

Willa Cather REVIEW

Volume 63 | No. 2 | Summer 2022

ONE OF OURS

By
WILLA
CATHER
*Author of
"Youth and the
Bright Medusa"*



ALFRED A.
KNOPF

ONE OF OURS By WILLA CATHER

Author of "YOUTH AND THE BRIGHT MEDUSA"



MORE and more have we come to recognize in Willa Cather our greatest living woman novelist. ONE OF OURS, a novel to which she has devoted nearly three years (she is one of the few writers of today who refuses to be hurried) is her first long novel since MY ANTONIA (1918), and shows her at the very fullness of her powers. Nothing that Miss Cather has ever written has quite prepared one for this book—and yet everything that she has written has been a preparation for it. Here, you will say, is an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age.

All the magic of Miss Cather's subtle and flexible style, all the passion of her daring, impatient mind, are lavished upon the presentation of a single figure—a sort of young Hamlet of the prairies—and upon the haunting story of his struggle with life and fate. ONE OF OURS is the intimate story of a young man's life. Claude Wheeler's stormy youth, his enigmatic marriage, and the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of the boy's nature, are told with almost epic simplicity. But behind the personal drama there is an ever deepening sense of national drama, of national character, working itself out through individuals and their destiny.

Alfred A. Knopf

ALFRED A. KNOPF



PUBLISHER, N. Y.

THEY WERE MORTAL, BUT THEY WERE UNCONQUERABLE.

WILLA CATHER

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On the cover:

“Battle of Cantigny. Early in the morning of the 28th of May, 1918, the Americans launched their attack, and within 45 minutes they had obtained all their objectives.” From *The People’s War Book: History, Cyclopedic and Chronology of the Great World War* (1919).

“They were mortal...”: Photograph by Mark A. R. Facknitz of Cather’s text used in the World War I memorial in the District of Columbia.

On this page:

No Man’s Land, Flanders Field, France, 1919, by W. L. King. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

U.S. No. 54, north of El Paso, Texas (detail), 1938, by Dorothea Lange. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



Letter from the Executive Director Ashley Olson

In the year prior to the release of *One of Ours*, Willa Cather wrote to her publisher Alfred Knopf that she wanted the book to be “regarded as the story of a boy’s life.” Cather insinuates that the mention of war would result in readers being “bored with it before it appears.”

Predictably, Cather got her way. When the book appeared in 1922, Knopf’s description on the dust jacket describes *One of Ours* as “the intimate story of a young man’s life.” The teaser hints at a larger plot without mentioning war. Knopf references simply an “ever deepening sense of national drama . . . working itself out through individuals and their destiny.”

Life; the period from birth to death, at its dictionary simplest. But viewing life strictly through a lens of time overlooks the myriad feelings and experiences that are distinctive features of . . . life. Even Cather’s protagonist, Claude Wheeler, recognizes that there is more to life than simply being alive, observing “if we’ve

only got once to live, it seems like there ought to be something—well, something splendid about life, sometimes.”

I’ll return to splendid (and you’ll encounter it often in these pages). Truth be told, it was difficult to accomplish the simple task of writing this letter. Alongside competing work assignments, the news cycle in recent weeks included headlines about the war in Ukraine, inflation, mass shootings, drug overdoses, climate change, and protests on competing sides of the abortion issue. But this is life. When these issues fade, new ones will emerge. History tells us so. This is the very reason that finding something splendid is not only necessary, but essential, for living our best lives.

In recent weeks, my splendid moments included observing artist Tim Youd retype Cather’s *The Song of the Lark* from settings featured in the novel. I overheard education staff facilitating a “guess the gadget” activity with elementary students using artifacts from the collection, and I watched artisans assemble materials for restoration of the Cather Second Home’s front porch. Splendid moments like these ensure that the National Willa Cather Center is a *living* memorial. I’m grateful to everyone who supports our work, and I hope you are experiencing something splendid in return.



Letter from the President Robert Thacker

Novelist A. S. Byatt once pointed to Alice Munro’s story “Dulse” (1980) where Willa Cather “appears as a riddling object of contemplation.” She goes on to guess “that Munro has learned something from that other local writer who transcended her local preoccupations without betraying them.” Truly, these descriptions of Cather have stuck with me since I first read them in 1996—I especially like “riddling object of contemplation”—and more than that I fondly remember Byatt’s wonderful 2007 keynote address to the International Cather Seminar in France. She certainly gets Cather right here and, for that matter, Munro too.

I highlight these connections in this my first president’s letter as an initial impulse: as my reading and research life has gone on I have found myself concentrating, almost completely, on these two writers and on their works. Odd, probably, but also wholly happy. I feel lucky to have found each of them. I first found Cather about 1972 and then Munro in 1973 and I have never looked back. For me, each of them has long been—and remains—a “riddling

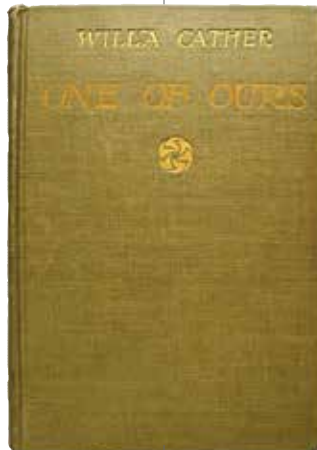
object of contemplation.” Artists to read and think about daily, to savor, to wonder over, to appreciate and debate. Each of them wise with the wisdom of being, each an impeccable craftswoman, each driven ever and always to make and to shape their writings in sharper and better ways. Each too, as a reader follows the trajectory of her writing, creates worlds in which recognizable human beings live lives.

With Cather, I began by seeing her as a prairie fiction writer, a Nebraska writer from Red Cloud, an emigrant there from Virginia. That she still is, and probably is still the best prairie writer ever, but since the 1980s I have moved on to other versions of her, to other visions of her (poet, journalist, magazine executive, biographical subject). She is all that and more, and each day brings new discoveries. In Munro’s “Dulse” there is a character—one based on a person Munro once met on Grand Manan, a person also met by Cather scholars who visited the island—and at one point he says, “I read and reread” Cather, “and my admiration grows. It simply grows.” True enough, we agree. Cather, a “riddling object of contemplation,” repays any interest, and she seems to do so most fully in these divided times. An artist who seems to live on and is, always, so very much worth what we all do on her behalf at the Foundation.



Reading *One of Ours* in 2022

More than a year ago, as we began to plan an issue commemorating Willa Cather's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1922 novel, *One of Ours*, World War I and many of the events of the novel seemed very far away. As we struggled through the second year of a global pandemic and confronted various catastrophes and controversies in our national life, I wondered how Cather's novel did and didn't feel contemporary to readers, and I invited eleven Cather scholars to respond to that question. Their varied—and very interesting—responses follow, and we hope they will offer you some new perspectives for reading *One of Ours* in its centenary year.



All eleven of these essays were submitted no later than early February 2022. By the end of that month, we were all being bombarded daily by increasingly horrific news of the Russian invasion and attack of Ukraine. Given the possibilities of television and internet coverage of this current war—unimaginable to Cather and her *One of Ours* characters, who followed World War I through newspapers—we can now follow this European war more closely than previous generations were able to do. For most of us, in fact, the war in Ukraine is now impossible to evade.

I'm writing this in mid-April; these words won't be available for you to read for a few more weeks, and who knows what will be happening in Ukraine and the surrounding countries then. But today, watching yet another hour of television coverage, I'm reminded again and again of *One of Ours*. In France, Cather's protagonist Claude Wheeler finds himself in a country that, like

Ukraine, has been occupied by an invading army. Refugees are common. The television coverage I'm seeing often emphasizes children and broken—or destroyed—families. Remember, for example, Cather's portrait of the little orphaned refugee girl from Belgium, who will speak only her Belgian language, Walloon, and is able to express love only to the kittens in the barn of the French household where she is being sheltered. Or the family of children who are trying to return their ill mother to her French hometown so that she may die there. Their love for each other is obvious—except for the despised baby their mother is nursing, who was fathered by a German soldier who presumably raped her.

On my television, a newswoman warns that the coming images, of dead civilian bodies and mass graves in Ukraine, will be very disturbing, but she feels they must be displayed to give us the full story of this war. Just so, Cather gives us the “pile of corpses . . . thrown one on top of another like sacks of flour,” the “stench,” the “wet, buzzing flies,” using sensory images that even my television cannot (yet) supply. And of course, in Ukraine as well as the war-torn France where Claude Wheeler dies, we encounter the contrast of “heroic” ideals—he and his men are “mortal, but unconquerable,” Claude thinks as he dies from enemy bullets—and despair, which may result in the veteran suicides that Claude's mother mourns at the novel's end. As you continue to follow the war news of 2022, perhaps you will conclude, as I have, that yes, Willa Cather got it all in.

Ann Romines, Issue Editor

Music in *One of Ours*: The Sounds of a Ruined Past

John H. Flannigan

An aspect of *One of Ours* seldom noted in the last hundred years is its striking musicality. Whether live, recorded, instrumental, or vocal, music permeates Cather's novel. Hymns, a classical concerto, an opera intermezzo, folk songs, jazz, wartime hits, patriotic anthems, Sousa marches, even a circus calliope: all play a role. Collectively, however, they signify not a colorful tapestry of sounds but a confused world being torn apart.

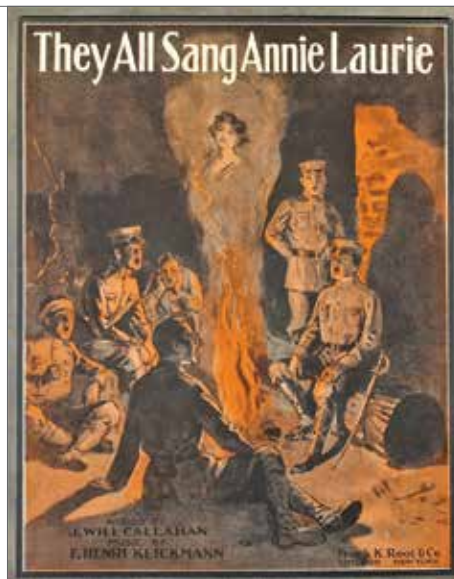
Appropriately, this jarringly musical novel also features Claude Wheeler, one of Cather's least musical main characters, who confesses, “I don't know one note from another” (89). But at a crucial moment, he reacts to a song, and the moment

exemplifies for me Cather's artistry. Bound for France aboard the *Anchises*, he marvels one evening that his rebirth as a soldier is as impressive as John the Baptist's exultant claim, “*Out of these stones can my Father raise up seed unto Abraham.*” Then a song makes him think of Nebraska: “Downstairs the men began singing ‘Annie Laurie.’ Where were those summer evenings when he used to sit dumb by the windmill, wondering what to do with his life?” (377). Scarred by his collapsed marriage, Claude must be chuckling at song lyrics comparing a woman's voice to “winds in summer sighing” and promising, “For bonnie Annie Laurie, I'd lay me doon and die.”



“Annie Laurie,” as Cather certainly knew, had been a favorite of soldiers for decades. An 1856 poem, “The Song of the Camp,” by the American author Bayard Taylor (1825–1878), depicts English, Scottish, and Irish soldiers of the Crimean War as they recall a woman on the eve of their deaths: “They sang of love, and not of fame; / Forgot was Britain’s glory: / Each heart recalled a different name, / But all sang ‘Annie Laurie’” (Taylor 86). World War I troops still sang it, too, as evidenced by a 1915 American song, “They All Sang ‘Annie Laurie’” (see image). “All,” that is, except Claude, who hears in it only a painful reminder of his wasted youth.

Cather juxtaposes musings on the Gospel with a sentimental song and marks a haunting moment as Claude embraces a seemingly noble enterprise while spurning his past and his shipmates’ nostalgia. The novel’s wrenching conclusion, however, suggests he dies for a corrupt world that lacks



Sheet music cover, “They All Sang ‘Annie Laurie,’” music by F. Henri Klickmann, lyrics by J. Will Callahan. Frank K. Root & Co., 1915. Author’s collection.

a moral center. *One of Ours* reminds us in 2022 that the countless wars fought since its publication have similarly stirred seductive dreams only to shatter them and heap agony on soldiers and civilians alike for generations. These wars, like Claude’s, have sunk to new depths of cruelty and stupidity and even robbed the gentle songs of bygone eras of their sweetness, turning them into unbearable reminders of a ruined past.

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After the Victory: Veterans Return Home

Becky Faber

Growing up in rural Iowa, the daughter of a farmer, I was aware that my father, not unlike Cather’s Claude Wheeler, had served in the Army. Like many of my uncles and neighbors, he fought in the second “World War.” Unlike Claude, Dad came home alive. As I came of age, boys I knew were being deployed to Vietnam. Some died in battle, at least one by suicide after his return. As an adult, I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where I wrote a dissertation about *One of Ours*. While serving as a career counselor at UNL, I learned of a campus event, the Ruck March, initiated to raise awareness of the fact that, although veterans make up approximately 9.7 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 22 percent of all the suicides in the country. Since 2001, the suicide rate for U.S. veteran males has increased 30.5 percent, and that of U.S. veteran females has increased 85.2 percent. Veteran suicide rates are highest during the first three years after leaving the military. For the Ruck March, held before the annual Nebraska-Iowa football game, marchers carry twenty-two pounds or twenty-two items of personal belongings as they walk halfway (150 miles) between their campuses to meet and exchange the game ball.

Shocked by the numbers of veteran suicides that the march publicizes, I wanted to help, partly because I have had so many relatives, friends, and former students who have served our country. Just donating crackers and trail mix for the marchers

didn’t seem enough. I decided to assemble a collection of my poems and a short story in a book, *One Small Photo* (published in 2017), and to donate a portion of the profits to the UNL Student Veteran Association to assist with Ruck March expenses.

The last pages of *One of Ours* focus on Mrs. Wheeler’s sadness about veteran suicides, the “survivors of incredible dangers” who “quietly die by their own hand” (605) in the years just after the war’s end in 1918, a sadness that we must continue to share more than one hundred years later. For many veterans of World War I, the war experience resulted in behaviors like those that Cather writes of Sgt. Hicks exhibiting when he is back home: his face taking on “a slightly cynical expression” (602) and often wearing “an expression which will puzzle his friends” (603). According to Chester E. Baker, a World War I veteran, “we were just a bunch of homesick doughboys, sickened by the blood we’d shed and the friends we’d lost” (90). The after-effects of war were haunting, Baker writes: “None of us had escaped without small wounds, gas inhalation or the emotional trauma they called shell-shock then. Most of us would suffer for the rest of our days with recurrent dysentery and nightmares” (125). Shell-shock, the effects of mustard gas, survivor’s guilt, unemployment and other economic problems, marital issues, body wounds, loss of appendages, vision, or hearing—all contributed to the challenges facing veterans as they returned. Jennifer D. Keene states that veterans “faced the challenges of reconnecting with their



families, finding a job, and putting the war behind them” (181). Few resources were available for them.

The American Legion was created as a direct result of post-World War I needs. According to the Legion’s website, it “evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I” and was chartered by Congress on September 16, 1919. Initial eligibility was limited to “U.S. soldiers, sailors, and Marines who served honorably between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918” (Wheat 206). On March 12, 1920, an “Application for Post of American Legion” was submitted to the Department Commander of the American Legion for Nebraska for Red Cloud, Nebraska, Post Number 238. In August 1921, the Legion supported a move by Congress to consolidate World War I veterans programs into a new body, the U. S. Veterans Bureau, now the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Thus, the darkness that Mrs. Wheeler foresaw for returning veterans began to be addressed by the support offered by the organizations established by and for them, during the time that Cather was writing *One of Ours*. Because it was not established until after World War I, the Veterans Administration could not compile accurate statistics relating to veteran suicide following the Great War.

Since 2016, the VA has annually issued the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report, in which veteran suicide rates are compared to the non-veteran adult population. The 2021 report covers information from 2001–2019. With such information about the veteran suicide rate available in print and online, the public can readily access critical figures. From 2001 to 2019 the average number of veteran suicides per day rose 4.5 percent; in 2019, 6,261 veterans died by suicide. In the age range of 18–34 (Claude Wheeler’s group), veterans “die by suicide at a 1.65 times higher rate than other Veteran age groups” (13). The 2021 report states that suicide prevention necessarily “remains a top priority for VA” and “is currently being enacted through the most significant amount of resources ever appropriated and apportioned to VA suicide prevention” (13). The movement to educate the public encourages all of us to realize that the responsibility for addressing veteran suicides does not belong solely to the VA. As family, friends, and fellow citizens of these men and women returning from service, we should help them reclaim and continue their lives at home, as I am so grateful that my father was able to do.

At this writing, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 800-273-8255. Effective July 16, 2022, the three-digit number 988 will route calls to the National Lifeline.

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One Small Photo

One small photo,
an Iowa farm boy
sharply pressed in Army khaki,
World War II
whirling around him

A studio photograph,
one formal frozen moment,
bluish boy eyes
gazing home
dreaming of corn and quiet,
his mother’s meals,
land needing his hands

An Army photo,
evidence that Uncle Sam owns him,
has given him
to a war seemingly without end,
the one following
The War to End
All Wars

One of the lucky ones,
he will come home,
although he cannot know this (only dream it),
daily servicing planes that will take off
but often not return,
daily awaiting word of his brother,
a POW,
whose weight will drop to eighty-six pounds
(his torture: dreams of their mother’s meals)

They will be re-united at their town’s July 4 celebration,
one hitchhiking for hours to arrive in time,
impatient to see survival in his brother’s face

One small photo,
one small memory,
proof of the smallness
of history



Becky Faber’s *One Small Photo* is available at the National Willa Cather Center’s shop in Red Cloud, Nebraska or online at willacather.org.

Eleven years ago, my wife and I took a trip to northern New Mexico, where we drove the famous “Enchanted Circle” near Taos, an eighty-five-mile loop that starts in the high desert near the Rio Grande Gorge and then climbs into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. When we reached the ski resort of Angel Fire, we encountered a road sign for what was then called “Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park.”

We had to check it out. At the end of a small road lined with American flags, atop a windswept ridge, stood the park’s centerpiece—a nondenominational chapel of eerie, otherworldly design, dazzlingly white, with long curved walls rising to a shark-toothed peak nearly fifty feet high.

The visitors center explained what we were looking at: in 1968, the death of David Westphall, a Marine Lieutenant who volunteered to serve in Vietnam, inspired his parents and surviving brother to build the chapel in his honor. At the same time, the structure functioned as a memorial to all Americans killed in Vietnam, as well as a symbol of the family’s hopes for world peace. None other than future Secretary of State and presidential candidate John Kerry spoke at the chapel’s dedication ceremony, which was held more than a decade before the official National Vietnam Veterans Memorial (aka “the Wall”) opened in Washington, D.C.

Surprisingly, no one had written a history of the memorial at Angel Fire, and so I impulsively decided to do so. The story fascinated me. Because of its high-altitude setting, which added considerably to the cost of construction and upkeep, the chapel presented endless challenges to its founders and nearly left them bankrupt. I was struck by the Westphalls’ nearly superhuman determination to make their commemorative dream a lasting reality and by the sometimes-toxic effect that this noble project had on all three family members. I’ve found few stories of memorialization more moving, dramatic, or complex.

But what really hooked me was David Westphall, whom I came to know in part through the letters he sent home from Vietnam. Athletic, but drawn to the humanities, David had a tempestuous relationship with his demanding father, adored his mother, and felt throughout most of his adolescence and early adulthood that something in his life was missing. After a series of disappointments and a broken marriage, he joined the war in



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire, New Mexico.
Photograph by Robert Rook.

Vietnam as a committed Cold Warrior determined to save the Free World one domino at a time. And he stayed that way. Just weeks before his death in an ambush at age twenty-nine, he signed up for a second tour of duty. As David’s letters make clear, war became a refuge, despite its dangers and discomfort, from the insecurities that had plagued him throughout his earlier life. In war, he found deep meaning and even happiness.

Sound familiar? I bring up the story of David Westphall because, like the fictional story of Claude Wheeler, it points to a profound truth that Willa Cather understood keenly: war, which carries its own culture, fundamentally

changes the way that we construct reality. In 1992, psychologist Lawrence LeShan made this point in his study *The Psychology of War: Comprehending Its Mystique and Its Madness*. LeShan posited that during times of armed conflict, *Homo sapiens* shift into nothing less than a different mode of cognition. Our peacetime construction of reality allows for subtlety and contradiction—to the point that meaning can seem elusive and existence shallow. In contrast, war simplifies everything, which can make it seductive, as it obviously was for David Westphall. Meaning now comes easily. There is us, and there is them. Our side is familiar and virtuous. Theirs utterly alien and evil. To be at war is to be caught up in a collective understanding of reality that is, in LeShan’s view, fundamentally “mythic,” an understanding so removed from peacetime reasoning that it can carry a narcotic effect, a terrible high (60).

That high and its often-sour aftermath are the subjects of Chris Hedges’s acclaimed meditation on war-addiction, *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (2002). A veteran war correspondent, Hedges was on hand as the former Yugoslavia descended into chaos in the 1990s. What he witnesses there was sanctioned mass violence at its most grotesque. And yet Hedges could also see that the Balkan Wars carried a dreadful attraction for their participants. War, he writes, “can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living” (3). Afterward, as the drug wears off and the trivial and banal flood back into one’s life, war can leave behind a powerful, irrational nostalgia. Or, as also sometimes happens, profound feelings of shame and betrayal become war’s legacy once its perverse magic fades.



Cather knew all this decades before LeShan's and Hedges's ideas became common currency. She intuited how war works—and how we do the work of war cognitively when we're held in its grip—as she read G. P. Cather's letters from France. I've read those letters as well, and I was reminded of them decades later when I accidentally happened upon the story of David Westphall. Everything LeShan and Hedges talk about is there in *One of Ours*, and their insights account for all the features of the novel once judged defects. For example, Claude's rapture in the final two books simply reflects his war-induced shift into a different way of looking at the world, a shift that LeShan and Hedges help us to understand. No wonder

so many American veterans of the Great War saw themselves in Claude and admired Cather for her accuracy.

Twenty years after focusing nearly an entire book on *One of Ours*, I remain more impressed than ever by Cather's recognition and analysis of war's beckoning call and its false promise of new life and new meaning.

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Medical Sexism in *One of Ours*

Sarah Clere

Enid Royce is one of the most unsympathetic characters in *One of Ours*, a novel that has historically drawn an ambivalent response from critics. Rebecca Faber remarks dryly that “readers love to hate Enid” (4). Cather aligns Enid with all of the repressive elements of modern America that so confine Claude. Enid's programmatic attitude toward food is one of her failings. She and her mother make regular summer trips to a “vegetarian sanatorium in Michigan” that Cather probably intended to be a reference to the Battle Creek, Michigan sanatorium founded by John Harvey Kellogg, originator of the “toasted cereals” Mrs. Royce enjoys and probably feeds her family (169). Within the novel, these annual trips are depicted as evidence of her hypochondria, self-indulgence, and neglect of domestic responsibilities.



Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, New York Public Library. *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1897.

When Claude asks Mr. Royce for his permission to marry Enid, the older man, attempting to warn him off, remarks, “Enid is a vegetarian, you know” (202). Enid and her mother's embrace of health fads is seen as at best ridiculous and at worst a grotesque and threatening distortion of the generative, nurturing role women are supposed to fill. A decade ago, I mostly agreed with Cather's depiction of the two women, viewing them as exemplars of the pseudoscience behind Progressive Era dietary restrictions and the nascent profession of domestic science's attempt to homogenize the diversity of American foodways into one bland, white-sauced cuisine. Now I am more sympathetic to Enid and her mother. American women sought out sanatoriums, health cures, fad diets, and patent medicines in part because their health concerns were

often misunderstood or dismissed outright by the mostly male medical establishment. Only two of Mrs. Royce's five children live to adulthood; we do not know what mental and physical trauma their deaths may have caused her and Enid, who was deprived of multiple siblings. In *One of Ours*, Cather, shockingly, figures the loss as Mr. Royce's: “He had not been blessed with a son, and out of five daughters he had succeeded in bringing up only two” (168). A page later she writes of Enid's mother, “A deep preoccupation about her health made Mrs. Royce like a woman who has a hidden grief. . . . Only when she was at the sanatorium, under the care of her idolized doctors, did she feel that she was understood and surrounded by sympathy” (169).

Given the loss of three children and the “damp and unwholesome” mill house where she lives, it is not surprising that Mrs. Royce feels protective of her health and that of her two surviving daughters (168). The novel emphasizes her failures as a caregiver, but her own need for care and sympathy is understandable. Women's health concerns are still routinely dismissed by the American medical establishment. Nonwhite women, who must contend with racism as well as sexism, are even more marginalized as are queer women and trans women, but medical sexism affects all women.

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Sensing *One of Ours*

Guy Reynolds

How did you spend the pandemic years? In my case, 2020–21 coincided with the final stages of work on a book, *Sensing Willa Cather: The Writer and the Body in Transition*, a manuscript published by Edinburgh University Press in June 2021. My study examines Cather as a *sensory* writer, an author engaged (as Rebecca West noted, in a eulogy that inspired my work) with the five senses. The book's core is thus a mapping of Cather's *oeuvre* in terms of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—moving from her apprentice years in Lincoln and Pittsburgh, and on to the culmination of her sensory explorations: *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, with its dense textures of smell and taste, its relentless attention to the corporeal basis of antebellum society.

My book fits within that area of scholarship known as "body studies"; it pays attention to disparate experiences such as singing, nursing, cooking, smelling flowers, touching furniture, and dancing. There was more than enough to think and write about: body studies is a notorious field for opening up panoramas of interest. In rewriting the manuscript (2019–20) I became more aware of Cather's engagement with the African American body, with the legacy of slavery, and with the cultural politics of whiteness. This led to a revision focused more closely on *Sapphira*.

