Silences

Joanna Lloyd
Lincoln, Nebraska

We are accustomed to thinking of Cather's prose as full of imagery and allusion, and of structural patterns that shape the writing, but we should also consider Eudora Welty's observation of voice in Cather, that her words evoke both sight and hearing. Welty quotes from *The Song of the Lark*, " 'It was over flat lands like this . . . that the larks sang,' " and comments, "Now we see the land. And hear the lark" (4). We have long given attention to passages like "It was over flat lands like this . . . that the larks sang," hearing description of land as we may not have heard it before without questioning very consciously what we hear. In *Lucy Gayheart* there is a prose that asks us to hear not only sounds but to listen for silences.

Consider some of the following sounds from the *Lucy Gayheart* text — the sleighbells, the knock of the brass knocker, and the "tick, tick" of the watchmaker's tiny watch, the last of which, after the watchmaker's death, is the most defined sound in the book (206). The sleighbells speak to Lucy, Harry hopes (11), but we don't know how, or if, she hears them, since her mind is elsewhere and on other sounds. There is a brass knocker: Lucy "lifted the brass knocker [which we never hear], and Sebastian opened the door" (87). What should we hear when Lucy, with trepidation, lifts the knocker (also p. 40) that narratively and textually has no sound? In the assessment of these sounds and silences the loudest thing articulated is the "tick, tick" of a tiny watch that measures time — and achievement — as well as silence. "Tick, tick, the little thing in [Lucy's father's] hand was measuring time as smartly as before, . . . old Mr. Gayheart . . . out of the measurement altogether" (206).

In *Lucy Gayheart* there is a language of sound we must manage to hear in order to understand how to interpret Cather's text. There is much to hear in the text but little or no formal direction as to how to hear it. There are significant silences and implicit questions and understandings in these silences. We aren't told how characters hear, so we have to hear what we are not told. The silences we must attend to in *Lucy Gayheart* generally cohere around words heard in poetry and music, for Lucy's life and relationship to Sebastian are presented as a poem in relation to other poems, and some of the meetings of minds occur over poetry. I would say that *Lucy Gayheart* is not a falling off from earlier work of Cather's but is different work about a different kind of love and extends the boundaries of what we hear in a text.

We have to free ourselves from the "Is Lucy a great artist?" matter. Lucy is a young woman who goes from Nebraska to Chicago to study piano in 1901, has a room, a teacher, and some piano students. She must also have some courage. She's

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caring; she's absorbed in her work; she's hired, too, as a practice accompanist to a concert singer, with the understanding that she be "elastic" and able to "catch a hint quickly in the tempi" (41). Their music (primarily Romantic) requires first a union of melody and words, and then a union of accompaniment for both: the singer must achieve the first union, the accompanist the second. It is silently understood that this is playing that respects the integrities of both. Thus, through art Lucy and Sebastian experience moments of true bond that transcend words.

When Lucy hears Sebastian sing of mariners' stars (29), song enters and becomes part of her memory, sometimes embodying Sebastian directly and sometimes not, for in one song "the black cloud that has passed over the moon and the song . . . obliterated [Sebastian], too" (30). Lucy had heard in song: "*In your light I stand without fear, O august stars! I salute your eternity*" (29). Out on the river with Harry she sees the "first star" "in the darkening sky, . . . releas[ing] another kind of life and feeling" (11). She finds herself silently thinking, "That joy of saluting what is far about one [is] an eternal thing, not merely something that had happened to her ignorance and her foolish [young] heart" (12). Harry sits in silence in the sleigh trusting the sleighbells to charm, but already new thoughts and new perceptions begun in poetry seem to come to Lucy as if beamed off a star. As this happens, words cease to be merely literal; they acquire extension: the thought that "she had reached that star and it had answered" (11) extends to words that beam and answer, too, as if from afar. (Harry fails to contemplate a star and the eternal until the end of the book.)

