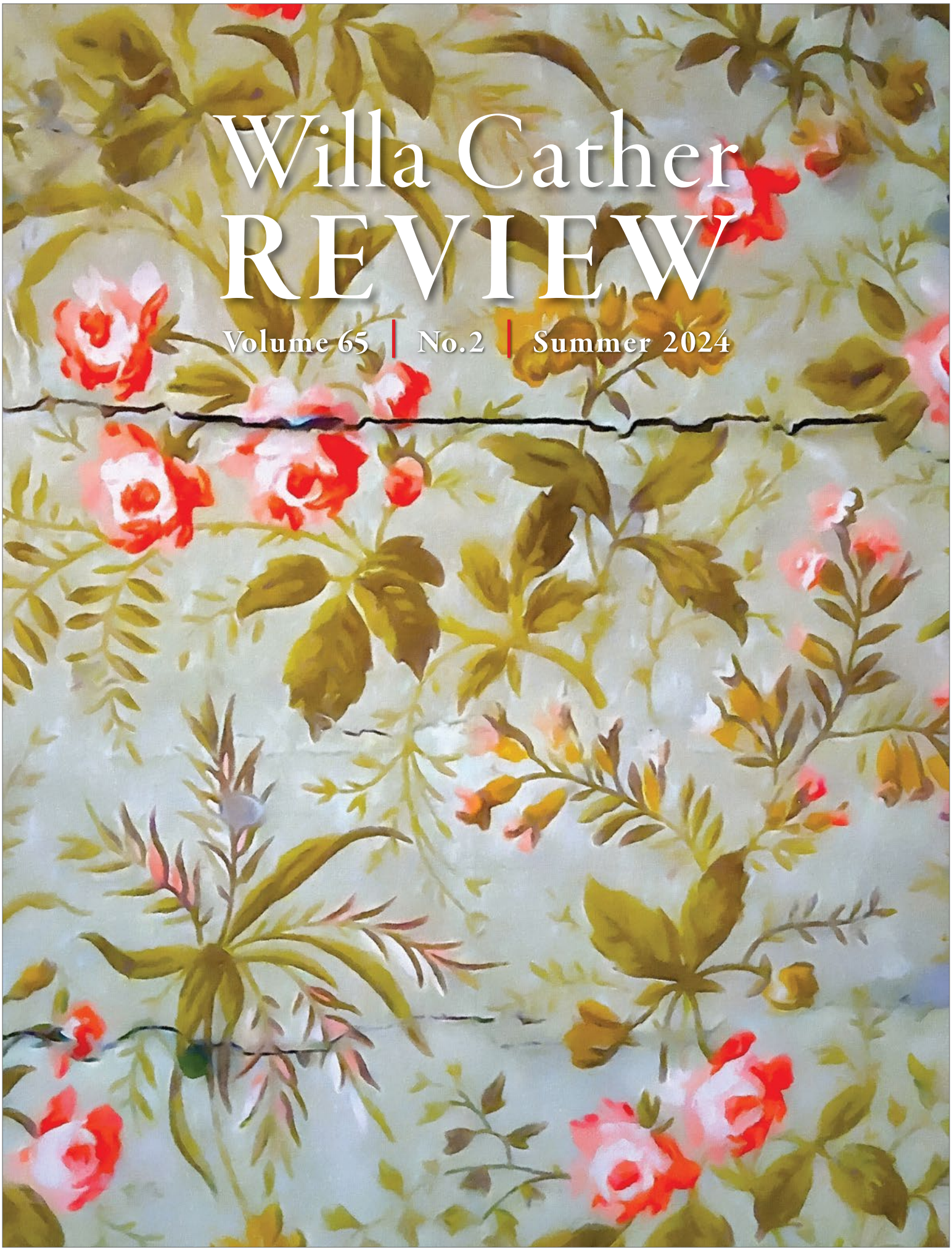

Willa Cather REVIEW

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On the cover: **A Dream of a Rose Bower**
Inspired by the discovery of a long-protected patch of wallpaper in Willa's room.

Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

As the days grow shorter and we look toward fall, I still feel a bit like 2024 has just begun. Often the weeks are long and the years feel short as we have juggled capital improvement projects at the Willa Cather Childhood Home and the future site of Hotel Garber alongside expanded program initiatives such as the Willa Cather Teacher Institute and the Willa Cather Residency.

Today's update begins with the elation we felt last fall when Cather's classic novel *My Ántonia* was selected by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as one of fifty titles for the 2024–25 Big Read. Not long before this news, we made our case for a significant grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to help reenvision and reimagine the Cather historic sites with new permanent exhibits. Recent months have brought good news in regard to both initiatives.

The NEA in partnership with Arts Midwest provided meaningful funding that will enable us to develop programs and resources in support of a shared reading experience of *My Ántonia*. To further knowledge and dialogue related to the novel, we will curate three new exhibits, organize a variety of educational programs, and host a series of creative writing workshops. Through these endeavors, we aim to meet the NEA's goals to inspire meaningful discussions, celebrate creativity, elevate a variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections within communities of readers.

In early August, we received notice that the IMLS approved our Museums for America grant with a full-ask award of $250,000. The agency received 355 applications, and we were one of the 115 projects selected to receive funding. Our grant will support a multiyear development and reinterpretation project for exhibits at the Burlington Depot and the Pavelka Farmstead, both popular visitor destinations that were recently restored.

As we begin implementation of these projects, we look forward to the opportunity to connect with you. Anyone interested in taking part in the Big Read is encouraged to visit WillaCather.org/Big-Read to request books, programs, or exhibits for your community. We will have ample materials available for book clubs, local libraries, or cultural organizations. As for the IMLS-funded exhibit development projects, please join us for community events and open houses during our 70th annual Spring Conference. Materials related to Webster County farm life in the early 1900s, Czech culture, westward expansion, and railroading are also of interest as we build out new historic site interpretation. We'd love to hear from you!

Letter from the President

Mark Bostock

Reminded that it is time to write my letter for this edition of the *Willa Cather Review*, I have a moment of panic. I'm not a scholar or writer, I'm just a simple guy who grew up in Red Cloud, where Willa Cather was always in the air. I tend to think of Cather that way—as a local, or a neighbor—so you will find my letters will relate back to Red Cloud.

We had a wonderful Spring Conference this year and many happy conference-goers, which is always gratifying. It couldn't have been done without our wonderful staff. One of the centerpieces of the conference was the rededication of the restored Cather Childhood Home, which turned out very well. What a beautiful place! A big shout-out to Tru-Built Construction and Steve Powell (a Red Coud native) who did the construction work. Credit to Ashley Olson and Tracy Tucker who spent many hours coordinating with Steve to tend to countless details, large and small, and get the project done. Heartfelt thanks also to the generous donors who made the funding possible.

It was quite exciting to see how the Farmers and Merchants Bank has turned out, especially the new *Making a Place* exhibit in the lower level. It is a valuable addition to what I think is the coolest building in Red Cloud. When the new Hotel Garber is finished, folks will be able to use the elevator from the hotel to access the different levels of the bank building. That will ease access to the bank for folks who have had a hard time going up and down its steep front steps. There again, thank you for the generous donors who helped fund this restoration project.

Speaking of Hotel Garber, it is coming along nicely, as conference attendees were able see when they toured it. I walked through it again last week and was able to see trim being installed around doorways and windows on the third floor. I'm certain that visitors will be pleased with the results. We are hoping to complete the hotel building by the end of the year. We have hired John Schwichtenberg, a Nebraska native, as the general manager. He is hard at work preparing the operations side for the opening. As I write we are about $300,000 short of having enough money to finish the construction. I would encourage readers of the *Review* to help us make up that gap (naming rights are available). Contact Ashley Olson for information.

In closing I'll mention that the Nebraska Department of Transportation is holding meetings in Red Cloud to discuss the future of the downtown's brick streets. The current bricks are a little tired, and it will be exciting to see that project get underway.

So, this is one Red Cloud native's update on the exciting times we're experiencing at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud.

"The Man Who Gave Me My First Chance": S. S. McClure and Willa Cather's "Before Breakfast"

Robert Thacker

When Hermione Lee reaches the end of Willa Cather's life in her 1989 biography *Willa Cather: Double Lives*, the last short story she considers is Cather's "Before Breakfast." "One of her last and strangest stories," according to Lee, "Before Breakfast" was published posthumously in *The Old Beauty and Others* (1948) by Edith Lewis and Alfred A. Knopf following Cather's death in April 1947 (373–75, 293). Janis P. Stout, about a decade after Lee in *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World* (2000), also ends her book with "Before Breakfast." To Stout, "Before Breakfast" is "a peculiar and seemingly inconclusive story that is little discussed, but one that [Cather] herself spoke of warmly, in part because she enjoyed the process of creating a story once again but at least in part, it would seem, because of the substance of the story itself" (308). Describing the position of "Before Breakfast" in Cather's *oeuvre*, Stout calls it a "summing up, a final statement." She then continues with precise salience: "But it is also a summing up in its pondering of the vast sweep of history, geological as well as human. At the same time, it is a very personal story, a final statement that is self-reflective in two senses: in reflecting or expressing the self and in being a reflection *about* the self, an act of reflection on herself as a person" (309).[1]

Lee and Stout, among other scholars, have seen in "Before Breakfast" something essential enough to use its discussion as conclusion to extended readings of Cather (see Murphy, "An American Tradition," and Friedman, Coyle, and Akins). I want here to add to these readings and extend them by calling attention to a key presence in the story that has yet to be addressed: S. S. McClure (1857–1949), Cather's boss at his magazine (1906–12) and a lifelong friend. The protagonist Henry Grenfell's character in "Before Breakfast" owes significantly to McClure—while not exactly a prototype for his situation, the echoes are inescapable. McClure is a real presence in this, Cather's penultimate story, and the understanding of his presence there adds to the "summing up" farewell statement Cather offers and Lee and Stout each recognized.

Beyond McClure, there are other echoing matters as well: the story is the only fiction which its author chose to set—effectively if not by name—on Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick, Canada, in the Bay of Fundy off the coast of Maine. There Cather and her life companion, Edith Lewis, spent summers from the 1920s until the outbreak of the Second World War.[2]

So place is memorialized in "Before Breakfast." More than that, the story's plot—a man arises the first morning back in his cabin on "his" island, ruminates over his whole life, and then takes a walk, ultimately seeing an inspiring sight which is, for him, an epiphany. Henry Grenfell, that man, carries a two-volume copy of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* in his bag as his island reading—and that story of sons resonates in Grenfell's own story and ruminations. Notably, "Henry" is the first word in Cather's story (141). Beyond Shakespeare, another literary presence in "Before Breakfast"—probed in detail by the late Merrill Maguire Skaggs—is William Faulkner. In her *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner* (2007) and elsewhere, Skaggs draws upon an inescapable allusion to *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) in Cather's description of a brook Grenfell crosses as he proceeds on his inspection tour of "his" island before breakfast ("the water was rushing down the deep-cut channel with sound and fury" [162]) and uses it as foundation to a conjectural argument regarding the existence of an ongoing "literary conversation" between the two authors.[3]

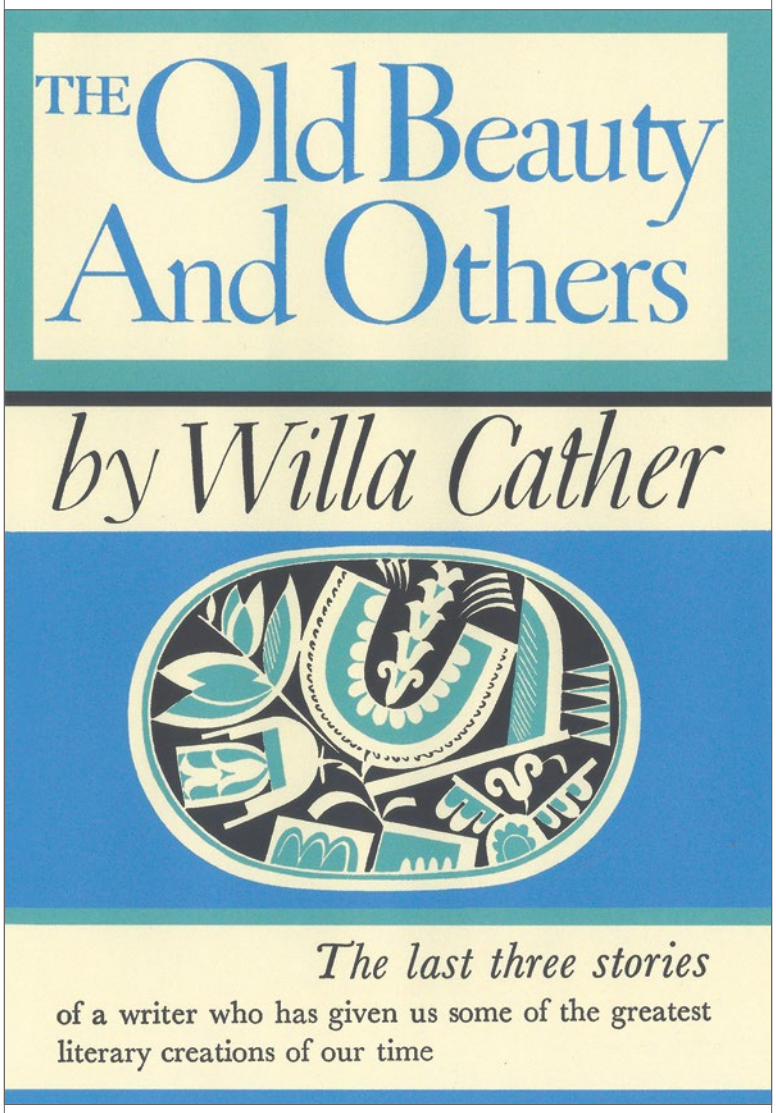
The provenance of "Before Breakfast" is largely circumstantial. Pointing to letters Cather wrote to friends in January 1945 alluding to its composition, Stout comments "its completion seems to have gone unrecorded, and she seems to have made no effort to have it published" (*The Writer* 309). True enough, but other letters Cather wrote, and timing, suggest that the story likely began in May 1944 when, at an award ceremony in New York City, Cather shared a stage with, and so saw, S. S. McClure again after some ten years. There, she received the Gold Medal for fiction awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters—a lifetime award—and McClure, for his part, was awarded their Order of Merit for his contributions to American letters and journalism ("Ceremonial"). Biographer James Woodress recounts the scene, writing that "Witnesses of the ceremony saw a moving scene when Cather recognized McClure at the other end of platform. She got up from her chair, walked across the stage, and flung her arms about him" (Woodress 498; "Recipients"). Reporting the event, the *New York Times* accompanied its story

with a photograph of the honorees in which Cather is next to McClure and has her arm around him and her hand on his shoulder. There is every reason to think that this reunion after a decade apart led directly to "Before Breakfast."

Cather first met McClure when, in May 1903, he summoned her to New York when she had just published her first book—*April Twilights*, a book of poems—and was teaching in Pittsburgh, writing, having some small successes, but struggling for a clear focus. Here Stout's summary of Cather's aesthetic development as an emerging writer then, seen in relation to what McClure ultimately did for her, is apt: "Like her poems, her apprentice stories bounce about among styles and subjects so much that they are difficult to discuss in any coherent way" (*The Writer* 89). After their first meeting—which affected Cather deeply—McClure published Cather's "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905) and "Paul's Case" (1905) in his magazine and then her first book of fiction, *The Troll Garden* (1905), through his book-publishing firm. In early 1906, McClure traveled to Pittsburgh and hired Cather onto his staff. By the time she arrived in April or May, the most prominent members of the *McClure's Magazine* staff had all resigned, with *McClure's* managing editor John S. Phillips and contributors Ray Stannard Baker, Lincoln Steffens, and Ida Tarbell departing to establish the *American Magazine* in June 1906. The reasons for this staff revolt were various, but McClure's frenetic personal and professional behavior was central, including an ongoing adulterous dalliance with a third-rate poet whom he was publishing frequently in the magazine where such poets as Kipling and Stevenson had appeared, and where Yeats and Housman would too.[4] Cather rose to the position of managing editor and served in that role from 1908 into 1912. She was a singular success in that position, one in which she worked closely with McClure himself. Woodress has claimed that, as a result, "next to her father and brothers he was the most important man in her life" (171). When, in 1912, McClure was forced out of the magazine he founded just after Cather had left regular work there herself, she volunteered to help him and ultimately wrote his *My Autobiography*, first published in serial form in *McClure's* (October 1913 through May 1914) to lessen his debts and then as a book in 1914 (see Thacker "Introduction" and "'It's Through Myself'").

