

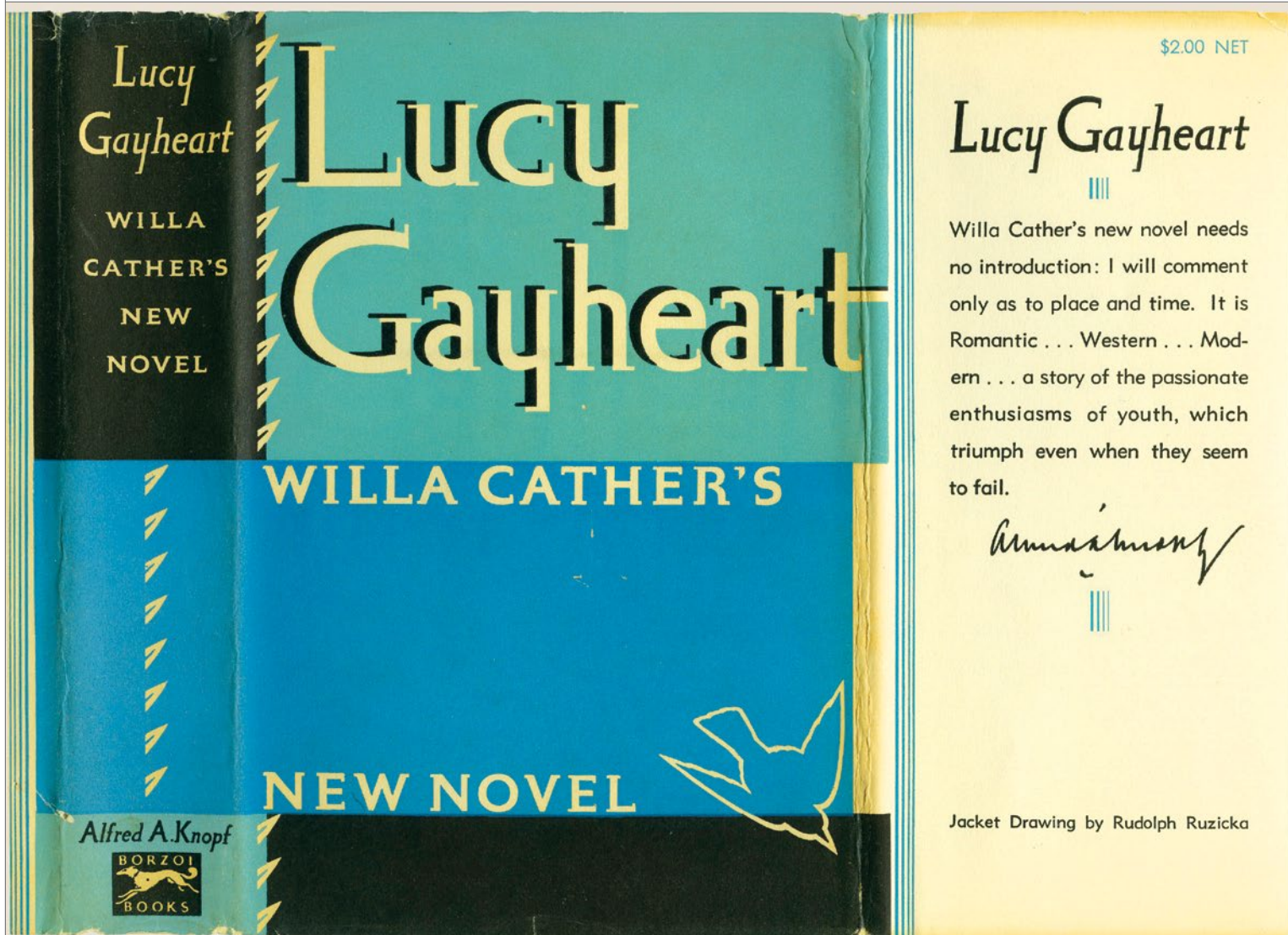
# Willa Cather



## NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

Volume 57 • No. 2

Summer 2014



New Perspectives on *Lucy Gayheart*

Exploring *The Selected Letters*: Emotional Depths, Profound Voids

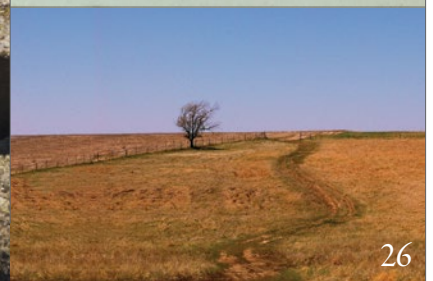
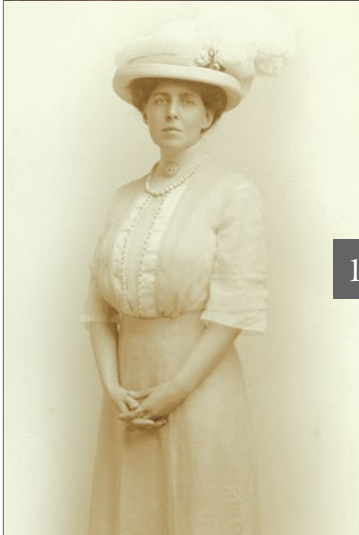
Revisiting the Cather-Lewis Final Resting Place



# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW



Volume 57 • No. 2 | Summer 2014



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On the cover: The dust jacket for the 1935 first printing of *Lucy Gayheart*, designed by Rudolph Ruzicka.



## Letter from the Executive Director Ashley Olson

Whew! What a swift few months it has been since Tom wrote to announce my appointment as Executive Director of the Willa Cather Foundation. I couldn't be more honored and humbled to play a role in carrying forward the important work started by our founder, Mildred Bennett, nearly 60 years ago.

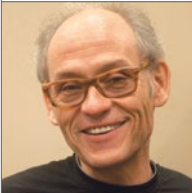
As I write this, we've just concluded some of our biggest and most exciting events of the year. I don't have adequate space to describe all of the stimulating programs, exhibitions, scholarly papers, readings, tours, and discussions that made up our Prairie Writers' Workshop, Spring Conference, and Scholarly Symposium in Rome, Italy. Now we turn our attention to the excellent Opera House programs, art exhibits, and a sold-out Road Scholar program that will liven our historic building over the next few months.

The end of the year will bring our traditional appeal for your support. Just as the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and staff have worked long and hard to sustain our valuable programs and publications while operating a substantial campaign to create the National Willa Cather Center, we ask our friends and supporters to give a bit more too.

As we go into the latter part of the year, we ask that in addition to your annual donations—which are vital to sustaining our operation as a strong and vibrant educational organization—you kindly consider making a pledge to the campaign to establish the National Willa Cather Center.

We are proud to report that we've raised 86 percent of the funds needed to create the museum and cultural center that was first envisioned by Mildred Bennett in 1988. Together, we can make this dream a reality and ensure Cather's legacy endures for generations well into the future.

So many superb things have happened since the Foundation's founding almost 60 years ago. I'm confident the next 60 years will be just as promising and productive.



## Letter from the President Thomas Reese Gallagher

In that part of my life that is *not* entirely organized around Willa Cather, when the topic of her work comes up, a characteristic exchange begins with my conversational companion recalling, with pleasure, having read Cather in school—ages ago, typically, and not since.

Then, often: "Which one should I read now?" This is a question I'm always happy to get, though never an easy one to answer. It greatly depends on the experience and expectations and sensibility of the person asking, but a basic truth about Cather's works asserts itself: when you reread Cather as an adult, after you have some mileage on you, it will be a very different experience from the one you had when you read her as a young person.

One of our goals for this issue of the *Newsletter & Review* is to begin training a spotlight on Cather's 1935 novel *Lucy Gayheart*, in advance of the Cather Scholarly Edition of the novel coming next year from the University of Nebraska Press. *Lucy Gayheart* is almost certainly not the novel to recommend to readers looking for an introduction, or re-introduction, to Cather. But after they have taken a preliminary step or two and are hungry for more, I would want to say: maybe now, just maybe, you're ready for *Lucy*.

For *Lucy Gayheart* is a profoundly somber novel. The personal losses Cather experienced between its conception in the mid-1920s and its eventual publication may help explain how a "frivolous and decidedly sentimental" idea (as we read in the late Merrill Skaggs's piece in this issue) evolved into an eloquent meditation on struggle and loss and endurance. We know from the very first sentence that we will grow to care for Lucy, and then have to bear losing her; we're much less prepared for the austere beautiful conclusion, as Lucy's friend Harry Gordon reflects on her death and the direction and meaning of his own life in the years that followed.

In a sensitive essay entitled "Music, Silence, and the Spirituality of Willa Cather," published in the Winter 2005 edition of Marquette University's journal *Renascence*, Richard Giannone states, "A reflection and surrender—that is all there is to the ending of *Lucy Gayheart*. And yet, for all the limited dramatic range of the book's closing movement, there is nothing quite like these fifteen or so pages in all of Cather's writing. Her non-dramatic method makes room for the action of the soul."

Among the twelve novels, this is the one that always draws me back. A good number of years ago, I rashly spent much more than I could afford on my first serious, collectable book, the volume that remains the jewel of my own library: my signed and numbered *Lucy Gayheart*.

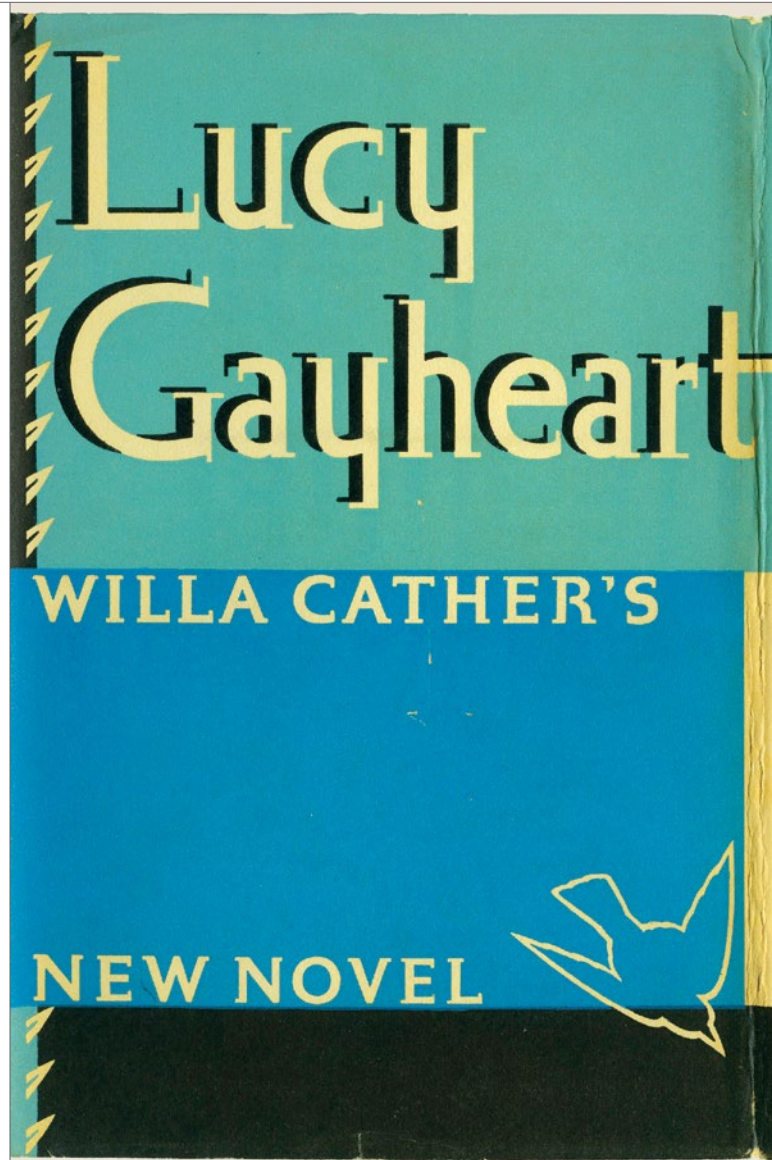




# Three New Perspectives on *Lucy Gayheart*

Next year, 2015, promises to be the year of Lucy Gayheart, for the long-awaited Cather Scholarly Edition of Cather's 1935 novel will be published at last, by the University of Nebraska Press. To whet your appetite for this important coming event, which will undoubtedly generate new readings of this often underrated novel, we offer three complementary essays that approach the novel in very differently suggestive ways. First, David Porter, Cather scholar, musician, and an editor of the Scholarly Edition, offers an elliptical, musical, and decidedly "speculative" essay that shows us both what an editor can and can't do. Then Jane Dressler, a musician, teacher, and scholar of music history, shows us how a diligent and thorough researcher of performance history works, as she identifies a convincing prototype for the most distinguished musician-character in the novel, Clement Sebastian. Finally, we are delighted to be able to publish a last contribution by a prolific and noted Cather scholar, Merrill Maguire Skaggs, a portion of an unfinished essay on which she was working at the time of her death in 2008. In her characteristic style, with energy and élan, she proposes yet another prototype for the character Lucy Gayheart.

Ann Romines



## Schubert's "Trout" and *Lucy Gayheart*: A Rainbow of Reflections

David Porter | Skidmore College

When Clement Sebastian stops by Lucy Gayheart's rooming house to ask her out to dinner, he recognizes which room is hers when he hears her playing Schubert's *Die Forelle*, "The Trout." It is a song that for her evokes "a joyousness which seemed safe from time or change" (76), a response that ignores the ominous undercurrents of its third stanza, where the wily fisherman muddies the stream's clear waters so that the trout loses its way, gets caught, and dies.

