Willa Cather REVIEW

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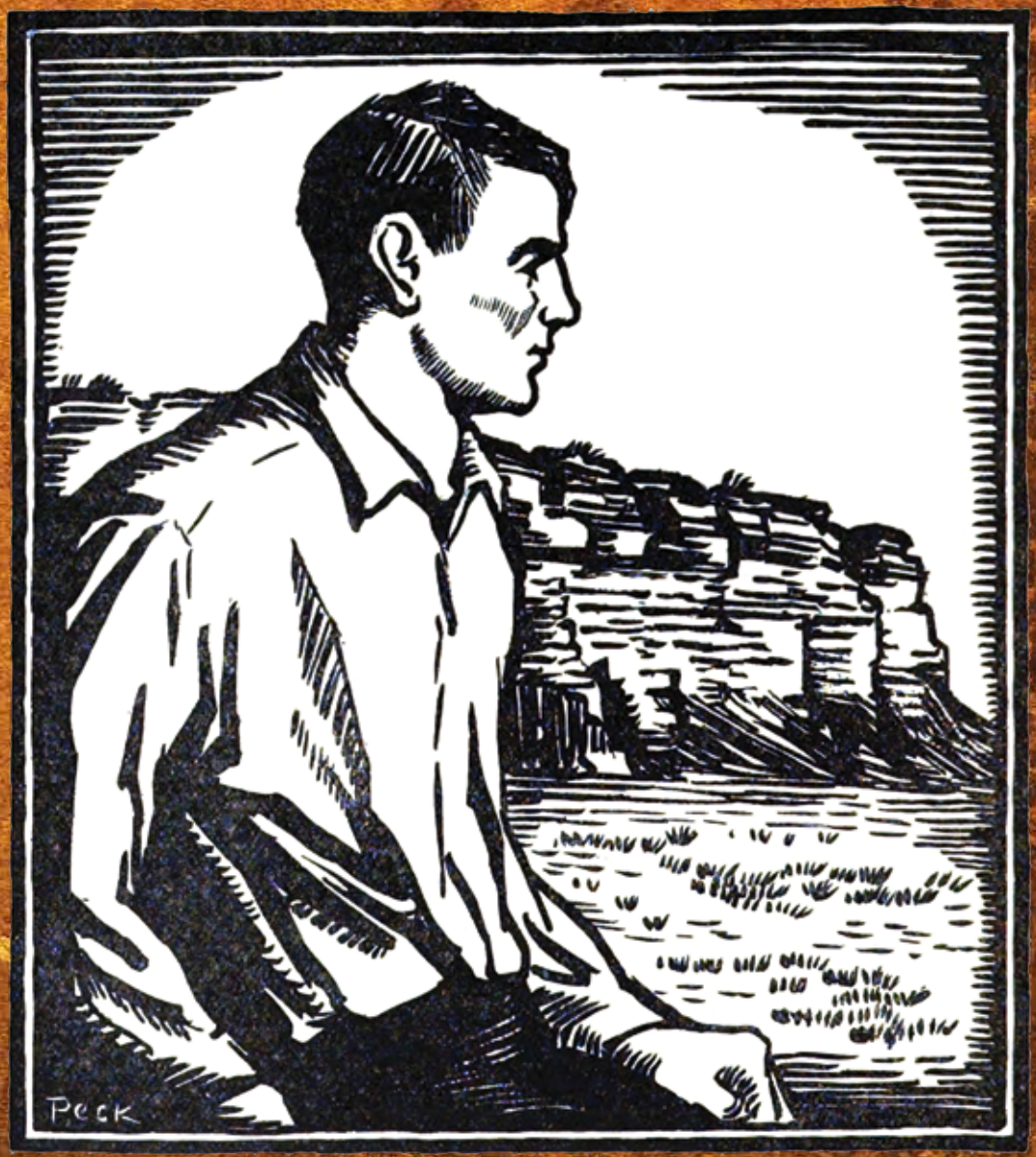

Willa Cather REVIEW

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The National Willa Cather Center

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On the cover:
Tom Outland and the Blue Mesa, as envisioned by illustrator Anne Merriman Peck (see story on page 30). As Cather wrote in "On *The Professor's House*" (1938): "In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy. . . . Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour."

On this page:
The Cliff Palace in Mesa Verde, 1891, by Gustaf Nordenskiöld. Public domain.

Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

In her 1933 radio address, Willa Cather described the novel as a "lightly woven net of words" that "has the power of transformation." She warned that mediocre novels are soon forgotten, while great ones are taken for granted and seldom read. Her sentiment reminds us that cultural treasures are at risk of fading from view unless they are nurtured and cared for with intention.

As an inspiring and enriching year draws to a close, I'm once again filled with gratitude for the work that your charitable support makes possible. Your gifts as members and donors help ensure that Cather's extraordinary literature is far from forgotten. Thanks to you, the National Willa Cather Center has elevated her writing for the past seven decades. What began as a small display of artifacts has grown into a vibrant cultural institution with a multifaceted mission that fuses education and arts programming with building preservation and prairie conservation.

Many have had a hand in the transformation of the Cather Center over the years, but all were guided by the belief that Cather's words offer a clear and valuable window into the American past—its people, landscapes, successes, and struggles. While Cather's writing is the heart of her legacy, there is no substitute for encountering her world firsthand. The childhood home she knew and the prairie that threatened her with a sense of erasure offer readers an experience that can not be replicated on the page alone.

Your generosity supports our growing educational outreach—books, exhibits, and programs delivered to students, libraries, and communities. It also fuels our ongoing transformation through the development of new permanent exhibitions, including *All Aboard: West-Bound Trains in American Culture*, set to open next year in the restored Burlington Depot. This exploration of the railroad and the ways it shaped our history and culture will also illuminate elements of Cather's writing that were influenced by her experiences on and around the rails.

As we close out the year, we have a special opportunity to strengthen this work. A generous foundation has issued a $50,000 challenge grant, and every gift made prior to December 31 (or shortly thereafter) will help unlock this vital support. With an additional gift of any size, you ensure that Cather's novels continue to be read, studied, and experienced. Thank you for helping us advance her legacy and sustain the places where her art comes alive.

Letter from the President

Mark Bostock

It is time to write my final letter for the *Willa Cather Review*. It feels like it has been a fast two years of being president of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation. On the other hand, it feels like ages—a lot has happened in my term as president. I would like to thank our Executive Director Ashley Olson and her very talented staff for all their help and hard work the last two years. I would also like to thank the members of the board who have volunteered countless hours of their time to help guide the Foundation. Nothing could get done without all these very talented folks. And finally, I want to thank all of you who have contributed to the Willa Cather Foundation. We wouldn't exist without all the financial help we have received from lots of folks, foundations, and businesses. We truly appreciate all of you. Lastly, I would like to welcome Peter Cipkowski, who will be the next board president. He is a great guy and you all will enjoy meeting him.

Let's review what has been accomplished over the last two years. The Willa Cather Childhood Home was completely restored and is absolutely beautiful. It has a new foundation, the main level is fully accessible, and temperature controls in Cather's upstairs bedroom protect the room and the wallpaper she bought and installed herself. The Farmers and Merchants Bank in downtown Red Cloud is also newly restored and is home to a fascinating permanent exhibit, *Making a Place: A Long History of Red Cloud*.

The last major accomplishment I'll mention was the completion of the Hotel Garber. This was a challenging construction project undertaken against the backdrop of the Covid pandemic, which contributed greatly to the difficulty of the project (not to mention the cost). But we have ended up with a lovely hotel in downtown Red Cloud, which will be beneficial to the town and the region and of course the Cather Foundation. If you're in the neighborhood and haven't stopped by and checked out the hotel, please do, and better yet, plan to spend a night or two.