That seeing McClure again at the award ceremony in May 1944 affected Cather is readily clear in her correspondence. A week later she wrote to him, beginning "I cannot tell you how happy it made me to see you again on last Friday afternoon. The sight of you awakened such a torrent of happy memories and stirred in me such a flood of gratitude, that I kept asking myself, 'Why have I let such a long time go by without seeing my Chief?' I want to see you again, before I go away for the summer, to tell you all the whys" (*Complete Letters* no. 1669). Cather did visit with him then, as she later wrote to her brother Roscoe—the sibling she was closest to, she the oldest and he the second—from Maine, enclosing two articles on McClure:

> I do want you to read both these articles. They are very truthful and exactly like Mr. McClure! After all he was the best friend I ever had, and I've neglected him shamefully for ten years. He has no home, but lives quietly at the Union Leage Club [sic]. The week before I left town I spent such a happy afternoon with him there. He is 86 years and has grown so gentle. Courteous and kind he always was. He is no longer a whirlwind, but a summer breeze. He took me into the Library of his Club, sat down beside me and held my hand and began: "Miss Cather, do you happen to remember the economic reforms of Edward the First when he got home from Palestine?" (*Complete Letters* no. 2221)



"Before Breakfast" is one of "the last three stories" in *The Old Beauty and Others,* published posthumously in 1948.

Concluding, she writes "I mean to see him from time to time this winter. I have had to cut so many people since I have not been well, but I ought not to cut out the man who gave me my first chance" (*Complete Letters* no. 2221).

That summer Cather worked on "Before Breakfast" in Maine, so seeing McClure again likely sparked the story, a summing up which led to Grenfell's own ruminations on the life he has led. When Cather returned to New York, having not had her mail forwarded to Maine (like Grenfell on "his" island), she found a letter from Marie Belloc Lowndes, a writer of suspense fiction—Cather had published stories by her in *McClure's* when she managed it. Lowndes had asked about McClure, "your old friend and mine," and Cather replied at some length, drawing upon her June visit with him. Her descriptions are rather remarkable:

> He is rather frail, but I have seldom seen anyone grow old so beautifully. He has really become very handsome,– and so gentle and dignified! You may remember that his face was always a singular, sympathetic one, with many shades of feeling. Occasionally his enthusiasms used to burst through it like a volcanic eruption. That volcanic activity is no longer there. As I sat and talked to him that afternoon four months ago, I thought I had never heard a voice that had so many shades of compassion and kindliness; a kind of forgiveness for all the wrong things in the world. Whatever faults Mr. McClure had came from his enthusiasms and nervous excitability. Now he is as calm as a harvest moon—when it shines over the wheat fields after the reaping is over. (*Complete Letters* no. 1674)

In these letters Cather may be seen, as well she might in 1944, taking up a long view of human existence from near its end in "Before Breakfast," a story of disquiet, rumination, recognition, and acceptance. That is, just what she saw in her eighty-six-year-old "Chief" before she went to Maine and began her story. By the time Cather wrote to Lowndes in October she was likely well into "Before Breakfast," so this letter may seen as sharing its perspective and encapsulating much of the sentiment ultimately achieved when "Before Breakfast" ends.

Turning to "Before Breakfast" with these details in mind, it is difficult to avoid seeing S. S. McClure in the story's protagonist Henry Grenfell. McClure's presence is not so much a matter of prototype—though such elements are shared—as it is a position in time and life. McClure in 1944 may have struck Cather as "calm as a harvest moon," but Henry Grenfell certainly is not. He needs, through the story's action, to get there. What I am asserting by suggesting McClure's presence in Grenfell's shaping as she wrote the story, and in "Before Breakfast" itself, is Cather's concern with the passage of time, individually and geologically, with an understanding of the aging process, and ultimately with the summing up of an individual's life—just as Stout writes—in ways articulate. When Cather writes the climactic scene that brings the story to its wry conclusion—describing Grenfell happening to see the geologist's daughter take her brief swim in the North Atlantic that morning, a scene Lee describes as "the lady, a seaborne Venus, 'unashamedly' spied on in an act of benign voyeurism" (375)—Cather knew she was returning to another instance of voyeurism in her work, one very clearly echoed in this penultimate story: "Coming, Aphrodite!" (1920). That is a story of youth, of romance and of sex, and of another failed romantic relationship. There, however, a discernable future is still ahead for its characters, and even as it ends years later, each person's life and career continues.

For Cather and McClure meeting in New York in June 1944 that is not the case—she had less than three years left, he just less than five, dying in March 1949 in his ninety-second year. Each already had a long perspective on time and existence when they met again and Cather conceived of "Before Breakfast" that summer in Maine, and when she wrote to Lowndes that McClure appeared to have aged well, despite obscurity and many travails.[5]

At the center of the story is an inspection walk Grenfell takes before breakfast after waking from a largely sleepless first night on "his" island. The geography of that walk is key—it was the same walk Cather often took between 1928 and 1940 atop the rock of Grand Manan. Two other leading Cather critics, David Stouck and Joseph R. Urgo, have written about the story, connecting it to *Shadows on the Rock* (1931). That novel has as its central image the rock—Cape Diamond—on which the city of Quebec was built beginning from the early seventeenth century on, and its title derives from a Latin inscription Cather found "over a wall sundial in the courtyard of the Laval Seminary, Quebec City," "*Dies Nostri Quast Umbra*" ("'Our days as if a shadow'") (Murphy and Stouck 392–93). Focusing on Cather's experience of and use of Canada in her work, most significantly *Shadows*, Stouck moves on to "Before Breakfast" and asserts that "If Canada had come to represent a place where things did not change, where old traditions continued, that comforting sense of time is exploded when Cather's protagonist is confronted by geological time and the brevity of human existence." He continues biographically, writing that she "was here no doubt incorporating some thing of her own experience, for not far from her cottage [at Whale

Lucius Richard O'Brien, *Northern Head of Grand Manan,* 1879. Art Gallery of Ontario.

Cove toward the north end of Grand Manan] was Ashburton Head, a rock face rising straight up from the beach and known locally as the 'Seven Days Work,' because in its layers of rock seven different periods of geological time are in striking evidence" (Stouck 20). Grenfell takes his walk toward that rock.

Urgo, for his part, writes of "the rock that threatens us with narrated nihilism," quoting Grenfell's rhetorical question to himself, "What was the use . . . of anything?," a question at the story's heart to which I shall return (192; Cather 148, ellipsis in the original). Continuing, he holds that in the story "it is modern science that suggests the artificiality of the rock, when the geologist tells Grenfell that 'the island was interesting geologically because the two ends of the island belonged to different periods, yet the ice seemed to have brought them both down together.' If the rock has a *history*, it was delivered by ice, if something predates it, then even (to get back to the metaphor) those things we consider rock-fixed and eternal are in fact contingencies, and we are left 'spineless, accidental, unrelated to anything,' left, like Grenfell, 'sitting in his bathrobe by his washstand, limp!'" (192–93; Cather 147, 149). Commenting on this last striking quotation, Urgo sharply points to Grenfell's dire mental situation before he sets out on his inspection walk of "his" island: "A man sitting limp beside the washstand holds little promise for the survival of the species. Cather's exclamation point is emphatic, ironic, and outrageous" (193). All this is to say that, for Urgo and Stouck (and probably others), "the rock" looms large as an icon of place, an allusion to Cather's prior work, and an invitation to symbolic interpretation, but the image of this geological feature may be so inviting as to obscure or downplay the man walking toward it, as well as his significance as an icon in his own right. In effect, Cather is having it both ways, invoking the vast sweep of geological time and a person's single lifetime.

Cather begins her story with her character's state of mind: "Henry Grenfell, of Grenfell & Saunders, got resentfully out of bed after a bad night. The first sleepless night he had ever spent in his own cabin, on his own island, where nobody knew that he was senior partner of Grenfell & Saunders, and where the business correspondence was never forwarded to him" (141). The cabin is situated as Cather and Lewis's is—"about fifty yards back from the edge of the red sandstone cliff which dropped some two hundred feet to a narrow beach—so narrow that it was covered at high tide" (142). Grenfell in his bathrobe goes to his window, facing the east, which "was already lightening; a deep red streak burnt over the sky-line water. . . . While Grenfell stood at his window, a big snowshoe hare ran downhill from the spruce wood, bounded into the grass plot at the front door, and began nervously nibbling the clover" (142). He "was sure it was the hare that used to come every morning two summers ago and had become quite friendly." Aptly, on this morning the hare "seemed ill at ease; presently he started, sat still for an instant, then scampered up the grassy hillside and disappeared into the dark spruce wood. Silly thing! Still, it was kind of a greeting" (143).

This man, a prominent businessman of some sort judging by the repetition of his firm's name, is resentful; he has just arrived, after a difficult journey up the east coast, on "his" island and spent a sleepless first night, sleepless for the first time, in his cabin. The hare he sees at waking before dawn is nervous but connected to the last time Grenfell had been there, two years prior. Thus in these first two paragraphs Cather creates both connection to place and awareness of time's passage. Beginning his "morning routine, still thinking about the hare," Grenfell is about to use eye-drops but, "staring into the eastern horizon," he demurs: "He saw something up there. While he was watching the rabbit the sky had changed. Above the red streak on the water line the sky had lightened to faint blue, and across the horizon a drift of fleecy rose cloud was

floating. And through it a white-bright, gold-bright planet was shining." Orchestrating this scene carefully and precisely—a man alone, unobserved, that condition a thread to be picked up later in the story—Cather continues initially with Grenfell's thoughts, but then expands toward her purpose and fundamental statement in "Before Breakfast"; this passage needs to be seen at length:

> The morning star, of course. At this hour, and so near the sun, it would be Venus.
>
> Behind her rose-coloured veils, quite alone in the sky already blue, she seemed to wait. She had come in on her beat, taken her place in the figure. Serene, impersonal splendour. Merciless perfection, ageless sovereignty. The poor hare and his clover, poor Grenfell and his eye-drops!
>
> He braced himself against his washstand and still stared up at her. Something roused his temper so hot that he began to mutter aloud:
>
> "And what's a hundred and thirty-six million years to you, Madam? That Professor needn't blow. You were winking and blinking up there maybe a hundred and thirty-six million times before that date they are so proud of. The rocks can't tell any tales on you. You were doing your stunt up there long before there was anything down here but—God knows what! Let's leave that to the professors, Madam, you and me!" (143–44)[6]

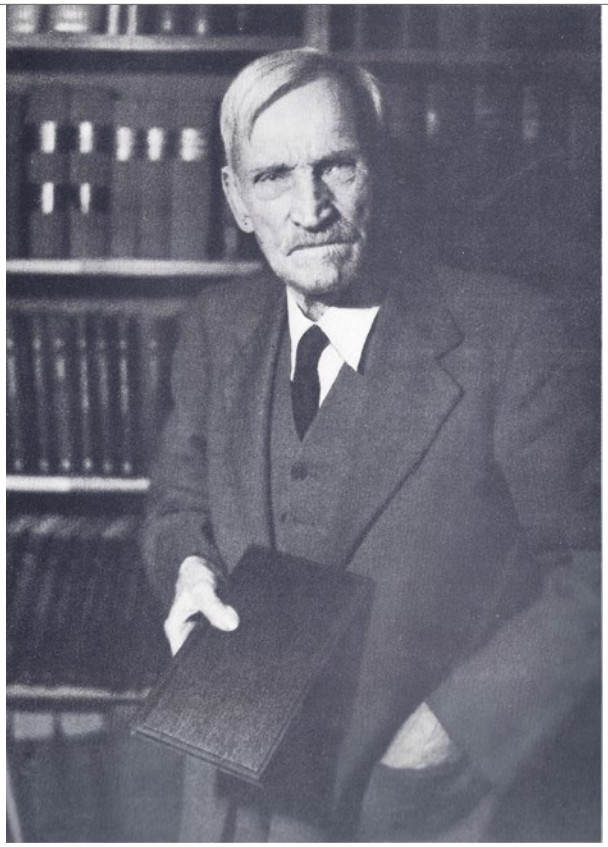
Studying this long initial passage which just precedes Cather's shift to necessary exposition, a sentence stands out: "The poor hare and his clover, poor Grenfell and his eye-drops!" It stands out because it offers brief authorial commentary on her character and on his situation just then—human commiseration. She steps in to empathize with this man at a critical moment in his life. And more than that, it points Cather's reader sharply toward the story's crux, the central tension of Grenfell's disaffection, one yet unexplained. So it is in the next paragraph. Grenfell's aesthetic response to Venus in that morning sky, a response Cather shares and gives language to, points to the reasons for his first sleepless night on "his" island, and to the reasons for his resentment.

Cather then explains Grenfell's pique: "This childish bitterness toward 'millions' and professors was the result of several things. Two of Grenfell's sons were 'professors'"; but he is thinking of the geology professor whom he had met on the boat the night before, "a delightful man who had, temporarily at least, wrecked Grenfell's life with civilities and information" (144–45). One word here, "wrecked," has a special resonance in this story. Cather continues to describe Grenfell's meeting with this man and his daughter—a "comely creature," she writes, "who shows breeding, delicate preferences"—aboard the boat. Her father, Professor Fairweather, "carelessly, in quite the tone of weather-comment small talk, proceeded to wreck one of Grenfell's happiest illusions; the escape avenue he kept in the back of his mind when he was at his desk at Grenfell & Saunders, Bonds" (145–47). In response to Grenfell's question, Fairweather replies that the end of "his" island is thought to be one hundred and thirty-six million years old. For his part too, Fairweather "had sensed in half an hour that this man loved the island. (His daughter had sensed it a year ago, as soon as she had arrived there with her father. Something about his cabin, the little patch of lawn in front, the hedge of wild roses that fenced it in, told her that)" (148).

Still in his cabin, remembering all this, the sun up, "Grenfell rejected his eye-drops," and asks, "Why patch up? What was the use . . . of anything? Why tear a man loose from his little rock and shoot him out into the eternities?" Here is Cather's nub. She continues: "All that [geological] stuff was inhuman. A man had his little hour, with heat and cold and a time-sense suited to his endurance. If you took that away from him you left him spineless, accidental, unrelated to anything." Then she describes him in "his bathrobe by his washstand, limp! No wonder: what a night! What a dreadful night!" (148–49). Having just seen S. S. McClure for the first time in a decade, doubtless noting the effects of age since the last time she had seen him, Cather created an analogous character at a moment of insight and distress, mentally wrestling with his position in time. Literally Grenfell, he is implicitly McClure.

And having accounted for Grenfell's disquiet on this first morning back on "his" island, Cather then develops his personal history, and it is here that presence of S. S. McClure is made explicit: "In the last ten hours poor Grenfell had travelled over seas and continents, gone through boyhood and youth, founded a business, made a great deal of money, and brought up an expensive family" (149). To this point I have relied perhaps overmuch on direct quotations because the surety of Cather's narrative and the precision of her detail reveal a writer absolutely certain with what she is doing. While McClure is not so much a prototype for Grenfell as he is a template, the detail from her "Chief's" life Cather takes in 1944 to create her protagonist is telling: together, McClure and Grenfell are a type of everyman figure in the Horatio Alger vein. As Cather knew and detailed in "his" *My Autobiography*, McClure's boyhood young-manhood strivings were singular. He was born the oldest of several in Protestant Ireland; his father was killed in an industrial accident; the family emigrated to Indiana; he worked his way through Knox College in Illinois, taking well more than four years to do so while wooing and eventually winning the beautiful daughter

of the college's most prominent and august professor. Setting out on a career, McClure worked for a time at a magazine for bicyclists, the *Wheelman*, before founding one of the first literary syndicates in the 1880s; that was followed in 1893 by *McClure's Magazine*—founded, notably, in the middle of a depression—which was enormously successful and ultimately made him the most famous editor-publisher in the United States. He too brought up an expensive family, though he and Hattie had just one son of their own, adopted another, and had three daughters (see Johanningsmeier *Fiction*; Lyon *passim*).



S. S. McClure in an uncredited photograph in *Success Story* (Scribner's, 1963), bearing the following caption: "In March 1944, the National Institute of Arts and Letters announced that McClure was to be awarded its Order of Merit. Newspaper photographers found him in a corner of the library of the Union League Club. He was eighty-seven years old."

Just before turning to detail Grenfell's history and rise, Cather writes that his first sleepless night in his island cabin "had been one of those nights of revelation, revaluation, when everything seems to come clear . . . only to fade out again in the morning. In a low cabin on a high red cliff overhanging the sea, everything that was shut up in him, under lock and bolt and pressure, simply broke jail, spread out into the spaciousness of the night, undraped, unashamed" (149–50; ellipsis in the original).

Accounting for Grenfell's history, he too lost his father when yet a boy, getting his first job as a Western Union messenger while his family—his mother and two younger sisters—struggled. Young Grenfell's experience in the West echoes young McClure's: "A business man should have early training, like a pianist, *at the instrument*. The sense of responsibility makes a little boy a citizen"; "he knew he could get on if he tried hard, since most lads emphatically did not try hard. He read law at night, and when he was twenty he was confidential clerk with one of the most conservative legal firms in Colorado" (150–51; emphasis in the original). Taking his "first long vacation," young Grenfell was bicycling near Colorado Springs "when another bicycle came round a curve and collided with him; a girl coasting." The girl was injured. "Henry ran two miles down to her hotel and her family. New York people; the father's name was a legend in Henry's credulous Western world. And they liked him" (151).