The implications of this dark turn come home to Lucy in the course of the novel, as we shall see. As I've worked in recent years

on *Lucy Gayheart*, Schubert's "Trout" has come home to me as well. I expect that colleagues who have edited other volumes in the Cather Scholarly Edition have had the same experience as I: work begins with clarity as to one's reading of the novel and the shape the Historical Essay will take, but as one explores the ever-expanding trove of relevant materials and absorbs their oft-contradictory implications, one begins to feel in danger of being swamped by details, trapped in eddies of evidence, and doubtful of ever reaching clear waters again. The corollary, however, makes it all worthwhile, for just as in *Die Forelle* Schubert moves into



darker and stranger harmonies as the trout's doom lurks in the third stanza, so one's at times terrifying immersion in the complexities that lie behind the creation of any Cather work eventually renders that work richer, more intriguing, and more profound.<sup>1</sup>

One particular danger lurks in this immersion, and the remainder of this brief piece will wallow near that tempting peril: *speculation*, the activity that Steve Shively so tellingly associates with Merrill Skaggs in his comment on her posthumous article in this issue. For if speculation is at the heart of any literary criticism worth writing or reading, it is not encouraged in the writing of a Historical Essay, as the CSE's wonderful editors, Guy Reynolds and Kari Ronning, gently but firmly kept reminding me. "Speculative" would appear in the margin by an insight in which I took particular pride, "Speculation" beside an argument that roamed too far from what could be proved toward what might be probable or possible. At the same time, however, they generously acknowledged that speculative gambits which were out of place in a Historical Essay might well be worth exploring in other venues. For an extended period, for instance, I found myself focusing on what I saw as Cather's deliberate creation of a broad and tight verbal and thematic network linking *Lucy Gayheart* to *The Song of the Lark*. Neat idea, I was told—original, imaginative, but *speculative* (as I could not deny): not appropriate here, but why not explore it elsewhere? And so I gave it a swim at the Cather International Seminar in Flagstaff—or, shall we say, a tr'out.<sup>2</sup>

Merrill Maguire Skaggs's essay on *Lucy Gayheart* exemplifies the same distinction. Her exploration of the rapidly evolving friendship between Willa Cather and Louise Guerber in 1925–26 is clearly relevant to a Historical Essay on *Lucy Gayheart*, for it was during these years that Cather began to think about writing "Blue Eyes on the Platte," the story that would become this novel, as she told just two people, Edith Lewis—and Louise Guerber.<sup>3</sup>

That in character and manner Guerber resembled the original prototype for Lucy, Sadie Becker, is also apparent from the letters Cather wrote her young friend—and perhaps explains why she shared with her these plans for "Blue Eyes." In addition, though, Skaggs, as was her wont, leads us into speculative waters: did Guerber not only remind Cather of Sadie Becker but even herself serve as a prototype for Lucy? Did Louise's evolving relationship with Bryson Burroughs, a man twice her age, and far more distinguished in the arts than she, provide Cather a prototype for the similar relationship of Lucy Gayheart to Clement Sebastian, as Skaggs briefly suggests at the end of her essay?

These lines of inquiry lead away from history and into speculation, but they also deepen our interest in the novel, open new interpretative possibilities. Indeed, as I thought about Louise and Bryson as perhaps analogous to Lucy and Clement,

another possibility sprang to mind: isn't there an even closer analogue, gender issues aside, in Louise Guerber's relationship to Willa Cather herself? There's the same sort of age difference—Louise was 24, Cather 51, when they first met in August 1925,<sup>4</sup> and even in her 18 Nov. 1934 letter at the time of Bryson's death Cather addresses Louise as "My dear girl." And while Cather's letters to Guerber provide little insight into Louise's relationship to Bryson, they everywhere document her relationship to Cather. On Louise's side there is Lucy-like awe for this older, established artist, a breathless eagerness to please, and virtual love at first sight (she speaks of losing her mind, heart, and soul after an early evening with Cather). And on Cather's side there are feelings that recall Clement's toward Lucy: flattered delight in the young Louise's attention, a willingness to exploit her eagerness and affection for her own benefit, and a sense of new life such as Clement finds in Lucy: "What a difference you have made in my life here! When you knocked, it was like springtime coming in at the door. I went to work with more spirit because things were new and wonderful to you" (*LG* 88-89). Mere speculation at this stage, yes, but exemplary again of how pursuit of the history behind a Cather novel inevitably leads into imaginative byways that broaden and enliven one's response to that novel and open new and intriguing possibilities.

All of which brings me back to the place of *Die Forelle* in *Lucy Gayheart*. On one level, Cather clearly wove this song into her design, just as she did the other Schubert songs and song cycles that appear in the novel.<sup>5</sup> As noted earlier, in the novel's first mention of "The Trout" Lucy associates it with joyousness and safety, and soon thereafter strains of this song lead Clement to Lucy's room, the start of the love story that will, a few months later, end so tragically. Here are the lyrics of the three stanzas of *Die Forelle* that Schubert sets to music:

In a limpid brooklet, merrily speeding, a playful trout  
shot past like an arrow. I stood on the bank, watching  
the happy ease of the lively fish swimming in the brook.

A fisherman with his rod was standing there on the  
bank, cold-bloodedly watching the fish dart to and fro.  
"So long as the water remains clear," I thought, "he will  
not catch that trout with his rod."

But at last the thief could wait no more. With guile he  
made the water muddy, and, ere I could guess it, his rod  
jerked. The fish was floundering on it, and my blood  
boiled as I saw the betrayed one.<sup>6</sup>

Limpid, bright waters, happy playful ease, safety in the  
first stanza, set to music of the same ilk; by the third, murky,  
dangerous waters, a fish floundering helplessly to its death, with





music that moves into deeper, darker, more distant keys. It is a sequence closely duplicated in what happens to Sebastian at the end of Book I, where one moment he is sailing on the bright waters of Lake Como, the next pulled under to his death by the clinging Mockford. Equally to the point is what happens to Lucy, whom we first meet swiftly and confidently skating the ice of the Platte, but whom we last see falling through the ice of that same river and, contrary to her expectations, finding herself snagged, floundering, pulled under its dark, cold waters. The parallel is precise and detailed, its irony clearly a product of Cather's compositional design.

*Die Forelle* also, however, strikes other notes that reach beyond facts into interpretation but that are as evocative as the harmonic palette Schubert introduces for the song's third stanza. Most obviously, its waters that turn from clear to murky, safe to treacherous, recall the concert where Lucy first hears Sebastian, and which begins with Schubert. In its first song a mariner gives thanks to the Dioscuri for protecting sailors at sea, and Lucy associates both the song and Sebastian's performance with "calmness and serenity," with "enlightenment, like daybreak" (30). But the love affair that subsequently develops between Sebastian and Lucy brings neither calmness nor serenity; Lucy learns of his drowning when she awakes one morning—so much for "enlightenment, like daybreak." As for the Dioscuri, they scarcely protect Clement from shipwreck and drowning. And as she thinks back on this whole first concert, Lucy recalls it as "a discovery about life, a revelation of love as a tragic force, not a melting mood, of passion that drowns like black water. As she sat listening to this man the outside world seemed to her dark and terrifying, full of fears and dangers that had never come close to her until now" (31).

Once one has "The Trout" in mind, and its implicit premonition of the parallel drownings at the ends of Books 1 and 2,

phrases like those just quoted—"passion that drowns like black water," an "outside world" that is "dark and terrifying, full of dangers and fears"—begin to fall into a larger pattern of waters that appear bright and inviting but turn dark and deadly.<sup>7</sup> Lake Michigan is a constant presence in Book 1, and one that Lucy associates explicitly with the haven of Sebastian's studio, and with the song she plays "again and again," *Die Forelle*: "No matter where in the world she should ever be, it [i.e., that song] would always drop her down into that room with the piano between two big windows, the coal fire glowing behind her, the Lake reaching out before her, and the man walking carelessly up and down as he sang" (76—cf. the trout's "to and fro"!)." As Lucy heads to the studio each morning, she allows time to walk along the Lake front: "There was very little ice in the water that January, and the blue floor of the Lake, wrinkled with gold, seemed to be the day itself, stretching before her unspent and beautiful" (47). Later, as she spends evenings in that same studio, she contrasts the remembered loneliness of summer evenings at home with what she feels here: "Now the world seemed wide and free, like the Lake out yonder" (136). But in the next chapter "the Lake" turns deadly as she learns of Sebastian's death in Lake Como. After she returns to Haverford there are nights when she dreams herself into that very scene, "drop[ping] into an ice cold lake to free a drowning man from the white thing that clung to him" (157), and in retrospect we recall an ominous passage from the period in April when Sebastian was away from Chicago: "The weather was consistently bad. The ice cakes ground upon each other in the Lake"—a reminder that Michigan, like Como, or the waters of *Die Forelle*, can be bimodal, a contrast rather than a complement to Sebastian's studio, where alone Lucy can find "a soft tint of gold, . . . an untroubled climate" (93).

Streams and rivers are equally ambivalent—like the one in which the trout darts, or the Platte, as we're reminded early on in *Lucy Gayheart*. Just after we are told that on the frozen river this year "[t]here had been good skating all through Christmas week," we are reminded that the Platte could be a "formidable river" that "sometimes cut out a new channel in the soft farm land along its banks and changed its bed altogether" (7), a clear foreshadowing of its changed course at the end of Book 2. Later, during those same summer days when Lucy is enjoying Sebastian's studio and its view of the Lake, her life is such that she feels "carried along on a rushing river . . . constantly saluting beautiful things on the shore. She couldn't stop to see them very clearly, but they were there, flashing on the right or the left" (132), language that suggests both her trout-like delight in the swift waters and their inexorable grip upon her. Even as she rashly strikes out onto the ice just before her death, she is still thinking of "light and freedom" (198), and as Harry in Book 3 recalls her "way of flashing with



The Town and Lake Como, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, 1834, private collection, Paris.





From waters both joyful and death-laden: Gustave Courbet's 1872 *The Trout*, Kuntshaus Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland.

her whole self into one impulse, without forethought or sight," he compares her to an arrow (221), an echo of the first line of *Die Forelle*: "In a limpid brooklet, merrily speeding, a playful trout shot past like an arrow."<sup>8</sup>

Streams link "The Trout" also to the two great Schubert song cycles that figure in *Lucy Gayheart*, the lyrics of which Cather seems to have known well. The trout's "limpid brooklet" has its counterpart in the babbling brook so central to *Die schöne Müllerin*, the Schubert cycle that Clement and Lucy rehearse upon his return from tour, and that Cather weaves into both the plot and the changing moods of Book 1. Like the trout's waters, this brook's are both joyful and death-laden. The brook is the narrator's constant confidant as he courts and wins the "lovely miller-maid," but it is in this same brook that he drowns himself when he loses her to a lusty hunter, this same brook that closes the cycle with a heart-breaking lullaby sung for him. Similarly ambivalent streams flow through *Die Winterreise*, the bleak cycle that so sets the tone for Books 2 and 3 of *Lucy Gayheart*. In one song the narrator describes his tears as torrents that will melt the snow, bring springtime to the fields, then swirl around the house of his former, forever lost lover.<sup>9</sup> In another he greets the river that once "went merrily gurgling by, clear and untamed," but that

now has turned hard and cold with ice, the image of the lover himself, whose heart still swirls in passionate torrents beneath its icy crust.<sup>10</sup> In another he likens himself to the river: "Through the mountain torrent's dry channel unconcerned I wind my downward way. Every stream will reach the sea, and every sorrow its grave."<sup>11</sup>

There is of course more—there always is with Willa Cather!—but for now we've followed the trout far enough. This winding stream of associations suggests how factual, demonstrable facets of this novel's composition (Cather's ironic links between *Die Forelle* and the drownings of Clement and Lucy) inevitably invite speculation that reaches well beyond the provable. Though such speculation does not belong in a Historical Essay, I would argue that a principal purpose of such essays is to catalyze and feed such interpretative explorations. One must also never forget Cather's ability to retain, and eventually to use, virtually every experience she ever had,<sup>12</sup> and her corollary habit, which Jane Dressler aptly notes in her fine article in this issue, of weaving these diverse materials into a seamless whole in her finished works.

Finally, just as the language of *Die Forelle* and its trajectory from safety to danger shape and color many aspects of *Lucy Gayheart* (including its progression from the mobile, jaunty



Lucy of its first page to her frozen footsteps on the last), so by yet one further interpretative extension one can read this same song as embodying a central theme of this novel. David Stouck has described *Lucy Gayheart* as “artfully put together and contain[ing] some of the author’s most profound reflections on art and human relationships—above all, on the human condition as defined by mortality” (214). Despite its heroine’s surname, the novel presents a darkly shadowed portrait of a young woman who through a variety of circumstances, some beyond her control, falls short of the success she might have achieved and suffers a death that feels cruelly unfair. Complementing her story are those of two other figures who also have considerable strengths, and who also, though flawed, are people of good intent. Of these two, one dies a death as inexplicable as Lucy’s, while the other, through a mixture of his own errors of judgment and—again—the vagaries of fate, ends up frustrated of all he had sought. To put it differently, *Lucy Gayheart* concerns, as Stouck suggests, the human condition itself, our bold dreams and passionate energies pitted against our inborn flaws and against the powers, often fiendish, that surround us, a condition that Cather the year after *Lucy’s* publication described in “Escapism” as “the seeming original injustice[,] that creatures so splendidly aspiring should be inexorably doomed to fail” (*On Writing* 22). Of this dark theme the trout of Schubert’s song is a powerful approximation, the waters in which it revels polluted and its life snatched away by an outside agent beyond its ken and control, but whom the song’s narrator can see. “My blood boiled as I saw the betrayed one,” cries this narrator, just as Cather in “Escapism” speaks of the Hebrew prophets and the Greek dramatists “cry[ing] out” at the gods’ cruelty. The trout’s senseless demise evokes some of Schubert’s most haunting music, and in *Lucy Gayheart* Cather darkens and deepens her evocation of “the seeming original injustice” with constant overtones of Schubert’s heartbreaking songs and song cycles, and not least of *Die Forelle* itself.

#### NOTES

1. Schubert does the same thing in his “Trout” Quintet, where the movement based on this song moves in its central variations into distant keys and agitated rhythms. Cather knew this quintet well: in 1922 she recalled hearing it played in 1916 by a group of musicians that included, at the piano, Pierre Monteux, soon to become conductor of the Boston Symphony (Sergeant 174).