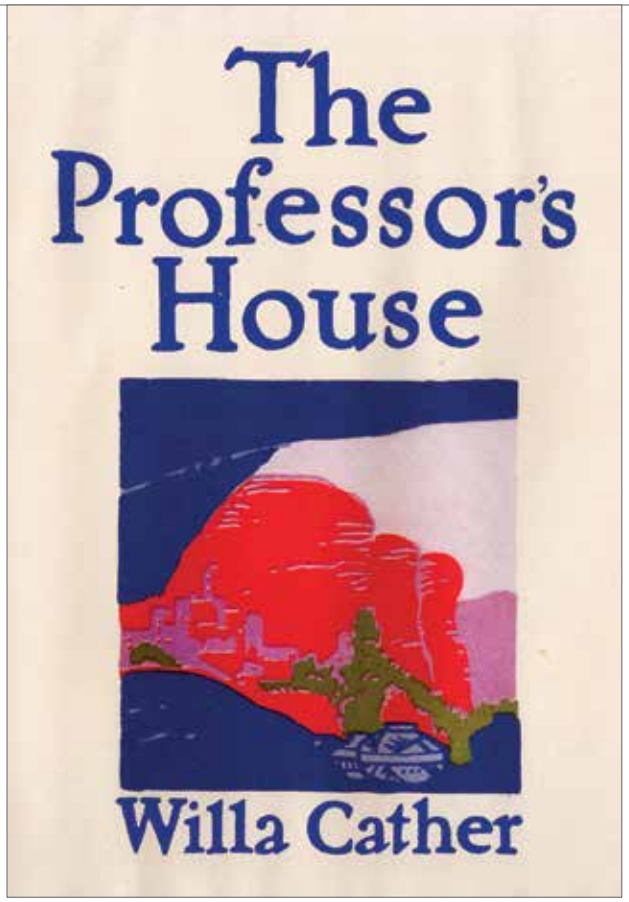
As you can see, it has been a busy and rewarding two years. Back when I was sitting in Mrs. Tupper's English class in high school learning about Willa Cather, I would have never thought that I would be this involved with her later in my life. (LOL!)

Thank you for supporting me as board president, and for your continued support of the Willa Cather Foundation.

Visiting the Professor's Houses

Sarah Clere

The Professor's House turns one hundred in 2025, but many of the issues that animate the novel remain strikingly relevant. Godfrey St. Peter's frustration with his family's and acquaintances' obsession with money, possessions, and status at times arouses our sympathy. Who among us has not at various times wanted to quote his sharp retort to Lillian: "Let's omit the verb 'to buy' in all forms for a while" (152)? Cather's focus on middle-class prosperity and the new money that galvanized it was prescient: Four years after the novel's publication the 1929 stock market crash upended American life.



Original dustjacket to the first edition, with cover art by C. B. Falls.

Despite his criticism of the extravagance of others, St. Peter himself is firmly enmeshed in this world of possessions. Near the novel's beginning Lillian calls "paying the rent of an entire house" so that St. Peter can keep using his study a "foolish extravagance," to which St. Peter replies, "It's almost my only extravagance" (96). Even a casual reading of the novel, however, shows that the Professor has a number of small extravagances. Cather directs our attention to St. Peter's enjoyment of Spanish sherry, California grapes, fine table linen, ample closet space, a luxurious hotel suite, and his own tiny stretch of Lake Michigan's beachfront. Some of us perhaps see our own dilemmas reflected in St. Peter's, for we too are mired in the problems of our time, trapped in patterns of acquisition and resource use that are producing catastrophic consequences for other people and the natural world.

Yet Cather is doing more than showing St. Peter up as a hypocrite. His frank enjoyment of comfort and beauty illustrates how material things bring us pleasure and soften the sometimes difficult circumstances of daily life. Some thirty years after his young manhood in France St. Peter still remembers the bouquet of dahlias he bought from a young couple in Versailles: "He had never again found dahlias of such a beautiful colour, or so charmingly arranged with bright chestnut-leaves" (102). It is also significant that he remembers the bouquet's exact cost of "*deux francs cinquante*" (102) and the strained courage of the young woman trying to get the best price for her flowers. *The Professor's House* forces us to reckon with the way the possessions that enrich our lives and affirm our relationships are inextricably caught up in the world of commerce. "Tom Outland's Story" is as much an extension of that reality as it is an antidote to it. Tom's attempt to show the worth of the Blue Mesa's artifacts as transcendent and set apart from financial valuation ultimately fails.

As with other issues of the *Willa Cather Review* keyed to Cather centenaries, my coeditor Ann Romines and I asked a range of scholars to contribute short pieces on the novel. These essays offer a range of compelling and at times provocative perspectives on *The Professor's House* and its continued significance.

The Professor's House does not build to a satisfying climax of reconciliation and moral clarity, but, as many of the essays in this issue note, moments of generosity and care emerge throughout the novel. When St. Peter encourages his daughter Rosamond to be generous financially and assures her that "there is enough to cover the fine, the almost imaginary obligations" (64), the reader will perhaps remember his advice even if Rosamond does not.