When McClure obtained his job on the *Wheelman*, though, he did not know how to ride a bicycle; Hattie's father loathed him and sought to block the romance. Even so, those two were married. So too were Grenfell and "that only daughter one year after she coasted into him." Doubtless thinking of the outcome of the McClures' often troubled marriage, Cather writes further that Grenfell's accidental meeting with the woman who became his wife was "a warning unheeded, that first meeting. It was his own intoxicated vanity that sealed his fate. He had never been 'made much over' before." Continuing, Cather writes "It had worked out as well as most marriages, he supposed. Better than many. The intelligent girl had been no discredit to him, certainly. She had given him two remarkable sons, any man would be proud of them. . . ." (151–52; ellipsis in the original).[7]

This is the third time Cather mentions the sons, but here she details one of them—Harrison, the physicist—by recounting first their father's view of them and then "a little scene" between the two men over *Henry IV, Part I*. After the comment on his marriage, Cather returns to Grenfell's disquieted night: "Here Grenfell had flopped over in bed and suddenly sat up, muttering aloud. 'But God, they're as cold as ice! I can't see through it. They've never lived at all, those two fellows. They've never run after the ball—they're so damned clever they don't *have* to. They just reach out and *take* the ball . . . the way Harrison picked up that book!" (152; emphasis in the original). The book was a volume of Shakespeare, one that Harrison noticed in his father's bag as Grenfell was packing; the scene that would trouble Grenfell later ensues when his son picks up one of the volumes:

> "Light reading?" he remarked. Grenfell was stung by such impertinence. He resented any intrusion on his private, personal, non-family life.
>
> "Light or heavy," he remarked dryly, "they're good company. And they're mighty human."
>
> "They have that reputation," his son admitted.
>
> A spark flashed into Grenfell's eye. Was the fellow sarcastic, or merely patronizing? (153–54)

Alfred Thompson Bricher, *Grand Manan*, ca. 1888. Birmingham Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Martee Woodward Webb.

To reiterate for emphasis, the play Grenfell carries to "his" island is about the differences between two sons, and so apt for the story being told here. Thinking back to the exchange, "Grenfell wondered if he hadn't flared up too soon. Maybe the fellow hadn't meant to be sarcastic." Likely so, for when Harrison left his father's room "he hesitated" (154). Cather then offers another remembered scene at dinner—featuring Harrison, his mother, and Grenfell—during which "the theoretical head of the house" behaved badly. That acknowledged, Grenfell thinks that "his wife rescued him as she often did (in an innocent, well-bred way) by refusing to recognize his rudeness." "Yes, when he was irritable and the domestic line-up got the better of him, Margaret, by being faultlessly polite, often saved the situation" (155–56).

What Cather creates in 1944 with Grenfell in "Before Breakfast" is a character sharing her own long perspective on her own life, one inspired in part by her reunion with her "Chief" after a decade. She writes Grenfell's history whole, recognizing his responsibility for his own situation. Thus after the passage just quoted and a white-space break, Cather continues, reminding her reader initially that Grenfell is still just up, the time is still dawn, just before breakfast:

> When he thought everything over, here in this great quiet, in this great darkness, he admitted that his shipwreck had not been on the family rock. The bitter truth was that his worst enemy was closer even than the wife of his bosom—was his bosom itself!
>
> Grenfell had what he called a hair-trigger stomach. When he was in his New York office he worked like a whirlwind, and to do it he had to live on a diet that would have tried the leanest anchorite. The doctors said he did everything too hard. He knew that—he had always done things hard, from the day he first went to work for the Western Union.

Continuing this reminiscence, Cather concludes this paragraph with Grenfell suggesting that "Perhaps he was a throwback to the Year One, when in the stomach was the only constant, never sleeping, never quite satisfied desire" (156–57). Saying also that the "humiliation of being 'delicate' was worse than the actual hardship," Cather continues to say that Grenfell "had found the one way in which he could make it up to himself, could feel like a whole man, not like a miserable dyspeptic. That way was by living rough, not by living soft" (157). She then offers an account of his big-game hunting exploits all over the continent. McClure did no such thing, though at his peak he traveled frantically, crossing the Atlantic by ship well over a hundred times. But here too McClure is being invoked: he also worked, when in his New York office "like a whirlwind" (the same word she used writing to Roscoe); he too had a delicate stomach and precarious health—he visited Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, became a devoted vegetarian, reported his milk intake to Hattie, and was a devotee, according to his biographer, to "such delicacies as oatmeal soup, nuttolene, yogurt buttermilk, and granola fruit pudding" (Lyon 343–45; McClure to Hattie McClure).

Cather's retrospective biography of Grenfell almost done, she returns to the story's present just before a final design break, writing that "He had got ahead wonderfully . . . but, somehow, ahead on the wrong road" (158; ellipsis in the original). She reminds readers that Grenfell had last visited "his" island two years before and then sets him off on his morning walk of rediscovery up toward Ashburton Head along the top of the cliff—imaginatively retracing her own many walks there.[8] (Cather had herself last been on Grand Manan in 1940.) Just before Grenfell sets out on his walk, Cather offers another internal retrospective: "Feeling comfortably warm, he ran up the dark window blinds which last night he had pulled down to shut out the disturbing sight of the stars. He bethought him of his eye-drops, tilted back his head, and there was that planet, serene, terrible and splendid, looking in at him . . . immortal beauty . . . yes, but only when somebody *saw* it, he fiercely answered back!" (158; ellipses and italics in the original). Taking her readers back to this earlier scene, reminding us of the reasons for Grenfell's disquiet—his conversation on the boat over with Professor Fairweather, pitting his subjective love for "his" island against the other man's bloodless geological facts—ruminations that brought on his sleepless night of wholesale life evaluation. Through them Grenfell realizes that he had gotten "ahead on the wrong road," and so Cather has pulled his many concerns together: Grenfell's disaffections the night before were embodied by "the disturbing sight of the stars" (158).

In such a state of mind Grenfell prepares and leaves on his walk, first leaving a note "for William, his man Friday: 'BREAKFAST WHEN I RETURN.'" "He would get out and find his island. After all, it still existed. The Professor hadn't put it in his pocket, he guessed!" (159). He greets "a giant spruce tree that had been struck by lightning (must have been about a hundred years ago, the islanders said)" (160). Even so, the tree is still alive, persisting. "Ten minutes more on the winding uphill path brought him to the edge of the spruce wood and out on a bald headland that topped a cliff two hundred feet above the sea. He sat down on the rock and grinned" (160–61). Cather is imaginatively retracing her own steps on Grand Manan, reminding herself of another "bald headland" where her character Myra Henshawe (one based in part on Hattie McClure) goes to die in *My Mortal Enemy* and, with his final grin, having Grenfell leave his disquiet behind. Grinning, he wonders "why had he let Doctor Fairweather's perfectly unessential information give him a miserable night? He had always known this island existed long before he discovered it, and that it must once have been a naked rock" (161). Like the naked rock of Quebec, Cape Diamond, the histories of which she had detailed so in *Shadows on the Rock* ("Our days as if a shadow"). Getting up and continuing his inspection tour, Grenfell realizes that "nothing had changed. Everything was the same and he, Henry Grenfell, was the same: the relationship was unchanged" (162). "This knob of grassy headland," Cather continues in the scene after more description, "with the bushy rowan tree had been his vague objective when left the cabin. From this elbow he could look back on the cliff wall, both north and south, and see the four silver waterfalls in the morning light. A splendid sight, Grenfell was thinking, and all his own" (163). Grenfell here is at both a moment of stasis, even wisdom, seeing all together his small place in the universe, his lifetime against the massed scope of geological time.

"Not a living creature," Grenfell thinks, "but wait a minute: there was something moving down there, on the shingle by the water's edge. A human figure, in a long white bathrobe—and a rubber cap! Then it must be a woman?" (163). Grenfell identifies the swimmer as Fairweather's daughter and there begins the scene Lee describes as "the enchanting but distanced figure of the lady, a seaborne Venus, 'unashamedly' spied on in an act of benign voyeurism" (375). Initially alarmed at her prospects, knowing better, Grenville eventually realizes that she, however hesitant at the cold, knows what she is about. Like Grenville after his sleepless night, "There was no one watching her, she didn't have to keep face—except to herself. That she had to do and no fuss about it. She hadn't dodged. She had gone out, and she had come back. She would have a happy day. He knew just how she felt. She surely did look like a little pink clam in her white shell" (165–66). The whole of "Before Breakfast" is preliminary to this scene.

Less than a week before Cather's reunion with McClure at their shared award ceremony in mid-May 1944 she wrote to her beloved brother Roscoe responding to "the precious letter that came from you last night!" In it, he had evidently called her attention to a recent article in *Life* featuring photographs from "Col. Harvey's party" at Delmonico's in New York on December 5, 1905, celebrating Mark Twain's seventieth birthday, one which she, still a high-school teacher in Pittsburgh, had attended and been photographed at by the press ("Mark Twain").[9] Accounting for her unusual invitation, she wrote further to Roscoe that "'Paul's Case' had been published in 'McClure's', and somebody told Col. Harvey I had a future." Harvey was the head of Harper & Brothers. Doubtless that "somebody" was McClure—Woodress writes

that "he did not forget that she was one of his authors" (182). Sometime in the spring the next year, 1906, McClure made his trip to Pittsburgh to hire Cather onto his magazine's staff: her career was *really* off and running. Reminded of all this by her brother's letter, Cather writes "Yes, I was young then. I hit the road pretty early and worked terribly hard" (*Complete Letters* no. 2217). So, certainly, did S. S. McClure and Henry Grenfell.

Having just been reminded of Mark Twain's marvelous seventieth birthday party in 1905, the invitation to which she owed to McClure, then seeing him the next week after a decade apart, and later meeting and talking and sharing memories, Cather was inspired to write "Before Breakfast." She wrote a subtle tale of subjective age and compelling understanding. Having sat down grinning earlier in his walk, Grenfell returns to his breakfast—"the door of the dining-car kitchen stood open, and the smell of coffee drowned the spruce smell and the sea smell"—after his glimpse of "the lady Venus" by the sea, still "chuckling to himself." "Plucky youth is more bracing than enduring age," Grenfell, Cather, and her readers conclude as the story ends, and to make this most telling point finally, she asserts both the truths of evolution ("well, he started on a long hop") and the truths of the passage of time (166). Recalling the youth, the promise, and the romance of her characters in "Coming, Aphrodite!", too, Fairweather's daughter and Grenfell together embody youth and age as each is lived every day by each of us. Most subtly, and beautifully, "Before Breakfast" captures in a character's ruminations and walk about "his" island these most basic of human facts. A brief and apt story, a wise one, written near the pinnacle of a stellar career.

NOTES

1. Stout continued in her *Cather Among the Moderns* (2019) to see "Before Breakfast" as a singular presence in Cather's *oeuvre*, calling it "cryptic" there and, later, writing that the story, along with *My Mortal Enemy*, makes "easy reading until we reread and reflect" (xii, 6).

2. In *Two Islands* (1971), Katharine Sherman describes the area Cather well knew north of their cottage at Whale Cove, "where molten rock had slid over the old beaches, creating a 150-foot wall. It is called Seven Days Work, not for its steepness but because on its face are seven rock layers, said to be seven strata of the earth's crust." Hiking along its top, she writes further that "We could not see the face of the cliff we were skirting, but after about a mile the land rises abruptly to the sharp rock of Ashburton Head, covered with grass and thrusting well out from the shore" (29, 30). See also Thacker, "The House that Cather Built."

3. The phrase "the sound and the fury" also invokes *Macbeth*, but more immediate reference to Faulkner is inescapable. The relation of Cather's work to that of the preeminent American modernists in fiction who followed her—Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, primarily—has long animated Cather studies. From the generation just ahead of theirs, Cather was a writer each of them watched. Her *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady* had a deep effect on Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*—to the point of his plagiarism, actually—and the others showed signs of such awareness too. See especially Skaggs *Axes* 21–39. Skaggs traces numerous additional connections to the modernists, some more direct than others.

4. Beginning in May 1904, poems by one Florence Wilkinson referred to by McClure's biographer, Peter Lyon, as "wretched" (258) began appearing regularly in *McClure's*, and more frequently than poems by others. Lyon treats Wilkinson (260–67) and the staff revolt which brought Cather to *McClure's* (286–94) and *passim*. Charles Johanningsmeier offers the best rendering of the McClures' courtship and marriage as he argues for them as prototypes for the Henshawes in *My Mortal Enemy* ("Unmasking"). Cather's relations with Mrs. McClure while she worked at the magazine were regular and cordial.

5. One of the ironies of McClure's life, as Cather well knew, was that once he was pushed out of the editorship of *McClure's Magazine* in 1912—owing largely to overextending its business financially—he never really regained his professional footing.

6. Only three mailings from Cather to Edith Lewis are extant, a single letter and two postcards. The letter is from the Shattuck Inn, Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where Cather and Lewis often stayed in the fall on their way back from Grand Manan. Its second paragraph connects to "Before Breakfast," since Cather writes that "One hour from now, out of your window"—she is in Lewis's room at the Inn—"I shall see a sight unparalleled—Jupiter and Venus both shining in the golden-rosy sky and both in the West, she not very far above the horizon, and he about mid-way between the zenith and the silvery lady planet." Before signing her letter "Lovingly, W." Cather writes, "And now I must dress to receive the Planets, dear, as I won't wish to take the time after they appear—and they will not wait for anybody (*Complete Letters* no. 1324).

7. Taking up what she calls the "broken marriages" found in Cather's stories of the twenties—from *A Lost Lady* on in the context of Cather's well-known 1936 comment that the "world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" (Prefatory Note)—Stout sees them as "metaphors for the world's larger brokenness" (*The Writer* 188). Lee comments that Grenfell is "the unhappy self-made American man with a marriage like St. Peter's," calling such marriages one of "Cather's obsessions" (374). She is actually pointing to Cather's prototypical troubled marriage. It was the one she saw up close and dealt with when she managed *McClure's*, that of Harriet "Hattie" Hurd McClure (1855–1929) and S. S. "Sam" McClure. Not only is McClure and the McClures' marriage

evident as an echo in the St. Peters', as Lee mentions, but it is seen also in Dr. Archie's marriage in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), the Burdens' in *My Ántonia* (1918), the Henshawes' in *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), and Harry Gordon's in *Lucy Gayheart* (1935). It is also evident in "Before Breakfast."

8. Throughout, here, I have put "his" in quotation marks in references to Grenfell's island because "Before Breakfast" pits Grenfell's subjectivity against the objectivity of being in time, which each person faces and which Dr. Fairweather articulated on the boat regarding Grenfell's island—the place he loves so, his solitary refuge, a place to escape to from the rest of his life.

9. The article *Life* published, on the occasion of a new film on Twain, included several photographs from the party at Delmonico's arranged by George Harvey in honor of Twain's seventieth birthday, including Cather's table. That photograph identifies her, indicating that "Cather was among the younger and prettier guests" (97).

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Modernist Ennui and the Use of Domestic Time in *A Lost Lady*

Amrita Bakshi

"How can anybody like to see time visibly devoured?"

While reading Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923), I was time and again struck by the prominent similarities between the character of Marian Forrester and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier from *The Awakening* (1899). Both are complex characters who challenge the conventions of their respective societies, yet they do so in markedly different ways. Edna Pontellier embarks on a journey of self-discovery and independence, rejecting traditional roles of wife and mother as she seeks personal freedom and emotional fulfillment. Her awakening leads her to defy societal expectations, ultimately culminating in a tragic assertion of her autonomy. In contrast, Marian Forrester embodies a more enigmatic rebellion. She navigates her social world with charm and grace, yet her infidelity and complex relationships suggest a deeper dissatisfaction and a subtle defiance of the roles imposed upon her. While Edna's story is one of overt resistance and tragic liberation, Marian's narrative is characterized by a quieter, more ambiguous subversion of societal norms. Both characters illuminate the struggles of women seeking identity and freedom within the constraints of their eras, but they do so through distinctly different paths and outcomes.

When Chopin describes Edna's psychological circumstances, her description of ennui could very well reflect the psyche of Marian Forrester in Cather's *A Lost Lady*: "The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui" (145). The ennui that characterizes Edna also seems to pervade Marian's mindscape, rendering her restless and dissatisfied with her mundane small-town life in Sweet Water. However, whereas Edna finds refuge from the existential ennui in music and the arts, Marian shows no inclination toward any form of artistic endeavour. Marian Forrester's decided use of domestic time—to her romantic ends without any artistic outlet—reflects a movement away from the idea that art is both a product of and a potential cure for existential ennui. This essay will investigate if this lack of artistic interest in Marian's character emerges from a sense of disenchantment with the arts which is a byproduct of a modernist ennui. I trace the etymological and sociopolitical roots of "ennui" in English literature and connect it to the female condition of the time, situating Marian Forrester among an array of persecuted female characters of nineteenth century English and European novels. I analyze Marian's relation to Victorian feminist ideologies and her subtle revolt against her oppressed position in the world.