2. “From *The Song of the Lark* to *Lucy Gayheart*, and *Die Valkyrie* to *Die Winterreise*,” to be published in a forthcoming collection of papers from the 2013 International Seminar.

3. In a letter of 15 October 1926: *Selected Letters* 387.

4. Both had birthdays late in the year, with LG born on 4 December 1900, WC on 7 Dec. 1873.

5. On Cather’s use of Schubert’s songs, especially the two great song cycles, in *Lucy Gayheart*, see my “Following the Lieder: Cather, Schubert, and *Lucy Gayheart*,” forthcoming, *Cather Studies* 10.

6. The translation is from *Schubert: 200 Songs*, xxi-xxii.

7. Lee speculates persuasively on the identity of the unnamed Schubert songs that Sebastian sings at his first concert, noting that if her intuitions are correct, these songs are “full of longings and departures, with a great deal of ‘black water’” (340).

8. Harry’s “flashing” recalls the description of Lucy carried along by the river, with “things on the shore . . . flashing on the right or left” (132); the same word appears also as Lucy begins her last skate on the river: “a soft, splitting sound brought her to herself in a flash” (198).

9. *Wasserflut* (“Floodwater”), *Schubert* ix.

10. *Auf dem Flusse* (“By the River”), *Schubert* ix-x.

11. *Irrlicht* (“Will-o’-the-Wisp”), *Schubert* x.

12. For a telling instance, see Mark Madigan, “‘Paestum’: An Unpublished Poem from Cather’s Grand Tour of Italy,” *WCN&R* 55.2 (2011), 18, who cites a 1908 Cather letter describing a “wild day” on Lake Como (“The lake steamers are pitching like ocean liners. . .”) and suggests that twenty-seven years later Cather “drew upon that memory for a pivotal scene in *Lucy Gayheart*.”

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# David Bispham, American Baritone: A Prototype for *Lucy Gayheart's* Clement Sebastian

Jane Dressler | Kent State University

One of the most tantalizing features of Cather's fiction is her use of living personages as prototypes for characters. As a musician and scholar, I enjoy Cather's writing for its inclusion of details about music and concert programming and for its descriptions of highly esteemed performance venues. Her years of writing music criticism allowed Cather to observe the profession of music and the personalities of musicians, onstage and off, and her writing fully recreates those years in the profession.

In *The Song of the Lark*, people familiar to her through her music criticism appear (such as orchestra conductor Theodore Thomas) and a personal acquaintance serves as inspiration for a leading character (Wagnerian singer Olive Fremstad for heroine Thea Kronborg). In *Lucy Gayheart*, however, a list of characters inspired by real-life musicians remains to be identified—Clement Sebastian, James Mockford, Professor Auerbach and Madame Renée de Vignon. This essay is an account of my process to determine a prototype for Cather's romantic baritone, Clement Sebastian, who "would be equal to any situation in the world" (*Lucy* 46).

Because "everything relates to everything in Cather, and the most apparently casual references resonate" (Rosowski 27), I chose to consider these two novels as one large work, each supplying cultural context for the other. *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart* make up a two-part commentary about classical singers and classical singing in Chicago. In *Lark*, Cather devotes a scene to the life and career of Theodore Thomas (225–229). This dynamo had a significant career made up of important conducting assignments in major American cities. After establishing himself as a violinist and conductor on the East Coast, Thomas developed extensive tours for his orchestras to keep his men employed and working together (Schabas 24–47, 259–60). Because *Lark* and *Gayheart* share the same city, era, venues and cultural trends and because the conductor was active at the time in Chicago, I reviewed a compilation of Thomas's concert programs.

His programs in New York included the Mason-Thomas Chamber concerts (1855–1868), Brooklyn Philharmonic concerts (1862–1891), and New York Philharmonic Society concerts (1877–1891). As Thomas sought to bring classical music to all American audiences, he conducted, founded, or served as the music director for the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, the Cincinnati May Festival, and the Chicago Symphony. From the concert programs, I compiled a list of male singers who appeared as soloists with Thomas in New York, Cincinnati or Chicago (Thomas 2: 37–77, 157–82, 183–97, 292–353).



David Bispham, 1918. Photo by Campbell Studio, New York City.

To supplement the list of male singers associated with Thomas in those cities, I worked with sources about music in Chicago for the names of singers who appeared in Chicago without Thomas at the podium. Many of the performers in this group were cast in touring productions of the New York Metropolitan Opera Company, so those names of singers were added. Through that step, male singers that Cather heard in Chicago during her March 1895 visit were added to the list; names of other male singers that Cather mentions in her music-related articles were added as well. At this point in the process, the list included seventy names.

If no additional information from other music or Cather-related sources could document a singer's career, I removed that name from the list. As a final step, I narrowed the list to include male singers who sang with Thomas in the three cities or that presented significant performances in Chicago, 1880–1910. The list converted into a group of seven singers. By considering



country of birth, voice types and career accomplishments, three of the seven emerged as the most likely prototypes for Sebastian.

From Cather's account of Clement Sebastian's life, I decided to search for a real-life singer born in America, who completed voice study in Europe, lived abroad for many years, and returned to the country as an accomplished performer. This singer would have been about fifty years old around 1900, with a performance schedule in Europe and the United States. The baritone would have been known for beautiful singing, an elevated style of presentation, and a notable commitment to clear and appropriate communication of text. Distinguished in appearance, he would have a habit of smoking and would have suffered an unhappy personal life. To be the complete inspiration for Cather's character, the singer would have died in mid-life in an unselfish manner.

Much of Cather's fictional character's life and career could be drawn from the career and life of David Scull Bispham. He was distinguished in England and America as a performer of opera, oratorio, and art song. Born in Philadelphia, on January 5, 1857, he died in New York City on October 2, 1921. His autobiography, *A Quaker Singer's Recollections*, recounts many of his opera, oratorio, and concert performances. He was educated at Haverford College outside of Philadelphia (Bispham 31). Cather readers recall that *Lucy Gayheart* is set in Haverford, Nebraska, so the name of Lucy's hometown may be a nod to Bispham as a prototype. After attempts to stay in his family's business, heeding his mother's admonition that "music [was] a wile of the Evil One, the stage a snare for every foot, old or young, and the combination, as in opera, something too appalling to contemplate" (Bispham 29), and with the encouragement of his wife, Bispham made his decision to study singing (Scott 1:56).

Bispham studied singing with Vannuccini and Lamperti in Italy and then worked with another Lamperti student, William Shakespeare, and Alberto Randegger in England (Bispham 61, 68–9, 120). While the singer devoted much of his early study to oratorio and art song, he achieved his first recognition in London in opera (Scott 1:56). When he returned to the United States after 1896, "he was 'the only American man singing upon the stage of either continent in grand opera'" ("65th Year").

After appearances with Covent Garden Opera from 1892–1896, Bispham returned to the United States to make his debut with the Metropolitan Opera, as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Scott 1:56–57, Bispham 186–7). Described as a "house favorite," he was heard in 189 performances with the Met, including some twenty Chicago performances with touring productions during the 1897–1903 seasons ("Bispham"). In his memoirs, Bispham cites performances of 58 opera roles, in the "light, comic, and grand opera styles" (351–52). For a time, he

appeared year-round, with rigorous performance schedules in United States and England (Bispham 302–03). One of his first appearances in Chicago was with Theodore Thomas and the Chicago Orchestra, February 3, 1900, when the baritone sang Wagner arias. This performance was well-received; a reviewer commented that the performer ". . . already enjoys the esteem of Chicago musical circles through previous appearances here in opera and concert. Mr. Bispham's numbers were Pogner's address from 'Die Meistersinger' and 'Wotan's Farewell' from 'Die Walküre,' both of which he sang with great dramatic fervor and vocal finish" ("Theaters"). Although Cather doesn't mention that Sebastian performs any opera roles in the city during his acquaintance with Lucy, Cather does not restrict Sebastian's repertory to oratorio and art song. During the scene in which Lucy auditions for the singer, the young girl accompanies him in staples of the operatic repertory, *Largo al factotum* from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and *Vision fugitive* from Massenet's *Hérodiade*. Lucy is nervous as she plays, but Sebastian selects her as his new rehearsal accompanist, for ". . . she has much the best touch" (*Lucy* 34–36).

Although Bispham's association with the Metropolitan Opera ended in 1903, he sang oratorio repertory throughout his career, with engagements in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in England as early as 1895, presenting the title role for fifteen years (Bispham 159–60, 353, 357–58). English venues for his oratorio performances included London's Crystal Palace in 1895, the Leeds Festival in 1895, and the Birmingham Festival in 1900 (Bispham 159, 172–175, 286). The baritone writes that he performed two hundred "oratorios, cantatas, masses and services, madrigals and part-songs" (352) and recalls oratorio performances in major American cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Boston and New York (221, 249, 285, 339–40). Cather refers to *Elijah* in *Lucy*; Sebastian and Lucy rehearse "It is enough . . . I am not better than my fathers," one of the most powerful arias in Mendelssohn's oratorio (*Lucy* 48). Cather fashions a demanding performance schedule for Sebastian, who travels for concerts in Minnesota and Wisconsin. When Sebastian departs for "his Eastern tour," he accepts engagements in England, planning to sail after "his second New York recital" (56, 68, 96, 115).

Michael Scott notes that Bispham was a popular and accomplished recitalist, for "he was one of only six singers who could be sure of a sold-out house at Carnegie Hall (the others were all women, Eames, Gadski, Nordica, Sembrich and Schumann-Heink)" (1:57). Reviewer Richard Aldrich commented about one these concerts, presented on October 31, 1910:

Mr. David Bispham's song recital is among the expected fruitage of the early Autumn. He gave it yesterday



afternoon in Carnegie Hall and that it is looked forward to with pleasure by many people was shown by the fact that it was heard by almost as large an audience as the hall could hold. . . . His dramatic style, that seeks to emphasize every characteristic touch and significant point in music or in verse and make it tell to the utmost; the clearness of his diction, that makes his texts for the most part easily intelligible—one of Mr. Bispham's most admirable traits . . . (291).

In his reminiscences, the baritone writes that he performed 1,400 songs, in a total of 800 song recitals during twenty-five years (Bispham 347).

Early in his career, Bispham sang complete song cycles for audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. One example of his programming would be his performances of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* in London and the United States during 1896–97 (190). He presented at least eight recitals for Chicago audiences during 1902–1908 (Krueger Vol. 11–31). These were unusual programs for the era, as seen in a November 20, 1904, *New York Times* recital announcement: “For the third recital in his ‘Cycle of Great Song Cycles,’ to be given at Mendelssohn Hall, Monday afternoon, Nov. 21, David Bispham will sing Schubert's ‘Die Winterreise’ for the first time in its entirety, it is said, in America” (“Mr. Bispham's Song Recital”). During the 1904–1905 season, the baritone's recitals included major song cycles which he sang in “the principal cities of the United States” (Bispham 323). Chicago audiences appreciated his artistic innovations, for archival programs show that during the 1905 season, the baritone performed Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* on January 15, Schubert's *Winterreise* on February 5, and Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* on February 22, with all three concerts heard in the Fine Arts Building Music Hall (Krueger Vol. 22–23). Cather writes that Lucy heard Sebastian perform and practice Schubert cycles and songs during their time together (*Lucy* 38, 66).

When compared with Bispham's schedule of performances, Cather's writing of Sebastian's schedule is probable. We hear of the singer's schedule through James Mockford. This peculiar and menacing pianist coolly reminds Lucy of her amateur status,

saying, “We shall be gone eight days or more; two oratorios and three recitals. He'll be disappointed at missing you, but he's very apt to forget engagements” (59–60).

Photographs of Bispham are found in memoirs, books about classical singing, and electronic archives. The images show the baritone in both formal dress and operatic costumes. In *Lucy*, Cather describes Sebastian as “. . . middle-aged, indeed, with a

stern face and large, rather tired eyes. He was a very big man; tall, heavy, broad-shouldered. . . . His torso, sheathed in black broadcloth and a white waistcoat, was unquestionably oval, but it seemed the right shape for him” (29). From his photographs, Bispham does not appear to be unusually tall or overweight but the rest of Cather's description suggests a likeness.

Bispham mentions that he smoked until he was about 35 years old. He writes that “after four days of successful struggle, I abandoned the habit for ever, through the simple expedient of carrying about and putting to my lips when moved to smoke the stub of a lead pencil about the size and the shape of a cigarette” (Bispham 99). Sebastian smokes in several scenes, once “until his throat was dry” as he reflects on his failure to establish relationships with “the earth itself, with a countryside, and a people” (*Lucy* 25, 78–79).

Some of the strongest connections between the personal lives of Bispham and Cather's character are crumbling marriages, bitter divorce proceedings, and public battles over child custody. Details

about Bispham's domestic problems appeared in newspapers for more than five years. Caroline Russell, the daughter of prominent Civil War Union Army general Charles S. Russell, married Bispham on April 28, 1885; the couple had four children, three daughters and one son. As the marriage fell apart, after a series of disputes, Bispham was granted custody of one child, their son. One of Bispham's most humiliating problems was his wife's practice of borrowing money. The tragic death of his only son as a Lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps during World War I was another blow to endure. After her husband's death, Caroline contested Bispham's will, dragging the family into public scrutiny once more (“Debt,” “65th Year,” “Suit”). Cather's description of the unhappy state of Sebastian's marriage is a similarly



David Bispham, 1905. Photo by Theodore C. Marceau.



grim story. Sebastian's wife was the daughter of a well-known conductor. Madame Sebastian interferes with Sebastian's choices of accompanists, cannot accept an orphaned boy as part of their family, and requires a great deal of money to maintain her distant and expensive life. Not surprisingly, Sebastian is attracted to Lucy as a way to escape his wife's demands and to have some happiness in his life (*Lucy* 51–52, 58–59, 78–79, and 126).

