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Guest Editor, Ronald W. Butler

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

EDITOR'S NOTE: The preparation of this special literary edition of the WCPM *Newsletter* has been done as a tribute to the ongoing work of Mildred R. Bennett, who for forty years has been the backbone of Willa Cather studies, in celebration of her eightieth birthday, September 8, 1989.

Edith Lewis Living

By PATRICIA L. YONGUE

University of Houston, Houston, Texas

At her own request, Edith Lewis's gravestone near the foot of Willa Cather's, in the old, sequestered Jaffrey Cemetery, is small — much smaller than Cather's — and was, until recently, unmarked. It was Lewis who had worked so diligently in 1947 to secure that location for her friend, perhaps already anticipating it for herself, in the face of word that the little cemetery was already full.

We still do not know officially whether Cather wanted to be buried in Jaffrey, although it is very likely that she did, and we have no idea if she wanted to be buried with Edith Lewis. Lewis wrote to Cather's British friend Stephen Tennant (fragment of a 1947 letter) that Cather had once told her and one of her nieces that she wished to be buried there. Cather loved Jaffrey; she found there solitude and a comforting and peaceful place to write; and she often invited her friends to visit her there. Most of the time, though, she went without Edith Lewis. In fact, as far as we can tell, Lewis only once accompanied Cather to Jaffrey — to read proofs, one of the major services she performed for Cather from the beginning of their relationship. Whether, then,

their forty-year life together and Cather's naming of Lewis as her executor, literary trustee, and an heir make axiomatic a desire to share a visible eternity with Lewis, or whether Lewis alone insisted on that intimacy is a very speculative matter.

Lewis's proposal to lie in death as she had apparently lived, anonymously, in the shadow of Willa Cather, suggests that she perceived herself — and wanted us to perceive her — as one with Cather, a part of her greatness. Forty years of serving Cather, of freeing her from duties and loneliness that would have impinged on her professional life and leisure, and thirty years of devotional protection and control of Cather's affairs might entitle Edith Lewis to such a view. And in the spirit of unity it seems she had indeed forged for herself a version of Cather's own chosen epitaph, a line from *My Ántonia*: "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

This final act, however, may have been the consummation of a series of such acts which belie conflicting motives. Stephen Tennant, to whom Edith Lewis became early attached after Cather's death, told me, affection-

ately, that in *Willa Cather Living* Lewis had without acknowledgment used some of the remarks about Cather and her fiction he had made in letters to her and to Cather — the latter he requested Lewis return to him (as Cather had promised him she would instruct Lewis to do). Although Lewis assured Tennant that his letters were tied up in neat bundles in Cather's secretary just as Cather had left them, and she would do what Tennant asked (1947 fragment), she told him later (May 23, ?1948) that she could not destroy his letters and that Miss Bloom (Cather's private secretary) would send them to him in the event Lewis should "get killed." Tennant, however, never received his letters. Lewis also wrote (May 23, ?1948) that she had never read Tennant's letters to Cather except one that Cather showed her, but that Cather had quoted frequently from them, such was her regard for the brilliant young aristocrat. And Lewis passionately gilded the lily several times (as Tennant's correspondents, myself included, tended to do), not the least of which was when she told the delighted Stephen that Cather spoke of him as she had spoken of no other of her friends.

Marilyn Arnold, in her introduction to the new edition of *Willa Cather Living*, argues the likelihood that Edith Lewis did examine the correspondence Cather did not destroy, borrowed from it, and then herself destroyed the letters. It happens that Lewis's stalling assurances to Stephen Tennant of the safety of his letters coincided with her

efforts to get Alfred Knopf to see it her way with respect to a much "dreaded" biography of Cather and with her invention of a Cather in *Willa Cather Living*. My own sense, similar to Marilyn Arnold's, has always been that she was using Tennant's letters to help her frame and express certain thoughts about Cather which she may, after so long a silence, and given her propensity toward self-effacement, have already felt incapable of voicing on her own. In the 1947 fragment, she even told Tennant that the loving way he wrote about Cather echoed her own thoughts. In 1948, apparently in response to his declaration that *Lucy Gayheart* was a wonderful, sensitive novel, she said that she had just been re-reading *Lucy* the winter prior to Cather's death and had told Cather that she (Lewis) had been too hard on it earlier.

Plagiarism, however, is by no means the issue here. Nor is exploitation. Appropriation of Willa Cather and the desire — the utter need — to possess and control her is.

Perhaps the need to assert herself and to govern in a way she could not while the very dominant Willa Cather was alive is embodied in Edith Lewis's attempt to supervise the first biography of Willa Cather. Lewis's surviving letters to Stephen Tennant from 1947 through 1952 provide a sustained, if incomplete, narrative of her project. It was, for a long time, her obsession.

Lewis and Alfred Knopf, Cather's publisher after 1920, had been conferring over the possibility of doing a biography (February 3, ?1948), a venture Lewis feared, particularly, we suspect, because she was not asked to do the biography herself. She wrote Stephen Tennant that she and Knopf probably ought to do it, because someone else was likely to write one and to write it wrong. In an April 18, 1948 letter, she said that Ten-

nant's arguments in behalf of a biography moved her at once to write Alfred Knopf and tell him to go ahead with the plan. She sounds very confiding, but she is quite circumspect about revealing to Stephen just exactly what her negotiations with Knopf had been. In her first letter to Stephen (September 5, ?1947), who was persistent in his inquiries about a biography, she acts as if she and Knopf were of a mind about finding the right person to take on the task. Tennant may have briefly entertained the idea of doing it himself, but Lewis, despite her continuing paean to Stephen's thorough understanding of Cather and of the sort of biography that needed to be written, never suggested that he apply for the job.

E. K. Brown had, according to Lewis, always been the strongest candidate; from her point of view, he was the most trustworthy, the one who would do the job as she would have wanted it done. Willa Cather had liked Brown's *Yale Review* essay on her fiction, Lewis said, and she herself had just read a pre-release copy of Brown's study of Matthew Arnold and was impressed by his handling of form and his intellectual integrity. He seemed a man likely to distrust feeling as a guide to writing a biography. In the February 3, ?1948 letter to Stephen Tennant, she said she wished she could get someone like Sidney Colvin, the Keats biographer, to write Cather's life; so many other biographers were more interested in promoting their own brilliance over that of their subject. Lewis wrote Tennant (April 3, ?1948) that his own appraisal of Brown's essay on Cather solidified her decision to go with Brown.

The letters through 1952, though they warmly endorse Brown for his capability and courtesy, emphasize the oppressive burden of monitoring the biography and also her determination to control his enter-

prise. After every session with Brown, Lewis wrote, she felt that she had betrayed Willa Cather by allowing any biography to be written at all. Cather depended mightily on her friends to protect her, to keep "the cheap and the vulgar and the merely curious" people away from her. She needed the security of knowing her friends were loyal (June 3, ?1948 or 1949). But, Lewis concluded, Brown's *Life* would be the ultimate protection against the world, if it were properly written.

In the first place, the biography was not to be an amassing of detail. It was to be a very definite portrait of a very definite artist. Detail was to be used as Cather herself used it, selectively, to capture the essential, not accidental realities of life. To this end, Lewis compiled (in increments) a set of notes for Brown which would contain all the material she would allow published and which she regarded as pertinent to the life of an artist. She said that she also copied for him a set of notes she had made from Tennant's letters to her that Brown found both stimulating and useful. How seriously Brown, or Leon Edel, who finished the biography, took this latter material has gone unremarked.

Lewis's sustained worry over the biography begins to take the form of a complaint that, I think, registers an ambivalence, if an unconscious one, about Willa Cather — an ambivalence not surprising in one who, even voluntarily, has made one's life a service to another. On June 20, 1952, Lewis wrote to Tennant that she had been working with Leon Edel on his completion of the biography (she does not mention how she feels about Edel or discuss how he was selected), and she compares her situation to that of the ancient mariner, with an overpowering weight, an albatross, hanging from her neck.

Such an analogy admits, no doubt, to a guilt she had had from the beginning about allowing any biography — any invasion of privacy — to take place at all. She emphasized Cather's refusal to be intimidated when it came to guarding the things she cared most for, and so, then, ought Lewis to remain staunch. Lewis was reasonably anxious over conflicting desires to proclaim the Willa Cather she "knew" and to protect "her" Willa Cather. Obviously, she realized that there would be, or had always been, gossip about their relationship, and she may have felt a biography under her governance could overwhelm the "cheap and the vulgar and the merely curious" images people entertained. She was hopeful about Brown and his integrity and kindness, but she did not relent in her determination to bind him to her notes. Edel's intervention at the end, however, surely disturbed her universe. So had Mildred Bennett's publication in 1951 of *The World of Willa Cather* and the knowledge that one of Cather's dearest friends, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, was writing *Willa Cather: A Memoir*. Lewis's own publication of *Willa Cather Living* (the letters to Tennant I have read do not mention this at all), in tandem with the Brown biography and Sergeant's memoir, poses many questions. What did she fear she had not been able to control? What had Mildred Bennett done to worry her, and what was Elizabeth Sergeant about to do?

Part of the albatross Lewis bore was her loyalty to Cather. A second part was her need at least to be in control of something, and she saw that she was losing Willa Cather to others who, she felt, had less right to her. A third part of the burden, however, might have been her own compulsion to protect the image/fantasy she nursed of her relationship with Cather, which in *Willa Cather Living* is made to

seem entirely warm and sharing — a passion, a union of spirits, at the very least a Sherlock Holmes-Dr. Watson camaraderie. But evidence (from Cather's correspondence and the correspondence of others) thwarts this image, especially Cather's attachment to other women, such as Louise Pound, Isabelle McClung, Dorothy Canfield (Fisher), Elizabeth Sergeant, and Zoë Akins, women very unlike the self-effacing and servile Edith Lewis. Cather's reliance less and less upon Lewis as a traveling companion, unless there was work to be done, likewise indicates a perception of the relationship unlike the one Lewis projects but probably realized she never had. Lewis was a competitor for Cather's attentions, and her omission from *Willa Cather Living* of any but the most measured of comments about these other women (some, like Sergeant, she omits entirely) suggests her grievance against these women — and against Willa Cather.

The final and perhaps greatest part of Lewis's albatross had then to be Willa Cather herself. Years of repressed resentment over her subordinate status and silence, not to mention the alienation from her own family that began after she and Cather started to live together, must have surfaced in those years following Cather's death. She saw herself for the first time in control of Willa Cather, for the first time able to make her own "tiny" voice heard.

Stephen Tennant, an indulged, then forty-one-year-old aristocrat, was charmed by Edith Lewis's flattery and confidence. She knew immediately how to respond to him. He more than any of Cather's friends who continued a relationship with Lewis unwittingly allowed her to indulge herself. In her letters to him, Edith Lewis seems, also unwittingly, gradually to appropriate Stephen away from Ca-

ther, under the guise of devotion to her. She even agreed to send him money when his family was forced to restrict his limitless extravagance. This, I think, is another sign of deep-seated grievance, even if it is at the same time an attempt to express oneness with Cather by imitating her generosity to her needy family and friends like Isabelle McClung.

In May of 1955, Edith Lewis wrote to Tennant, triumphantly, that she had replaced the George Sand etching by Couture that at Cather's request hung over the mantelpiece of their home at 5 Bank Street for as long as they lived there (1912-1927) and had continued its life over the mantelpiece at 570 Park Avenue. She said she replaced it with one of Stephen's paintings of a flight of doves. She was happy, she declared, not to have to look at the domineering face of Sand any longer. She preferred, instead, the comfort and sense of escape and relief provided by Stephen's doves.

The Sand etching hanging over the mantelpiece, the Brown biography that hung like an albatross from her neck — Edith Lewis needed a freedom from an oppressive Willa Cather, for whom she had made possible so much freedom, and even a revenge. The former she secured somewhat by the control she exercised for thirty years over our scholarly research and to a certain extent exercises to this day. Cather's inheritance also freed her. Stephen Tennant gave her the freedom to speak and to take over one of Cather's special friends. Lewis's revenge likewise has its source in her rigorous governance of Cather's life and literary affairs, but it is gained finally, ironically, by her burial in the Jaffrey Cemetery.

Lewis told Stephen Tennant that her major difference with Cather had always been over "places," which may have been a reason why she was an infrequent traveling companion;

though I think not, since she speaks very warmly of her "adventures" with Cather on the few trips she made with her. Jaffrey was a place to which she had been a stranger. And it was a very precious place for Cather, a place where Cather invited people dear to her, a place where she could also be by herself. It is fitting that Edith Lewis in the end intruded upon that solitude.²

NOTES

¹Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, (Boston Houghton Mifflin, 1918) 20.

²My great debt is to the late The Honourable Stephen Napier Tennant who over the past decade gave me his hospitality numerous times at Wilsford

Manor and allowed me to use his private collection of letters from Willa Cather, Edith Lewis, and other literary figures of his acquaintance. Stephen died in March of 1987, having refused to leave a will. The majority of his estate has been sold at auction. Hugo Vickers, the biographer of Sir Cecil Beaton, purchased the Lewis letters, and Philip Hoare, who is writing a biography of Stephen Tennant, has been recently given access to them. I am also grateful to Edith Lewis herself, with whom I corresponded for the three-year period before her death in 1972 and with whose cause I am sympathetic. I hope my paraphrases of Ms. Lewis's letters do her justice.