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Deep State

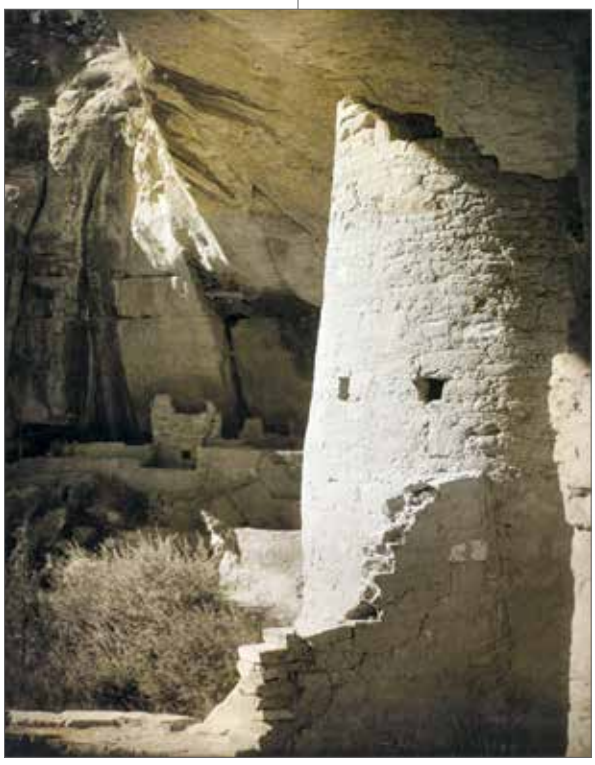
Joseph C. Murphy

As we entered the centenary year of *The Professor's House*, an authoritarian American president, loosely tethered to a sphinxlike First Lady, and shuttling between domiciles at Mar-a-Lago and the White House, struck up a bromance with a protean rocket scientist who proceeded to demolish the federal bureaucracy. These developments were not only appalling but, to a Cather scholar, a little uncanny. Was the new administration, in line with its crackdown on universities, also coopting the master narrative of her classic academic novel about an aging historian distanced from his wife, straddling old and new houses, and fixated on a mercurial genius fed up with the feds?

Paranoia, I admit, but the analogy is instructive. The president and his "tech support" were staging a divisive assault on national institutions, intercultural relations, democratic alliances—on art and even science itself. Godfrey St. Peter and *his* rocket scientist, Tom Outland, offer a progressive and unifying vision of the same. The political bromance was predictably fleeting, but the male bond at the heart of Cather's novel upholds republican virtues that endure.

In a period of social division and academic upheaval, then and now, St. Peter is an appealingly centrist figure: a Midwesterner eschewing both commercialism and elitism, a historian of America's multicultural roots whose magnum opus, *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, calls adventurism by its name. For all his cinematic flare, Outland shares his mentor's humanism. His gaze penetrates D.C.'s architecture not to target inefficiency but to reveal a legion of bureaucrats "like people in slavery, who ought to be free" (232). He feels the passion behind the façade—the deep state, indeed—just as he peers around Cliff City's tower to the livelihoods once sheltered there. Chastened by his coldly principled rejection of Roddy Blake, Outland cultivates a generous patriotism that propels him from the watercourses of the Southwest to the trenches of Europe. In the halls of the Smithsonian and the laboratories of Hamilton and Johns Hopkins, his genius challenges and excites rather than destroys and censors. No wonder he brings St. Peter "a kind of second youth" (258), not to be confused with the kind of adolescent machismo featured lately in the West Wing.

One hundred years on, Outland's vision of the round tower remains—more substantially than Gatsby's green light—a captivating symbol of resilience. "Swelling out to a larger girth a little above the base, then growing slender again," it constrains egotism and holds "the jumble of houses together" (199–200). In "Two Friends," her 1931 story of political rupture, Cather writes of "pictures, vivid memories, which in some unaccountable and very personal way give us courage" (161). *The Professor's House* is shot through with such images, intimations of a hidden union. Climbing from the canyon floor to Cliff City for the first time, Tom and Roddy take "a plain suggestion" from their Indigenous forebears and use notched cedar limbs to ease their ascent (205). Contemplating the faithful seamstress Augusta after near asphyxiation in his gas-filled attic, the Professor reflects, "If he had thought of Augusta sooner, he would have got up from the couch sooner. Her image would have at once suggested the proper action" (279). In cynical times, *The Professor's House* is a reminder of our obligations to one another and the past—a summons to get up from the couch and revive a civilization eviscerated "from mere love of slaughter" (219).



Laura Gilpin, *Round Tower, Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde National Park*, 1925.
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, bequest of the artist.