If I had had time to work again on the manuscript—and more words to play with!—I'd have expanded my commentary on *One of Ours*. As a novel about war, but also about the hard labor of farming, and about injuries and nursing (think of Claude's accident, when his mules pull him into a barbed-wire fence), the narrative

delivers a typically quirky Cather collation of bodily experiences. The book also opposes such body writing to what I termed Enid's "de-corporealised spirituality": Claude's wife exhibits that suspicion of bodily experience that Cather would also have encountered in her work on the biography of Mary Baker Eddy.

One of Ours is likely to become a novel whose significances will shift as a new generation of readers arrive with lives shaped by experiences of a pandemic. In "The Voyage of the *Anchises*" Cather described "a scourge of influenza . . . of a peculiarly bloody and malignant type" that breaks out on the transatlantic crossing (387). Perhaps redeploing anecdotes and observations derived from her experience of the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, Cather turns this part of the novel into an exercise in gender-role revisionism, focused on how the doughboys care for one another.

One of Ours might well become a focus for readings that will bring an understanding of pandemics and contagion, wounded bodies and nursing, to a text that is "about" the First World War, but also about so much more. Look out for books with titles such as *Willa Cather and the Medical Humanities: New Perspectives . . .*

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Another influenza outbreak . . . as glimpsed in Nebraska newspapers 1918–19.



“These Strange Boats Seem to Be Building Themselves”: *One of Ours* and the Military Industrial Complex

Mark Whalan

Willa Cather has rarely been seen as a prescient writer. Quite the opposite, in fact; the most (in)famous takedown of her work, Granville Hicks’s 1933 fusillade “The Case Against Willa Cather,” charged her with “a refusal to examine life as it is,” and for surrendering to “the longing for the safe and romantic past” (710). Hicks saw *One of Ours* as a particular offender, a book which used the Great War as a convenient vehicle for reanimating the heroic ideal Cather had so identified with early pioneer life on the prairies, a choice which for him tarnished her war reportage as “romantic and naïve” (706). Yet my work argues that she was considerably more clear-eyed than that about the nature of modern war, and with what war would become in the twentieth century.¹

For me, perhaps the most interesting section of the novel is the opening of book 4, as Claude watches from his transport train the seemingly ghostly apparition of warships in the marshes of New Jersey, “strange boats [that] seem[ed] to be building themselves” (356). Unusually for *One of Ours*, the narrative voice speaks here in the continuous present, and slips into a patriotic reverie—one that imagines a kind of national magic has conjured up these ships outside of the realities of labor and even of time. This moment recalls Benedict Anderson’s classic account of how a temporality of “homogeneous, empty time” was the temporal paradigm most associated with nationalism’s emergence as a preeminent modern political (and cultural) formation, a device which envisaged a national “essence” existing, unchanged, across history (24–25). Yet contemporary readers would doubtless also be reminded of the postwar scandal of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, established in April 1917, and which took a \$50,000,000 appropriation but delivered its first ship in December 1918, a month after the conflict was over. In 1920 and 1921, several very public investigations exposed a picture of mismanagement, graft, and the colossal waste of taxpayer money in the United States Shipping Board’s wartime activities.

While acknowledging the continuing appeal of discourses of martial (and national) romance in this scene, then, Cather also gestured toward the new realities of an emergent military-industrial complex that had developed in the U.S. to support total war, a complex that would in many ways remain intact throughout the



U.S. WWI propaganda poster publicizing the Emergency Fleet Corporation, 1917–18 by Jonas Lie. Printed by W. F. Powers Co. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of John T. Spaulding.

interwar period and would metastasize in World War II and its Cold War aftermath. In fact, Cather saw that the heightened rhetoric of national romance was not in contrast to the realities of graft, corporate welfare, and a new industrial sector devoted permanently to war; on the contrary, it was essential to it. Moreover, she saw that such developments would change forever the regions that critics like Hicks charged her with wanting to set in aspic. When, later, Claude sees stacks of tinned goods awaiting

distribution in France—American goods that literally saved the life of a French woman he forms an intense bond with—he reflects on their “American trade names . . . which seemed doubly familiar and ‘reliable’ here, so far from home” (508). The standardizing, incorporating power of American manufacturing and agribusiness—so destructive to the kind of Midwestern family farm life that Cather so often idealized—is here repurposed as the salvific arm of American power.

Cather saw that U.S. military, agricultural, and industrial power would be inextricable in the twentieth century, and that this would change the cultural parameters for how artists like her could (and should) talk about American regions. Profligacy as much as parsimony, geopolitics as much as the local, would define those spaces going forward. All of which seems pretty prescient to me.

NOTE

1. See my *World War One, American Literature, and the Federal State* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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I first read Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922) in the twentieth century and last taught it in the twenty-first to Indiana college students from small towns and farming communities very much like Claude Wheeler's. They "get" Claude, although none of us agrees with the 1923 Pulitzer committee that *One of Ours* depicts "the wholesome atmosphere of American life, and the highest standard of American manners and manhood" (Harris 613)—or that any novel should. And as for standards of American womanhood: my twenty-first-century students argue that Enid Royce is not a cold fish dressed in white sauce, but someone whose spirit has been perturbed by the same oppressive culture as Claude's, and whose impulse to do good in China is not very different from Claude's drive to find "something splendid" (*One of Ours* 79) in the war in France.

When I teach *One of Ours*, I am as eager as Claude to get to France, but the class lingers on Cather's depiction of immigrants on the home front—Troilus Oberlies and August Yoeder being fined for having publicly expressed anti-American sentiments, and especially the shame and harassment that the German restaurant owner, Mrs. Voigt, suffers. My students of German extraction tell me about defaced gravestones and unmarked graves in old parish cemeteries; a historical marker in downtown Indianapolis at the former location of the *Täglicher Telegraph und Tribüne* commemorates the demise of 175 German-language newspapers in Indiana due to the "suspicion

and antipathy" caused by the U.S. entry into World War I; and a small sign on Pershing Avenue notes that before World War I, it was named Bismarck Boulevard. Cather's novel leads us from these twentieth-century examples of ethnic othering to more recent ones writ small and large—the hasty closing of a favorite Afghan restaurant here in Indianapolis right after 9/11; the anti-Muslim travel ban of 2017.

Like Heraclitus stepping into the river, we do not read the same novel twice, and *One of Ours* remains flexible under our interpretations. It requires us to reflect on our own affiliations, expectations, and assumptions. Importantly, as a historical novel, it insists that we pay attention to past events as a way of understanding human experience in the present—to the way nationalism, for example, can make an enemy of ethnicity.

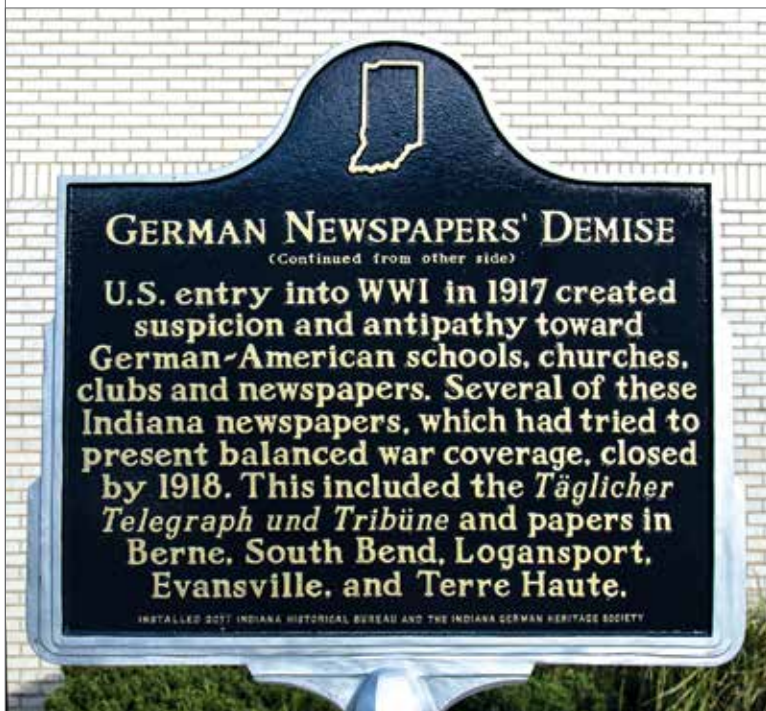
How might the river of this novel change as we continue to step into it in the increasingly ahistorical century to come?

As I began writing this piece, the Indiana General Assembly was debating House Bill 1040, the "Education Matters" bill. Among other things, the bill proposed prohibiting K-12 teachers from teaching that "an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex is inherently privileged, racist, sexist, or oppressive" or "bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex," or "that Indiana or the United States was founded as a racist or sexist state or nation"; it would not prohibit "impartial" discussion of "controversial" issues, including historical instances of oppression (House Bill 1040). Such words as "inherently," "privileged," "responsibility," and "impartial" were not defined. Education Matters.

The bill was defeated in the Indiana Senate. But the cultural anxiety that prompted it continues to roil this state. I am not a K-12 teacher, but some of my students are and more will be. I hope none of them have to teach, as Claude Wheeler died, "believing his own country better than it is" (604).

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From the Historical Marker Database, hmdb.org. Photograph by J. J. Pratts, 2020.



For me, to read *One of Ours* during the pandemic is to recognize how well it captures the desperate response of a country obsessed with realizing its full potential against the dual threats of World War I and the 1918 influenza epidemic. Life was hard enough before these challenges for Claude Wheeler, who finds time and again that promises of pleasure (his cherry tree) are inevitably mowed down and ravaged by those stronger than he before he can ever enjoy them. Sick of being on the losing end, Claude turns to the war as his first crack at an equal shot at the pot—and at first his hand plays out well, as he advances swiftly through the ranks of seasoned officers cut down by influenza. These promotions on the *Anchises* are what draw the two halves of the novel together: Claude’s grim jubilation links him at once to the scavengers of Lovely Creek and to the Germans, who, we learn, are successful because of their chillingly inhumane rapacity. One of the novel’s sleekest ironies is that it follows Claude’s efforts to preserve the unprotected from forces of consumption while he becomes himself one of those forces, unconscious of his own hypocrisy.

What saves Claude from becoming utterly opportunistic and cruel—like his father, his brother, and the German forces—are the lessons he gains from experiences with disability. When David Gerhardt bemoans the destructive sway of consumptive power evidenced by his smashed Stradivarius, Claude responds enigmatically that nothing is ever destroyed in this world, only scattered. Where has Claude learned such Zen wisdom, apart from the people with disabilities that he has found scattered along his path? Three exemplars stand out: the steward’s brother on the *Anchises*, who, though abused, provides lifesaving nourishment for the ailing; the wounded veteran Louis, who has taught the people of Mademoiselle de Courcy’s wrecked village to rebuild from salvaged materials; and, of course, Mahailey, who has a “costume for calamitous occasions” (138), and who, despite her decaying teeth and disordered mind, is the only survivor in the novel who can remember what war is really like on one’s own turf. From the examples of these individuals, Claude learns the heroism of becoming vulnerable to virulence without becoming like the virus himself.

Read in this way, Cather’s novel speaks volumes to our current experience of the pandemic, as it points once again to the lessons that the disabled community has to offer about the damage of adopting the habits of the virus. “From the very start of the pandemic,” author Andrew Pulrang has written, “elderly, disabled, and chronically ill people heard the unusually clear

message that we are less worthy of saving, that our lives are worth less” (“What I’ve Learned”). Ableism, he suggests, is not an antiquated attitude of the past but a dangerously perennial stance that privileges the rights of the able-bodied to life over those deemed less able to hold onto it. Cather depicts this view powerfully in a moment near the end of her novel, when American forces come upon a trench filled with “human discards,” dozens of “crippled and sick” and “half-witted youths” that the Germans have left for dead (559). With this haunting premonition of the German “test killings” of the disabled that were to come before World War II, Cather demonstrates the timelessness of ableism, of the eugenic view that the disabled are not “one of ours” but are mere chaff, unworthy of inclusion or preservation.

One of Ours looks to the disabled not only as reminders of historical cycles of oppression but also as everyday teachers well equipped with the know-how to tackle pandemic experience. “Welcome to my world,” quips Pulrang, as he advises Americans shocked by the pandemic to “join the club” of the hardship of modern life that defines, for many, the permanent experience of being disabled. “We can only hope that this taste of disabled life has been a learning experience for everyone that will carry over into the post-pandemic world. Maybe it will finally add some urgency to the decades-long push to make life more accessible and sustainable for disabled people” (“What Disabled”). Cather’s novel points the reader toward what Pulrang counsels—recognition of the insights born from disabled experience. Like Mahailey gleaning dandelion greens from dead weeds and acrid spoilage at dawn, the example of disability is a wakeful one, modeling what it means to challenge a culture of ableist valuation by prizing what has been discarded and redirecting it toward life-giving ends.



“The Harvest Is Ripe” (1916–17), political cartoon by Dutch painter Louis Raemaekers depicting the German advance into Belgium in 1914. From *Raemaekers’ Cartoon History of the War*, compiled by J. Murray Allison (Century, 1918).



Jean-François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Wikimedia Commons.

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Charting Claude's Charting: The Importance of Maps in *One of Ours*

Aaron Shaheen

When drafting a chapter on *One of Ours* for my 2020 book *Great War Prostheses in American Literature and Culture*, I noticed the novel's fixation with maps. But perhaps because so much past and present critical conversation has been absorbed by the extent to which the novel glorifies or denounces war—Steven Trout (3–6, 105–06) and Janis P. Stout (80–86) provide excellent summaries of this critical history—these maps have largely gone unnoticed. In recent decades, however, scholarship has developed methodologies to read maps as literature and literature as maps. As Eve Sorum explains, "links between political, aesthetic, and subjective concerns materialize at the intersection of the cartographic and the literary" (4). Perhaps not coincidentally, these methodologies emerged as mapping technologies became embedded in the electronic devices we have absorbed into everyday life. In honoring the centennial of *One of Ours*, I offer here a cartographic close reading of the pivotal scene in which Claude Wheeler visits the French relief worker Olive de Courcy. Though only a scant eight pages, the scene teaches readers how to map Claude's personal growth—from being "lost" (74) to having finally "found his place" (603)—by his very ability to map.

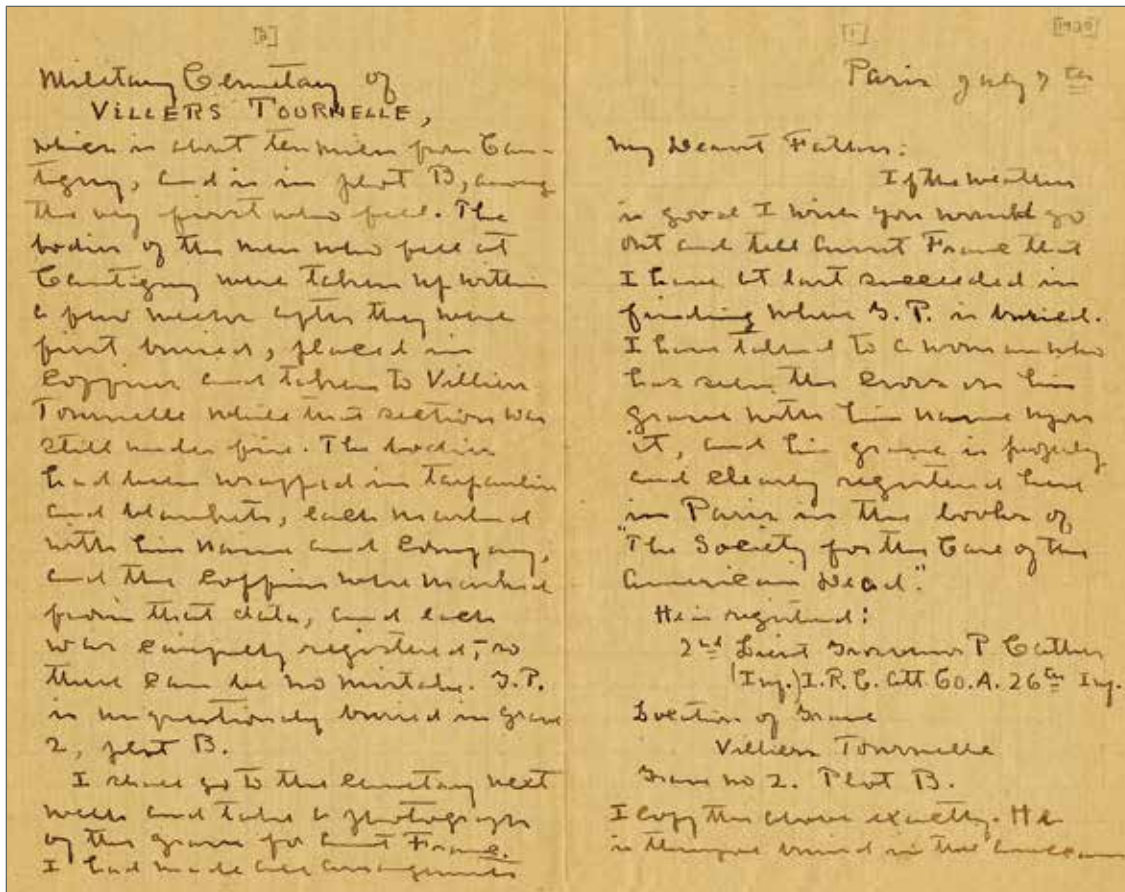
One of Ours partially originates in conversations Cather held with her first cousin Grosvenor, who found in the Great War purpose for his somewhat aimless life. "Timidly, angrily, he used to ask me about the geography of France," she recalled (*Complete Letters* no. 0589). For most of his prewar existence, Claude, Grosvenor's fictional version, "had never seen a map of France, and had a very poor opinion of any place farther away from

Chicago" (93). Yet by the war's outbreak, he, like Grosvenor, develops an interest in geography, which he cultivates by tracking the conflict with maps his mother retrieves from the attic.

Maps thenceforward carry increasing significance. When later asked by the war-weary Olive de Courcy to describe his homeland, Claude resorts to cartography: "Claude took a stick and drew a square in the sand: there, to begin with, was the house and the farmyard; there was the big pasture, with Lovely Creek flowing through it; there were the wheatfield and cornfields, the timber claim; more wheat and corn, more pastures. There it all was, diagrammed on the yellow sand. . ." (512–13). Before commercialized mass production in the late 1800s, map-making was considered a form of artisanry, if not artistry (Schulten 24). Himself skeptical of industrial processes and regretting his lack of artistic cultivation, Claude creates a palimpsest, using the French soil that has come to mean so much to him as the sketchpad for a map of his home. The design unfolds through an emotional logic that closes the gap between what Henri Lefebvre calls "experienced" and "representational" space (quoted in Harvey 218–19): it moves from the house where his fellow map-enthusiast mother resides, to the timber claim, where he sought refuge from a world that, until deployment, made little sense to him.

In the quoted passage, the anaphoric consistency of the directional "there" is both cartographic and poetic, suggesting through the Claude-filtered narration that the map's spatial delineations carry artistic sentiment. Indeed, Claude's cartography





The first two pages of Cather's July 7, 1920 letter to her father. *Complete Letters* no. 0511.

exemplifies Cather's own beliefs about artistic creation: an intuitive author "finds that he need have little to do with literary devices; he comes to depend more and more on something else—the thing by which our feet find the road home on a dark night, accounting of themselves for roots and stones which we had never noticed by day"; intuition therefore offers artists a mental map or "guide" that transcends bookish uses of literary devices (Preface, 197). Likewise, the intuition guiding Claude's cartography is so deeply embedded in him that he "would not have believed that he could tell a stranger about it in such detail" (513).

If maps, according to Franco Moretti, "[bring] to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden" (3), Claude's map not only reveals his familial relationships, but it also creates a brief but meaningful bond with Olive, who "gave him unusual sympathy and the glow of an unusual mind. While she bent over his map, questioning him, a light dew of perspiration gathered on her upper lip, and she breathed faster from her effort to see and understand everything." With his phallic stick, Claude evokes in the rapt Olive an erotically suggestive response. As he concludes, "Olive sank back wearily in her chair" (513), as if arriving at a state of post-coital languor. "Two people," he realizes when asking Olive where he can find her after the war, "could hardly give each other more if they were together for years" (516), as if to suggest that he

bonded more with her in one afternoon than he ever did with his wife Enid. He finally leaves Olive "almost lost to himself in the feeling of being completely understood, of being no longer a stranger" (515). The hedging provided by "almost" implies that Claude's emotional rapture finds balance by the demarcation of boundaries implicit in his map-making.

Upon learning of her son's death, Evangeline Wheeler sits in the quiet parlor where "there was nothing but him in the room,—but him and the map there, which was the end of his road. Somewhere among those perplexing names, he had found his place" (603). Far from pinpointing where Claude died, the parlor map

shows where he lived. Moreover, if Claude's map for Olive outlined his route back to Nebraska, then the map outlines Nebraska's route back to Claude, forever making him, at least in Evangeline's eyes, one of ours.

When Cather traveled to France in 1920 and located the gravesite of her cousin, she wrote her father with the grave's exact whereabouts (see image above). That information is marked off from the rest of the letter, with Cather explaining immediately afterward, "I copy the above exactly." The description's indented formatting, which visually delineates in precise words a specific geographical spot, blurs the line between prose and cartography. Maps' pervasiveness in our own time can make us intuitively attuned to these and other complexities in a novel that has perplexed and fascinated readers for a hundred years.

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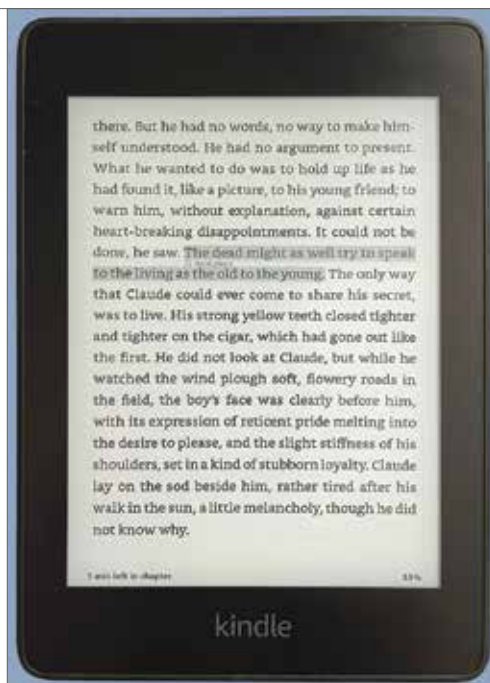
Reading Alone, Together

Kelsey Squire

During the first spring of the Covid-19 pandemic when stay-home orders were in effect, I began buying and borrowing ebooks more frequently. One of the intriguing features included in many ebooks is “popular highlights”—an anonymous record of the number of times readers have flagged memorable passages.

In considering the lasting impact of *One of Ours*, I turned to this list. Readers (forty-nine of them) were moved by Mademoiselle Olive de Courcy’s analysis on how the war had affected the elders of her community. Noting that they complain little about the war’s destruction of their physical property, she says, “This war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feeling matters” (book 5, chapter 10). One of the most frequently highlighted passages, flagged by seventy-three readers at the time of my rereading, was one of Claude’s reflections: “Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men” (book 5, chapter 14).

The one that stood out the most to me—and to many others as well—occurs in a conversation between Claude and Mr. Royce. Claude has just asked for permission to marry Mr. Royce’s daughter Enid. Mr. Royce, knowing the missionary-inclinations of his daughter, doesn’t believe it is a good idea, but struggles in how to explain this to Claude: “The dead might as



A popular highlight.

well try to speak to the living as the old to the young,” he thinks to himself (book 2, chapter 5).

Mr. Royce, as readers of *One of Ours* well know, is not successful in communicating his reservations to Claude. Yet in rereading *One of Ours*, I’m impressed by how Cather herself defies this sentiment: we’re transported through time and space, to sit on that hillside overlooking the alfalfa field. Mr. Royce “wanted . . . to hold up life as he had found it, like a picture, to his young friend”—as a novelist, this is what Cather does for us.

Readers of Willa Cather’s biographies and letters will be familiar with her quest to prevent her novels from being published in paperback. In a 1932 letter on this topic written to her former publisher Ferris

Greenslet, Cather writes that “I feel more strongly than ever that I want to keep out of cheap editions” (*Complete Letters* no. 1130). But at a time of isolation, I felt some comfort in reading along with my invisible ebook friends.

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Once More to *One of Ours*

Janis P. Stout

Recently, in the early fall of 2021, I reread *One of Ours*. In September 2021, actually. So my rereading was done just after the ragged end of America’s Longest War: our invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Context does affect reading. Though I found myself unable to resolve my ambivalence about the book and Claude, I was—in part, maybe, because of what had been

unfolding on TV—even less able to resist reading it the way Cather said she did not want it read: as a novel about war.

A particular moment in book 5, “Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On,” caught me up as if I were reading it for the first time. Claude Wheeler and David Gerhardt explore their attitudes toward the war in which they are embroiled:



"You don't believe we are going to get out of this war what we went in for, do you?" [Claude] asked suddenly.

"Absolutely not," the other replied with cool indifference.

"Then I certainly don't see what you're here for!"

"Because in 1917 I was twenty-four years old, and able to bear arms. The war was put up to our generation. I don't know what for; the sins of our fathers, probably. Certainly not to make the world safe for Democracy." (538-39)

Unlike Claude, who sees the war as an opportunity to get away from a stultifying life at home, and perhaps reach "something splendid," David has no illusions of a Wilsonian kind. And David, we recall, serves as a normative character both for Claude and for the reader.