On May 28, 1914, more than a year before Lewis and Cather arrived, a caravan of six cars had gleefully chugged its way up the mesa, and the road they took was officially opened to the public on July 4 of the same year, with a good deal of celebration (D. A. Smith, "Love Affair," 7; Torres-Reyes 39-40.). Horses and wagons did remain in use for a time, but the auto quickly gained favor. In fact, according to the superintendent's reports, well over half of the visitors that summer arrived in cars, either their own or vehicles rented from a local garage (see Rickner 8/3/15, 9/15/15, and 10/16/15). Understandably, then, the park brochure for the season of 1915 is full of references to automobiles, including a rule that teams and wagons still have the right of way and another rule that cars must never exceed fifteen mph and must go even slower under certain well-defined circumstances (29). What's more, according to the granddaughter of C. B. Kelly (the man who took Lewis and Cather to the ruins), Kelly had quit using a team and wagon as soon as the automobile road was opened. He still operated out of the same livery, the Kelly and French Auto Livery, but he used cars exclusively (Bader) — two five-passenger Studebakers (Rickner 3/11/15). Of course, it's conceivable that, given her aversion to travel by auto (see Bennett 27 and 150), Cather could have prevailed upon Kelly to use the older mode of transportation.¹ By her own account, he used both cars and wagons; and the journey, once very hard, was then very easy (Rosowski and Slote 82-83). But however they made the ascent, Lewis and Cather would surely have seen automobiles somewhere "in that country" as they were bouncing picturesquely up the mesa.

Once they arrived on the mesa, Lewis says, they had the whole place virtually to them-

Edith Lewis's Tall Tales of the Southwest

By DAVID HARRELL

University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico

"*Esa mujer!*" (That woman!). It was with this contemptuous epithet that one of the relatives of Padre Martinez of Taos referred to Willa Cather, the Anglo writer who misrepresented the good pioneer priest by casting him as a self-indulgent villain opposed to the beneficent new archbishop (Mares). With less contempt, perhaps, but certainly as much frustration, one might use the same exclamation for Edith Lewis, whose memoir of Cather has often proved unreliable (Woodress, "Biography"). A case in point is Lewis's account of the trip that she and Cather took to Mesa Verde, Colorado, and Taos, New Mexico, in the summer of 1915. For some reason, Lewis consistently misrepresents conditions at both places to make them seem considerably more primitive than they actually were. The result is a narrative that is as "striking" in its historical errors as in its general reader appeal (see Brown 195).

In 1915, Mesa Verde had been a national park for nine years, and it was under the direction of its third superintendent, Thomas Rickner. Local guides had been taking tourists to the ruins ever since the 1890s, and they were continuing to do so under the auspices of the federal government. Getting to Mesa Verde was still something of an adventure, however, involving, as Lewis says, a scenic train ride from Denver to Durango to Mancos and then special transportation to the park itself. For Lewis and Cather, this transportation was decidedly nineteenth-century — "a team and driver" — because nothing more modern was available: "I do not remember seeing any automobiles in that country then — but in any case, there was no road up the Mesa Verde that an automobile could travel" (Lewis 94). This assertion makes the Mesa Verde seem hardly more accessible than Tom Outland's Blue Mesa. Such was not the case, however.

selves: "Very few people visited the place then — we were, I think, the only guests for the greater part of that week . . ." (95). This is possible but not likely. The summer of 1915 was the busiest season yet for the park, with visitors numbering 110 in June, 173 in July (Rickner 8/3/15), and 380 in August (Rickner 9/15/15), the month that Lewis and Cather were there. Anticipating these increased numbers, Superintendent Rickner had placed a rather anxious order that February for twice the number of circulars as the season before (2/10/15). It could be, as one observer has suggested, that to someone accustomed to the crowds in New York and other eastern cities, the number of visitors looked like "very few" indeed (Fleming), especially when spread through those canyons and mesas. But tourists were there in sufficient numbers to make Oddie Jeep's tent camp near Spruce Tree House a fairly promising enterprise. According to the park superintendent, who was also Oddie's father, the camp had "good accommodations for thirty people, and all comfortably provided with new tent bedrooms, and excellent beds" (Rickner 4/19/15), a description with which Cather would concur (see Rosowski and Slote 83). There was even a telephone line from the camp to the park office in Mancos (Torres-Reyes 66).

The park also offered some cultural amenities. Most evenings, Jesse Walter Fewkes, the archeologist in charge, gave campfire talks for the benefit of tourists curious about the ruins and the people who once inhabited them. As these talks were held beside the tent camp — often with very dramatic effects² — Lewis and Cather could hardly have missed them. Also, at Spruce Tree Camp itself there was a "small log cabin that served as a museum" (J. E. Smith 9). One of Rickner's priorities was to establish a real mu-

seum at the camp (Torres-Reyes 89), but in the meantime this cabin would suffice as a means of displaying the artifacts uncovered in the various ruins. And it gave Fewkes a place to give his campfire talks during bad weather (Torres-Reyes 189). Another cultural development of sorts, with which Cather would have been less pleased, was the movie crew tramping about the mesa that summer (see D. A. Smith, *Shadows*, 102). However, as one who "didn't like the cinema" (Woodress, *Life*, 352), Cather would have been gratified to know that no copy of the film is extant, only a reference to it in Rickner's letters as an upsetting experience (D. A. Smith, letter).

After their celebrated rescue and the return trip to Mancos, again by team and driver, Lewis and Cather proceeded to Taos, "then little visited and very isolated — one had to drive a long way by team to get there, over a rough road." And once there, they found "no American hotel or boardinghouse"; therefore, having reached the very fringe of civilization, the two adventurers had to accommodate themselves in "a rather primitive but comfortable adobe hotel run by a Mexican woman" (Lewis 99). This hotel may well have been the Columbian, as James Woodress suggests in his allusion to Mabel Dodge Luhan's description of the place in December 1917 (*Life*, 265), about a year and a half after Lewis and Cather arrived there.³ But it may also have been the Barker House or Trujillo's Hotel and Restaurant, which, like the Columbian, advertised in the local paper for the increasing tourist trade. The Columbian far outdid its competition, however, with this enticing ad that ran at least from the summer of 1915 through the winter of 1917-18: "Now under New Management," "First Class Accommodations," an "Excellent Table," and rooms "All Furnished with Electric Lights." Best of all, the hotel was able to offer

all this for only \$2.50 per day (*Taos Valley News*), about what Lewis and Cather had paid for accommodations at Mesa Verde (see T. Rickner 10/11/15). According to the locals' column in the paper, which printed visitors' names and sometimes their points of origin, the Barker House and the Columbian attracted virtually all of the tourists. As they did at Mancos and Mesa Verde, however, Lewis and Cather came and went unnoted, eluding somehow the watchful eye of the same editor who, on August 31, reported, "Herbert Cheetham came down from the hills . . ."

Like travel anywhere in those days, travel to Taos was less convenient than it is now, or than it was even in 1952 when Lewis published her memoir. But the town wasn't as isolated as Lewis would have us believe. On August 31, 1915, the *Taos Valley News* reported on the numerous visitors arriving "via auto" and, on September 7, issued this proclamation/exhortation: "It is understood that Taos has been placed on the Tourist Map of [the] Bureau of Travel and it is now up to Taos County to see that her roads are put in better condition."⁴ The same issue also interviewed some local vacationers who said, "traveling by auto is the best way to enjoy a trip." If Lewis read this issue of the paper, she must have felt left out as she and Cather rambled about the countryside on horseback or at the reins of a team.

What Lewis says about the accommodations and transportation in Taos is misleading enough, but she saved her greatest misstatements for the art scene. "There was no artist colony in Taos then," Lewis says, "though one or two painters lived there quietly" (99). In the summer of 1915, probably no one was living in Taos quietly because that was the season that saw over a hundred artists descend upon the town, having

been attracted there by traveling exhibitions of the resident artists' work "and by enthusiastic reports of settlers and visitors" (Coke 27; see also Gibson 29). In fact, so many artists arrived in such a short time that they placed something of a burden upon "the limited local facilities" (Gibson 29). This may have been the biggest invasion, but it was not the first. Artists had been coming to Taos ever since the 1840s (Reeve 32); and the art colony itself, which Lewis says didn't exist in 1915, is usually said to have begun in 1898 (see Reeve 34, La Farge 222, and Gibson 25), if not earlier.

Interestingly, one of the founders of the colony, Ernest L. Blumenschein, was on an illustrations assignment for *McClure's Magazine* when he first came to the Southwest in the winter of 1898 (Coke 13). He returned that summer with another *McClure's* illustrator, Bert Greer Phillips, and the Taos art colony was born. Blumenschein, if not also Phillips, was still drawing for *McClure's* when Cather started to work there in 1906 (see Reeve 35). He also illustrated books by Jack London, Stephen Crane, Booth Tarkington, and Willa Cather (Coke 18).

As a muse, Taos was quite effective in truly American ways; as a market, however, it was too far from the people with the money to buy paintings. So in 1912, six of the full- or part-time resident artists established the Taos Society of Artists to arrange traveling exhibitions of the members' paintings. Their efforts were so successful that by 1915 "the Taos painters were well known across the nation, their paintings had become increasingly popular, and museums and galleries in the major cities welcomed Taos Society of Artists' exhibitions" (Gibson 27-28). According to the town paper during August and September 1915, there were also frequent exhibitions locally, often

in Santa Fe. And the front page of the issue for September 7, when Lewis and Cather were still there (see Lewis 99; and Woodress, *Life* 265), carried a story about an exhibit at the upcoming state fair in Albuquerque. "[C]onservatively valued at \$50,000," the collection comprised paintings by "The group of twenty or more artists of national reputation now spending a large part of each year in the picturesque village of Taos."⁵ Taken as a whole, these activities constitute a remarkable achievement for a community with no artist colony and only one or two painters.

Faced with all of these contradictions, one has to ask why Lewis described conditions as she did. That she simply remembered them incorrectly can be discounted by the extent of the details and the consistent pattern toward primitivization. It may be that, a writer herself, she was indulging her novelistic bent with a little embroidery, perhaps with the idea of rejuvenating the American frontier as a literary theme. She does seem no less skilled than Cather in "obliterating from a historic scene its modern encrustations" (see Brown 270); and, as Leon Edel has pointed out, Lewis was certainly capable of creating "an overlay of folklore" (189). Perhaps she was simply expecting too much. Marilyn Arnold has said, not altogether facetiously, that for Lewis "conditions became primitive when she and Cather had to prepare most of their own meals." Or maybe it's nothing more than a bad case of tourist vision, that skewed perspective that still afflicts visitors to the Southwest — New Mexico in particular — and causes them to return to their Eastern climes with some of the strangest impressions.

Still another possibility is suggested in a comment by Patricia Lee Yongue, who says Lewis's tendency toward primitivization may be an attempt to "do right"

by Cather. Such an attempt would account quite nicely for the exaggerations Lewis makes. As she was writing her memoir, and perhaps even before then, Lewis certainly realized how important the Southwest was to Cather's art. Knowing this, perhaps she wanted to create the impression that Cather had put that region on the literary map just as she had done for Nebraska. Thus, she portrays the places they visit as remote, primitive, and largely unknown, as if waiting for aesthetic discovery.⁶

At Mesa Verde there were already a museum of sorts, an informal lecture series, and an extensive bibliography conveniently enumerated in the park brochure that Lewis and Cather must have seen; yet none of this does Lewis mention. Taos was crawling with artists — some of them with international reputations — yet Lewis acknowledges only one or two. With such omissions, Lewis goes a long way toward presenting Mesa Verde and Taos as rich but overlooked material, gems from the past that had scarcely begun to sparkle in the light of the modern day. This is just the sort of presentation that would have come naturally to someone who, in Sharon O'Brien's words, "knew how to create the emotional and psychological sanctuary Cather needed to write" (353); and it also would attract what James Woodress calls "the polarity in Cather between primitivism and civilization [that] adds tension to her fiction" (*Life* 297).

As the author of a memoir originally intended to provide information for an authorized biography and as Cather's literary executor, Lewis was in the position either to correct the record or to distort it. In the case of this important "first trip together to the Southwest" (Lewis 93), she clearly chose the latter. Knowing this — and recalling James Woodress's words of caution —

one is tempted to entertain doubts about the rest of the memoir as well, and one is inclined to look for corroboration in other biographical and historical sources before relying too heavily upon this one. What James Woodress says about Cather "rewriting the story of her own life" (*Life* 273), treating it, in fact, "as though it were fiction" (*Life* 42), may apply equally well to Lewis, who seems just as intent upon defining Cather's literary persona as was Cather herself, no matter how many facts of history must be altered in the process. *Esa mujer!*

NOTES

¹Patricia Lee Yongue has pointed out an interesting parallel with one of Cather's stories. Near the end of "The Best Years," Miss Knightly (now Mrs. Thorndike) chooses a buggy over an automobile when she plans her visit to some of the schools she used to supervise (Cather 128-29).

²Jack Rickner, the middle son of Superintendent Thomas Rickner and one of Fewkes's former assistants, recalls his role in the production: "Dr. Fewkes gave talks at a camp fire on the ledge below the museum looking toward Spruce Tree House. . . . Across the canyon there was a ditch cut in the rock. We took black powder and fuse. . . . When he came to the point in his lecture where the ball of fire came out of the earth we set the powder off — and the Indians came out of the ground on to this earth. That was their belief."

³Mabel Dodge Luhan found rooms rather dimly lighted by oil lamps and beds with "thin springs and thinner mattresses . . . [that] curved into wide hollows." Evidently, the hotel's year-old two-story addition of twenty-four rooms — a "much needed improvement [that] will provide excellent quarters for the many visitors who come to Taos" (see the *Taos Valley News*, 12/5/16) — did not impress her.

⁴A year later, in 1916, the paper was still harping on the same theme (see the issues for August 1, 15, and 22).