Ennui and Modernism

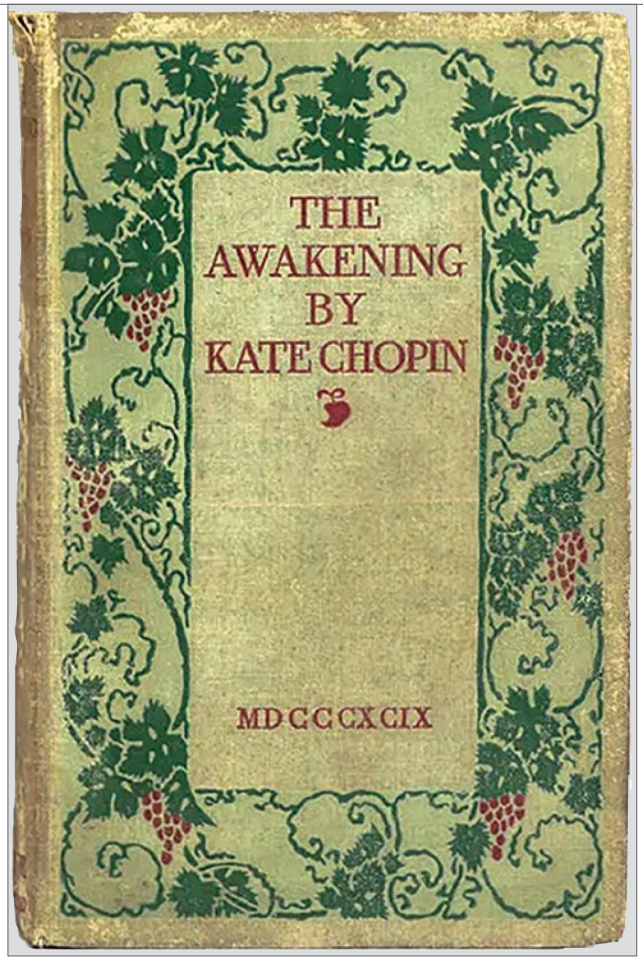
To understand the significance of a modernist ennui and its effects on Marian Forrester's psyche, consider the history of the word *ennui* itself and its connections to the conditions of modernism. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *ennui* is "the feeling of mental weariness and dissatisfaction produced by want of occupation, or by lack of interest in present surroundings or employments." The English *ennui* is fully naturalized from the mid-18th century French word *ennui*, which originates from Latin *in odio*, meaning "hateful" or "hatred." The English word *ennui*, on the surface simply meaning "boredom," seems to be a milder version of a more intense feeling of detestation whereas its etymology suggests a deeper meaning associated with a form of existential malaise. In literary sense, it has essentially come to mean a feeling of alienation—both self-imposed and forced—from one's society and environment, which have become meaningless due to stagnant ideas and mundane repetition of life.

In the twentieth century, when it came to be associated with the existentialist movement in France, ennui gradually became recognized as one of the symptomatic aspects of modernism. After the age of Enlightenment and the following Industrial Revolution, western culture underwent a radical and experimental transformation—in not only technological, sociopolitical, and economic fields, but also in spiritual and philosophical discourse—that brought forth a new realization about individual identity. Therefore, in literary and cultural terms, ennui or boredom combined feelings of anxiety, angst, and disillusionment emerging from an existential and temporal realization of one's self.

Ennui and the Lost Ladies

To establish Marian Forrester as a female protagonist tormented by the oppressive feelings of ennui, we must re-gender the concept of ennui in the first place. In modernist Anglophone literature and culture, boredom is gendered with ennui being a depressive mental

state of the male characters and hysteria being a female experience of paranoia. This distinction perhaps becomes more prominent in T. S. Eliot's exploration of the character of the ever-procrastinating Prufrock in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or Samuel Beckett's portrait of Vladimir who is "bored to death" waiting indefinitely for perhaps a nonexistent Godot in *Waiting for Godot*, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's hysterical female protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper," or in the hysteria and eventual doom of Edna Pontellier in Chopin's *The Awakening*. However, it is also important to note that in all the cases of female hysteria, the hysterical expressions stem from feelings of a deeply rooted ennui. Experience of ennui for the modern female character is, consequently, different from that of her male counterparts—both in how they are caused and how they are received in society. While the broader historical and cultural issues remain the same as a driving force for female ennui, there are gender-specific reasons of individual and economic autonomy as well that intensify feelings of ennui in the 19th century female psyche. Josefa Ros Velasco and Nancy Provolt detail these reasons in their essay in *The Culture of Boredom*. They identify upper-class married women as the main group affected by boredom, stemming from the sociocultural expectations tied to their gender and economic roles. These women were restricted to roles that emphasized being dutiful wives, maintaining a proper appearance, and following high-society norms, without the opportunity for personal ambitions or interests. Their experiences reveal the sources of their boredom. Additionally, their reactions—such as committing adultery or, in extreme cases, resorting to suicide to escape the oppressive monotony—highlight their yearning for excitement in their otherwise tedious domestic lives. However, the hysterical woman trope throws a pejorative light on issues of feminine ennui, thus rendering it invisible in a more intellectual social discourse that is predominantly a patriarchal playfield. The association of a reactive adultery and other morally vague means of countering the feminine ennui, too, put the 19th century female condition under a dismissive and moralizing light.



Cover to the first edition of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899, Herbert S. Stone).

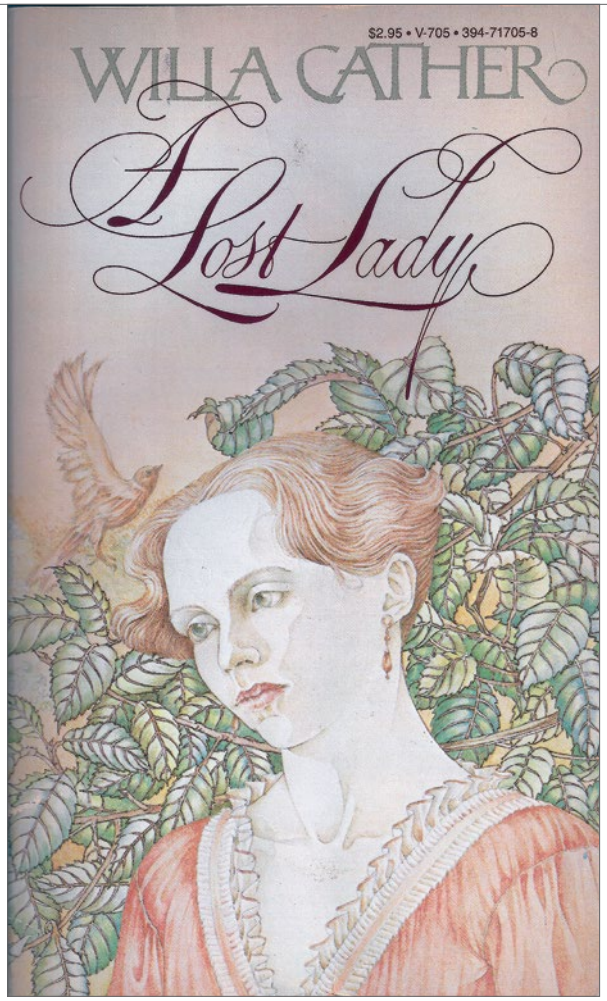
This context casts light on Flaubert's Emma Bovary, who exclaims, "What a boredom! What a boredom!" (quoted in Velasco 190) and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, who cries, "I'm bored! Bored! I am so bored!" These are not frivolous outbursts of haughty women. They are cries for help that perhaps Tolstoy understood in *Anna Karenina* when he described boredom as "the desire for desires." The character of Marian Forrester from *A Lost Lady* joins this list of literary women characters persecuted by an existential and oppressive boredom. As Nancy Morrow shows, in its own way *A Lost Lady* brings together different stories: it mixes memories of real people and places with memories of fictional characters and events. Cather might have started with the idea of creating a fictional version of a real woman from her childhood. However, when she decided to make Marian Forrester an unfaithful wife, one can see similarities to other fictional heroines such as Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Flaubert's Emma Bovary, and Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. Marian Forrester's character may also show Cather's dislike for characters like Chopin's Edna Pontellier.

Although Morrow situates Cather's novel in the tradition of the novels of adultery and Marian Forrester among the adulterous heroines, she also acknowledges the differences that Cather brings to the narrative and character sketches in *A Lost Lady*. To study Marian's character through the looking glass of modernist and feminine ennui will resituate her in the broader historic moment of the modern feminist condition and will locate Willa Cather as an articulator of that condition.

Marian Forrester, Lost Lady

Understanding Marian Forrester's character in relation with modernist ennui requires first looking into her immediate surroundings and cultural moments. Just as the western world itself was going through an epochal paradigm shift in the 19th century, those revolutionary ethics and aesthetics also seeped into the socioeconomic fabric of the American West. And this parallel of cultural circumstance ties Cather with the high modernists

like T. S. Eliot, who were concerned with the implications of changing world-orders. Samuel R. Delany finds ideological and thematic parallels between Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Cather's *A Lost Lady*—two contemporaneous works, the former being published in 1922 and the latter a year later. Delany asserts that the central concept shared by the two works is the portrayal of the contemporary world as a moral wasteland, an ethical desolation. This is exemplified by Cather's observation on her opening page that things are "so much greyer to-day than they were" (7).



1972 Vintage Books edition of *A Lost Lady* with illustration by J. K. Lambert.

Cather's novel is set against the backdrop of the rapid expansion of railway development, culminating in the establishment of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869. Many of the characters in Cather's novel like Marian, Captain Forrester, and Niel Herbert are all facing the trappings of the changing times: the last days of the "pioneer men of the Old West" and the beginning of "a new breed of men like [Ivy] Peters" (Gustke 173), "trained to petty economies by hard times" (*A Lost Lady* 102, quoted in Gustke). However, the setting of the novel being during this transition, those characters must inhabit two morally and economically different worlds. There can be seen a sense of displacement that can also be caused by a sense of disillusionment.

The Forresters lead their lives at different places with different sets of people: in Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado, and in Sweet Water, Nebraska. These places are very different in terms of politics, economy, and people's prejudices and moral structures. Also, Captain Forrester being one of the last of the pioneers, found the changing times—that heavily relied on economic stability through unstable and unscrupulous means—to be difficult to adapt to. Susan Rosowski observes, "The concern of the book is not to be with change itself; that, for better worse, is a fact. Instead, Cather focuses on human adaptation to change—on characters who struggle to maintain value within a framework of mutability" (52). Mrs. Forrester, different than her husband, being a woman of no means of her own, living at the mercy of the mercenary-minded males, found it is best to adapt to the changing times in order to claim/reclaim financial stability. The Forresters, living in both these places and times, are perhaps the most displaced of all the characters in the novel.

In the case of Niel Herbert, however, the displacement is different, as it arises from his sense of disillusionment. This disillusionment occurs when his adolescent impression of Mrs. Forrester—as an embodiment of pure light and lively perfection—diminishes and perhaps influences his move to Boston. (Cather cleverly builds the scene with just unseen presence and the sound of Frank Ellinger's yawning in Mrs. Forrester's bedroom and the abandoned "prickly" wild roses.) As a result, Niel too lives in two different worlds: the progressive and academic world of Boston and the increasingly capitalist and prejudiced world of Sweet Water. In his character, disillusionment and displacement both define his psyche and decisions. It is unsurprising, therefore, that most critics studying the novel chose to focus on Niel's feelings of disenchantment. Chad Trevitte, for instance, finds Niel's character to be at the epicenter of the modernist conundrum. He considers that, in the narrative of *A Lost Lady*, the interplay between illusion and disillusionment, romance and realism, resonates profoundly with the significance of art within the context of modernity. Cather's work not only presents an allegorical portrayal of the journey from innocence to experience embodied by Niel, or a representation of societal transformation through the decline of Marian Forrester, but also serves as an allegory of aesthetic significance, serving as a bridge between these dualities.

Critics, however, have not really considered Marian Forrester to be experiencing the same trappings of the time. Marian, in fact I'll claim, goes through the effects of the rapid modernization of the American West far more intensely than Niel or any other male character does in the novel. That is mainly owing to her position in the sex/gender system. Charmion Gustke observes that the "sex/gender system" in *A Lost Lady* revolves around Mrs. Forrester being traded and passed between men, defining her role in society. Mrs. Forrester, seen as a commodity exchanged among men of different ages, undergoes a transformation from being admired as

a "lovely lady" to being labeled as a "flighty and perverse" widow, influenced by her perceived worth in the marriage market and the economic and political circumstances surrounding her (25, 145). As the story progresses, it becomes increasingly easy to notice all the parallels between the modern intellectual man persecuted by the changing sociocultural dynamics of the world and the economically and sexually oppressed Marian Forrester. And this parallel also leads to the recognition of the existential ennui that pervades Marian's psyche. Thus, the ennui in Marian's character is not only natural, but also expected.

When we meet Marian for the first time in the novel, she is portrayed as the epitome of beauty in dishabille. We first read of her in relation to hosting her husband's colleagues, the pioneers, the railroad men: "If she happened to be in the kitchen, helping her Bohemian cook, she came out in her apron, waving a buttery iron spoon, or shook cherry-stained fingers at the new arrival. She never stopped to pin up a lock; she was attractive in dishabille, and she knew it" (10). This first description of Marian is important to note because that will suggest or mislead the readers of her domestic habits. Even though from the first impression Marian seems in her dishevelled appearance to be a diligent homemaker, always busy doing some household chore, later development of the novel's narrative would not completely corroborate that impression. Soon after meeting Marian, it becomes increasingly clear that the Forresters are one of the very few well-to-do houses in the poor little town of Sweet Water. The very distance between the Forresters and most of the residents of the town of Sweet Water is based on class distinction which is in turn a byproduct of economic disparity in the community. The class divide becomes quite obvious in the scenes where the poor Blum twins are always conscious of their place in the Forrester household, keeping their distance with both admiration and intimidation. Being the lady of the house of an upper-class household, Marian always has help in keeping house from her Bohemian cook, Mary, and Black Tom, the servant borrowed from Judge Pommeroy. This help leaves very little opportunity for her to be actually busy in daily hard work. The next time we meet her, when we see her interacting with boys from the town, we see her merely "standing in the deep bay-window of her parlour, arranging old-fashioned blush roses in a glass bowl" and soon after meeting the boys, ordering Mary to bake cookies for them (12–14). Her gracious yet eager conversation with the boys indicates the amount of empty time she had at hand and the desire for filling that time with honest human connection. This realization about her character inherently enlists her in the long list of 19th century upper-class women characters, suffering from ennui, from the "desire for desires," who were persecuted by the emptiness of a mundane and meaningless time. As the novel progresses, we also see the sense of ennui developing further in Marian's character, soon reaching a breaking point when she finds in the romance of adultery an outlet and a cure for her frustration with her life lacking in romance and purpose.

Time, Ennui, and the Lost Lady

As ennui and time are intrinsically connected, it is imperative to consider how the usage of time itself contributes to Marian's feelings of ennui. Speaking of Captain Forrester and his near-obsessive fascination with his sundial to Niel, Marian Forrester complains: "How can anybody like to see time visibly devoured? We are all used to seeing clocks go round, but why does he want to see that shadow creep on that stone?" (106). While Captain Forrester himself seems to be undergoing spells of ennui that are never fully developed in the novel, Marian—whose existence is built upon schemes of ennui—complaining at the Captain's exhibition of that ennui might, at first glance, seem odd or self-contradictory. However, looking closely into her statement would make her sentiments seem more natural, genuine, and logical. Being confined in a socioeconomic structure, Marian had all the time in the world on her hands but no work of substance or meaning to fill that time. And so, her ennui emerges from a sense of restlessness and a desire to defeat the benumbing time itself. As a result, it is no wonder that Captain Forrester's surrender to time's devouring is unacceptable to Marian who looks for a cure of the ennui in volatile but exciting romantic intrigue. "Excitement" to her, in some sense, becomes life-affirming.

In the modernist context, time, or rather the emptiness of modern time, is often regarded as the source of existential ennui. But ennui's associations with time have been recognized well before modern time. British Clergyman John Bennett wrote in his *Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects* some advice to young women in which he made "visible the blurred lines between having too much time, feelings of ennui, and the moral difficulties that arose from trying to fill time in the wrong way" (Kaartinen 137). Bennett observes that many wealthy women lament their lack of meaningful activities to occupy their days. To stave off the boredom and restlessness that often accompany idle time, they may experience a decline in mood or turn to play, social outings, or constant social calls for entertainment. From this relationship between empty time and ennui arose the much-debated discourse on women's use of domestic time. Furthermore, the gendering of domestic time gives credibility to the thought that feminine ennui is not only generated from the trappings of the rapid changes of the world affecting both the sexes, but also intensified by operating on an additional dimension of gender oppression.

John Singer Sargent, *Nonchaloir (Repose),* 1911. National Gallery of Art, gift of Curt H. Reisinger.

Florence Nightingale in *Cassandra* (1852) points at that gender oppression as she meditates upon the issue of woman's time and the value of it: "Is man's time more valuable than woman's? or is the difference between man and woman this, that woman has confessedly nothing to do?" (308). And as they are perceived of doing nothing, their value—both economic and individual—also is diminished. Nightingale shows how time itself is commercialized only for masculine use:

> If you offer a morning visit to a professional man, and say, "I will just stay an hour with you, if you will allow me, till so and so comes back to fetch me;" it costs him the earnings of an hour, and therefore he has a right to complain. But women have no right, because it is "only their time." (310)

Both women and women's time are taken for granted by society; by both men and women alike. Dinah Mulock Craik in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858) similarly asserts that "with men 'time is money;' but it never strikes [women] that the same commodity, equally theirs, is to them not money, perhaps, but *life*" (12; emphasis in the original). But Nightingale offers women a way to gain individual dignity in life by reassigning some of their time to worldly affairs. She vocalizes the urge of the Victorian woman to cross the threshold of her home and join the men's world outside as his equal: "Women often long to enter some man's profession where they would find direction, competition (or rather opportunity of measuring the intellect with others), and, above all, time" (307). Nightingale reveals three desires of a Victorian woman: "direction" or finding a higher purpose in life rather than merely fulfilling one's wifely or motherly duties; "competition" or finding one's true intellectual worth in society; and "time" or finding the temporal opportunity to pursue the other two desires. This is how Nightingale explained the relation between time and women's economic position.