The crucial phrase here is "the sins of our fathers."¹ Assigning war guilt to such "fathers" as career officers, munitions manufacturers, and pro-war spokesmen was a commonplace among the poets of World War I. The phrase also refers, of course, to historical and literary exemplars who inspired young men who followed them to take up arms. Wilfred Owen, in his noted "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young," reached back further, to the Bible, using father Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac allegorically to condemn Great War "fathers," changing the story in the final devastating couplet by having the modern fathers reject Abraham's willingness to accept the angel's call to spare his son and sacrifice, instead, a ram from a nearby thicket:

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.²

Historically, the Great War was indeed an offspring of chauvinistic hatreds manifested in, for example, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, and codified in a web of treaties that successively triggered the outbreak of war in 1914. How much further back we need reach in tracing the bloody heritage of the sins of the fathers is hard to say; there seems to be no limit. But from our present vantage point we can see that World War I and the punitive Versailles Treaty became sinning "fathers" in turn. It is now common to speak of the two world wars as one war with a long though not untroubled intermission. And the so-called Good War forged links that extended the chain to Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq, and Afghanistan.



Rembrandt, *Abraham and Isaac*, 1645. Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer.

Cather herself linked the two world wars not only retrospectively (in, for examples, "Uncle Valentine," "Double Birthday," and "The Old Beauty") but prospectively as well. In a letter to Ferris Greenslet dated December 21, 1914, four months before the United States entered the conflict, she wrote, "I suppose they will patch up a temporary peace and then, in twenty-five years, beat it again with a new crop of men" (198).³ Counting from when she wrote this, the time span she foresaw was startlingly accurate. Counting from 1919, when the peace was "patch[ed] up," it was an over-estimate.

NOTES

1. Both the public rhetoric of World War I, with its posters of women urging their men to go fight, and *One of Ours* itself, with its portrayal of Claude Wheeler's mother as being excited and moved by the need to fight for the sake of France, support a gender-inclusive wording. But that, of course, would not have occurred to Cather and would not have carried the Biblical overtone.

2. For a fuller reading of Owen's "Parable," see Stout, *Coming Out of War: Poetry, Grieving, and the Culture of the World Wars* (University of Alabama Press, 2005), 53-57.

3. Developing my reading of Cather's sense of both the terribleness of World War I (though her treatment of it in *One of Ours* is often seen as idealizing) and the connection between the two world wars, see my essay "Between Two Wars in a Breaking World: Willa Cather and the Persistence of War Consciousness" in the collection of essays edited by Steven Trout: *Cather Studies 6: History, Memory, and War* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 70-91.

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The Eagles of the West Fly On

Mark A. R. Facknitz

On April 16, 2021, after a “First Colors” ceremony, the nation at long last had a memorial to World War I in the District of Columbia. Until then, the National Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri, dedicated in 1926 as the Liberty Memorial, had served the purpose of a national monument to the sacrifices of the country and its soldiers between our entry into the war in 1917 and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. In the District, however, where every other war had its monument, for the First there was only the District’s memorial to its dead, a set of Doric columns with a dome, off in the trees between the Reflecting Pool and the Tidal Basin. It was completed in 1931 and inscribed with the names of the District’s 499 dead. Neoclassical and mundane, the structure was intended to double as a bandstand. Compared to Kansas City, it was far from sufficient.

In the last forty years, other monuments have been built in the vicinity of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, some to national heroes, notably Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1997) and Martin Luther King Jr. (2011), and to those who served and died in America’s costly twentieth-century wars: Vietnam (1982), Korea (1995), and World War II (2004). Claude Wheeler’s war remained conspicuously absent.

Inspired by the enthusiasm of Edwin Fountain, former vice chair of the World War One Centennial Commission, and through the energy of members of the commission (and numerous other stakeholders and government bureaus), money was raised, designs vetted, sculptors canvassed. Eventually the efforts coalesced and the transformation of Pershing Park began. The memorial design, “The Weight of Sacrifice,” was awarded to a twenty-five-year old architect, Joseph Weishaar. A narrative sculpture composed of thirty-eight human figures was commissioned from Sabin Howard. Today, a block from the White House between 15th and 14th Streets NW just above Pennsylvania Avenue, a scrap of national real estate has been remade, ennobled, consecrated. Pershing Square, once in thrall to the idea of the “great man of history,” has been refashioned in honor of all who fought in the war once called the Great War, the war to make the world safe for democracy, and—most ambitiously—the war to end war. The plaza has been reopened to the public. Only a little work remains. Within a few years, when the last of Sabin Howard’s figures are installed, the memorial will be complete.

As a member of the Historical Advisory Board of the Centennial Commission, my role was perched somewhere between nil and

risibly minimal until I and other advisory board members were contacted directly by Vice Chairman Fountain for ideas on what might be suitable inscriptions. That was July 28, 2017. I didn’t need to be asked twice. I spent a rewarding morning flipping through favorite books and typing up passages from Theodore Roosevelt Jr.’s *Average Americans*, or finding lines from a letter from pilot Victor Chapman to his father, or a pithy snippet from the American ambulance driver Leslie Buswell, and a few others. I sent also a facsimile of the typescript of a poem—half elegy, half exhortation to the living—written by the Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish, at the moment when America was approaching entry into World War II.

And, of course, I included the last moments of Claude Wheeler’s life:

The blood dripped down his coat, but he felt no weakness. He felt only one thing; that he commanded wonderful men. When David came up with the supports he might find them dead, but he would find them all there. They were there to stay until they were carried out to be buried. They were mortal, but they were unconquerable. (597)

After that, I returned to my posture of being an invisible, grateful, unperturbed advisor. Suddenly, so it seemed, in May 2019 I got word that the Commission of Fine Arts had approved four quotations for inscriptions, including lines based on MacLeish’s “The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak”:

Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope
or for nothing we cannot say; it is you who must say this.
They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.
We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.

MacLeish (1892–1982), while Librarian of Congress, wrote the passage as part of his day job. It was intended for ceremonial use by the Treasury Department. He noted at the bottom of the typescript that the poem would eventually be published anonymously, requesting that it be “treated as a private document until that time.” MacLeish, like Cather and others, thought the war had been the principal disaster of the modern world. He knew it firsthand. After serving as an Army ambulance driver, he became a captain of artillery. His younger brother Kenneth, a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve Flying Corps, was seconded to the Royal Air Force and died when his Sopwith Camel was shot down over Belgium. “We were young. We have died. Remember us.” Chilling words and true. They are now more prominent than any others.



THEY WERE MORTAL, BUT THEY WERE UNCONQUERABLE.

WILLA CATHER

The commission also took a line from the 1922 Pulitzer Prize winner, the novel that Cather did not really intend as a war novel, *One of Ours*:

THEY WERE MORTAL, BUT THEY WERE UNCONQUERABLE.

The Pershing statue has not moved, and its inscription still praises the valor of the officers and men of the AEF. Yet the general looks over a much different park, one in which the perspective changes and new voices are heard. Among the new quotations, from President Wilson's Memorial Day 1919 address at the Suresnes American Cemetery outside Paris, there is "Never before have men crossed the seas to a foreign land to fight for a cause which they did not pretend was peculiarly their own, but knew was the cause of humanity and mankind."



The fourth new quotation is: "If this world must become embroiled in a tremendous 'war to end wars,' I am glad that I, too, may play a part in it." The noble sentiment was first expressed by Alta May Andrews (1890–1987) in a letter to her mother that Andrews wrote while working as a Red Cross nurse in France. Andrews is an interesting story in her own right. She was intrepid in a way that Cather would admire, dauntless and modest like Alexandra or Antonia. Andrews typed up her war diary with the idea of publishing it, yet in a handwritten note that circulated among family and friends with the typescript, she avowed that she had decided that the diary "isn't good enough 'as is' and would probably be not interesting enough to the general public." She also declined to take the advice that she "sex it up" to make it saleable, and went on to affirm that "these have been my very own experiences and every word I have written is the truth!" (Sharp). There are some other documents, and accoutrements such as a nurse's collar and cuffs, also stored at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, half a day's drive from Red Cloud. But as with Cather's reimagining of her feckless cousin G. P. as Claude, an improbable but ultimately idealistic

and fearless soldier, Alta May might be forever boxed away were it not for one line expressing the good will of an ordinary person in extraordinary circumstances. She was very real. Indeed, one can

IF THIS WORLD MUST BECOME EMBROILED
IN A TREMENDOUS "WAR TO END WARS,"

I AM GLAD THAT I, TOO, MAY PLAY A PART IN IT.

ALTA MAY ANDREWS

hear her slow speech and voice with age in an interview two years before her death at age ninety-six. At the end of life, she sounded singularly unimpressed with the hardships of her youth.

That of the four new inscriptions two are by women is a fact remarkable in itself. This new memorial is not just a way of putting paid to an old debt; it is preeminently a gesture of recuperation, of valuing the lives and sacrifices of all those who have gone over the dark lip of the western night. Recognizing that we cannot even begin to remember those whom MacLeish prompts us to recall, we still do what we can to dignify the ever more anonymous names on plaques. They represent un-lived lives. It seems right, therefore, that in some sad celebration we conjure lost persons like Alta May who—except for a chance recording, a diary, a few letters, a photo album, and a nurse's uniform in ancient cloth, would be completely gone to us. Yet her small and rich archive makes us want to try. G. P. Cather would also be lost—in fewer and even less-often visited boxes than Alta May Andrews—had Willa Cather not pulled a best-possible fictional version of him back from oblivion. Unavoidably, the progress of *One of Ours* through the critics, the Pulitzer, and popular success encumbered it with readers' cavils and praise, scholars' caveats, and cynics' glib ironies. The noise and temporizing can be ignored now. To contest the tragic sentiment one must first write a better line, quarry one's own stone, master the chisel, and build a better monument.

Janis Stout persuades us that the war, for Cather, marked "the separation point between a beautiful former world and modernity" (96–97). Similarly, in his essential book, Steven Trout demonstrates that the "notorious ambiguity" in the second half of *One of Ours* "does not spring from any avoidance of culturally pervasive myths" but rather "stems from the essentially modernist mixture of contradictory discourses, jarring thematic juxtapositions, and conflicting perspectives" (147). Cather makes



the rift increasingly clear as the novel moves towards Claude's highly improbable clean death. There was nothing tidy or Homeric about the Great War; rather it was an excrescence of a rapidly emerging industrialization and modernity that affected most of the world. Before Claude left Frankfort, hedgerows, pastures, and plots were being amalgamated into huge monocultural sweeps as wartime wheat prices transformed Kansas and Nebraska. Where trains had once brought settlers, now internal combustion machines, like those farm implements sold by Claude's brother Bayliss, were flattening the landscape of everyday life. Horses were becoming obsolete along Lovely Creek. The same was happening in France. For a time, traffic of each type moved against the other, creating snarls as seen in the movement of troops and provisions during the Meuse-Argonne offensive (see photograph below).

Cather was alert to the metaphor. Claude, informed by his father that a mule-drawn cart loaded with stinking hides is how he ought to travel, craves the automobile, but then is threatened by Enid's black and boxy car. He is carried by train to Hoboken, is stashed among the diseased on the steamship *Anchises*, and is again moved by train toward the front. Once back on his feet, he walks into a shell-hole of water burbling with the gases of decomposing Germans. Later he climbs from a trench and stands still to receive three clean and lethal bullets. New modes of transportation and new ways of killing rendered walking and standing straight deadly. In the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, heroic gestures were suicidal.

Resignation to the slaughter was the alternative. Claude's friend, David Gerhardt, is supremely talented, positioned to ride famous and wealthy into the future. He cultivates unconcern, like his life model David Hochstein, who enlisted after declining a deferment offered because his mother was a widow, and whose Stradivarius was smashed in a motor accident while the virtuoso rode in a crowded bus among Army vaudevillians from Camp Upton on Long Island ("Camp Upton Soldier"). His fictional double David Gerhardt, unreadable to Claude, realizes that western civilization has been unhorsed, and so renounces his



"A crowded road through Esnes near the Meuse-Argonne Front." As published in *A Journal of the Great War* by Charles G. Dawes, 1923.

musical talent and training as pointless encumbrances. Even when hearing his own recording of the swarming pathos of the "Meditation" from *Thaïs*, tempo marked *andante religioso* giving over to *poco a poco appassionato*, Gerhardt responds with stoic insouciance. In his character, Cather projects a new mechanical self, emptied of emotion and fear, of a sort that Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* might wish for but could not achieve. Gerhardt, unlike his pal Claude, and like the real Hochstein, is hit by a shell and disappears in a gust of blood, flesh, and bone fragments. The irony is complete and symmetrical. The hapless rube dies like a cinema hero; the genius is gone without an identifiable trace. This is an accidental modern truth to which Cather bore witness. Claude and David were mortal. One was unconquerable because he had nothing to lose. The other could not imagine that his action was anything but a splendid, heroic destiny.

Cather's was a stark warning about the age America was then entering. That we can still grasp her meaning is cause for celebration; that we have survived is reason for relief; and yet here and now, in the swinging hinge of our moment, it is salutary to be reminded of our mortality. We have one chance. We must accept that. Yet it behooves us to wonder if we too will prove unconquerable. And, I think, we should be glad when a century later and now that all the war's veterans and victims are dead, we choose her voice to honor them, and honor them with honest admiration and regret.

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The editors thank Mark Facknitz for his photographs of the World War I Memorial inscriptions included in this essay.



Incongruities and Questions of Fact in the Narrative of *One of Ours*

Peter M. Sullivan

Willa Cather's 1922 novel *One of Ours* proposes a narrative that takes the protagonist Claude Wheeler from his youth on a Nebraska farm to the status of an Army officer who leads men in battle, and dies heroically for ideals he believes are "the real sources of power among men" (553). Cather scholar James Woodress claims that the protagonist is not a heroic figure, but like many ordinary young men who went to the war from the Midwest, and "a hopeless romantic and idealist who believes in the myths of his culture" (Woodress 326). As Richard Harris points out, Claude's sacrifice was not in vain, but rather in accord with a chivalric code of values and the concept of noble sacrifice, as well as with Cather's personal interpretation of Claude's life and death (Harris, "Cather's 'Doomed' Novel" 25).

Much of the story has a linear progression and is told in the third person, though the narrator's voice is often indistinguishable from the ideas and sentiments of Cather's protagonist, and at the end of the novel from the reflections of his grieving mother. As James Woodress comments, the novel is told mostly from Claude's point of view, and critics assumed that Claude's ideas were Cather's. And he adds: "This perhaps was inevitable considering Cather's usual method of incorporating a great deal of autobiography into her fiction" (326).

Cather knew early on that her novel would be treated as a war novel by the critics. She insisted, however, that was never her intention. As she told an *Omaha World-Herald* interviewer, for her it was simply the story of one "red-headed prairie boy" (Mahoney 39). He had "desperately wanted 'to find something splendid about life' (*One of Ours* 79) and had done so while training and fighting with the AEF in France" (Harris, "Pershing's Crusader's" 87). And Janet Sharistianian sees Cather's *One of Ours* as "a novel made up of many pieces drawn from a wide variety of sources that cohere unambiguously in some regards but ironically in others" (92).

Moved to write the novel by the death of her cousin, G. P. Cather, who died in the Battle of Cantigny in 1918 and received the Distinguished Service Cross, Cather sought to gather information about the war from various sources. She spoke with returning servicemen who arrived in New York, and visited soldiers in the Polyclinic Hospital, listening to their stories (Harris, "Historical Essay" 651). During a stay in Jaffrey,

New Hampshire, Cather was treated for flu symptoms by a doctor who had been a medical officer aboard a troop ship. Dr. Frederick Sweeney agreed to let Cather see the war-time diary he kept, supplying details that went into Book Four of Cather's novel (Woodress 310). Certainly, she would have seen accounts of the war in newspapers, especially after America joined the fight in 1917. Cather's use of journalistic sources is evident in the novel. As noted in the Scholarly Edition, "contemporary journalism informs Cather's writing about the war"; she has one of Claude's comrades read a clipping from the *Kansas City Star* announcing that British soldiers had discovered the site of the Garden of Eden in Mesopotamia, a piece which ran earlier in the *London Times* and in the *New York Times* (Harris, "Historical Essay" 653). Cather, though, was keenly aware that these sources afforded second-hand information.

Cather expressed her concern about having to use such materials in her novel. She confided in a letter to friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher that it was unfortunate for both her and her publisher "that anything so cruelly personal, so subjective, as this story, should be mixed up with journalism and public events with which the world is weary and of which I know so little" (*Complete Letters* no. 0589). A few days later she mentions to Fisher that she knew from the beginning that her novel "was, in a manner, doomed. External events made it, pulled it out of utter unconsciousness, and external events mar it—they run through it ugly and gray and cheap, like the stone flaws in a turquoise matrix" (*Complete Letters* no. 0585). Cather anticipated that the war part of her novel, since it lacked the personal experience of people and places she knew well, would be judged harshly by reviewers.

It is then remarkable that Cather could write the novel that she did, creating an enduring account of a young man's experience in the Great War, though she herself possessed little or no knowledge of details and events. Her narrative, focusing on a young man from the prairie, his disappointment with the stifling materialism of a small Nebraska town, his disastrous marriage, his experiences as a soldier in wartime France, where he is transformed by his exposure to French culture, and his heroic death while directing fire at the approaching enemy clearly rises above sentimentality and an outmoded, romantic



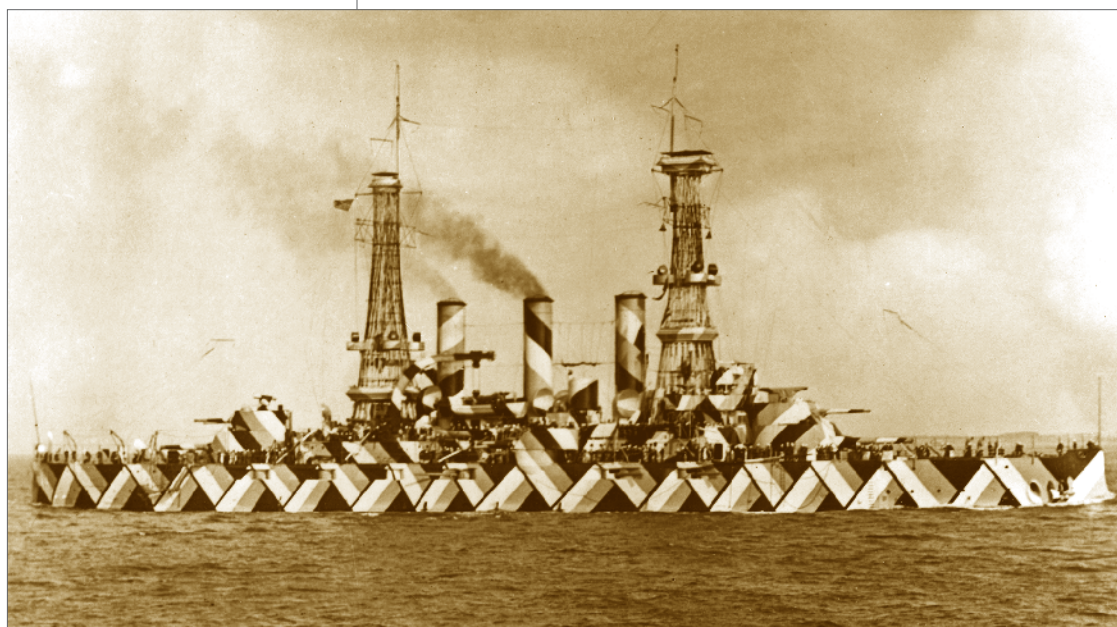
view of war alleged by some critics. As Cather scholars have noted, the novel reflects Cather's emotional commitment to a subject she felt compelled to write about. And reassessing *One of Ours*, Steven Trout concludes that "it is long past time to recognize her 1922 novel as a major work of twentieth-century American war literature" (190). Though the appearance of the novel prompted some harsh reviews, more were favorable, and Cather's *One of Ours* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1923.

Cather's concern for accuracy in writing her book is reflected in letters to her friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Cather, realizing that Fisher, with whom she had traveled to France in 1902, was fluent in French and had a wide knowledge of French culture, asked her to read proofs, and look for "anything that seems to you misleading as to facts, or false as to taste" (*Complete Letters* no. 0578). Throughout the writing of the novel, Cather likely read books about the war and she questioned friend Elizabeth Sergeant about conditions in wartime France. Cather, though, was still concerned that "the attempt to be correct and precise, the desire to make the story truthful, had weakened the narrative," and she saw this "journalistic approach as a fundamental flaw" (Harris, "Historical Essay" 625). As Cather wrote to Fisher, she felt her book had been "strangled by . . . external dates and facts and dates and feelings" (*Complete Letters* no. 0585). In his "Historical Essay" in the Cather Scholarly Edition of *One of Ours* (626), Richard C. Harris draws the connection to Cather's statement in her 1922 essay "The Novel D meubl " that "if the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism" (*Not Under Forty* 48). Cather defended her novel soon after its publication, writing to her Pittsburgh friend Elizabeth Moorhead Vermorcken that she liked the book and that it would survive "the controversy as an imaginative work and not a piece of reporting" (*Complete Letters* no. 0620). Given the thoroughness of Cather's research and her desire for accuracy, it is noteworthy that many incongruities appear in the novel, and that there are departures from fact that raise questions about the authenticity of her narrative.

As James Woodress observes, "One cannot ignore the novel's flaws despite its many excellencies. In writing the novel

Cather ignored her best method, which required the use of material that had long possessed her" (331). He notes that Cather had to work with immediate materials such as Dr. Sweeney's diary and information about the Argonne offensive, but considered using such sources "only a kind of higher journalism" (331). Recognizing that it was Cather's inner compulsion to write the story that carried it to completion, Woodress identifies certain blunders in the text. For example, he believes that the soldiers' dialogues do not ring true: "Her sergeants, corporals, and privates are given appropriate backgrounds, ideas, and aspirations, but they don't talk like men living in an all-male society" (331). And he mentions other errors, such as "giving her soldiers a leave after a couple of weeks in the trenches, sending her officers on leave with their rifles, making the battalion an administrative unit, having the troop convoy escorted by battleships," the last misstep corrected by the third printing (332). Woodress believes, however, that overall these shortcomings are minor, and that *One of Ours* succeeds in presenting a broader view of the war than other novels (332).

Some of the items cited as flaws, though, require further comment. While Woodress is accurate on points about early leaves from the trenches and officers taking rifles on leave, the use of the term "battalion" for an administrative unit is common, as an abbreviated form of "battalion headquarters." Also, the presence of a battleship as a convoy escort was not unheard of. Though battleships were usually kept in home waters because of the enormous use of fuel for Atlantic crossings, capital ships such as the *Nebraska* (see photograph below), the *Virginia*, the *Georgia*, the *Louisiana*, and others saw convoy duty during the war.



U.S.S. *Nebraska* in WWI naval camouflage. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command.



Aside from the few blunders cited, Cather's narrative reveals several incongruities in the Nebraska part of the novel and in depictions of the war in France. Readers might be prompted to ask how Cather wants to tell the story, and what her level of knowledge might be. Cather expressed a desire to get the facts straight, as explained to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, but inconsistencies are apparent.

An incongruity in the narrative of the Nebraska part of the novel relates to Claude's interest in the story of Joan of Arc. As a college student in Lincoln Claude writes a paper about the trial of Joan of Arc, and, as the narrator mentions: "He worked from an English translation of the *'Procès,'* but he kept the French text at his elbow, and some of her replies haunted him in the language in which they were spoken" (91). This information would not cause a ripple in the narrative unless we recall that Claude has been portrayed as an average student, without reference to proficiency in a foreign language. And, when coming home on leave as a lieutenant in book 3, Claude practices basic French phrases to himself on the train, and arrives in France with but a rudimentary knowledge. Here, the narrator leaves unresolved the question of whether the protagonist, who has enthusiasm for his thesis topic, has little or no background in French, or whether he somehow acquires the skills to comprehend the French text kept "at his elbow." The protagonist's slim knowledge of the language becomes evident when it is only through his friend Lieutenant Gerhardt, who had studied in France before the war, that Claude has access to the homes and traditions of cultured French families.

One of the French sentences in the phrase book that Claude practices on the train, as the narrator notes, is "*Non, jamais je ne regarde les femmes*" (326–327). According to the narrator, this handy book is "made up of sentences chosen for their usefulness to soldiers" (326). But such an expression would not likely appear in an Army phrase book. It would be incongruous for soldiers in France to announce to women, whom they may meet socially, that they never look at women—an absurdity that would hardly gain an introduction.

Like Claude, thousands of other doughboys from the prairie states landed in France and found themselves in the midst of an ancient civilization. Cather explained that she tried to convey what "the sensitive roughneck" felt when plunged into it all—as if he had been cheated of a cultural treasure because he could not speak the language or play a musical instrument (*Complete Letters* no. 0590). As she admitted to her friend

Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Claude's feeling of inadequacy in the company of Lt. David Gerhardt, who played the violin and spoke fluent French, was similar to the feeling that Cather had traveling with Dorothy on her first trip to France. While Cather had a reading knowledge of French, she could not speak it well. And, as she reveals, she wanted to make her protagonist feel the way she did (*Complete Letters* no. 0590).

In the war part of the novel, and on the crossing to France, questions arise about factualness in the narrative. One such occasion, on board the *Anchises*, relates to a conversation between Claude and the aviator Victor Morse. When Claude naively supposes that it must make "a fellow feel pretty fine to bring down one of those German planes," the veteran aviator replies that he brought down one too many, and adds that he once shot down a German woman pilot. He describes her as "a plucky devil" who "flew a scouting machine," and that she was crushed under the wreckage but lived long enough to dictate a letter, which Morse then dropped inside German lines (382).

The aviator's story is referenced in the Scholarly Edition with a note: "Women became interested in aviation early on; a woman was first issued a pilot's license in 1908." As also indicated, a record of a woman pilot involved in combat in World War I could not be found, and it is suggested that Cather "may have heard a story to this effect from one of the soldiers she talked with while working on the novel" (755).