⁵As pleased as the local paper was about the influx of artists, the artists themselves were apparently concerned about public relations. When in 1917 he received an award of a gold medal and \$1,000 for one of his paintings, artist E. L. Blumenschein hastened to point out that the award was really for twelve years' work and therefore "not very good pay." "He does not want it thought that the artists of Taos are in the habit of receiving so much money for their pictures. He has been here for twelve summers and most of those summers he has spent every cent of his money to pay the expenses of the long trip from New York to Taos and return" (*Taos Valley News*, 11/13/17).

⁶Considering this possible motive, it's interesting to note that twice in his introduction, E. K. Brown emphasizes Cather's "discovery" of the Southwest, the first time calling it "the principal emotional experience of Willa Cather's mature life" (xxii; see also xxiv).

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(NOTE: This study was aided by a grant from the Student Research Allocations Committee of the Graduate Student Association at the University of New Mexico.)

read any of these epistles, but David Stouck, the Canadian Cather scholar, has seen at least one which warns the receiver about that "wretched Mildred Bennett."

Her attempts to thwart research antagonized Mrs. Sherwood, who exclaimed, "I guess I know what is better for 'Willie' than Miss Lewis and we'll go right ahead." The immediate result was that Mrs. Sherwood put all her resources at my disposal, including her letters from Miss Cather. But on the other hand, Miss Elsie Cather (Willa's youngest sister) would not talk with me. A friend in Red Cloud told her, "Elsie, that book will be published and if there are errors in it that you could have corrected, you will have only yourself to blame." Miss Elsie Cather, being an intelligent and reasonable person, saw the truth of this statement and communicated to her friend that if I would try again, she would talk to me. I then spent a week at her Lincoln home going over every word of *The World of Willa Cather* and received her excellent suggestions and corrections. She said she would have talked to me sooner but she didn't want to hurt "dear Edith."

When I visited New England I wanted to talk to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, but when I called her home her husband said she was not home, and that she would not feel right about talking with me unless I had Alfred Knopf's permission. I obtained that permission by telephone. Mr. Knopf said he could see no conflict of interest in my having a conversation with Mrs. Fisher. When I did visit with her, Dorothy Canfield Fisher asked me, "What is the matter with Edith Lewis?" I said I had no idea. She said she felt that she had been shut out of the Cather-Lewis friendship in the last few years. She said after Willa Cather and Edith Lewis started living together, Edith Lewis, who had just begun to publish, pub-

At the Feet of Willa Cather: A Personal Account of Edith Lewis as Protector

By MILDRED R. BENNETT

Willa Cather Foundation, Red Cloud, Nebraska

Edith Lewis, long time trusted friend of Willa Cather, executor of her estate, inheritor of one-third of that estate, and self-appointed protector of her privacy and her legends, spent a lifetime helping and sustaining Willa Cather, and perhaps encouraging some of her idiosyncrasies. However, an objective examination of the relationship suggests that without Miss Lewis, Willa Cather could not have achieved so great a literary stature. The Gods are kind.

Edith L. Lewis, born ca. 1882, possibly in Moline, Illinois, went one year to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and then to Smith College where she graduated in 1903. Although Dorothy Canfield knew her in those Lincoln years when Willa Cather attended the University, authorities seem to agree that Miss Cather met Edith Lewis in 1902 when the former visited in Lincoln. The two began sharing an apartment when Willa Cather returned from Boston in 1908 and continued to do so until Cather's death in 1947.

My first encounter with Edith Lewis came in 1947. I had already begun research on Willa Cather with the help of Carrie Miner Sherwood, who had known "Willie" since 1883. Mrs. Sherwood insisted that I should talk with the Menuhin family, who had meant so much to Willa Cather in her declining years. That fall I planned to go to California and I wrote Mrs. Menuhin asking her if I might visit with her about Miss Cather. I enclosed my parents' address and telephone number.

The first day after my arrival I received a cordial telephone call from Mrs. Menuhin inviting me up to Los Gatos. But the next morning I had a telegram cancelling the invitation and saying she had talked with Edith Lewis and it was no time for any biography of Miss Cather. (Willa Cather had died that spring.)

When I returned to Nebraska, Mrs. Sherwood had received a letter asking her not to talk with me or have anything to do with me. Similar letters went out to all relatives and friends. I did not

lished no more. Mrs. Fisher and other friends expressed concern for this cessation of creativity. From that time on, apparently, Edith Lewis submerged her own talents to help Willa Cather's work.

On my 1948 trip east, Mr. Knopf arranged a visit with Miss Lewis. She had alerted the doorman at the Park Avenue apartment and he admitted me readily. Miss Lewis, with a white straight bob and a friendly smile, greeted me at the door. Later, in recalling that visit to friends, Miss Lewis said I took off my shoes on entering the apartment, and this is true, but not from a worshipful attitude, but because the streets were muddy. A gracious hostess, she asked about my husband and son, but when Miss Cather's name came up she became most agitated. During the half hour that we talked, she twisted her little linen handkerchief nearly to shreds.

She had read the manuscript of my book and did not like it. I had included some pages from an old album where Willa Cather as a child had written her favorite occupations: "Sliceing toads," her favorite author: "Sheakspear," her favorite amusement: "Vivisection," chief ambition: "To be an M.D.," and her idea of perfect happiness: "Amputating limbs." Miss Lewis banged her fist down on these pages and said, "You can't use these. They're letters." Miss Lewis's response gave indication of the protective attitude she assumed toward Willa Cather's literary effects.

Still, within the first year of Cather's death, Edith Lewis's attempt to control anything about Miss Cather extended to any kind of biography. "Who are you that you think you can write a book about Willa Cather when even I wouldn't think of it?" she demanded during our conversation. But she did write about Willa Cather, and her notes, originally intended to help E. K.

Brown with his biography commissioned by Alfred Knopf, were published as her memoir: *Willa Cather Living* (1953). Her influence on Brown's biography shows in the respectful tone of *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (Brown indeed wrote with Edith Lewis looking over his shoulder) and in content, passages directly echo Lewis's account of events. In some essential details where fact contradicted what Cather had led Lewis to believe, Lewis gave way — momentarily. Brown, in a personal conversation with me, recalled great difficulty with Miss Lewis over Cather's birth date, which historical record set in 1873 and Cather had set in 1876; although Lewis finally consented to letting him use 1873 in his book, she put 1876 on the tombstone in Jaffrey.

In our 1948 conversation, I mentioned that a new house was being erected between Cather's grave and Monadnock Mountain, and added that the sight distressed me. "Well, if you feel bad about it, how do you think I feel?" Miss Lewis replied.

The interpretation of devotion differs, of course, according to who is perceiving it. I then commented on her devotion to Cather, and she responded that Miss Cather had given her much more than she had given Cather. Other accounts, however, stress Miss Lewis's friendship. Mrs. Sherwood described Edith's assistance in both Cather's art and life: she read all scripts aloud for Miss Cather's ear, and she selected clothes which might please her, bringing them home for her friend to try on, appraise, and discard if she chose.

Edith Lewis's considerable power in regard to Cather archives has become its own legend in Cather scholarship. Again, Lewis assumed the role of guardian. When I visited Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant in 1955, she suggested I go to the Morgan Library in New York to read

her Cather letters, which she had deposited there. When I arrived, Mr. Adams, the director, said I could not read the Sergeant letters — no explanation. However, he said I could read the other Cather letters in their rare collection. When I inquired in that section, the girl said they had no Cather letters. I went back to Mr. Adams, who then accompanied me to the room and told the girl to let me see certain documents. After he had disappeared the girl said, "We're not supposed to admit that we have any Cather letters." When I did see the collection — not Sergeant's — I also found one note from Edith Lewis which showed the letters had passed through her censorship. No informative correspondence remained.

In the years since Miss Lewis's death, I have thought much of the dependence these two women placed on each other. I think Miss Lewis deliberately put herself at Willa Cather's feet and gloried in her position there. And after Miss Cather's death she rose to guardian of the legends Miss Cather had insisted were fact.

Since Dorothy Canfield Fisher had mentioned Edith Lewis's publication, John March searched and found the two following poems. Published in 1905, these give one a clue to why their friendship began and lasted. If you listen you can hear echoes of Housman, and Cather herself.

ALIENS

Edith L. Lewis

Published in *Scribner's Magazine*, 37 (March 1905)
353

Still are the many houses,
And still the long street
lies;
The moon above the house-
tops
Shines through cloud-
travelled skies;
From lands of spendthrift
treasure
It looks and lights the way

Of those whose beggared
 footsteps
 Outmarch the sleeping day.
 Of those to whom the
 darkness
 Brought not their heart's
 desire,
 But filled their cup with
 longing
 And fed their veins with
 fire;
 Who up and down the pave-
 ments
 From eve till morn must go,
 Pursuing dreams that lead
 them
 In ways I do not know.
 Down there go lads that
 wander
 With pulses hot as mine;
 Slow are their feet to follow
 There where their thoughts
 incline;
 Far are the lips that
 cherished,
 The hearts they lay beside,
 And far to find by starlight
 The joys of morning-tide.
 They walk all night for
 solace,
 And here alone sit I,
 And weigh the heavy
 footfall
 Of each who hurries by;
 Till one, beneath his
 trouble
 More wistful than the rest,
 Looks up, and knits my
 burden
 To that within his breast.

AT MORNING

Edith L. Lewis

Published in *Harper's*,
 112 (December 1905) 2

Now in the fields the dew is
 wet
 Upon the green stalks of
 the rye;
 Far from the land of
 aching thoughts,
 By streams I know, the
 aspens sigh;
 And light beneath the
 trembling clasp
 Of hedges hung with
 sweets of May
 Between the kisses of
 delight

Young lovers give their
 hearts away.
 But here the late and
 languid dawn
 Mounts slowly through
 the bitter air,
 And in the streets of
 breathless stone
 A thousand weary
 travellers fare:
 All save some lad whose
 captive heart,
 On dream-worn pathways
 fled afar,
 Beneath the gold of wind-
 swept skies,
 Goes carolling the
 morning star.

Miss Lewis's friendship with a missionary priest who has asked to remain anonymous, a great Cather enthusiast, began not too long after Miss Cather's death. The letters which she wrote to him begin in October 1956. She is sending him George Kates' reproduction of the Avignon story in the volume *Five Stories* by Willa Cather. She says Kates' essay tells all she can say about the unfinished story. In December she writes that Mr. Kates has written of his meeting with the aforesaid priest and she is sure the two enjoyed their visit. She knows whatever comments come from him about Miss Cather's books will be sincere and appreciative. The next letter discusses the friendship between Willa Cather and Sigrid Undset who, when she lived in Brooklyn, often came to visit Miss Cather, and they talked of many books but not of their own. She thanks Father for the spiritual bouquet he sent. Her kind feeling toward the Catholic church becomes more evident.

In June 1960, she says she has not written because she has been ill. She wishes she could see the Santa Fe sky again. She comments that Willa Cather's books have now been translated into twenty-five languages, including Chinese and Malayan.

In August 1960, Edith Lewis thanks him for his masses offered from little towns in Ne-

braska, to the Basilica of our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico to the cathedral in Santa Fe. She treasures his kindness in remembering her, which no one else can do or has done, and signs herself in terms well known to Cather researchers, "Faithfully yours."

By 1960 this missionary Father had also been to Red Cloud, Nebraska, and had talked with Mrs. Sherwood and me. He did not mention Miss Lewis to us nor us to her, I discovered later. In a note to Mrs. Mellen (one of Miss Cather's favorite nieces, daughter of her sister Jessica), he explains his discretion in not upsetting anyone over the negative feelings between Miss Lewis and those of us in Red Cloud. When he is with her, he does not mention Carrie (Sherwood) or Mildred. When he is with us, he does not mention Miss Lewis. He ends with saying he feels like the man in *Alexander's Bridge* with two women in his life.

In November, Miss Lewis responds to his article about Christian Science. He had been looking into the possibility that Cather's study of Mary Baker Eddy had some influence on her own beliefs. Miss Lewis reminds him that she was working as a proof reader on *McClure's* when Miss Cather was researching the Christian Science articles in Boston; she used to go up to Boston to read the proofs with Miss Cather and then listen to the comments about the subject. In regard to Quimby, one of the early proponents of Christian Science, Miss Lewis calls him and others like him philosophers of humble origin who gathered disciples about them and instructed them. She does not think Miss Cather could have taken their doctrines seriously. Miss Lewis says that whatever ideas Miss Cather had of dualism in human nature, she did not get them from Quimby. Nor would she have been influenced by Mrs. Eddy. Miss Lewis adds that in all her years with Miss

Cather, she never discussed religion or religious philosophy. And if Cather ever did talk about such subjects, she would have done so with two or three of the priests she knew well — such as perhaps, Father Fitzgerald in Red Cloud.

On November 24, 1960, Miss Lewis thanks him for his letter and article. Now she signs herself "Faithfully yours" in almost the same handwriting as Cather herself.

In January 1965, she gives him her unlisted telephone number. She still has her lovely Irish Catholic nurse. She is able to go out for short walks and can still read and enjoy it. She's reading Churchill's six-volume *Life of Marlborough*. "Faithfully yours."

May 22, 1965. She has had to change nurses — her former one has gone to Rome and there married a Baltimore business man — in a new kind of ceremony where both partake of the bread and wine. She will say a prayer for him. "Faithfully yours."