Despite his wearisome circumstances, Bispham sang and taught until his death. His obituary notes that "He first was stricken August 8 following an extended tour, but had thought his condition so improved that he gave a lesson on Saturday morning." The cause of his death, at the age of 65, was reported as "a complication of diseases" ("65th Year"). In Cather's novel, Sebastian's death is one last struggle for the baritone; his death is reported to have been the result of his unselfish attempts to save Mockford from drowning (*Lucy* 137–38).

As a young journalist, Cather heard Bispham in New York and Pittsburgh. She first listened to the baritone during a Metropolitan Opera Gala, February 13, 1898. Her response to him is mixed: "Mr. Bispham is a man who suffers from too much method. He thrusts his 'method' at you; it is obvious and aggressive. It completely conceals the man and too frequently obscures his naturally remarkable powers." Cather continues her assessment of Bispham, saying "Then his solemnity descends upon you like a shroud. He is unpardonable in opera; he sings an aria as though it were an anthem. In short he has never quite recovered from being born in Philadelphia" (Curtin 418).

The following year, after hearing Wagner operas presented by the Metropolitan Opera touring in Pittsburgh, Cather clearly enjoyed Bispham's performances, saying that his "Frederick is wonderfully dramatic," for *Lohengrin*. Two days later Cather heard the baritone in *Die Walküre*, and wrote that Frau Lilli Lehmann "was certainly unequal to that first stormy scene, and Herr Dipple and Mr. Bispham who sang a most dramatic Hunding, bore the weight of it upon their shoulders" (621, 623).

During an extended trip to England and France in 1902, Cather and Isabelle McClung spent three weeks in London (Woodress 160, Kates 50–79). While visiting Shropshire (Kates 27–34), Cather recalled Bispham's singing. Cather described the stillness of "real Housman country" and hearing "a chime, at Evesham, which played the whole of 'Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes' more rhythmically than anyone but Bispham can sing it" (28, 32). She and Isabelle traveled on to London, and Cather mentions visiting Covent Garden (59). That same summer Bispham returned to London to prepare for his upcoming performances at Covent Garden. As the baritone wrote in his autobiography:



*David Bispham in costume as Ludwig van Beethoven in Adelaide, a play with music about the composer's life. Bispham performed in the play, which he personally adapted from a German work by Hugo Müller, first in 1898 and in several revivals. Reviewing a 1915 production in New York City, Harper's Weekly stated, "He is no longer a great singer; but by virtue of this misfortune he is an even more capable actor."*

I took my usual rôles at Covent Garden and added to my repertory the part of Rudolf in an opera called "Der Wald" (The Forest), a work already performed on the Continent. It was composed by the talented Englishwoman Ethel M. Smythe, and brought prominently to the fore the gifted Olive Fremstad, an American of Norse descent and German training, whom I had met a few years previously at the house of Madame Wagner at Bayreuth and with whom earlier in the London season of 1902 I sang in "Tristan and Isolde" and in "Lohengrin," her interpretation of Brangäne and Ortrud giving promise of the great things she was later to achieve as a Wagnerian singer. (Bispham 303)

Because Cather first heard Bispham in 1898, the direct professional connection by Bispham to Fremstad through their 1902 London appearances is important. Cather lived in New York



after 1906, and she likely read notices and reviews of Bispham's appearances with orchestras and his sold-out Carnegie Hall song recitals. Bispham's performances at the Metropolitan Opera numbered more than two hundred between November 1896 and April 1903; Fremstad's career at the Met began in November 1903 and continued until April 1914, with some 345 performances in all ("Bispham," "Fremstad"). The two singers were part of an elite group of Wagnerian singers that performed in Chicago and New York, among other important venues. Bispham and Fremstad must have had mutual professional colleagues and known many faithful music-lovers in the city.

After his operatic career ended, the baritone had a successful career as a recitalist and oratorio soloist, so his name was familiar to music-going audiences. Bispham's personal life was repeatedly publicized in major newspapers. His memoirs were published in 1920, the year before his death. Because Cather was well-acquainted with Fremstad and the friendship was "close enough to allow confidences on which Cather drew but which she never actually broke" (Moseley 30), I think that Cather learned even more general information about singing and the profession of music through that friendship. Cather must have reconsidered and returned to Bispham's career when she wrote *Lucy Gayheart*.

The comparison of Bispham and Sebastian is significant because it unmistakably points to David Bispham as a prototype for Clement Sebastian. When I first read *Lucy Gayheart*, I wondered about Cather's inclusion of musical details regarding Sebastian's concert repertory, concert programming, and venues. His career seemed unattainable or at least impractical. After completing this comparison and considering her long acquaintance with Fremstad, I think that Cather was well aware of the life and career of David Bispham for nearly forty years.

For her second novel about musicians in Chicago, Cather remained true to her early years as a journalist writing music criticism. She followed her customary practice of observing people and events, surrounding all with specific details in her memory, and then writing her observations. From her early impressions of Bispham through the years after his death, this American baritone held a place in Cather's imagination and in her writing of *Lucy Gayheart*.

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# Another Look at *Lucy Gayheart* and Another New Lucy

Merrill Maguire Skaggs



Merrill Skaggs

*In spring 2008 Professor Merrill Skaggs sent the draft of an article on Lucy Gayheart to her colleague, Lucy Marks, curator of Drew University's Willa Cather collection, asking for her "critical remarks on this essay." Following Merrill's death in November 2008, Ms.*

*Marks shared the draft with me, as I then did with Ann Romines.*

*For readers who knew Merrill Skaggs and her work, the present article will evoke mixed emotions of the sort I felt when I first read her draft: how wonderful to receive out of the blue this sample of Merrill's unique mind and voice, but how painful to be so vividly reminded of what we have lost in her passing. Steven Shively, who also read Merrill's essay, commented on how it brings home what scholarship is all about: "Speculation—some call it coming up with a hypothesis or a theory—is a big part of what literary scholars do, followed by confirming or debunking the initial speculation (or a bit of both). We may not know the extent to which Merrill would have adjusted her hypothesis before making it public, but it's both fun and educational to get in on the early stages of the scholar's work, especially when that scholar is Merrill Skaggs."*

*As Steve suggests, the draft Merrill sent Lucy Marks is unfinished—she would not have published it in its current form. That said, its first portion is full of provocative insights into Lucy Gayheart and its genesis, and we publish it here in honor and memory of our beloved colleague, and with the generous permission of her family. My editing has been limited to facilitating some transitions, checking references to the Guerber archive, and filling out the notes (those that are mine are initialed below). With few exceptions the language of the essay is Merrill's own.*

David Porter

In the autumn of 2005 a brother and sister team of Cather researchers—Suzi Schulz and Jay Yost—proposed at Drew University's Cather Collection colloquium a hometown prototype for Lucy Gayheart.<sup>1</sup> This musician, who in fact *did* marry a respected banker in "real life," was named Trixie Mizer. She had been watched and admired by schoolgirl Cather as the prettiest girl around, had excelled at the study of vocal music in Chicago, had lived with other Red Cloud young people (including her future husband) in a student boarding house like the one described in the novel, and had been a Nebraskan Cather "kept up with" fondly. Townsfolk fondly recalled that she had golden flecks in her eyes, laughed memorably, and was always on the move.

It may seem gilding the lily to suggest yet another prototype for Lucy Gayheart, but that is nevertheless my purpose: Louise Guerber, with LG the initials for both. Here's the back story. Pennsylvanian Louise, whose family lived in Upper Montclair, was born in Allentown; we recall that *Lucy Gayheart* is set in a Pennsylvania-west-sounding town named Haverford. (Why Haverford, I have often asked.) Louise Guerber was just out of library school at Columbia when she drove herself to Denver, in 1923, to work as a reference librarian in the Denver Public Library. In the summer of 1925 she was beckoned to help a little lady who entered the Reference Room. Approaching, Louise heard the lady mutter about whether the director would know her name. Louise thought miserably that she was looking at another would-be Colorado poet when she was handed a piece of paper with that name inscribed—Willa Cather! An avid reader, electrified Louise "rocked on . . . [her] heels" and blurted, "Of course Mr. Wyer will see you, Miss Cather," as she led her prize away. The instantly alerted and mobilized staff called Mr. Wyer on his outside phone to suggest that he ask Miss Cather to tea that afternoon. When the arranged hour approached, Louise was allowed to accompany Cather's library escort. Before returning the honored guest to her hotel that evening, Louise had volunteered to drive Cather, her mother, and her sister Elsie around Denver to see the local sights. That drive was memorable enough for Cather to mail Louise three months later a mock-cubist magazine cartoon of frightened pedestrians caught in boulevard headlights, which Cather had re-captioned, "Motoring by Moonlight—Denver City."<sup>2</sup> Soon Cather invited Louise and her friend Til<sup>3</sup> to dinner at the hotel, in reciprocal thanks, after which Louise





wrote succinctly, “As for me, if I had not already completely lost my mind, my heart & my soul to Willa S. Cather[,] I made a thorough job of it that evening.”<sup>4</sup>

Louise not only assisted Miss Cather in Denver, but also thereafter. As Cather would explain in a request-filled 4 December 1925 letter, she only asked for help from those she liked—and she clearly liked Louise. In a letter written from Nebraska not long after her departure from Denver, Cather asked for a care package to be sent to Red Cloud containing contraband cigarettes, as well as important books for immediate research on the evolving Archbishop story.<sup>5</sup> The Denver Library continued to serve at Miss Cather’s command, and her thank-you notes flew back to the Library from New York as well as Nebraska. A few months later Mr. Wyer could tell Cather that young Miss Guerber had taken a job in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, but the exchange continued.<sup>6</sup>

Their friendship burgeoned during the ensuing year. By January 1, 1926, Cather had sent Louise a picture of herself, and on January 27 she herself gladly greeted Louise’s arrival in “this part of the world.” She was by then quite fond of Louise and was signing her New York greetings “Affectionately Willa Cather.” She merrily assured the young woman that she still needed a librarian and promptly invited her to tea at 5 Bank Street on Saturday, February 6.<sup>7</sup> Cather astonished Louise by kissing her upon her first arrival that day for tea: “I left with my head in the clouds,” Louise’s journal records.

Further encounters are noted on March 28, April 1, April 2, April 8, April 29, and May 11, before Cather left town for the summer. By April 26 Louise is being invited to read “the first part of the ms. for the Bishop.”<sup>8</sup> After the summer hiatus, these visits resume: November 5 and 12, December 2 and 18, January 7 and 8. Louise is given for a 1926 Christmas present a corrected carbon of the poem “Poor Marty,” titled “A Lament.” Louise’s diary entries end abruptly in early 1927, though they are followed by two poems copied in her carefully printed calligraphy: “Star Dial: A Variation Upon a Theme of Sappho’s” and “The Namesake.”<sup>9</sup> Presumably these poems are copies of manuscript loans or gifts from Cather herself, which Louise has been asked to return (as was common in this relationship). Hereafter this story is told in epistolary form from Cather’s point of view, and must be pieced together from her notes and letters, which Louise meticulously saved, along with their postmarked envelopes.

Of the breezy notes Cather wrote Louise in 1926, one stands out for its jauntily dismissive references both to the novel she’d just completed (for which Louise had been a “copyreader”) and to the one that was still several years in the future:

October 15 [1926]

Jaffrey, New Hampshire

My Dear Louise;

I won’t be back in town before November 4th or 5th, probably. I’m flirting a little with a story that’s been knocking round in my head for sometime. Title “Blue Eyes on the Platte”—PLATTE, not plate. Rather frivolous and decidedly sentimental, love’s-young-dream sort of thing. The natural result of a year of celibacy with the Archbishop. Yes, he’s done and gone—at his head a copyreader’s smirch, at his feet a stone.

This note makes clear that Cather had started thinking about *Lucy Gayheart* before *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was printed<sup>10</sup> and well before the sight of Norman Quebec produced an alternate gleam in her writerly eye. So far as we know, the only other person to whom Cather revealed her early plans for this novel was Edith Lewis, who noted in *Willa Cather Living* that “several years” before writing *Lucy Gayheart* Cather “had talked of writing a story about a girl like Lucy; she was going to call it *Blue Eyes on the Platte*” (173–74). Did Cather in 1926 tell Louise Guerber about these plans because this new young friend so strongly reminded her of those earlier Nebraska prototypes, Sadie Becker, Anna Gayhardt, and Trixie Mizer, all lively, swift-moving, smart, and drawn to the arts, just like Louise Guerber and Lucy Gayheart? Did Louise Guerber herself to this degree serve as a prototype for the heroine of the novel Cather was now describing as *Blue Eyes on the Platte*?

What most forcibly strikes me when I put the Guerber journal and Cather notes together, however, is that for a specific and limited amount of time, especially in the spring of 1926, Cather’s frequent reappearances made her seem almost ubiquitous—like a private detective, a private eye. She began appearing at the Metropolitan Museum’s Information Desk and sending up messages calling Louise out of her workspace, to come down and sit in adjacent Central Park, to talk. Further, the pattern of such talk is clearly described in the first 1925 journal entry Louise had recorded in Denver:

The tea was a great success and Miss Cather was charming. She is very easy to talk to and talks very easily herself.