Women in Germany became interested in controlled flight from the beginning. By 1913 Melli Beese (1886–1925) had become the first German woman to obtain a pilot's license (Probst 22). Married to Frenchman Charles Boutard, a pilot at an airport near Berlin, Beese had accepted French citizenship, and at the outbreak of the war both were interned and prohibited from flying.



Elfriede Riotte, 1919.

Germany's first woman airship pilot, Elfriede Riotte (1879–1960) completed the requirements for her license in April 1914. She was the first woman airship pilot in the world, and was made a lieutenant in the army (Probst 177). But, as indicated in a post titled "Women Combat Pilots of WWI" on the website *Hargrave: Aviation and*

Aeromodeling—Interdependent Evolutions and Histories, at a meeting of representatives of the German Army, the Zeppelin Co., and government officials, "it was decided that, although

[Riotte] had played it all by the rules there was no way that she could be admitted into the ‘fraternity.’” A memo found in the *Bundesarchiv* in Koblenz “suggests that she was then offered ‘honorary’ pilot status. . . .” Riotte’s reaction is not known, and “certain events of summer 1914 likely put an end to any argument.”

It is not surprising that a German woman pilot would be refused permission to participate in combat. Given the patriarchal nature of German society at the time, wartime roles in aviation would be reserved for men, especially members of the nobility like Baron Manfred von Richthofen. All saw themselves continuing in the chivalric tradition as Germany’s “knights of the sky” (Harris, “Cather’s ‘Doomed’ Novel” 21).

As mentioned in the previously cited “Woman Combat Pilots of WWI,” a French woman pilot allegedly flew in combat, and several Russian female pilots flew reconnaissance missions, but there is no reference to German women in those roles during the war. Since Cather was known to have spoken with returning servicemen about their experiences, it is likely, as the editors of the Scholarly Edition suggest, that Cather could have heard the story (of a downed German woman pilot) in one of those interviews. Perhaps Cather lacked the caution advisable about such postwar tales, passed readily from one soldier to another. But she may have inserted it to heighten the suspense about an enemy that Claude was going to face.

Rumors about German brutality circulated widely. As related in Ernest Hemingway’s story “Soldier’s Home,” the protagonist Krebs’s hometown “had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities” (90). And Krebs attributes to himself things that other men had seen or heard, and states as facts “certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers” (90). Krebs’s acquaintances at the local pool room claim they had heard of “German women found chained to machine guns in the Argonne” (90), and they could not comprehend any machine gunners who were not chained. The small Midwestern town was always thrilled by such stories.

The tale of the German woman aviator purportedly shot down by Victor Morse, as told to Claude, represents a situation inconsistent with the practice of the German military at that time. The story, like that of chained female machine gunners, is sensational. And it contributes to the wartime image of a barbaric enemy that had to be defeated.

When Claude’s convoy departed Hoboken it consisted of “ten troop ships, some of them very large boats, and six destroyers” (369). Other ships would eventually accompany them, and as the narrator observes, “Their escort would not

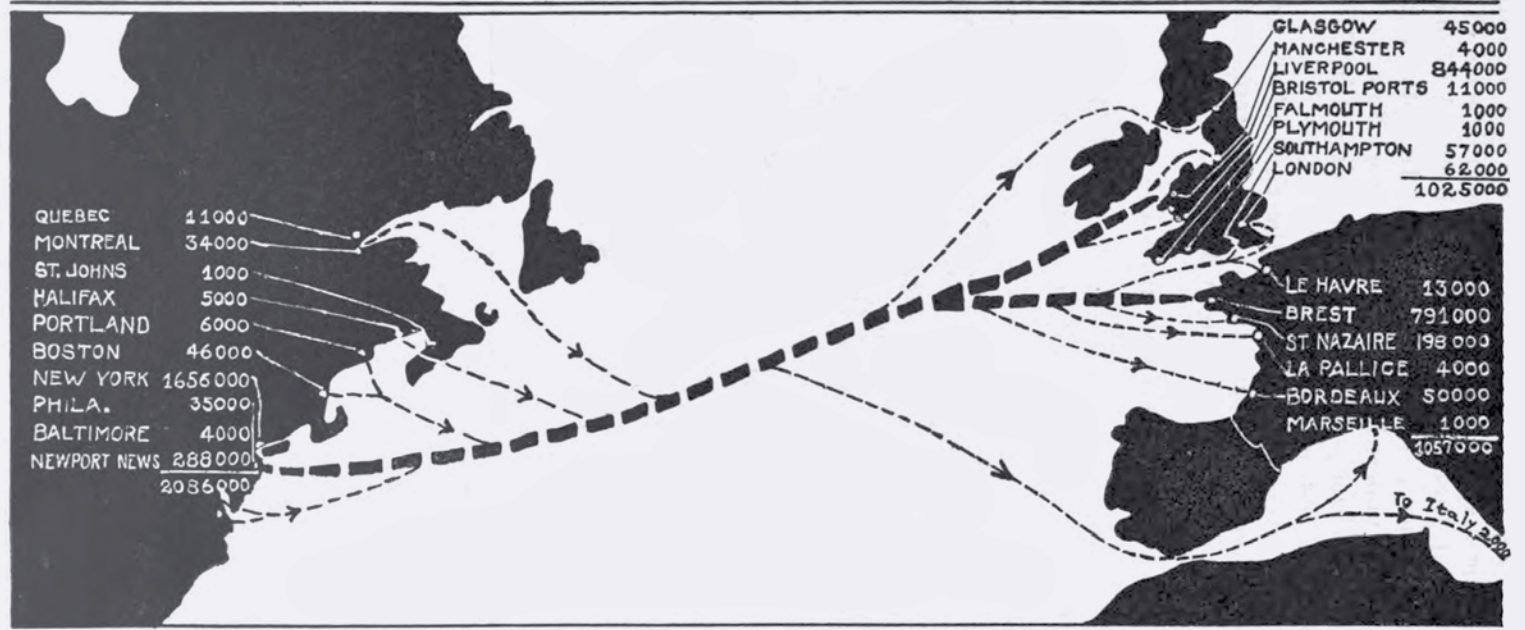
leave them until they were joined by gunboats and destroyers off whatever coast they were bound for,—what that coast was, not even their own officers knew as yet” (369). And, at the conclusion of book 4, as Claude gets his first sight of France, and in book 5, as the troops go ashore, the narrator withholds the name of the port of arrival. As Richard Harris indicates in his essay “‘Pershing’s Crusaders’: G. P. Cather, Claude Wheeler, and the AEF Soldier in France,” “Willa Cather essentially took her recollections of her own landing at Dieppe in 1902 and made them Claude’s” (80). The town can be identified as Dieppe later in the narrative with reference to a landmark, the church of St. Jacques, which Claude and his men visit.

For Cather the name of the port where Claude arrives is less significant than his visit to the medieval church, and importantly, the town is a short distance from Rouen, where Claude and his men later find the marketplace where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in 1431. As critics have pointed out, the story of Joan of Arc appealed to Claude as something miraculous, and in college he completed a thesis on Joan’s trial, gaining the approval of his professor. It was for thematic reasons that Cather’s hero, imbued with thoughts of Joan of Arc (Woodress asserts that the vision of Joan of Arc “hovers over the novel” [331]), would arrive near a site associated with her martyrdom. Cather was apparently not concerned about the fact that Dieppe was not a port of debarkation for American troops, particularly not for a convoy of ten transports like that in which Claude was involved.

Selecting the ports for American arrivals in France was done by the AEF with an eye toward bringing the troops close to their area of operation, primarily the province of Lorraine. In the chapter of *American Military History* titled “World War I: The U.S. Army Overseas,” by Charles B. MacDonald, the planning is explained:

For assembling American troops, Pershing chose the region southeast of Paris. Since the British were committed to that part of the front north of Paris and since the French had achieved their greatest concentration in protection of the capital, they had tied up the Channel ports and the railroads north and northeast of Paris. By locating southeast of the city, U.S. forces would be close to the Lorraine portion of the front, a likely spot for committing an independent American force. The French had few troops there and important objectives lay within reasonable striking distance—coal and iron mines and railroads vital to the Germans. This part of the front could be served by the ports of southern and southwestern France and by rail lines less committed to French and British requirements. Pershing set up his headquarters at the source of the Marne in Chaumont. (381)





Map 4.—Troops sailing from American ports and landing in France and England.

French Debarkation Ports for Troops Sailing from U.S. and Canada

Port	Number of Troops
Le Havre	13,000
Brest	791,000
St. Nazaire	198,000
La Pallice	4,000
Bordeaux	50,000
Marseille	1,000
Total	1,057,000

From *The War with Germany: A Statistical Summary*, Leonard P. Ayres, Government Printing Office, 1919 (p. 42). The illustration above shows how this information was presented upon original publication.

Channel ports, including Dieppe, essentially served the needs of the British forces, and numerous British base hospitals were set up in Rouen, which also served as a major logistics center. As the data for the American seafight to Europe reveal, Dieppe is not listed as a port of debarkation, and the channel port of Le Havre received only 13,000 American troops; in contrast, the Atlantic ports of Brest, St. Nazaire, and Bordeaux received the greatest influx, as shown in the chart above and in the accompanying illustration.

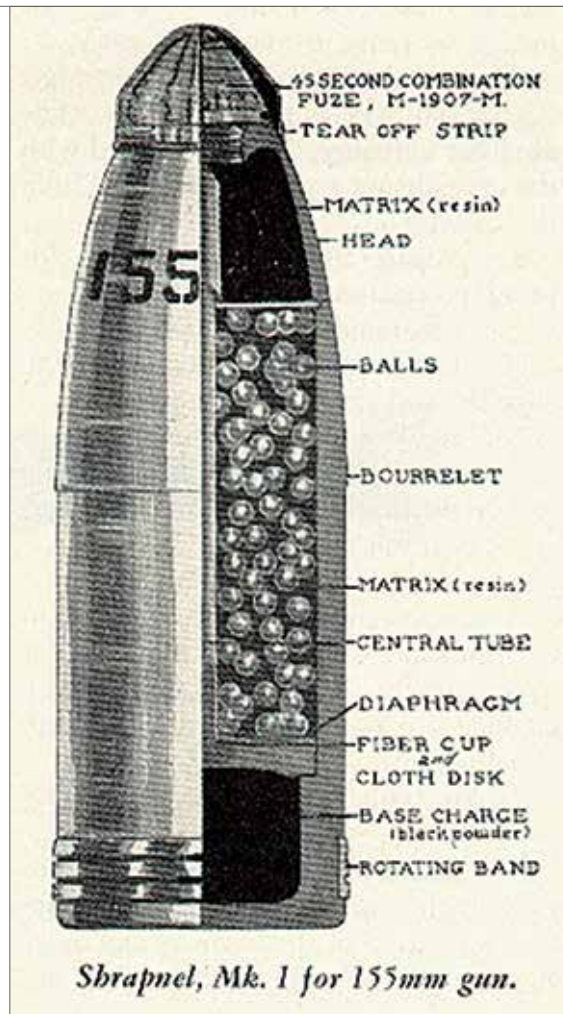
After his arrival in Dieppe, Claude keeps an appointment with Victor Morse for dinner at his hotel, and afterward roams the busy streets alone. He spots a couple in the throng talking eagerly, but appearing anxious. “Without realizing what he did” (438), as the narrator observes, Claude follows

the pair through deserted, dark streets, the moon throwing shadows across the cobblestones, until they reach the church he and his men had visited. Claude watches the affectionate couple, an American soldier with one arm amputated and his companion, an innocent-looking country girl sitting on a bench at the portal. Claude has benign feelings toward them at this point, but his uncharacteristic stalking of a distressed young couple through the dark, empty streets of the old Norman town lends an uncanny aspect to the narrative of Claude’s arrival. His behavior here is inconsistent with the openness and reliability which he had exhibited on the ship, assisting the doctor with the sick men and making a heroic, successful effort to save Lt. Fanning’s life.

Several questions of fact are raised by the portrayal of Sgt. Hicks, a member of Claude’s company. During a night action in book 5 involving Claude and Lt. Gerhardt, a shelling occurs that kills many troops; when Claude reaches the wounded doctor, whose use of a flashlight caused the barrage, he asks about the fatalities: “You didn’t see Lieutenant Gerhardt among them?” asks Claude, to which the doctor replies “Don’t think so.” Claude then asks, “Nor Sergeant Hicks, the fat fellow?” Again the reply is in the negative (527). Here, as on several other occasions, Sgt. Hicks is referred to as portly, and as “the fat sergeant” (498), and when Claude and David discuss rejoining their battalion at a French town, David predicts: “They’ll be living like kings there. Hicks will get so fat he’ll drop over on the march” (535). Hicks, too, is aware of his weight, and on the forced march mentioned in book 5, when the men beg for a rest, Hicks proclaims: “If I can do it, you can. It’s worse on a fat man like me” (581).

As Cather must have known, this representation of an infantry sergeant in wartime France as conspicuously obese seems inconsistent with the image of the athletic, slender infantryman after months of training. And it seems inconceivable that Hicks would be permitted by an Army physician to serve overseas and lead men on forced marches. Hicks's stoutness seems compatible with his behavior in the cheese shop, described in book 5, where he and his men boorishly devour all the cheese within sight, to the chagrin of the shopkeeper. In her article "The Cost of Cheese and Hapless Sergeant Hicks: Measures of Value in *One of Ours*," Elaine Smith argues that in a world of violence and shifting values neither Hicks nor the cheese woman can come to an equitable price for the products he and his men have consumed. Hicks, as the name suggests, is undereducated in the ways of the world and has no idea that he is insulting French culture or undermining the values of a lifetime. Coming from a small town where everyone knows him and his family, "he may be taking liberties he is used to taking at home" (30). Sergeant Hicks may thus be excused in part for his behavior, Smith concludes, and perhaps the attitude we should take toward Hicks and the others in the cheese shop scene is that they are doing the best they can in a confusing world, in which standards of value are difficult to ascertain (32).

While drawing attention to Sgt. Hicks's portliness, the narrator also presents his better features. He is a jovial fellow and a capable NCO. And, in the latter part of the novel, he proves himself a courageous soldier. When the "Missourians" are delayed from reaching the front lines by German aircraft, the colonel orders that two men be sent back to bring them up; Sgt. Hicks and Lt. Gerhardt volunteer without hesitation. When Hicks returns from the mission, as Claude sees, he is "stripped to his shirt and trousers," wet



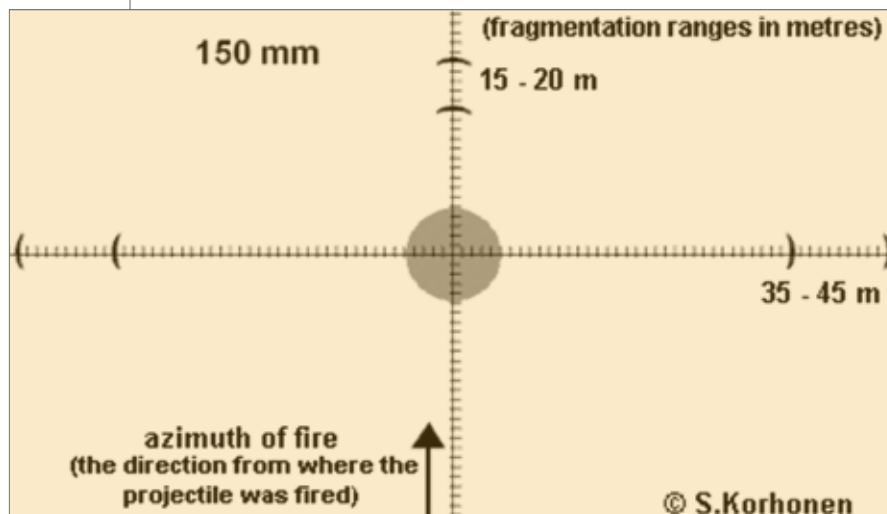
Shrapnel, Mk. 1 for 155mm gun.

WWI shrapnel artillery shell for 155-mm gun. U.S. Army Center of Military History.

with perspiration, and "splashed with blood"; he reports to Claude that they found the Missourians and that Gerhardt is bringing them up (594). After Claude's heroic death, Hicks pulls his lieutenant off the parapet and tells the others that he kept Gerhardt's demise from Claude. "Bert and Oscar knew what Hicks meant. Gerhardt had been blown to pieces at his side when they dashed back through the enemy barrage to find the Missourians" (598). They had run together until Gerhardt went around one side of a wire entanglement, waving to Hicks to follow. "The two were not ten yards apart when the shell struck" (599).

Referring to the proximity of the two men, the narrator's phrases "at his side" (598) and then "not ten yards apart" (599), raise questions about factualness. The effects of being in the blast zone of a World War I artillery shell have not been considered here; the blast area of a barrage shell was up to approximately twenty meters by

forty-five meters, and this would likely have meant Sgt. Hicks's demise (see illustrations on this page). His survival with just an injury to his hand would seem little short of miraculous. Other incongruities in the war part of the novel relate to the scene at Beaufort; after most of the Germans have been driven out, a concealed German shooter kills an old woman



WWI artillery blast zone.



and a young girl on the town square, while they stand near American officers and Sgt. Hicks. A trained sniper would surely have aimed for the enemy soldiers, rather than the innocent civilians, to protect the German retreat. He kills the elderly woman first and then the little girl, and also wounds an officer, Captain Maxey, with the third attempt. Since the shooter turned out to be a highly decorated officer, newly transferred from the Eastern front, he would likely have adhered to a chivalric code that precluded such acts as killing elderly women and children. And a reference to smoke suspended in the air near a window, as noticed by Sgt. Hicks, seems inconsistent with the fact that the German Army used smokeless powder (565–70).

As Hicks reflects on board a troop ship returning to New York, his comrades “Nifty Jones and Oscar, God only knows why, have gone on to the Black Sea” (601). But travel to such a location would have been difficult. In 1919, the German Army was putting down a communist revolt in Bavaria, and Hungary and Romania had gone to war over Transylvania. If the two comrades were traveling as servicemen they would be conspicuous in these postwar troubled areas. (And, as a factual issue, would their officer have issued them leave papers for a possibly hazardous journey to the Black Sea? Or, does the phrase “gone on to the Black Sea” here suggest that the pair had been discharged and were going on a new adventure?) Cather’s narrator leaves questions about the purpose of the unusual excursion and the practicality of travel unresolved.

Cather’s narrative of a prairie boy who enlisted in World War I, believing that there was something splendid in life if he could but find it, is interspersed with various incongruities and questions of fact. Their occurrence reveals particular gaps in Cather’s knowledge of the war, about which she had been concerned in the writing, but they also reflect her artistic freedom in using the materials she gathered from many different sources. For Cather the art of fiction was akin to the domestic arts, in that both were expressions of creativity, placing ideals, traditions, and human destiny above actuality and external data. In avoiding literalness Cather, who said that she liked *One of Ours* best of all her novels, provides an epic story that readers still find engaging more than a hundred years after the end of the war to end all wars.

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The *Pathfinder* Serialization of *One of Ours*

Richard C. Harris

In June 1918 Willa Cather learned of the death of her cousin G. P. Cather on a World War I battlefield in France. In September, upon reading his letters home while visiting her parents and her Aunt Franc, G. P.'s mother, in Nebraska, she became fascinated by his story. She had barely known this young man who, until he joined the U.S. Army in 1917, had failed at almost everything he had done. Like the fictional counterpart Cather would create, he hoped he would find "something splendid" (*One of Ours* 79) in his military service. As is indicated in several letters to Dorothy Canfield Fisher in April 1922, telling G. P.'s story, originally titled "Claude," became an obsession during the next four years of Cather's life.

Although she later changed the title to *One of Ours*, Claude Wheeler's story remained a personally important part of Cather's creative experience, a story she said she simply had to tell. Cather's involvement not only in the creation of the narrative but also in the production of the volume was intense. With her new publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, she commented on the design of the dust jacket, the typeface to be used on the dedication page, as well as many other details. One of her reasons for moving from her original publisher Houghton Mifflin to Alfred A. Knopf was Knopf's attention to producing beautiful books. Given this personal, emotional involvement in the writing and production of *One of Ours*, published in 1922, it is interesting that Cather apparently paid little or no attention to the serial publications of the novel in 1923.

In his essay on Cather and her literary agent, Paul Reynolds, Matthew Lavin says Reynolds placed many of Cather's works in magazines from 1916 through the 1920s (159). From the time Cather moved to Knopf in 1921, both Alfred and Blanche Knopf were also helping to place some of her work.¹ Alfred said that he tried to place *One of Ours* in several magazines, with no success (Memoirs). Blanche, however, may have been the person who finally sold serial publication of the novel to the *Omaha Bee*, which printed it in installments over a period of

fourteen weeks, from March 2, 1923, to June 16, 1923. Cather's being a Nebraska writer and the novel's Midwestern setting were no doubt influential in the *Bee's* interest in serializing the novel. (The announcement that Cather had won the Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours* was not made until May 13, 1923, about a month before publication of the last installment in the *Bee*.) In her article on this serialization of Cather's novel, Kelsey Squire declares that the publication of *One of Ours* in the *Bee* four years after the war ended indicates that "the war had yet to become a historical event or memory, but rather, was still a fact of daily life" (9). The *Bee* thus reflected, or as the editors put it on the paper's masthead, "mirrored" a number of events and issues of the times.

My focus here, however, is on a second serialization of *One of Ours*, previously not noted in Cather criticism.² This version appeared in the *Pathfinder*, a conservative, Republican weekly magazine published in Washington, D.C., between October 6, 1923, and December 22, 1923.³ Exactly which of Cather's supporters—Paul Reynolds, Alfred, or Blanche Knopf—placed the novel in the *Pathfinder* cannot be determined.⁴ Cather's financial ledger provides some information on the serialization of the novel. Under a column labeled "*One of Ours*," there is a 1923

Date	Amount	Balance
Jan 1, 1923	55,588	13,313.50
Jan 30, 1923	10,711	4,016.62
	46,277	17,330.12
supplements		150.00
Dec 31, 1923	10,429	3,910.87
de Knopf	158	22.65
	56,879	21,413.64
June 30/24	1,419	532.12
	58,298	21,945.76
Dec 30, 24	2749	280.58
	59,047	23,266.64
June 30, 25	336	126.01
	59,383	22,522.64
	442	166.12
Dec 30, 1925	59,825	22,519.86
June 30, 1926	453	146.30
	60,278	22,665.66

Publication	Amount
Aunt Lady	2,000.00
Julian rights	10,800.00
My Mortal Enemy	1,500.00
Uncle Valentine	2,700.00
The Professor's House	9,000.00
Youth + Bright Madonna (selections)	92.00
Death Cross for Uncle Tom	2,700.00
Youth + Bright Madonna	157.50
	117.50
One of Ours (selections)	25.00
Double Birthday	25.00
Neighbor Rogich	1,500.00
Youth + Bright Madonna (selections)	25.00

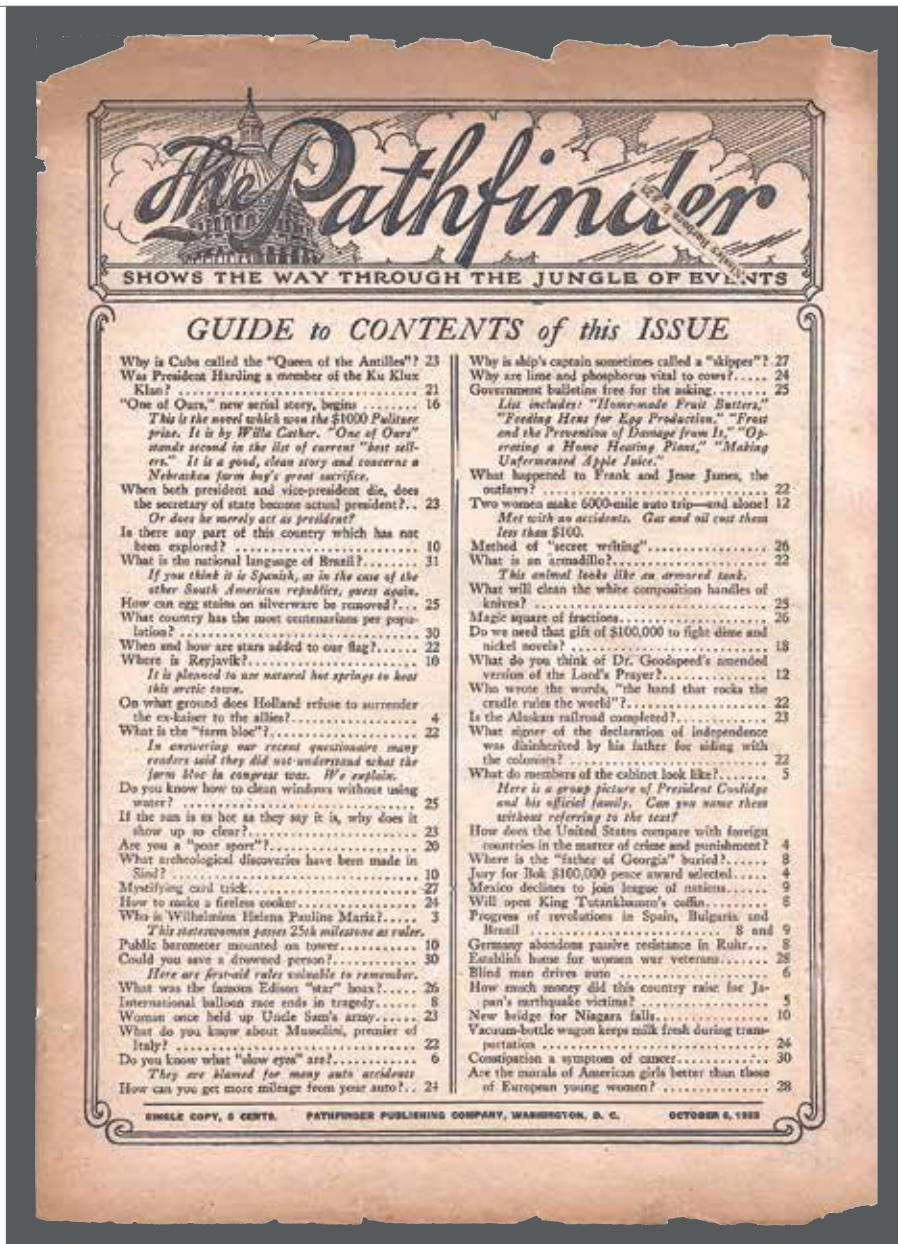
Pages from Cather's financial ledger. Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



entry for \$150 received sometime between June 30 and December 31, 1923, designated “syndicate,” and another listed on a page titled “Serial publications,” “One of Ours (selections)” for \$25. (That \$175 in today’s money would come to nearly \$3,000.) Neither note provides any additional information regarding the dates or sources of these payments (Cather, Financial Ledger).

