

Willa Cather

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Cather and the Wolves

Nella Larsen, Willa Cather, and Cultural Mobility

Fitzgerald's Daisy and Cather's Rosamond

Teaching "The Enchanted Bluff"

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On the cover: Sleigh with Trailing Wolves by Paul Powis. Photo courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society’s Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center.



Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

As I write this, a productive and busy summer at the Willa Cather Foundation is drawing to a close and we are celebrating the success of some of our most important arts and educational events of the year.

The events that made up the 60th annual Spring Conference and 15th International Cather Seminar—held in Red Cloud and Lincoln and co-hosted by our friends at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Cather Project—achieved record attendance. More than 280 scholars and patrons and visitors participated.

As we begin the final phase of the National Willa Cather Center’s construction, we were overjoyed to host a ceremonial groundbreaking. Special guest Richard Norton Smith delivered a stimulating keynote address, reminding us that exposure to Cather and her literary legacy is a deeply enriching experience. Even after years of being involved in planning for the Center, I found myself lost in excitement listening to an esteemed guest describe how the facility will allow guests to encounter Cather and Red Cloud as they never have before.

Also relevant to our vision for the future is news that the Cather Foundation has recently entered into a strategic partnership with the Red Cloud Community Foundation Fund,

the City of Red Cloud, and the area Chamber of Commerce to further develop and enhance the visitor experience. Through the hire of a Heritage Tourism Development Director, the partnership will increase Red Cloud’s appeal as a destination for tourists through creation of new services and amenities. Jarrod McCartney, a scholar and Red Cloud native, has already settled into this position comfortably.

Many wise colleagues and friends have often reminded me that to ignore Cather’s life and writings outside of her childhood home of Red Cloud is to turn a blind eye to her remarkable genius. Are Cather studies bigger than Red Cloud? Are they bigger than Nebraska? Yes and yes. But we can have roots *and* wings.

After 60 years, we’ve established a strong foundation in Red Cloud, where the National Willa Cather Center will enhance our efforts to tell the story of Cather’s life and legacy. Yes, Red Cloud is off the beaten path. You must be deliberate to visit this historic community. But we see it over and over again: when visitors arrive to experience Cather’s world and the breathtaking unbroken horizon, they are not disappointed.

Stretching our wings opens a realm of new possibilities. Serving constituents who may not be in a position to visit Red Cloud poses a thought-provoking challenge. We’ll start by hosting the 16th International Cather Seminar, “Beyond Nebraska: Willa Cather’s Pittsburgh,” to be held June 11–17, 2017. We hope to see you there and we thank you for your ongoing interest and support.



Letter from the President

Thomas Reese Gallagher

Willa Cather’s very pronounced views on what constitutes serious art, particularly as it might be reflected in fiction, did not permit of explicit, center-stage explorations of class turmoil or social injustice or economic reform. To Cather, reform in the guise of fiction was antithetical to art. Her letters and nonfiction work contain numerous pronouncements on the topic, leaving little ground for dispute. And yet! Her fiction is full of passages in which the straitened circumstances or cultural conflicts faced by her characters form a resonant subtext.

Picture Anton Rosicky’s poverty-stricken time in London, in “Neighbour Rosicky”; Marian Forrester’s disgrace after Captain Forrester’s death in *A Lost Lady*; the stark difference between the robust, capable hired girls from the country and the “refined” town girls in *My Ántonia*. Similar examples appear throughout Cather’s work.

One such thematic detail has haunted me through years of reading and rereading Cather: her transients. These are characters whose company we share only briefly, before their circumstances

oblige them to move on and their presence is no longer essential to the narrative line. We grow fond of Jake and Otto of *My Ántonia* and Professor Wunsch of *The Song of the Lark*, but then they’re gone (and Cather gives them leave-takings of great economy and beauty). These three don’t just exit their stories; they become socially unmoored and disappear even from the fictional worlds in which they exist. There will be a postcard or two, and then silence.

Compare them with the two “tramps” who follow a reverse trajectory: coming into view, entirely unwelcome, from the nameless spaces beyond the edges of the narrative. In *My Ántonia*, a man “tired of trampin” commits suicide by throwing himself into Ole Iverson’s thresher. In *The Song of the Lark*, “the dirtiest and most utterly wretched-looking tramp” drowns himself in Moonstone’s standpipe, causing a fatal outbreak of “the fever.”

This is a tiny sample, granted, but these fates don’t permit us to hold out much hope for Jake and Otto and Professor Wunsch. Where is the Cather fan fiction? The very unacademic reader in me would like to hope that things turn out well for them, even if I fear otherwise. (And I wonder if any of them ever ran into Roddy Blake?)

Here in the real world, at the Cather Foundation, we will greet you warmly when you arrive. We will miss you when you move on, and hope you stay in touch.



“Never at an End”: The Search for Sources of Cather’s Wolves Story

Michela Schulthies | Utah State University

Willa Cather’s novel *My Antonia* is full of stories the characters share with each other. One of the most memorable of these—certainly the most memorable for me—is the tale Russian Pavel tells on his deathbed, the story of why he and his companion Peter had to leave Russia. Pavel and Peter survived a horrific wolf attack on a wedding party returning to the groom’s town, but they escaped only by throwing the bride and groom to the wolves in order to lighten the load.

Haunted by the wolf story after finishing the novel, I wondered if such a horrible thing could actually happen. My search for Cather’s source of this story yielded surprisingly rich results. Jim Burden notes that “For *Antonía* and me, the story of the wedding party was never at an end” (59); similarly, the search for the story’s sources seems never to end. I made an initial research foray on Google, where I searched “wolves in Russia,” hoping to find historical information on the wolf populations of that country. Surprisingly, I found several recent newspaper articles (2011–2013) with unsettling headlines: “Unstoppable Super-Packs of Wolves Roaming Russia” (Kossoff), “Wolf Attacks Lead to State of Emergency in Russia’s Siberian Region” (Oliphant), and “As 400 Wolves Lay Siege to a Village . . . Have These Ruthless Killers Lost Their Fear of Humans?” (Ellis). These articles tell similar tales of a pack of wolves of possibly unprecedented size terrorizing towns in Siberian Russia only a few years ago. The enormous pack seems worryingly unafraid of humans and “killed 313 horses and over 16,000 reindeer in 2012 according to the agriculture ministry”; the regional governor calls for a “battle against wolves” and promises “a six-figure cash prize for the hunters who bring back the most skins” (Oliphant).

In addition to media accounts, I found *The Fear of Wolves: A Review of Wolf Attacks on Humans*, a 65-page scholarly report published in 2002 by a research team commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment which concludes that wolves (usually rabid) have killed hundreds of humans throughout the world, mostly before 1900. Data from Russia, compiled from multiple reports, shows that from 1849–1851 wolves killed 266 adults and 110 children, and in 1875 alone wolves killed 160 people (Linnell et al. 63).

Newspaper articles and government-sponsored research suggest that the story of an enormous pack of wolves attacking a wedding party is possible—at least to twenty first-century readers with access to the internet and recent research. But what of Cather herself? In the course of my search for facts about Russian wolves, I unearthed a literary goldmine: undoubtedly the principle source for Pavel’s story. I discovered a web-archived *New York Times* article from March 19, 1911, with a dateline of St. Petersburg, March 8, and the note, “Special Correspondence THE NEW YORK TIMES.” The headline proclaimed, “Wolves Kill Bridal Party: Only Two Escape out of 120 in Asiatic Russia.” A bridal party killed by wolves? In 1911? Only two survivors? Jackpot! The accompanying article is remarkably similar to Cather’s story in *My Antonia*. I soon discovered that the *New York Times* was far from the only paper printing the story with several iterations available digitally. The oldest English-language occurrence in newsprint seems to be from Oswego, New York, on February 28, 1911 (“Wolves Devoured”), and by April 15 it had spread to New Zealand (“Thrown”). Most versions reference a story from *Die Zeit*, a newspaper in Vienna, rather than the St. Petersburg source noted by the *Times*.

WOLVES KILL BRIDAL PARTY.

Only Two Escape Out of 120 in Asiatic Russia.

Special Correspondence THE NEW YORK TIMES.

ST. PETERSBURG, March 8.—Tragic details of the fate of a wedding party attacked by wolves in Asiatic Russia while driving on sledges to the bride’s house, where a banquet was to have taken place, are now at hand, and in their ghastly reality surpass almost anything ever imagined by a fiction writer.

The exceptionally severe weather has been the cause of many minor tragedies in which the wolves have played a part, but perhaps none has ever been known so terrible as that now reported, since in this instance no fewer than 118 persons are said to have perished.

A wedding party numbering 120 persons set out in thirty sledges to drive twenty miles from the village of Obstipoff to Tashkend.

The ground was thickly covered with snow, and the progress was necessarily delayed, but the greater part of the journey was accomplished in safety.

At a distance of a few miles from Tashkend the horses suddenly became restive, and the speculation of the travelers changed to horror when they discerned a black cloud moving rapidly toward them across the snowfield.

Its nearer approach showed it to be composed of hundreds of wolves, yelping furiously, and evidently frantic with hunger, and within a few seconds the hindmost sledges were surrounded.

Panic seized the party, and those in the van whipped up their horses and made desperate attempts to escape, regardless of their companions, but the terrified horses seemed almost incapable of movement.

A scene frightful almost beyond description was now enacted. Men, women, and children, shrieking with fear, defended themselves with whatever weapons they could, but to no avail, and one after another fell amidst the snarling beasts.

The wolves, roused still further by the taste of blood, rushed toward the leading sledges, and though the first dozen conveyances managed to stave them off for a time, it was only at a terrible cost, since it is asserted that the women occupants were thrown out to be devoured by the animals.

The pursuit, however, never slackened, and the carnage went on until only the foremost sledge—that containing the bride and bridegroom—remained beyond the wolves’ reach.

A nightmare race was kept up for a few hundred yards, and it seemed as though the danger was being evaded, when suddenly a fresh pack of wolves appeared.

The two men accompanying the bridal couple demanded that the bride should be sacrificed, but the bridegroom indignantly rejected the cowardly proposition, whereupon the men seized and overpowered the pair and threw them out to meet a horrible fate.

Then they succeeded in rousing their horses to a last effort, and, though attacked in turn, beat off the wolves and eventually reached Tashkend, the only two survivors of the happy party which had set out from Obstipoff.

Both men were in a semi-demented state from their experience.

The New York Times, March 19, 1911.

Copyright The New York Times.



There is little doubt Cather had the opportunity to come across the *Times* news article. According to “Mapping a Writer’s World: A Geographic Chronology of Willa Cather’s Life” on *The Willa Cather Archive* and comments in her correspondence, she was in New York City during the winter and spring of 1911, affirming that she had access to the *New York Times* on March 19, 1911. On February 22, Cather wrote to her aunt, Frances Smith Cather, that S. S. McClure was in Europe and she had “been keeping the shop alone” (*Selected Letters* 136). A letter to Louise Pound dated May 9 confirms Cather’s presence in New York City (137). Furthermore, Cather scholars have established her interest in wolf attacks, identifying several other sources of inspiration for the inset story in *My Ántonia*; previous encounters with stories and depictions of wolf attacks would have drawn her attention to the “Wolves Kill Bridal Party” piece. In addition, the article’s opening paragraph contains what amounts to a taunt for novelists: “[the details] in their ghastly reality surpass almost anything ever imagined by a fiction writer.” However, we need not rely only on the circumstantial evidence of Cather having an interest in wolf attack stories and being in New York when the story was printed; Pavel’s story in *My Ántonia* also shares details, even language, with the article that are absent from other sources. Before I delve into these details, a review of the previously known sources will be useful for clarifying the distinction between the old information and the new.

Barry Lopez describes the wolf attack story as “the most oft-repeated wolf scene in literature” (268), making the fact of multiple sources of inspiration for Cather unsurprising. Indeed, the threat of being thrown to the wolves is at least as old as Aesop’s “The Nurse and the Wolf.” In a 1983 study of the origins of



This late 19th century lithograph from the Willa Cather Foundation archive is strikingly similar to the Paul Powis painting that hung in Red Cloud during Cather’s childhood. Both are likely copies of an earlier painting by the German painter Adolf Schreyer.

Russian wolves stories, Paul Schach recorded dozens of folktales about wolf attacks that were told by German-Russian immigrants on the Great Plains. These stories often involved numerous wolves attacking horse-drawn sleighs, sometimes telling of children sacrificed by their parents and sometimes recounting a bride and groom thrown from a sleigh by its drivers.

Schach includes one particularly detailed variant of the “bride and groom sacrificed by the drivers” folktale, which he collected from a Mennonite man who first heard it from his grandmother, a South Russian woman who came to Nebraska in 1880 (69)—confirming that the story would have been circulating by the time Cather moved to the state in 1883. This version has much in common with Pavel’s story in the novel, including descriptive language, the number of horses, and dialogue. (In 2009 Robin Cohen published an analysis of Cather’s wolves story which includes a side-by-side comparison of Schach’s folktale and the version in *My Ántonia*.)

The folk imagination resonates through many literary and artistic representations of the theme of humans thrown to the wolves, several of which likely influenced Cather. These include a Paul Powis painting of wolves attacking a horse-drawn sleigh, which hung in Red Cloud during Cather’s childhood (Murphy 63), Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (Cohen 54–56), Robert Browning’s poem “Ivàn Ivànovich” (Schach 71–72; Woodress 292), the painting *Running from the Wolves* by Bohemian artist Josef Mathauser (Funda), and a short



The Nurse & the Wolf

“Be quiet now,” said an old Nurse to a child sitting on her lap. “If you make that noise again I will throw you to the Wolf.”

Now it chanced that a Wolf was passing close under the window as this was said. So he crouched down by the side of the house and waited. “I am in good luck to-day,” thought he. “It is sure to cry soon, and a daintier morsel I haven’t had for many a long day.” So he waited, and he waited, and he waited, till at last the child began to cry, and the Wolf came forward before the window, and looked up to the Nurse, wagging his tail. But all the Nurse did was to shut down the window and call for help, and the dogs of the house came rushing out. “Ah,” said the Wolf as he galloped away,

“Enemies’ promises were made to be broken.”

Aesop’s “The Nurse and the Wolf,” an early story about the threat of wolves.