When it was over I took them home in our car. She was very much interested in Agnes Vaille<sup>11</sup> and wanted to know all about the adventure and what I thought of it. I told her to the best of my ability and we sat in the car in front of the hotel for quite a while discussing it. I gave her the opinion of almost everyone, I think, when I said



I thought she had a right to fling her own life away but when it came to involving a dozen other people who didn't want to climb the Peak it was a different story. Miss Cather was interested and **catechized me** about it. [bold emphasis in manuscript]

This pattern of “catechizing” or leading Louise to express her opinions then repeats itself in New York. One obvious explanation is that Cather wanted to “hear her speech,” or double-check the way a young woman of Louise’s age and type would express herself. In fact, Cather in 1926 seems to be researching such a young woman as Louise, and from her point of view, her willing model has conveniently moved herself back east to help in the process. Louise is present both in person and in Cather’s consciousness before the Archbishop drops back into the immense design of things. Cather “catches step” with Louise, as Clement advises his accompanist Lucy to do. While Louise is too old to provide material for either Cécile or Vickie, for Lucy Gayheart she’s just right.<sup>12</sup>

It occurred to me at this point, for the first time, that one reason Cather showed such ambivalence toward the novel she eventually named for a heroine identified by Louise Guerber’s initials was that she was ambivalent about what she was thinking of doing to that heroine. Startled by this thought, I reread the novel and realized how often and emphatically Cather’s narrator describes Lucy fondly and favorably. Before, I had dismissed Lucy as an underdeveloped ego, a natural dependent, one contented to be an accompanist. My big mistake. The dependent in this “real life” relationship is Willa Cather, who from early on began to call on Louise to supply everything from Latin lines to Lord & Taylor hairnets.<sup>13</sup>

Implicit also in Cather’s 15 October 1926 letter to Louise is the romance her young friend had already begun with a man more than twice as old as herself—a romance much like the “love’s-young-dream sort of thing” that Cather was imagining for “Blue Eyes on the Platte,” and that Lucy Gayheart would have with Clement Sebastian. Bryson Burroughs, 31 years Louise’s senior, was a well-known artist and a powerful figure in the art world. He was also Curator of Painting at New York’s Metropolitan Museum, where Louise had come to work in the Cataloguing Department early in 1926.<sup>14</sup> Soon after charming, youthful Louise Guerber started working at the museum, she was modeling for him. Not long thereafter, they were engaged. In a lively letter of July 8, 1928, Louise details the scene at home when she broke the news to her family.<sup>15</sup> A few weeks later Cather asked Louise how her family “took it” and added her own comment on the pending match: “the more I think about it, the more I like it” (2 August 1928). On October 5, 1928, Louise Guerber and Bryson Burroughs were married.

Other features of Guerber’s relationship with Burroughs may also look ahead to *Lucy Gayheart*—e.g., their shared interest in impressionist art (compare Lucy’s attempt to win Harry over to impressionism), or their European trips together in 1929 and 1931, the sort of trip Clement imagines with Lucy in the novel. Yet more suggestive of Lucy and Clement is what one of Louise’s family members wrote of these trips: “Louise thoroughly enjoyed these new experiences with her beloved soul mate and artistic mentor, and Bryson found a renewed spirit of youthful adventure with her.”<sup>16</sup>

The marriage ended in the shockingly sudden death of Bryson Burroughs, which a stunned Cather read about in the *New York Times* on November 17, 1934,<sup>17</sup> just as she was putting final touches on the last part of *Lucy Gayheart* (page proofs at the University of Virginia are stamped 3 December 1934).<sup>18</sup> Bryson was 65, old enough to be Louise’s father; he died from tuberculosis—a disease in which lungs gasp for air; and his death followed soon after the couple had made a trip to Italy. By a tragic serendipity, real facts suddenly confirmed Willa Cather’s hunches in a nearly finalized manuscript.

## NOTES

1. Suzi Yost Schulz and John A (Jay) Yost, “Cather’s Letters to Lucy Gayheart,” subsequently published in a volume of papers from the Drew conference (see Works Cited). Trixie Mizer joins two other long-identified local prototypes, Sadie Becker and Anna Gayhardt (see Woodress 449–50).

2. The cartoon accompanied an 11 November 1925 letter from Cather to Guerber.—DP

3. The friend’s name—Til Craven—may have stuck in Cather’s mind and reappeared as [craven] Till in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. At least, Cather asks about Miss Craven in an early letter to Louise.

4. Both in this paragraph and throughout her article Skaggs’s account of the evolving Cather-Guerber friendship draws closely on Louise’s ebullient handwritten Journal [unpaginated].—DP

5. Cather’s request already catches the light, jesting tone that would mark so many of her subsequent exchanges with Louise: “You may not know that in the Sovereign State of Nebraska it’s illegal to sell cigarettes.” Asking that Louise purchase and mail her four packages of Lord Salisbury cigarettes, she adds, “I enclose a dirty dollar for this low purpose” (undated letter, probably from August 1925).—DP

6. Examples of this ongoing exchange, often relating to Cather’s work on *DCA*, include a page of handwritten queries from Cather





on the expansion of railroad lines to Santa Fe and Lamy, to which Guerber has sent answers by 27 August 1925; an 11 November 1925 request for a library loan of Horatio Ladd's *History of New Mexico*; a 4 December 1925 request for a list of books on Kit Carson and his period, along with Guerber's subsequent full-page response; and a request on 11 May 1926, long after Louise has left Denver, for a map of the Santa Fe Trail.—DP

7. Louise's Journal suggests that this tea actually took place on Wednesday, February 10.—DP

8. Cather's had just asked Grant Overton to read the same section to get his reactions as a newly declared Catholic, and she now turned for a different perspective to her young and talented friend. Louise welcomed the opportunity and comments on how much she enjoyed seeing Cather's own corrections—and on two places where she herself found room for improvement. On 28 April Cather phoned to say that a messenger from Knopf would pick up the manuscript the next day. The afternoon after he had done so, Louise and Cather had a lengthy conversation “in the park” about the manuscript. Louise's reading of *DCA* during these days is probably reflected in Cather's reference in her 15 October 1926 letter to “a copyreader's smirch” (see below).—DP

9. For “Star Dial,” see O'Brien (135). The poem, difficult to locate at the time when Merrill Skaggs was writing this paper, has now been published in *April Twilights and Other Poems*, ed. R. Thacker, 113–14.—DP

10. On 2 April Cather wrote Louise that she had finished “the Archbishop” and was “turning over a few ideas to see which is more attractive.”—DP

11. Agnes Vaile, who started out leading a party of three climbers, froze to death on 12 January 1925, on Longs Peak in Chaffee County, Colorado. Since one of her companions returned to camp and reported her plan, rescuers were mobilized. Herbert Sortland froze to death while attempting to rescue her, after he suffered a broken hip.

12. The references are to figures in works Cather published in the years preceding the publication of *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), the pre-adolescent Cécile of *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), and the adolescent Vickie of “Old Mrs. Harris,” the central story in *Obscure Destinies* (1932).—DP

13. For the Latin quotation, see Cather's letter of 19 October 1926 (she thanks Louise for her quick answer on 23 October); for the hairnets at Lord & Taylor, see her letter of 18 September (from the Shattuck Inn).—DP

14. From Denver, on 4 July 1926, Cather addressed a note to her at the Metropolitan Museum and marked it “Cataloging Department.”

15. It appears that Bryson Burroughs saved this letter for its sentimental value and its color, and that Louise Burroughs filed it among her carefully saved notes from Willa Cather. It is one of the very rare letters from Louise herself in this collection of letters.

16. I have added this reference to John C. Guerber's brief “vignette” of Louise, which is in the Guerber/Burroughs archive but which it appears Merrill Skaggs may not have seen.—DP

17. See Cather's letter of 18 November 1934, the beginning and end of which are worth citing: “My heart stopped for a moment when I opened the morning paper yesterday. I had no idea Mr. Burroughs was dangerously ill. I got back to town [from Jaffrey] only last week and had heard no news of him. . . . My dear girl, I am so sorry, so sorry. And I'm sad that a man who got so much out of life (and put so much into it) had to leave. Very lovingly, Willa Cather.” The only previous reference in the archive to Burroughs's illness is Cather's question in a 29 August 1934 letter asking how he “had picked up that bug.”—DP

18. Prepublication dates and facts about the manuscript were graciously provided me by Charles W. Mignon of the Cather Project, in emails dated 18 and 19 December 2007.

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# No Longer Secret: Willa Cather's Letters and Their New Influence

## A Conversation with Andrew Jewell and Marilee Lindemann

*On 12 September 2013, The George Washington University's Department of English (with support from the Wang Family Endowment) sponsored an event celebrating the recent publication of The Selected Letters of Willa Cather: "No Longer Secret: Willa Cather's Letters," featuring Andrew Jewell, one of the editors of The Selected Letters and founding editor of the Willa Cather Archive, and Marilee*

*Lindemann, author of Willa Cather: Queering America and director of the LGBTQ Program at the University of Maryland. The two scholars conducted a lively and illuminating conversation about the ways that the newly accessible Cather letters can change and expand Cather scholarship. For this issue, we have asked Jewell and Lindemann to continue that conversation for our readers.*

AR

## The Significance of Willa Cather's Letters

Andrew Jewell | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Though Cather's letters have significance for a variety of people with wide-ranging perspectives, they are particularly revealing for the reader interested in the creation of literary works, both imaginatively and practically. Consider, for example, the letters she wrote in 1921 and 1922 to Dorothy Canfield Fisher about the novel she called "Claude," a book later published as *One of Ours*. Cather's letters give us specific information about how that novel emerged in her imagination, its sources in her own family and acquaintances, and the vibrant psychological relationship she had with its main character, Claude Wheeler. I want to share some of this rather complex story by looking closely at one passage in one letter, a passage that I think will illustrate the kind of insights the letters bring more generally. Importantly, the power of these insights rests in the *specific* language used in the letters; I could summarize for you the "information" that these letters contain, but in doing so I could never convey what the letter communicates in its original language.

Here's a passage from Cather's March 8, 1922, letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher about the imaginative origin of *One of Ours*:

It was like this: My cousin, Grosvenor, was born on the farm next my father's. I helped to take care of him

when he was little. We were very much alike—and very different. He never could escape from the misery of being himself except in action, and whatever he put his hand to turned out either ugly or ridiculous. There were years when we avoided each other. He had a contempt for my way of escape, and his own ways led to absurdities. I was staying on his father's farm when the war broke out [this is the First World War]. We spent the first week hauling wheat to town. On those long rides on the wheat, we talked for the first time in years; and I saw some of the things that were really in the back of his mind. I went away and forgot. I no more thought of writing a story about him than of writing about my own nose; it was all too painfully familiar. It was just to escape from him and his kind that I wrote at all.

He went over in July, 1917. He was killed at Cantigny, May 27, of the next year. That anything so glorious could have happened to anyone so disinherited of hope! Timidly, angrily, he used to ask me about the geography of France on the wheat wagon. Well, he learned it, you see. I send you his citation. I first came on it in the morning paper when I was having my hair shampooed





in a hairdresser's shop. From that on he was in my mind. The too-personalness, the embarrassment of kinship, was gone. But he was in my mind so much that I couldn't get through him to other things. It wasn't affection, but realization so acute that I could not get away from it. I never meant to write a story with a man for the central figure, but with this boy I was all mixed up by accident of birth. Some of me was buried with him in France, and some of him was left alive in me.

It's a misfortune for me and my publisher that anything so cruelly personal, so subjective, as this story, should be mixed up with journalism and public events with which the world is weary and of which I know so little. But that's the way things come about in this mixed-up world (*Selected Letters* 311–12).

Though many know Cather based Claude Wheeler on her cousin, G. P. Cather, this letter details that her novel did not emerge from old, fond memories like, for instance, *My Antonia*. It was the *mystery* of G. P. Cather's experience that was the basis of the book, the way this loser in Nebraska, a man who frankly failed at a series of degree programs, jobs, and relationships before he ever went to France, could somehow be successful and respected as part of the American Expeditionary Force—and could even receive a “glorious” Distinguished Service Cross citation.

G. P. Cather's apparent transformation into this leader was the story that was “cruelly personal” and “subjective.” (By the way, it is important that Cather did not witness G. P. in France but instead knew him only before he left and later learned remarkable, but skeletal, facts about his wartime experience.) Cather continually claimed the book was not “about” the war at all, but about a man who happened to be mixed up in it, a fact she regretted but could not change. But the language of this letter also alerts us to the close psychological relationship Cather felt with G. P.: at first, she rejected his story as source material because it was “all too painfully familiar”; but after his death, the “too-personalness” was gone. It was painfully private and self-revealing, and then it somehow wasn't any more. She tells Fisher, “It wasn't affection, but realization so acute that I could



Andrew Jewell in *Red Cloud*, 2010.

not get away from it.” “Realization.” Realization of what?

I understand her to mean realization on multiple levels: first, the realization of an imaginative, fictional character and the novel that would tell that character's story. Second, her realization that she had misunderstood G. P. Cather: she was surprised by him, and in that surprise recognized her own failure to properly apprehend his character. Third, she had a personal insight into her own link to the sad story of G. P. Cather. In him she had witnessed the painful awkwardness of her own adolescence and naiveté; that was the “painfully familiar” part. But, after his death, she saw that they shared another connection, that they both

were transformed from a contemptuous person who longed to escape to a person that *did* escape, a person that saw the world and fellow people with something more than contempt.

This letter complicates how we understand the motivation of the novel *One of Ours*. The book, according to its author, was highly subjective and fixated on an individual character, a character who is transformed, or at least believes himself transformed, by an experience of war that, to others, was devastatingly destructive. That character, who seemed to emerge from an epiphanic moment of personal revelation, was so present in Cather's imagination that she felt as if she could write nothing new until she had written through him; “Claude” was blocking her ability to write about anything else.

Over and over, Willa Cather's letters provide us glimpses into the emergence of her creative works, how they bubbled up in her imagination before appearing on the page. Sometimes these passages are like this one to Fisher: explicit psychological revelations about the author's relationship to the source material. Other times, Cather is more coy and suggestive about her methods, as when she asks Fanny Butcher to try re-reading *Death Comes for the Archbishop* “just the way you read ‘Swiss Family Robinson’ when you were little, not as writing at all, but sort of living along with the priests and the mules in a world where miracles really come into the day's work, or into one's experience of it, which is the same thing” (*Selected Letters* 396–97). And in still other moments, Cather is fixated on the material details of her work, cajoling her publishers about illustrations or font types or advertising copy.