The coming serial publication of Cather’s novel was advertised in the July 7, 1923, issue of the *Pathfinder*, about seven weeks after announcement of Cather’s having been awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The announcement, titled “Another Prize-Winner Coming!” declares that a great deal of time and energy have been spent in arranging for the upcoming publication. The format in the *Pathfinder* is that of the *Omaha Bee*, as is clear from the typeface and use of a synopsis for each section. The first installment is printed on pages 16–17 and continues on pages 32–38. The subsequent installments all begin with a “synopsis,” with the narrative in the majority of cases printed on pages 32–38 of the standard forty-page periodical. All installments are titled “*One of Ours: The \$1,000 Prize Novel by Willa Cather.*”

Given the high praise of the novel in announcement of its forthcoming serialization in the July 7 issue of the *Pathfinder*, it is perhaps shocking that the editors of the *Pathfinder* so bowdlerized the original text of *One of Ours*.⁵ The greatest change involves the length of the *Pathfinder* text: this serial publication deletes almost a third of Cather’s original text. The changes were evidently made in part to facilitate the format that places installments on pages 32–38 of almost all of the twelve installments of the forty-page weekly, despite the use of a type font that is exceptionally small. For example, of the 265 lines of text in chapter 1 of Cather’s novel, seventy-three of those lines—almost thirty percent of that text—is deleted. In chapter 3, of Cather’s original 215 lines, eighty-four lines, or about forty percent of Cather’s text, is eliminated. In chapter 7, of 163 lines, seventy-seven, or forty-seven percent, are deleted. Finally, eight entire chapters of book 5, “Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On” (425–452) were deleted in the *Pathfinder* serialization, including one of the most beautifully written passages in all of Cather’s fiction, the description of Claude in the Church of St. Ouen in Rouen (449–52).



The first page of the *Pathfinder*, Oct. 6, 1923. This issue featured the first installment of the publication’s serialization of *One of Ours*. Author’s collection.

The question, then, is not merely what was done, but why was it done? Given the strict format in which the novel was serialized—generally seven pages of text (albeit very small text) per installment, with twelve installments—one might answer that the cuts were made simply to save space by focusing on those elements of the narrative that moved the story of this young Nebraskan along. Significant cutting was, in fact, common in periodical serialization, and according to Frank Luther Mott, the *Pathfinder*’s editors were known for and “were highly skilled in condensation” (63). However, we must also consider the nature of the periodical itself. In a time of great change in American society, the *Pathfinder* was a staunchly conservative publication. The “Guide to Contents” page of the October 6, 1923, issue, in which the serialization of Cather’s novel begins, says this of

One of Ours: “This is the novel which won the \$1000 Pulitzer prize. It is by Willa Cather. ‘One of Ours’ stands second in the list of current ‘best sellers.’ It is a *good, clean story* [italics mine] and concerns a Nebraskan farm boy’s great sacrifice” (see image on previous page). The editors of the *Pathfinder* evidently knew clearly that its predominantly rural readership (the publisher was the *Farm Journal*) liked “good, clean” stories. Mott, in fact, notes that the magazine, originally titled “A National Newspaper for Young Americans,” had subsequently broadened its reader base to improve its financial standing by carrying the news of the day (63), with, of course, the requisite advertisements for that larger readership.

The text of the first *Pathfinder* installment of *One of Ours* is prefaced by an “Introduction,” which reads:

This is the story of Claude Wheeler, a young man of Nebraska whom you will recognize as “One of Ours”—so truly has the author portrayed him. Beset with continuous circumstances of a nature that throttle his very joy of life he seriously wonders if there is no outlet for his youthful energy. The unfoldment of his destiny is not fictional—it is a true account of what many American boys go through whenever a simple and honest character is pitted against a cruel and relentless world. So this is not merely a story of one life in one section of the country; it pertains to youthful lives everywhere. The final chapter in the rocky career of this lovable youth is what you will agree is the most logical remedy for the chronic ills that fate had fastened upon him. Miss Willa Cather, who has rightly been termed “our greatest living woman novelist,” has given the world an immortal novel in “One of Ours.” No finer tribute to her and recognition of the excellence of her work could be desired than the award of the \$1000 Pulitzer Prize for 1923 for the “American novel which best presents the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood.” (October 6, 1923: 16)

Those final words are a close approximation of the Pulitzer Prize committee’s statement announcing the selection of *One of Ours* for the 1923 award (*New York Times*, May 14, 1923). While the *Omaha Bee* referred to itself as a “Mirror of the World’s Events,” the *Pathfinder* variously billed itself as a periodical that “Show[ed] the Way through the Jungle of Events,” presented “The Gist of the World’s News in a Nutshell,” and was “An Independent Journal for the American Home.” According to Squire, the *Bee* presented “a constellation of current events unfolding in the headlines of the daily paper” (13). The *Pathfinder* did much the same thing for “busy Americans,” who did not have time to keep up with events on a daily basis. And with a subscription rate of one dollar a year, it did so for a large segment of the nation’s “heartland”

population, in particular. The *Pathfinder* is, in fact, a fascinating publication; however, to the Cather enthusiast the serial version of *One of Ours* printed there is disturbing, to say the least.

Once one moves past the omission of a third of Cather’s text, some of the changes are minor, e.g., “honor” for Cather’s “honour,” lowercase lettering in cases where Cather used capital letters, printing spelled-out, two-digit numbers as Arabic numerals, and neglect of Cather’s paragraph and chapter breaks. However, other edits to Cather’s original language are more significant, obviously reflecting the magazine’s attempt to eliminate any phrasing that might disturb or offend readers, e.g., “My God” and “God a’ mighty” (105 and 140) become “My Heavens” and “Great Heavens” in the *Pathfinder*. “Damned mules” (189) becomes simply “mules”; later, “damned old shirts” (255) becomes “confounded shirts.” While these examples illustrate a recognition of the preferences of the periodical’s readership, more substantive changes apparently reflect the attempt to tell the readers what they want to hear and not disturb their positions on controversial subjects currently being debated in the postwar era.

Alcohol, a major social and “moral” issue in the United States in the early twenties, arises almost immediately in Cather’s novel. We learn in chapter 1 that Claude’s father “had been a heavy drinker in his day” (18) though he has given that up. Mahailey’s husband, “a savage mountaineer,” too often provided “nothing but a jug of mountain whiskey and a pair of brutal fists” (37). We are told that Ernest Havel, a Bohemian who owns a farm near the Wheeler place, “usually drank a glass of beer when he came to town” though he is “sober and thoughtful beyond the wont of young men” (21). However, Claude’s brother Bayliss is “a virulent Prohibitionist” (18) who considers Ernest “a drunken loafer” (21). Both the paragraph describing Mahailey’s husband and Ernest Havel’s drinking that one beer are deleted in the *Pathfinder* version of the story, as is the description of an incident before the dinner following Claude and Enid’s wedding. When all guests have been seated, Enid’s father rises and offers a toast—a glass of “grape-juice punch” to the bride and groom (259). However, just before the bride and groom and all the guests had been seated, Mr. Royce “had taken Mr. Wheeler down to the fruit cellar, where the two old friends drank off a glass of well-seasoned Kentucky whiskey, and shook hands” (259).

The subject of drinking becomes more important when Claude joins up with other soldiers bound for France in book 4, “The Voyage of the *Anchises*.” Claude first meets Victor Morse, a flyer, when late one night Morse enters Claude’s and Lieutenant Bird’s quarters to claim a berth. When Morse climbs into a berth over



Lt. Bird, Cather tells us that “a heavy smell of rum spread in the close air” (367). A few pages later we learn that Morse is still in bed; one of the other soldiers says, “I reckon he’s been liquouring up pretty steady. The place smells like a bar” (370). When Claude returns to his quarters a few minutes later, Morse produces a bottle and asks Claude, “Have a nip?” Claude accepts his offer. All three of these passages are deleted from the *Pathfinder* edition. Moreover, Claude later meets a young girl named Marie, who tells him about an American soldier friend: “*Il est bon, il est gai, mon soldat,*” she says, “but he sometimes drank too much alcohol, and that was a bad habit.” A drunk friend of his had recently fallen into a cellar hole and been drowned, she adds. Maybe that would be lesson to him (503). This passage *is* included in the *Pathfinder* version, a lesson for the magazine’s readers, perhaps?

If drinking is clearly frowned upon, sex is certainly taboo in the *Pathfinder* version. Again, the more worldly Victor Morse is at the center of much of what is said about this topic in book 4, chapter 4 of Cather’s novel, the whole of which is deleted in the *Pathfinder* version. Morse offers to show Claude London, “a city that’s alive”; he suggests they dine at the Savoy: “The curtain will rise on this world for you. Nobody admitted who isn’t in evening dress. The jewels will dazzle you. Actresses, duchesses, all the handsomest women in Europe” (383). Victor then explains to Claude that because M.P.s are very strict about American soldiers cavorting with French women, if he sees a young French woman in whom he’s interested, he’ll have to make a move quickly. In response to Claude’s question as to whether French women have “scruples,” Morse answers that he hasn’t “found that girls have many, anywhere.” The conversation ends with Morse relating “a tale of amorous adventure” (384). As noted, this entire section is deleted in the *Pathfinder*.

Victor subsequently tells Claude about his London mistress, Maisie, who has left her husband and now shares an apartment with Victor. He produces a photograph of Maisie that shows “a large moon-shaped face with heavy-lidded, weary eyes—the neck clasped by a pearl collar, the shoulders bare to the matronly swell of the bosom” (407–408). It is clear to Claude that she is old enough to be Victor’s mother. “Had Victor been delicate enough to leave him in any doubt, Claude would have preferred to believe that his relations with this lady were of a wholly filial nature” (408). This conversation ends with Victor’s asking the naive Claude to try to procure something for a medical problem, presumably a venereal disease, for which he has been “dodging medical inspections” (409). Predictably, this section of the original text is also deleted. Additional conversation about Maisie is part of the huge block of text, pages 425–452, that is cut from this serialized version. An especially risqué passage includes Victor’s recalling Maisie

and declaring to Claude that “you won’t know what a woman can be till you meet her, Wheeler.” When Claude asks whether his friend’s current plans for an evening “playing” with French women might seem an objectionable “diversion” to Maisie, Victor answers, “Women don’t require that sort of fidelity of the air service. Our engagements are too uncertain.” Then “half an hour later Victor had gone in quest of amorous adventure” (436).

One other example indicates Cather’s awareness of what is on the minds of many soldiers and again demonstrates the *Pathfinder* editor’s refusal to include any references to sex in the text. In Cather’s original text, the description of “that week they spent at Beaufort” (571) again includes clear reference to the soldiers’ amorous relationships with the town’s women. Cather says that the men dance with the local women every evening. “Claude saw that a good deal was going on, and he lectured his men at parade. But he realized that he might as well scold at the sparrows” (575). In the evening there were always “loitering couples in the dusky streets and lanes” (575). “Excursions into the forest after mushrooms” have become a common occurrence (576). David Gerhardt jokes with Claude that Maxey, another soldier, who had lost a leg, “would come back here on one leg” if he knew about these excursions (576). When Gerhardt asks Claude whether he is going to put an end to these excursions, Claude replies, that he has decided not to. “Oh, the girls—” David laughed softly. “Well, it’s something to acquire a taste for mushrooms. They don’t get them at home, do they?” (576). This whole chapter (17) in book 5 of Cather’s novel is, of course, deleted.

Another topic that might understandably be avoided, given the *Pathfinder*’s attempt to appeal to a wide and varied national audience, is the horror of war. Although some reviewers, and notably, Ernest Hemingway, criticized Cather’s novel for presenting an unrealistic picture of war, Cather, in fact, does not shy away from those realities. Numerous examples demonstrate Cather’s understanding of the horror, many certainly taken from articles and photographs that appeared in the *New York Times* and other New York newspapers, as well as her interviews with dozens of veterans. Several passages in Cather’s novel suffice to illustrate this point. In book 5, chapter 16, Cather describes a sniper’s killing an old woman and a young girl. He hits the woman and with a second shot, a “little girl who stood beside Hicks, eating chocolate.” She “threw out her hands, ran a few steps, and fell, blood and brains oozing out in her yellow hair” (566). In the *Pathfinder* version, we are told more simply that she “threw out her hands, ran a few steps, and fell dead.” In book 5, chapter 17 the “battered defenders of the Boar’s Head” stumble through a trench filled with the recently

One of Ours

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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of Claude Wheeler, a young man of Nebraska whom you will recognize as "One of Ours"—so truly has the author portrayed him. Beset with continuous circumstances of a nature that throttle his very joy of life he seriously wonders if there is no outlet for his youthful energy. The unfolding of his destiny is not fictional—it is a true account of what many American boys go through whenever a simple and honest character is pitted against a cruel and relentless world. So this is not merely a story of one life in one section of the country; it pertains to youthful lives everywhere. The final chapter in the rocky career of this lovable youth is what you will agree is the most logical remedy for the chronic ills that fate had fastened upon him. Miss Willa Cather, who has rightly been termed "our greatest living woman novelist," has given the world an immortal novel in "One of Ours." No finer tribute to her and recognition of the excellence of her work could be desired than the award of the \$1000 Pulitzer prize for 1923 for the "American novel which best presents the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood."

The *Pathfinder's* introduction to its first installment of *One of Ours*.

killed. The stench is disgusting. "Under their feet the earth worked and moved as if boa constrictors were wriggling down there—soft bodies, lightly covered." They pass "a pile of corpses, a dozen or more, thrown one on top of another like sacks of flour" (587). While this part of Cather's description is included in the *Pathfinder* serialization, the rest of the paragraph is not: "While the two officers stood there, rumbling, squirting sounds began to come from this heap, first from one body, then from another—gasses, swelling in the liquifying entrails of the dead men. They seemed to be complaining to one another; *glup, glup, glup*" (587). A few pages later Cather describes "a large fat boot" that "stuck stiffly from the side of the trench" (589) and then at the top of the earthen wall a "dark hand" that "reached out; the five fingers, well apart, looked like the swollen roots of some noxious weed" (590). Both of these passages, as well as many others similar in their detailed descriptions of such scenes of horror, do not appear in the *Pathfinder*.⁶

Many other topics were also avoided, for example, Claude's difficult relationship with his brother Bayliss, and especially his strained relationship with his father, who seems to enjoy frustrating and tormenting young Claude. Several lengthy passages in book 1, chapter 2 in which Cather describes Nat Wheeler in less than flattering terms, are cut in the *Pathfinder*. As one might expect, the traumatic episode involving his father's cutting down the family's cherry tree (44–47) is omitted. The postwar period saw serious challenges, especially on the part of young people, to the traditional notions of family and traditional

"family values." With the strong interest in trying to preserve the traditional family in the years after the war, a scene in which a young boy, "almost choking with rage and hate," calls his father "a damn fool" (45) would certainly not appeal to a conservative, middle-class readership.

Basically, almost any passage that questions or criticizes conventional American values is omitted. In the July 7 announcement of the upcoming serialization of *One of Ours*, the reader is told that the novel "has been widely praised for its literary qualities and for its patriotic spirit" and that it "typifies the true American spirit." The American fascination for "things"—fundamental to the American spirit of the twenties—is touched upon early in the novel when Claude looks with disgust at Ralph's "mechanical toys," which fill the cellar of the Wheeler house (*One of Ours* 35). The American "mania for *owning* things" (Whitman's phrase, italics mine) was a theme that we see also in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922) and in *The Professor's House* (1925). It is also an idea that Cather returns to in the heavily edited last section of *One of Ours*, where Claude considers the possibility of buying a farm and staying in France after the war ends because "there was no chance for the kind of life he wanted at home, where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down. He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotions" (534–35).⁷ However, Claude Wheeler died in battle, unlike so many others, who, physically disabled, scarred, or disillusioned by their experience, returned home to "quietly die by their own hand" (605). The reviewer for the *Omaha Bee* noted Cather's "tolerant realism" in *One of Ours* but called her picture of the Midwest unflattering ("Story of Nebraska Boy's Revolt" 130). The editor of the *Pathfinder* version of the novel would allow neither.

Unfortunately, almost every passage in the novel that reveals something of Claude's complex nature, passages in which Cather attempts to show him as more than a one-dimensional character, is omitted. Claude's reflections on his life—his childhood memories, his love of the Midwestern landscape, his disappointment in himself for shortcomings and failures—apparently were deemed interruptions in the narrative or passages that could be deleted in order to preserve the basic seven-page format of each issue and at the same time limit the length of the serialization. Those passages in which he expresses his joy in camaraderie, his sense of accomplishment, his pride in the leader he has become, the feeling that "he commanded wonderful men" (597), are retained. He has, indeed, realized his desire to do "something splendid" with his life. For Claude "the call was clear; the cause was glorious" (604). These



One of Ours

THE \$1,000 PRIZE NOVEL

By Willa Cather

This banner introduced each installment of Cather's novel.

passages reflect fundamental patriotic values in a postwar period in which many were questioning U.S. involvement in the war and suffering the disillusionment that came from a sense of loss, dishonesty, hypocrisy, and betrayal. G. P. Cather and Claude Wheeler were two of those who, dying young, still saw that original vision in terms of “beautiful beliefs” (604).

Many of the deleted passages throughout the *Pathfinder* version of the novel are the very passages that show Claude not only as an uncertain and at times angry young man but also as a man who is at times quite sensitive. The passage in which he visits the Church of St. Ouen clearly reveals this more reflective, contemplative side of Claude. He is struck by the atmosphere of the church, and especially by the beauty of the stained glass windows and the tolling of the bell:

The revelations of the glass and the bell had come almost simultaneously, as if one produced the other; and both were superlatives toward which his mind has always been groping—or so it seemed to him then. . . . He sat solemnly through the hour until twelve, his elbows on his knees, his conical hat swinging between them in his hand, looking up through the twilight with candid, thoughtful eyes” (450, 452).

The way in which Cather develops Claude's relationship with David Gerhardt is also illustrative of what is lost in many of the deletions. Initially, Claude is shown to be, as Cather later referred to him, “an inarticulate young man butting his way through the world” (Merrill 78). When he first meets Gerhardt, Claude responds with a certain hesitation and distrust because it is clear that David is so different from him. He, unlike Claude, “seemed experienced; a finished product, rather than something on the way. He was handsome, and his face, like his manner and his walk, had something distinguished about it” (456). Claude's discomfort is especially obvious when, visiting the Jouberts with David, he is unable to understand what David and his friends, speaking French, are saying, and later when he is invited to play tennis with David and his friends. Claude subsequently relishes his being able to select lumber for a project when David cannot. Initially, Claude sees David as one who “had always lived in a more or less rose-coloured world” (494). During training, however, Claude comes to marvel at David's “spirit and endurance” (469), and he develops an interest in David's career as a violinist. While some of these details are retained in the *Pathfinder* serialization, the real sense of camaraderie, of mutual respect and easy friendship

that develops between the two men, qualities that are so clearly revealed in the “week at Beaufort” passage mentioned above, are lost to the *Pathfinder* editor's deletion.

In fact, as brutally edited as the *Pathfinder* version of Cather's novel is, there is much to be learned from it. Those reviewers who saw the novel as a disappointment or a failure focused on what they considered Cather did *not* do in *One of Ours*, e.g., she did not develop the Enid story, did not effectively describe the horrors of war, did not employ the same kind of skepticism or cynicism seen in Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*. What the deletions clearly do indicate, however, is what Cather *did* achieve, what she *did* do well. The *Pathfinder* serialization of *One of Ours* is merely a rather stale narrative about a one-dimensional “red-headed prairie boy” (Mahoney 39), who dies for his country in World War I. References to those social issues that Americans faced in the teens and early twenties, deleted, perhaps make us more aware of the relative complexity of Cather's depiction of the times in which her narrative took place.

So, what did Willa Cather think of this serialization of a story that she told Dorothy Canfield Fisher so obsessed her (*Complete Letters* nos. 0585, 0596, 0588)? She may have learned of the *Omaha Bee's* serialization, but nothing indicates that she saw or read the *Pathfinder* version of her novel. Nothing in her published letters reveals knowledge of this copy. One might imagine what she would have said had she known how brutally her novel was edited. Yet her correspondence from this period suggests that the serializations were of little or no concern. With the 1922 publication of *One of Ours*, Cather's career took a sharp turn upward. In a February 6 [1922] letter to Fisher, written seven months before the publication of *One of Ours*, she remarked, “A slow-selling author, who pays little attention to in-come, has to pay attention to the out-go, or be in a hole at the end of the year” (*Complete Letters* no. 0578). In the months after publication of *One of Ours*, Cather repeatedly wrote to Alfred Knopf, asking about or commenting on the sales of her novel (e.g., *Complete Letters* nos. 2530, 2531, 2535, 2537, 2538, 2539). Her financial ledger indicates how scrupulously she recorded information on the sales of her works. After the success of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920) and *One of Ours* and the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize in 1923, Cather never again had to worry about “in-come and out-go.” Clearly concerned with her financial, as well as her artistic success, with “chasing bright Medusas” (*Complete Letters* no. 0534) in 1920, by 1923 she had achieved both.

With the support of her new publishers, Alfred and Blanche Knopf, and a series of remarkable novels and



short stories that followed *One of Ours*, Willa Cather finally achieved a lifestyle to which she had long wanted to become accustomed. With serializations of *A Lost Lady* in 1923 and the subsequent critical success of novels and short stories (many also serialized), she would be comfortable for the rest of her life. As for the serialized versions of *One of Ours*, it is perhaps fortunate that all Cather evidently knew, or perhaps cared about, was that they represented \$175, a significant amount of money at a time when she very much wanted to realize financial success. She wrote to Alfred Knopf in November 1922 that serialization of *A Lost Lady* would no doubt be “good advertising . . . as well as good pay” (*Complete Letters* no. 2542). As published in the *Pathfinder*, *One of Ours* was, perhaps, both. The novel was advertised in the first *Pathfinder* installment, as “a good, clean story,” and it was—after the magazine cleaned up what Cather had originally written. However, that version is a far cry from the book over which Cather struggled for four years.

NOTES

1. According to Lavin, with *My Antonia* (1918) and *One of Ours* (1922) Cather “ruled out serialization with little consideration” (165). For discussions of Cather’s ambivalent attitude about magazine publications, see Roorda and Lavin.

2. My thanks to Kari Ronning for calling my attention to this publication.

3. For a brief history of the *Pathfinder*, see Graham Patterson, “A Man Who Started Something.” *Old MagazineArticles.com*, oldmagazinearticles.com/article-summary/pathfinder_magazine_history.

4. See Lavin, notes 4 and 17. While Blanche may well have placed the novel with the *Pathfinder*, according to Mark Madigan, Paul Reynolds placed some of Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s work in the *Pathfinder*. Perhaps he made the connection with the *Pathfinder* for *One of Ours*.

5. In a May 27 [1920] letter to her mother and sister Elsie, Cather noted that when “Coming, Eden Bower,” later titled “Coming, Aphrodite!,” was sold to the *Smart Set*, “It had to be cut and changed so for the magazine that I don’t see why they wanted it” (*Complete Letters* no. 2417). *The Omaha Bee* serialization of *One of Ours* was also edited; however, the edits made in the *Bee* were not nearly so numerous or extreme as those made in the *Pathfinder* serialization.

6. Interestingly, the bathing hole scene (481–485) is deleted, but the passage describing the German officer who is killed when Claude and Sergeant Hicks enter a building is not. Did the *Pathfinder* editor simply fail to see the suggestion of a homosexual relationship here? See *One of Ours*, pp. 568–70, 786.

7. For a similar statement, see Cather’s Dec. 21, 1924 interview with Rose C. Feld of the *New York Times*, “Restlessness Such As Ours Does Not Make for Beauty” (*Willa Cather in Person*, 68–72).

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One of Ours: Reading the Truth Hidden Within the Headlines of the American Press's "Great" War

Lilia Hutchison

In a letter to her publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, in February 1922, Willa Cather includes a draft of the dust jacket text for the first edition of *One of Ours* that refers to the novel's protagonist Claude Wheeler's "stormy youth, his enigmatic marriage, and the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of the boy's nature." The draft claims that the novel provides "an ever deepening sense of the national drama, of national character, working itself out through individuals and their destiny." Cather defended this vague language, emphasizing to Knopf that "the theme of the story must not be whispered" on the jacket (*Complete Letters* no. 2526). That theme, of course, is the Great War. As publication approached, Cather also voiced concern for the novel's reception in letters to close friends, unveiling a critique at the heart of *One of Ours*: how the press led naive American boys to believe in their impossible version of the war.