New Life for a Well-known Painting

The painting often called Sleigh with Trailing Wolves is as elusive in its way as the legend it is said to depict. This 1887 work by Paul Powis, about whom little is known, hung in Red Cloud during Cather's childhood. After the establishment of the Willa Cather Foundation (then the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial), it hung for years in its damaged state in the historic Garber Bank. The painting is almost certainly a copy of an earlier painting named Verfolgt! (The Pursuit) by the German painter Adolf Schreyer (1828-1899), who had a specialty in portraying horses and horsemen. But where Powis's work was created and how it made its way to Red Cloud is unknown (so far). The scene depicted, in all its particulars, at one time had a degree of cultural currency; witness the lithographic version on page three. Powis painted the same scene at least one other time.

The Cather Foundation is grateful to Kenneth Bé and the Nebraska State Historical Society's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center for giving this work the restoration it has wanted for so long. On the next page, Kenneth Bé gives an account of his restoration of the painting.

TRG



In its original state.

story, “Tom’s Adventure with Wolves,” submitted by a youthful Johnny McAdoo to a writing contest sponsored by *The National Stockman and Farmer* when Cather was briefly the paper’s youth editor (Bintrim).

These sources certainly played their part in capturing Cather’s interest and imagination, but the *New York Times* article, printed only seven years before she published *My Ántonia*, is clearly the

principle source. The similarities in details and language between Cather’s version and the *Times* article surpass all known sources.

Cather’s word choices are noticeably similar to the *Times* article. The folktale variants Schach examines use the words “sleds” or “sleighs,” but both Cather and the *Times* use “sledges.” The only other known source to use “sledges” is the Browning poem, although the conveyance in Mathauser’s painting looks more like a sledge than a sleigh. Cather’s vocabulary shares with the *Times* story an initial nebulous image of the wolf pack, the color contrast of black wolves against white snow, and a similarly large number of wolves; such details are significant in establishing a mood of terror. The *Times* reports that “the travelers . . . discerned a black cloud moving rapidly toward them across the snowfield,” immediately followed by “its nearer approach showed it to be composed of hundreds of wolves.” This movement from a cloudy image to a sharp, distinct threat is echoed in *My Ántonia*: “The wolves ran like streaks of shadow” (55) followed by “a whirling black group on the snow” (56); these indistinct visions quickly clarify to individual wolves leaping upon victims. Cather’s claim of “hundreds of them” echoes the *Times* and goes beyond the “several packs” of folktale versions. The *Times* story adds an aural aspect to the mood, mentioning people “shrieking with fear”; similarly, Cather moves from the “singing” of the wedding party and “the jingle of sleigh-bells” to the “shrieks” of the first victims of the wolves, and she repeatedly mentions “screams” and “cries” (54–57).

When the front sledge becomes the only surviving sledge, similarities emerge that go beyond shared word choices and sensory images to details of plot. In the Mennonite immigrant’s story, one of the drivers seizes the first opportunity to throw the bride out of the sled: “As soon as [the bride] looked backward, the driver seized her feet and threw her out” (Schach 69). In both *My Ántonia* and the *Times*, however, a fellow traveler first takes a moment to explain the plan to the groom. In the *Times* article, “the two men accompanying the bridal couple demanded that the bride should be sacrificed, but the bridegroom indignantly rejected the cowardly proposition, whereupon the men seized and overpowered the pair and threw them out,” and in *My Ántonia*, Pavel hands the reins to Peter and moves to the back of the sledge, where he “called to the groom that they must lighten—and pointed to the bride. The young man cursed him and held her tighter. Pavel tried to drag her away. In the struggle, the groom rose. Pavel knocked him over the side of the sledge and threw the girl after him” (57). Even though Cather partially exonerates one of the two drivers, Peter, who, “crouching in the front seat, saw nothing” (57), she follows the sequence of events in the *Times* article’s account of the final struggle almost exactly.



Based on such shared details, the centrality of a wedding in both accounts, and Cather's access to the *New York Times*, I claim that the *Times* article was Cather's principle source for Peter and Pavel's story although it undoubtedly resonated with other literary and artistic material which had long tickled her imagination. With an understanding of this critical new source, we can gain further insights into Cather's creative process and her purposes for the story of the wolves. Schach notes that few critics have discussed the function of the wolves story in *My Ántonia* (71), and subsequent critics seem to emphasize sources more than analysis; I argue, however, that the source material is crucial to understanding Cather's artistry and the story's function in the novel. While we can understand much about what interested and inspired Cather by looking at the similarities between her version of the story and known sources (now including the *Times* article), there is also much to be gained by examining where her version departs from them. The story in its various forms had long tugged at Cather's imagination, but after she saw such a sensationalized



Mid-restoration, showing a "double vision" effect.



The restored work. (All images courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.)

Describing the Restoration

In 2013, we received the painting at the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center for treatment to repair the two large and severe horizontal tears across its center section—one running through the ground directly beneath the horses and through one hoof; the other passing through two of the horse heads and the arm and torso of the driver with the yellow tunic. The latter tear was especially disturbing and disruptive to the original composition.

In a repair several decades earlier, the painting had been relined—attached to a reinforcing backing canvas—but not re-aligned so the gaps in the composition could be closed. Instead of the tears being repaired, huge separations remained.

Furthermore, after removing the old, weakened lining to replace it with a new lining canvas, I found it to be impossible to rejoin the compositional gaps resulting from the old tears. Over the decades, the canvas had stiffened and the painting had adjusted permanently to the configuration with the open gaps. Attempting to realign the canvas would have put undue stress on the paint, possibly risking further harm to the delicate paint layers. Instead, I relined the painting to a new canvas in the exact same "open tear" configuration. Then, after removing the discolored varnish and accumulated grime, I added new gesso fills. These fills form a base layer over which restoration retouching or inpainting could be added.

But what to add? Simply filling in compatible colors and brushstrokes to recreate paint to join up with the original edges of the paint along the tear would result in unnaturally elongated horse heads. This would be immediately noticeable to viewers. Instead, the sections of the horse head above the tear gap were replicated over the new fill—in other words, simply moved down slightly. And the original upper parts of these horse heads were masked over with paint to match the snowy background. All of the retouching was done with easily removable pigments in a varnish-like synthetic resin medium, so the work done is reversible. With this restoration approach, the overall goal has been to respect the original painting by minimizing any physical stress on the painting around the old tears, but also to reintegrate the composition so that it visually reads as closely as possible to the artist's original intent.

Kenneth Bé





Undated oil painting of the Russian town Sergiev Posad in winter, by Konstantin Juon (1875–1958).

“stood up and lashed their horses,” but at least two of the sledges lose control, and “the screams of the horses were more terrible to hear than the cries of the men and women” (55). When there is only one other sledge left, “three big wolves got abreast of the horses, and the horses went crazy. They tried to jump over each other, got tangled up in the harness, and overturned the sledge” (57). Meanwhile, the middle horse on the front sledge is having a harder and harder time running. What is the significance of this persistent focus on the distressed reactions of the horses? Their behavior seems instinctual. There is something primal and horrifying about the screams of an animal that more

version on page fifteen of the *New York Times*, with its claim for “ghastly reality,” Cather may have wanted to include it in her novel of intimate storytelling in order to give it more room to breathe than in that small piece of newsprint. Cather returns the story to a word-of-mouth memory, first shared as something of a deathbed confession, then passed back and forth between two children like a legend, a story which, unlike a newspaper article, “was never at an end” (59).

Some of Cather’s innovations, of course, are purely practical. For instance, the *Times* reports that the tragedy occurred on the snow-covered road between Obstipoff and Tashkend in Asiatic Russia (now Uzbekistan). Cather’s version more likely takes place much closer to the western border of Russia, where the dialects would have been more compatible with the Bohemian language spoken by the Shimerdas. In the *Times*, the party was heading out to the bride’s house for the banquet, but in the novel the wedding party is *returning* to the groom’s village when attacked, thus adding the complication of their post-ceremony drunkenness while emphasizing the circular pattern of *My Ántonia*. Cather also reduces the number of victims in the wedding party from the staggering 118 of the *Times* story to something near fifty, still horrific and fantastic but more believable for a rural region.

Other differences go beyond logistics and believability. Cather greatly expands on the single reference to panicking horses in the *Times* story: “the terrified horses seemed almost incapable of movement.” Like the drivers in the *Times* story, Cather’s men

commonly whinnies or gives an irritated grunt; a scream feels unnatural—and therefore more powerful. In addition, horses, especially those trained to the harness, are usually under human control. If their fear is strong enough to disrupt all control, then the power of the wolves as a device for creating fear in readers is enhanced. Similarly, Pavel’s act is mostly instinctual, based on fear and self-preservation. Cather’s story becomes a Darwinian illustration of human beings behaving and sounding like animals. In a single sentence she echoes “the screams of the horses” with “the cries of the men and women”; her horses, wolves, and humans all act on instinct, utter similar sounds, and go “crazy” (55, 57). Ultimately, Cather blurs Pavel’s act of self-preservation and betrayal into animal savagery. The memorable story of the wolves thus anticipates other instances when humans behave like predatory animals, especially the rapacious behavior of Wick Cutter.

Additional differences between the *Times* story and Cather’s vignette highlight her efforts to humanize Peter and Pavel in the face of their horrifying experience. Cather thus simultaneously humanizes and dehumanizes her characters, an indication of the complexity and artistry of her novel. Most readers’ first reaction to a man throwing a newlywed couple into the maws of hungry wolves would be disgust; Cather permits such a reaction, but she takes pains to make sure that her readers neither begin nor end there. Cather’s characters are not just anonymous men from a faraway land (though they are that at first: “Russia seemed to me

more remote than any other country—farther away than China, almost as far as the North Pole”); they are Pavel and Peter, whom the young *Ántonia* introduces as “Nice mans, Mrs. Burden. One is fat and all the time laugh. Everybody laugh. The first time I see my papa laugh in this kawn-tree. Oh, very nice!” (32). When *Ántonia* translates Pavel’s story for Jim, the children refer to the men as “our Pavel and Peter!” (54). Before we know details of the “great trouble” (36) we know they have been afflicted with many troubles: they have been “cheated” in a trade with *Krajiek* and are prisoners to *Wick Cutter*’s “exorbitant” mortgage conditions, and Pavel is “very ill indeed” from what is no doubt tuberculosis (32, 48, 49). Cather’s careful arrangement of the story and its humanizing details ensure that our responses to the awful story are not solely based on two men who survive at the expense of an innocent couple but are tempered by knowing that those men are also victims.

Cather’s decision to include the sound of monastery bells near the end of her tale—a detail found in no other known source—provides a window into the ways she built multiple meanings into her fiction. The bells provide a notable contrast to the screams, both animal and human, that fill the wolves narrative. Initially, the bells suggest an end to trauma and re-entry into routine—Peter and Pavel have undoubtedly heard them nearly every day of their lives, and they symbolize home, “their own village”—but they also subtly suggest the changed lives Peter and Pavel will endure; now the sound of the bells is different, “louder than they had ever heard it before” (57). Even the monastery as the source of the bells creates a complication as it opens the possibility of a place that is religious but somehow stranger, less friendly, more separated than, say, a parish church. The bells are comforting in their familiarity and their suggestion of the hope and forgiveness offered by the Church, but ominous in their potential for spiritual judgment.

Cather also changed details of her source material in ways that force readers to consider responsibility for the tragedy. The *Times* story first uses passive voice—“. . . it is asserted that the women occupants were thrown out to be devoured by the animals”—and then assigns unnamed, shared responsibility for the final act to “two men.” Cather, however, assigns the grisly act of sacrificing others to Pavel alone, thus offering a pointed contrast between Peter, who “saw nothing” as he was handling the horses, and Pavel, who came up with the idea of tossing people to the wolves and executed the plan. Peter, nevertheless, is not totally innocent; like the driver of a getaway vehicle, he is wholly present and does nothing to intervene. Cather’s scenario pushes readers to consider questions of responsibility as it connects with similar moments throughout the novel, most notably the responsibility of the neighboring community for Mr. *Shimerda*’s suicide.

While nearly all readers and critics appreciate the power of Peter and Pavel’s story, some have struggled to find its relationship to the larger narrative. David Daiches, for example, argues that “its relation to the novel as a whole is somewhat uncertain” (47). Indeed, the novel contains almost no other direct mentions of wolves although the sounds of coyotes are certainly related: the “whining howl” of coyotes prompts Pavel’s deathbed reminiscence (51), and their “hungry, wintry cry” only a few pages after the wolves story (but this time heard from the “cheerful” atmosphere of the Burden farm kitchen) is both an echo and a contrast (66). Even if there are no other literal wolves in the novel, certainly none that compare to the vicious predators of the inset story, metaphorical ones abound. The first is Peter *Krajiek*, who preys on the *Shimerda* family, taking advantage of their inability to communicate and their desperation for social interaction in order to squeeze food, money, and shelter out of them. *Krajiek* also “cheated [Peter and Pavel] in a trade” (32). The Russians—along with many other settlers and townspeople, including *Ántonia*—are also victimized by *Wick Cutter*, who looks and acts like a wolf. Jim describes him in most unsettling terms, with his “yellow whiskers, always soft and glistening” and his white teeth that look “factory-made” (203). Those details conjure up images of a hungry beast salivating as it stalks its prey from the shadows, and *Cutter*’s behavior certainly matches. Whether he is cheating desperate foreigners trying to make their way as farmers in America or creeping into the beds of young girls he has hired as housemaids, *Cutter* always has his eye on his next meal. His wife, significantly, is likened to a horse: “her teeth were long and curved, like a horse’s” (205). Mrs. *Cutter*, like the horses in Pavel’s story, will perish in a violent and bloody event. *Ántonia*, who escapes *Wick Cutter*’s clutches, falls victim to *Larry Donovan*, who entices her into following him to Denver and then abandons her, pregnant and unwed, to face a judgmental community.

The wolves story forms a microcosm of a theme that reappears throughout the novel: the past can never be truly left behind. Sometimes this is positive. Jim Burden, who happily reconnects with his past in the return trip to Nebraska that ends the novel, learns that “[s]ome memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again” (318). Earlier, even amid the stimulation of the university, “the places and people of [Jim’s] own infinitesimal past,” people like “Jake and Otto and Russian Peter,” sustain Jim “through all [his] new experiences” (254). The past, given form in Jim’s adult restlessness, *Ántonia*’s stories to her children, the re-living of *Harling* family traits in the *Cuzak* children, *Leo*’s violin playing, and much more, enriches and inspires many



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lives. Cather expresses the affirming power of the past for Jim and Antonia in the novel's final sentence: "Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past" (360). For Jim and Antonia, Peter and Pavel and the wolves are part of that past.