Sometimes after this favorite nurse had left, Miss Lewis's missionary friend and the former nurse happened to visit 570 Park Avenue on the same afternoon. Apparently they had a joyous conversation. Then not too long after, Miss Lewis became ill and went to Roosevelt Hospital on the West side. She asked for a priest to come, but messages got mixed and no priest arrived. She had been thinking of seeking membership and baptism into the Roman Catholic Church, but this commitment did not occur then. Later she again became seriously ill and asked for visitation and baptism in her own apartment on Park Avenue. This was accomplished, but still no priest came for regular calls until our old friend, the missionary priest, intervened and obtained proper visitations.

In June 1965, she is thankful she can still read but sorry to

have finished Churchill's *Marlborough*. She still may have to read him over. "Faithfully yours."

In August 1965, the missionary priest had visited her and she wishes Cather could have known him, how she would have enjoyed him. She discusses the Father's articles on Dante and how she has read Longfellow's translation, that she had a four-volume prose translation by Norton which she had read many times. She loves the meeting between Dante and Beatrice: "How hast thou dared to approach this place! Dost thou not know that man is happy here?" Thanks him again for visiting. "Yours with all my good wishes."

In October 1965, Miss Lewis tells him she has sent him her extra four volumes of Norton's translation of Dante. She had bought one while in college and the other later because it was a revised edition — not much different. Again she mentions Beatrice's words previously quoted — her favorite passage.

She so much enjoyed his visit. "With many good wishes always."

Edith Lewis died a Roman Catholic, August 12, 1972, in New York at the age of ninety.

Mrs. Ruddy, the woman who took care of Edith Lewis in her later years, wrote our priest friend that Miss Cather did not want anyone to know about her charities; Miss Lewis handled the household money. One of the maids told Mrs. Ruddy that Miss Cather would give a trusty maid ten dollars extra and warn her not to tell Miss Lewis. Gilbert, the doorman, told Mrs. Ruddy that Miss Cather would ride only in a green taxi. She wanted her books printed only with hard covers. Mrs. Ruddy claims to have persuaded Miss Lewis to let *Death Comes for the Archbishop* be published in paperback. Mrs. Ruddy argued that Miss Cather would not want to deny the children the privilege of reading her book. Gilbert also told Mrs. Ruddy that Miss Cather and Miss Lewis did not care if their guests had money, but they must be intellectual.

Edith Lewis lies now at the feet of Willa Cather, a place she chose a long time ago for life and for death.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The three preceding essays on Edith Lewis were presented at the October 1988 meeting of the Western Literature Association in Eugene, Oregon. A fourth essay, Marilyn Arnold's "Edith Lewis's Memoir of Willa Cather," was adapted from the Foreword to the new edition of Edith Lewis's *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Memoir*, Athens: Ohio UP, July 1989, cloth \$22.95, paper \$12.95.

Cather's *One of Ours*: A French Perspective

By MICHEL GERVAUD

University of Aix en Provence, France

It is a well known fact that Willa Cather had a deep appreciation of European culture, the ancient but still very much alive civilizations of the Old Continent.

Of all European countries, France was, beyond doubt, the one she cherished most — its

literature, art, land and people, and its way of life. Indeed, she was an "inveterate Francophile" as her publisher and friend the late Alfred Knopf once remarked.

When I first discovered Willa Cather some twenty-five years ago, I felt deeply moved by what

her friend, Elizabeth Sergeant, described as her "devotion to and insight into French culture."¹ Reading her books, I was exploring a new world — Nebraska and its mosaic of immigrant communities — and yet I did not feel lost. To get acquainted with that American writer I did not need to go into cultural exile. The familiar landmarks were there.

The better I got to know her works, the more fascinated and puzzled I was by the intensity of her attachment to France and French values. I wondered, and I am still wondering, how it was she could be so partial to my country and its people when she could be so impatient with her fellow Americans. But such is the nature and mystery of love; its intensity does not necessarily depend on the intrinsic qualities of its object. It can only be accepted gratefully, as a gift from the Gods. Granted that, one is no more tempted to question the validity of Willa Cather's enthusiastic comments on the French, even when she found in 1902 that the very porters spoke French "almost as music is phrased,"² a talent I had not so far perceived in French porters.

Quite obviously, in *One of Ours* she communicated her passion for all things French to Claude Wheeler, the young Nebraska farmer, making him one of the fifty thousand Americans who died on the battlefields of France during World War I.

Taken as a whole, *One of Ours* is certainly not Willa Cather's best novel, but it does not deserve the hostility of critics who pronounced the book a failure as a war novel. The truth is that *One of Ours* is *not* a war novel. Actually, the war proper is limited to the last book, and even then there is hardly any description of real fighting, which Willa Cather avoided as much as possible. The deep meaning and purpose of the novel lies elsewhere, I believe. Even to present *One of Ours* as the story of a

frustrated young man rejecting the materialistic prosperity of Nebraska before and during World War I and finding fulfillment in the war against Germany does not entirely do justice to the book. Undeniably, Claude, the idealistic young man, is willing to die for a cause. But far more important, in my opinion, is the realization by Claude, upon coming into contact with France, that he can find there new reasons to live and even be happy at last, once the war is over. And this, to me, excludes any so-called "death wish" on the part of Claude, who can not be described either as a war-lover. When he was staying with the Jouberts, Claude felt that "he was having his youth in France He was beginning over again."³ He even planned to buy a little farm in France and "stay [t]here for the rest of his life" (406).

Willa Cather's introduction to French culture was initially achieved through literature mainly (although not exclusively) — Victor Hugo and the giants of fiction, Flaubert and Balzac. She also got acquainted with French history through Michelet and his vivid resurrection of the past (what she called the "romance of history"). Claude discovers France through history essentially. Willa Cather lent her young roughneck her fascination with medieval history and architecture. To Willa Cather the great cathedrals of France or the Papal Palace at Avignon symbolized the permanence of civilization, the soul of old nations.

Claude, likewise, writing a thesis on Joan of Arc, associates her with visions of "a great church . . . cities with walls" — thus preparing himself for his encounter with France and its ancient past, although "[a]t that time he had never seen a map of France, and had a very poor opinion of any place farther away than Chicago" (62). No doubt Claude's interest in Euro-

pean history helped shape his attitude toward the war. At first Claude thought that the Germans, "this splended people" whose solid virtues he had been able to appreciate in the farmers of German origin in Nebraska, "had made some great mistake" and would soon "apologize" (166). Soon, however, the invasion of Belgium, a neutral country, by the German armies, the destruction of Louvain and its prestigious university, and atrocities on civilian populations convinced Claude and an increasing number of Americans that "an unprecedented power of destruction, . . . [s]omething new, and certainly evil, was at work among mankind" (167). As a result, as shown by Claude and other Nebraskans, American public opinion little by little grew hostile to Germany, although at the time very few Americans favored a U.S. intervention in a war thousands of miles away, when America was enjoying peace and prosperity — after all, quite a legitimate and normal reaction — until it became clear that neutrality was impossible for a country as powerful as the United States with international concerns and interests to defend.

Just at the beginning of the War, the first crushing defeats of the French armies, the Germans close to Paris (twenty miles or so, at Meaux) caused dismay among the Wheelers, certainly representative of the average Americans in that respect. Although Mrs. Wheeler was convinced that the Germans were better Christians than the French and that Paris was a beautiful but wicked city — with a venerable Christian past, however — she considered that the fall of Paris would be a tragedy and she rejoiced when the French at the battle of the Marne stopped the German offensive in early September 1914. As to Claude, more significantly, he had started dreaming of fighting for Paris, now for him

"the capital . . . of the world" (172), a town which, ironically enough, he never was to visit during the few months preceding his death in action. Paris, "the place where every dough-boy meant to go" (341), was to remain a confused image for him and his men who envisioned our capital as a city of "spires and golden domes past counting" with buildings higher than in Chicago — "They attributed to the city of their desire incalculable immensity, bewildering vastness, Babylonian hugeness and heaviness — the only attributes they had been taught to admire" (341).

To Claude, more cultured than his men, there is, woven into the long history of Paris with its "pages of kings" (169), an idea of permanence — a major theme in Willa Cather's fiction — which he highly values; indeed, life for him had no meaning without something that "endured." It is highly revealing to note that upon catching sight of the French coast, at the end of the voyage of the *Anchises*, his impression is that of a "pillar of eternity," "strong," "self-sufficient," "unshaken," "mighty" when he had expected to find a "shattered" country, a "bleeding France" (319). In keeping with this idea of eternity, it was particularly appropriate for Willa Cather to have her young hero come to the full awareness of the past as a permanent living element of a civilization as "a life rooted in the centuries" in the Gothic church of St. Ouen in Rouen. She presents Claude's experience as a kind of illumination in the course of which the Prairie boy frustrated by a selfish, careless father in his aspirations to culture, at last, in this centuries-old French church receives his share of the legacy of ages. Here the past is palpable, pulsating, part and parcel of an uninterrupted tradition, reaching him at last as the light from some distant star having traveled through space for

hundreds of years. Truly what takes place during that crucial episode is Claude's integration into French heritage — without rejecting his ties with his own native land. "He felt distinctly that it went through him and farther still . . . as if his mother were looking over his shoulder" (343). To me, this "unique experience" is the key to the whole meaning of the novel. It is nothing less than the moment when Claude truly feels adopted by France and is definitively accredited, reaching a point of no return.

Of course, far easier to perceive are the geographical links established by Claude and his men between Nebraska and "flowery France," displaying in the summer of 1918 its fields of wheat, oats, rye and even alfalfa — much to the amusement of the young soldiers — as in their prairie states. As those were the days when highly efficient weed-killers had not yet been invented, the fields are strewn with cornflowers and poppies unknown to Claude's men (with the exception of one Austrian boy from Omaha) — a discovery which creates a sensation among them. They also remark the presence of "American binders, of well-known makes" (Deering or McCormick, I suppose) well maintained not by "peasants," i.e. backward people, "but by wise-looking old farmers." (The young ones, of course, are on the battlefield.) But the most cheering sight is that of the tree dearest to the heart of Willa Cather: "the familiar cottonwood, growing everywhere" persecuted by the prosperous Nebraska farmers for being too common and replaced by more "noble trees" like maple and ash. Apparently the French are not prejudiced against these beautiful trees, and Claude feels "they were a real bond between him and this people" (340). However, the pragmatic, efficiency-minded young American farmers are sur-

prised to see trees along the edges of every field — "didn't they take the strength out of the soil?" (340). Well, maybe they did, but what is implied by Willa Cather is that in the Old World, the sense of beauty was inseparable from farming itself. Generations of men had tended their fields as if they were gardens — not merely exploiting the soil but lovingly landscaping it for centuries. In that respect productivity was not the supreme goal. That reminds me of Antonia, who loved her fruit trees "as if they were people," carrying water to them after working all day in the fields.⁴

Gardens, which play such an important role in the civilizing process, as described by Willa Cather in some of her major works, are also present in *One of Ours*. In spite of the devastations inflicted by the war, the great sorrows affecting the families Claude meets, the French stubbornly take care of their gardens as microcosms of harmony and peace in a world of chaos and violence, whether it is the simple intimate garden at the Jouberts', or the garden around the Red Cross barracks among ruins tended by a former soldier with one arm, or the fine formal garden of the upper-class Fleurys, with the rows of plane trees cut square, its beds of gorgeous flowers, and rose gardens. In such tragic circumstances, the French looking after their gardens are not engaged in any frivolous occupation. (They never are in Cather's fiction!) They are doing no less than maintaining civilization, affirming the vitality of the "French soil" no matter what the Germans did to it.

Claude, thanks to his gift of sympathy, but also his Nebraska rural background, gets a deep insight into the land and the way it reflects the soul of a people unbroken by the war, but he is also acutely aware that to really get to know a people one must speak its language. Claude is

very desirous to speak French but he is discouraged by its difficulty. We see him in July 1917 perusing a French phrasebook made up, says the narrator, of sentences chosen for their usefulness to soldiers, such as, of all things, "Non, jamais je ne regarde les femmes," (No, I never look at the women!) (244). The only explanation to me for this strange sentence is the anxiety of American military chiefs to guard the doughboys against venereal diseases — a serious waste of man power — when you think that up to the summer of 1917 the French army had reported a million cases of VD since the beginning of the war.

Claude, arriving in France and putting his French to the test, does not say anything noble and historic, such as the famous "Lafayette, nous voila." He only asks the French cheese woman, "Avez-vous du fromage, Madame?" (324). And it works. He and his men can buy cheese at two and a half times the normal market price. But Claude is less successful with a child whose very simple and friendly question he cannot answer, much to his confusion and distress: "Unless I can learn to talk to the *children* of this country, . . . I'll go home!" he thinks (328). It is true that American soldiers fascinated French children. Frederick Palmer, a famous war correspondent, observed that the smattering of French American soldiers managed to get was essentially picked up from children.

On the whole, Claude's attitude to the French language is ambivalent. On the one hand, he experiences paralyzing self-consciousness and frustration, but he sees French also as a positive encouragement to form strong ties with the people. Above all, he perceives in the language itself what it reveals about the national character. Thus in a famous passage, too long to be fully quoted here, he sees French, this exacting

tongue, spoken by Mme. Joubert as a lesson of energy.

Finally, in spite of the language barrier and his fear of "the treacherous 'French politeness,'" Claude wins the esteem and sympathy of the people he encounters in France, especially the Jouberts, whose affection Claude feels was "genuine and personal" (405). However, meeting the Fleurys, the upper-class family, proves to be quite an ordeal for Claude. In this refined environment, Claude feels miserable and "out of place." Actually, the real trouble, as made clear by Claude himself, is not with the Fleurys' manners, totally devoid of any trace of haughtiness, but with Claude's deep sense of frustration and despair at having been deprived by his insensitive father of the proper education that would have made "a man of him" and enabled him to share in the interests of this cultured French family, such as music, which "has always been like a religion in this house" (418) says his friend, David Gerhardt, the distinguished former violinist, at once admired and envied by Claude for his brilliant accomplishments and especially his command of the French language.