This critique is powerfully reflected in Claude Wheeler's story—based on the story of her cousin G. P. Cather—which had preoccupied Cather while she wrote the book, as she explained to Dorothy Canfield Fisher in an undated letter written on or about April 12, 1922: "he's given me three lovely, tormented years" (*Complete Letters* no. 0589). In fact, Cather learned of G. P.'s death when Isabelle McClung Hambourg showed her the June 8, 1918 notice in the *New York Times* listing G. P. Cather as among those killed in action in France (Harris 618–619). As she wrote in the letter to Fisher, she saw the notice of his subsequent citation for bravery "when I was having my hair shampooed in a hairdresser's shop." Cather was disturbed by G. P.'s death, telling Fisher in the same letter "that anything so glorious could have happened to anyone so disinherited of hope! . . . If the reader doesn't get him, he gets nothing." It is not remorse, but Cather's bitterness toward the press's misuse of Americans' ideals in wartime that is central to her formation of Claude Wheeler.

Also in this letter to Fisher, Cather wrote, "it's a misfortune for me and my publisher that anything so cruelly personal, so subjective as this story should be mixed up with journalism and public events with which the world is weary and of which I know so little." Her comparison here is no idle comment, but rather illuminates the press's largely overlooked role as the molders of the American consciousness of World War I—of boys like G. P.—and, in turn,

of national memory and war narratives. Kelsey Squire confirms this in her analysis of the *Omaha Daily Bee's* 1923 serialization of *One of Ours*, recognizing that Cather's novel was quite literally "mixed up" with journalism. Since the war "was still a fact of daily life" in 1922, the American public's reception of Cather's novel was clouded by the press's "reality" of war (9). Otherwise, the role of the press in this novel remains largely unexamined. In the previously referenced letter to Fisher, Cather wrote: "Yes, it will be classed as a 'war story' . . . but it stood between me and anything else." Considering her prior concerns and cousin's death, Cather pointedly enclosed "war story" in quotes to underscore her distinction—the novel is a war story, but not the expected war story—romantic ideals of patriotism, heroism, and bravery shape Claude's transformation from a naive Nebraskan farmer to a heroic soldier, but she intentionally undercuts his ideals with her perspective. Cather's war story reveals that the accepted "patriotic" war narrative was problematic because the press had buried the true tragedy of boys like Claude Wheeler under sensationalism. Framing Cather's letters within her career in journalism during the press's professionalization, I investigate how Cather's novel came to be "mixed up" with journalism—the wartime rhetoric—and argue that she employed the press's language to expose how exactly Americans' ideals were exploited to warp the war into a romantic "reality."

Evidence of Cather's developing concern illuminates why she wished to omit the war from the dust jacket: it was not World War I itself that she would eliminate, but the idealized "Great War" solidified in the postwar American consciousness, shaped by the American press. She rightfully worried that readers' entrenched postwar perspectives would limit their understanding of her complex vision of war. As it was, her fears came true: so much of the American public's reading of Claude Wheeler's tragic narrative was muted by their idealized vision or direct experience of World War I. Lisa Bouma Garvelink and Kelsey Squire recognize the unique complexity of her novel that has remained undiscovered beneath the postwar biases of readers at publication and even now, a century later. As Garvelink notes, most early critics either condemned *One of Ours* as a failed modernist novel or celebrated Claude's romanticism. As a result, she argues, readers conflated



Claude with the war and overlooked “the dynamic struggle between Cather’s romantic, idealistic vision and modernist, questioning vision” (914). In turn, Garvelink proposes a new framework for *One of Ours*, as not either romantic or modernist, but rather as a “heteroglossia,” a dimensional vision of war that conveys the spectrum of American perspectives (913–14). In this essay, to further recent scholarship on *One of Ours* that has begun to read Cather’s perspectives in conversation rather than in conflict, I examine the means by which Claude Wheeler’s family, like most Americans, experience the war—newspapers. I explore how Cather recreates the wartime reality and critiques the idealistic illusion of World War I by shedding light on the forces that made this illusion a reality for Americans at home—the American press.

In her book *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*, Ellen Gruber Garvey explores how industrialization and the mass-market “fed the growth of the ad-dependent magazines.” At the same time as admen wove their target readers’ ideals into advertisements and narratives to encourage “consumership” (Garvey 136–37), a new voice in journalism formed in opposition—muckrakers. Writing from a particular and decisive point of view, muckrakers grabbed Americans by their patriotic bootstraps, advocating the preservation of liberty and individual voice to rouse them to action (Aucoin 560). Despite moral conflict, fundamentally, both admen and muckrakers manipulated readers’ ideals to evoke a desired response with identical strategies. This influence over popular culture and public opinion soon caught the attention of politicians. Historian Joseph R. Hayden, in *Negotiating in the Press: American Journalism and Diplomacy, 1918–1919*, recognizes how U.S. presidents of the twentieth century, particularly “McKinley, Roosevelt, and Wilson,” inspired journalists to believe their work was of “vital national significance” and, taking heed of the press’s influence, began “facilitating the formation of their presidential image and fomenting journalism’s reputability” (66). In his book *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, David M. Kennedy examines the relationship between political reform and the press’s influence over the American consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century. Kennedy provides context for Hayden’s point, emphasizing how the press became “the chief instrument of [political] reform,” cultivating a unified American consciousness (46–47). Unfolding just before the war, the press’s accession to the voice of and for the people gave the U.S. an advantage unmatched in World War I—the public’s support and unwavering trust.

Willa Cather and Journalism

Because her own early career had involved her in the processes of journalistic professionalism, Cather understood the dangers

of journalists’ jump from selling products to selling the war to the nation. She entered journalism at the height of the press’s professionalization, and this provides context for her later concerns about the public’s enthusiastic response to newspapers in *One of Ours*. Moreover, her range of experience illuminates how she embeds her awareness of the press’s strategies into the language of the novel. The chronology of Cather’s career, I argue, affected her understanding of modern journalism and founded her representation of the wartime press in the novel.

Cather began to work as a columnist for local papers during her college years in Lincoln, Nebraska. After college, in 1896, she became the editor of the *Home Monthly*, an ad-dependent magazine, in Pittsburgh. Over the next few years, Cather worked for various Pittsburgh newspapers while continuing her columns in Lincoln, learning how to navigate the expectations and social ideals of both a small Midwestern city and a larger, industrialized city of the Northeast. Cather spent the last six years of her journalistic career (1906–1912) as an editor at *McClure’s Magazine*, a literary and muckraking publication based in New York City (Gerber 14–21). After a decade of diverse journalistic work, her experiences at this very popular and influential magazine further opened her eyes to the press’s contrived intentions and prepared her to craft her satire of the wartime press: *One of Ours*.

Early in her career, Cather recognized how the press’s focus was not informing the public, but how to best manipulate language and information to gain circulation and reputation. For example, on October 13, 1897, Cather wrote to Louise Pound about her new position as telegraph editor at *The Pittsburgh Leader*. She explained that it was not the “dramatic work” she had expected as a columnist but work requiring “discretion, some general knowledge of foreign affairs and history, and the trick of writing headlines.” She lingers on the writing of headlines, explaining, “it is so funny to have to hold a form half an hour because the King of Belgium is on a spree or to be almost wild because somebody in Paris shot herself just five minutes too late to get in on the dramatic page where she ought to be” and instead might appear beside “a W.C.T.U. [Woman’s Christian Temperance Union] Convention.” She adds that she must write headlines for twelve suicides of people who “show a poverty of imagination in the way they kill themselves” then expresses frustration about receiving contradictory telegrams about the same political story. The responsibility of making twelve attention-grabbing headlines about suicides and discerning truth from political biases reveals the heart of her criticism: instead of seeking stories of events affecting Americans’ lives, the newspaper sought to turn suicides into attractive stories and politics into drama. Disturbed by her work, Cather apologizes repeatedly to Pound for releasing



her personal stress unintentionally with an “autobiographical” paragraph (*Selected Letters* 47–48). Ultimately, she presents the press’s strategy as a jigsaw puzzle: how to best arrange stories and, most importantly, craft provocative headlines to draw readers in by a word.

Cather’s sarcasm in her letter to Pound reveals an attitude of disdain for the press’s strategic manipulation that is also apparent in later letters to Dorothy Canfield Fisher about the public’s reception of the novel. Applying her journalistic experience to her fiction, Cather demonstrates how the press exploited readers’ strongest emotions, interests, and ideals to shape their understanding of news stories, by making newspapers the source of the Great War’s presence in the Wheelers’ lives. Both recreating the American press and satirizing it, Cather crafts the Wheelers’ emphatic responses to expose how the press controlled the American war experience with language. In *One of Ours*, Cather is not critical of the ideals of war itself, but rather of how the press manipulated and distorted patriotic ideals to sell the war to Americans.

Mary R. Ryder, in her essay “‘As Green as Their Money’: Doughboy Naïfs in *One of Ours*,” investigates the romantic irony that distinguishes between propaganda’s war rhetoric in Cather’s narration and Claude’s imagination. Whereas Ryder examines propaganda posters, I argue that Cather critiques printed propaganda; I compare the language of Midwestern newspapers in wartime, primarily the *Omaha Daily Bee*, to the various newspapers that shape the Wheelers’ war experience in rural Frankfort, Nebraska. Kelsey Squire’s investigation of the *Omaha Bee*’s 1923 serialization of *One of Ours* substantiates my argument and provides a framework to further dissect Cather’s ironic use of war rhetoric that fuses her narrator’s and Claude’s voices. To expand upon Squire’s corroboration of Cather’s concerns that her novel was “mixed up” with journalism, or misunderstood as perpetuating rather than exposing the press’s romantic illusions about the war, I analyze Cather’s use of the war’s events to structure Claude’s narrative.

One of Ours

Claude represents a generation of American boys yearning to step out from behind their fathers’ shadows and prove themselves men. With a father like Nat Wheeler, the expectations of masculinity weigh heavily on Claude, a boy ruled by his insecurities. The ideals Claude enacts unknowingly—bravery, protection, agency, and a strength akin to immortality—are qualities characteristic of both a man and an American soldier. However, unsuited for the life of farming expected of him, Claude is the target of criticism from the most masculine of men, namely, his father. So, when Nat buys

the ranch in Colorado, Claude accepts his duty on the farm and leaves the State University. Determined to fit the expectations he detests in order to gain others’ validation, Claude feels mocked by fate as “another gold day stretched before him like a glittering carpet, leading . . . ?” (114) He begins falling into a cyclical pattern symbolic of his war with predestination: his heroic efforts at innovation in farming are met only with criticism. Once Claude takes over the farm, his string of failures unfolds like an accordion and the fateful concatenation ensues: the heavier his fate looms, the greater the failure weighs on him; the more abundant his fantasies of living, the more desperate he becomes for any means of escape.

The snowstorm that collapses the barn roof and kills Claude’s hogs prefigures a soldier’s duty to protect the lives of his fellow soldiers and nation. Despite his heroic efforts, Claude internalizes this as his failure to uphold his responsibility for the innocent lives left in his care. The morning after the snowstorm, Claude laughs at his mother’s concerns about their cattle. Finding the cattle safe but the hogs buried, Claude jumps to action. Fighting his way into the barn, “his back and arms ached, and his hands, which he couldn’t keep dry, were blistered.” A single thought propels him: “There were thirty-seven hogs in the hog-house.” Energized by his shame, Claude only stops when he finds the last twelve dead: “wet and black in the snow, their bodies warm and smoking.” Later, Claude is indignant at Mahailey’s concern that the hogs be butchered and eaten: “I wouldn’t butcher them if I never saw meat again.” He feels humiliated “because they had been left in his charge” (141–43). Ruminating over the hogs’ deaths as a loss of life, while to his father it is a loss of profit, Claude becomes “aware of ‘multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation’” (Palmer 117, quoting Henri Bergson). He realizes: just as the hogs are commodified into market values, so his yield as a farmer determines his value, not who he is. In such torturous moments, “he would be transformed from a wooden post into a living boy” sure that beyond the farm there is “something splendid about life” (147). Though the war is not yet discernable on the horizon, every failure deepens his painful awareness that the expectations in Frankfort will unfailingly deny him and feeds his faith that his Destiny lies beyond the farm.

Just before the war, Claude’s heroism results in a blunder that leaves him both psychologically and physically wounded, concluding his hopes of proving himself as a farmer. Leonard Dawson, a neighboring farmer, describes to Claude’s best friend Ernest how Claude’s mules dragged him into a barbed wire fence, which scratched him severely. When he insisted on working the next day, he developed a severe infection. Ernest reflects that Claude is “big and strong, and he’s got an education and all that



fine land, but he don't seem to fit in right," recognizing his friend's masculine but misdirected energy. Claude tortures himself with this same thought, embarrassed that his reward for saving his mules' lives is an injury to match his wounded spirit—he does not see that, like a true soldier, he was willing to sacrifice his own life to save theirs. During his long convalescence his face becomes “so white that even his freckles had disappeared, and his hands were the soft, languid hands of a sick man,” changes that symbolize a rebirth. Consequently, he determines Enid's “significant and fateful” visits during his recovery are his answer; she is his Destiny. His strength returns; “the desire to live again sang in his veins. . . . Waves of youth swept over him,” and he idealizes her, sure that their marriage will resolve his every failure (190–98). His first day out after recovering, Claude visits Enid's father, Mr. Royce, asking for her hand in marriage. Claude's confidence both moves and concerns Mr. Royce, who warns Claude genuinely against marriage, but also sees in Claude's “reticent pride” and “stubborn loyalty” of his shoulders (205) that he possesses the qualities of a man—also a soldier—but Claude will have to learn this lesson himself, hoping it does not destroy him first. As with his prior failures, the warning signs incite a surge of intuition that Claude desperately acts on—wrongly.

Cather ends this first section with Gladys Farmer, a childhood friend whom Claude ought to have married, to emphasize that the answer Claude seeks is not his marriage, but within him. Gladys admires Claude's imaginative spirit and wishes “to see him emerge and prove himself” but is also painfully aware that Frankfort's expectations ensure that Claude, “so well endowed, so fearless, must fail, simply because he had that fine strain in his nature” (212). Gladys's insights underscore how Claude disillusions himself, in denial that this new beginning with Enid is another dead end. Lisa Garvelink argues that, although Claude struggles against expectations, he ultimately “allows the authoritarian discourse around him—in this case war rhetoric—to become internally persuasive for him because of his unswerving search for something to make life worthwhile” (915). Following up on Garvelink's observation, the congruent timelines of the Great War and Claude's narrative, specifically Claude and Enid's relationship, reveal that the ideals that shape his heroic journey are the very ideals the press exploited systematically across the war. In other words, as a boy desperate to be a man in the eyes of others, he falls for the press's image of a romantic soldier, knowingly crafted with the ideals that boys like him would go to any length to achieve.

This pattern is apparent in many Midwestern newspapers, such as those of the Cather family's Nebraska hometown, Red Cloud. For example, on May 28, 1914, the *Red Cloud Chief* printed a



Juxtaposed features from page 7 of the *Red Cloud Chief*, May 28, 1914.

poem beneath an image of a man and children honoring the “brave hearts” of fallen heroes for Memorial Day. While the war was yet to be, duty and bravery linked Americans' ideals of masculinity to ideals of war (see image above). Near the poem is a section titled “Memorial Day from the Lighter Side,” with satirical anecdotes, of Americans' misguided ideals of war. The title suggests and brings to attention the unifying critique. In one of these anecdotes, titled “In His Way,” a father tells his son that the boy's grandfather, a private, was a war hero but not as great as he, a millionaire, for “people can read my name on the billboards,” exposing modern culture's value of material wealth over valor. Each anecdote turns a wholesome American moment into an absurdity, emphasizing the naive national consciousness as it entered the war. In *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I*, historian Justus D. Doenecke describes Americans' view as “a gruesome illusion,” just as the *Red Cloud Chief* illustrates how the press convinced the nation to see the war as a fictional conflict of good and evil (19). While propaganda posters have been identified as manipulating the public opinion of war, Cather's novel also exposes how, as print propagandists, journalists transformed propaganda's images into narratives that came to life in readers' minds.

The Wheelers' initial responses to the war embody the malleability of the American mind in the press's hands. Nat Wheeler reads aloud from one of the “bundle of newspapers” he brings to dinner: “Claude, I see this war scare in Europe has hit the market. Wheat's taken a jump. They're paying eighty-eight cents in Chicago.” He suggests they haul wheat to Vicount in the morning for “seventy cents a bushel” (217–18), similar to what



the *Omaha Daily Bee* printed on September 1, 1914: “another big bulge in wheat prices, cash wheat on the Omaha market selling from \$1 up to \$1.08½ (“Big Grain Receipts”). Introducing the war through Nat Wheeler’s interest shows how the press incentivized participation from the start by playing to “what America’s self-interests truly were”: monetary and moral gain (Aucoin 566). Enlivening the press’s language in narrative and bringing the war to the Wheelers by newspaper, Cather illuminates the first of the primary ideals the press exploited to foment home-front support: prosperity. Blinded by the promise of wealth, Nat represents the American men who were bought by their interest in economic gain, not in the reasons why. As the war unfolds, each character similarly buys into the “Great” War when their opportunity to prove themselves men, women, and patriots, appears in print.

Claude’s initial indifference toward the war reflects his resignation to predestination. At his most desperate moment, the war scare first appears—Cather joins Claude with the war from the start. He first remarks, “Ernest was stirred up about the murder of that Grand Duke. . . . I never thought there was anything in it” (218), his ambivalence reflecting the *Omaha Daily Bee* which printed the news of the Archduke on June 29, 1914, the day after the assassination, on the front page’s rightmost column—while a large image of yachts dominates the top of the page (see image below). Claude’s lack of interest in the assassination also represents the nation’s ignorance of the political realities that caused and sustained the war, as exemplified in the *Omaha Daily Bee* and the

Red Cloud Chief. Although Mrs. Wheeler is the only one skeptical of the war scare’s hidden agenda, she is also, as Claude describes her, “trusting and childlike” (41). Her sympathetic attachment to the French develops from her highest ideal—religious faith. She tells Claude, “You saw in the paper how the churches are full all day of women praying. . . . And you believe those prayers will accomplish nothing, son?” (229). Mrs. Wheeler, who recognizes both the press’s manipulation and responds to it, embodies Cather’s fused perspective. Therefore, she observes the rhetoric’s influence over Claude, her awareness illuminating the holes in his illusion. Cather knew this trick well. Responsible for crafting engaging headlines and arranging articles for effect as telegram editor for the *Pittsburgh Leader* during the Spanish-American War, she described this work as unrelenting: “the horrors of war seem to be a good deal worse in newspaper offices than in the field and I had to stay on here grilling in the heat and writing headlines” (Stout 53; *Selected Letters*, 50–51). In this position, Cather experienced the pressure of spinning new and exciting headlines about the war to keep readers’ attention and cultivate their support. Recreating the press’s influence over the American mind, Cather’s critique unfolds with the war’s events; the Wheelers’ blind trust in the press ironically reveals the ulterior motives woven into every call to participate.

The characters’ exchanges about the war explain Cather’s choice to set the first half of the novel in prewar Nebraska. Reinforcing the Wheelers’ naivete, Cather imbues her postwar perspective into Ernest, a Bohemian immigrant, who, having seen the realities of war, is content with the “safety, security” of farming that, to Claude, “was like being assured of a decent burial” (146). Claude and Ernest’s conflicting perspectives about the war personify Cather’s critique of the press’s biased voice. The *Omaha Daily Bee*’s headline on August 5, 1914, “Great Britain and Germany to War” (see image on next page) is comparable to that which Claude had read before remarking to Ernest, “England declared war last night” (221): the top half of the page celebrates the Allies’ victories over the Central Powers, sub-headlines like “Orders the Army Mobilized” build the drama and captivate the reader. Though his education is unclear, Ernest can conceive of the German position from experience and has lived in the world that Claude, with a “poor opinion of any place farther away than Chicago” only imagines (93). As Ernest explains Germany’s power, the sun sets behind them; the close of day symbolizing Ernest’s realization that, had he been home, he would have been forced to fight. Therefore, when he asks Claude rhetorically, “How would you like it yourself, to be marched into a peaceful country like this, in the middle of harvest, and begin to destroy it?” Claude’s proudly ignorant proclamation, “I’d desert and be shot,” strikes a nerve in Ernest: “You Americans brag like little boys . . . nobody’s will has anything to do with this” (222–23).



From the front page of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 29, 1914.

Ernest's blunt statement ought to confound Claude's trust in the newspapers but instead Claude defends the patriotic rhetoric he just read; next to Ernest, his ignorance is obvious. In this dialogue, Cather carefully chooses her language to powerfully contrast Americans' exploited romanticism with Ernest's realism. Claude's passionate and naive patriotism illustrates the dangerous efficacy of the press's rhetoric from the start of the war.

Claude's immediate trust in the newspapers' reports demonstrates the intentions of American propagandists' tactics in the Great War that Harold Lavine and James Wechsler analyze in *International Propaganda and Communications: War and Propaganda in the United States*. The successful tenets of U.S. home-front propaganda include: blame the enemy, depict them as "murderous, cruel,

rapacious," assure "certain victory" because "as long as people are convinced that good eventually will triumph over evil, they are willing to suffer privation and death" (6-7). In Claude's conversations with his mother over wartime newspapers, Cather brings attention to the Battle of the Marne to exemplify how Americans unconsciously adopted the rhetoric as their own thoughts. For example, on September 8, 1914, two days into the Marne, the *Omaha Daily Bee* headline—"Kaiser's Army in West in Retreat"—offers hope, while sub-headlines, "Parisians Hear Thunder of Guns" and "Germans Retire After Vigorous Action with Foe!" evoke fear for an ideal all Americans value: safety. Similarly, Claude tells his mother "the French have moved the seat of government to Bordeaux!" as if this is a familiar place; Mrs. Wheeler turns pale as if directly affected, then locates Bordeaux and Paris on her new map to visualize their importance while Claude reads aloud of France's geography. Albeit with little education to conceptualize the abstract names of European cities, much less geography or military strategy, they speak as if personally involved, the war a purpose and a distraction from their discontent (226-228). Their confidence in the French army's defense exemplifies the power of propaganda in print. In this conversation and others, Cather exposes the press's exaggeration of Allies' suffering and victory to cultivate American sympathy, fooling impressionable Americans like Claude and his mother, who have no reason to distrust what they read.

Cather employs her experience as telegram editor for the *Pittsburgh Leader* to tie Claude's transformation to the war's pivotal events. The Wheelers' daily anticipation of new reports



From the front page of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 5, 1914.

demonstrates how effectively the press crafted the war with the drama of a serialized novel. From September 6 to 10, 1914, the Marne filled the front page of the *Omaha Daily Bee*: the headline on the 6th reads, "Allies in Danger of Being Surrounded," then on the 9th, "Allies Inflict Great Losses Upon Germans." Mrs. Wheeler's anxiety turns to hope "one morning": she sits on a grass bank in a bucolic scene, absorbed by the newspaper until Claude's approach breaks her trance. She runs to him, announcing: "The French have stopped falling back, Claude. They are standing at the Marne." That night, after retrieving the Hastings evening newspaper from Vicount because they only receive "yesterday's Omaha and Kansas City papers," Claude fantasizes that he might "slip unnoticed into the outnumbered [French] army. . . . There was nothing on earth he would so gladly be as an atom in that wall of flesh and blood that rose and melted and rose again before the city that had meant so much through all the centuries" (230-233). The newspapers ignite Claude's imagination dangerously; he conflates the war with the heroes of history he idealizes. At the end of the chapter, the date is September 8, 1914—one of Cather's few specific references to the war to convey how she mirrors the Marne's importance in Claude's narrative. Just as the Allies' fate had looked grim, so Claude, after the summer plowing, has nearly surrendered to fate. Nearly—the Allies' comeback at the Marne reawakens his passions. Consequently, Claude believes anew that he will win Enid's love and become a man.

Following the Marne, the relationship between Claude's dissatisfaction and ideals develops as the war's presence in his life grows inversely to Enid's emotional distance. When Claude

begins to build their home, he believes it will bring him and Enid closer. But soon, he falls into a perpetual melancholy, vexed by how “there could be no question about her pride in every detail,” yet Enid remained detached. Over these months he imagined would be blissful, there was no passion and the construction of their future “she treated merely as a time in which they were building a house.” Claude tells himself that marriage will change Enid into a docile, loving wife, and jumps to work to avoid every reminder that he cannot change her, nor himself (237–238). On the night of their wedding, Enid refuses to consummate their marriage. This, which scholars have recognized as the ultimate blow to Claude’s masculinity, makes his act of building their home ironic: the foundation of their future cracks irreparably before they move in.

Cather interweaves Claude’s marital conflicts with the developing martial conflicts, correlating the newspapers’ reports of the war’s major events and Claude’s confrontations with the ideals not satisfied in his marriage. One day, Leonard Dawson visits Claude who, newspaper in hand, explains dryly that the Germans sank the English ship the *Arabic* (271). Leonard changes the topic to express further concerns about Enid, appalled to learn that she keeps one rooster for their brood of hens. Claude laughs and tries to make a joke of this, but Enid’s independence exacerbates his discontent with himself and how his energy was “spent in resisting unalterable conditions, and in unavailing efforts to subdue his own nature” (146–47). Later that night, Claude bathes under the moonlight, washing his troubles away with his imagination. Just as he was amazed by how a figure like Joan of Arc “could perpetuate itself thus, by a picture, a word, a phrase” (92), so the moon’s symbolic immortality frees Claude from the shackles of the farm. He imagines how the moon had shone “into fortresses where captives languished” across history, so it now shines upon him; opening his prison to release the secret self within from the suffering of his marriage (277).

Tensions between Claude and Enid grow in tandem with the war’s intensity; Claude’s devolving attitude reveals his deepening unhappiness. When Mrs. Wheeler speaks of Edith Cavell, Claude waves her off, saying, “if [Germany] could sink the *Lusitania*, they could shoot an English nurse” (286). His returned indifference, as Mrs. Wheeler’s thoughts reveal, signals a second inverse relationship of his denial and idealism. The next chapter begins, “Claude had been married a year and a half,” an abrupt jump in time aligning the highest tensions in the war and Claude’s marriage, foreshadowing its rupture (291). A year and a half after Edith Cavell’s execution brings the novel to December 1916, specifically, the week before Christmas: the end of the Battle of Verdun, the longest of the war, on December 18.