But *My Antonia*, of course, is more than pleasant nostalgia. The past can also be a prison, its burden inescapable. Pavel and Peter are a dark manifestation of this theme, but Mr. Shimerda also succumbs to it. The gentle musician cannot adjust to life as a Nebraska farmer; his past will not let go of him, and he will not let go of it. As for Pavel and Peter, they are "run out of their village" and flee from town to town, ultimately driven out of Russia entirely. Cather writes, "Wherever they went, the story followed them" (58). Even in America, where no one knew their story, "[m]isfortune seemed to settle like an evil bird on the roof of the log house. . ." (49). As Pavel lies dying, the stars shine as on that winter night in Russia, the coyotes howl like the wolves, and he coughs up bright red blood, like the blood that spattered the snow behind his sledge. The specter of his past echoes relentlessly across miles and years.

There is no assurance that the tragedy reported in the *New York Times* ever occurred, despite its distribution in newspapers around the world. Even given the nature of journalism at the time, the story feels sensationalized and exaggerated. It seems odd that this occurrence does not appear in Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men* or in the seemingly credible and comprehensive Norwegian government report of 2002. But there is also no likelihood or even expectation of veracity in Cather's other source material: oral tales, literature, and paintings. Cather's concern, of course, was with the truth of human nature rather than literal truth.

As with so much of her writing, Cather draws on many sources for the story of the Russians, Peter and Pavel, and the wolves, weaving the grisly tale into the fabric of her novel. Knowing about those sources yields greater meanings as well as a richer understanding of her artistry. I will long remember the excitement that accompanied my discovery of the *New York Times* prototype story. More important than knowing her sources, however, is understanding the ways she changed them, claimed them as her own. Cather brings new characterization to the nameless drivers narrowly known as "cowardly" ("Wolves Kill") if they merited any description at all. Cather names them, finishes their story, gives them sympathetic listeners, and connects them to the spectacle of life. Modern technology enables us to discover long-lost influences like the *Times* article, but if we seek to touch the human spirit through art, Cather's words cannot be replaced.

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Meanings of Mobility in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

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Reflecting racial divisions in the literary canon, Willa Cather (1873–1947), a white writer from the South and the Great Plains, and Nella Larsen (1891–1964), a biracial author of the Harlem Renaissance, have largely existed in separate realms in literary scholarship, despite publishing and living in New York City in the same period. In *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *Quicksand* (1928), however, both authors address issues related to upward and geographic mobility, focusing on women who do not fit the traditional social pattern. Cather, who migrated from Virginia to Nebraska and finally to New York City, often identifies with social outsiders, writing with empathy of the experiences of immigrants to the Midwest in two of her most well-known novels, *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918). In contrast, in *The Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronborg, descendant of Swedish and Norwegian parents, leaves Moonstone, Colorado, to pursue a musical education in Chicago and ultimately an operatic career in Germany and New York City. In *Quicksand*, Helga Crane attempts to reconcile her dual heritage in her journeys between the southern and northern United States, and also between Europe and America. Leaving familiar yet uncomfortable surroundings, Thea and Helga seek a cultural sense of belonging and a means of self-expression. Thea gains recognition as an opera singer, while Helga continually struggles; a sense of home remains elusive in both novels, which explore the risks and benefits of cultural mobility from opposite sides of the color line.

Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and Larsen's *Quicksand* include elements of regionalism and modernism. Scott Herring traces the intersections between these two modes of American literature, writing that places such as "Willa Cather's Red Cloud . . . have often been treated as geographic curiosities removed from larger global impulses. Such a picture inevitably paints a highly restricted field that neglects the importance of locality to modernism's world-imaginary" (4). Cather scholars have addressed her international and modernist tendencies in the International Cather Seminar 2009, "Cather, Chicago and Modernism," and, more recently, at the symposium "Cather in Europe/Europe and Cather," which took place in Rome in 2014. Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and Larsen's *Quicksand* fluctuate between local and transnational modernism with both telescopic and panoramic effects. Cather represents the influences of Thea's visits to Panther Canyon and



Nella Larsen, photographed in 1928 by James Allen. Inscribed by Larsen to her friends Carl Van Vechten and Fania Marinoff.

Germany on her operatic career. Larsen explores Helga's return to the Deep South and her continual resistance to the pull of a more traditional, culturally and geographically rooted life, which motivates her migration to Chicago and her travel to Denmark. Scholars rarely consider these authors together in the same critical work. Jessica G. Rabin, however, makes a case for the common theme of mobility, noting "Larsen's novels share Cather's use of the journey motif" (141), although the "crossing" she explores in the works of these authors includes only brief references to *The Song of the Lark* (10, 18) and its intersection between upward and geographic mobility. Despite their seemingly opposing perspectives, these novels share common concerns about women's ability to pursue a career in the early twentieth century, with the taint of racism and segregation placing greater limits on the



artistic and verbal expression of *Quicksand's* Helga Crane than her counterpart in this analysis, Thea Kronborg.

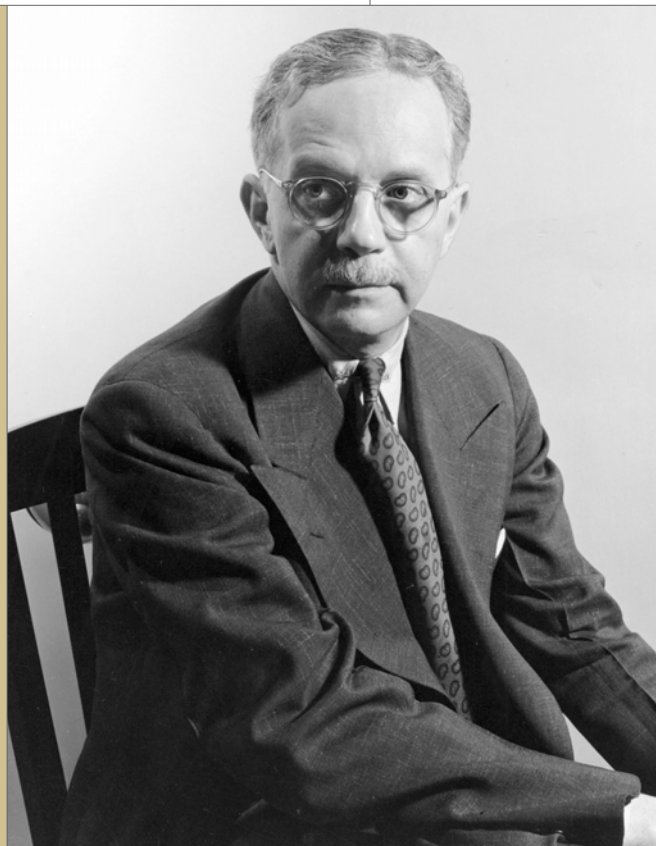
Developments in mobility studies influence this analysis, particularly Stephen Greenblatt's *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. Two of his guiding statements speak to this essay's concerns about the tensions between the individual and society, and the significance of locale: "mobility studies should account in new ways for the tension between individual agency and structural constraint" (251) and "mobility studies should analyze the sensation of rootedness" (252). *The Song of the Lark* and *Quicksand* represent the limits and possibilities for people identified as black and white in America. The novels include major cities in the U.S. and Europe, as well as the places and people on the margins of U.S. society represented through their means of transportation, the railroad. Thea Kronborg and Helga Crane, ambivalent toward their respective regional identification, seek opportunity and a sense of belonging through travel. In a period known for the New Woman, which Charlotte Rich has analyzed in terms of its own multicultural influences, both characters are apolitical, yet well educated and mobile, and conscious of the necessity of financial means to achieve independence. Thea and Helga reflect on the social issues of their time: women's independence from traditional roles, and the influence of race upon upward mobility.

The experience of mobility represents the authors' own journeys, albeit within the typical circuits of migration for whites

and blacks of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Willa Cather descends from Anglo-Saxon ancestors who settled in Virginia; however, her family's migration to Nebraska when she was a child placed her among the European pioneers of the Great Plains, resonating with her own sense of herself as an outsider in her artistic sensibility (O'Brien 59–60; 72–73). Her interest in mobility itself, whether through travel, migration, or immigration, permeates her writing. A frequent traveler to Europe and an opera aficionada, Cather's interest in Olive Fremstad, an opera singer with Scandinavian roots, inspired her depiction of Thea Kronborg. Just as Paul in "Paul's Case" and Claude in *One of Ours* sought to leave their hometowns, Thea not only resists the homogenizing U.S., but also tries to escape from something within herself. Cather uses this internal alienation to build Thea's persona as an opera star, yet the shadow self appears throughout her life, in the child who identifies with older men rather than her peers, in the young woman who imagines herself a Native American woman as she occupies a cliff dwelling, and in the tired singer beneath the stage make-up who seems to prefer solitude to the adoration of countless fans. Despite Thea's achievement, Cather indicates in a 1932 preface that Thea's life represents a "descending curve" (617): "Her artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real" (618). Describing the novel as "the reverse of Wilde's story," Cather references *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* to demonstrate the closeting of Thea's self while she devotes her life to her performance (617).

The feeling of being an outsider to her society also marks Nella Larsen's experience. The daughter of a white mother, an immigrant from Denmark, and a father of mixed racial ancestry who emigrated from the Virgin Islands and most likely passed as white in her childhood, Larsen struggled with a sense of estrangement through most of her life (Davis 48). While Larsen gained recognition as a writer during the Harlem Renaissance, "she never felt fully accepted by either the theater and entertainment segment of Harlem or the socially prominent upper classes of African-Americans" (Davis 236). Described by biographer Cheryl Wall as "young, intelligent, and strikingly cosmopolitan" (93), Larsen entered Harlem's upper-class artistic set

Walter F. White, a prominent civil rights leader active in African-American intellectual circles. He succeeded James Weldon Johnson as head of the NAACP, a position he held from 1931 to 1955. In 1929 he wrote a letter of support for Nella Larsen's application for a Guggenheim Fellowship in which he compared Larsen to Willa Cather: "[Larsen] is possessed of an uncanny instinct for divining and depicting those emotions which govern the words and acts of her characters. She writes with an economy and with a lack of verbosity which is characteristic of another woman writer—Willa Cather—whom I admire greatly" (quoted in Thadious M. Davis's *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled*, page 295).



and analyzed the constraints on upper-class African-American women, even within their lives of privilege. Wall notes that in her novels Larsen “explores the choices open to educated and middle-class black women in western society. Superficially broad, they are profoundly restrictive” (96). Through her tragic characters Helga Crane in *Quicksand* (1928) and Clare Kendry in *Passing* (1929), Larsen portrays cosmopolitanism as a potentially ruinous existence where material wealth and mobility conceal spiritual emptiness and isolation. Like Thea, Helga Crane continually faces a process of adaptation and adjustment as she tries to find a home that represents her sensibilities and mixed ethnic background. Despite her high level of education and varied cultural experiences, however, she fails to achieve a self-supporting existence, with the birth of her fifth child in the novel’s conclusion indicating the end of her dreams.

In contrast, Thea’s ability to achieve recognition speaks to her place in the racial hierarchy, highlighted in her “dazzling” (329) whiteness as an opera singer, although she too experiences a sense of isolation in the process despite the devotion of her childhood friends. Both authors, then, show that the geographic mobility prized in American culture as an indicator of social success presents its own challenges; such mobility also demonstrates their internal rootlessness, search for origins, and sense of a stable identity. Furthermore, upward mobility, while supported in Thea’s case, eludes Helga because of the social disapproval of miscegenation (Rabin 155), a topic Larsen would continue to explore in Clare Kendry’s decision to pass for white in *Passing*.

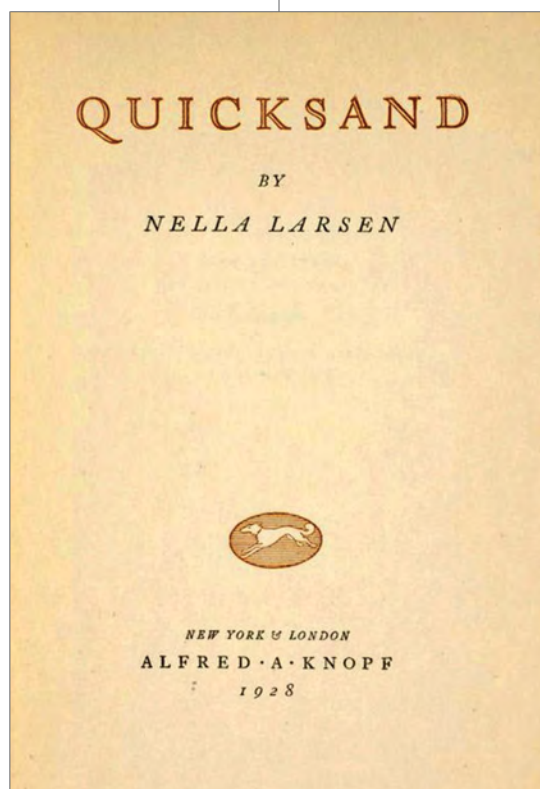
Larsen’s *Quicksand* explores the complexity of Helga Crane’s origins despite her identification as black. At the beginning of the novel, as a teacher in an African-American school, Naxos, an anagram for Saxon (McDowell xvii), also “evocative of abandonment, exile, longing, and despair” (Davis 258), Helga Crane conversely experiences both racial prejudice and racial uplift. Reflecting Larsen’s own biography, Helga’s father, identified as black, abandoned her mother when Helga was young, and her white mother, a Danish immigrant, raised her alone until she remarried a white man who rejected Helga (23). Larsen’s attention to the details of Helga’s origins undermines

the broad strokes of the U.S. racial hierarchy at this time, and its denial of individual backgrounds and experiences. Her personal background causes her vacillation between her African-American and European identities. With the death of her mother, Helga is “without people” (21, 38), as she declares to African-Americans who press the issue, such as Dr. Anderson, the principal of Naxos, and Mrs. Hayes-Rore, a lecturer on racial uplift. As in passing novels of the period, including Larsen’s own *Passing*, she fits within neither white nor black communities. Her anomalous, lonely identity haunts her as she consciously attempts to find a

place to call home, as a teacher at Naxos, a secretary in Chicago, a socialite in New York, an exotic artistic subject in Denmark, and finally, a mother of a large family in the South, which she describes as a life of “oppression” and “degradation” (135). Her story ends tragically, centering on her desire to escape: “So she dozed and dreamed in snatches of sleeping and waking, letting time run on. Away” (135). The novel’s final sentence confirms her despair and entrapment: “And hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain . . . when she began to have her fifth child” (135), re-asserting the quicksand of the title. Nevertheless, her aesthetic tastes dominate the narrative. Her question, “Why, she wondered, didn’t someone write *A Plea for Colour?*” (18), reveals her desire for a

more assertive and communal form of self-expression, yet it does not occur to her that she might write such a tract.