In reality, Willa Cather's sympathetic presentation of her young Nebraskan hero — so much of a brother to her — shows that there is little ground for Claude's almost masochistic self-depreciation. Indeed, we can imagine, what Claude was too modest to realize was that perceptive and friendly French people would appreciate him for just what he was: a fine handsome young man, intelligent, sensitive, generous, eager to understand and to learn — a man with solid qualities and potentialities. In that respect, nothing could be more meaningful than his encounter with the gracious Mademoiselle Olive de Courcy, just behind the battle front. Despite their vastly differ-

ent cultural and social backgrounds, Claude, talking with the young woman, experiences, perhaps for the first time in France or even in the United States, "the feeling of being completely understood, of being no longer a stranger" (391). On this occasion, the situation is quite original. This is not any more an American trying to get acquainted with France, but an aristocratic French woman, the descendant of a family of soldiers, wishing to know about Claude's native land, Nebraska, which perhaps Claude did not consider worth talking about. Olive de Courcy, genuinely interested, intently listening to Claude, dreamily imagines Nebraska: "Flat — covered with grain, muddy rivers. I think it must be like Russia" (389). Quite curiously it is this young French woman who has the power to arouse in Claude's heart the dormant love for his own land and place, lying buried under layers of frustration and bitterness.

On a more personal level, Claude's encounter with Olive de Courcy, the opposite of Enid, the bigoted, castrating girl he had the misfortune to marry, is the counterpart of his memorable experience in the Church of St. Ouen in Rouen. Something unique has also taken place between the two young people, causing Claude to wonder: "Two people could hardly give each other more if they were together for years" (391-92).

Here, maybe, we witness the beginning of a romance. They agree to meet again after the war. In a Hollywood version of *One of Ours*, we can imagine, Claude would be wounded in action and nursed by Olive de Courcy. He then would marry her and look after her estate, living a happy life in France and having many Franco-American children. But Claude, upon taking leave, prophetically thinks that he had left something "which he would never find again" (392).

His mother's reflection, so often quoted, Claude "died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be" (458), first of all clearly indicates that Claude had not rejected his own country, however severely he judged it — a projection of Willa Cather's own disenchantment, no doubt. Secondly, the judgment confirms Claude's idealized or mythic vision of France, the nation he had elected, and where he felt he was beginning a new life. Truly we could talk about the "French dream of Claude," the immigrant in reverse, finding the "promised land" in the Old World, as embodied by "beautiful France" (in Willa Cather's words). Definitely, France came first in Claude's heart. In his friend David he had at last found a person he could admire "without reservations" (411). The phrase applies to France as well. He admired it without reservations.

Such was the case with Willa Cather. If she ever was aware of France's weaknesses, she had deliberately chosen to ignore them. She never saw the French Baylisses trying very hard to make France ugly. Claude died with "beautiful beliefs." As for Willa Cather, this very American writer, she never gave up her warm loving vision of France, right or wrong! And the liberation of my country in 1944, a liberation in which again many Americans lost their lives, was

one of her last great joys. In a sense we French people could well say that Willa Cather from Nebraska was really "one of ours," while remaining at heart a solid American who said she could not write away from the American idiom.⁵

NOTES

¹Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (1953; Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1963) 241.

²Willa Cather, *Willa Cather in Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1956) 95.

³Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Knopf, 1922) 410-11.

⁴Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918) 383.

⁵In 1917, the American intervention in France was decisive. Without the help of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), the Allies, exhausted, having sustained millions of casualties, could not have won the war, in all likelihood. In preparing this paper I found the following book particularly useful and illuminating: Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Racine: U of Wisconsin P, 1986).



(This paper was presented as the featured address at the Cather Spring Conference in Red Cloud, Nebraska, on May 6, 1989.)

Warren, Edward Wagenknecht, Joseph Wood Krutch, Robert Morss Lovett, Glenway Wescott, and others. A gifted poet and writer of short stories as well as novels, Roberts was born in Perryville, Kentucky, in 1881, and, after having taught school in Springfield, Kentucky, the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, attended the University of Chicago while in her thirties. I first read *The Time of Man* as an undergraduate in Brooklyn in the fifties and considered it then superior to *My Ántonia* as a woman's story, and still so consider it, despite my extensive study of Cather's fiction. Both novels concern girls growing to womanhood, being jilted, struggling on the land as wives of poor farmers and mothers of many children. Where Cather explores the purposes of her male narrator, Roberts focuses exhaustively on Ellen Chesser, her heroine, getting into her mind as she tries to order and understand her experiences. Roberts's unique experiments with flow of consciousness enable the reader to know her heroine more thoroughly than we can know Antonia Shimerda. *The Time of Man* is the less self-conscious and more intimate novel.

While my subject here is Roberts's second ranking novel, *The Great Meadow*, which I will try to compare to Cather's *Shadows on the Rock* (published a year later than the Roberts novel), I would like to comment briefly on a scene near the end of *The Time of Man* which recalls a similar one near the end of *My Ántonia* and suggests the differing approaches these authors take to their heroines as well as possibilities for future in-depth comparison of the two novels. Pregnant for the fourth time, Ellen tries to envision her born and unborn children

as men and woman, as they would be . . . all standing about the cabin door until they darkened the path

Coming of Age and Domesticating Space in the Wilderness: Roberts's *The Great Meadow* and Cather's *Shadows on the Rock*

By JOHN J. MURPHY
Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah

Willa Cather needs little introduction to readers of American literature, but Elizabeth Madox Roberts unfortunately does — I say unfortunately because two

of her six novels, *The Time of Man* (1926) and *The Great Meadow* (1930), are truly great American novels, the first enthusiastically praised by Robert Penn

with their shadows, all asking beyond what she had to give, always demanding, always wanting more of her and more of them always wanting to be. She took up the bucket and went down the hill to the spring, walking quickly as if she were pursued. "Out of me come people forever, forever," she said as she went down the hill path. (321)

This recalls the explosion of children from *Antonia's* fruit cave, but notice that Roberts gives us the reflection from the mother's perspective rather than from the poeticizing perspective of a narrator on vacation, Cather's Jim Burden. The reader participates in Ellen's wonder as to what comes from her body, and the novel comes full circle as Ellen's children's lives duplicate her own at the novel's beginning — when they as children of a tenant farmer (she had been the child of a tenant farmer) move from place to place and ask questions about life, the heavens and their destination.

Discussing *The Great Meadow* and *Shadows on the Rock* brings up the problem of defining western American literature because Roberts's novel especially has all the ingredients of a Western — movement westward, mountain men, Indians, bison, etc. — although it goes no farther west than eastern Kentucky. *Shadows on the Rock* is even "easterner" in setting and might be classified as Northern if there existed such a classification for novels. Quebec is the frontier, and from it scouts, trappers and missionaries explore the Indians' wilderness. What makes these novels comparable, besides their colonial settings (*Meadows* opens in Virginia in the 1770s, and *Shadows* in Quebec in the 1690s) is that they focus on heroines who define themselves within domestic spaces and through domestic activities,

who experience conflicts with their fathers as they set childhood aside, who function within orderly views of the universe, and whose development is patterned against and representative of the development of their fledgling nations, respectively, of the independence of the United States and of distinct Canadian identity.

We first meet Roberts's heroine, Diony Hall, at sixteen, seated in the house of her father's plantation and repeating aloud, "I, Diony Hall," while behind her spread the floor, arose the walls, and outside reached the clearings into infinity (9-10). Later she looks down from a hilltop toward the plantation house and, "in mind," goes "within the house and up the stairs to her own sleeping place, where she lay down on her own soft bed and drew the coverlet over her Shut securely within . . . a hushed voice farther within saying some mute word, as 'come,' or 'here you will find me'" (18). Besides milking and garden chores, Diony's and her sister Netty's prime activity is cloth-making: knitting, weaving, and spinning. After her marriage and during her journey to Kentucky, cooking, housekeeping, and eventually child-rearing are added to cloth-making. In the days before Diony's departure, her mother, Polly, schools her,

and they, as a woman and a woman, would listen together in silence to the after-wisdom that would gather about these utterances. Through the killing of the swine and the preparations of the meat, through the boiling of the soap and the making of the summer linen, [Polly] contemplated [her daughter's] departure, her care continual from speech to speech. (72)

Mother gives daughter seeds, advises her to grow gourds for utensils, gives her cuts of women cloth, and blankets, tells

her to keep the Sabbath and "take care the least one always and don't let hit fall into the embers" (77). Her special gift to her daughter is precious spoons.

Cather's heroine, Cécile Auclair, also receives her most direct schooling from her mother who, when dying, instructs her daughter in the ways of running the household, especially taking care of the linens. She tells her, "You will see that your father's whole happiness depends on order and regularity, and you will come to feel a pride in it. Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages" (24). Cécile takes these directions to heart and is discovered by her father one cold night protecting their box of parsley from frost. She also benefits domestically from his lifestyle. Euclide Auclair maintains Parisian dinner habits and helps with household chores, and his house and shop remind the colonists of France: "the interior was like home to the French-born" (22).

The challenge of the wilderness brings home to Cécile the meaning of her mother's advice and the importance to civilization of domestic chores. When Pierre Charron, her future husband, takes Cécile on an excursion to the Harnois farm on the Isle of Orleans, the wilderness challenges the household. Although she delights in Pierre's stories of the woods and his desire for open places, she finds roughing it difficult and pleads with him for an early return to Quebec. As she approaches the city in his canoe, it becomes for her the epitome of order in the wilderness. When she returns to her own kitchen, she recognizes the necessity of being surrounded by the utensils of the household in order to create civilized space and that it has not been to please her father and carry out her mother's wishes that she has devoted herself so faithfully to domestic

order: "Now she realized that she did [all these things so carefully] for herself, quite as much" (197-98). This reflection is noteworthy because it advances Cécile toward womanhood: "she had grown at least two years older in the two nights she had been away. She did not feel like a little girl, doing what she had been taught to do."

In *Meadow* the confrontation between household and wilderness is more dramatic and extended — in fact, it occupies the Kentucky half of the novel. Diony cannot flee back to the orderly life she left behind in Virginia. During her journey into the wilderness, she loses her mother's precious spoons but eventually replaces them with wooden ones of her own making. She also learns how to make a broom by shredding a hickory pole, to sew moccasins, and to cook game meats and journey cakes. Butter and sugar making, the bartering of seeds and needles for delicacies like sweets occupy her time, and eventually, when all the precious cloth from the plantation runs out, she experiments with nettle cloth from herbs and makes yarn from buffalo wool. She carries on the traditions of her mother with new materials and realizes with some resentment the role women play in the process of civilization. Men experiment with law, from revenge expeditions to the formation of courts, "but the women gave their thought to other things and followed a hidden law . . ." (136).

In order to achieve the independence and growth necessary to recognize this hidden law compelling woman to contribute in her unique way to civilizing, Diony Hall Jarvis must separate herself from a cherished childhood, an immediate past enshrining her father and sister, and further distance herself from the Tidewater area of Virginia, the country of her forebears. Her closest relationship in her early years is with Betty,

who loves her sister Diony "with idolatry and clung to her" (22). Diony amuses Betty with imaginary visits to Tidewater cities, to their relatives' great houses under "fine trees that came from France" and with great dining halls with long tables and chairs at their sides and "Silver spoons to eat with and fine napkins to wipe your fingers on after you dip in your plate. Fine wine to drink, from Italy. Chinaware and silver and salt cellars," and so on (23-24). Diony and Betty imagine chariot rides, religious rituals, expensive gowns, cloaks, capes, and silk shoes. When Diony accepts Berk Jarvis's offer to marry him and journey with him to Kentucky, she is sorrowful that she must break her promise to visit someday with Betty the coastal land of their forebears, "and she felt a pain arise within her to know that she would hurt Betty . . ." (60).

Complicating her struggle for independence are the protests of her father. Thomas Hall at first refuses to have his daughter taken into the wilderness, and he gives vent to his disapproval by pounding the table and going out to hammer a shoe for his horse. Diony is "abashed at her father's words, at his strong blow on the table, sickened by them until her breath was slow in her throat and her head bowed" (68). But Thomas Hall finally acquiesces, and Diony begins the long gray wait for Berk Jarvis, her frontiersman, to return the next spring, marry her, and take her away. Thus, a break with her sister and the past as well as a distancing from her father are prefatory to maturation.

In *Shadows*, Cécile's childhood and dependence are related to her childish exploits with the waif Jacques Gaux and to her harmonious fidelity to her father. The novel's childhood scenes with Cécile and Jacques are many and memorable: the candlelighting at Notre Dame de

la Victoire, the setting up of the crèche, the sledding scene, and so on. In the last mentioned of these, as she pulls Jacques up the hill before a setting sun and beneath the evening star, Cécile's fondness for childhood becomes explicit: "A feeling came over her that there would never be anything better in the world for her than this; to be pulling Jacques on her sled, with the tender, burning sky before her, and on each side, in the dusk, the kindly lights from neighbours' houses" (104). Cécile's woodsman, the counterpart of Diony's Berk Jarvis, is Pierre Charron, who, like Berk, returns in spring as the man of a new season in terms of Cécile's maturity. Pierre comes in buckskin as "hero of the fur trade and the coureurs de bois" and is "quick as an otter and always sure of himself" (170). He is the Frenchman of the New World, the Canadian hero who combines "the good manners of the Old World" with "the dash and daring of the New" (172). Pierre will take Cécile from little Jacques as she matures, although their first "date," the difficult trip to the Harnois farm on the Isle of Orleans, is rather unhappy. Cécile somewhat haltingly moves toward maturity; one minute, when modeling the grown-up gowns she has been sent from France, she seems a woman, but in the next she lapses toward childhood. It is fitting that after she receives the new clothes, Pierre returns to take her, her father, and little Jacques to dinner with the captain of *Le Faucon*. Cécile's concern over what to wear indicates her young womanhood, while her excitement over the captain's parrot indicates her childishness: "The idea of a talking bird was fascinating to her — seemed to belong with especially rare and wonderful things, like orange-trees and peacocks and gold crowns and the Count's glass fruit" (215).