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"The Superior Quality of His Taste in Art"

Jess Masters

This illustration accompanied "The Professor's Commencement" in the June 1902 edition of *New England Magazine*.

Scholars such as Charlotte Salley have argued that Professor Godfrey St. Peter, the central figure of *The Professor's House*, is the fictional character with whom Willa Cather most closely identified, as his devotion to writing and near-ritualistic attachment to his study mirror her own increasing solitude during the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the roots of this figure can be traced to an earlier incarnation: Emerson Graves, the protagonist of "The Professor's Commencement," a short story published in *New England Magazine* in 1902—some twenty-three years before *The Professor's House*. Viewed retrospectively, Graves emerges as an early sketch of Cather's solitary academic protagonist, imagined by a writer still at the outset of her literary career but already drawn to the image of a scholar nearing the end of his.

In Emerson Graves as well as other early characters, Cather began to explore an intertextual and allusive style that would become more subtle and integrated in her later fiction. "The Professor's Commencement" is rich in art and literary references that reflect romantic ideals and underscore Graves's cultivated sensibilities: his library "testified to the superior quality of his taste in art as well as to his wide and varied scholarship," with walls adorned by works from Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Corot, and others (283). The room itself is described with painterly detail: its rugs "exquisite," its Fra Angelico reproductions "delicate," and its palette "original in color scheme as a painter's studio" (283). His name—Emerson—anchors him within an American tradition of romanticism, while he has a "St. Gaudens medallion of [Robert Louis] Stevenson" on his wall, sits with a copy of English scientist Thomas Henry Huxley's letters, reads Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Great Stone Face" with his classes, and quotes Horace's *Odes* to his sister, Agatha (283–85). For Graves, allusion functions largely as cultural shorthand, a means of defining character through conspicuous markers of taste and education.

It is no secret that Cather's allusions lend mythic, musical, historical, and literary resonance to her fiction, and scholars such as Marilyn Arnold and Mathew Hokum investigate various references in *The Professor's House*. Yet what emerges when comparing Emerson Graves to Godfrey St. Peter is the changing function of Cather's allusions. By 1925, references to art and literature no longer only furnish fictional libraries or signify erudition—they serve as indicators of character interiority and insight. St. Peter quotes Longfellow, hums a favorite aria from *Il matrimonio segreto*, and reflects on the figure of Euripides, who "lived in a cave by the sea" (154), drawing an unmistakable parallel to his own retreat into his study. On the mesa, Tom Outland carries Caesar and reads all twelve books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, while the young men pass the time with *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Elsewhere, allusions are left unnamed but deliberately placed: Louis Marsellus is likened to "'an extravagant and wheeling stranger'" (258) from Shakespeare's *Othello*, while Robert Crane's moral conflict leads the Professor to echo "My fortunes have corrupted honest men" (149) from *Antony and Cleopatra*. Most poignantly, it is the Professor's own act of *writing* that is likened to Queen Mathilde's weaving of the Bayeux Tapestry. Woven together from "personal memories" (100) as well as historical action, it mirrors Cather's own narrative practice, where allusions are no longer ornamental but integral, and scaffold the interior lives of its characters. Rather than signifying the good taste of characters like Emerson Graves, each of Cather's allusions in *The Professor's House* affords an extra-textual dimension to the novel, just as Queen Mathilde and her women "carried the little playful pattern of birds and beasts that are a story in themselves" (100) alongside the more dramatic action of the Bayeux tapestry's knights and heroes. In this way, art and literary references in *The Professor's House* become a narrative double thread, inviting the reader to read across Cather texts while offering interpretive keys to her characters' inner lives.

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One More House for the St. Peters

John H. Flannigan

The Auditorium Theatre, Chicago (1889). Author's photo, May 2016.

Despite its title, Willa Cather's T*he Professor's House* (1925) concerns two houses: the old, *démeublé* one Godfrey St. Peter cannot leave but Lillian, his wife, leaves for good before the novel begins; and the new, comfortable one Lillian embraces but Godfrey tolerates. The St. Peters find respite from this stalemate, however, in a third "house," Chicago's Auditorium, where they attend a performance of Ambroise Thomas's opera *Mignon* (1866). In this theater, which Cather first visited in 1895, they share a congenial, neutral space untainted by Spanish histories, daughters, sons-in-law, and Tom Outland's memory and, for a few hours, seem to forget their differences.