Helga serves as a teacher but longs for the time to herself at the end of the school day in a “room of her own.” Larsen draws on a cosmopolitan tradition from the opening page of the novel, where Helga Crane reads “alone in her room. . . . Only a single reading lamp, dimmed by a great black and red shade, made a pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet . . . on the oriental silk which covered the stool at her slim feet” (1). While Cather looks to Europe to create her cosmopolitan American, Larsen initially turns to the East, as Helga reads *Said the Fisherman* (1903), which Deborah McDowell describes as a novel of “Eastern color, movement, and sharp authenticity” written by Marmaduke Pickthall (note 3, 243). In a metatextual image of cosmopolitanism, the setting of the novel she reads mirrors the Eastern influence of her décor, suggesting a literary tradition in



which people of color contribute to an atmosphere of exotic sophistication in literature, a cosmopolitan image which she also, ironically, consumes through literary escapism. However, in an actual trip to Denmark, her ancestral home, she unwittingly becomes part of an imperialist fantasy.

In *The Song of the Lark*, Cather also traces the mobility of a protagonist who resists the conformity of her place of origin. Like Helga, Thea also has a room of her own, which her mother has created for her, away from the business of their household (52). The desire to create a separate space, one which helps them to escape their local environments, predates Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), but makes a similar case: a woman needs a place for herself, apart from the pressures of society and family life, and money to support herself (also see O'Brien 16). These concerns are central to the work of both authors, as their mobility drives them away from the pressures of environments that would capture them and their artistic spirits, with the more material needs of labor and a salary counterbalancing the abstractions of a search for identity and self-expression. Thea also seeks mobility, leaving Moonstone, Colorado, which, like Naxos, represents social rigidity and confinement. Even though Moonstone has its Mexican Town, the people of Moonstone proper "scarcely knew that this part of the town existed" (35). The place seems dominated in Thea's mind by people like Lily Fisher, whom she associates with American advertisements (69). Thea's Norwegian and Swedish ancestry gives her a sense of distinction yet also sets her apart; after a noteworthy performance by the Moonstone Drama Club, townspeople remark, "Of course all Swedes were conceited" (76).

Readers focused on the traditional and obvious black/white binary that Larsen and Cather seem to represent could miss the fact that both protagonists are Scandinavian in origin. This ancestry adds a touch of the exotic to Thea's characterization, allowing her to transcend Moonstone's bland whiteness, which Cather associates with a lack of origins and authenticity. However, while Helga Crane also embodies European "civilization," her white heritage represents the social taboo of miscegenation.

Both protagonists seek a life beyond the limits of their current locale. Like Helga Crane, who heads North, symbolic of the Great Migration of African-Americans in the early twentieth century, Thea heads east from Moonstone to Chicago. She finds a temporary boarding place, and eventually meets Fred Ottenburg, scion of a beer-brewing family, who introduces her to the Nathanmeyers, a stereotypically wealthy Jewish couple who show an interest in her Swedish heritage and pay her to sing for them. As Fred remarks of Mrs. Nathanmeyer, "She will like you because the Jews always sense talent, and . . . they admire certain qualities

of feeling that are found only in the white-skinned races" (304). In this comment, Fred distinguishes Thea's Scandinavianness from the Nathanmeyers' Jewishness by suggesting that they lack European "qualities of feeling." Thus, while the Nathanmeyers desire European culture, Thea, through her Scandinavian heritage, embodies it. Although I agree with Loretta Wasserman's statement in "Cather's Semitism" that the Nathanmeyers present a "glowing interlude in Thea's drab Chicago winter" (8), Cather certainly distinguishes between their respective cultures even in this positive portrayal. As Thea rises in Chicago society, she learns from Fred how to use her art and her heritage to gain access to "society," as well as different parts of the country and the world. In Chicago, Thea begins her transformation from a marked immigrant, a hungry girl tramping the street, to a cosmopolitan with access to European art, high culture, and upper-class society. Cather writes that in cities like Chicago, "Fortune . . . flicks her whip upon flesh that is more alive, upon that stream of hungry boys and girls who tramp the streets of every city, recognizable by their pride and discontent, who are the Future, and who possess the treasure of creative power" (294). Thea's journey fits within a narrative of upward mobility, as "the course of Empire takes its way" (61) through her.

Despite her own Scandinavian heritage, Helga Crane in *Quicksand* does not experience the same opportunities as Thea because of her African-American heritage. She seeks out a YWCA hostel and a temporary position, eventually accompanying wealthy Mrs. Hayes-Rore on lectures supporting racial uplift. For Helga, Chicago is a difficult, unpleasant place: the accommodations are crowded, her options are limited, and her "lucky" break throws her into a political opportunity which does not interest her because she does not fully identify as black and she has other ambitions, for which she has no name.

Despite these differences, however, as single women in Chicago, both characters experience sexual threat, understated but representative of the perceptions of the time. Cather also addresses this theme in a regional setting in "The Hired Girls" chapter of *My Ántonia*, in which the immigrant girls, Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball, along with Ántonia, risk their reputations after moving from the farms of Nebraska to the local town, Black Hawk, a symbolic name for its predatory dynamic. In Chicago, the anonymity and perceptions of a marginalized young woman would have made the danger even greater. In Chicago, when a medical student "exceeded his rights" when listening to Thea's heartbeat, Cather minces no words: it "wounded her and made her feel that the world was a pretty disgusting place" (315). Helga Crane walks "acres of streets" in Chicago, realizing that "nobody wanted her services. At least not the kind she offered.





Nora Holt, a frequent song and dance performer in New York and Europe during the 1920s. Despite being an influential music critic and the first African-American in the United States to earn a master of music degree, Holt was most famous for her scandalous performances and her reputation as a wild Harlem socialite. She was a close friend to Nella Larsen and Carl Van Vechten. In Quicksand, Helga Crane similarly learns she gets more attention as a glamorous exotic than as a teacher.

A few men, both white and black, offered her money, but the price of the money was too dear” (34). Both women seek safe places to stay: Thea migrates among boarding houses, and Helga chooses the Young Women’s Christian Association, places which offend their aesthetic sensibilities but provide some sense of security. Thea Kronborg and Helga Crane, women of immigrant ancestry and, in Helga’s case, of mixed racial background, new to the city and without companionship, would have been at a social disadvantage.

Both Thea and Helga rise above their outsider status and their immigrant backgrounds. The intensity and confidence of Thea’s physical presence obscures her discomfort with spoken English, which Cather suggests she inherits from immigrant

parents, her father, who “habitually expressed himself in a book-learned language, wholly remote from anything personal, native, or homely,” and her mother, who “spoke Swedish to her own sisters and to her sister-in-law Tillie.” Suggesting that their foreign language affects Thea’s verbal expression, Cather writes: “Thea, who had a rather sensitive ear, until she went to school never spoke at all, except in monosyllables. . . . She was still inept in speech for a child so intelligent” (17). Instead of verbal eloquence, Thea “excelled in ‘written work’” (17), which suggests an artistic sensibility ultimately expressed in her singing. Ray Kennedy, who becomes Thea’s benefactor when he dies in a train accident, provides the means for Thea’s success: she escapes the marriage plot and embarks on her musical career. She travels first to Chicago, where she labors for her art to the point of exhaustion, then Panther Canyon, where she renews her artistic sense of purpose, imagining an affiliation with Native American women who have walked before her. She then leaves for Germany to pursue an operatic career, a journey absent from the text. In Germany, she gains access to a deeply rooted musical tradition and, by extension, a cultural home. A turning point in her career, her performances prepare her for the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Like Thea, Helga follows the cosmopolitan narrative convention of fleeing to Europe, a site that represents both aesthetic pleasure and a sense of belonging. Helga seeks an “imagined community” (Anderson 6) in the beauty and calm of Copenhagen that she remembers from her childhood, an approving whiteness that contrasts with the racial antagonism she experiences as an African-American woman in the U.S.: “It was as if she were shut up, boxed up, with hundreds of her race, closed up with that something in the racial character which had always been, to her, inexplicable, alien. Why, she demanded in fierce rebellion, should she be yoked to these despised black folk?” (54–55). Rebelling against U.S. racism yet exhibiting her internalization of this prejudice, she seeks “leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings” (67) in Denmark. She flees the “tainted” racial mixture of the U.S. by entering the white realm of the European upper class, but in her adulthood she travels alone, without her Scandinavian-American mother, whose white skin initially allowed her mixed-race daughter to gain entrance into this exclusive community. Instead of a ticket to a cosmopolitan life, her trip to Europe turns into a grotesque parading of her race and gender under the stage direction of her white relatives.

Helga’s initial pleasure in Denmark turns to pain when the Dahls, her aunt and uncle, show their delight with their dark-skinned foreign niece by dressing her up in outfits that make



her feel like a “veritable savage” (69). As they turn her into a “decoration,” “curio,” and “peacock” (73), the Dahls hope to secure entertainment for their homogeneous and stifling society by creating an exotic union between Helga and Axel Olson, a painter whose manner and racial insularity reflect traditional white cosmopolitanism. Helga realizes the extent of her subordination in this exclusive white community when the group attends “the great Circus, a vaudeville house, in search of entertainment on a rare off night” and “upon the stage pranced two black men, American Negroes undoubtedly, for as they danced and cavorted, they sang in the English of America an old ragtime song that Helga remembered hearing as a child, ‘Everybody Gives Me Good Advice’” (82). Such stereotypical portrayals of minstrelsy bind region with race and ignore the potential empowerment of African-Americans as they crossed geographical borders. Although Helga refuses the constrictions of region in her cosmopolitanism, she does not find a way to overcome the combined constraints of her race and gender. Like Spanish Johnny, a “minstrel” of sorts in the Barnum & Bailey Circus and a Moonstone outsider, making a solitary appearance at the opera house in New York, Helga, a lone black woman among white companions, realizes that even in the audience she remains part of the spectacle. Unlike Thea Kronborg, whose journey to Germany plays a pivotal role in her operatic career, Helga does not find a homeland in Europe despite her own Scandinavian roots; instead, she experiences the racial prejudice of both Europe and the U.S.

Helga’s biracial background prevents her connection with either black or white communities. Without people or benefactors who encourage her talent and support her work, she feels alone in the uninspiring teaching or secretarial positions available to her. Her employers, Dr. Anderson at Naxos and Mrs. Hayes-Rore in Chicago, express interest in Helga probably for the “dignity and breeding” she represents (21), which is connected in the narrative with her Danish heritage. Helga also feels that her admirers do not know her true feelings or her background. For example, James Vayle, who would have provided her with social connections, lets her go easily; Axel Olson admires her only for her exotic beauty and does not understand her resistance to what he perceives as adoration; and finally, the Reverend Pleasant Green, a name that parodies the reality of rural poverty, never shares her emotional life. In her marriage to Green, Helga attempts to enter a less complex world, “to sink back into the mysterious grandeur and holiness of far-off simpler centuries” (114), away from the contradictions of her cosmopolitan existence with its constant mobility, isolation, and thwarted desires. However, the rural homecoming is obviously an imposed plot in which the modern, urban woman does not fit.

In contrast, Thea receives loyalty and unfailing support from Dr. Archie, Ray Kennedy, Fred Ottenburg, and the singer Oliver Landry. Despite the admiration and support of men, however, she maintains a single life for most of the novel; Ray dies before he can fulfill his dream of marrying her; Fred proposes but Thea rejects him when he reveals that he is already unhappily married; Oliver Landry “was a good friend to a green girl” in Germany (479), but, a rather Wildean figure, he is not a figure of romantic interest; fellow performer Nordquist, whom Thea admits she thought of marrying, couldn’t escape his wife and children without Thea’s money, a proposition she angrily rejected. Both Cather and Larsen counter the typical feminine plot, speaking to the tension between traditional expectations and independent choices, depicted by Cather in Thea’s conversation with Fred Ottenburg, in which she rejects his offer of “a comfortable flat in Chicago, a summer camp up in the woods, musical evenings, and a family to bring up” (349–50). He confirms that mobility is central to her identity: “You’re not a nest-building bird” (350). A mention of Thea’s eventual marriage to Fred appears subtly in the novel’s epilogue in an account of her Aunt Tillie’s visit to New York. Cather writes, “When Thea dined in her own room, [her husband] went down to dinner with Tillie, and never looked bored or absent-minded while she chattered” (535), suggesting a creative twist on the romantic happy ending: a devoted husband and dinner in a room of her own confirm that Thea has not relinquished her career.

In reading these works together, it may seem that blackness has little place in Cather’s work, and that Larsen’s work would not engage modernist primitivism, but both reveal the prejudices of the time and their effect on art and the artist. In her description of Thea’s train ride from Chicago to Moonstone, Cather subordinates the African-American presence, thus controlling the potential disruption of the Pullman porters occupying the same social space as Thea. Cather writes, “The linen was white and fresh, the darkies were trim and smiling, and the sunlight gleamed pleasantly upon the silver and the glass water-bottles” (242). By placing “the darkies” between the white “linen” and the “glass water-bottles,” metonymically associated with Thea as consumer, Cather represents the African-Americans on the train as existing solely for service to Thea. Toni Morrison writes in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, “Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers people their work with the signs and bodies of this presence—one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their [white writers’] sense of Americanness” (6). In a novel that creates an American cosmopolitan from a second-generation immigrant, Cather

not only uses the Africanist presence to confirm Thea's racial superiority but also her sense of belonging to America. With the Pullman Porters signifying her racially privileged position, Thea, "in an absolutely regal mood" (292), appears to be a queen with a retinue of servants, a position dependent on her whiteness as well as her rise in class status after her winter in Chicago.