Her father's plans to return to France provide the push that Cécile needs toward maturity. While Euclide Auclair anxiously awaits his boss Count Frontenac's recall to France, his daughter has a falling out with him because her associations are Canadian rather than Parisian and she wants to remain in Quebec. The proposed return to Europe causes her to lose interest in the household and take a somewhat defiant tone toward him. She does not want to give up her world, and she weeps in the cathedral for "all that she must lose so soon" (230). As she shares with Jacques a loaf of bread on Cap Diamant and watches the sun set over Quebec, she contemplates escape to the wilderness and identifies herself as Canadian and independent from her father. Subsequently, however, Frontenac's request to return to France is refused by the Court, and Auclair decides to stay with his boss in Canada. Domestic peace now returns, and as Frontenac sickens and dies, Cécile plays mother to her somewhat confused and abandoned father. She realizes that he has always lived under the shadow of the Count's paternity: "She felt as if a strong roof over their heads had been swept away" (259). Her father's idea that his time is over challenges her renewed efforts to restore domestic peace, which is not achieved until the final arrival of Pierre Charron. As Canadian protector, Pierre takes over from the French protector, the Count, and in demanding supper from Cécile, he encourages her to resume her efforts toward household order. As he and her father drink the Count's golden wine, Cécile's doubts and loneliness melt away. Her maturity and that of the new Canadian country are simultaneous, and Pierre becomes master of both.

Despite her dispute with her father, Roberts's Diony, like Cather's Cécile, is very much her

father's girl. He nurtures in her a love for words and for intellectual order. A student of Bishop Berkeley, he reads to her from *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, and she commits to memory long passages concerning the existence of reality in the Eternal Mind and concerning creation through knowledge: "Oh, to create rivers by knowing rivers, to move outward through the extended infinite plain until it assumed roundness. Oh, to make a world out of chaos" (21). Diony's father, like his French counterparts in *Shadows*, believes in the conquest and individual creation of the world through the so-called developed civilizations: "Civilized Man is forever spreading more widely over the earth, historic Man bringing such men as have no history to humble themselves and learn their lesson. It's a strong mark of the hidden purposes of the Author of all things . . ." (72). Thomas Hall concludes his speech to his daughter with his reason for agreeing to surrender her to Berk Jarvis and the wilderness: "It will never be said of me I hindered Diony." The challenge for Diony is to perceive her own life in terms of this destiny. Her father's present to her is books, probably one of them *The Aeneid*, from which he quotes excerpts of the fate-driven voyage of civilization from Troy to Rome. With a sense of destiny, then, Diony begins her journey to the music of horse bells, aware of taking her cherished past into the future. As the caravan moves,

she knew herself as the daughter of many, going back through Polly Brook through the Shenandoah Valley and the Pennsylvania clearings and roadways to England, Methodists and Quakers, small farmers and weavers, going back through Thomas Hall to tidewater farmers and owners of land. In herself then an infinity of hopes

welled up, vague desires and holy passions for some better place, infinite regrets and rending farewells mingled and lost in the blended inner tinkle and clatter. These remembrances were put into her own flesh as a passion, as if she remembered all her origins, and remembered every sensation her forebears had known, and in the front of all this mass arose her present need for Berk and her wish to move all the past outward now in conjunction with him. They went quickly along the road, the seven pack horses making a seven-keyed music that played about her choice and wrapped it in a fine pride. The air was pleasant, the hills vividly seen, the water in the creek being bright over the brown of the stones. (85)

Like her mother's gift of spoons, her father's gift of books is lost during the journey, but Diony is able to apply what the books have taught her, just as she is able to improvise domestically in the wilderness from what her mother had taught her about how and what women contribute to the voyage of civilization. In effect, she is able to fuse domestic arts and the philosophy of the books: "Remembering some phrases from a book which was now more than half forgotten she had a sudden sense of herself as eternal, as if all that she did now were of a kind older than kings, older than beliefs and governments" (149). She is able to detect the "Author of Nature, the great Mover of the Universe" by "signs that appear in the mind" (121) and to feel "the power of reason over the wild life of the earth" (197). And she is able to understand that her life in Kentucky is the "beginning before the beginning," and to envision sheep sprinkled over

pastures, stone walls and rail fences setting bounds to the land, neighbors, places to sell the growth of the farm, bridges over streams, fine cattle yielding milk and cream, and bees in hives near the dwellings, and, as the faithful daughter of Thomas Hall, to envision a developed society with letters written, knowledge, "wisdom brought under beautiful or awful sayings and remembered, kept stored among written pages and brought together then as books" (126).

The coupling of the nation and the heroine is very deliberately achieved by Roberts. Diony's vision is of a civilization realized, the completion of what begins in the novel's first pages with the reflection "I, Diony." A key scene occurs when she approaches the threshold between childhood and adulthood, between her sister and her mother, Polly, and tries on her mother's dress:

it swallowed her into its folds. The drooping roundness of the dress made her afraid to know that she would come to a stature that would fill it. She was fearful of the dress But when she had stood a moment . . . a change spread over her knowledge of the dress, and she took up the garment with a sweet loathing that turned all to joy as she put it on anew. She brushed the folds of the cloth with her hands, slowly, accepting her new self and being ready to run to meet all that would come to her. Standing in the garment, she felt herself burgeon slowly to a roundness and firmness that satisfied it, that lifted its limp folds and swelled the shoulders and arms, that poised the skirt to a fine point of grace. Then she took the dress gravely from her body and hung it on its peg in the corner beside Betty's child-

ish little frock, and she took her own garment to her body again, buttoning the front opening gravely, and she went gravely down the stair, being no longer in awe of adult being. Her mind sank into a maze, both ways, Betty's way and Polly's way, being equally known to her, and the year continued to make seasons over her. (41-42)

The paragraph immediately above this one reads, "Diony . . . heard the great ticking [the turning of the year]. There was war in Boston, the colony fighting the King's men. Some said that all the colonies could snatch themselves free" (41). After Diony has agreed to wait for Berk, and immediately before she receives a proposal from a Tidewater gentleman, "News came from Philadelphia . . . : Congress had declared the colonies free" (58). Just as the colonies separate from the parent country, Diony will leave her parents, and like the new nation, move westward into the new Eden,

through orchards of crab trees where the crab apples hung . . . onto the great fertile plateau Diony could not now remember what lay far behind. Over her though flowed continually a freshness as if the world were newborn. While she rode through a low-lying valley approaching a ford . . . a parrakeet flew over the trail There was bright yellow shading to orange over its head and neck and its body was bright green. (103-04)

This is the exotic land of the future and of self-definition, and although painful times await her, this colorful image will sustain her significant efforts toward civilization fulfilled.

In *Shadows*, the march of civilization to which Cécile contributes receives impetus from the orderly world vision of medi-

eval Catholicism. Cécile's faith is that of the nuns, whose world is a contained and well-ordered fortress, like the altar of Notre Dame de la Victoire, a universe comprised of

this all-important earth, created by God for a great purpose, the sun which He made to light it by day, the moon which He made to light it by night, — and the stars, made to beautify the vault of heaven like frescoes, and to be a clock and compass for man. And in this safe, lovingly arranged and ordered universe . . . the drama of man went on at Quebec just as at home, and the Sisters played their accustomed part in it. (97)

The convent and the kitchen are vital in extending order over the wild places of the world, and Cécile and her nun friends are associated with Virgil's hero Aeneas. Cather uses a line from Book 27 of the Roman epic about Aeneas bringing his gods to Latium:

Inferretque deos Latio.
When an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country, the colony he founds will, from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit. Its history will shine with bright incidents, slight, perhaps, but precious, as in life itself, where the great matters are often as worthless as astronomical distances, and the trifles dear as the heart's blood. (98)

Cather's epilogue suggests such fulfillment and the passing of the torch from the past to the future. Set fifteen years after the end of the action, in August 1713, it is a scene between Euclide Auclair and Bishop Saint-Vallier, who has recently returned from France. The Bishop tells of the sadness at Court over the deaths of the

Duke and Duchess of Burgundy and their infant son. But Auclair tells of Cécile and Pierre's happy family of four sons, the Canadians of the future. Canada is preferred over France: Auclair "believed that he was indeed fortunate to spend his old age here . . . to watch his grandsons grow up in a country where the death of the King, the probable evils of a long regency, would never touch them" (279-80).

The heroines of these novels are relatively obscure women, who keep houses, raise children, and make do with what they have in difficult environments, yet they are associated in each case with Virgil's hero bringing the gods into a new land. Both novelists are aware that civilization begins in the kitchen with the domestic arts. Of course, these novels are not the same, but they have important similarities and are prod-

ucts, I think, of artists with serious civilizing purposes. Willa Cather would have admired and echoed her sister novelist's somewhat homey statement that "it is the function of art to enlarge one's experience, to add to man more tolerance, more forgiveness, to increase one's hold on all the outlying spaces which are little realized in the come and go of everyday" (Rovit 8).

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romantic era in which the delusion and fall of Marian Forrester mean for the young man the corruption of time, the death of a dream, and the encroachment of the "coarse" bourgeoisie and rampant materialism. As long as she lives, Niel cannot forgive his lost Mrs. Forrester for her spiritual failings — defrauding Indians to mitigate the ill effects of her financial disaster, conducting amorous affairs with unworthy lovers, and, especially, for refusing to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of the dead Captain Forrester.

The most simple interpretation of Cather's *A Lost Lady* is to see the heroine through Niel's eyes and to assume that Cather is, like Niel, indulging in a "supine romanticism" (Hicks 710), a nostalgic longing for the days of promise, youth and vitality for the now grey prairie towns and for the men who built them. Another more likely interpretation is that Niel represents a longing of the past familiar to all of us — including Cather — the yearning for an idealized time and place, a lost naiveté and innocence, a dream that "what you think and plan for day by day . . . you will get" — as Forrester says (54). In this revisionist version of traditional romantic longing, Cather turns the tables upon the aesthetic predecessors of Mrs. Forrester, most notably Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and makes an admirer of the lost lady, rather than the lady herself, an ineffectual and idealistic dreamer of romantic escapism.

Remarkable similarities exist between Cather's Marian Forrester and Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Both are vivacious raven-haired women who love music, dancing, gaiety, mimicry, laughter, and the admiration of men. Both marry older men whose first wives have died, and both exist in an immediate environment made up almost entirely of men and boys — Emma Bovary with her adoring husband

Cather's *A Lost Lady* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: Re-envisioning Romanticism

By LINDA M. LEWIS

Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas

Marian Forrester, of Cather's novel *A Lost Lady*, is the vivacious young wife of an aging railroad contractor who gradually loses first health, later wealth, and as a result is reluctantly imprisoned in a fading mansion on the edge of the little prairie town of Sweet Water where — according to her — "nothing ever *does* happen" (132). As Captain Forrester and his generation of dreamer entrepreneurs who opened the West die off, younger businessmen move in like parasites to cash in on the work of their predecessors, carve up estates, and defraud the naive with their shyster tactics. Niel Herbert, a local lad through whose sensibilities the story is filtered, admires the Captain and his empire-building companions, loves the Captain's lady for her beauty, grace, and

charm, and rejects the go-getting materialism of his own generation for the beauty of the past age represented by the Forresters.

The story begins in nostalgia with the sentence: "Thirty or forty years ago, in one of those grey towns along the Burlington Railroad, there was a house well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere. Well known, that is to say, to the railroad aristocracy of that time . . ." (9). The novel ends on a similar note with Niel looking back upon an age "already gone." "The taste and smell and song of it, the visions those men had seen in the air and followed, — these he had caught in a kind of afterglow in their own faces" (169). The reader experiences with Niel an elegiac lament for a

Charles (the bungling village doctor), as well as Yonville's apothecary, merchant, tax collector, and priest, Emma's lovers, and Justin, the servant lad who worships her and unwittingly supplies the arsenic for her suicide; Marian Forrester with the Captain and the empire-builders who are his friends, and after the Captain and the old West have died, with a younger generation of Sweet Water boys whom she vainly teaches to ape the ways of gentlemen. The group includes Niel, who begins adoring Mrs. Forrester in childhood as Justin adores Emma, but who witnesses what he considers her spiritual suicide, the "poison . . . at work in her body" (131). (Interestingly, her second affair is with Ivy Peters, whom the neighborhood boys had called "Poison Ivy.")