The St. Peters also exhibit characteristics that perhaps once made them attractive to each other. Lillian does not mention the music but uses an artist's eye to note the tenor's resemblance to pictures of the young Goethe, whose novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) is the source for *Mignon*'s plot. Godfrey admires the singers and the orchestra and is reminded of Opéra-Comique performances he attended in his student days. Even the "sweet, impersonal emotions" of Mignon's "immortal" act-one aria seem to evoke for him not Goethe's novel but his own youth (92).

Soon, however, the opera's act-two sexual tensions invade the St. Peters' reverie. Mignon's resentment of Wilhelm's fascination with the actress Philine seems to embolden Lillian to reproach Godfrey, "It wasn't the children that came between us" (93). Godfrey, caught off guard, admits his affection for Tom has helped drive them apart: "'You, you, too?,' he breathed in amazement" (93). He picks up one of Lillian's gloves and, "drawing it out through his fingers," gestures theatrically as if accepting a dueler's challenge even though it is doubtful he has any honor left to defend (93).

Mignon, Philine, and Wilhelm, in act two of Thomas's *Mignon*. Author's collection.

Godfrey experiences a crisis during the opera's final act, realizing how little he understands Lillian and perhaps she him: "He wished he knew just how it seemed to her" (93). This "it" can refer to many things—to their marriage, to Tom's haunting presence in their lives, even to the opera itself, whose jealous heroine has seemingly crossed the footlights and poisoned an otherwise pleasant evening. As they leave the Auditorium, now just one more discomforting house, the St. Peters carry with them a sharper awareness of their vanishing common ground. Both seem to understand, long before the novel's conclusion, that "the heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been to one's own" and that no house can provide an escape from their worsening estrangement (93).

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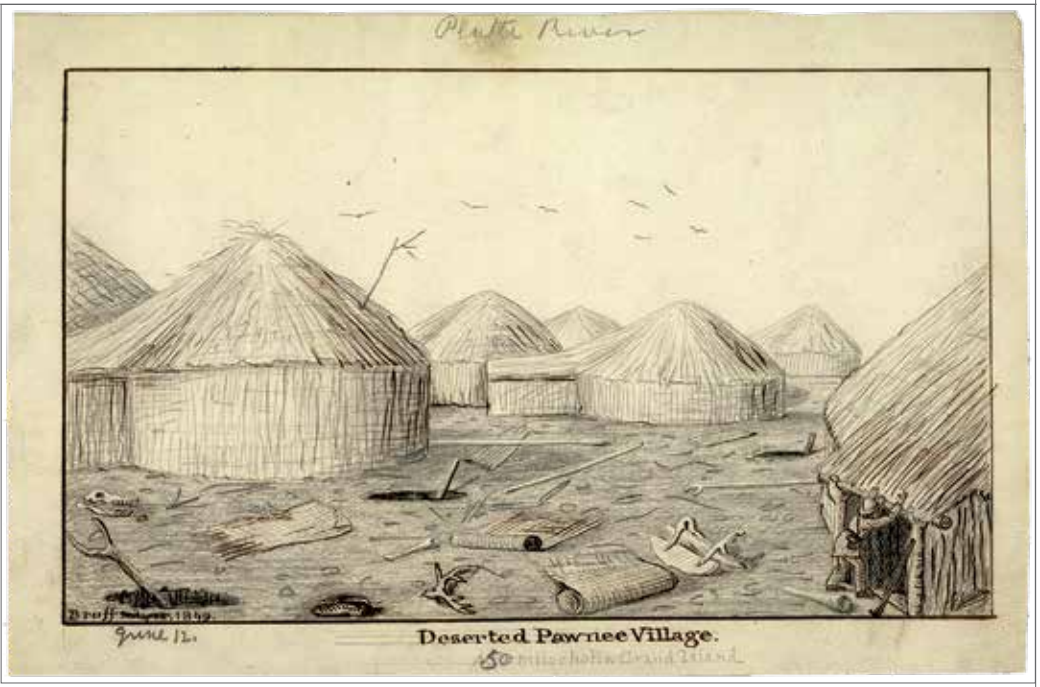
On the Divide: The Cradle of Plains Archaeology

Sallie Ketcham



Joseph Goldsborough Bruff, *Deserted Pawnee Village*, pencil and ink, 1849. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Part of the Western Americana Drawings Cataloging and Digitization Project, Box 1.