To picture Lucy and Sebastian together requires thinking about the language of the Romantic music they practice together. There are songs that are settings of poetry, of biblical texts and themes that encompass union and become for Lucy metaphors for art. There is *lied*, in which the composer has worked for a musical whole (see Láng, 808), and there are selections from opera — diverse approaches to verbal and musical union, each to be brought into being (hearing) by the composer, the singer, and the accompanist able to adapt sensitively, "elastically" enough, while maintaining a musical being of her own. And none of this is told us in any direct way; we are assumed to be able to hear, and see, and know. Narration taken for omniscient and as reliable is actually limited and unreliable and depends on the reader's work — partially intuitive and indeterminate and incomplete, for the reader is never able to know the subject fully or comprehend the cognitive, musical, or literary whole.

Lucy hears Sebastian sing what the narrator refers to as "Byron's *When We Two Parted*, a sad, simple old air that required little from the performer" (31), but we should reconsider this statement. We are given the words:

When we two parted,
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years.

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Surely that hour foretold
Sorrow to this. (32)

What we are hearing, presumably, is a cut version of the poem for performance as a song. Lucy is "hearing" the silence telling her that that song will have "some effect upon her own life," and feeling as if "some protecting barrier was gone — a window had been broken that let in the cold and darkness of the night" (32). — All this from those few lines, as sung by Clement Sebastian, a union of words and music in a voice accompanied by piano.

In Byron, the words continue:

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow —
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame:
I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me —
Why wert thou so dear?
They do not know thee,
Who knew thee too well: —
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met —
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee? —
With silence and tears.

(Byron, *OAEP*, 760)

The poem ends in "silence," but it's a different silence than that which Lucy experiences. Both the poetry and song are new to her, but Lucy picks up something from the song that creates silence, and silences have meaning, she knows. The pianist, too, plays in part for the silence at the end of the work, and the quality of silence changes when the work has been heard. Sebastian and Lucy live out this silence in their parting: they "[drive] back into the city in silence" "to sever for years" (128). The full text of the Byron poem, which we do not actually hear in the Cather text, speaks volubly of the silences experienced by and awaiting the protagonists.

Sebastian asks Lucy if she has "ever heard the *Elijah* well given" (which matters because it's the

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oratorio he's rehearsing), but she hasn't (42). Paul Henry Láng says that in the *Elijah* Mendelssohn works for unity of music and religion (804), which can be detected in the aria that Sebastian and Lucy rehearse, "'*If with all your heart you truly seek Him*'" (41). (Cather's quotation here includes certain transpositions. We don't know if they're supposed to be Cather's or Lucy's, but we assume Lucy's.) "If with" (long leap of nearly an octave followed by descent) "all your hearts ye truly seek Me" expresses the reach of the hope and the voice (and the far above) that the accompanist must also experience. After chorus and ensemble are hushed in expiation and in exaltation, suddenly comes that voice speaking to "the people": "Rend your hearts and not your garments." Then follows the aria.

> "If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me,
> Ye shall ever surely find Me,"
> Thus saith our God.

We don't know exactly what Lucy hears (or what context she sets it in), except that what she hears is long-lasting. She hears Sebastian, his voice reaching toward the high leap, then twisting and turning down the scale, wrenchingly tender and gentle, as if in response to other voices.

Lucy observes early, at a concert, "she had never heard *Die Winterreise* sung straight through as an integral work" (38). Integrity and union are ideas here, not disparity between singer and accompanist. Láng speaks of "the miraculous union of voice and accompaniment" (Láng, 780), and Cather acknowledges the same; even though we never hear Lucy and Sebastian play, we must take our clues from what is for us a silent music and text. When Sebastian leaves Lucy he leaves on a Schubert note, noisily slamming the door of his cab for her to hear. Does she see the mariner's star, his boat, the moonlight, a good night but not a final "good night," and in what combination? We know she hears Byron, Mendelssohn, and a goodby; perhaps she also sees the star.