Adding to the complexity of these revelations about her work is the fact that they are contained in *letters*, which are, after all, private performances to an individualized audience. When Cather makes confessions to Dorothy Canfield Fisher about the writing of *One of Ours*, she does so aware of Fisher's identity and the history of their relationship. Fisher was an old friend by 1922, but one from whom Cather had been estranged for many years. The correspondence about *One of Ours* was bound up in a rekindling of an old relationship, and restringing of broken ties. Furthermore, Fisher was a well-known author herself with influence in the literary community—and would write an important review of *One of Ours* in the *New York Times Book Review* shortly after publication in September 1922. So, when Cather was explaining *One of Ours* to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, she did so knowing, at some level, that it was part of her attempt to both strengthen a resurgent friendship and convince a potential reviewer about the complex ambitions behind a new novel.

One need not understand Cather's awareness cynically, as if she were merely manipulating Fisher for personal gain. The truth is more complex than that. The letter, I think, represents



G. P. Cather, 1898, while a student at Grand Island Baptist College. Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska—Lincoln Libraries.

sincere experiences and honest emotions, but the style and energy with which she conveys her thoughts is influenced by the character of her audience. She needs to not just blandly convey information, she needs to *convince* Fisher emotionally and intellectually about her artistic integrity when writing the story of Claude Wheeler. In writing this letter, she distances herself and her book from the war because she knows that Fisher, who had taken her family to France during the war to serve those whose lives were being destroyed, would recognize that she lacks the experiential background to write authoritatively about the experience. Cather demonstrates canny humility in her letters to Fisher, and wisely seeks her assurance that the novel will not trouble those who have known France in wartime.

All of these things are wrapped up together in Cather's letters: insights into her creative process, details about her writing life, revelations into her multifaceted relationships, and rhetorical performances for letter recipients. The letters tell stories through their narrator's fallible personality, and, like her fiction, this quality gives human dimension and complexity to each one of Cather's letters.

## “I Did Feel Queer”: Why Cather's Letters Matter to LGBTQ Studies

Marilee Lindemann | University of Maryland

My first trip to a Cather archive was made in the summer of 1987, months after two major biographies were published that took starkly different positions on the question of the writer's sexual orientation. Sharon O'Brien's *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* made a clear, unapologetic case for Cather's lesbianism, while James Woodress's *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, though acknowledging the emotional importance of her attachments to women, dismissed as speculation and inference any claim that those attachments might be sexual. My own project wasn't fundamentally biographical, but I was deeply interested in the question of Cather's relationship to the sex and gender norms of the late nineteenth century. Given that both arguments were rooted in letters that the critics could merely paraphrase, I felt I had to go to Red Cloud and Durham to see *exactly* what she



Marilee Lindemann in Red Cloud, 1987.





Louise Pound



Isabelle McClung Hambourg



Edith Lewis

Louise Pound: Nebraska State Historical Society; Isabelle McClung Hambourg: Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries; Edith Lewis: Class Book of 1902, Smith College.

said to or about her college crush Louise Pound regarding the prospect of being apart from Louise during the summers of 1892 and 1893. A proximate sense would be insufficient, and so I logged many hundreds of miles in an ugly gray compact that had a weird and unfixable habit of stalling out in summer storms. I don't regret having to make my way around the country to hold often-fragile missives in my hands and frantically scribble down notes and transcriptions on legal pads that are now themselves growing fragile from age and the moisture in my basement study. Those journeys taught me a lot about the scholarly delights of archival research, but they also underscore some of the costs, literal and figurative, of Willa Cather's will.

Scholars of all critical and theoretical persuasions have much to celebrate in the lifting of the restrictions on quoting from or publishing the author's letters, which made possible the publication of Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout's monumental *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. The editors have judiciously and impeccably culled, edited, and annotated a mass of far-flung documents into a well-organized and widely accessible text. Readers with an interest in sex and gender issues can now see for themselves how Cather used terms such as "queer" and "feminine friendship" in those crucial letters of the 1890s, one of which I quote from in my title to this piece (17). Extensive collections of correspondence with family members and close friends that weren't available when O'Brien and Woodress produced their studies also shed new light on how Cather spoke to intimates about her relationships with Isabelle McClung Hambourg and Edith Lewis, the two most important women in her adult life. I'm especially intrigued by the frankness apparent in letters to her brother Roscoe, Cather's next

younger sibling and the one to whom she was closest. In a 1938 letter, she seems casually to joke with Roscoe about her sexual nonconformity. Upon learning that both of his twin daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth, are to be married, she teases: "My Dear Boy: Oh, they are all headed for matrimony, I can see it! You and Meta [Roscoe's wife] had better adopt me, I won't go back on you" (546). Several months later, she writes to her brother in a far different mood, to confide her sorrow over the death of McClung Hambourg: "You cannot imagine what her death means to me. . . . No other living person cared as much about my work, through thirty-eight years, as she did" (561). Edith Lewis, who lived with Cather for nearly forty years, is also referred to in dozens of letters, and the one known surviving letter from Cather to her, a tender missive written from the Shattuck Inn in 1936, is included in the volume (519-21).

The glimpses we get of the two women who were such central figures in Cather's emotional and domestic life are tantalizing and well worth some careful queer attention, because they show Cather exhibiting considerable candor about her relationships with a select few of her intimate friends or family members. And yet, of course, they are only glimpses and mostly indirect ones, because the corpus of known Cather documents so far includes just two postcards to McClung Hambourg (115, 195) and one postcard (341) and the letter just mentioned to Lewis. That takes me toward the one point on which I must confess I respectfully disagree with the editors of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*.

Cather biographers have long argued that Cather and/or Lewis destroyed letters, a claim grounded in a report in Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's *Willa Cather: A Memoir*. Sergeant recounts



the story of a dinner at her apartment with Cather, Lewis, and another friend, in May of 1939: “Isabelle Hambourg had died in Sorrento in 1938. Willa told us that Jan Hambourg, after his wife’s death, had sent over her own letters to Isabelle, and that she was burning them up, as quickly as she could. Every Sunday Miss Lewis took a bundle of them to the apartment incinerator” (265). A letter from Cather herself suggests such a task might have occupied several Sundays. She writes to her niece Margaret Cather Shannon in November 1938 that Hambourg “is returning to me *three hundred of my letters* which [Isabelle] carried with her from place to place all the time” (562, emphasis added).

Three hundred letters to McClung Hambourg would increase by ten percent the total number of known Cather letters. It seems fair to assume that at least that many letters to Lewis were either destroyed or buried so deep they are likely never to be found. And yet Jewell and Stout, in a rather remarkable understatement in their introduction to *The Selected Letters*, describe this haunting absence merely as “a disappointing gap in the record” (xiii). I appreciate the editors’ desire to push back against the idea that Cather and/or Lewis engaged in mass destruction of letters and that they did so, as some have speculated, in a desperate and perhaps shame-driven effort to keep the details of the author’s attachments to women out of the public eye. Nevertheless, the paucity of known, surviving correspondence between Cather and two such key figures in her life makes untenable the claim that “there is no evidence that [Cather] systematically collected and destroyed her correspondence” (vii). Sergeant’s account and the number—three hundred—mentioned in Cather’s letter to her niece make it clear that the destruction, whatever motivated it, was systematic and substantial. It has also proven to be, biographically and critically, consequential. The “disappointing gap in the record” is in fact a chasm that has enabled those who wish to deny the significance of Cather’s relationships with women to claim that evidence regarding her sexual orientation is insufficient to justify describing her as a lesbian. Though biases against Lewis have abated somewhat in recent years, critics still cling to fleeting glimpses of heterosexual possibility in the epistolary record, citing a handful of references to a man named Julio, whom Cather met and seems briefly to have been infatuated with in Arizona in 1912, as something that “complicates the view of Cather’s sexuality” (Moseley 17). One might be forgiven for imagining that if the record included three hundred to, say, six hundred letters from Cather to Lewis and McClung Hambourg, Julio would disappear from critics’ radar screens as quickly as he appears to have disappeared from Cather’s.

My disagreement with Jewell and Stout is over a minor matter of emphasis or interpretation that in no way detracts from

my admiration for what they have accomplished in producing *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. The book is an extraordinary contribution to Cather studies that will enrich the field for years to come. I also want to be clear that I make no judgment on Cather over the destruction of documents and her efforts to restrict use of her private writings. Writers and other public figures don’t owe posterity unfettered access to every word they ever wrote and every detail of their private lives. Scholars have a legitimate stake in wanting to learn as much as they can about how a writer’s life experience and sensibility shapes, informs, or meshes with (or does *not* shape, inform, or mesh with) the products of her or his imagination, but the archives we work with are never complete. They are always partial, imperfect records: merely what is known of what remains. I might mourn the loss to Cather studies that resulted from the tossing of who knows how many bundles of letters into an incinerator, but I don’t presume to know nor do I much care why some documents might have been consigned to the fire. The more important task for critics is to focus on these incomplete yet astonishing remains, for they still have much to teach us. Now, thanks to the painstaking efforts of Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, that crucial work has become vastly easier. Whatever Cather studies has lost, it has much to gain from *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*.

## “A Profound Void”:

### Andrew Jewell Responds to Marilee Lindemann

I agree with Marilee that the absence of letters to Isabelle McClung Hambourg and Edith Lewis is a profound void in Cather’s correspondence, and our Introduction in *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* understates this loss. As the facts of Cather’s biography—and the many letters that mention McClung Hambourg and Lewis—make clear, these two women were distinctly important to Cather, the most important people of her adult life. We must remember when we read Cather’s surviving correspondence, particularly in this moment of seeming abundance, how much remains missing. Our sense of what is true, what is important, is going to be skewed by what is available. We can presume, with confidence and evidence, that the missing correspondence from Cather to these two women is revealing, ardent, and persistent.

I confess, some small part of me remains hopeful that one day a portion of this correspondence, particularly the letters to Lewis, will emerge. Other than their absence from the known collections, we have no evidence of their destruction, just a presumption that Cather or Lewis would have destroyed them. And yet, there is that one full letter that did survive, the gentle, loving note written



late in afternoon at the Shattuck Inn in November 1936. How did this letter make it into the collection of the Willa Cather Foundation? Did other letters survive that currently are dispersed in private collections, unknown to scholars? Only recently, after the publication of the book, we learned of a new postcard from Cather to Lewis that is now at the Morgan Library in New York. It is possible, even likely, that more exist and will continue to emerge.

My presumption that more letters exist comes, in part, from my conviction that Cather and Lewis did not seek to locate and destroy *all* existing letters. I certainly do not question Marilee's assertion that the destruction of the letters to McClung-Hambourg was an *episode* of systematic destruction, but we don't have any evidence that the destruction was anything but episodic (the only other episode I'm aware of is small collection of early letters to a childhood friend Lewis purchased shortly after Cather's death; records indicate Lewis destroyed them after reading them and making notes about their contents). That said, Marilee's important observations about the consequences of this "chasm" in the record are spot on: we build our conclusions on what remains in the record, even when we know that record is inadequate.

### "Emotional and Literary Depths": Marilee Lindemann Responds to Andrew Jewell

Readers interested in the practical aspects of Willa Cather's creative career have learned much over the years from her correspondence with Ferris Greenslet, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, and Alfred Knopf, her publisher for the last twenty-seven years of her life. Despite not being able to quote directly from the letters, scholars who worked with the extensive collections at Harvard's Houghton Library (Greenslet) and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas Library in Austin (Knopf) were able to convey a vivid sense of how assiduously Cather worked to get what she wanted at every stage in the production and marketing of her books. She was hands-on, persnickety, sensitive to slights, and savvy about the literary marketplace. James Woodress mined these letters in *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* to give readers not a wispy princess in the Kingdom of Art but a hardworking, flesh-and-blood Cather who did what she needed to do to succeed.

Andy is wise to have chosen from Cather's correspondence with Dorothy Canfield Fisher to explore how both the practical and imaginative aspects of her writerly life enter into an old yet complex friendship with someone from her Lincoln years who had also gone on to achieve literary success and influence. Woodress drew upon this correspondence, but it is illuminating to have full-text transcriptions of the whole series of letters Cather

wrote to Fisher during the period in the early 1920s when they were repairing their relationship after a prolonged estrangement and Cather was finishing and launching *One of Ours*. Paraphrase could never do justice to how fraught these letters are, weighed down as they are by a potent combination of emotional baggage, artistic ambition, and insecurity. They reveal a lot about Cather as a writer, a friend, and an expatriate Nebraskan who never really stopped worrying about what the folks back home thought of her and her work.

*One of Ours* would be the first of Cather's novels published by Knopf. She clearly felt concern about how a war novel written by a woman would be received and also sent letters aimed at garnering favorable reviews to H. L. Mencken (308–10) and Sinclair Lewis (322). I agree with Andy that Cather isn't merely manipulating Fisher (or other influential reviewers) for personal gain, but I am fascinated by the relentlessness of her campaign. She sent Fisher eleven letters between March 1921 and late June 1922, and nearly all of them touch in some way or another on the subject of "Claude," which is how she tended to refer to the novel in letters even after she agreed with Knopf's proposal to title it *One of Ours* (305). Her deep attachment to her protagonist gets expressed in some moments as maternal solicitude, at others as a passionate kinship she compares to the incestuous love of Siegmund and Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* (318). She refers to him as "poor Claude" (313) and tells Fisher that she would "like to save him outside the book" (314). In a later letter, she suggests that Fisher's sympathetic reading of the novel had precisely this effect: "I feel as if you'd sort of rescued Claude, Dorothy, as if you'd snatched him up when he fell and born him off through the fray" (322). It is impossible to plumb the emotional and literary depths of these letters without having access to the author's exact words. Finally, we do, and our understanding of Cather will be richer for it.