On September 25, 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike and his expeditionary soldiers approached a large, bustling Pawnee village on the Republican River, about ten miles southeast of future Red Cloud. The Spanish flag, a recent gift from Lieutenant Don Falcundo Melgares, flew provocatively over the site. Pike's mission was clear. At a grand council meeting in Chief Sharitarish's earth-lodge, Pike persuaded Sharitarish to strike the Spanish colors and raise the Stars and Stripes instead (Pike 413–15). The memory of the Spanish flag soon faded, but tales of Spanish explorers in Nebraska and the lost Pawnee village persisted for generations. It proved a potent combination in Willa Cather's imagination. The rediscovery of the Pike Pawnee Village in 1923, just prior to the publication of *The Professor's House,* revealed excavation findings so spectacular that Nebraska historian D. R. Burleigh later deemed the site "the cradle of Plains Archaeology" (76).

Willa Cather knew the old legends of Spanish Nebraska and included them in her short story "The Enchanted Bluff" (1908) and *My Ántonia* (1918). Both the story and the novel presaged elements of "Tom Outland's Story" in *The Professor's House*.

> "Jim," Ántonia said dreamily, "I want you to tell the girls about how the Spanish first came here. . . ." At school we were taught that he [Coronado] had not got so far north as Nebraska, but had given up his quest and turned back somewhere in Kansas. But Charley Harling and I had a strong belief that he had been along this very river. A farmer in the county north of ours, when he was breaking sod, had turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade (*My Ántonia* 235–36).

In 1898, J. Sterling Morton established his news journal, *The Conservative*, in Nebraska City. Between 1898 and 1902, in numerous weekly editions, *The Conservative* provided detailed accounts of Spanish explorers and Spanish artifacts in Nebraska. Romantic Spanish swords, like the famous sword recovered by the Republican River near McCook in the 1880s, fascinated readers ("Society Holds State Meeting"). Nebraska newspapers also described the excavation of Indigenous artifacts and grave goods. In 1886, when Willa Cather was growing up in Red Cloud, the *Webster County Argus* included the following item from Odell, Nebraska, in a roundup of news from around the state: "Mr. Fred Hartmann left a large collection of Indian relics at our office on Tuesday, that he had found on a peculiar mound on his farm southeast of town. The collection consists in part of smoke pipes, crockery, and petrified articles of every description. The articles undoubtedly belonged to a people that lived possibly a thousand years ago" ("The State"). When A. T. Hill rediscovered the Pike Pawnee village near Red Cloud, he met with George De Witt, son of the original 1872 homesteader, who showed Hill a crumbling Spanish saddle exhumed on the farm. De Witt told Hill that when his father broke the land, "it was covered with these lodge rings, fortification walls, caches, etc. They gathered great numbers of stone mauls, axes, war clubs and such like, threw them in the holes and plowed over them. He stated that the land was literally covered with such relics of Indian life" (Hill 163).

Indigenous sites were frequently looted, and their artifacts sold as "relics" and "curios," a practice Cather clearly disdained in *The Professor's House*. For many years "Omaha Charley" traveled the West with a mummified papoose—not unlike Mother Eve—which he commercialized and advertised in his company's handbill:

> And best, and wonder most of all,
> A papoose found in a tree top tall.
> Dried up and mummy-like entire
> Without the help of gums of fire,
> Complete in every limb and part
> From outside form to tiny heart (Koeppe 184).

Passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 provided for "the repatriation and disposition of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony." Thousands of Indigenous artifacts have been returned to tribal authorities; thousands more remain jumbled in the metal drawers of universities, museums, and historical societies, or in private collections. In *The Professor's House*, Cather addressed an American controversy few early twentieth century writers bothered to examine or acknowledge. Her keen awareness and sensitivity originated on the Divide.

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Caring and Keeping Mother Eve's Memory

Jeannette Schollaert

Mother Eve has fascinated and haunted me since my first reading of *The Professor's House* ten years ago. Of the many avenues of exploration that the novel offers, Tom Outland's bold claim to and possessiveness over the remains of Mother Eve unsettled me. Even after devoting part of a master's thesis to Cather's representation of Mother Eve, I remain unsatisfied with my reading of her and the spell that the idea of her casts on Tom, the Professor, and a century of Cather's readers.