After Sebastian's death, home in Haverford, Lucy spends time in the orchard thinking about her relationship to Sebastian, but she has difficulty conceptualizing what has taken place; their love for each other was relatively disembodied and without text.[1] Lucy implies that he has known something of her secrets and she of his, but she knows that words won't completely do. Richard Giannone has said "the expression of their love is as taut and intuitive as their motives are inexpressible" (225). Eventually Lucy thinks she has solved the Mendelssohn aria: "life" is "the sweetheart" to be sought (Cather, 184); she will seek Sebastian in the "splendors" of the earth he has shown her (184). "'*If with all your heart you truly seek Him*'," intuitively understood, can mean, she comes to believe, the divinity of the performance, which Lucy attributes to the voice, not recognizing how much belongs to the composer (38). "'*Oh that I knew . . . where I might find Him*'" (157) becomes "everything that made him what he was" (184). By such silent transpositions Lucy writes Cather's text.

Lucy disdains a traveling company's performance of Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, but she goes to see it anyway and finds herself listening to a "little soprano" somewhat old and worn, striving for excellence:

> Her voice was worn, to be sure, like her face and there was not much physical sweetness left in it. But there was another kind of sweetness; a sympathy, a tolerant understanding. She gave the old songs, even the most hackneyed, their full value . . . . (181)

Cather does not give us a whole song, but she gives enough for us to imagine that we hear words and music. The soprano "sang: 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,' " and at once we have the first line and the popular title of the opera's most famous air. We hear words and music and learn that Lucy pays attention to phrasing that "glide[s] delicately over the too regular stresses" that we remember from hearing this song. The soprano, Lucy thinks,

> gave freshness to the foolish old words because she phrased intelligently; she was tender with their sentimentality, as if they were pressed flowers which might fall apart if roughly handled. (181)

Nothing identifies the "foolish old words," or if Lucy considers hackneyed and sentimental all the words of the song.

What we should hear beyond Cather's text, and what we should realize that Lucy must also hear, is not only the first but also the second part: "but I also dreamt, which pleas'd me most, that you lov'd me still the same that you lov'd me, you lov'd me still the same" (*Bohemian Girl*, 96). Lucy listens to the song as concert performance, various words in a new way, and knows more about love than she used to. For Lucy, listening, the old song is implicitly true and life and art become one. Again we must focus on something Cather leaves to silence and which then comes to us. We may not know all the words of the song, but we learn that Lucy decides to pursue a life of art and that she dies. Before returning to Chicago she goes out to skate once more on the Platte. She gets out on the ice and, where roughness doesn't flag a warning, heads out toward the center of the river for better ice, and the ice — cracks. Her skate gets caught on the branch of a submerged tree. Lucy had thought herself on the shallow arm of the river, but in between the times of her skating both life and the river had changed course. Lucy dies, Cather bequeathing her struggle to silence.

The last section of the book and the formal ending are Harry's. We see Harry look at "the three light footprints" he had seen Lucy print in wet concrete when she was a child. Erroneously he seems them as "running away" (231). The plot concludes, even the words end, but resonances do not. Words of home and direction as well as motion send us back to the

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narrator's opening, retrospective view of Lucy as a

> slight figure always in motion; dancing or skating, or walking swiftly in intense direction, like a bird flying home. (3)

We wonder about Lucy's direction. The narrator seems to think of one, identifiable home, but it is not necessarily true that Cather also does. Lucy's true home we can only leave to silence.

In this experimental novel, Cather gives us resonances of words, and she gives us resonances of silence.[2] Probably she would have us hear resonant silence at the end.

NOTES

[1]Blanche Gelfant develops the idea that Lucy is a disembodied Romantic heroine and that Cather had a late-in-life fear that words are impermanent: Cather was "always after words to do more" (124); Cather's treatment of death is "analagous to the silence in which song is recovered as an unheard melody playing only to the inner ear, but nonetheless playing" (130); "Sebastian's song, passionate but bodiless, laps[es] into silence, but [is Lucy's] to hear again [in memory] whenever she wishes" (133), and "music [is] unsafe because it seduce[s] one to illusions that [cannot] survive in life" (135). Gelfant's statement about Cather's treatment of death is apt: Cather sees, here, as if by way of art rather than simply rendering in art. Gelfant seems to disapprove, thinking perhaps that Cather disapproves, of Lucy's attempted fusions of life and art.