Both novels involve two affairs — the first with a virile older man of the world, the second with a calculating young lawyer or law student on the rise in the world — in Emma's case, Leon Dupuis, and in Mrs. Forrester's, the unscrupulous Ivy Peters. Both Flaubert and Cather use descriptions of garments as images of seduction. Though in androgynous caprices Emma dresses in manish-looking hats or vestcoats, she is described in four-flounced dresses, satin slippers, and *barège* gowns. Marian Forrester wears "a swirl of foamy white petticoats" (42), white lace hats, dangling pendant earrings shaped like fleurs-de-lys, and many rings. In the seduction scene between Emma and her first lover, Rodolphe (known for his many mistresses, brutal temperament and shrewd intelligence), Flaubert describes the cloth of her dress clinging to the velvet of his coat: "Le drap de sa robe s'accrochait au velours de l'habit" (*Madame Bovary* 177). Similarly, Frank Ellinger, Marian's first lover, has a bad reputation with women, a "scandalous chronicle" (50), says

Niel, who sees Ellinger's restless muscular energy as evil. When Marian sweeps from a room, "the train of her velvet dress caught the leg of his broadcloth trousers and dragged with a friction that crackled and threw sparks" (60). (The tangling of the woman's train and the man's trousers is an image repeated numerous times in Emma's history — beginning with her nuptial party.)

Both women have a passion to escape the mundane and, in their desired flight, both are compared to birds — Emma's fluttering hand is like a captive turtledove, "une tourterelle captive" (164), while Mrs. Forrester's fingers are "light and fluttery as butterfly wings" (96). Emma is adept at dovelike poses, "ces poses de colombe assoupie" (293), and her dreams fall in the mud like wounded swallows, "comme des hirondelles blessées" (204). When she plummets into an abyss of adultery, deceit, insanity and debt, she longs to "s'échappant comme un oiseau, aller se rajeunir quelque part, bien loin, dans les espaces immaculés" (323). Mrs. Forrester's relationship with the shyster Ivy Peters is foreshadowed by the "wild and desperate" female woodpecker that Ivy blinds (25), and when Niel comes back home to a Mrs. Forrester trapped by poverty, her husband's illness, and the incapacitating isolation, he finds her lying in a hammock "like a bird caught in a net" (110). In both novels, the image suggests to the respective narrator flightiness and fragility.

The chief similarity between the heroines is the boredom and entrapment of a life far removed from the centers of activity, style, novelty, and excitement — in Emma Bovary's case, Rouen or Paris; in Marian Forrester's, California or Denver. The keynote for Flaubert's Emma is *ennui*. Her life in the flat "countrée bâtarde" of Yonville-l'Abbaye

(76) is cut off and isolated, and there her complexion pales, her intellect withers, and her soul shrivels. Marian Forrester says she is "stranded" (63) in a country where nothing happens and nothing matters, that she is "struggling . . . to get out of [a] hole" (126), and she too shrivels, her complexion fading from hyacinth white to the ivory of fading gardenias.¹ In her depression Emma becomes anorexic and fatigued; when Marian Forrester cannot escape the dullness, she too is weary and pale, and she overindulges in French brandy.

The situations (if not the sensibilities) of the husbands are also similar. Charles Bovary is a slow-witted *officier de santé*, whom Emma despises for his bourgeois tastes, bovine ways and uncultivated mannerisms, even as she is infuriated by his moral superiority (337). Bovary does not suspect Emma's affairs, but precisely in admitting his wife's affair, Forrester establishes (at least to Niel) his own moral superiority to the "[p]oor . . . misguided" lady (151). And Niel, to whom the Captain reveals his insight by commenting upon "Mrs. Forrester's elegant handwriting" in a letter about to be posted to Ellinger, sees Forrester's great integrity in his knowing, accepting, and forgiving. While Bovary seems a dunce and simpleton, though, Forrester is lord of his manor, a prince among fellows, and is defined in organic metaphors — an "old tree" (115), a "man of iron" (126), a fallen mountain (41).

Finally, money grubbing materialism triumphs in each novel. In *Madame Bovary*, the apothecary Homais uses his glib tongue, his ties to the press, and his influence in the town to rise to prominence, while Emma is a suicide, Bovary dies in poverty, and their orphaned child is put to work in a cotton mill. In *A Lost Lady* the self-confessed shyster Ivy Peters rents the Forrester place, drains the Captain's lovely marsh to plant wheat, and in-

stalls his horses in the Captain's barn and, eventually, himself in the Captain's bed. He purchases the house that he had coveted as a symbol of the "high-and-mighty" (27) "chesty old boys" (104) — as Peters terms the empire builders — just as he had wanted Mrs. Forrester because she was a "stuck-up piece" (22), in Peters' mind, a thing or object formerly owned by the failed entrepreneur. With the numerous similarities in situation and imagery, it is small wonder that critics have from the beginning noted the similarity between Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* and Cather's lost lady.²

Cather's biographers have established that she was an admirer of Flaubert. As a student at the University of Nebraska, she often carried a copy of *Madame Bovary* (Brown 61). An older Cather's favorite Flaubert work was not *Madame Bovary*, but *Salammbô* (O'Brien 324), and she was to characterize Bovary type heroines as "spoil[s] of the poets" (O'Brien 182). In a review of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, a work Cather thought too much like Flaubert's, she says there was no need for a second novel on "so trite and sordid a theme" as Flaubert's original (Curtin 697). Why then would Cather write a novel that evokes memories of such a famous predecessor?

Nancy Morrow, in "Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* and the Nineteenth Century Novel of Adultery," suggests that Cather is carrying on a dialogue with Flaubert's novel, along with Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and other works that stress the moral implications of the adulteress' act more than Cather does (300). While Morrow deals with the moral values of nineteenth century heroines and their male creators versus those of Marian Forrester and Willa Cather, I am here concerned with the writers' manipulation of the familiar adultery plot for purposes of commentary on art and life.

The foolish and shallow heroine of Flaubert's mock romance represents a sentimental longing for romantic escapism. Critics long ago pointed out that in Flaubert's declaration, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi," he is in fact having it out with his own proclivity for romanticism and announcing once for all that romantic art — at least as recently practiced — is merely so much sentimental escapism.³ To achieve his purpose, Flaubert makes Emma appear not only pathetic, but also foolish. She devours sentimental novels of gothic passion, wishes to live in a chalet or cottage with a husband who wears a black velvet cloak, imagines that she is loved by Edgar of *Lucia di Lammermoor* or by the tenor who sings Edgar, and wants Rodolphe to elope with her to some magnificent city with "des dômes, des ponts, des naïves, des forêts de citronniers et des cathédrales de marbre blanc" (217), where they will ride in gondolas and swing in hammocks. In Flaubert's satiric rejection of romantic exoticism, he pokes fun at Emma and at human beings, in general, for we all have the need to dream dreams and escape the mundane. In fact Emma's young lover Leon romanticizes her as an Odalisque and the amorous heroine of all novels, poems, and plays (293), and Flaubert says that every bourgeois has believed himself capable of stormy passions and lofty enterprises, the most mediocre libertine has dreamed of Oriental queens, and every notary bears within himself the remains of a poet (321). In his mockery, Flaubert tries to detach himself from Emma, whom we are not meant to perceive as a tragic heroine. Rather, she suggests mawkish sentimentality in life and art, as well as the novelist's own chagrin at his desire to live in an ivory tower when — as he writes in a letter to Turgenev — he is actually drowning in a "tide of shit" (*Letters*, 200).

The suggestion that Cather's novel is a revision of the bored adulteress in Flaubert is not to suggest that Cather's art is merely derivative. If Morrow is right, a writer cannot enter into dialogue with an earlier text without allusions to that text. And if Harold Bloom is right in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, each work of art is a "misprision" or deliberate misreading of a previous work; each poet re-envision the vision of the predecessors in whose shadow she or he works. Bloom says that the influence need not make the revisionist less original (7), but rather that one strong poet's work expiates for the work of the precursor, or later visions cleanse themselves at the expense of earlier ones (139). Thus for Bloom, all art is a deliberate recasting of existing art.⁴

Cather's novel extols the past, but her heroine does not long for escape into an unrealistic dream as Emma does. Nor does she especially wish to be exalted as an icon on Niel's pedestal. Nevertheless, in spite of herself, she is his "aesthetic ideal" (87), a romantic figure in his personal mythology. With her blue-black hair, triangular cheeks, many-coloured laughter and voice that "burn[s] through the commonplace words like the colour in an opal" (133), the lost lady is for Niel a symbol for all that is exquisite and fine, and like a single blossom, she has "the power of suggesting things much lovelier than herself" (172). She is his essence of a heroic and beautiful past, and Niel cannot forgive her for shattering his nostalgic dreams of that past.

Recent criticism has noted the romanticism and romance in *A Lost Lady*. Susan Rosowski calls the novel "classically romantic" and interprets it in terms of a Keatsian ode, the drama of a mind engaged with an object — the mind being Niel's and the object his lost lady (116-29). It is interesting

that in perceiving her as an object, Niel does no better than Peters, who desired the "stuck-up piece." In "The Broken World: Medievalism in *A Lost Lady*," Evelyn Thomas Helmick reads the novel as a chivalric romance, saying that the Captain represents an idealized code, specifically, that of King Arthur; Niel, whose name means "champion," is a young knightly protagonist; Mrs. Forrester, the fallen Guinevere, is a "polished goddesswoman, the embodiment of chivalric ideal" (43). Like Flaubert, Cather plays deliberately upon dreams, romances, and idealized longings.

While dreaming is merely escapism in Flaubert, it is in Cather both pragmatic vision and nostalgic longing. For the Captain and his peers, dreams are the prelude to action. Forrester says, "We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water" (55), and Niel refers to the "visions those men had seen in the air and followed" (169). "Dream" or "vision" had no pejorative connotation when the homesteaders, prospectors, and contractors were envisioning the future; sentimental dreams of the past are quite another matter.

Niel's romantic dream, like Emma's, is sentimental longing for an unreality — for the long ago or far away in preference to both present and future. She ransacks Walter Scott and other works of romantic adventures to create settings and characters for her daydreams; he reads *Don Juan*, *Tom Jones*, *Wilhelm Meister*, and Ovid, and the essays of Montaigne because he is interested, not in what men had thought, but about "what they had felt and lived" (81), and perhaps, as Kathleen Nichols has pointed out, because the sexual adventures and peccadillos in fiction serve as alternative to his personally repressed sexuality (16-17).

Niel's dreams, like his reading, are escapist, nostalgic, and vicarious; his romantic adventures from the past build no roads and create no new worlds. Even his professional choice dramatizes this fact. He had served as law clerk for his uncle when law was a gentleman's profession, but he gives up the law to hucksters like Peters and decides upon architecture, a "clean profession," as his uncle Judge Pommeroy puts it (93). Although an architect is a builder, nowhere does Niel speak of his vision for building and creating. His misty dreams are for the time whose glory was spent before he arrived upon the scene, whose epic heroes have been laid low by time and change. The great actors are gone and only the "stage hands [are] left" (167). Because he does not dream dreams upon which he can act, Niel is himself one of those stage hands.

The criticism has noted that Niel is an unreliable interpreter, and the text points out his pride, monastic cleanliness and severity, his critical habit of mind, and "stiff" qualities. Niel is not Cather. Unlike Flaubert, who is writing his way out of romanticism, Cather is using it as her own aesthetic ideal, and at the same time distancing herself from Niel in somewhat the same manner as Flaubert distances himself from Emma. It could be argued that Cather, like Niel, is charmed by Mrs. Forrester, just as Flaubert, like Justin, is fascinated in spite of himself — or perhaps because of himself. As novelist, Cather also admits to being haunted by the past; in "On the Art of Fiction," she says the artist's vision is "blurred by the memory of old delights he would like to recapture" (104). As artist, Cather takes the middle road between fleeing the past (as Mrs. Forrester does) and dreaming it (as Niel does). She cannot lay the past to rest, for it is the material of which her best works are woven. Perhaps, like

Captain Forrester sitting by his sundial, she accepts that time cannot be halted and the past cannot be reclaimed. Except of course in memories and, as Cather does, in art.

NOTES

¹Flower imagery is used extensively in the novel. While the most frequently noted is the Shakespearean allusion, "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds," Niel's response when he hears Marian Forrester and Frank Ellinger in bed, the images for flowers as symbols of Marian blend the images of the Virgin and of female sexuality, argues Kathleen L. Nichols, in "The Celibate Male in *A Lost Lady*: The Unreliable Center of Consciousness."

²See, for example, Regis Michaud, *The American Novel Today* (239).

³See Stratton Buck, *Gustave Flaubert* (70). Buck suggests not only that Flaubert is Emma, but he is also Justin. That is, Justin's fascination with Emma is like Flaubert's (at age fourteen) for Madame Schléisinger.

⁴In *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, Sharon O'Brien rejects Bloom's "Freudian reading of literary psychohistory" (163), and says that Cather was not engaged in an Oedipal struggle with forefathers she wanted to supplant or overpower, but rather she was trying to forge, not break; claims of inheritance and legitimacy, investing male artists with privilege and authority and looking for evidence of female creative power. Although Bloom's theory unfortunately accounts for only the male writer killing off *his* progenitor and is therefore rejected by a number of feminist critics, Bloom does explain the modern writer as adoring and admiring, and certainly identifying with and emulating the creative genius in whose shadow he writes — as Blake and Shelley admire Milton and invest him with poetic authority. Whether

or not we call it the "anxiety" of influence, Cather's adoration of Flaubert and her taking him to task over his love obsessed heroine who "demands more romance out of life than God put in it" (O'Brien 181) certainly parallels, for example, Shelley's admiration of Milton and his "dialogue with the text" of the predecessor.

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Sexual Imagery in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*

By RONALD BUTLER

Owensboro Community College, University of Kentucky
Owensboro, Kentucky

When Willa Cather wrote *A Lost Lady* in her fiftieth year, she was at the peak of her creative powers. Since many regard this novel as Cather's masterpiece and Marian Forrester as one of her finest characterizations, it has been the subject of much recent attention. One aspect of this novel which has not been adequately explored, however, is the strong sexuality which forms one of its major elements. Previous studies have shown how effectively Cather has used sexual imagery in *My Ántonia* (1918) and *One of Ours* (1922).¹ In *A Lost Lady* she again uses this type of imagery to define her characters and reveal the depths of their complex relationships.