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# “That Is Happiness”: A Note on the Final Resting Place of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis

Francis Murphy | Smith College

Willa Cather died late in the afternoon on Thursday, April 24, 1947, in New York City. Cather had been ill, but her death that afternoon was a shock to all who were close to her, especially Edith Lewis, who, as Cather’s niece told her mother, “will be really lost I fear” (*Selected Letters* 676). Cather and Lewis met in 1903, shortly after Lewis graduated from Smith College, and their lives were closely entwined thereafter: two Nebraskans making their way in the publishing world. By virtue of Cather’s will of 1943, Lewis was made executrix and sole trustee of her estate. Lewis had always been the one to organize things, and one of her first steps was to call Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where, according to Margaret Bean and Robert Stephenson, she spoke to George Austermann, a friend and proprietor of the grand Shattuck Inn, where Cather and Lewis spent many treasured autumns. Her call was urgent, Lewis said, because some time earlier Cather had told Lewis that in the event of her death Lewis was to call the Austermanns and ask them to make arrangements for Cather to be buried in the Old Burying Ground in Jaffrey Center, behind the eighteenth century meetinghouse, and to find an Episcopal priest to officiate (Bean 11).

Mr. Austermann, a trustee of the Old Burying Ground, deeded back to the “Old Jaffrey Burying Ground” a portion of his own large plot, and the trustees in turn sold that portion to Lewis “in consideration of the sum of one and more dollars.” It is a very generous plot, approximately 19 by 13 feet, and allows for two earth burials or caskets. It borders the Austermann plot on its left-hand side, filling and completing the right-hand corner of the Old Burying Ground as you face the meetinghouse. The Austermanns always treated Cather as a celebrity guest and they were thinking of an appropriate burial site for a person of national interest and importance. The deed to the plot was signed on June 16, 1947, and recorded in the Cheshire County Registry of Deeds in Keene, New Hampshire, on June 26. The cemetery plot has three restrictions that are worth noting:

1. The tract of land hereby conveyed is restricted to use for burial purposes of the grantee, Edith Lewis, and one Willa Cather, late of 570 Park Avenue, New York, New York.
2. Title to the same may not be transferred except to the town of Jaffrey, N.H.

3. Those general restrictions imposed upon all holders of burial plots in said burying ground heretofore adopted by action of the town of Jaffrey, N.H.<sup>1</sup>

One general restriction, of which Lewis was certainly aware, was that only one headstone was allowed per plot. If two people shared a plot, then a foot marker, traditionally placed at the base or foot of a grave, was allowed. Cather was buried on Tuesday, April 29. The Rev. Anders G. Lund read from “The Order for the Burial of the Dead” in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*.

Cather thus chose her burial place but not this particular spot. Although Cather had given notice to her Nebraska relatives some years before that she intended to be buried in Jaffrey with Lewis, her family must have thought her choice odd (O’Brien 356–59). But there are many reasons why she might have preferred New Hampshire to Nebraska. Cather wrote parts of *My Ántonia*, *One of Ours*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *Shadows on the Rock* in Jaffrey Center, and for Cather her writing always came first. Lewis tells us that “the fresh, pine-scented woods and pastures [of Jaffrey Center], with their multitudinous wild flowers, gentle skies, the little enclosed fields, had nothing of the disturbing, exalting, impelling memories and associations of the past—her own past” (105). Who can read “The Sculptor’s Funeral” without thinking that Cather had put the strictures of provincial life behind her. She loved classical literature, music, especially opera, and most things French. Writing to her brother Douglass on July 8, 1916—Cather would have been forty-two—she said she “shall always be sorry that I went home last summer, because I seemed to get it wrong at every turn. It seems not to be anything that I do in particular, but my personality in general, what I am and think and like and dislike, that you all find exasperating after a little while” (*Selected Letters* 224). She told Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant that “I used always to be sure that I’d never get out, that I would die in a cornfield” (150). In October 1938, she wrote enthusiastically to Thornton Wilder about his play *Our Town*, where Jaffrey Center and East Jaffrey serve as historical models for the fictive Grover’s Corners. Cather told Wilder that she had been going to Jaffrey Center in the autumn for fifteen years, and “in your play I find a complete expression of everything I have ever seen and felt and become friends with in that countryside and in all the little towns scattered about the foot [of Mount Monadnock]. Something enduring and resigned and





gracious lies behind the details of your play, as the mountain lies behind (and permeates) all those little towns and farms and the lives of all those people. Exiled Americans living abroad, to whom I have sent the book of the play, write me that it has made them weep with homesickness” (556–57).

Perhaps another reason for choosing Jaffrey Center for a final resting place was New England’s acceptance of what are sometimes called Boston marriages. Think of Sarah Orne Jewett and Annie (Mrs. James T.) Fields or Alice James and Katharine Loring. And for one who treasured her privacy, especially when it came to people she loved, Jaffrey Center would hold one other attraction. It was a place, her niece Virginia Cather Brockway shrewdly observed, that was “almost inaccessible.” Joan Acocella equated New Hampshire with being buried in “exile” (78).

From her niece’s letter to her mother, Cather’s sister-in-law Meta, dated April 30, 1947 (*Selected Letters* 673–76), it is clear that the Cather family deferred to Lewis in all matters concerning Cather’s New York funeral and her burial in Jaffrey Center. We can safely assume that Lewis ordered the granite headstone from nearby Peterborough Marble and Granite.<sup>2</sup> She certainly wrote and chose the words inscribed upon the headstone and approved its final design. From the beginning Lewis had in mind a headstone that would incorporate the public and the private.

Visiting Cather’s grave site today is not quite the same as visiting it sixty-seven years ago—the area is slightly more suburbanized—but the view of Mt. Monadnock is actually improved with fewer large white pines interfering. There is a distinct sense of separateness here. Unless you are good at climbing stone walls, the only way to approach the site is by way of the meetinghouse gate. You turn left and descend the hillside. The erosion barriers are new and were never intended to be steps. As you approach the grave you realize that you are walking toward an uninscribed granite monument, almost square (32½ by 36½ inches). Nothing is done to alert your attention to who is buried there. Only when you turn back do you see Cather’s name. The Austermanns’ headstone looks toward the meetinghouse; Cather’s looks toward the mountain. The center of Cather’s headstone is polished and carved. Her name comes first, and under it in small italics, her date of birth—December 7, 1876—and her date of death—April 24, 1947. Almost no one quotes these words—all in capital letters in the center:

THE TRUTH AND CHARITY OF HER GREAT  
SPIRIT WILL LIVE ON IN THE WORK  
WHICH IS HER ENDURING GIFT TO HER  
COUNTRY AND ALL ITS PEOPLE.

This is, first of all, a public monument, but what follows (and is always quoted) are lines identified as being from *My Ántonia*:



“There should no longer be any question about whether or not Cather and Lewis rest side by side.” Photos by Frank Simpson.

“... that is happiness, to be dissolved into something complete and great.”

This quotation calls us back from thoughts of a public gift to a private declaration of belief, and although an Episcopal priest officiated at Cather’s burial, this is not an orthodox Christian sentiment and a far cry from the more traditional inscriptions on her neighboring slate stones.

With the exception of the year of birth inscribed on Cather’s headstone (she was actually born in 1873 but insisted on 1876), I have discovered no published criticism of her memorial. Lewis’s grave, however, has been widely criticized and misunderstood. As Cather’s literary executrix, Lewis held to the letter of the law regarding permission to quote from her letters. Mocking her grave seems to have been one way of getting even.

Lewis died of natural causes in the residence she shared with Cather in New York on Friday, August 11, 1972. Her body was taken to the Charles J. O’Shea Funeral Homes, Inc. in East Meadow, New York. On Monday, August 14, Mr. O’Shea brought her casket by hearse to Jaffrey Center for burial, a journey of about 250 miles. Lewis was just four months shy of her ninetieth birthday (she was born in Lincoln, Nebraska on December 22, 1882) and had outlived Cather by twenty-five years. Late in 1990 or early in 1991, when the Lewis family was becoming disturbed about what they had been reading concerning Lewis’s grave site, Helen Morgan Schulte, Lewis’s niece, asked Charles J. O’Shea to write a letter testifying to how Lewis was buried. On January 4, 1991, Mr. O’Shea wrote: “Edith Lewis was not cremated, but was interred according to the instructions in her will. She was buried next to Willa Cather in Old Jaffrey Cem., Jaffrey, N.H.”



In their full-length version of *Willa Cather in Jaffrey*, Margaret Bean and Robert Stephenson confirmed the presence of at least seven “local attendees” at Cather’s burial service (Bean 15). Lewis’s burial, however, was a family affair. Writing to the Jaffrey town Manager Hunter F. Rieseberg on January 20, 1992, Helen Schulte informed him that “My mother—Helen Lewis Morgan [Edith Lewis’s sister]—my cousin, Elizabeth McGilvery and myself attended the burial in Jaffrey. My mother and I followed the hearse up from New York.” Both Randy P. Cournoyer, Senior and Junior, having met the hearse when it arrived in Jaffrey, joined Charles J. O’Shea and possibly Henry Doody (the owner of the company that provided Lewis’s vault) and two town employees as pallbearers. This is the burial of a stranger, with more present who did not know her than those who did. The Shattuck Inn was still standing (it was demolished in 1996), but very few, if any, people living in Jaffrey in 1972 would have remembered Lewis from her earlier visits.

While Lewis chose to make Cather’s grave both public and private, she was determined to make her own solely private. Knowing the Old Burying Ground rule about only one headstone to a plot, she took it one step further. In her will, dated July 2, 1968, she directed, in part two:

that my remains be buried in my plot in the burying ground in Jaffrey, New Hampshire near Jaffrey Common, beside my friend, Willa Sibert Cather and I further direct that no headstone or marker be put over my grave.

In visiting Cather’s grave site we are treading on the grave of one who did not wish to be remembered, one who did not want to intrude on the national significance of Cather’s memorial.

It was not to be, however. Someone, not a family member and unlikely to have had access to Lewis’s will, arranged to have a polished grey granite foot marker (10¼ by 20 inches), with only Lewis’s name and years of birth and death incised, placed at the foot of her grave. And this, as Randy P. Cournoyer, Jr. is fond of saying, is where all the trouble began.

It is impossible to say just when the foot marker first appeared, but it was certainly there when, in his “Epilogue” to his biography, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (1987), James Woodress informed his readers that Lewis lived on in “the Park Avenue apartment until her death in 1972 and was buried at the foot of her friend’s grave with a plain flat stone marking the spot” (Woodress 505). The foot marker is not plain, nor was it placed at the foot of her friend’s grave. It was placed at the foot of Lewis’s grave, as is proper. This error, repeated, took on a life of its own. Sharon O’Brien, whose *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* was also published in 1987, mistook the foot marker for a headstone and declared “Those who seek the grave site may find further evidence of Lewis’

subordination to Cather. Her grave is smaller, humbler. But the juxtaposition of the graves tells a story besides that of Lewis’ self-effacement: that of her importance to Cather. . . . Even if she never placed Lewis’ name before a title page, Cather was willing to leave a public sign of [their] intimacy that could be read after their deaths” (O’Brien 357). But, of course, Cather made no such prior arrangement nor was it what Lewis ever envisioned. Marilyn Arnold, in her “Foreword” to a reprint of Lewis’s 1953 biography of Cather, *Willa Cather Living* (1989), is also confused by the foot marker and tells us that there are “two headstones—one upright and tastefully engraved with a passage from *My Antonia*, the other modestly flat and plain. The legend on the first indicates that the remains of Willa Cather, 1876-1947, are buried here. The second indicates that some twenty-five years later the remains of Lewis were squeezed in at the foot of the first grave” (Lewis vii). How could anyone squeeze in a casket and its cement vault at the foot of Cather’s grave? Both caskets occupy the same amount of space; one grave is neither smaller nor more humble than the other. But it was probably Hermione Lee’s snide and uninformed comment about Lewis that finally determined the Lewis family to do something about the foot marker. In her 1989 biography *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up*, Lee tells us that, after Isabelle McClung—Cather’s great love—married, “all Cather’s pioneering journeys were made with Lewis, who, in the end, would be buried at her feet: not—at a guess—a position that Isabelle McClung would have wanted to assume for eternity” (Lee 73). That stung.

On January 20, 1992, a year after first writing to Mr. O’Shea, Helen Schulte wrote to the Town Manager of Jaffrey, Hunter F. Rieseberg that, with respect to the graves of Lewis and Willa Cather, “There has been a great deal of misunderstanding regarding this property and just where Miss Lewis is buried and I would like to have this cleared up once and for all.” She added, “I do not know who authorized the marker or why it was put at the foot of Miss Cather’s grave.” “If you have this information,” she told Mr. Rieseberg, “I would appreciate having it. In the meantime, I would appreciate your having the marker removed according to my aunt’s wishes.” Mr. Rieseberg turned the matter over to Floyd Roberts, Director of the Jaffrey Public Works Department, and on June 2, 1992, Mrs. Schulte wrote confirming their telephone conversation and told Mr. Roberts that “after speaking with my two cousins, we agreed upon keeping the headstone [sic], but placing it at the head of Miss Lewis’ grave.” The foot marker was never placed at the head of Miss Lewis’s grave, but a letter from Beverly J. Cooper of Hastings, Nebraska, thanking Randy P. Cournoyer, Jr. for a brief history of the burial site, dated October 1, 1993, confirms that the foot marker had been moved to the right of Cather’s headstone by that date. Beverly Cooper asks, as one last favor:







One of the four corner markers for the Cather-Lewis plot.

“Do you know when and why the Lewis marker was moved from the foot of Miss Cather’s grave to its present site between her memorial stone and the stone wall? It is my understanding Lewis requested in her will that no memorial marker be placed at her burial site. . . . It is surmised that Lewis’ niece had something to do with this marker being moved and I am inquiring about that matter from her, too.”