Not all female writers and thinkers of the time, however, viewed the failure of a worthwhile use of women's time through a compassionate lens. In *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*—barely acknowledging that the oppressive social structure obstructs a woman's ability to be directly involved in the world outside her home—Craik quite harshly criticizes Victorian women for doing nothing: "They have literally nothing whatever to do, except to fall in love; which they accordingly do, the most of them, as fast as ever they can" (8). Although Craik acknowledges that romantic pursuits are a consequence of the empty time women have, she does not look deeply into the reasons behind such consequence.

No matter how differently they view women's uses or abuses of time, both the feminist authors—Nightingale and Craik—prescribe ways through which Victorian women can reclaim time and thus, redefine their self-worth by moving away from the essentialist structure. Their prescription can be categorized in four ways of self-actualization: homemaking (by redefining the value of housework); vocation (by adopting within one's character the virtue of self-dependence); education (by equipping oneself with the proper knowledge for a worldly occupation); and arts (by pursuing the finer aesthetics of their realities).

As Janis P. Stout argues in *Cather Among the Moderns*: "If Cather's writing is to be read in resonance with the past—that is, the literary and historical past as well as her pervasive memories of her own past—it is also to be read with reference to the works of her contemporaries" (187). Therefore, reading Marian Forrester against the backdrop of Victorian feminist thought about women's domestic time is valid even though many of the reasons behind Marian's ennui are rooted in modernist socioeconomic structures. This is because Marian Forrester is a product of the 19th century ideals who experiences the repercussions of the late 19th century's paradigm shift. To gain a comprehensive understanding of her ennui, it is necessary to read her character from both modernist and Victorian perspectives.

And to understand her feelings and expressions of ennui, we must consider how Marian uses her domestic time. Following Nightingale's and Craik's prescription, let us see if Marian uses her time in any of those prescribed ways. We know that she does not really spend much time doing household work as her cook Mary does the most of it. She does not have a child and so does

not spend time in childbearing or childrearing either. Being the upper-class married woman that she is, she does not pursue any vocational route. Neither does she show any desire for education. However, all these failures to use domestic time in meaningful ways are inherently tied to her social and class identity, giving her very few opportunities to fill the time she has.

The only way (according to 19th century feminist advice or custom) for Marian to break away from her ennui and triumph over the benumbing effects of time, and yet adhere to her class identity, was to pursue any form of artistic expression. However, throughout the course of the novel, we never encounter Marian participating in any form of artistic endeavour. We never see her playing a piano or singing or painting or even reading a book. But she does possess a passion for dancing. Marian also expresses that passion to Niel: "I shall dance till I'm eighty. . . . I'll be the waltzing grandmother! It's good for me, I need it" (74; ellipsis in the original). Her apparent disinterest in any arts except dance perhaps hints at how she chooses to counter her ennui: not through any intellectual means but through reclaiming her senses (dance being a physical art). Her passion for dance can also pave the way for us to understand her adultery as a way for her to defeat the entrapments of ennui.

The Disenchantment with Art and Adultery

Marian's disinterest in or disillusionment with the arts can also be seen as a particular modernist tendency. In the era of mechanized reproduction, the value of the artistic artifact or art in general has been questioned by various thinkers. Walter Benjamin, faithful to the philosophy of art and aesthetics of the Kantian and Hegelian tradition, foresees a failure of future artistic pursuits in the world of artifice. Rainer Rochlitz explains Benjamin's fears in his book *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, stating that "art is no longer an immediate instrument of the revolution" and that "the decline of the aura that traditionally surrounded artistic phenomena, now becomes the object of a reevaluation. Benjamin inquires into the price to be paid for arriving at modernity" (180). Thus, it becomes easy to understand why Marian refrains from any artistic pursuits but indulges in romantic affairs.

Adultery for Marian Forrester, then, becomes both a coping mechanism from ennui and a desperate attempt at fulfilling her "desire for desires." This realization dismisses the patriarchal tendency of demonizing Marian's character and reducing her as just an adulterer. And this is how Cather's novel differs from the typical standards of the novels of adultery; it is not a novel solely about adultery. The condition of the lost lady, Marian, throws light on several cultural conundrums of the time: the rapidly changing socioeconomic structures and world orders, the consequent emergence of the "epidemic" of ennui, and the ensuing feelings of disenchantment. Marian inhabits all these trappings of modern times along with the existential and psychological effects of her gendered oppression. Adultery becomes a mere ploy for her survival: both in economic terms and in terms of meaningful living. Through Marian's character, it can be seen that if ennui is a symptom of the modern existence, disinterest in the arts is further development of that ailment. Art ceases to be considered a cure for that ennui. But Marian Forrester chooses intimacy of relationships and intensity of living as ways to cope with the existential ennui, not some fabricated dream of life that art provides.

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The Only Daughter of a Distinguished (Pittsburgh) Man: The McClungs, the Mellons, and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*

James A. Jaap

Last summer, as I drove across Pittsburgh to show some friends 1180 Murray Hill Avenue, the home where Willa Cather lived for five years with Isabelle McClung and her family, I happened to notice the mansions along Pittsburgh's Fifth Avenue—"Millionaire's Row" as it was once called. After decades of disuse, several of these large, lavish estates had recently been restored to their previous glory, and my friends and I marveled at their renewed majesty. During the twenty years Cather lived in and visited Pittsburgh (1896–1916), the city was reaching its industrial peak, a center for the steel, glass, banking, and railroad industries. Many of its leaders lived in these mansions, not far from the McClung home and the various Pittsburgh boardinghouses in which Cather lived. I was rereading *My Ántonia* (1918) at the time. My thoughts turned to the novel's much discussed narrator, James Quayle Burden. Jim, as "legal counsel for one of the great Western railways," is, we are told, a powerful man: "If a young man with an idea can once get Jim Burden's attention, can manage to accompany him when he goes off into the wilds hunting for lost parks or exploring new canyons, then the money which means action is usually forthcoming" (ix–xi). Given his influence, Jim, I realized, is rich. If he was from Pittsburgh, I thought, Jim would have lived in one of these gorgeous mansions.

Further consideration of the potential connections between *My Ántonia* and Pittsburgh led me to several questions centered on Cather's Pittsburgh life. Are there any biographical connections linking Cather and her novel to the city, and if these connections exist, might Cather have partially based Jim Burden on people she knew, or knew of, while living in Pittsburgh? What role, if any, did Pittsburgh and Cather's Pittsburgh experiences play in the composition of one of the great novels in American literature? While a prototype for Jim has never been identified, Cather likely pulled from many sources for the character of Jim, including several prominent Pittsburgh men connected to the railroads, and one significantly less prominent Pittsburgh friend, Isabelle's brother, Alfred McClung. An examination of *My Ántonia* and Jim Burden and the connections to Cather's Pittsburgh life, I argue, provides another layer to our understanding of Jim and his marriage to Genevieve Whitney, and perhaps a deeper understanding of Cather's motivations behind the revisions to the Introduction for the 1926 republication of her most famous novel.

Some may think Cather's Pittsburgh life ended when she moved to New York in 1906, but she continued to visit the city until early 1916, often for months at a time. For example, during the sixteen months between September 1914 and January 1916, I estimate Cather spent at least nine months in Pittsburgh with Isabelle.[1] In her final visit, Cather stayed from November 1915 until the end of January 1916. Judge McClung died in November, and the two oldest McClung children, Isabelle and Alfred, had decided to sell the home. On Christmas day Cather wrote to her Aunt Franc and expresses her feelings of sadness on her final holiday in Pittsburgh: "It is very hard to see dear familiar things pass out of one's life. I shall never feel so safe and happy in any other house, I fear" (*Complete Letters* no. 0343). At this point, December 1915, Cather's grief is primarily for leaving her "safe" and "happy" home in Pittsburgh. Sadness became sorrow, however, soon after the New Year when Isabelle's engagement to violinist Jan Hambourg was announced. The official notice appeared in the February 29, 1916, edition of the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, but given the timeline and Cather's long stays at the McClung home, her abrupt departure in late January indicates her prior knowledge of Isabelle's engagement. In a letter to Ferris Greenslet dated January 22, 1916, Cather writes that she is leaving Pittsburgh for New York (*Complete Letters* no. 0346). Nine days later in a January 31 letter from New York to Pittsburgh friend Helen Seibel, Cather writes, "Please come to see me when you are in New York. I am afraid I shall not be in Pittsburgh very soon again, but I shall hope to see you here in my own place sometime" (*Complete Letters* no. 0349). She was correct; she never again returned to Pittsburgh.

Not surprisingly, Cather became quite depressed after leaving the city. In a long, melancholy letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher dated March 15, 1916, Cather expresses her sorrow and its effects on her writing: "I've been unable to start a new book this winter. . . . On April 3d Isabelle is to marry Jan Hambourg. . . . I am glad, for she is very happy, but the final closing up of that long Pittsburgh chapter is very hard, all the same" (*Complete*

Letters no. 0351). On July 8, she writes a "gloomy" letter to her brother Douglass from Taos, New Mexico that articulates how the marriage has affected her: "The loss of a home like that leaves one pretty lonely and miserable. I can fight it out, but I've not as much heart for anything as I had a year ago." (*Complete Letters* no. 1952).

Although unable to begin a new novel in early 1916, Cather did compose four short stories during the first seven months of this transitional year: "The Bookkeeper's Wife"; "The Diamond Mine"; "Scandal"; and "A Gold Slipper." While only "A Gold Slipper" is set in the city, all refer to her Pittsburgh experiences, and all, I argue, specifically reference the McClung family and its newest member, Jan Hambourg. Written in early 1916, "The Bookkeeper's Wife" was published in the May 1916 *Century* and recalls Cather's office work and her living arrangements in Pittsburgh boardinghouses. This story is one of Cather's unhappy marriage stories, and neither character arouses our sympathy. After the dissolution of his marriage to Stella Brown, Percy Bixby moves into a boardinghouse with other lonely men who, like Percy, are separated from their wives. Cather lived in multiple boardinghouses in Pittsburgh's East End between 1896 and 1901, and these experiences inform her numerous depictions of boardinghouse life: the 1901 sentimental story "Jack-a-Boy"; her article "Boarding Not Living," a discussion of the various "types" of Pittsburgh boarders published in the February 23, 1902, *Pittsburgh Gazette* under the name of Henry Nicklemann; and of course, Thea's experiences in Chicago in *The Song of the Lark*. Placing the story in the context of her difficult personal life in early 1916, one must read "The Bookkeeper's Wife" as Cather's wishful thinking for the quick and simple dissolution of Jan and Isabelle's marriage.

Like "The Bookkeeper's Wife," "The Diamond Mine" and "Scandal" may also portray Cather's Pittsburgh experiences. Written during the summer of 1916 and published in the October 1916 volume of *McClure's*, "The Diamond Mine" tells the story of famed opera superstar Cressida Garnet and her series of failed marriages. "Scandal," composed in July 1916 but not published until August 1919 in *Century*, focuses on opera singer Kitty Ayrshire and the various rumors surrounding her personal life. While not set in Pittsburgh, both stories feature a clichéd Jewish character likely based on Jan Hambourg. In "The Diamond Mine," Cressida's accompanist, Miletus Poppas, is described as "a vulture of the vulture race and he had the beak of one" (84). Sigmund Stein in "Scandal," "the department store millionaire," is "one of the most hideous men in New York" with "a long nose, flattened as if it had been tied down" (182, 185–86). James Woodress writes that the stereotyping of Poppas and Stein can "likely" be attributed to Cather's "subconscious resentment" of Hambourg (284), and Hermione Lee asserts that one of the "unpleasant" features of these two stories "may have had something to do with Cather's feelings about Isabelle's husband Jan Hambourg" (161). "Subconscious," "likely," "unpleasant," and "may have had" do not seem strong enough descriptors. In a letter to her brother Roscoe written on July 8, 1916, around the same time she was composing "Scandal," Cather writes "Isabelle has married a very brilliant and perfectly poisonous Jew" (*Complete Letters* no. 2073).

The McClung residence at 1180 Murray Hill Avenue in Pittsburgh. Photograph by Joe Murphy.

Cather's final story from this tumultuous time, "A Gold Slipper," was written in June 1916 and published in *Harper's* in January 1917. Set in Pittsburgh, the story centers on a random meeting between opera diva Kitty Ayrshire and conservative coal baron Marshall McKann. The story features several Pittsburgh

locations, including the Carnegie Music Hall, one of the settings for one of her most renowned short stories, "Paul's Case" (1905). Woodress argues the character of McKann represents Pittsburgh industry, a combination of Henry Clay Frick, Andrew Carnegie, and other Pittsburgh industrialists (116). Mark Madigan asserts that the character of McKann is also based on Isabelle's father, Samuel A. McClung (339). Given her intimate knowledge of Judge McClung's conservative character and tastes, Cather likely had him in mind during the composition of the story. Importantly, Cather chose to set the story in Pittsburgh. Her previous Pittsburgh story, "The Namesake," had been published a decade earlier in *McClure's* in 1907, and she would not fictionalize the city again until "Uncle Valentine" in 1925. Why write a story set in Pittsburgh when New York would work just as well? Like the three previously discussed stories written during the first seven months of 1916, Pittsburgh places and people, specifically the McClung family and Isabelle's marriage to Jan Hambourg, were on Cather's mind.

During the second half of 1916, Cather's sorrow seems to have lifted. In June, she left New York for Denver and spent the next five months in Taos, New Mexico, Lander, Wyoming, and Red Cloud, before returning home to New York on Thanksgiving day (Woodress 281–84). She had been working on "The Blue Mesa," the story of Tom Outland that would eventually serve as the centerpiece of *The Professor's House* (1925), but she shifted after returning from her trip west. In a letter to R. L. Scaife, director of publicity at Houghton Mifflin, Cather writes, "As soon as I returned to New York at the end of November [1916], I put aside the notes to "The Blue Mesa" to take up another novel,– a Western story which will run about the same length as "O Pioneers!" and which has a somewhat similar background" (*Complete Letters* no. 0382). That novel was of course *My Ántonia*.

What happened that could have caused such a dramatic change in attitude and perspective? In addition to travel, by late 1916 Cather had begun to reconcile herself to Isabelle's marriage. In a letter dated August 3 from Lander, Wyoming to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Cather appears to be on her way to accepting the McClung-Hambourg union: "Of course Isabelle's marriage is still hard enough—always will be, I'm afraid—but the rest of the world looks as it used to and is not overcast" (*Complete Letters* no. 0363). She had also reconnected with many of her Pittsburgh friends. On December 30, 1916, she writes to her sister Elsie of the Christmas Eve dinners, parties, and concerts with "friends from Pittsburgh here for the holidays," specifically Isabelle's brother Alfred (*Complete Letters* no. 1953). Throughout the composition of *My Ántonia* in 1917, she remained close to Isabelle and other Pittsburgh friends. While in New Hampshire, two of her Pittsburgh friends, Lucy Hine and Ethel Acheson, set up a tent on their rental property where Cather could write (Flannigan 197). These examples from Cather's biography, and the brief analyses of Cather's four short stories written in 1916, indicate that Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh people, especially the McClung family, were very much a part of Cather's life and psyche as she wrote *My Ántonia*.

Having established that Cather was somewhat beset by Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh people prior to the composition of *My Ántonia*, specifically the McClungs, could Cather have partially based Jim Burden on people she knew—or knew of—while living and staying in the city? Cather does not provide much information about Jim's current life. He grew up in Nebraska, now lives in New York, and is married to wealthy socialite Genevieve Whitney. Jim serves as the successful "legal counsel for one of the great Western railways" and as such, holds significant power and influence. We often think of steel at the center of Pittsburgh industry, but the railroad was equally important. During Cather's years in the city, Pittsburgh served as a hub linking the east coast to western states and Canada for many of the major railroad lines. The Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), for example, was chartered in 1846, and by 1854 had established an all-rail link connecting Pittsburgh with Philadelphia. By the time Cather arrived in 1896, the PRR had become the nation's largest railroad, connecting Pittsburgh to most of the country ("The Railroad in Pennsylvania"). Other railroads serving Pittsburgh include the Baltimore and Ohio and the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad, which was also headquartered in the city. As a result, Pittsburgh was home to many of the industry's prominent leaders; *Notable Men of Pittsburgh and Vicinity* (1901) includes hundreds of photographs of powerful Pittsburgh men, including over eighty connected to the railroad industry.

In Pittsburgh, Cather was aware of—and may have met—several powerful attorneys connected to the railroad industry, including James Hay Reed and Robert Pitcairn. James Hay Reed, according to the *Book of Prominent Pennsylvanians* (1913), was one of the leading lawyers in the country, a director of United States Steel, and chief legal counsel and president of the Pittsburgh, Bessemer, and Lake Erie Railroad (57). He started the law firm Knox and Reed with his partner, the powerful Senator from Pittsburgh, Philander C. Knox, in 1877.