Like Thea, who leaves provincial Moonstone, Helga escapes Naxos by travelling to Chicago, where she hopes to begin a new life. The train frees Thea and Helga from the constraints on their ambitions in the rural West and South, respectively, and in both novels, the protagonists' racialized view of the other passengers reflects their class ambitions as well as the prejudices of Anglo-American society. Despite her rural, immigrant roots, Thea stands apart from those she encounters: "tired men in rumpled shirts, their necks bare and their suspenders down; old women with their heads tied up in black handkerchiefs; bedraggled young women who went to sleep while they were nursing their babies and forgot to button up their dresses; dirty boys who added to the general discomfort by taking off their boots" (237). Similarly, Helga's perspective implies the inferiority of the African-Americans who share her car:

Across the aisle a bronze baby, with bright staring eyes, began a fretful whining, which its young mother essayed

to silence by a low droning croon. In the seat just beyond, a black and tan young pair were absorbed in the eating of a cold fried chicken, audibly crunching the ends of the crisp, browned bones. A little distance away a tired laborer slept noisily. Near him two children dropped the peelings of oranges and bananas on the already soiled floor. (25)

Despite Helga's emotional distance from these "folks," she and they bear in common the painful indignities of racial prejudice: "A man, a white man, strode through the packed car and spat twice, once in the exact centre of the dingy door panel, and once into the receptacle which held the drinking-water" (25). In comparison with Thea, whose whiteness allows her simply (and at times condescendingly) to enjoy the privileges of her mobility, Helga's blackness makes her the target of racial prejudice regardless of her class distinction. Both Thea and Helga are mobile, ambitious young women, yet only Helga remains constrained in a society that offers increasing opportunities for women but maintains the narrow-minded boundaries of racial prejudice.

Helga's discomfort on the train prompts her to seek a sleeping berth, which would have been denied her because of her race (25). Paying the conductor, she is able to achieve a higher status, but such negotiations are not necessary for Thea, whose

whiteness allows her the kind of passage denied Helga Crane. Ironically, despite her education, determination, and mobility, Helga Crane's solitude ultimately leads to her becoming part of the traditional Southern community she has worked so hard to escape. Eventually, after trying out all the other images available to her and finding that none of them allows her the freedom and independence she seeks, she attempts to create roots in the South by becoming a preacher's wife with a large family, leading to a tragic end. She has experienced not only double-consciousness as a black woman, but the realization that her European heritage does not lift her out of the binding American racial structure. Failing to find a sense of home anywhere, or people who can relate to



The model for Larsen's Naxos was Tuskegee Institute, where Larsen was a nurse and teacher in 1915–1916. Most students, faculty and visitors arrived and departed by train. This image, ca. 1920, is from the Tuskegee University Archives.



and understand her unique background, she succumbs to the performance of a maternal role which does not suit her.

Despite Thea's seemingly flawless upward trajectory, the split self also haunts Cather's work. In her 1932 preface, Cather uses the allusion to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to signify a separation between the artist and the self. In spite of her success, Thea performs and exists for the audience, losing a sense of her life offstage despite her attempts to use her performance to represent her family, to give a sense of her self through her origins. She wears her hair like her mother for her role as Fricka in *Das Rheingold*, but, as she tells Dr. Archie, she maintains a slight difference: "You remember, Dr. Archie, how my mother always wore her hair, parted in the middle and done low on her neck behind, so you got the shape of her head, and such a calm, white forehead? I wear mine like that for *Fricka*. A little more coronet effect, built up a little higher at the sides, but the idea's the same" (487-88). The "coronet effect" suggests Thea's role as diva, a significant difference from her mother's role, which was confined to the household. While her mother built a legacy in America through her children, Thea takes her mother's fertility one step further; her ambition, the possibility of fulfilling her dreams, allows her to "give birth" to herself as an artist, evoking Harsanyi's statement, "Every artist makes himself born" (196). When she becomes an artist, Thea utilizes her immigrant heritage to place herself within the realm of European high culture that ultimately separates her from her immigrant past. This separation may motivate Cather's return to the novel in her preface, written in 1932, in which she attempts to reclaim the "talented young girl 'fighting her way'" (617) who seems to disappear into the performer on stage.

Both Helga Crane and Thea Kronborg seek escape—for Helga, from the rigidity of Naxos, an institution for cultural uplift; for Thea, from the cultural backwardness of Moonstone. Their trajectories represent their respective orientation to racial structures. They share Scandinavian roots, yet Helga's father determines her racial identity as black, a designation she cannot escape, neither by migrating to the North nor travelling to Europe. Both seek the upward mobility associated with the New Woman by migrating to the city and finding a position. Yet both experience threats in the process: men who would take advantage of them and difficulty finding an appropriate teacher/mentor. Thea seems to meet a benefactor fairly easily while Helga continually searches for someone to understand her. Helga's biracial identity poses difficulties Thea does not encounter, trials that trouble each aspect of her journey, including her difficulty identifying with the racial uplift project of either Naxos or Mrs. Hayes-Rore and

her experience as an exotic subject in Denmark. Thea, on the other hand, finds cultural support for her artistic expression in Germany. Each becomes a subject of performance: Helga tries out the different roles available to her, eventually capitulating to marriage and motherhood, while Thea lives for the stage, her wan attention and fatigue belying the grandeur of her performance. As women writers who made their living through their own labor, Cather and Larsen write insistently of the need for mobility, mentors, financial support, and new ways to combine a personal life and a career. But first, they suggest, the artistic woman must define herself, using her imagination to create a place for herself in an unfriendly world.

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More Than Beautiful Little Fools: Fitzgerald's Daisy, Cather's Rosamond, and Postwar Images of American Women

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On the surface, the only similarity Daisy Buchanan in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Rosamond Marsellus in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* share is they are both named after flowers. Actually, the "old money" Southern socialite and "new money" Midwestern girl have much in common. Critics are often quick to judge Daisy as "shallow" (Fryer 43) and write off Rosamond as "materialistic" (Prenatt 218). While Cather and Fitzgerald criticized female consumers of their time, to look at Rosamond and Daisy through this limited view flattens these complicated characters and is a disservice to their creators. Rosamond, whose "name spells emeralds" to her husband (Cather 75), and Daisy, whose voice is "full of money" to Gatsby (Fitzgerald 127), offer glimpses of the dilemma women in the 1920s faced in the wake of World War I. At a time when women were given a taste of independence by gaining the right to vote, driving cars, and entering the workforce, they were

presented with a slew of images that encouraged them to settle down, get married, and raise a family to reestablish gender roles and quiet rebellious spirits. Through their female characters' romantic interactions with American men of nontraditional social and ethnic backgrounds, Cather and Fitzgerald reveal how some women in the postwar era tried to forge new lives for themselves in a world where they could buy—and charm—their way to becoming the new American woman. After the wartime death of her fiancé Tom Outland, Rosamond ventures away from her father's values and awakens the powerful, independent

consumer within her through her marriage to Louie Marsellus. On the other hand, Daisy loses her individuality through her marriage to Tom Buchanan after her tumultuous courtship with Jay Gatsby, turning into the "beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald 21) that her upbringing groomed her to become.

In the 1920s, images of what it meant to be an American woman were inescapable due to the boom in mass media and advertising (Gourley, *Flappers* 48). Women at the turn of the century were surrounded by visions of Gibson Girls, suffragists, wartime volunteers, and charity girls, but after the war they were introduced to icons like the baby vamp, femme fatale, domestic goddess, and, most notoriously, the flapper. (For images of Gibson Girls, suffragists and wartime volunteers, see Gourley's *Gibson Girls and Suffragists*. For a more in-depth look at charity girls, see Gandal. For images and descriptions of flappers, femme fatales, domestic goddesses, and baby vamps, see Banner, Chapter

4, and Gourley, *Flappers and the New American Woman*.) While women may have emulated the physical traits of the flapper model by bobbing their hair and raising their hemlines, most of them did not live the devil-may-care, even promiscuous lifestyle represented by this symbol for the decade's "sexual revolution." As Lois W. Banner clarifies in her book, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History*, "To what extent such behavior constituted a true sexual revolution is debatable. Some rudimentary surveys of sex attitudes were attempted during the 1920s, but what they pointed to was a limited, rather than an extensive, change in



A 1920s advertisement for Leon Chapeaux.



Often a bridesmaid but never a bride

EDNA'S case was really a pathetic one. Like every woman, her primary ambition was to marry. Most of the girls of her set were married—or about to be. Yet not one possessed more grace or charm or loveliness than she. And as her birthdays crept gradually toward that tragic thirty-mark, marriage seemed farther from her life than ever. She was often a bridesmaid but never a bride.

That's the saddest thing about Listerine (pleasant breath). You, yourself, really know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deperated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that the well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these surgical properties as a breath deodorant.

It kills food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. Yet by substituting some other odor, but by only removing the old cause. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and quiet side.

Your druggist will supply you with Listerine. He sells lots of it. It has dozens of different sizes in a safe attractive and has been created as such for a half a century. Read the interesting little booklet that comes with every bottle.

—Listerine Pharmaceutical Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.

An “ideal life of luxury and leisure,” achieved by buying the correct products.

behavior” (150). When the Daisy Buchanans of the upper class did partake in this rebellion, their stay was often fleeting and superficial. Even Fitzgerald, often credited with helping develop the mythos of the flapper, was growing tired of her by the time *The Great Gatsby* and *The Professor's House* were published in 1925: “The flapper, upon whose activities the popularity of my first books was based, had become passé by 1923—anyhow in the East” (*Crack-Up* 132). In contrast to these temporary rebels, including Daisy, the real revolutionaries of the decade were the Rosamond Marselluses who married outsiders instead of merely having flings with them.

While the flapper is the predominant image that comes to mind when thinking of women in the 1920s, a different one was more influential—the glamorous, happily married housewife. Banner observes that in response to modern women who exuded more masculine qualities, there was a push to

redefine the American female’s sense of feminine beauty—and behavior—by steering her back into her domestic place in the home: “By the late 1920s numerous articles appeared in popular journals contending that in gaining their ‘rights’ women had given up their ‘privileges.’ What these privileges amounted to in this literature were self-indulgence, leisure, and freedom from working” (142). Scholars note the advertisements that appeared alongside these magazine stories capitalized on selling an ideal life of luxury and leisure, convincing women that to land a husband and keep him they had to buy the right kinds of home appliances, clothing, jewelry, and beauty products. Listerine’s iconic “Often a Bridesmaid” advertisement is a prime example of the types of advertisements women encountered at the time (Sivulka 161). In *Flappers and the New American Woman: Perceptions of Women From 1918 Through the 1920s*, Catherine Gourley states, “In an attempt to sell their products, advertisers preyed on three emotions: vanity, shame, and fear” (48). Just as the propaganda posters of WWI sold men the idea that they could prove their masculinity by joining the war effort, these visuals convinced female consumers that their femininity was defined by their marital status, which they could change by purchasing certain products. In buying these commodities, the women themselves became objects and status symbols for their husbands and vice versa.

Through their time spent working in the magazine and advertising industries, both Cather and Fitzgerald were aware of this overarching presence and the powerful effect advertisements had on the growing number of literate, middle-class consumers. When discussing the new crop of magazines that were developed around the turn of the century in *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising*, Juliann Sivulka explains, “Although they varied in content, these magazines had one thing in common: They depended on a new class of subscribers—the middle-class readers who were ready to buy consumer goods advertised in an appropriate fashion” (82). The serialized version of *The Professor's House* illustrates this modern, complex relationship between art and consumerism. As Matt Lavin explores in his article, “Intellectual Warfare in *Collier's* Magazine: Art versus Advertising in Cather’s Serialized Novel *The Professor's House*,” when the story debuted in *Collier's*, it ran alongside ads for brands like Coca-Cola and illustrations where “suddenly, Cather’s stuffy characters do not seem drab but rather, aristocratic” (32). Fitzgerald, who had an early career as an ad copywriter, strove to separate himself from the industry and be taken seriously as an author but was never fully able to do so, eventually becoming an advertisement himself for his works and a certain lifestyle. When referencing comments

Fitzgerald made to the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* about an ad in which he appeared, Kirk Curnutt explains, “he never escaped the advertising business; during the decade to which the title alludes, the commodity he has sold has merely been himself, not Muskateen Laundry” (87). While both Cather and Fitzgerald looked down on consumerism, their relationship with the industry is complicated because it ultimately helped finance and increase the popularity of their works.

Even though Cather never places Rosamond in direct contact with magazines or advertisements in *The Professor's House*, there is no doubt that Godfrey St. Peter's late-night efforts “to give [the bathtub] another coat of some one of the many paints that were advertised to behave like porcelain” (12) are motivated by his wife and daughters rather than his own perusal of ads. Certainly, Rosamond is attracted to the lifestyle and the things of advertisements. The St. Peters are not exceedingly wealthy, but the Professor repeatedly makes clear that his wife and daughters do not suffer for want of anything: “If they couldn't get the right thing, they went without. Usually they had the right thing, and it got paid for, somehow” (158). The St. Peter's women are not “drab” or “a little pathetic” like those in other professors' families (158); they want fashionable things such as an attractive bathroom (12). These desires were motivated by advertising; Sivulka states

Consumers were encouraged to buy the “right” bread, the “right” vacuum, and the “right” car. But the ads didn't stop there. Consumers also discovered that, to be socially acceptable, they had to look and smell a certain way, had to maintain spotless modern bathrooms, and even to smoke cigarettes. And the primary target of all this promotion was women. (149)

Now that Rosamond has come into even more money through her marriage to Marsellus and their commercialization of Tom's invention, she is able to indulge in expensive “handmade French frock(s)” (85), furs, Spanish furniture, and more, all coming together as an “orgy of acquisition” (152). Rosamond and Louie revel in the “new money” fad of Europeanizing their new house, a “Norwegian manor house” being built by “a young Norwegian, trained in Paris” and filled with “just the right” architectural details (40).