The same date is written on President Wilson’s “note” or peace terms, which Germany formally rejected on the 26th (Doenecke 235). This decisive moment in the war is also when Enid decides to leave for China to care for her sick sister and join her as a missionary. Charmion Gustke argues that Enid’s committed and certain departure highlights “the spiritual, not corporeal, ideals structuring Claude’s drive towards the dangers of France” (21), showing how this moment delivers a fatal blow to the illusion of their marriage that Claude has desperately clung to. Now, he must face the truth of Mr. Royce’s words he has fought: “You’ll find out that pretty nearly everything you believe about life—about marriage, especially—is lies” (205). Claude resents Enid for doing what he cannot, but truly resents his own self-deception and all that restrains him, believing he has missed every opportunity to escape (292–98).

Two days after the Battle of Verdun ends, on December 20, 1916, hopes raised by optimistic headlines anticipating Germany’s acceptance of Wilson’s peace terms are crushed; news of Germany’s counter-terms and inevitable rejection falls like a guillotine. That day, the *Omaha Daily Bee* headline reads: “Allies Refuse to Put Heads in ‘German Noose,’” quoting British Prime Minister Lloyd George about Germany’s “denial of the only terms upon which peace was possible.” Enid echoes Lloyd George’s stoicism, stating, “no feeling would be right that kept me from doing my duty,” refusing to surrender herself to social expectations (297). Claude fails to make peace with Enid before she leaves and their marriage crumbles at the same moment U.S. intervention becomes inevitable; the failure to make amends severs the false hope of the war’s end and of Claude’s marriage. In the next chapter, set during February 1917, Claude gazes at the stars, “afraid for his country” but sure that the war was “life and death, predestination” (307). Also reflecting Lloyd George’s statement included in the *Omaha Daily Bee* story, “I am convinced ultimate victory is sure if the nation shows the same spirit of endurance and readiness to learn as the mud-stained armies at the front,” Claude, in the moonlight that symbolically unites him to his immortalized heroes, at last grasps the Destiny that was earlier only a hopeful dream.

In March, Claude takes the duty of war upon himself. He visits Gladys with an unspoken goodbye, proclaiming, “there is only one thing we ought to do” and implies his intention to enlist (309). From April 2 to 6, 1917, Wilson’s declaration of war fills the front pages of the *Omaha Daily Bee*. Then, on April 7, at last: “Americans at War With Kaiser’s Empire” (see image on next page). By paralleling the novel’s timeline with the newspapers’ accounts of the war, Cather crafts Claude’s agency ironically, revealing that enlisting is not his idea, but rather that of the press. Claude’s words



even reflect those of the *Grand Forks (ND) Herald*: “no great nation ever took up the burden of war more calmly. For weeks the people of the United States have recognized war as inevitable” (“Events of a Week”). Typical of the newspapers I read, this journalist informs readers declaratively: they have anticipated and support involvement. Similarly, Cather’s narration adopts this declarative tone, when on “the eighth of April,” the day after Congress passes Wilson’s war declaration, Claude tells Mahailey: “I’m going over to help fight the Germans” (312–13). Fusing her cynicism with Claude’s idealism in this moment, Cather laments how the press molded American boys’ minds throughout the war to compel them to see enlisting as their duty when the time came.

When Claude returns home from training camp, he believes himself a soldier. The fact that he transforms without yet going to war demonstrates how American boys did not seek the violence of war but the ideals of a soldier, desperate to create, as Steven Trout writes, “personal myths that bestow a sense of order and meaning on their lives” (49). In the *Omaha Daily Bee* on July 22, 1917, an article titled “Cheering Words for Soldier Kin” (see image on next page) is juxtaposed with a picture of a Nebraska youth admitted to the Naval Academy at Annapolis. The article opens: “Little mother, is your tender heart filled with apprehension . . . ? Do you awaken in the still watches of the night with the fear that your boy may not come back to you?” The journalist strikes mothers’ hearts, evoking maternal love and sympathy, then consoles them with compassion. By comparison, when Claude leaves, Mrs. Wheeler knows “that the moment had

come” to accept his choice, but looking at him “as if she were taking the mould and measure of his mortal frame,” her pride crumbles to grief over the only fate she foresees (350–51). Here, Cather embeds her fused voice into Mrs. Wheeler’s awareness of the truth the press hides, demonstrating Travis Montgomery’s argument that Cather “valorizes the martial spirit but condemns the destructiveness of war” (98).

By July 1917, domestic propaganda began to “nourish the illusion of victory,” attempting to assuage concern for American soldiers’ lives and boost morale (Lavine and Wechsler 7). To strip away this false promise, Cather paints the departure of Claude’s ship, the *Anchises*, as a propaganda poster. Ryder analyzes Cather’s repetition of “boys” in this scene as exemplifying how the nation engaged in “recruiting its boys for what would be the greatest slaughter of the modern era” (146–47). Indeed, Cather shows how journalists’ use of propaganda’s rhetoric brought the still images of posters, which emphasized the youth of American recruits, to life. As the *Anchises* sails past the Statue of Liberty, the boys’ reverence for the founding ideals she symbolizes echoes the patriotic sentiment articulated in *How the War Came to America*, the widely circulated pamphlet published in June 1917 by the U.S. government’s Committee for Public Information and reprinted in its entirety in dozens of American newspapers: “Further neutrality on our part would have been a crime against our ancestors, who had given their lives that we might be free” (22). Cather continues, “youths were sailing away to die for an idea” (364), a phrase which “could

renew itself in every generation” (92). Or as a headline, a promise of propaganda—like Senator Hitchcock’s words in the *Day Book* of Chicago on April 4, 1917: “We are going to war to vindicate honor and independence as a great nation. We are going to war in defense of humanity” (“War Senators” 2). Cather’s poster-like image of boys passing by the statue that embodies their national identity captures her ambivalence: she depicts boys whom the press has given a glimpse into an idealistic world and implored them to join it; boys promised honor as a worthy cost for their lives.

Claude, War, and Destiny

Despite living the brutal realities of war, Claude’s idealism is unwavering. Whereas the press romanticized the violence of war, Cather juxtaposes violence with the picturesque;

Americans at War With Kaiser's Empire

All German Ships Held in American Waters Seized by United States

NEWS SECTION PART ONE Page 1 to 10
THE OMAHA DAILY BEE
 THE WEATHER Unsettled

VOL. XLVII—NO. 311. OMAHA, SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 7, 1917—TWENTY PAGES. SINGLE COPY TWO CENTS.

ALL ENLISTMENTS EXPIRE AT END OF WAR WITH KAISER
 When days hope of world to win European struggle over that the nations may choose.

Our Flag
 SEIZED GERMAN SHIPS PROPERTY OF THE U. S. NOW

THE REAL DIVINE RIGHT
 The real divine right is the right of the people.



PRESIDENT SIGNS WAR RESOLUTION AT 1:11 O'CLOCK
 Executive Order Proclamation Declaring State of War With Germany.

FLAP FOR THE PRESIDENT
 President Approves Principle Submitted to General Staff Proposal.

PATRIOTIC MASS MEETING SATURDAY
 H. L. Shuman and Friends Oration to Speak at the Auditorium.

IF NOT FINALLY DISBURSED
 Post Officials Take Possession of Hundreds Vessels Aggregating \$50,000,000.

SEIZURE OF GERMAN SHIPS
 Washington, April 6.—A fleet of German merchant vessels, seized after today's cabinet session, are being taken to the United States. The vessels, which were seized in the Atlantic, are being taken to the United States. The vessels, which were seized in the Atlantic, are being taken to the United States.

NAVAL RESOLUTION CALLED OUT
 All American Citizens Asked to Give Support to All Government Measures.

SHARP NOTICE TO ALIENS
 Washington, April 6.—President Wilson signed the executive order today declaring a state of war between the United States and Germany.

THREE ARMY ELEMENTS
 Washington, April 6.—The three army elements are being sent to the front.

WAVE OF PATRIOTISM HERE
 A wave of patriotism is sweeping the country.

ALL OMAHA INVITED TO FABRICATE MEETING
 Public men invited to meet at the Auditorium.

WAVE OF PATRIOTISM HERE
 A wave of patriotism is sweeping the country.

ALL OMAHA INVITED TO FABRICATE MEETING
 Public men invited to meet at the Auditorium.

WAVE OF PATRIOTISM HERE
 A wave of patriotism is sweeping the country.

BRAZIL PROBABLY WILL DECLARE WAR **German Officers Offer Services As Private** **GERMAN U-BOATS IN GULF OF MEXICO**

From the front page of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 7, 1917.

such moments reveal how Claude adheres more to his romantic ideals when directly facing the horrors of war—as he had with Enid. On August 29, 1915, the *Omaha Daily Bee* memorializes the Marne. An Associated Press story titled “Respect Soldier Graves” and bearing headings that read “Farmers Keep Weeds Cut Over Burial Places on the Marne Battlefield” and “Villagers Kneel in Prayer” describes the “fresh tri-colored flags” that have appeared on “almost every sunny hillside, in almost every valley between the Marne and the Aisne, in the growing barley, the alfalfa, the clover; at the roadside . . . like a more vital fleur-de-lys.” (38). The journalist mentions crops familiar to Midwesterners, sensationalizes the landscape and symbolism of poppies, all of which Claude’s thoughts reflect:

“Deeper and deeper into flowery France! . . . and everywhere, in the grass, in the yellowing grain, along the road-bed, the poppies spilling and streaming.” Then Cather adds: “They had supposed that poppies grew only on battlefields, or in the brains of war correspondents” (446). Here, Cather undercuts the romanticism so intensely with sarcasm and simple, brutal words journalists avoided. Most vividly, Cather evokes one of the subheads in this article—“All Graves Marked”—when Claude and his compatriots wander through a forgotten graveyard. Cather describes the white crosses marking French graves and black for Germans’, all picturesquely strewn with poppies, as in the article. A nameless grave reads: “*Soldat Inconnu, Mort pour La France*,” echoing the *Bee* article’s affirmation: “all soldiers of France are equal in life as in death.” In the next sentence, Cather sours these idealistic words and Claude’s romantic reflections with the cold reality: “Most of the boys who fell in this war were unknown, even to themselves.” They “died and took their secrets with them” (518–19). In this moment, the American boys realize that they could become this unknown soldier—forgotten, buried under an unmarked headstone on a French hillside. By weaving her ironic distance into the closeness of Claude’s thoughts, Cather perverts such simple scenes to expose how boys like Claude, living in the press’s fantasy of momentary glory’s permanence, were tragically fooled.

With the taste of battle still fresh in his mind, gunshots resounding in the distance prove to Claude “that men could still

8—A

CHEERING WORDS FOR SOLDIER KIN

Figures Show Chances Overwhelmingly in Favor of Young Men Returning Alive and Well.

By A. E. GROH.

Little mother, is your tender heart filled with apprehension because your son has marched off to war or is going to march off to war? Do you awaken in the still watches of the night with the fear that your boy may not come back to you?

Let me speak words that shall comfort the mother heart of you. I shall not speak here about the honor that rests upon your son and upon you because he is a soldier of his country. You know that without being told, I shall show you simply that the chances are overwhelmingly in favor of his coming back to your arms alive and well.

There has been so much news of great battles and wholesale destruction that I think the dangers of soldiering have been exaggerated in our minds.

Let us look this question squarely in the face and consider it at its worst. Estimates of the number of men killed in this war, so far, vary from five to seven millions. The smaller of these figures is probably too high. The German official figures up to July 1 reported only 1,032,800 Germans and Austrians killed and died of wounds in the whole war. It is hardly likely that the other nations made up a grand total to five or seven millions.

WOOD RIVER BOY GOES TO ANNAPOLIS.



Daniel Q. Root, of Wood River, Neb., has been named by Congressman A. C. Shallenberger as the representative of the Fifth district of Nebraska at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. Root has passed the examinations and will report at the naval academy July 24.

From the *Omaha Daily Bee*, p. 8, July 22, 1917.

die for an idea,” and that “ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were real sources of power among men.” Claude is no longer crushed by predestination, but inspired by it. Knowing what lies ahead he accepts his Destiny as a soldier, “like the new moon—alluring, half-averted, the bright face of danger” (553–54). While Cather recognizes the value of his ideals, his thoughts reveal the real danger for naive boys: their romantic illusion numbs them, like an anesthetic, to the blood and barbarity they face. For boys who enlisted because the press promised such moments, this made for a more horrific awakening—if they lived long enough for battle to shatter their illusion.

Claude’s opportunity to prove his worth arises when he is chosen to defend “The Boar’s Head” trench, emphasized as Cather explicitly connects Claude’s final moments to the loss of his hogs in a snowstorm. Steven Trout describes how Cather paints war “with such suddenness and repetition that no psychological defense mechanism can deny them” (117) and here, Claude’s shining romanticism intensifies her imagery and dramatizes rather than softens the gruesome details of the scene. Claude and his close friend, David Gerhardt, trudge through the trench, the stench, mud and bodies. At the Snout they find “a pile of corpses . . . like sacks of flour” (587), just as he found the hogs. Rather than repeat Claude’s failure, Cather reverses the hog story: whereas Claude dug his hogs out from beneath the collapsed barn roof, twelve dead before he reached them, he starts where he left off: removing the dead bodies to prepare the Snout for his men, reinforcing the trench walls, this time putting their lives before his. Just as he had dug a path to reach the hogs in “air so thick that they could scarcely breathe” (133), exerting himself courageously, so he directs his men into the trenches to evade enemy fire. As the enemy’s barrage nears, Claude rallies his men who look to him for guidance. Seizing the romantic, heroic moment he had dreamed of, Claude jumps “out on the parapet.” He is shot: “the blood dripped down his coat, but he felt no weakness,” sure that David “might find them dead, but he would find them all there” as proof of their heroic dedication (596–97). With this prophecy, Claude reaches his

Destiny in his last thought: “they were mortal, but they were unconquerable” (597).

This scene speaks to the military citation awarded to G. P. Cather posthumously. Compared to primary accounts, Trout posits that the incongruencies show “the U.S. Army established a version of his fate that satisfied the demands of drama. . . . The lieutenant *had* to expire at the moment of his greatest triumph” (emphasis in the original) to model the “military sacrifice” integral to the press’s illusion (124). In a June 8, 1918, *New York Times* story titled “48 Casualties Reported by Gen. Pershing; Three Aviation Officers Killed in Accidents,” Grosvenor P. Cather’s name appears among seventeen casualties “killed in action”—a mere statistic. On June 13, the Cather family’s hometown newspaper, the *Red Cloud Chief*, published “A Hero Dies,” a front-page column recounting G. P.’s military service that closes: “He fought the good fight—made the great sacrifice—for God, for home, for his country. He lived for the right, fought for the right, and died as he had lived. Honor to him.” This comparison reinforces and sheds light on the critique Trout illuminates in Cather’s novel: a glorified citation or a name in a list, American boys died “unknown, even to themselves.” Thus, Cather does not celebrate the patriotism Claude’s self-immortalization symbolizes but rather weaves her critique into Claude’s trust in Destiny—he marches into machine-gun fire to give his life for a greater purpose, an abstract ideal, only to be killed by lifeless metal bullets. Claude’s march toward death, heroic in his eyes, epitomizes the tragic irony of the war: the press’s idealistic war he believed in was a thin veil for advancing political agendas. Knowing that the political agendas of the war would not rouse the support or interest desired, the press exploited Americans’ naivete to sell the war as an opportunity to prove and validate one’s patriotism. Because the press crafted such a “great” war, boys like Claude, devoted to their country, died believing they were protecting the world from evil. In reality, they were a means to an end, so that the U.S. could pursue the unprecedented opportunities the war presented for economic and political gain on a global scale.

Jean Schwind argues that Cather continued the events of her novel after Claude’s death to emphasize “the vision her idealistic young protagonist dies defending” against the reality, which dismantles this romantic ideal (57). The next and final chapter of *One of Ours* links Cather’s critiques of the illusions of war to the common denominator: the American press. At the close of the novel, doughboys return home in a scene that mirrors the departure of the *Anchises*. But here Cather trades the rhetoric of propaganda for an honest account of the soldiers’ broken spirits, which never make it ashore. Those who return are no longer boys singing to Lady Liberty, but quiet and distant, because, as Ryder shows in

her close reading of Cather’s interchanging use of rhetoric, boys became men after the war eviscerated their idealism (156). And the only two men of Claude’s battalion to return, Sergeant Hicks and Bert Fuller, were “not the same men who went away” (600). Hicks reflects on how the world has changed; a year and a half at war has deconstructed his ideals and left him in the rubble. When Fuller relates that Captain Maxey (promoted to Colonel after Claude’s death) will die of pneumonia before they land, Hicks’s angry outburst, “Colonel for what Claude and Gerhardt did, I guess!” (601) illustrates Cather’s grief over the men who did not need to die, giving her ironic romanticism a unique purpose. In fact, the two men Hicks grieves over, Claude and David, are the two characters based on men Cather knew: her cousin G. P. and David Hochstein, a violinist she admired and had written about to friends as a man who knew of the war’s realities but fought and died because it was his duty. This short exchange, a confirmation of the two’s existence, exemplifies Hermione Lee’s explanation that, in her prior novels, Cather’s role was “memorializer,” while in *One of Ours*, she confronts how “in a broken world, the only consolation is forgetting” (182). Like Cather herself, Hicks struggles to forget, tortured by knowing that such great men might as well have never existed, as Ryder recognizes when she notes Cather’s widely cited interviews with returned American Expeditionary Forces soldiers in which Cather stresses their shame and reluctance (155). So, instead of immortalizing G. P. and Hochstein, Cather endeavored to lay their untold stories to rest—to point to the truth of the war, buried beneath the press’s idealism, where it would remain, a nameless gravestone reading: *Soldat Inconnu. Mort pour La France*. Such suffering shapes Cather’s fused voice, which speaks the soldiers’ silenced truth: they arrived in France as idealistic boys and returned, if they survived, as grave men whose experiences were too real to stand up to the illusion cultivated by the press over the five years of war. Hicks and Fuller’s return shows how the soldiers’ hopes of American heroism were blown apart by shells, buried or stuffed into the walls of trenches with their men. In this way, Cather exposes the press’s distortion of heroism, duty, and masculinity, not as achievable opportunities for glory, but to sell the boys to the war for political ends, like hogs at a market.

In *One of Ours*, Willa Cather threads her own experience in journalism into her portrayal of the war through the eyes hanging on the press’s every word: those of the naive American boy. She stands both inside and on the outside looking in. Conceptualizing the war from the minds of the boys who did not return by using the narratives of those who did, she interweaves the postwar reality and the wartime illusion. Cather connects the lost narrative of the soldier who died in combat before he had the chance to live, to the narrative of history—the romanticized “Great War.” She



exposes the press as wielders of the Great War's most dangerous weapon—war rhetoric—the language that turned propaganda's images into living narratives in naive American imaginations and shaped the public opinion of the war. In Claude Wheeler's pursuit of his "Destiny," the press's sensationalism formed so thick a cloud that Claude was blinded to the war's corporeal and spiritual destruction of men, occurring before his eyes. Claude dies with his idealism intact; his death represents the fate of hundreds of thousands of American boys who enlisted to become the men they already were, to fight for ideals they could never have reached. With Claude, Cather put to rest the ghosts of the newspaper-reading young American soldiers buried in the battlefields of France with poppies growing from their brains.

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Out West: The Social Work of Dorothea Lange and Willa Cather

Charmion Gustke

In a letter to Alfred Knopf in July 1931, having “just finished” “Old Mrs. Harris,” the longest of the three stories in *Obscure Destinies* (1932), Willa Cather suggests “Out West” as a possible title for the collection, as “they are all western stories; one in Colorado, one in Kansas, one in Nebraska” (*Selected Letters* 449). Although Cather was writing from Grand Manan Island, where she and Edith Lewis were spending the summer revising the stories for the Knopf edition, the West was pervading her emotional landscape, providing provocative imagery, and igniting source material. By this point, “Neighbour Rosicky” had been serialized in the *Woman’s Home Companion* in April and May 1930. “Two Friends” appeared two years later in the same magazine, followed by the serialization of “Old Mrs. Harris,” under the title “Three Women,” in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in September, October, and November 1932. *Obscure Destinies* was published in August 1932 and would undergo five printings in its first year, totaling 40,500 copies. As Melissa Homestead has shown, Cather and Lewis worked extensively on “Old Mrs. Harris” and “Two Friends” while in Canada, locating “Cather’s fullest creative engagement” with these stories in July, August, and September 1931. During this period, Cather was not only distressed by her mother’s long illness and death, but by the suffering of her people out West, where the Great Depression hit most severely.

During the spring of 1933, less than a year after the widespread circulation of these three stories in magazine and book form, the photographer Dorothea Lange gazed out the second-floor window of her San Francisco photography studio and saw the streets flooded with unemployed men from all sectors of the economy—“not only bums in ragged clothes and workingmen’s caps but also men in suits and fedoras” (Gordon, *A Life* 103). Moved by the discrepancy between the portraits of privileged families in her studio and the dire situation outside her window, Lange grabbed her Graflex camera and roamed the streets of the Mission District, eventually coming to the White Angel soup kitchen where she shot her first image of the Great Depression (see photograph on next page). This photograph and the social drive that produced it are part of what William Stott describes as the documentary expression of the 1930s. As a form of social documentary, these images are created to promote social action by providing visual evidence of the greatest economic catastrophe in modern American history: “Thirties documentary constantly addresses the ‘you,’ the ‘you’ who is we the audience, and exhorts,

wheelles, begs us to identify, pity, participate” (28). As James Agee stated in 1936, the camera was the “central instrument” of the time, allowing the viewer of the photograph to witness “the cruel radiance of what is” with “the whole of consciousness,” breaking down the barrier between the viewer and the viewed (9). For Americans in the 1930s, documentary photography was thus the one medium that could be counted on to represent an immediate experience for a public hungry “for the facts of the actual world” (Stott 76).

This cultural history, with its salient visual documentation, is rarely incorporated in interpretations of *Obscure Destinies*; instead, the stories are read as remembrances and reflections on the people and places of Cather’s past. Upon its publication, as James Woodress notes, Cather fans were relieved that she had abandoned historical fiction “and turned her mind to family and friends of her youth” (438). “Old Mrs. Harris,” specifically, was seen as a work of mourning, echoing Cather’s grief over her mother, but bearing little resemblance to the harsh realities of the time. Critics such as Granville Hicks found the collection to



Dorothea Lange in Texas on the Plains ca. 1935. Photograph by and gift of Paul S. Taylor. Oakland Museum of California. With the exception of this photograph, all images in this essay are by Dorothea Lange.



be a “distortion of life,” sacrificing honesty and reality for “romantic dreams”(710). Hicks suggests Cather’s work idealizes the past while lacking any insight into the political importance of “contemporary life,” finding her uninterested in the fundamental concerns of her age (708). However, by interpreting *Obscure Destinies* through the lens of Dorothea Lange’s Farm Security Administration photographs, “Neighbour Rosicky,” “Two Friends,” and “Old Mrs. Harris” may be read in light of the iconography of the era in which they were produced, circulated, and received, allowing a more expansive view of Cather’s stories, one that includes not only Cather’s personal past, but the broader expanse, present and future, of a nation in crisis. Such an analysis is essential if we are to understand

the magnitude of the Great Depression and how it may have influenced anyone reading these widely read stories within the first ten years of their publication. This argument is particularly important when considering readers living in the over-mortgaged Midwest who faced not only the betrayal of the stock market, but the horrors of the Dust Bowl.

Never in the history of the United States had there been so many upheavals and crises across the country in such a short period of time as those during the 1930s. Each crisis was seemingly worse than one before and all were “dutifully and sometimes luridly chronicled in the daily press” (Watkins 81). Although Cather’s immediate family in Nebraska were not directly affected by these losses, many of her Nebraskan friends struggled to make ends meet. Cather’s own success, which flourished in the 1920s, allowed her to be a benefactor to many, but the deepening Depression troubled her, and she lost money on “gilt-edged bonds” (Woodress 437). In October 1931, in response to a letter from Mary Austin that likely included an appeal for assistance in preserving the work and collections of the recently deceased artist and preservationist Frank G. Applegate, Cather declined, writing, “I imagine that money is the thing you most need to keep these things going, and I shall be glad to do my bit when the present stress is over. . . . This is really a terrible time to live through” (*Complete Letters* no. 1080). As this letter implies, the mood of the time



White Angel breadline, San Francisco, ca. 1932. Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

was dark, similar to “the depressive phase of the manic-depressive cycle,” a time marked by a sense of lack and melancholy (Dickstein 223). By the end of 1932, one-fourth of all banks had failed, and an estimated nine million depositors lost their savings (Egan 77). Bank closings, evictions, poverty, and farm losses, as Helen Hall observed in a 1933 article for the *New York Times*, had ravaged American family life, demanding once self-reliant men and women to depend upon government relief or assistance from family and friends.

The dislocation and despair of the Depression would take an unknown toll on the personal lives of millions of Americans; by extension, widespread economic tension would forever alter American living standards and the way in which people managed their homes. The

collapse of the stock market exacerbated, as Lange documents, the dire conditions of farmers living in the West who endured stifling temperatures and a series of dust storms that destroyed their land and homes. Cather was acutely aware of the economic and emotional burdens placed on the people of the Great Plains during this time. In a letter to Zoë Akins in 1936, Cather laments: “So many sad and bitter things are happening to my old friends in Nebraska that I can’t feel very happy. . . . These five terrible years of utter drouth and frightful heat have ruined their farms and their health” (*Selected Letters* 518).