Though the opening of *A Lost Lady* shows the Forrester place in an idyllic setting with its sandy creeks and marshy meadows, and its "fine cottonwood grove that threw sheltering arms to left and right,"² Cather wastes no time in informing the reader there are serpents in the Sweet Water, which does not tempt Mrs. Forrester because of its "mud and water snakes and blood-suckers" (18). This introduction of the serpent becomes significant when Cather describes Ivy Peters as having very small eyes with an absence of eyelashes which "gave his pupils the fixed, unblinking hardness of a snake's or a lizard's" (21-22).

Cather presents Frank Ellinger and Ivy Peters, successive lovers of Marian Forrester, with images of animals, repeatedly suggesting sexuality. Frank's

"whole figure seemed very much alive under his clothes, with a restless, muscular energy that had something of the cruelty of wild animals in it" (46). In contrast to Ivy's eyes like a snake's, Frank's eyes "had something wolfish in them" (65). Adolescent Niel Herbert's grey eyes, though "rather moody and challenging" (33), do not suggest an animal image. Awakening in Mrs. Forrester's bedroom, he looks about the half-darkened room "wonderingly" (27), and the best he can do to suggest animalism is to wear a "wolf-skin" coat (36); later he thinks to himself that he has "the nature of a spaniel" (170).

Cather uses the suggestive comment throughout the novel to keep sexuality in the foreground. For example, she indulges her sense of humor in presenting Niel Herbert as the innocent in the presence of Frank Ellinger. In one scene, Ellinger offers the cherry in his cocktail to young Constance Ogden, and later refuses her a second cocktail, offering her only the Maraschino cherries. But, she says, "I want the one in your glass . . . I like it to taste of something!" Mrs. Forrester laughs, and asks Niel, "won't you give the child your cherry, too?" When he does so, Constance "took it with her thumb and fore-finger and dropped it into her own, — where, he was quick to observe, she left it when they went out to dinner" (46-47). In another scene, Mrs. Forrester, in arranging a card game, asks Constance, "will you play with Niel? I'm told he's very

good," but Niel thinks Frank would be a better partner for Constance and says to her, "probably you are used to playing with Mr. Ellinger" (56). Later that night Mrs. Forrester tells Frank to "Take care, I heard silk stockings on the stairs" (60), which comment indicates to the reader involvement between Frank and Constance. The reader is encouraged to consider underlying meanings in such passages by other more explicit examples, such as when Mrs. Forrester tells Niel that Bohemian Mary's sweetheart is sure to come through the heavy drifts of snow to see her. "I am blind and deaf," she says, "but I'm quite sure she makes it worth his while!" (76). Such comments, however, merely prepare the setting for much more explicit sexual imagery, always with Marian Forrester as the central figure.

Cather defines the relationship between Marian Forrester and the most important person in her life, her husband Daniel, not in terms of sexuality but rather by the absence of it. In the beginning of their relationship when he is carrying her out of the canyon where she has fallen and broken her legs, she "could feel his heart pump and his muscles strain" (165), and she quickly recognizes him as her balance. When he asks her to marry him, "he didn't have to ask twice" she says (166). But, twenty-five years older than his wife, Daniel Forrester has grown old in Sweet Water, and as the novel begins he has had a terrible fall from a horse "which broke him" (13). Cather never describes Daniel Forrester in terms of sexual energy, but rather as one who when he lays his hands on "a frantic horse, an hysterical woman, an Irish workman out for blood, . . . brought them peace" (48-49). After his first stroke he leans upon two canes and "looked like an old tree walking" (115). She has become his nurse as he spends

the closing days of his life watching time being "visibly devoured" on his sun-dial (111), and "watching the sunset glory on his roses" (114).

The relationship between Marian Forrester and Frank Ellinger is up front in its sexuality and presents few interpretive problems for the reader. She has but to touch the sleeve of Frank's coat with her white fingers and this touch "went through the man, all the feet and inches of him," and, as she turns away from him, "the train of her velvet dress caught the leg of his broadcloth trousers and dragged with a friction that crackled and threw sparks" (60). On the next morning before their sleigh ride, Frank "looked even more powerful and bursting with vigour than last night" (61), and the effects of this power on Mrs. Forrester are shown when she directs Frank deeper into the ravine to cut cedar boughs. As Adolph Blum observes her, "when the strokes of the hatchet rang out from the ravine, he could see her eyelids flutter . . . soft shivers went through her body" (67). As Susan Rosowski writes, "the non-judgmental Adolph Blum provides the lens for presenting profoundly sexual qualities in Mrs. Forrester."³ Through this lens the reader knows exactly the relationship between them, but Niel must learn the cruel facts when he hears Frank's laughter "fat and lazy" which "ended in something like a yawn" coming from behind the green shutters of Mrs. Forrester's bedroom (86).

The relationship between Marian Forrester and Ivy Peters confronts the reader as obviously as that with Frank Ellinger, but again Cather uses a traumatic scene to open Niel's eyes. Having gone to visit Mrs. Forrester, he accidentally sees through the dining room window Ivy Peters walk up behind her "and unconcernedly put both arms around her, his hands meeting over her breast" (169).

Though she does not even look up "but went on rolling out pastry" (170), this sight overwhelms Niel, who goes down the hill "for the last time" and never sees Mrs. Forrester again.

The reader, however, has seen this relationship evolving from the beginning of the novel, and Willa Cather handles it carefully by use of a symbol associated with Ivy — his gun. When he first appears on the Forrester place carrying a gun, the other boys tell him he had better hide it, and though Ivy thinks, "I'm just as good as she is" (20), he does put his gun and gamebag behind a tree. After Ivy begins to assert his power over the Forresters he tells Niel "I'm just mean enough to like to shoot along that creek a little better than anywhere else" (105). Later Niel observes Ivy on the Forrester place "with his gun, talking to Mrs. Forrester" (119). And after the Captain's death, when his widow invites the boys at her dinner party to the summer place she hopes to have in the Sierras, she acknowledges Ivy's control by saying, "Ivy can bring his gun and shoot game for us" (163). This comes as no surprise to the reader who has already observed that Ivy slits the eyes of the woodpecker he has knocked out of the tree on the Forresters' place only after Niel informs him the bird is a female (23).

Ivy's manner toward Marian Forrester throughout portrays the conqueror. When Niel reproaches her for permitting Ivy's rudeness, she says "we have to get along with Ivy Peters, we simply have to" (123). She has allowed Ivy to invest her savings, and later she places all of her legal affairs in Ivy's hands. Ivy has completed his conquest of Mrs. Forrester long before the scene Niel witnesses between them.

Niel Herbert's complex relationship with Marian Forrester, though never overtly sexual, has strong sexual overtones. Susan Rosowski writes, "Unable to ac-

commodate sexuality in his imaginative concept of her, Niel draws back in disillusionment." Although this statement is true, it does not mean that Niel himself does not have unrecognized sexual feelings for Mrs. Forrester. This novel does deal with the emergence of sexuality in the adolescent Niel, and Cather never attempts to disguise this fact. As twelve-year-old Niel awakens from unconsciousness in Mrs. Forrester's bedroom, she "ran her fingers through his black hair and lightly kissed him on the forehead. Oh, how sweet, how sweet she smelled!" (29). At nineteen Niel realizes that other women do not have "that something in their glance that made one's blood tingle" (41). Later, aged twenty, standing with her on the bridge over the creek on the Forrester place, a creek significantly frozen in this scene, Niel points out the new moon to Mrs. Forrester, who says she saw it "over the wrong shoulder," to which Niel replies "No you didn't. You saw it over mine." When she says "My dear boy, your shoulders aren't broad enough," instantly Niel recalls an image of Frank Ellinger's "objectionably broad" shoulders, and "the intrusion of this third person annoyed him" (78).

When Niel learns of Ellinger's visiting Mrs. Forrester in Captain Forrester's absence, he decides not to call on her. He sleeps lightly and awakens to the puffing of the switch engine. "He tried to muffle his ears in the sheet and go to sleep again, but the sound of escaping steam for some reason excited him" (83-84). He thinks of the roses growing in the Forresters' marsh, and "an impulse of affection and guardianship" draws Niel to the marsh where he decides to "make a bouquet for a lovely lady." He plans to leave the roses just outside her bedroom window where "when she opened her shutters to let in the light, she would find them, — and they would perhaps give her

a sudden distaste for coarse worldlings like Frank Ellinger" (84-85).

This scene suggests that the relationship between Niel and Mrs. Forrester, far from being asexual, is, indeed, similar to the relationship between Hamlet and his mother. This passage parallels that of Hamlet trying to dissuade Gertrude from returning to his uncle's bed:

Queen. O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain.
Hamlet. Oh, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night. But go not to my uncle's bed.
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.

(3.4.156-60)

Though Cather here makes no specific reference to *Hamlet*, she does show Niel turning to Shakespeare's "Sonnet 94" to express his disgust over having heard Ellinger's "fat and lazy" laughter coming from Mrs. Forrester's bedroom. " 'Lilies that fester,' he muttered, '*lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds*' " (87).

Is it far-fetched for us to think of Mrs. Forrester and Niel's relationship as that of mother and son? By tradition the name Marian suggests maternity, and she seemingly accepts this maternal role. When Niel is leaving for Boston, she says to him, "Don't bother about your allowance. If you get into a scrape, we could manage a little cheque to help you out, couldn't we, Mr. Forrester?" (99). And when he returns, she seems much more than friend when in an unguarded moment she tells Niel, "Every night for weeks, when the lights of the train came swinging in down below the meadows, I've said to myself, 'Niel is coming home; there's that to look forward to' " (111).

But the mother-son relationship is nowhere more evident than in the climactic scene

where Mrs. Forrester talks to Ellinger on Judge Pommeroy's telephone. The setting for this scene, fraught with sexual undercurrents, includes "thunderstorms and torrential rains" and the bursting of the Sweet Water out of its banks. She crosses the flooded marsh to use the Judge's long-distance telephone to call Ellinger, who had abandoned her to marry Constance Ogden. Just at the point where she is about to disgrace herself, Niel, in one of his many efforts to save her, takes "the big shears left by the tinner and cut the insulated wire behind the desk" (134). This symbolic cutting of the cord after the bursting forth of the waters suggests a new birth for Niel, and, as Blanche Gelfant writes, the severing of "a relationship he cannot abide."⁵

Though this act signals a change in the relationship between Niel and Mrs. Forrester, it does not bring an end to his ambivalent through still unrecognized sexual feelings toward her. When after two years Niel returns to Sweet Water, finding her lying in a hammock, "he stepped forward and caught her suspended figure, hammock and all, in his arms. How light and alive she was! like a bird caught in a net. If only he could rescue her and carry her off like this," Niel thought. And is this not the same yearning expressed when he thought his shoulders were broad enough? Mrs. Forrester too seems to be caught up in the moment: "She showed no impatience to be released, but lay laughing up at him with that gleam of something elegantly wild, something fantastic and tantalizing, — seemingly so artless, really the most finished artifice! She put her hand under his chin as if he were still a boy" (110).

In one other scene Niel returns to the Hamlet role, trying to tell Mrs. Forrester how the townspeople are gossiping about her and Ivy Peters. She

shocks him by saying, "If you came to see me any oftener than you do, that would make talk. You are still younger than Ivy, — and better-looking! Did that never occur to you?" To this Niel replies coldly, "I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that" (154). Niel is unable to consider himself consciously as a possible lover of his idealized lady and thus cannot come to terms with his ambivalent feelings toward her. Years after he has lost his lovely lady he can "think of her without chagrin," but, significantly, only after she returns to him, not as Daniel Forrester's widow, but much more safely as Daniel Forrester's wife, "a bright, impersonal memory," and "he came to be very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him in to life" (171).

Cather shows Niel in his relationship with Mrs. Forrester at crucial periods in his development into manhood — at age twelve, on the verge of adolescence; at nineteen, on the brink of maturity; at the "natural turning-point" between nineteen and twenty, which Cather calls "a very great difference" (69); two years later when he has "seen the world" in Boston and has found in it "nothing so nice as you, Mrs. Forrester" (110); and finally at around forty, when he has been able to fit his life in Sweet Water into perspective.

Marian Forrester's affairs with Frank Ellinger and Ivy Peters are clearly defined through sexual image and sexual conquest. The much more complex relationship with Niel Herbert, however, Cather handles on the level of a boy who could have said, as Jim Burden said to Antonia, "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister — anything a woman can be to a man."⁶ Niel has these same adolescent conflicts about the "aesthetic ideal" (87) who proves herself to be a woman. Cather uses sexual imagery to reveal depths of

Niel's character which he has not the maturity to recognize or understand.

NOTES

¹The studies referred to are Blanche H. Gelfant's "The Forgotten Reaping Hook: Sex in *My Antonia*," *American Literature* 43 (1971): 60-82; Stanley Cooperman's "The War Lover: Claude (Willa Cather)," in *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967) 129-37; and my "Sexual Imagery in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*," pre-

sented at the Western Literature Association Meeting in St. Paul, MN, October 7, 1983.

²*A Lost Lady* (1923; New York: Vintage, 1972) 11.

³Susan Rosowski, "Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: Art Versus the Closing Frontier," *Great Plains Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1982): 241.

⁴Rosowski 241.

⁵Gelfant 61.

⁶*My Antonia* (1918; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961) 321.

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