Reed counted many of Pittsburgh's powerful industrialists, including Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the Mellon family among his clientele. Cather obviously knew of Reed; articles documenting his business dealings in the Pittsburgh newspapers during Cather's years in Pittsburgh are numerous, and he and his wife were often mentioned in the social columns.[2] Cather also likely met his wife. According to the *Pittsburgh Post*, Mrs. Reed attended a debutante reception for Isabelle's younger sister Edith at the McClung residence on November 15, 1903. "Miss Willa S. Cather . . . of Lincoln, Neb., who is spending the winter in the McClung house" was also in attendance, the article notes ("Happenings").

Like James Reed, Robert Pitcairn was legal counsel before assuming an executive role with the Pennsylvania Railroad's Pittsburgh division. On November 3, 1897, President McKinley and his wife traveled to Pittsburgh to announce the winners of the Carnegie Art show, and while the president was meeting with business leaders, Mrs. McKinley attended a reception at the Pitcairn residence, "Cairncarque," located at 5200 Ellsworth Avenue in Pittsburgh's Shadyside neighborhood. Cather attended the reception, and her description of the afternoon and the mansion appeared in her "Passing Show" column in the November 27, 1897 edition of the *Lincoln Courier*: "Never before," she writes, "was I present at anything so truly gorgeous. It was one of those things that are not overdone and yet leave nothing to be wished for" ("Passing Show" 2–3).

Cather obviously knew of and possibly met these two powerful Pittsburgh lawyers connected to the railroads, but there is no evidence of any further interactions with them. While they may be the model for Jim's career success and influence, Cather may also have had in mind a lesser-known Pittsburgh lawyer, one with whom she was very familiar, Isabelle's brother Alfred McClung. Three years Isabelle's junior, Samuel Alfred McClung, Jr., known as Alfred, was born in 1880, attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1900 to 1904, then returned home to work as a clerk at Pittsburgh First National Bank. In 1908, he attended law school at the University of Pittsburgh and by 1918, according to his draft registration card, was self-employed as a lawyer. Cather seems to have been genuinely fond of Alfred, and from her letters they seem to have been fairly close. She first mentions him in an October 10, 1899 letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Written during the early days of their relationship, Cather's letter describes Isabelle as "looking as though all the frieze of the Parthenon ought to be tripping after her" and ends the letter with, "Isabelle sends everything in the shape of regards and Alfred—O but I'll tell you about him next time!" (*Complete Letters* no. 0058). While not directly mentioned in another letter until July 1915, other possible encounters with Alfred are suggested in multiple letters. For example, in late November and early December 1907, Cather returned to Pittsburgh to care for Isabelle who had fallen ill. In a December 9, 1907 letter to Rose Standish Nichols, she writes, "Miss McClung improves steadily, though very slowly. We still feel a great deal of anxiety about her" (*Complete Letters* no. 2849, forthcoming). In a series of letters written between March and May 1912, Cather refers to staying at the McClung home during Mrs. McClung's difficult recovery from a stroke. In a letter to S. S. McClure dated March 13, 1912, Cather writes about the chaotic week with the McClung family in the immediate aftermath of Mrs. McClung's illness: "We are all pretty well used up by this time and I am going to bed to sleep for a week (*Complete Letters* no. 0217). Over the next several months, Mrs. McClung appears to rally, and Willa was present for her recovery. On May 2, she writes a postcard to Sergeant updating Mrs. McClung's recovery: "Yes, Mrs. McClung is gaining all the time" (*Complete Letters* no. 0225). Although he is not specifically mentioned in any of the letters related to McClung family events, Alfred was living at the Murray Hill Avenue home at the time. He is part of Cather's "We."

Several other letters indicate Cather's personal connections with Alfred. In July 1915, soon after the beginning of World War I, Cather planned an ill-timed trip to Germany with Isabelle and S. S. McClure to interview "the leaders of German thought and the makers of Prussian policy." Judge McClung advised against going, and in a letter to Greenslet written on July 24, 1915, Cather discusses Alfred going in Isabelle's stead: "Isabelle's brother would go with me, but he is no linguist and not an experienced traveler. . . . It would have been a tall adventure! . . . But I would be foolish to undertake it with anyone else (*Complete Letters* no. 0315). This is a bit of an exaggeration. While she belonged to the Dante Alighieri Society of Pittsburgh ("Societa Dante Alighieri") and the Pittsburgh chapter of the Alliance Francaise ("Society," *Pittsburgh Daily Post* April 22, 1906), Isabelle was no linguist and there is no evidence she spoke German. She may have been irreplaceable to Willa as a traveling companion, but certainly not a translator. Alfred was also not a babe in the woods. He was thirty-five years old, had a law degree, and was taking care of some of Cather's finances. The point is that Cather and Alfred were close enough for Alfred to volunteer to accompany her, and for Willa to consider him, however fleetingly, as a companion for her untimely trip.

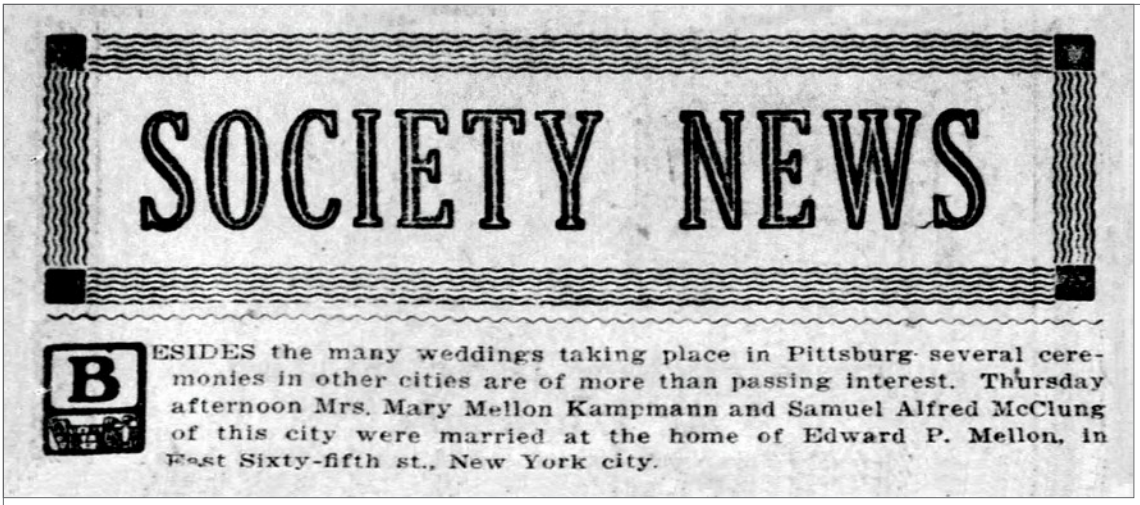
After 1916, Willa and Alfred remained in contact and likely saw each other occasionally. He saw her in New York

when he visited over the 1916 holidays, as Cather references in the previously quoted letter to her sister Elsie written on December 30, and Alfred, as mentioned, took care of some of Willa's finances until at least the 1920s. In a letter to Greenslet written on December 28, 1918, Cather asks, "Can you without inconvenience send me two-hundred dollars on account? Because of the illness of Alfred McClung, who attends to my business affairs, the interest on some mortgages I own has failed to come in, while end-of-the-year bills have come, in great profusion" (*Complete Letters* no. 0446). Alfred, like millions in 1918, was sick with the Spanish flu, and Cather writes tenderly of his illness in several letters. In a November 11, 1918 letter to her mother, less than two months after the September publication of *My Ántonia*, Cather writes, "Alfred McClung has been dangerously ill with double pneumonia for a long while now, and on Saturday very alarming symptoms began by blood-clots forming in his legs. . . . His condition looks very doubtful" (*Complete Letters* no. 2414). That same day, in a letter to her sister Elsie she states that "Alfred is still nearer dying than recovering" (*Complete Letters* no. 1845). In another to her mother, likely composed a month later, she writes, "Alfred McClung is still dangerously ill. His wife, writing to thank me for flowers, said she was almost in despair. His heart has to be stimulated constantly" (*Complete Letters* no. 2415). While there is little evidence of personal interactions between Alfred and Willa beyond 1918, we do know they corresponded. Cather apparently informed both Alfred and their sister Edith of Isabelle's death on October 10, 1938. In a November 3, 1938, letter to Alfred Knopf, Cather writes, "So much personal correspondence had to be gone through with the McClung family. Jan had not cabled them! . . . I had to stay on at home and get off all those letters to her friends and family. Jan had done none of that dreary work" (*Complete Letters* no. 2704). In another letter to Isabelle's sister written soon after Isabelle's death, Cather asks Edith to "Please thank Alfred for his kind letter" (*Complete Letters* no. 1935).

Mary Mellon McClung in an undated photograph.

If Cather did look to Isabelle's brother Alfred as a potential model for Jim, it is not based upon Alfred's career. Unlike Jim, whose success as general counsel for the railroad is unmatched, Alfred had a modest career as an attorney in private practice. He does not appear to have served on any boards, and certainly was not as successful as James Reed, Robert Pitcairn, or even his own father. He was not one of Pittsburgh's business or cultural leaders, and while his wife and daughters are often mentioned in the Pittsburgh's society pages, Alfred's appearance is never noted. Although he was wealthy, he was not one who makes young men's dreams come true. His obituary in the February 8, 1945, *Pittsburgh Press* simply states he was an attorney for thirty-five years, referring to him as the son of "the late Judge Samuel Alfred McClung" ("S. A. McClung"). So, what does Cather's relationship with Isabelle's brother Alfred McClung have to do with the character of Jim Burden in *My Ántonia*? The answer may lie in Cather's depiction of the marriage of Jim and Genevieve Whitney in the 1918 introduction of *My Ántonia*, and her misunderstanding of Alfred's marriage to wealthy socialite Mary Mellon Kampmann.

One month before the public announcement of Isabelle's engagement to Jan, several local Pittsburgh newspapers announced the engagement of Alfred McClung to Mrs. Emily Seymour, a widow whose first husband had died unexpectedly in February 1914. At the time, Alfred was thirty-six years old and except for his four years at MIT, had lived at home his entire life. The January 26, 1916, edition of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* titled the notice, "Interesting Engagement." Although the former Emily Sproul does not appear in any known correspondence, Cather was likely friends, or at the very least, an acquaintance of the young socialite who was then to be the future Mrs. Alfred McClung. Cather spent the 1915 holidays and nearly all of January 1916 at the McClung home and would have had prior knowledge of the engagement. Seymour and Cather also appear to have run in the same circles. According to Ann Ryan's social column in the March 19, 1916, *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, Seymour held a reception for Jan and Isabelle, and the guest list reads like one of Cather's Pittsburgh address books; in attendance were Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Esquerre, Dr. and Mrs. Litchfield, Elizabeth Vermorcken, May



SOCIETY NEWS

BESIDES the many weddings taking place in Pittsburg several ceremonies in other cities are of more than passing interest. Thursday afternoon Mrs. Mary Mellon Kampmann and Samuel Alfred McClung of this city were married at the home of Edward P. Mellon, in East Sixty-fifth st., New York city.

The October 14, 1917 announcement in the *Pittsburgh Press* of the marriage of "Mrs. Mary Mellon Kampmann and Samuel Alfred McClung,"

Willard, and Glendenning Keeble ("Mid-Lenten Revival"). Seymour also attended the Hambourg's wedding with Alfred in New York on April 3, 1916 (Ryan, "Charitable Enterprises"). Abruptly, Seymour disappears from Alfred's life, and less than a year later in early March 1917, she remarried ("Quiet Wedding"). Then, with no prior announcement, in a brief ceremony on October 11, 1917, at the home of her uncle Edward P. Mellon on East Sixty-Fifth Street in New York City, Alfred McClung married Mary Caldwell Mellon Kampmann, the divorced granddaughter of Andrew Mellon, the patriarch of what was then the world's richest family ("Society News").

Traces of Jim Burden and Genevieve Whitney can perhaps be found in this couple. Mary Mellon was the only daughter of Thomas Alexander Mellon and the granddaughter of Andrew Mellon, founder of Mellon Bank. Born in 1884, Mary lived in Pittsburgh until 1905, when she married John Hermann Kampmann, the grandson and namesake of famous San Antonio architect John Kampmann, and moved to San Antonio.[3] The couple had two children but divorced in 1914. Then, in October 1917, around the time Cather was revising *My Ántonia*, Mary married Alfred after a brief courtship. According to unpublished correspondence between Cather scholar John March and Mary Mellon McClung from 1963 to 1969,[4] Alfred and Mary first met in 1905 at a ball during her "debutante year" (October 6, 1967). That same year, she writes, Alfred "stood shoulder to shoulder with me on a crowded street car for some ten minutes . . . – went home and told his mother he had seen a girl on a street car that he would like to marry" (March 11, 1968). After returning to Pittsburgh, she apparently saw Alfred often: "Alfred was again in the offing – a great friend of one of my cousins – Tom Mellon – and I saw him frequently – Then after my divorce, I married him in 1917 – He had not married before" (October 6, 1967).

Despite the social status of the Mellon and McClung families, the marriage of Alfred and Mary did not make the front page of the Pittsburgh society section. When Mellon's engagement to Kampmann was announced in 1905, all the Pittsburgh newspapers reported the engagement, the parties, and the wedding. The announcement of Jan and Isabelle's wedding generated numerous announcements.[5] I failed to locate any news about the engagement of Alfred and Mary and found just one two-sentence notice of their wedding ("Society News"; see image). It is not an understatement to say that the McClung-Mellon engagement/wedding was not the society news of the season. According to Mary Mellon McClung, Isabelle was unhappy about Alfred's marriage: "Isabelle had tried, unsuccessfully, to marry her brother to one or another of her friends and I felt she felt a little resentment toward me – Am not entirely sure that she ever recovered from same" (August 10, 1966). Here was gentle, kind Alfred marrying this wealthy divorced woman with two young children. I can imagine Willa and Isabelle having much to say on the engagement, especially if Alfred's former fiancé Emily Seymour was a friend.

Did Cather also hold "a little resentment" toward Mary, this wealthy, divorced, Pittsburgh socialite? The answer may be found in the similarities between Mary Mellon McClung and Genevieve Whitney. Like Whitney, Mellon

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Obituaries—

S. A. McClung, Squirrel Hill Attorney, Dies

Son of Late Judge To Be Buried Friday

Samuel Alfred McClung, of 1232 Murray Hill Ave., son of the late Judge Samuel Alfred McClung of Pittsburgh, died yestereday. He was 64.

Mr. McClung, a native of Shields, Pa., was an attorney and had practiced law for 35 years. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church.

Surviving are his widow, Mrs. Mary Mellon McClung; a son, Corp. Samuel Alfred McClung III; two daughters, Mrs. Charles Newton Abernethy Jr. and Mrs. Stephen Stone Jr.; a stepdaughter, Mrs. L. D. Schwartz of Ardmore, Pa., a sister, Mrs. John L. Sawyer of Cherry Valley, and five grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p. m. tomorrow in his late home. Burial will be private in Homewood Cemetery.

Alfred McClung's obituary in the February 8, 1945, *Pittsburgh Press*.

McClung was the "only daughter of a distinguished man" (x). Her father Tom was the eldest son of Judge Thomas Mellon, and a wealthy banker and businessman, and while he was not as powerful as his father or brother Andrew, he was a successful businessman in his own right, owning a lumber yard and coal company among other endeavors (Ingham 917). Mellon McClung could also be considered, like Whitney, something of a "restless, headstrong girl" (x). She left the Mellon enclave in Pittsburgh at the age of twenty-one in 1905 to marry and move to San Antonio, and then divorced less than a decade later. She also, like Whitney, had "her own fortune" (xi). After Alfred McClung's death in 1945, the February 17 edition of the *Pittsburgh Press* reported that his estate, valued at more than fifty thousand dollars, had been left to his three children. In his will, the paper writes, McClung explained why he did not leave the money to his wife: she "has enough" ("Two Wills Dispose of $70,000 Estates"). The family's assets had enabled it to purchase a large home at 1232 Murray Hill Avenue, where they lived with their five servants (*1930 U.S. Census*).