Dorothy McClean Boettner, a resident of Fremont, Nebraska, painfully recalls how her family endured the dust storm as the “choking stuff drifted into the house everywhere—on the windowsills, into Mom’s white curtains, across the floors,” killing livestock, garden, and fruit trees. The Dirty Thirties, as the decade was known in Nebraska, began in 1931 when dry, loose soil gave rise to black blizzards and the abandonment of 750,000 acres of Nebraska farmland within a one-year period (McKee). Newsreels and newspapers would continue to report on the wreckage of the Dust Bowl throughout the next six years, as the dust buried farm animals and ravaged crops. For instance, On March 16, 1935, in Hastings, Nebraska, just thirty-five miles north of Red Cloud, *The Hastings Daily Tribune* reported a severe dust storm that sent residents “hurrying to their

basements” while pedestrians were blinded and suffocated by the swirling dust that hit with a “tornadic fury” (“Snow Liberates Nebraska from Dust Storm’s Fury”).

Lange’s Dust Bowl series confirms that the Great Plains, where the Dust Bowl hit most directly, suffered severely, destroying the romantic notion of the American farm family. “Lange’s objective was not only to document poverty but to show also the agricultural *system* from which it grew” (Gordon, “Agricultural Sociologist” 705; emphasis in the original). Paul Taylor, Lange’s husband, and a New Deal expert on “Okie” migration, traced the dust storms to the 1870s when white settlers began to erode the “bison ecology” that had sustained the Plains Indians (710). They uprooted prairie grass that held down dry soil, cheered on by real estate and railroad companies promoting settlement and an allegedly inexhaustible water belt that could be sourced with proper plowing. However, new methods of plowing and heavy machinery only aggravated dry conditions, ultimately leaving the soil surface fine and more vulnerable to wind. Eventually, family farms were losing out to large-scale commercial farms worked by tenants. By the time the drought hit in the 1930s, the land was defenseless, leading to damaged crops, insect infestations, and dust storms that penetrated everything.

Viewing this history through the lens of Lange’s photographs for the Farm Security Administration brings to light the invisible, unspoken scars of Cather’s characters. This invisibility, the unacknowledged wound, as Caroline Bird suggests, was a metaphor for the Great Depression itself, which “you could feel” as it deepened, but only “the knowing eye” could observe it (22). The aim of documentary photographers like Lange was therefore to reveal what many Americans were unable to see in the early days of the Depression. To a “startling degree,” the image of the Depression that Americans eventually saw was the story told through Lange’s visual documentation, due to the fact that her employer, the Farm Security Administration, “aggressively” distributed the images nationwide through local and national newspapers and magazines (Gordon, “Agricultural Sociologist” 698). Images alone, however, do not generate reform, as communication must be established between the viewer and the image to convey the social fact captured by the camera. For Allan Trachtenberg, the composition of documentary



Dust Bowl farm. Coldwater District, near Dalhart, Texas, ca. 1938. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

photography, such as Lewis Hine’s child-labor photos, awakens the “viewer’s awareness of and imaginative empathy with the pictured others” (203). The exchange between the viewer and the subject of the image is a process of interaction, of sociality through which the image becomes distinctly and fully human. Creating a social dialogue between Lange’s images and Cather’s *Obscure Destinies* keeps these works alive and free from the limitations of biography, offering an alternative experience that enhances the viewer/reader’s knowledge of the characters and their world.

As an illustration, considering “Neighbour Rosicky” in the “Last West” section of Lange and Taylor’s volume titled *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* reveals the history of the 1930s in the broader framework of the ecological and economic consequences of industrialization, as both texts examine American life through the lens of the working male body. Following Kari Ronning, the origin of “Neighbour Rosicky,” datelined “New York, 1928,” can be traced to the death of Cather’s father in March 1928, although she didn’t begin writing the story until later that year (201–202). Cather’s portrayal, while intricately entangled, like Lange’s, in a critique of capitalism, relates to larger issues of farm work and the loss of agrarian simplicity, focusing on the circular relationship between generations—not only between Rosicky and his sons, but between Rosicky and his younger self.



Nebraska farmer come to pick peas. Near Calipatria, California, 1939. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (published in *An American Exodus*).





Was Nebraska farmer, now developing land in cut-over area. Bonner County, Idaho, 1939. J. Paul Getty Museum.

Similarly, Lange's Nebraska farmer (see photograph on previous page) understands his own plight in relation to the future of his sons: "I put mine in what I thought was the best investment—the good old earth—but we lost on that too . . . my boys have no more future than I have" (Lange and Taylor 129). The farmer refers to the trust he put in his land as "mine," highlighting his full-bodied dependence on the farm to which he has given his entire life and his family.

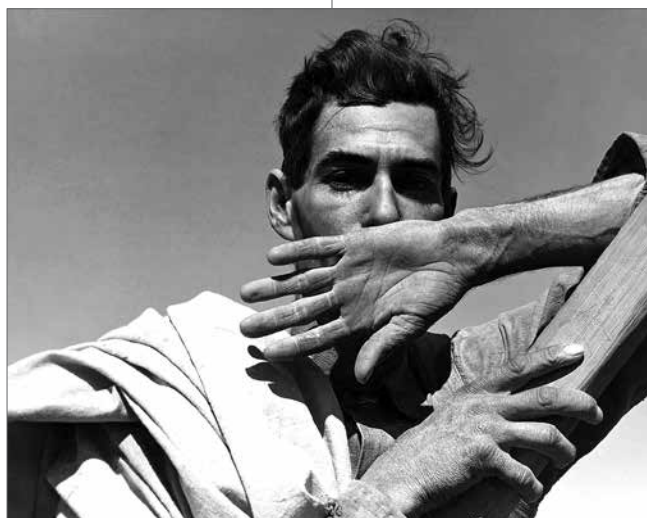
Rosicky, like many of Lange's portraits from this series (see photograph above), is an "old man" at sixty-five whose youth and physicality remain visible behind worn lines and brown, sun-drenched skin. With the past always close at hand, the old Rosicky remembers, "as if it were yesterday the day when the young Rosicky found out what was the matter with him." (28). It was during that lonely New York City Fourth of July that Rosicky realized the city was an empty, cement trap, inorganic and disconnected from the living earth and the history of his people. As the desire to return to open land took root in Rosicky, he was captivated by stories about Czech farmers in Bohemian

newspapers. "His mind got farther and farther west" until his body followed, landing him in "another part of the world" (30), where the reader finds him with a bad heart and a face that "suggested a contented disposition and a reflective quality" (8). The male body here, for both Lange and Cather, is used to illustrate a balance in composition between hard work and the pride of a life well lived. Lange's Nebraskan farmers, like Rosicky who "did not look like a sick man" (7), manage to convey strength and certainty despite the depressed economy.

For the American Polly, newly married to Rosicky's son Rudolph, Rosicky's body—the twinkle in his eyes and the warmth in his hands—awakens her to a full understanding of herself in the world: "It seemed to her that she had never learned so much about life from anything as from old Rosicky's hand. It brought her to herself" (58). Rosicky's hand communicates something "gypsy-like" for Polly as she strives to comprehend the messages being conveyed through the "deep, deep creases across the palm" (57). This recognition on Polly's part bridges the distance between her American identity and the Bohemian heritage of her new family, conveying unspoken meaning through an appreciation and awareness of the body. As Lange's migratory cotton picker shows, the hands are capable of speaking what the voice cannot. In this image (see photograph below), the hand is seen first, then the face, with shadowy, dark set eyes. He has one hand resting on the cotton wagon before returning to work in the field, while the other hand, the one that captures our attention, blocks his mouth, displaying his dirt-stained palm and outstretched fingers. Lange's emphasis on this physical gesture symbolizes "a life on the land" through the "replacement of mouth by hand," accentuating the laboring body and silenced voice (Durden 104). This provocative photograph is representative of many of Lange's images of farm workers which speak to the

viewer on a human level, urging the viewer to question the varying political interests at play in the governance of corporate farming.

Political conflict is central in "Two Friends," carrying a dateline of "Pasadena, 1931," which captures "the feeling of something broken that could so easily have been mended" (191). With its strained political plot, an exception in the Cather canon, it is a tale of "senselessly wasted" friendships and fractured political parties (191). Although the climax of the story



Migratory cotton picker. Eloy, Arizona, 1940. National Archives and Records Administration.



centers on the Democratic National Convention of 1896, which ultimately breaks up the friendship of Dillon and Trueman, the heated political exchanges in the work can also be read in connection to the bipartisan tension pervading the country during the presidential election of 1932, with Franklin Delano Roosevelt defeating incumbent president Herbert Hoover in a landslide. Lange, a polio survivor, related to the way in which FDR conveyed power and strength regardless of his disability (Gordon 114). Having survived double pneumonia in 1918 and polio in 1921, which left him partially paralyzed, Roosevelt knew what it meant to struggle and to survive at all costs: “If you spent two years in bed trying to wiggle your toe, after that anything would seem easy” (Egan 130). Lange, who walked with a limp due to her own battle with polio as a child, associated Roosevelt’s gritty attitude toward his disability with his activist approach to the Depression, “in contrast to Hoover’s call for patience and faith in market forces,” which contradicted the reality of what she saw in the streets (Gordon 114).

“The economy was not fatally ill,” President Hoover insisted; “Americans had simply lost their confidence” (Egan 95). A former Commerce secretary, President Hoover believed the government should monitor the economy, but not directly intervene. He repeatedly denied requests by Congress, governors, and mayors to combat unemployment by creating public service jobs, arguing that the suffering of the unemployed was up to local governments and private charities (Taylor). Trueman’s insistence in “Two Friends” that Dillon “mustn’t be a reformer” (178) coincides with many Hoover supporters who believed it was the individual’s responsibility to provide for one’s family, despite the current economic crisis. Emphasizing self-reliance, Hoover supporters countered the argument made by Dillon, “that gold had been responsible for most of the miseries and inequalities . . . that it had always been the club the rich and cunning held over the poor” (184). Dillon’s zeal for the common man mirrors Roosevelt’s New Deal, initiating a variety of recovery programs aimed to restore jobs and stabilize the economy. Roosevelt’s radical initiatives would forever change the relationship between the federal government and the American people, causing an



McLennan County Courthouse just before the primary. Waco, Texas, 1938. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

even deeper fissure between the Democrats and Republicans.

As Lange, “America’s preeminent photographer of democracy” (Gordon 423), portrays in *McLennan County Courthouse just before the primary* (also known as *Political Signs*), the political cacophony and division of the nation would continue throughout the 30s. This photograph depicts the immense public engagement in the congressional election of 1938, which occurred in the middle of Roosevelt’s second term and essentially marked the end of the New Deal. Along the same lines, “Two Friends” depicts the way in which the politics are divisive on both a national and local level. At its core, this division, as the narrator observes, severed relationships and disrupted communities—“After that

rupture nothing went well with either of my two great men. Things were out of true, the equilibrium was gone” (188). This feeling of loss corresponds to the combative political rhetoric in Lange’s visual narrative, allowing Cather’s story to be contextualized within the framework of the political turmoil of the Great Depression.

Regardless of the politics, many Americans who suffered the causes and effects of scarcity experienced the Depression on a personal level, not a political one. The physical and psychological manifestations of both depression and the Depression can be seen as a recurrent theme in “Old Mrs. Harris,” where the “pinch told on everyone, but most on Grandmother” (111). For many Cather scholars, “The Southern family gone West” is Cather’s family (Lee 319), but the story can also be read as foreshadowing the suffering of millions of Americans who migrated west during the 1930s in search of opportunities only to find the failed promises of the American dream. The Templetons’ inability to adapt to their new, rugged lifestyle mirrors the middle-class migrants who were less able to adjust to financial losses than the chronic poor (Dickstein 24–25). Having “lost his courage,” Mr. Templeton settled in the northern flatlands of Colorado, working on an irrigation project where “things had not gone well” (111). The Templetons’ descent from Southern gentry to struggling middle-class constitutes the blurring boundary between middle-class and the almost poor, where grandmothers such as Mrs. Harris are obliged to take on the burdens of childcare and housework well beyond the body’s ability.



A study in contrast and uncertainty, Lange's *Grandmother of twenty-two children*, like Mrs. Harris, has a direct look, which asks for nothing, hopes for nothing. In the same way, as Mrs. Rosen notes of Mrs. Harris, "there is a "kind of nobility about her head . . . an absence of self-consciousness" (70). An example of Lange's "social work," this image attests to Lange's ability to represent the disenfranchised with heroism and admirability, creating a conversation between the subject and the viewer, imaginatively and materially. Like Mrs. Harris "who had the kind of gravity that people who take thought of human destiny must have" (94), her expression defies pity. Drawing on the observations of William Stott, Judith Fryer Davidov notes that when Lange "shot in the direct sun," with the subject elevated in the frame, the eye is drawn upward toward the sky (240–41). This elevation compels the viewer to take in and process the full magnitude of the subject's dignity. Such is the case in this image in which the tight focus on the grandmother makes her appear almost superhuman in size, demanding respect, and admiration.

The grandmother's purposeful clothing and steady gaze contrasts with the dire living conditions in the background, where an automobile and layered tarps are being used as a make-shift tent. The grandmother's protective hold on her tidy grandsons indicates she is responsible for them and the work necessary to take care of them. The disintegration between borders, such as those between home and automobile, child and parent, and public and private, is a common trope of the Depression, during which boundaries and space were constantly being distorted. Both the blurring of boundaries and spatial collapse are employed in "Old Mrs. Harris" to delineate Mrs. Harris's lack of autonomy and privacy. For example, her "bedroom" is really a passageway between the kitchen and the dining



Grandmother of twenty-two children, living in Kern County migrant camp, California, 1936. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

room and is doubly occupied by the children as a playroom. Likewise, her role as grandmother is closely linked to Mandy's role as a domestic worker, demonstrating the way in which social hierarchies between paid and unpaid labor have been dismantled due to paucity. Through the intuitive eyes of Mrs. Rosen, the reader witnesses Mrs. Harris's "profound weariness" (67) and the burdens she must endure to maintain a façade of Southern middle-class distinction. Insisting that Victoria be well-dressed, Mrs. Harris "wouldn't for the world have had Victoria" doing housework, as that "would have meant real poverty," "coming down in the world so far that one could no longer keep up appearances" (112–113). Yet, as Mr. Templeton's means continue to decrease and the family continues to grow, it becomes more and more difficult for Mrs. Harris, with her aching feet and failing body, to hide the hardships of daily life. Despite her obvious pain, she refuses to appear "put upon" (83, 108) and never complains: "Nobody did anything about broken arches in those days, and the common endurance test of old age was to keep going after every step cost something" (114).

Thomas Fahy cites Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "unflagging optimism and strength," despite his disabled body, as a key element in defining the way in which the Great Depression was represented in the art of the time as an injury to be overcome, to be endured with dignity regardless of the erosion of optimism (3). Throughout the trauma of the 1930s the public viewed Roosevelt's fight with paralysis as "ennobling" because he was able to offset his physical disabilities by his proud demeanor and commanding presence (Fahy 2). It was easy for the public to see Roosevelt as a powerful, unencumbered leader because the press complied with his desire to maintain control over images of his body and disability: "No movies of



Child living in Oklahoma City shacktown ("Damaged Child, Shacktown, Elm Grove, Oklahoma"), 1936. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

me getting out of the machine, boys” (Gunther 239). Roosevelt’s determination to look strong despite his pain or physical ailments reinforced the belief that one must “appear” positive, hopeful, and capable regardless of the circumstances. Old Mrs. Harris’s insistence on enduring her suffering in private, to not appear “put upon,” a phrase repeated throughout the text, connects her to the prevailing middle-class sentiment that confidence should be portrayed at all costs: “To be pitied was the deepest hurt anybody could know” (83).

While Cather’s social work here is embedded in the language of loss and pride, portraying Mrs. Harris as gallant and selfless to the end, Lange’s social work, as we see in the FSA photographs specifically, is systematic, with a particular agenda: to speak to matters of injustice (Gordon, “Agricultural Sociologist” 698). Often focusing on children to demonstrate that the poverty of a region is not bound by state or local lines, Lange insists that the welfare of families and children is a national concern. Lange’s *Child living in Oklahoma City shacktown*, who, much like the “poor Maude children” in Cather’s “Old Mrs. Harris,” materializes tragically on the margins of society. The posture of this child is at once confrontational and vulnerable, obliging the viewer to participate as witness, to ask questions, and to imagine the life, history, and impossible future of the girl. Her fragile, exposed limbs, oily hair, bruised face, and threadbare dress lay claim to her dire conditions; yet, her gaze is defiant, and her stance is confident as she stands in front of the metal shed in the center of the four panels, evoking the cross of the crucifixion. Fryer-Davidov reasons that viewers who lived through the Great Depression would have resonated with the child’s damaged body; “she represents the wounded body of the nation during the Depression, stands for the crippled body of the President, who, like Lange, had suffered polio as a child and who, like Lange, had surmounted his infirmity by carefully covering up its trace” (222).

When read in the context of the impoverishment of the era, “Neighbour Rosicky,” “Two Friends,” and “Old Mrs. Harris” reflect the broken body of American capitalism, drawing the reader’s attention to the stories’ imagery of displacement, alienation, spatial disorder, and immobility—all tropes of positioning used to signify the iconography of the Depression. Framing these stories through the lens of Lange’s photographs of the Great Depression thus offers an alternative to viewing these texts solely as acts of memory, as doing so disavows the material realities of the era in which these stories were shaped, edited, published, and read. Understanding *Obscure Destinies* as an articulation of the suffering and stoicism of the Great Depression is imperative if we are to comprehend the way in which Cather’s contemporaries, not necessarily her critics, but the everyday folk

living through the loss and trauma of the 1930s, resonated with the characters of these stories. Furthermore, historicizing Cather’s work in this context is necessary to keep these texts relatable to our visually minded millennial readers, many of whom are seeking human connectedness, as they survive a pandemic and face an uncertain future. For all of us, young and old, these two bodies of work remind us of all the things we do not need, and all the loved ones we have lost, realizing all too late, as Mr. Rosen tells the young Vickie Templeton, “The end is nothing, the road is all” (131).



U.S. No. 54, north of El Paso, Texas. One of the westward routes of the migrants. 1938. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

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Peter Sullivan spent his career teaching German in the Pennsylvania State College System. During his career, he became fascinated with the writings of Willa Cather, whose work brought to life the sentiments of an era and touched on intriguing aspects of German culture. These qualities provided Peter with a deep well of detailed research and analysis, explored in numerous published essays.

Steven Trout is professor of English and chair of the Department of English at the University of Alabama. His books include *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War*, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance*,

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Tracy Sanford Tucker is education director of the Willa Cather Foundation and a certified archivist. She presents and publishes regularly on topics related to Willa Cather, Great Plains literature, and the environment.

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Willa Cather REVIEW

Volume 63 • No.2 | Summer 2022



Ashley Olson, Executive Director

www.WillaCather.org

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The *Willa Cather Review* (ISSN 0197-663X)

is published by:

The Willa Cather Foundation

413 North Webster Street

Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970

402-746-2653 | 866-731-7304

info@willacather.org

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From the Collections: The Death of G. P. Cather

Tracy Sanford Tucker

The centenary of *One of Ours*, Willa Cather's Pulitzer Prize-winner for fiction, allows us a chance to reflect on the life—and death—of Willa Cather's first cousin, Grosvenor Phillips Cather of nearby Bladen, Nebraska. The entire novel is inspired by real lives and real events, from G. P.'s prewar life and marriage to his final days in France. The collections at the National Willa Cather Center are rich with objects and papers that provide glimpses of that world.

Following his death on May 28, 1918, at the battle for Cantigny, France—one of the American infantry's defining battles—details about the death of Lieutenant Cather were relayed to his wife, Myrtle Bartlett Cather, and his parents, George and Frances Smith Cather. Soldiers who witnessed his death shared their accounts. One of these was Sergeant Emanuel H. Prettyman.

Anne Taylor of the Home Communication Service of the American Red Cross met the wounded and grieving Prettyman in a French hospital in October 1918. Prettyman had served under G. P. Cather at Cantigny, and he saved the orders he had received from Cather prior to that engagement. Later, Prettyman was captured by the enemy more than once, and after escaping, was gassed and finally shot in the right leg as the 26th Infantry engaged in Soissons and moved toward the Saizerais sector. At Taylor's urging,



G. P. Cather, probably during his time with the Nebraska National Guard on the Mexican border under General Pershing. Sayra Cather Wagner Collection.

Prettyman and Frances Cather, G. P.'s mother, began a correspondence that detailed G. P.'s death and burial in France, as well as Prettyman's own injuries and readjustment to civilian life.

Like many of the war dead in France, G. P. Cather was interred hastily near the battle site and later moved to an American military cemetery. His burial card indicates the wishes of his family that a cross be placed on his grave in France; however, in 1921, his body was returned to Nebraska. *The Bladen Enterprise*, on May 6, 1921, dedicated their full front page to the "Impressive Military Funeral Conducted by Legion Boys in Honor of the Late Lieut. G. P. Cather Jr." [sic], and reprinted a number of commendatory letters the family received from officers, including Col.

Hamilton Smith, who would be killed at Soissons, and Maj. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who was gassed and wounded at Soissons.

In addition to a number of military sources, crucial clues to understanding the context of the novel are held in our collections in Red Cloud. The Sayra Cather Wagner Collection contains a number of photographs of G. P. Cather unavailable elsewhere and the one-of-a-kind image of Emanuel Prettyman in uniform. The Lynette and Paul Krieger Collection contains many pieces of ephemera previously belonging to the George and Frances Cather family, while the Blanche Cather Ray Collection comprises extensive farming and genealogical records of the Cather family. The WCPM Collection contains family letters, photos, and military souvenirs and more, much of it donated by the family early in our organization's history. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the archivists at the National Archives in St. Louis, Michael Knapp of the American Battle Monuments Commission, and Captain Cody Cade and Major Scott Ingalsbe of the U.S. Army for their help in locating unclassified military records to further our understanding of the entirety of G. P. Cather's military service. Their assistance has been invaluable.

If you would like to use these collection materials or other items related to G. P. Cather, please contact archivist Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org for an appointment.



Following their training at Camp Morehead in Lincoln, Nebraska, G. P. Cather (behind the sign) and the rest of Blue Hill's Company K of the Nebraska National Guard departed for the Mexican Expedition. Commanded by General John J. Pershing during their border service, many of these newly federalized troops went on to serve under Pershing in France when the U.S. entered World War I. Sayra Cather Wagner Collection.





*Sgt. Major E. H. Prettyman,
Co. A, 26th Inf., 1st Div. A.E.F.*

Emanuel H. Prettyman served under G. P. Cather at Cantigny and later maintained a long correspondence with Frances Smith Cather, G. P.'s mother. Sayra Cather Wagner Collection.

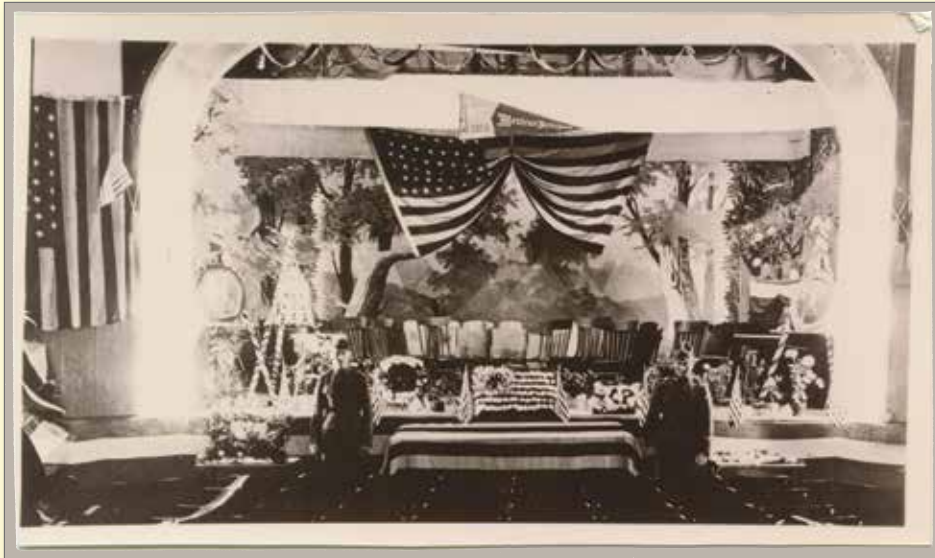


This J. W. Pepper bugle belonged to G. P. Cather and may date to his time at Grand Island College, where he was the bugler of the College Cadets drill team and performed with the Grand Island College Band. The horn, though showing its age, was a cherished family heirloom. The "1916 Mexican Border Service" pennant was a souvenir of G. P.'s time on the Nebraska National Guard at the Mexican border; it was prominently displayed at G. P.'s memorial service. Bugle: Charlotte Shaw and Ken Smith Collection. Pennant: WCPM Collection.



After G. P. Cather's funeral service at the Bladen Opera House on May 3, 1921, the procession to Bladen's East Lawn Cemetery was led by a color guard and the Holdrege Legion Band. "It is estimated that two thousand people thronged the city to pay tribute to the dead soldier," said the *Bladen Enterprise*. Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Collection.





In May 1921, following his body's return to the United States, a memorial service was held in the Bladen Opera House for Lt. G. P. Cather. His Mexican Border Service pennant hangs above. The details of the service were handled by the local American Legion members and Company K soldiers. Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Collection.

Local girls dressed as Red Cross nurses followed the body of Lt. G. P. Cather from the Bladen Opera House to East Lawn Cemetery just outside Bladen. Virgil Waburn, a World War I veteran from nearby Blue Hill, drove Butch and Tony, the team of horses owned by H. E. McCoy of Bladen. Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Collection.



“Tuesday, May 3rd, witnessed the final chapter in the heroic career of Lieut. G. P. Cather, first Nebraska officer to pay the supreme sacrifice upon the battlefields of France”

Bladen Enterprise, May 6, 1921.

See the story on page 52.