Daisy Buchanan steps right out of a 1920s magazine. She is the “it girl” that women like Rosamond try to emulate. She is the girl who proclaims “I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything. . . . God, I'm sophisticated!” (Fitzgerald 22). Daisy says of Gatsby, “You resemble the advertisement of the man” (100), a probable allusion to the

Arrow Collar Man (Curnutt 124), thus revealing both the appeal and the artificiality of the persona Gatsby presents to the world. The same can be said of Daisy. She is the “advertisement” of the modern woman. She presents this façade as the ideal lady with the perfect marriage to the outside world. When Nick Carraway goes to her house at East Egg, he says,

Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered “Listen,” a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour. (13–14)

Daisy is an enigmatic, captivating creature who holds her world, and everyone in it, in the palm of her hand. With the white mansion on East Egg she shares with Tom Buchanan and their news-making wedding, she becomes a paragon for women like Jordan Baker who “admired her most” (80) because of the gold standard she represents.

Rosamond, through her trips to Europe and acquisition of goods, is slowly forming an identity for herself as this new type of woman. Evolving from “a little bracelet” made of “turquoise set in dull silver” (106) to furs and emerald necklaces, Rosamond is the modern female consumer who is the target of the ads of the 1920s. As Sivulka notes, “Ads encouraged the burgeoning middle class and nouveau riche to buy—not because they ‘needed’ the material goods, but they ‘wanted’ them to enhance their status” (169). She is transitioning from a St. Peter to a Marsellus. When Louie asks if she still has the bracelet that Tom Outland gave her, she brushes off the question: “I think so.” There was a shade of displeasure in Rosamond's voice, and she turned back into the hall to look for something” (106). Rosamond quickly dodges talking about things that remind her of her deceased fiancé. In contrast to her father, whose coping mechanism is clinging to the past, Rosamond chooses to move forward and embrace consumerism's new opportunities. When Lillian and Louie talk about the emeralds in Rosamond's new necklace, Lillian notes that “they seem a little out of scale—to belong to a different scheme of life,” but Louie replies, “I like the idea of their being out of scale. I've never given her any jewels. I've waited all this time to give her these” (75). This piece of jewelry is a symbol of the decadent new money class to which Rosamond and Louie belong, a group which desires products signifying wealth not only for their monetary value, but because they hint at being an expensive family heirloom. Her new last name, Marsellus, basically beckons businesses to “more sell us.”



Rosamond can afford this type of lifestyle because of World War I. The war further complicated the pressure placed on women like Daisy and Rosamond to get married because it tore down barriers between them and a new crop of potential suitors. As Keith Gandal suggests in his book *The Gun and the Pen*, the war gave opportunistic American men the chance to rise in the ranks and mingle with previously inaccessible women of the upper class (77–81). While Gandal focuses on the new opportunity that the war presents to Gatsby, this culmination of events provides new experiences for Daisy as well. The war places the temptation of the class or ethnic other on Daisy's doorstep. When recounting Daisy and Gatsby's courtship, Nick says, "In various unrevealed capacities he had come in contact with such people but always with indiscernible barbed wire between. He found her excitingly desirable. He went to her house, at first with other officers from Camp Taylor, then alone" (155). The war permits Daisy to interact with new, "excitingly desirable" men like Jay Gatz, whom she previously would only have been able to view from afar. He is the idealistic knight who can whisk her away from her parents. Just as the war enables Gatsby to build up the idea of winning his dream girl, it permits Daisy to indulge in her own fantasy of running off with a lover.

While Gandal focuses on *The Great Gatsby* and works by Hemingway and Faulkner, his points about the mobilization novels of the 1920s also apply to *The Professor's House*. Just as the war causes Gatsby's encounter with Daisy, it also brings Rosamond together with Louie Marsellus. He says, "My wife was young Outland's fiancé—is virtually his widow. Before he went to France he made a will in her favour; he had no living relatives, indeed. Toward the close of the war we began to sense the importance of what Outland had been doing in his laboratory—I am an electrical engineer by profession" (42). Rosamond and Louie are brought together not only by Tom's wartime invention and death, but also by the economic, professional, and social opportunities suddenly accessible to new groups. As Gandal explains, around the time of the war, Jewish Americans and others were presented with new chances on the home front as well as the battlefield, gaining entrance to Ivy League colleges and obtaining more white-collar jobs (124–25). Even with these advantages, however, marrying a man with Louie's heritage wasn't easy for a girl like Rosamond (and it was even more difficult for a woman of Daisy's class). Walter Benn Michaels notes in "The Vanishing American" that in the years following the war there was a rise in racial prejudice in America with the Johnson Immigration Act and President Coolidge's desire to "help 'America . . . remain

American'" (220–21). Such prejudice makes Rosamond's choice in Louie courageous. (It is a courage Daisy cannot muster.) After her attempt to marry her father's protégé ends in heartbreak, Rosamond gravitates to Louie, who, Cather notes, was "mackerel-tinted" with a prominent nose (44–45); he is, in ways that go far beyond appearance, her father's antithesis. The Professor's bewilderment by his wife's fascination with him solidifies Louie's status as an outsider: "He would have said that she would feel about Louie just as he did; would have cultivated him as a stranger in the town, because he was so unusual and exotic, but without in the least wishing to adopt anyone so foreign into the family circle" (78). In her own way, by choosing a mate like Louie, whom her father deems an interesting dinner guest but not husband material, Rosamond is staging an inner rebellion, one that is much stronger than the outward, aesthetic revolt the flappers of the time symbolized.

Unfortunately, this strength in Rosamond's character is often overlooked because she is seen through her father's critical eyes. Most critics are quick to point out Cather's disgust over Rosamond's purchasing power, but viewing her in this singular way ignores Cather's ability to paint an accurate portrayal of the times. Honor McKittrick Wallace states in "An Orgy of Acquisition: The Female Consumer, Infidelity, and Commodity Culture in *A Lost Lady* and *The Professor's House*," that ads of the period "portrayed the female consumer as a potential adulteress and the adulteress as the ultimate consumer" (147). To describe female consumers at the time solely as women who wanted to "dream ways 'out' of the house and to style [themselves] after dangerous, seductive adulteresses who destroy both homes and empires" (147), however, is misleading. While some ads encouraged this type of lifestyle, others urged women to return to the home, settle down with a good man, and raise a family.

While Rosamond's susceptibility to consumerism can be seen as a weakness, it also enables her to achieve the kind of life that she wanted and to form an identity for herself independent from her father. As Margaret Doane, in her article "In Defense of Lillian St. Peter: Men's Perceptions of Women in *The Professor's House*," observes, many critics consider the women of the novel, including Rosamond, in a negative light because they are "a distinct threat to the higher values of males" (300). By embracing her materialistic side, Rosamond begins to develop different values from those of the Professor. Rosamond's sister Kathleen complains, "It's not just the clothes. . . . It's everything. When we were at home, Rosamond was a kind of ideal to me. What she thought about anything, decided it for me. But she's entirely changed. She's become Louie. Indeed, she's worse than



AUGUSTA MAINE THE AUGUST 1919
AMERICAN WOMAN

FIVE CENTS
A COPY



Magazine cover, 1919.

Louie. He and all this money have ruined her” (85). In “‘Terrible Women’: Gender, Platonism and Christianity in Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*,” Ann Baker uses this passage to argue that postwar Rosamond is a “shadow” of her “original” self (260); however, such an interpretation commits the error of viewing Rosamond through the lens of the Professor’s point of view. His judgment, never flawless, is clouded by his reverence for Tom and his nostalgia for earlier times, including the years when Rosamond was a little girl. The woman Rosamond becomes when married to Louie is her original self. Marrying Louie helps her form her own identity separate from her father, one that is closer to her mother and her “clear-cut ambitions,” which St. Peter no longer can live with (275).

The Professor’s disapproval of Rosamond is evident in his description of her. While everyone else thinks Rosamond is “brilliantly beautiful,” she does not fit her father’s ideal of a woman: “He thought her too tall, with a rather awkward carriage. She stooped a trifle, and was wide in the hips and shoulders. She

had, he sometimes remarked to her mother, exactly the wide femur and flat shoulder-blade of his old slab-sided Kanuck grandfather. For a tree-hewer they were an asset” (38). He takes inventory of her physical traits as if he is purchasing a new car. Others also take note of her physical qualities—the “red of her curved lips” and her “dusky black hair” (38)—but their perceptions are positive; St. Peter, however, “was very critical” (38), analyzing those parts he considers flaws. Rosamond’s grounded and sturdy physical characteristics hint at an intrinsic strength that gives her the courage to procure a future for herself with Louie.

Rosamond’s marriage to Louie and the money from Tom’s invention enhance her natural beauty and her strong, independent spirit. The commodities their relationship provides look good on her: “Rosamond entered, very handsome in a silk suit of a vivid shade of lilac, admirably suited to her complexion and showing that in the colour of her cheeks there was actually a tone of warm lavender” (58–59). In marrying Louie, Rosamond not only becomes his wife but also more herself. By adorning herself with the fashions of the time, she is growing closer and closer to the modern woman she aims to become. When writing about the descriptions of Rosamond’s fashions, Diane Prenatt in “Art and the Commercial Object as Ekphrastic Subjects in *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor’s House*” notes, “The painterly and sculptural details of these descriptions identify the members of the St. Peter family themselves as art objects, and our introduction to them is an ekphrastic encounter in itself” (218). While the Professor doesn’t agree with Rosamond’s marriage to Louie, even he can’t deny that the lifestyle agrees with her. When commenting on one of Rosie’s new furs, the Professor says, “You know, these things with a kind of lurking purple and lavender in them are splendid for you. They make your colour prettier than ever. It’s only lately you’ve begun to wear them. Louie’s taste, I suppose?” She proudly replies, “Of course. He selects all my things for me” (81–82). She basks in the idea of being the type of girl whose husband dotes on her and buys her nice things. Just as the lavender color of the coat suits her, so does the lifestyle that comes with it. St. Peter notices “something he had not seen before—a coat of soft, purple-grey fur that quite disguised the wide, slightly stooping shoulders he regretted in his truly beautiful daughter” (81). The moment hints of more substance to Rosamond than what appears on the surface. While these material goods may bring out Rosamond’s “selfish” and “materialistic” tendencies (Prenatt 218), they also foster her confidence and independence.

This confidence allows her to speak her mind with her father in regard to Tom’s money. Rosamond’s strong will and shift in





An illustration by J. C. Leyendecker, the influential (and prolific) American illustrator best known as the creator of the iconic Arrow Collar Man.

ideology from Midwestern values to new money aspirations cause tension between her and her father; the clash comes to a head when she urges him to accept some of Tom's money. She prefaces her proposal by saying she is "afraid" of him. The Professor scoffs dismissively, "Afraid of me? Never" (60). He tries to brush her off and does not take her feelings seriously. The conversation about Tom's money demonstrates a breakdown of communication between Rosamond and her father. Rosamond overcomes her fear and talks to her father, but he refuses to accept the gift, leaving her "perplexed and a little resentful. 'Sometimes,' she murmured, 'I think you feel I oughtn't to have taken it, either.'" She "murmurs" her comment, indicating she is hurt by her father's judgmental comments, but St. Peter still doesn't understand. He replies, "You had no choice. For you it was settled by his own hand. Your bond with him was social, and it follows the laws of society, and they are based on property" (63). While the Professor is right that she "had no choice" in taking the money, she did not do it solely to honor Tom's memory. She did it for happiness and the power to buy a certain lifestyle. The scene ends with a noteworthy switch;

now Rosamond is dismissive of her father. St. Peter tries to move the conversation from himself to other ways Tom's money might be spent, including for Tom's laboratory instructor and colleague, Professor Landry. She cuts him off: "Rosamond's face grew hard. 'I won't bother you about the Cranes, Papa. We will attend to them'" (63).

While Rosamond's rebellion results in a successful marriage, Daisy's rebellion is short-lived because she does not possess the same strength. As Sarah Beebe Fryer points out in *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change*, to become the ideal woman she ultimately desires to be and have the stable marriage she craves, Daisy has to give up the freedom and independence that Gatsby represents: "[Daisy] lacked the courage and conviction to break away from them in pursuit of her own happiness" (50). Fryer goes on to say, "Daisy's confusion over her relationships with the two principal men in her life reflects the gender confusion that was rampant during Fitzgerald's era. Although she is disappointed in her marriage, she does not see any viable alternative to it" (55). The fortitude she shows in choosing Gatsby during their courtship cannot withstand the separation of the war. By the end of the fighting, her letters contained "a quality of nervous despair" as "[s]he was feeling the pressure of the world outside" (158). Daisy could not sustain her risky choice: "She wanted her life shaped now,

immediately—and the decision must be made by some force of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand" (159). Lois Banner explains, "[This generation of young women's] rebellion was a typically adolescent one: it came from the heart and spirit, not from the mind. When it had played itself out, its adherents fell back on the standards that their parents and their culture had set for them—marriage and motherhood" (151–53). Being in limbo is agonizing for Daisy; her rebellion loses momentum and she ultimately decides to do what her upbringing taught: marry a man of her own social class.

Daisy cannot live up to Gatsby's illusion of her, nor can she achieve the picture-perfect life she attempts with Tom. While Rosamond's risky choice in a mate gives her more freedom to be herself and offers a stable, long-term future, Daisy's safer decision forces her to bury happiness and potential for an insincere lifestyle. Fryer explains, "She's playing a part, saying what she considers appropriate, but not what she really feels" (46). Rosamond's future seems bright in terms of potential

for her happiness; it is a future her father does not want, would probably rather die than join, but his family has already demonstrated the ability (and willingness) to break from his values. Daisy's future is grim, at least for any happiness. Early in the novel Fitzgerald captures both her promise as well as her doom in a remarkable passage: "For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened—then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk" (18).

With Rosamond and Daisy, Cather and Fitzgerald provide a glimpse of the complex choices for women that emerged in the years following World War I: female consumer, new feminine ideal, flapper, and more. While both Cather and Fitzgerald were critical of the materialistic culture of the 1920s, to view Rosamond and Daisy in such a one-dimensional way diminishes the difficult position women were in at the time and the authors' understanding of them. After World War I women experienced certain new liberties and temptations to rebel against the values of their parents, but they held onto a strong desire to assert their femininity. Near the end of *The Great Gatsby* Nick Carraway, recognizing the power of media images, notes that Jordan Baker "looked like a good illustration" (185). For some women, like Daisy, popular images became a trap, a motivation to a seductive sameness that stifled their imaginations and limited their happiness. For others, like Rosamond, these images helped cultivate and sustain an independent, even rebellious, spirit which led them, for better or worse, away from their parents' values.