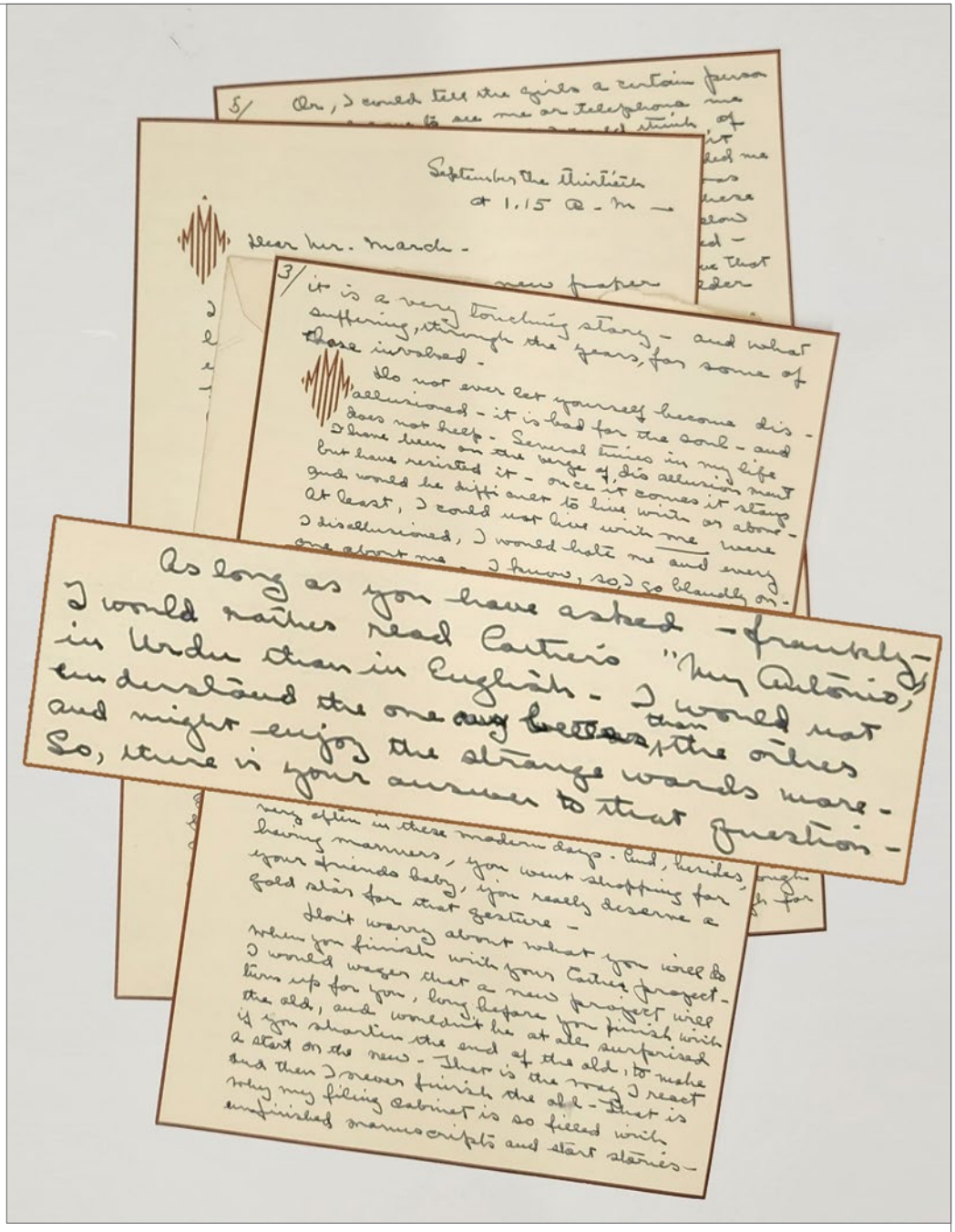
Mary Mellon McClung's past also may connect to Jim Burden's wife, Genevieve Whitney. In *My Ántonia*, Whitney marries Jim because she was "brutally jilted" by her cousin (x). In her letters to John March, Mellon McClung refers to her time in San Antonio as a "grim teacher" (May 5, 1964). In a reply to a letter in which March apparently defended Jan Hambourg's jealousy, she writes, "You say, too 'if he [Hambourg] was so violently jealous he probably took good care of her'—That does not always follow. Once upon a time I had a jealous husband and should know" (April 27, 1965).

Like Genevieve Whitney, Mary Mellon McClung was also a socialite who "live[d] her own life" (xi). Mellon McClung's social activities were well-documented in the Pittsburgh newspapers, and she seems to have jumped headfirst into Pittsburgh society immediately after marrying Alfred in 1917. For example, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* society page of December 9, 1917 lists her among numerous "patronesses" of the Misses Masters' School Society Charity Ball to be held in the Schenley Hotel the night after Christmas, 1917 (Peterson), and on November 16, 1919, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* notes that Mrs. McClung will give a luncheon for her two debutante nieces on December 1 at the Pittsburgh Golf Club (Smith, "Society"). She was also, like Whitney, involved in causes related to women's suffrage. The *Pittsburgh Post* reported on Tuesday January 15, 1918, that a group of local "suffragists" had organized for the Red Cross and Mrs. Samuel A. McClung was named "vice chairman of supplies and requisitions" ("Suffragists Organize"). In a January 4, 1920, article, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reports that she is one of dozens of women involved in the chartering of the Allegheny Branch of the Women's League, whose mission is to "educate women to citizenship" and provide "systematic training in the principles of government, along non-partisan lines" ("County Branch of Women's League"). Alfred never appears in these columns. Finally, Cather's narrator notes that Jim's career quickly advanced because of this "brilliant marriage" to Whitney (xi). Cather seemed to believe the same about Alfred. In a letter to Greenslet dated April 4, 1940, Cather writes, "Marrying a Mellon was the only wise thing Isabelle's brother ever did. He was a great disappointment to his father, Judge McClung" (*Complete Letters* no. 1537).

In considering whether Cather based Genevieve Whitney on Mary Mellon McClung, it is important to address Cather's 1926 revision of novel, which eliminates many details about Jim's wife, including her name, her being jilted by her cousin, and the descriptor of her being the "only daughter of a distinguished man." The answer may partially lie in Cather's perspective on the marriage of Alfred and Mary. As previously discussed, in several letters written to her mother in November and December 1918, soon after the publication of *My Ántonia*, Cather notes that Alfred has been very sick, and that Mary took great care of him. "Oh I do hope Alfred will pull through!" she writes (*Complete Letters* no. 2415). Alfred did eventually pull through and lived until 1945. His wife Mary died in 1974 at the age of ninety. From all perspectives, it appears to have been a happy marriage. The family bought a home on Murray Hill Avenue, not far from the house at 1180, and by 1926, Alfred and Mary had three children together; Alfred became a moderately successful banking lawyer, and Mary, from all appearances, was devoted to her husband and children. If Cather did indeed base aspects of Jim Burden's wife Genevieve Whitney on Mary Mellon McClung, she misunderstood their marriage. This may partially explain her choice to eliminate some of the specifics about Whitney from the Introduction to the 1926 revision. Perhaps Cather had come to know Mary Mellon McClung as a devoted wife and disliked the specific reference to Alfred's marriage in the original Introduction.

Both the 1918 and 1926 introductions include the narrator's comment, "I do not like his wife." In Mary Mellon McClung's letters to John March, it is quite clear that she did not like Cather, Isabelle, or Jan. She writes that Cather caused great "upheaval" (February 12, 1963) in the McClung household that "practically ruined the home life of the family and led to great unhappiness of several members" (May 5, 1964). She also notes that the house was emotionally cold; "the Judge never spoke while Cather was present" (August 9, 1964). He was, she

writes, "caustic and stern." (March 19, 1963). She is also not very flattering to Isabelle, depicting her as shallow and easily manipulated by others: "I can not think of even one accomplishment. She was unquestionably beautiful but, the Good Lord made her so, she had nothing whatever to do with it. . . . Isabelle was not a student, nor a reader, nor an art lover, perhaps you can figure out just what she was" (August 10, 1966). Mellon McClung also disliked Jan: "He was jealous, selfish, overbearing, conceited, and mean" (March 8, 1965). She also asserts that Jan may have been abusive to Isabelle: "Either physically or mentally he controlled her, even her thoughts seemed under his sway" (April 27, 1965). In response to March's question about reading *My Ántonia*, Mary implies she has read it, but is not interested in doing so again: "As long as you have asked — frankly — I would rather read Cather's 'My Antonio' [sic] in Urdu than in English. I would not understand the one any better than the other and might enjoy the strange words more. So, there is your answer to that question" (September 30, 1965). While I cannot say for certain that Cather based the marriage of Jim Burden and Genevieve Whitney on her (mis)understanding of the marriage of Alfred and Mary, there must be some explanation for the animosity Mary held toward Cather, a woman she claims to never have met. Perhaps Mary recognized herself in the description of Jim's wife Genevieve Whitney, the "only daughter of a distinguished [Pittsburgh] man."



Detail of a letter from Mary Mellon McClung to Cather scholar John March, September 30, 1965. Mildred Bennett collection, National Willa Cather Center.

NOTES

1. "Mapping a Writer's World," the Willa Cather Archive's geographic chronology of Cather's life (cather.unl.edu/life/geochron), notes nine visits to Pittsburgh between 1907 and 1913.

2. *Newspapers.com* includes over 600 references to Reed or his wife in Pittsburgh-area newspapers between 1896 and 1916.

3. John Herman Kampmann (1819–85) was a San Antonio architect and businessman who was influential in the modernization of San Antonio.

4. Cather scholar John March and Mary Mellon McClung corresponded by mail on a wide range of topics, including the McClung family and the relationship of Cather and Isabelle. The letters from Mellon McClung are part of the Mildred Bennett Collection held in the archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska. I would like to thank Tracy Tucker for making this material available.

5. The engagement and wedding of Jan and Isabelle were extensively noted in the local Pittsburgh newspapers. *Newspapers.com* includes over twenty columns noting their 1916 engagement and wedding.

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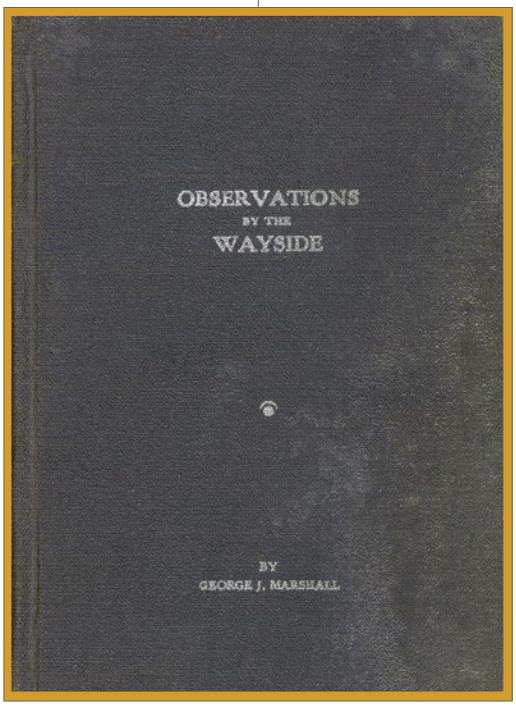
A Riverton Poet Praises Cather: Jessica Cather Auld's Copy of *Observations by the Wayside*

Nathan Tye

The Song of the Lark was well received in and around Red Cloud when it appeared in the fall of 1915. "I wasn't trying to put something over on Red Cloud," Cather informed Dorothy Canfield Fisher the following year, "I was writing it from their point of view. And they did like it very much." Cather saw this herself. "I was out there when the book came out, and the way they talked it over was a great satisfaction" (*Complete Letters* no. 0351). This local praise reflected national critical opinion. H. L. Mencken considered it a turning point in Cather's career, from which she "steps definitely into the small class of American novelists who are seriously to be reckoned with" (72). With three novels, a short story collection, and a poetry collection to her name, Cather was the literary toast of Red Cloud in the 1910s. When Cather returned to Red Cloud in August 1916, the local *Weekly Advertiser* welcomed the "authoress of world wide repute" in a brief front page notice. Other locals, beyond Red Cloud, recognized her growing national fame and artistic talent.

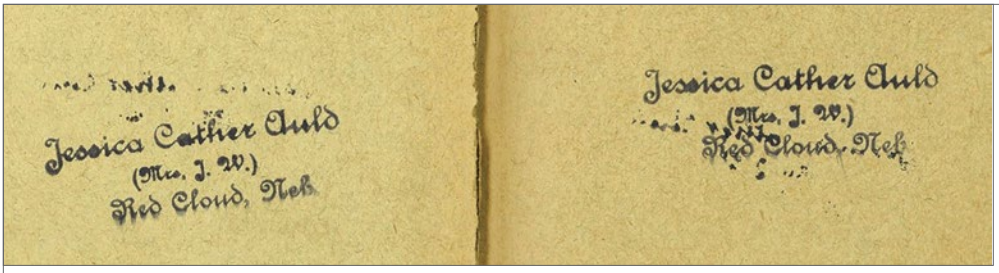
George J. Marshall, an influential attorney in nearby Riverton, likely known to members of the extended Cather family, wrote a poem titled "Nebraska" mentioning Willa Cather around this time. "Nebraska" appeared in his self-published collection, *Observations by the Wayside* (1918). "Nebraska" is a poetic celebration of the state and cites Cather and famous locals as evidence of Nebraska's intellectual prowess. This poem sits amongst an eclectic mixture of legal analysis and poetry bookending current event essays, editorials, and an imaginative interview conveying Marshall's thoughts about World War I. *Observations by the Wayside* is uneven but earnest, and Marshall hoped someone would recognize its merits. "We cheerfully submit it to the serrated teeth of its critics," he wrote, "and the generous consideration of its friends." It found a pair of critics, discussed below, and fewer friends to preserve it for posterity. Only two copies of *Observations by the Wayside* are known to survive. One resides at Brown University, and the other, Jessica Cather Auld's copy, recently surfaced at Tiede's, an antique store in Overton, Nebraska. Among the establishment's many offerings is an entire storefront filled with books culled from farmhouses, estate sales, and other dusty corners of the state. I plucked a slim black volume, at random, and was startled by Jessica Cather Auld's ownership stamp. In my excitement over its provenance, I overlooked the book's content. Only after bringing it to the National Willa Cather Center did Tracy Tucker spot the Cather reference. It is this volume that is the subject of this short essay.



George J. Marshall's self-published *Observations by the Wayside* (1918).

Marshall's poem referencing Willa Cather is unrecorded in Cather scholarship and adds to our knowledge about the local reception of her work. Cather's continued success and use of her Red Cloud memories in *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady*, among other works, angered some corners of the community. Later Cather disdained these "town cats," in a 1934 letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood (*Complete Letters* no. 1214). If the poem in *Observations by the Wayside* is any indication, local reactions in early 1918 were positive.

Jessica Cather Auld's ownership adds another curious dimension to this book. In "What Happened to the Rest of the Cather Family," an essay published in *Nebraska History* magazine in 1973, Mildred Bennett writes that Jessica was the second eldest daughter in the family (eight years younger than Willa) and the last Cather child born in Virginia. When the family moved to Red Cloud, Jessica was nearly two years old. Into adulthood, Willa Cather was closer with her brothers. Her distant relationship with Jessica is reflected by the few surviving letters between the two (the *Complete Letters of Willa Cather* includes just a single letter from Cather to Jessica Cather Auld, compared to ninety-six to her sister Elsie Cather). Jessica Cather taught after high school, and then married James William Auld, a cashier for and later owner of the State Bank of Red Cloud. An active clubwoman, she was a founding member



Jessica Cather Auld's ownership stamp appears twice in her copy of *Observations by the Wayside*.

of Red Cloud's P.E.O. Chapter Y and remained an active member for sixty years. The couple divorced in 1933 and Jessica moved to Palo Alto, California shortly thereafter (620–21). Given the book's discovery in Nebraska, she presumably did not take it to California.

Marshall's biography parallels other settler families in south central Nebraska. According to his 1957 obituary in Red Cloud's *Commercial Advertiser*, he was born in Missouri in 1870 and moved with his family to Riverton in 1887. A small village then, and smaller now, Riverton sits between Franklin and Inavale, some two miles west of the Franklin and Webster County boundary. After attending the Franklin Academy in Franklin, Nebraska he graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Law in 1904. He practiced law in Riverton from 1904 until 1956 and was the Franklin County Attorney from 1908 until 1913 ("George J. Marshall," p. 7).

Riverton residents navigated cross-county social networks emanating across the Republican River valley. They had friends and acquaintances in villages and towns throughout the area. As a prominent attorney, Marshall was surely professionally, if not personally, familiar with Jessica's husband, the banker James William Auld. How Jessica Cather Auld obtained Marshall's book is unknown, but it was likely a gift, although it lacks a gift inscription. In the volume's introduction Marshall welcomed the "kind consideration of our friends into whose hands some of the numbers of this book will fall," suggesting he distributed copies to friends and acquaintances. The book presumably had a limited print run, evidenced by the small number of surviving copies. Regardless of its origin, Auld did add Marshall's work to her library and marked it twice with her ownership stamp (see image).

As for the book itself, *Observations by the Wayside* appears to have been self-published, based on contemporaneous reviews and internal evidence. Marshall dedicated the book to his son, Max, a 1917 Red Cloud High School graduate then serving in World War I. The book does not list any publication information, but the first review appeared in the *Franklin County Tribune* in May 1918. The reviewer found Marshall's book "full of human interest, and will be read with pleasure by the autohr's [sic] many friends in this state and elsewhere." They hoped Marshall would continue to write and publish "and trust that this effort of his will not be his sole activity along that line."

Marshall's poetry focused on local themes. He was known as "the bard of Thompson Creek," for his poem about the "gentle, docile brook" which ran through town. This title was bestowed, tongue in cheek, by the *Franklin County Tribune*, who noted the creek "went on a rampage and tore the map all to pieces," shortly after its composition. Marshall included a poetic rejoinder to his creek ode, "The Brook's Defense," in *Observations by the Wayside*.