Helen Schulte seems to have been unaware that her letter of June 2, 1992, was acted on quickly and that the foot marker had been moved to the right of Cather’s headstone. On March 22, 1994, Randy P. Cournoyer, Jr. wrote a “To whom it may concern” letter in response to many requests for clarification about the infamous foot marker. The Cournoyer Funeral Home has been in business since 1915, and Randy P. Cournoyer, Sr. handled all the arrangements for Willa Cather’s burial. Randy P. Cournoyer, Jr. described meeting Mr. O’Shea when he arrived in Jaffrey and informed his readers that Lewis’s casket was “dug parallel to the existing grave of Miss Cather. The casket was lowered into the vault. The vault cover was placed and the grave closed. There was *no* evidence of this grave being any differently situated than any other grave of two people buried in the same lot. That is, they were buried side by side.” The heads of the two caskets, he added, are “toward the flag pole or the [meetinghouse] horse sheds.” He explained the difference between a headstone and a flat marker or a foot marker and made it clear that the foot marker “was placed in its proper location, at the foot of Miss Lewis’ grave”:

Some misguided individual, not familiar with cemetery customs or regulations in Jaffrey, assumed that Miss Lewis had a headstone and thus it indicated that she was buried at the foot of Miss Cather! How foolish and how ridiculous! Just look at the lot and the surrounding area, with the stone walls, and anyone can tell that this is not possible.

Mr. Cournoyer sent Helen Schulte a copy of his letter and she responded gratefully to him on March 25, 1994, explaining that she now understood why the foot marker was placed at the foot of her aunt’s grave: “Your letter explained the reason for the marker. No one has been found who ordered the marker. After talking to my two cousins we decided to leave it there.” It is no wonder that Mr. Cournoyer seems exasperated. The foot marker remained next to Cather’s headstone from 1992 until the summer of 2013.

People do not come to the Old Burying Ground to debate the meaning of foot markers and headstones. They come to honor a great American writer whose work has meant something to them.

The foot marker next to Cather’s headstone is confusing and improper, and Cather’s actual burial spot is hard to determine. In 2013 required changes were made to Edith Lewis’s “tract” (see restriction 3) in order to comply with cemetery standards. Markers, initialed CL, were placed in the four corners of the plot, and Lewis’s foot marker was returned to its original position. A foot marker identical in size and color and with only the name Willa Cather inscribed was placed at the foot of Cather’s grave. There should no longer be any question about whether or not Cather and Lewis rest side by side. But who put the unwanted foot marker at the base of Lewis’s grave in the first place will, most likely, never be known.

*Special thanks to Randy Cournoyer, Judy Dickson, Kathy John, Frank Simpson, and Rob Stephenson.*

#### NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all letters and documents quoted are taken from the Edith Lewis file at the Cournoyer Funeral Home, Jaffrey, New Hampshire. The Town of Jaffrey Cemetery Committee is the authorized overseer of the Old Burying Ground.

2. Peterborough Marble and Granite remains in business. Their business records were deposited in the Peterborough Historical Society, but, unfortunately, only those before 1945. However, everyone agrees that Peterborough Marble and Granite would be the likely place of choice in the Monadnock region to order a monument in 1947.

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## The Year My Sister Went East

The first year my sister went east, she wrote to tell me that they don't have real winters out there, not like we do in Nebraska.

She wrote to tell me about how her classmates panicked the first time they found their windshields coated with a veneer of frost and the way it nipped their gloveless fingers, how they didn't believe her when she told them about our "Willa Cather" winter, three straight months where nothing melted, where we were so cold that the sun could not draw any energy from us and so could not break through the clouds, and how her furnace was out for eight straight days that winter so she and her roommate wrapped themselves in blankets and read *O Pioneers!* aloud in solidarity.

Growing up, Nebraska was never a place we stayed, but instead a way station, a place to rest before continuing on. I remember, when I left the dry soil of Colorado and no longer had the mountains to anchor me, how I felt adrift in a sea of sky and prairie so vast and so endless that I was nothing but a boat on the waves, entirely at the mercy of the wind. It was not until I became intimate with two-lane highways and the way each town feels like an island no one has yet drawn on the map but someone calls home that I learned to love Nebraska.

My sister has not yet returned to this land of dust of wheat, though she swears that she will. The last time I visited her, she told me that she misses the sunsets here, the way the sky opens up, and the way the sun is absorbed into the earth, like it is part of the earth, like we all belong to the earth.

Andrew Ek





## Contributors to this Issue

**Jane Dressler**, soprano, is Professor of Voice at Kent State University School of Music and a performer of song, chamber music repertory, and oratorio literature. At the 2000 International Cather Seminar, she presented the premiere of *My Antonia*, a song cycle written for her by Libby Larsen. As a music historian, she has published articles and given presentations related to Willa Cather's writings about classical singers.

**Andrew Ek** serves as education director for the Nebraska Writers Collective, producer of the "Louder Than a Bomb: Great Plains" youth slam poetry tournament and festival. His work appears frequently on stages and in classrooms in the Midwest and beyond. His work can be read at [andrewcek.wordpress.com](http://andrewcek.wordpress.com).

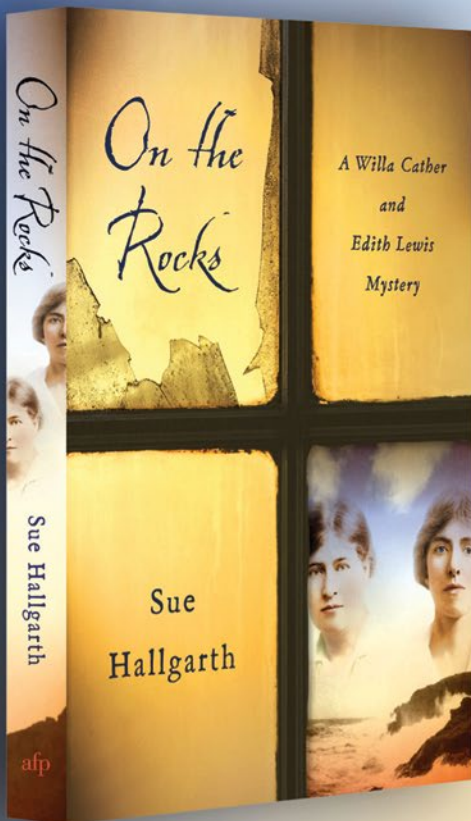
**Andrew Jewell** is Associate Professor at the University Libraries, University of Nebraska–Lincoln. With Janis Stout, he is co-editor of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (2013). He is editor of the Willa Cather Archive ([cather.unl.edu](http://cather.unl.edu)). Recently, he edited a special issue of *Studies in the Novel*, "The Work of Willa Cather: Creation, Design, and Reception."

**Marilee Lindemann** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, where she has just completed a successful term as Director of the LGBTQ Program. She is the author of *Willa Cather: Queering America* (1999) and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather* (2005).

**Francis Murphy** is Professor Emeritus of English at Smith College. He is co-editor emeritus of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* and editor of the Penguin *Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*. His most recent research, as this issue shows, has been on the Cather-Lewis plot at the Old Burying Ground in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

**David Porter** recently retired from 52 years of teaching English and classics, most recently at Skidmore College, where he was also formerly President. A classicist and musician by training, he has been writing about Willa Cather since 2000. He is the author of *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* (2008) and co-author, with Lucy Marks, of *Seeking Life Whole: Willa Cather and the Brewsters* (2009). He is volume editor of the Scholarly Edition of *Lucy Gayheart*, forthcoming in 2015.

**Merrill Maguire Skaggs** died in 2008, a few months after her retirement as Baldwin Professor of the Humanities at Drew University, where she had also served as Dean of the Graduate School. She was author of *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (1990) and *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner* (2007) and editor of four Cather volumes, most recently *Willa Cather: New Facts, New Glimpses, Revisions* (2008). Skaggs was for many years an important and energizing presence in Cather studies, and a much-valued longtime member of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation, as well as an editor of this journal.



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# Call for Papers

## Fragments of Desire: Cather and the Arts The 15th International Willa Cather Seminar

June 5–12, 2015  
Red Cloud and Lincoln, Nebraska

*“It had come all the way; when men lived in caves, it was there. A vanished race; but along the trails, in the stream, under the spreading cactus, there still glittered in the sun the bits of their frail clay vessels, fragments of their desire.”*

—Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (1915)

In the centenary year of Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*, the Willa Cather Foundation and the Cather Project (University of Nebraska–Lincoln) invite paper proposals relating to our theme: “Cather and the Arts.” This will be a seminar based in the two prominent places of Cather’s Nebraska experience—Red Cloud and Lincoln.

The conference will focus on Cather’s engagement with, love of, investment in, and representation of art forms beyond the fiction to which she dedicated herself. We are interested in exploring Cather’s fascinations with performance (music, and especially opera), and the visual arts. Topics for consideration might include: voice and performance; European music/American setting; classical and folk forms of music; the female performer; Cather and image-making; Cather and French art; photography; collecting and exhibiting; craft object and the art object, “high” art and “low” art. Papers with diverse critical and theoretical perspectives are encouraged.

The seminar will open with three days in Red Cloud where participants will stay in motels, bed and breakfasts, or private homes. The second phase of the seminar will be in Lincoln on the University campus. Participants may stay on campus in the dormitories or make arrangements at nearby hotels. Paper presentations, speakers, and special events will be held in both locations. If needed, travel assistance between the two sites will be available.

To submit a proposal, please email an abstract of 500 words, a cover letter, and brief résumé by **February 15, 2015** to Tracy Tucker at [ttucker@willacather.org](mailto:ttucker@willacather.org). If your paper is accepted, you will be notified by April 1, 2015. You will need to submit your final paper by **May 1, 2015**. Papers should be 10–12 pages in length (20 minutes when read). For further information visit [www.unl.edu/cather](http://www.unl.edu/cather) and [www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org) or call the Willa Cather Foundation at 402-746-2653.





# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

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## **The Willa Cather Foundation** **Established 1955 by Mildred Bennett**

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The *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should not exceed 3,500 words; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment and should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the Seventh Edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

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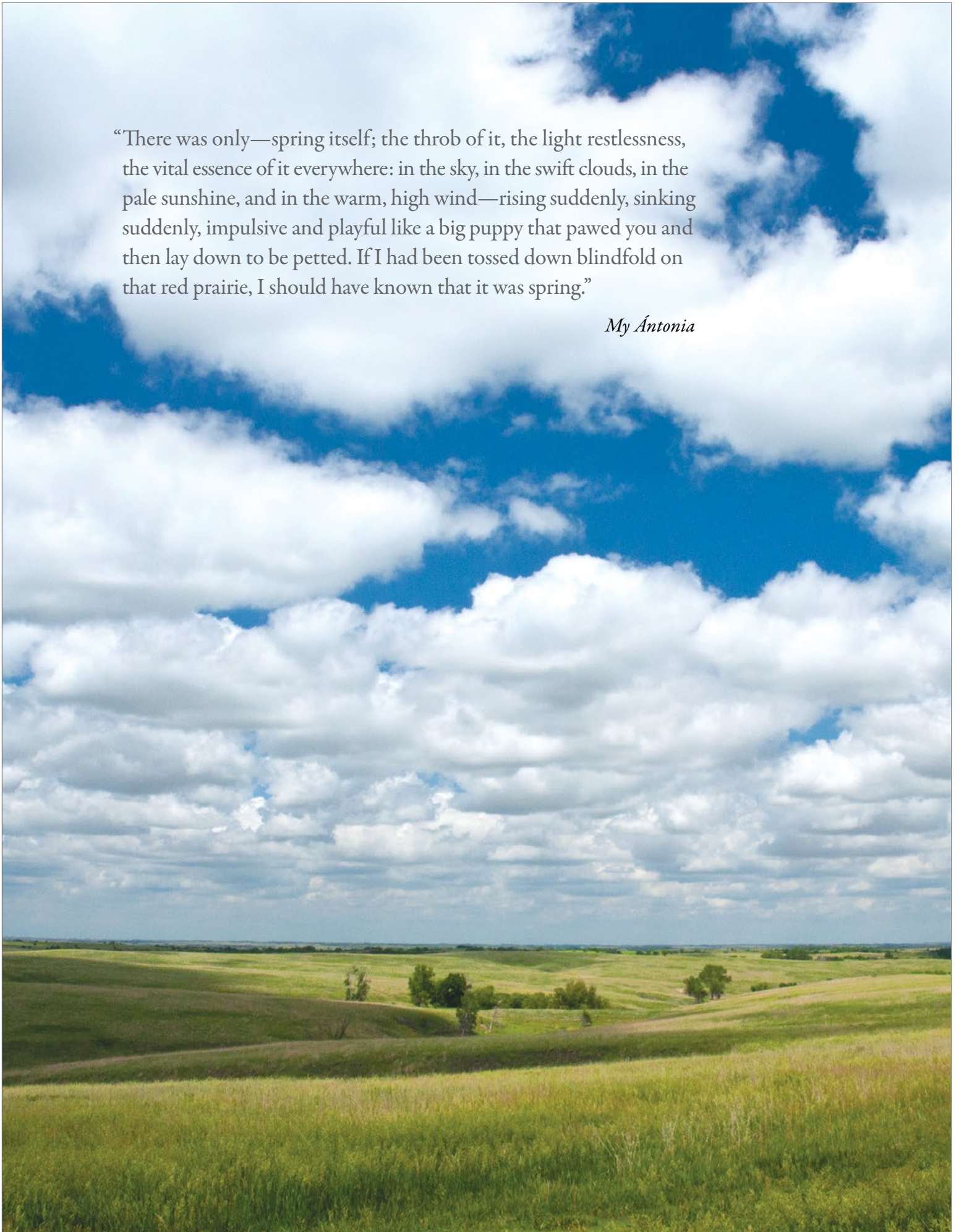


Willa Cather Foundation Executive Director Ashley Olson is joined by Janis Stout and Andrew Jewell, co-editors of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, at Cather's childhood home in Red Cloud, May 2014. Janis and Andy were in Red Cloud for work on the forthcoming documentary *Yours, Willa Cather*, written and directed by Christine Lesiak for Nebraska Educational Telecommunications.



“There was only—spring itself; the throb of it, the light restlessness, the vital essence of it everywhere: in the sky, in the swift clouds, in the pale sunshine, and in the warm, high wind—rising suddenly, sinking suddenly, impulsive and playful like a big puppy that pawed you and then lay down to be petted. If I had been tossed down blindfold on that red prairie, I should have known that it was spring.”

*My Ántonia*



*The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, south of Red Cloud, Nebraska, June 5, 2014. Photograph by Tracy Tucker.*