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Upwardly Mobile: Teaching “The Enchanted Bluff” to Contemporary Students

Christine Hill Smith | Colorado Mountain College

This essay is about imagination and the dreams of youth—their creation, growth, and how they do and/or do not come to fruition in adulthood. Like many community college professors, I teach five classes per term: one or two classes perceived as “fun” courses and the rest Composition. For my own enjoyment, I often design Willa Cather stories and novels into my writing classes, since that is my only opportunity to teach Cather at all. More important, however, I am convinced that my students’ writing improves when they read accessible, good writing like Cather’s. Several of her short stories prompt my students to think about their own lives and to make meaning of their experiences. Our discussions of Cather’s fiction often become brainstorming sessions for their essays. Cather “teaches” many of the concepts I want my students to learn: perspective, point of view, tone, audience, vivid descriptions, memorable people, and—perhaps most important—the power of writing to connect with other people.

My Composition I and II students read and respond both informally and formally to Cather’s work. At first they write “response pages” about the texts and then later a short research paper, usually around mid-term. Response pages are one full page of their own musings and ideas about the readings. I use them in all my classes: Composition, Humanities, and Literature. I don’t grade them for grammar or usage, but I do put comments on the content to encourage brainstorming and non-linear thinking. Response pages are not summaries, as I have to remind some students at the beginning of each term. In today’s lock-step world of K-12 education, many students are not used to being asked for their own opinions, and it can take a few tries before they are comfortable writing even non-graded personal reactions. Reluctant students can enter the world of ideas, and they can learn to use writing to engage with others. I tell the students my rationale for response pages is to promote critical thinking and to make sure that they really do the readings. Their roommates might take an online multiple-choice quiz for them, but only they can write their own response pages.

The two Composition II classes that read *Great Short Works of Willa Cather* in the spring term of 2014 contained the usual Colorado Mountain College mix of local and out-of-state American-born Anglos and Hispanics, and a few foreign-born

students, in this instance one each from Peru, Mexico, Ukraine, and Russia. I found that Cather’s tales moved and inspired my generally non-literary students. Both low- and high-skilled writers found Cather accessible as we plowed through “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” “A Wagner Matinée,” and “Paul’s Case.” But the story that elicited the most intense response was Cather’s 1909 “The Enchanted Bluff.” This early tale speaks directly to youthful hopes and imaginings, with its callow lads from a place much like her hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska, enjoying unstructured time together down by a lazy river much like the Republican River of her youth. In their response pages on “The Enchanted Bluff,” my students related to me, without prompting, their own youthful fancies and fantasies. They revealed much about their own educational and career trajectories and successes, as well as the so-far less successful circumstances and outcomes of their childhood peers. Mostly, my students identified with the narrator of “The Enchanted Bluff,” who presumably travelled farthest and became the most successful of the group of boys. On the other hand, my students compared their friends to the narrator’s more place-bound pals; not one of them seemed to relate to those old friends and their narrow, perhaps thwarted lives. Their choices may seem surprising given the life difficulties many of them face, but I believe they reflect the optimism of youth, a theme which reverberates throughout much of Cather’s fiction.

One of the American students who liked the story was Nick, who is majoring in Sustainability, one of our new four-year degrees. Down by the Cache la Poudre River near Fort Collins, Colorado, Nick wrote, he and his junior high friends would make fires and “talk about the story’s [sic] we had heard and how we wanted to live after we left our home town.” They would “sit around and make big plans for the future. We had to have made over 20 plans to do something spectacular and more than 90 percent of those plans never happened. Although we never did them it still gave us something to want and think about.” The echoes with Cather’s story are striking. Nick particularly appreciated that even though the boys in the story never got to the Enchanted Bluff, they “still held on to the plan and the story . . . and then when they saw that they would not succeed they passed it down to his son.” Nick was glad to see that Tip’s boy Bert had become as obsessed with the tale as his father and friends had been years earlier. Nick liked





A 1910 view of the Republican River near Guide Rock, Nebraska, ten miles east of Cather's childhood home of Red Cloud.

that the “passion and obsession” had filtered down to the next generation. For him, the passion of a dream is more important than its fulfillment.

I found my foreign-born students’ reactions to “The Enchanted Bluff” particularly profound in light of personal parallels in their lives. Several related that their peers back in the old country clearly had not achieved as many adult goals as they themselves had in the States; their perceived successes perhaps explain why the increasing barriers to upward mobility so talked of these days do not seem to faze them. The immigrant students—mostly documented and legal—still see the United States as a land of opportunity. The American Dream is alive for them in their own successes, no doubt enhanced by the knowledge that their childhood buddies have often stagnated back home, captives of the realities and expectations of their underprivileged upbringings.

One student, a young man of 25 or so from Russia, came to this country six years ago from, as he puts it, “my old, forgotten-by-God village.” Aptí knew only 100 words of English when he arrived in the States, but in May 2014 completed his associate’s degree from Colorado Mountain College. The boys’ river adventures and speculations about their futures in “The Enchanted Bluff” resonated particularly well with Aptí. Apparently, a common pastime for Aptí and his junior high “peeps” was debating which is the most important profession in the world. He related in his papers that his friend Ilya insisted the best job was being a doctor;

pal Alexander put forth military leadership like being a general; and Aptí himself asserted that (of all things) to be a crane operator was the most useful job to humankind. Now in their mid-twenties, the young men have come down to earth. Ilya works at a smoky casino in Russia watching security cameras and has a growing family. Alexander fled to drugs at age 14 when his mother died. Only Aptí was, as he puts it, “fortunate enough to make it out of there”; he left at age 16 when he started university in Sochi, where the recent Winter Olympics were held. Aptí commented on Cather’s story, noting its counterparts in his own life: “When we talked about who we want[ed] to be when we [grew] up, we did not even wonder how it all could come true; but we thought it would somehow.”

Aptí wrote, “[A]fter reading Willa Cather, these forgotten, deep-down-in-my-mind memories start coming back, which I think is just unbelievable.” He added, “It does not happen right away while reading, but some time later, when I sit down to eat or to smoke a cigarette, I think about the story and remember my own life experience relative to that.” Aptí noted that Cather “makes me unconsciously think . . . about the life situations she presented in her stories, and it surprises me every time to find them similar to something that happened to me in my life.” She places “you in the shoes of the stor[ies]’ characters.”

Cather returned Aptí to the time when he was young with dreams of his future, when the sky was the limit, and he was not constrained by realistic, pragmatic, or mature considerations. For





OTTO AND FRITZ CAUGHT THE FAT, HORNED CATFISH

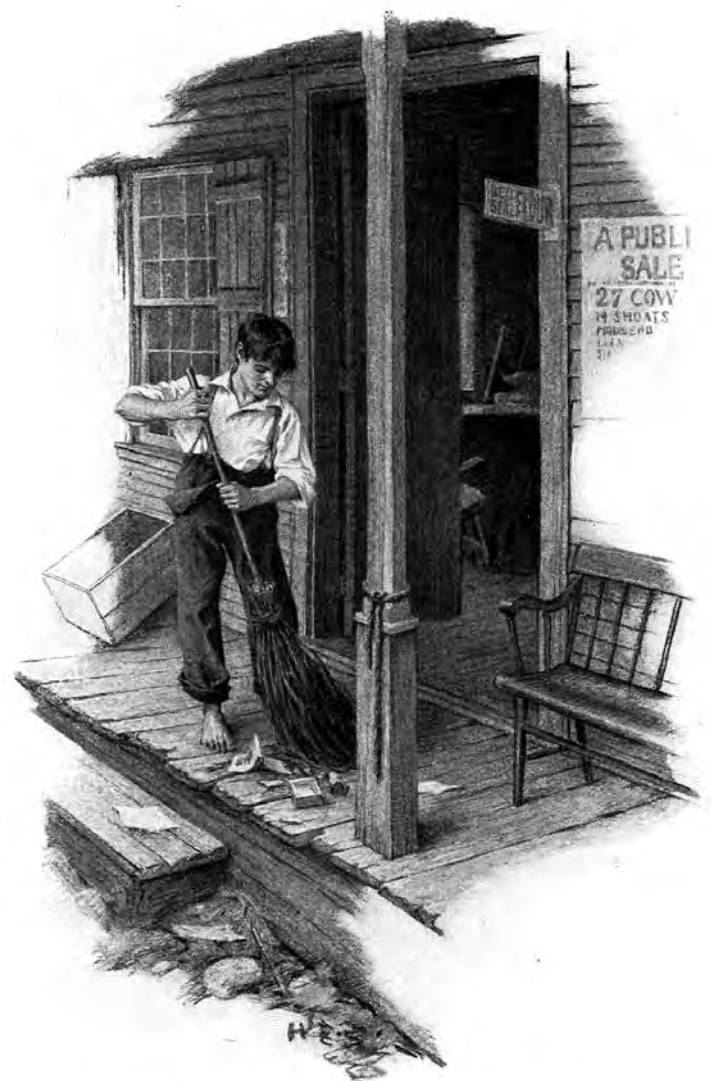
The four captioned illustrations in these pages are by Howard E. Smith and accompanied the first publication of "The Enchanted Bluff" in Harper's Monthly in April 1909.

Aptí, just as for Lucy Gayheart, eagerly contemplating her return to Chicago after a Christmas holiday back in Haverford on the Platte, "the air trembled like a tuning-fork with unimaginable possibilities" (24).

Another foreign-born student, Rosa, noted in her response to "The Enchanted Bluff" that when she visits her old village in Peru, her friends have stayed put and now have many children; none has gone beyond junior high school. Rosa herself has a good job in our valley as a lab technician at the local hospital, but she is going back to school to improve her career options. Without connections, youth in impoverished or corrupt countries often have little opportunity to change their class circumstances much beyond those of their parents. Aptí made his way with what some might call misdirected ingenuity. He went to university at Sochi with no money from home. He wrote to me in a response page later that he supported himself by fixing computers, writing other students' papers for them, and being the liaison between corrupt professors and students who were buying grades. After a year or two at Sochi, Aptí managed a visa to the U.S. and hit the ground

running. Again, the comparison to Lucy Gayheart returning to Chicago seems apt: the rhythm of the train's vibrations reinforced her feelings of "escape, change, chance, with life hurrying forward" (24). Aptí has already exceeded his childhood dreams by getting to the States, succeeding in college, and owning an American car, while his peers in Russia languish. As science fiction writer William Gibson observed long ago, "the future is already here; it's just not very evenly distributed." For Aptí, the U.S. is still very much a land of opportunity.

As an educator, I sometimes wonder why the future plays out so differently for certain of Cather's young characters than others. Similarly, after reading their responses to "The Enchanted Bluff" I wonder, "Why do Aptí, Rosa, and some U.S.-born students succeed in this country while others are left stunted by their circumstances?" An answer might be a mixture of the "winter dreams" of their youth, to use F. Scott Fitzgerald's label from his well-known short story of the same title, combined with temperament, opportunity, and training.



TIP WORKED IN HIS FATHER'S GROCERY STORE



HE WAS ALWAYS OFF SOMEWHERE WITH HIS GUN

Last fall, when I wanted my students to think self-consciously about factors that cause certain groups to succeed more than others, my students and I spent some time with a *New York Times* essay by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld exploring “What Drives Success?” I hoped my charges might apply some of the lessons to their own lives.

Chua—she of *Tiger Mom* fame (or infamy)—and Rubenfeld assert that when individuals or groups have a certain “triple package” of traits, they climb the ladder of upward mobility better than others. The package consists of (1) a sense of personal or cultural confidence or superiority, (2) an insecurity—the urge to prove themselves, and (3) self-restraint and discipline. Whether or not Chua and Rubenfeld have got it right, I maintain that Cather is right—young people need dreams first; then, armed with those dreams (or burdened by them), people learn or acquire attitudes and behaviors. The vivid force that one’s dreams impart must somehow come from within, often ignited by something, someone, or chance.

Early on, even before most of her fiction, Cather looked back to her youth in Red Cloud as a place of ambitious dreams—which

in her case came to fruition. Her early poem “Dedicatory,” to her closest brothers Roscoe and Douglass, recalls their childhood by the riverbank and summons “happy shadows / Of the three who lay and planned at moonrise, / On an island in a western river, / Of the conquest of the world together.” Cather recreates this adolescent realm of promise, the “vanished kingdom” of the poem, often, from the sentimental fantasy of 1902, “The Treasure of Far Island” to 1935’s *Lucy Gayheart*. Cather’s own youthful friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote in a 1949 letter to Mildred Bennett that Cather perceived the importance of early feelings: “[Willa] felt, and said in print several times, and often in conversation, that for her the only part of life which made a real impression on her imagination and emotion was what happened to her before the age of twenty” (quoted in Bennett 151). In an essay titled “Willa Cather, Learner” Thomas J. Lyon recognizes “. . . what was crucial in Cather’s developing years was that there was no lid on discovery, no limit on the confidence one could feel in one’s own mind” (94). Lyon perceives this presence of an unfettered imagination in Cather characters Nellie Birdseye,



HE LED US INTO MARSHES AND STUBBLE FIELDS





"Their dreams speak to them . . ." *Enchanted Mesa, 1929, by Carl Redin (1892–1944), from the private collection of the painter Billy Schenck, exhibited at the Tucson Museum of Art in 2004.*

Claude Wheeler, and Niel Herbert: "In their youthfulness, discovery shimmers just ahead of them" (97). Certainly for the boys of "The Enchanted Bluff," no matter how their futures would unfold, anticipated discoveries were more real on that summer night than all of the practical barriers they faced. Their hoped-for futures were, as Lyon writes, "the almost felt, mysterious something just ahead" (94).

Dreams, of course, are often derailed. Many children engage in daydreaming and fantasy en route to adult realities, but their visions too often do not reflect their eventual position in life. The truth of Cather's coda for "The Enchanted Bluff" is poignant. Indeed, Cather gives readers plenty of young romantics whose dreams are not realized, from Paul in "Paul's Case" to Marie Shabata in *O Pioneers!* to Tom Outland in *The Professor's House*. Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours* and Lucy Gayheart get a taste of self-actualization, only to have it dashed by seemingly uncontrollable or random circumstances. Even characters who make it out of places like Red Cloud and are successful by the standards of the world—Harvey Merrick in "The Sculptor's Funeral" and Jim Burden in *My Ántonia*, for example—often have diminished lives. Yet there are also Thea Kronborg and Anton Rosicky, who achieved satisfactions even greater than they were able to dream.