[2]Richard Howard, in his note of introduction to Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*, quotes Cather on what is beyond definition in an author's voice and text:

> The qualities of a first-rate writer can . . . only [be] experienced. It is just the thing in him which escapes analysis that makes him first-rate . . . [T]he thing that is his very own, his timbre, this cannot be defined or explained any more than the quality of a beautiful speaking voice can be.

Barthes concerns himself with what "pleasure" a critical reader can articulate and what goes beyond. It seems possible that in *Lucy Gayheart*, where Cather seems to ask us to hear resonances in silences that might otherwise have to be perceived as voids, she looks for resonance in what is beyond both life and text. In *Lucy Gayheart* resonant silence becomes, in its context, both Barthes's "bliss" and Cather's "thing not named." Cather offers an experience of silence with "overtone[s] divined by the ear but not heard by it" ("The Novel Démeublé," *On Writing*, p. 41), of "verbal mood" that qualifies whatever ultimate silence we face.

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Cather in the Mainstream

Loretta Wasserman
Annapolis, Maryland

I was in the same room as a "channel surfer" recently when a picture appeared that made me request a stop. On the screen was small, old-fashioned frame house among some trees, with a big sign on the roof: "Willa Cather's Birthplace" (16 March 1994, Local Annapolis cable channel 11). I of course continued to watch, but nothing followed. As best I could determine, the program featured a group of zany comics, rather like the old Monty Python, going from one situation to another, and they zoomed on to something else. What interested me was that the writer of the program, or someone, assumed that (1) the name of Willa Cather is a familiar one, and (2) it conjures up associations of humble, rural beginnings, rather as the name Fitzgerald provokes a martini glass or Hemingway an African big-game hunt.

A writer's mainstream reputation is somewhat harder to estimate than his or her ranking among academics, but certainly one way to determine widespread familiarity is the appearance of the artist's name in spots aimed at the general public. It has been my observation that Cather's name is appearing with greater and greater frequency. I first became aware of this trend about three years ago reading an article in the *New Republic* concerning railroading, or some policy having to do with railroads (I failed to record the author or date of publication). The author was appealing to our romantic associations with trains, epitomized by our response to a distant train whistle, ". . . what Willa Cather called 'that cold, vibrant scream'." I immediately checked "The Sculptor's Funeral," and sure enough, there was the phrase. I was amazed that a journalist had made a quick reference to Cather without the usual condescending description ("the well-known American novelist") and doubly amazed that he or she quoted from a fairly obscure story.

(Continued on Next Page)

CATHER IN THE MAINSTREAM
(Continued)

James Woodress has called our attention to the great number of references to Cather in David McCullough's popular biography of Harry Truman (*Newsletter*, Spring 1993), especially to *One of Ours.* Here the quotations go beyond rhetorical background to become validating parallel descriptions. Given McCullough's familiarity with Cather, I was not surprised at his mention of her in an article he wrote for the *Washington Post* (23 April 1994) in defense of appropriations for NEH and NEA: "History is about who we were. In the arts we show who we are . . . . Whitman and Willa Cather, Thomas Eakins, Louis Sullivan, Martha Graham, Langston Hughes speak to us still."

In an interview with Toni Morrison (Claudia Dreifus, "Chloe Wofford talks about Toni Morrison," *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 September 1994) the author asks Morrison, "As a young reader, when you encountered racial stereotypes in the classics of American literature — in Ernest Hemingway or Willa Cather or William Faulkner — how did you deal with them?" Very probably the interviewer had done her homework and knew that Morrison had written about her response to Cather. Still, it is heartwarming for us who are sure she belongs in America's pantheon to see Cather's name linked easily with two long taken as exemplary of America's best.

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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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- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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