Further reviews were slow in coming, but the *Omaha World-Herald* commended the slim volume two years later for its essay "My Father" and the poem "The Brook's Defense." Area waterways were not always the toast of village poets. Riverton was flooded and heavily damaged again in 1935 during the Republican River flood. Cather followed the news and forwarded New York press coverage on to Jessica's daughter, Mary Virginia Auld, while she honeymooned on Lake Champlain (*Complete Letters* no. 2757).

Jessica Cather Auld ca. 1919. Willa Cather Foundation Collections and Archives, National Willa Cather Center, PHO-4-W689-117.

Marshall's poem, "Nebraska," reproduced in full here, is of interest to Cather scholars for its reference to her and the contrast it offers to her own accounts of the area. "Nebraska" is pure boosterism, extolling the land, resources, and virtuous people of the state. Marshall frames Nebraska as an inheritance, "The land that our fathers did love," that shall pass to future generations who will live and die there, "Their dust in her soil may repose." It is saccharine and naïve. Marshall's earnest and unblemished view of the state and its people is one that Cather did not embody in her work. In this sense, the limits of Marshall's vision underscore the vitality and power of Cather's insights. The body of work he extolls did not always find a place "Where patience and labor prevail." Instead, she found hypocrisy, violence, and

the limits of humanity, bound up with the potential and hope of prairie life. This is a reality Marshall could not muster into verse.

He lists three Nebraskans who embody the state's "intellectually and keenly alive" cultural and educational landscape: the "writers renowned" Willa Cather and Ada Patterson, and "Nebraska product" Roscoe Pound, then dean of Harvard Law School. Personal connections between each and Marshall can be extrapolated from his biography. As noted above, Marshall was likely acquainted with members of the wider Cather family, if not Cather herself. Cather referenced Riverton at least once in her fiction, in "Eric Hermannson's Soul," which appeared in *Cosmopolitan* in 1900.

Riverton, Nebraska, ca. 1911. Private collection.

He extolled "Nebraska with pride points to Cather, / And Patterson as writers renowned." Cather's fame up to 1918 has been discussed, but the link to Patterson requires elucidation. Ada Patterson, little remembered now, was a leading journalist and author from Franklin, Nebraska. Her time as a theater critic in New York City during the 1920s has garnered some scholarly attention but warrants further research. Like Marshall, she graduated from the Franklin Academy. She became a society reporter for the *Salt Lake Herald* and later a feature writer for the *St. Louis Republican*, which proclaimed her the "Nellie Bly of the West." This title "clung burr-like to me," Patterson recalled in a letter to the *Lincoln Journal*. She then went to New York and worked as a feature writer for various papers there. Patterson's national fame and skill as a reporter place her on par with Cather, according to Marshall. Marshall's subtext pairs them through their childhood in neighboring counties. He and his local readers would recognize this connection and see their poetic paring as a commendation not just of Nebraska, but of Franklin and Webster County as well.

He closes the stanza, "Harvard assists in commending / A Nebraska product, Dean Roscoe Pound." Marshall's training at the College of Law in Lincoln coincided with Pound's professorship, so the law student and teacher assuredly crossed paths. Closing with Pound adds a tension unknown to Marshall. As Cather scholars well remember, Cather's satirical portrait of Pound, "Pastels in Prose," published in the *Hesperian*, fractured her relationship with the Pound family.

Marshall continued to write earnest, if little read, works. A second book, *The Victims of Class Legislation*, appeared in 1936 and received at least one positive review, in the *Franklin County Sentinel*. The sole surviving copy is at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. Marshall passed away in 1957. A respected figure throughout the region, his funeral was attended by residents of Riverton, Franklin, Inavale, Red Cloud, and other nearby communities. Among the mourners identified by the *Commercial Advertiser* was Dr. Wilbur K. Bennett, a nephew of the deceased and husband of Mildred Bennett, founder of the then two-year-old Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

Willa Cather likely never knew of Marshall's poem referencing her, and if Jessica Cather Auld mentioned it, it is not revealed in surviving letters. Admittedly, Cather was busy in 1918 completing *My Ántonia*, which appeared that September and it is easy to imagine her finding the amateur poetry of a rural lawyer tedious. Cather was particular about her poetry, she preferred formal verse and disliked modern poetry, especially "the crackling little fire of poetical activity which is being fanned, so to speak, by a wind off Spoon River" (*Complete Letters* no. 2027). Thompson Creek was hardly Spoon River, which Cather may have appreciated. Marshall's insights into small town life lacked Edgar Lee Masters's edge, but his few readers nevertheless welcomed the earnest celebration of his community and their environs. Cather understood the merits of such a perspective, and Jessica Cather Auld welcomed it to her library.

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Nebraska

Nebraska, the home of the sturdy,
The land of sunlight and health—
With its pure air laden with ozone,
The state abounding in wealth
The land where the soil is so fertile,
Where patience and labor prevail,
Where a breath of its fresh air of freedom
Is better than old England's ale.

Nebraska, the state of resources,
Where reward awaits those who persist—
Her fields with golden grain laden,
The fairest the sun ever kissed,
A clime that no state can equal,
In mildness and sunlight to cheer—
Not even boasting old Kansas
Can claim to be our state's peer.

Nebraska, the land where our fathers
Broke up the virgin rich soil,
Where content and plenty as blessings
Rewarded their patience and toil.
With swift steps we spring to accept it,
The land that our fathers did love,
With its rich soil so fine and producing
And its bright skies prevailing above.

Nebraska, the state of the cultured,
Where refinements and wisdom both thrive—
Where students as well as our teachers
Are intellectually and keenly alive.
Nebraska with pride points to Cather,
And Patterson as writers renowned,
And Harvard assists in commending
A Nebraska product, Dean Roscoe Pound.

Come out to the land of Nebraska,
View the landscape and test her flair clime,
Confess that her boundless resources
Are worthy a poet divine.
You will not wonder her sons adore her,
When she blooms like a full blown rose—
And pray that when life's dream is over,
Their dust in her soil may repose.

George J. Marshall

Dedicatory

Ashley Olson

"I have a funny little room in the attic here, with a sloping ceiling, like my 'rose bower' in our old first house. Do you remember?" Cather wrote these words to her brother Roscoe from an inn in Maine less than two years before her death. She was at work on "The Best Years," a story about their childhood. The day Cather was set to mail Roscoe a typescript of the story, she received telegram notification of his death. The brother whom she referred to as her best critic was gone without having read one of her final stories, one that returned to Nebraska and drew upon their childhood memories.

While the Ferguesson family home in "The Best Years" bears similarity to the Cather family's next residence in Red Cloud—now the Cather Second Home Guest House—the story vividly describes an attic with features matching the one in their first Red Cloud home; a space that is the private world of the children, where, as Cather wrote, "there were no older people poking about to spoil things."

We also see this private world in *The Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronborg's "little room for herself up in the half-story," with its wallpaper decorated with "small red and brown roses on a yellowish ground."

When the Cather Foundation acquired the house in 1960, the attic had been sealed off and the main floor had been divided into two rental units. It was our founder Mildred Bennett's good fortune to discover Cather's attic bedroom intact; the room and its rose-strewn wallpaper remained largely undisturbed.

Like the house's first restoration, undertaken in 1966 under the guidance of Cather's childhood friend Carrie Miner Sherwood, much thought and care has gone into the recent restoration and rehabilitation. A new foundation clad in original brick; recreation of the fence seen in archival photos; an accessible walkway and entrance; electrical service and non-intrusive museum lighting for enhanced interpretation; climate controls for the attic; and a new cedar shake roof. Enclosure of the attic space and extensive repairs to the windows and doors sealed the building envelope to limit exposure to the elements, ensuring an improved environment for collections and enabling us to move ahead with the meticulous conservation of the original wallpaper in Cather's attic room, which is now more than 130 years old.

These were all much-needed enhancements. But returning to the question Cather posed to her brother—"Do you remember?"—we know these enhancements won't be what guests to the Willa Cather Childhood Home will remember, or perhaps even notice. They might remember the nickel-plated parlor stove that matches Cather's description in *The Song of the Lark*. Or the small passageway occupied by Grandmother Boak, a space that strongly recalls Grandma Harris's living quarters in "Old Mrs. Harris." And I hope they'll remember peering into the delicately papered room that was home to Willa or William Cather, M.D. between the ages of ten and sixteen. What makes this site so special is that it brings us closer to an author whose work has been so meaningful to our lives.

Ashley Olson delivered these remarks at the June 8, 2024 ceremony marking the rededication of the Cather Childhood Home.

The Muse and the Poets

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the dedication and reopening of the restored Willa Cather Childhood Home on June 8, 2024, two of the high points were high indeed: the dedicatory poems written for the occasion and read by their creators, Nebraska Youth Poet Laureate Miranda Davis and Nebraska State Poet Matt Mason. The *Willa Cather Review* is honored and delighted to feature these works on the following pages.

Before the dedication: Miranda Davis and Matt Mason on the porch of the Willa Cather Childhood Home.

Flowers in the Attic

When the days were still warm, before the bitter cold hardened her throat, before the internal fire burned out.

She sat in the window while the rest of the house was sleeping.

You could see a single railroad lantern flickering in the distant attic window.

Somber, sullen sunsets, a palette of light, grasping onto youth under the sanctimonious cloak of misty dusk like larks onto their simple song.

Transfixed by a glance into tomorrow, this room was a story in and of itself, a secret romance, an incandescence.

Clandestine smoke, esoteric hidden artifacts too beautiful for the light, one-way locks keep her safe.

A sanctuary of innocence tucked away from the fear of yesteryear and the haunted helplessness of homely sentiment.

She found older and wiser companions in the petals that dotted her walls, heavenly haunts searching for the sun.

Small maroon paper roses on yellowed grounds, blossoming from seeds of memory and those who came before her.

Audacious trespassers into the past, lined with pine and poetry and the sequestered dreams of a world beyond.

In her mind roared pleasant plans that had never before occurred, secret gardens that she read books about as a precocious, tumultuous child.

Prophetic turmoil and lovelorn hope, she waits for what's to come and what's destined for her. Where would she end?

For she knows, within these walls and among the whispering winds of these widespread plains lies a repose, an idle life, a slumbering juvenescence waiting to bloom.

They will break for her to breathe.

The asters and bluestem grow with her, milkweed and goldenrod coursing through her veins and pulsating in her heart. Soil and soul where she was free.

The broken ground and roaring storms are the mother and father who raised her, the rolling hills and free spirit winds the siblings she was raised with.

Walls of refuge and reserve, she looks ahead to the bustling pavement on the corner of tenth in the arms of a forbidden domestication.

And the years pass by like scenes of a silent film, anticipatory marks of age creeping away. Her aesthetic bleeds out, forgetting what the agony was all for.

But right now, she finds home in the attic of flowers with the railroad lantern and secret clay-tinted ash and pine-soaked foundation.

How far would she go for one more blissful night? How far indeed.

And as the house sleeps, a circus of loved ones below, she waits for tomorrow to come even slower.

Miranda Davis

The Feeling of Being at Home

"Here where the girl first dreamed the dreams that led to greatness; here where so many of the people of the living world she built in story moved briefly in the flesh . . ."

—from John G. Neihardt's address at the opening of the Willa Cather Museum, May 26, 1962

Willa, I know your house
by way of books
and stories;

yes, there are bits
mixed different—
wallpaper roses

more red
than they really bloom
in your attic room—it's

the word
I pronounce wrong
having only read it, never heard;

so,
this is a gift
here,

in Red Cloud—though
I have pronounced that name
"Skyline," "MacAlpin," "Moonstone"—

to see this
brick foundation,
these fence slats;

even you, Willa, sometimes
pronounced it "Sandy Point"
when you played here

before you were
an author,
you,

snug in your "rose bower"
sewn with paper seeds—
wallpaper wages

for a kid
working at Dr. Cook's drugstore—
flowers and foliage grown

to transform walls
and ceiling into
sanctuary, this

home
called back
by characters

who
"…would never be able to think
anywhere else as well as here,"

who "would never sleep so well
or have such dreams
in any other bed…"

Willa,
what treasure to find
ourselves here,

now,
where we open
this door—

this book's cover—
and step
inside.

Matt Mason

"She gave herself up to the feeling of being at home. It went all through her, that feeling, like getting into a warm bath when one is tired. She was safe from everything, was where she wanted to be, where she ought to be." From Willa Cather's short story "The Best Years," published posthumously in 1948.

Skyline is from "Old Mrs. Harris" (1932) MacAlpin from "The Best Years," and Moonstone from *The Song of the Lark* (1915).

From *The Song of the Lark*.

Contributors to this Issue

Amrita Bakshi is a Ph.D. student and instructor of record at the University of Alabama. Her research is centered around modernism, especially modernist poetry, art, and music. In the classroom, she teaches post-colonial world literature. She fell in love with Willa Cather's writing after reading *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy*. She finds in Cather's works a deep recognition of modernist themes and pre-modernist ideals, which she aspires to incorporate in her own research.

James A. Jaap is a teaching professor of English at the Greater Allegheny campus of Penn State, where he has been for over 27 years. He has served on the Cather Foundation's Board of Governors since 2018, and coedited *Cather Studies 13: Willa Cather's Pittsburgh* (2021). His research interests include western Pennsylvania art and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Ashley Olson is the executive director of the National Willa Cather Center, a position she has held since 2014.

Robert Thacker is professor of Canadian Studies and English emeritus at St. Lawrence University and past president of the Willa Cather Foundation. Since 2009 he has been a coeditor of the *Willa Cather Review* but after the Spring 2024 issue, which he edited, this work has been taken up by others.

Nathan Tye is an associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska–Kearney. A labor historian by training, he has published on Nebraska's literary history in the *Willa Cather Review*, the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, and the *New Territory*. He also serves on the board of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society.

Willa Cather REVIEW

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Ashley Olson, Executive Director

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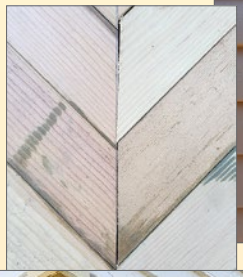
Site Preservation: Sweating (and Appreciating) the Details

Tucked inside every major restoration or maintenance project are countless small-scale elements calling out for particular attention and care. Sometimes these are essential to the integrity of the structure, other times decorative details that simply contribute to its beauty and character. Often they are both. As caretaker of these historic structures and priceless treasures, the National Willa Cather Center hopes always to be able to meet the challenge of preserving them for the public, in all their lovely detail.

Many of our sites feature historic Red Cloud brick, which is notoriously irregular and soft and requires frequent upkeep. *Pictured: the sidewalk at the J.L. Miner House (left) and the St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church.*

With more than 318 windows throughout our historic sites, window cleaning, maintenance, and repair is a critical part of keeping our buildings and collections safe. Whenever possible, we retain the historic glass and window fittings to preserve the historic character of the site. *Pictured: renovated storm window at the Willa Cather Childhood Home (left) and at the Burlington Depot.*

Our sites feature many types of historic trimmings, from delicate glazed tiles to ornate door hardware. Nearly all of it is irreplaceable. *Pictured: tile in the entryway to the Farmers and Merchants Bank (left) and the lock plate at St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church.*



Caring for the wooden envelope of our historic structures—especially sealing and painting porches, clapboards, decorative window trims, and moldings—is challenging, costly, and time-consuming. Ultimately, however, it's a good indicator of the health of the building itself. *Pictured: new porch decking being installed at the J.L. Miner House (upper left), newly repainted historic clapboards at the Willa Cather Childhood Home (upper right), newly repainted window trim at the Cather Second Home.*

Photographs by Tracy Sanford Tucker

Showering Love on the Cather Second Home

"By the way, I think you should have the front porches painted this summer if you wish to preserve them. As to the rest of the house, Father always said once in ten years was enough, and I think he was quite right."

Willa Cather to Elsie Cather, 1932

Willa Cather's quote refers to this Victorian house purchased in 1903 by Charles and Mary Virginia Cather. A frequent visitor, Willa Cather held fond memories of this home, which was acquired by the Willa Cather Foundation in 2011 thanks to the generosity of a Cather family descendant. It serves the Foundation well as the Cather Second Home Guest House. The National Willa Cather Center has completed a series of improvements to the home over the past five years: updated mechanical systems, driveway repair, a complete restoration of the front porch, historic paint analysis and repainting, new roofing, and more.

At the National Willa Cather Center, we believe that our historic sites are some of our most valuable collections pieces. In our work to preserve them, we aim to be as thoughtful and careful as we would be with a piece of Cather's clothing or a historic document. Through tremendous donor support for our Campaign for the Future, we were able to complete major restoration work on the Farmers and Merchants Bank, the Willa Cather Childhood Home, and the Pavelka Farmstead, but preservation work doesn't end with major restorations. The National Willa Cather Center's ongoing preventive maintenance work is costly: protecting our 11 historic sites through routine maintenance costs more than $100,000 annually. We hope that you will consider supporting our work with your charitable gift to assist us with maintaining and preserving these very special sites. You can donate to our preservation efforts by visiting **WillaCather.org,** or by contacting Development Coordinator Jeniffer Beahm at **jbeahm@willacather.org**. Planned gifts by bequest are also a welcome way to contribute to the ongoing preservation and maintenance of our 11 historic sites.

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