Not surprisingly, my students are similar. Some who have seemed so bright and promising leave college and go off track, caught up in various by-ways: pot-induced slacker-dom, unexpected family responsibilities, a beguiling job offer. From what I've observed, with students whose upwardly mobile options are shaky or marginal, any setback, small or large, can be fatal to their trajectory: a DUI, a pregnancy, financial problems, a couple of bad grades, car trouble, or a move across country to nurse a sick relative—a task that somehow falls on them even if they have a substantial extended family. Such anecdotal tales seem

to confirm community college professor Kate Geiselman's recent claim in *Salon* that most community college students—and by extension most young millennial Americans today, especially those of color—are falling through the cracks of upward mobility. She decries community college administrators who, at graduation ceremonies, trot out poster students of color or disadvantaged backgrounds who have 4.0 GPAs, as if to imply that anyone can overcome adversity.

Many commentators have drawn parallels between the pre-union, pre-labor law Gilded Age and our own "99% vs. 1%" era. They toss out statistics showing it is more difficult to rise through education and other avenues now than it was some decades ago. Geiselman and other jeremiahs are probably correct that the odds are worse for advancement these days. Nonetheless, at my community college, optimists like many of my students (and me, I might add), still believe in upward mobility. I see plenty of students who, despite being from circumstances narrowed and constrained by economic, family, and cultural pressures, still have dreams and manage to fulfill them. Young or middle-aged, they are psychologically and cognitively able to take advantage of wider opportunities, new technology, and more expansive ways of thinking. They plow ahead, term by term, rent check by rent check, first earning

their associate's degree with us and then going on to four-year schools and fulfilling jobs. There is enough of that to keep me positive about this country and our educational pathways.

Ultimately, as Cather knew, Youth is youth. The green aspirations of my sometimes provincial and untraveled U.S.-born students and their hopeful immigrant counterparts are not much different from those of Cather's boys by the Republican River in the 1880s. And the reasons they sometimes get off course turn out to be not so different from those of Cather's river boys (as the Sandtown lads were afflicted with alcoholism, family responsibilities, the seduction of materialism, a railroad accident—not unlike my students' problems). My students who succeed always have dreams first, and then with willpower and grit stick to them and learn how to achieve them. Their far-off Enchanted Bluff is like the "point of silver light" from the winter evening's first star that overwhelms Lucy Gayheart. Their dreams speak to them, as the star spoke to Lucy: "like a signal, [it] released another kind of life and feeling" (11). The "flash of understanding" may last "but a moment" (12); nevertheless, it helps them focus on their goals, not their barriers. My former student Jeremy Tafoya, now thriving in math, physics, and German at a private university in Denver after putting himself through Colorado Mountain College with little family support or understanding of his accomplishments, says that when he was introduced to the world of ideas and knowledge at CMC, it blew him away. "I just have to keep learning," he exults now. "It makes me feel that I want my brain to be like a well—the deepest well in the world. People can drink from my well but it will never run dry." Jeremy's persistence and hunger to learn echo Chua and Rubenfeld's prescriptions for success and also Cather's descriptions of youthful yearnings.

As Cather knew, dreams light fires under us. It doesn't matter if Lucy's silver star is a fanciful vision or if the legend of the Enchanted Bluff is fictitious. Maybe Tip's cherished artifacts in the story are not really from the Holy Land, nor are the great cities of the boys' dreams as wonderful as they believe. A personal, sacred dream is enough for many; it helps bolster those who get away and, interestingly, offers some solace for those who don't. My students recognize that Cather's ending to "The Enchanted Bluff" is ambiguous. None of the boys makes it to the Enchanted Bluff, and they have all known disappointments. Cather, however, does not dwell on the negative. Percy is wealthy. There is no indication that Otto and Fritz Hassler are unhappy as the town tailors. Tip's difficulties are in the past, and he believes he has "come into easy water." Even Arthur, who dies before he is twenty-

five, remains "unabashed" and his eyes stay "clear and warm" (96). Many of Cather's word choices for her story's final four paragraphs have negative connotations: none, nowhere, lost, died, untidy, not steady, stopped, broken. But she balances these with positive words: succeeded, clear, warm, laugh, comfortable, easy, revived, romance. The dream of seeing the bluff has survived twenty years; the narrator and Tip "quite revived the romance of the lone red rock" (96). Not forgotten, it now lives in Tip's son. The expectation that Tip and his son will visit the Enchanted Bluff is probably unrealistic, but recall that my student Nick wants to believe it.

The castles in the air Cather and her characters created on lonely river islands remain, in both dreams and realities. Sparks still stimulate my more determined students. In the contest between imagination and reality, imagination can win even against the stark truth of poverty, family responsibilities, sickness, or poor choices. Despite national economic trouble and, arguably, the successful machinations of the "1%," my students are fiercely reenacting the American Dream. Contradicting gloom-and-doomers, people in my corner of rural Colorado keep the American Dream alive and well. Their enchanted bluff remains attainable and has lived on into subsequent generations.

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New Beginnings for National Willa Cather Center



Members of the WCF Board of Governors are joined by Executive Director Ashley Olson, consultant Judy Keller, historian Richard Norton Smith, and architect George Haecker for a ceremonial groundbreaking of what will soon become the National Willa Cather Center.

The Cather Foundation held a festive ceremonial groundbreaking in June 2015, during our Spring Conference, on what will become the National Willa Cather Center. Next year, Red Cloud's historic Moon Block will come alive again as a vibrant arts and education center and home of the Foundation's archive.

The impetus for the project—dreamed of for decades and in active development for more than 10 years—is the creation of

the best possible preservation and research environment for an extensive and growing collection of rare books, archival papers, photographs, textiles, and artifacts once belonging to Cather and the Cather family or associated with her circle. The restoration will also provide new exhibit space, classroom facilities, and backstage facilities for our Red Cloud Opera House. Thanks to our supporters for helping make this happen.

Contributors to this Issue

Kenneth Bé is Head of Paintings Conservation for the Nebraska State Historical Society's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center. In addition to his work on *Sleigh with Trailing Wolves*, he has recently completed restoration of the Cather Foundation's *Water Carriers*, a painting by Achsah Barlow Brewster formerly owned by Willa Cather and Edith Lewis.

Mallory Boykin is completing a master's degree at the University of South Alabama. Upon graduation, she plans to teach high school English. For the past six years, she has been the assistant editor for *Mobile Bay Magazine*, a regional lifestyles publication on the Gulf Coast.

Max Despain holds the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and is Associate Professor of English at the U.S. Air Force Academy. She studies the role of memory in identity formation and specializes in autobiography and women writing from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. She teaches seminars on topics such as American literature, American modernism, food in literature, and minority literature, as well as a core senior capstone course on war literature and speech.

Amy Doherty Mohr teaches courses in American literature, focusing on themes related to regionalism, mobility, and immigration, for the Department of English and American Studies at LMU Munich. She has published articles in *Teaching Cather* and *The European Journal of American Studies* and is editor of *The Collected Stories of Maria Cristina Mena* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997).

Michela Schulthies is an adjunct instructor of composition at Utah State University, where she recently completed a master's degree in English. This fall she will be one of the co-directors of a new Science Writing Center at Utah State.

Christine Hill Smith is Associate Professor of Communication/Humanities at Colorado Mountain College, Spring Valley Campus (Glenwood Springs). She teaches a range of humanities courses as well as literature surveys and composition. Her dissertation was on Mary Hallock Foote, but she has returned to her first academic love, Willa Cather, for recent presentations at the Western Literature Association conferences.



In Appreciation: Charlene Hoschouer (1940–2014)



For many years one of the most loyal, energetic, and interesting personalities at Willa Cather events in Red Cloud was Charlene Hoschouer. While we have missed her physical presence due to her battle with Alzheimer’s Disease and her death on June 3, 2014, we treasure her memory and continue to be warmed by her legacy.

Charlene and her husband Doug came to Red Cloud as owners and publishers of the *Red Cloud Chief*. Through news stories, features, event listings, Charlene’s personal column, and the space they provided to columnists like Beverly Cooper, the *Chief* was a dependable source for all things Cather. As a former teacher and a third-generation journalist, Charlene brought skill and personality to this work. She was as comfortable promoting the small town she loved as she was talking with scholars.

Charlene and Doug took on an even bigger challenge when they decided to restore the Cather Second Home, the large home Willa Cather’s parents moved to after she left Nebraska. This was Willa’s Nebraska headquarters during her regular visits, and the home her nieces and nephews knew as Grandmother and Grandfather’s house. After the Cather family’s time there, the house had served as a hospital and apartment house, but it had been empty for several years when Doug and Charlene stepped up to the task of preserving it. Jim Southwick, Cather Foundation

Advisory Council member and son of Willa Cather’s niece Helen Cather Southwick, praises “the courage and determination Doug and Charlene displayed in taking on the renovation.” They found just the right balance of preserving the house and making it livable as their home and a bed and breakfast for visitors. Doug and

Charlene cultivated a friendship with Helen Cather Southwick, thus learning important details about the house and bringing Cather family history home. This friendship brought much joy to all involved. Jim Southwick acknowledges his gratitude to Doug and Charlene “for having provided my mother with the highlight of her last years, the opportunity to return to the house where she and Mary Virginia Auld served tea to their Aunt Willa.” Doug and Charlene recorded Helen’s memories in an invaluable booklet, *The House According to Helen*, through which people can take a personal and historic tour of the house and its memories.



Thanks to the work, vision, and investment of the Hoschouers, this magnificent home survives as an architectural and historic treasure. Now owned by the Cather Foundation, it serves as an anchor to the Cather historical site and a place where visitors enjoy good hospitality while soaking up tradition.

Charlene’s memorial service was held at Grace Episcopal Church, the historic Cather family church only a block from the Second Home; the service was conducted by Fr. Steve Ryan, former director of the Cather Foundation. She is survived by Doug and their daughter and son-in-law, Nancy and Mark Krejci.

Jim Southwick remembers, “Mother often expressed a desire to visit Red Cloud, by which she really meant her grandfather’s house.” Many people also remember it as “Charlene’s house” and still hear the excitement in her voice as she talked about it. She left a significant and lasting legacy; the Cather Foundation, her many friends, and Cather fans everywhere honor her memory.

THE HOUSE ACCORDING TO HELEN

A tour of the Cather Second Home as recalled by
Helen Cather Southwick



BY DOUG AND CHARLENE HOSCHOUER



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The town of Black Hawk, as illustrated in the new Kyrgyz edition of My Ántonia.



Willa Cather and the Connection to Kyrgyzstan

The Willa Cather Archive shows *My Ántonia* translated into 33 languages. Now that number will be 34. The novel, with the enthusiastic blessing of the Willa Cather Foundation, was just released in the Kyrgyz language as part of a nationwide nonprofit reading program in Kyrgyzstan. It was my pleasure to have had a role in this event. Here's a bit of the story.

Gripping the armrests of the VIP coach as the driver careened down the undulating road, I kept an eye out for horses in the fields. The upscale van was for the colonel, my wing commander, but I was part of the weekly meetings at the U.S. Embassy on the other side of town. In the months since I deployed to Kyrgyzstan and became the public affairs officer for the Transit Center at Manas, I had learned to enjoy the scenery on the 40-minute drive that went from open agricultural fields to city suburbs to Soviet-era architecture. I thought of New York City each week as we passed through a different part of the mile-long park, Erkindik (Freedom) Prospect, watching people wander along the wide pedestrian way, ancient oak trees shading prams, games of chess, sculptures.

But my favorite part of the drive was always the fields. They spread out against a backdrop of 14,000-foot mountains, but even so, the flat, high plain had the feel of Cather. Maybe it was Joseph Urgo's kind gift of an Armed Forces Edition of *My Ántonia* the week before I left on my deployment that put me in the mindset to read the landscape as a version of Cather. Or maybe it was the people in plain traditional garb—men herding goats from horseback alongside women in the fields wearing headscarves and skirts with leggings, and the donkeys pulling carts, all called to mind the Bohemians in Cather's classic novel.

One morning, as I waited for my meeting, I was reading the spines of a small collection of books in the embassy public affairs office. With a slow dawning, I realized I was looking at a translation of *Huckleberry Finn*, but not in Russian, the current business language of Kyrgyzstan. I learned from my colleagues that the U.S. Embassy helped support a reading program to inspire young Kyrgyz towards a passion for reading in the Kyrgyz language.

I said, "I have the perfect book for you to translate."

It took just an easy email to the Willa Cather Foundation to connect them with Cholpon Bakirova, who runs the American Corners and Centers in libraries around Kyrgyzstan, working to bring English language materials to Kyrgyz youth. And after that, I was out of the picture. But Cather and *My Ántonia* were coming to Kyrgyzstan.

Fast forward to this summer, when the Executive Director of the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Kyrgyzstan, Oleg Bondarenko, sent our own Executive Director, Ashley Olson, an email describing the successful translation of *My Ántonia*. (And



The front and back cover of the Kyrgyz edition of My Ántonia, published this year.

the Cather Foundation now holds the book in its permanent collection of Cather editions and translations.)

Excusing his English, Bondarenko described the nonprofit project that gives away copies of the book: "The book will be distributed free of charge to schools and local libraries in Kyrgyzstan. We want to promote good literature in our country, to instill in children a taste for reading."

To promote that taste for reading, they hired the best translator in the country. Turusbek Madylyby was an honorary fellow in writing at the University of Iowa in 2010, won a 2011 American award for outstanding work in promoting reading and cultural values, and, most recently, was honored by the Kyrgyz government for his translations of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Although he found the novel a bit slow at first, he enthusiastically wrote me that, "When I went on, I realized that *My Ántonia* was a great novel. I worked with passion, and when I finished, I was an ardent admirer of it."

To add to the novel's attraction for young readers, the publisher also illustrated the Kyrgyz edition. Zlata Koksál, a woman from Ukraine who now lives in Turkey and illustrated the book, describes Willa Cather as an "earthly romantic." She is passionate about the nonprofit organization's role: "Our calling is to attract young readers, regardless of religion or national affiliation, to the idea that love, faith in one's neighbor, and the desire to *live*—will always be the main tenets of human relations."

Bondarenko insists that while his country is small, with only about 3.5 million people who speak Kyrgyz, "We are delighted that the people of Kyrgyzstan can get acquainted with the work of such a great writer like Willa Cather."

Max Despain