Scholars have long considered how Mother Eve is weighed down by the many significations that the characters in "Tom Outland's Story" project onto her. Yet, to me, no projection is more troubling than Tom's identification of Mother Eve as his preferred matrilineal ancestor whom he believes belongs, like the rest of the Cliff City artifacts, "to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from" (242). Tom's claim to Mother Eve positions the remains of a Native woman, who died by unknown means, whose name is unknown, as the universal possession of the men of a country that she would not recognize. Tom imagines Mother Eve as a fount of culture divorced from her own context; his vision is reliant on the sublimation of Mother Eve's own culture, unknown and unimaginable to him, as part of the new American "State." It's impossible not to read Tom Outland's possessiveness over Mother Eve in light of the pronounced attention to the repatriation of artifacts and archives stolen via settler colonial violence, as investigations into the Smithsonian's possession of remains of Black and Indigenous people continue (Ortega). While Mother Eve's death predates the colonization and settlement of the West by the Americans of Cather's time, the extractive and possessive perspective through which Tom views her remains is not disconnected from the entitlement with which white explorers treated Native remains and artifacts well into the twentieth century. The institution that failed to live up to Tom's ideals of compensating settlers for stealing artifacts from colonized communities did, in fact, succeed in that effort, just not in a way that benefitted Tom's specific interest.

Additionally, Mother Eve's silent scream continues to speak to calls for justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women. Mother Eve is described as a spectacle of violence, as the description of her remains lingers on her plentiful teeth and permanent, frozen scream. Father Duchêne's imagined story of her murder positions Mother Eve as a stereotypically sexualized "primitive" woman, whom he believes was murdered by a man too jealous to allow her to live (222). Father Duchêne and Tom both describe Mother Eve in terms of property, a dehumanizing narrative tactic that works to justify their seizure of her remains and the Cliff City artifacts. Father Duchêne's belief that Mother Eve was aptly named speaks to a lack of curiosity about how this woman really lived and died. Instead, he erases her experience in order to mythologize an American version of the biblical Eve, a mother who sinned and may be scorned.

Otis Polelonema, *Hopi Woman*, water color on paper, ca. 1920–30. Pueblo and Plains Indian Watercolors from the Hartley Burr Alexander Collection, Ella Strong Dennison Library, Claremont Colleges.

Cather's portrayal of Native women is worthy of continued analysis, from Thea Kronberg's imagined embodiment of Indigenous women's experience in "The Ancient People" book of *The Song of the Lark* to Don Hedger's haunting tale of "The Forty Lovers of the Queen" and its reductively theatrical appropriation of Aztec lore to scare Eden Bower in "Coming, Aphrodite!" But Mother Eve's silent scream is eerie because she was at one point a real person, a woman who lived and died, yet she is unable to speak back to the male construction of her story, or the entire constructed history of the mesa. Here, we the readers see the very process by which Mother Eve's death is recast and mythologized. There is beauty in Cather's descriptions of the mesa and Tom's yearning for belonging in a land where he desperately wants proof of his place in a community. However, Tom has no right to speak over the history lost in the erasure and reconstruction of the woman dubbed "Mother Eve." I look forward to the continued conversation in Cather studies about Mother Eve's role in *The Professor's House*, and how Indigenous and Native women haunt Cather's fiction. I remain haunted by Mother Eve's scream, and I hope that continued efforts in reparative anthropology and archival studies as well as the force of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives movement continue to inform how we study the interlocking systems of oppression and settler colonial themes in Cather's work.

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When Choosing Your Next Book . . .

Kelsey Squire

In a *New York Times* op-ed from January 2025, LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman touted the potential of artificial intelligence programs to optimize the human experience. He invites readers to imagine AI models, "trained on comprehensive collections of your own digital activities," that could help people optimize their choices. Hoffman writes: "Imagine a world in which an A.I. can analyze your reading patterns and alert you that you're about to buy a book where there's only a 10 percent chance you'll get past Page 6."

For many readers of the *Willa Cather Review*, including myself, Hoffman's vision of reading optimization is a sad and narrow one. It fails to capture or even acknowledge the thrill of discovering a novel that absorbs you or the fun of reading a novel that is shockingly bad. Hoffman's vision ignores much about reading, including the social components of reading: the joy of sharing a reading recommendation with a friend or the heated debates that might ensue when our tastes diverge. Nothing else

in the op-ed reveals any interest on its author's part in the reading habits of his intended audience.

As a lark, I decided to ask two AI programs, ChatGPT and DeepSeek, what books I should read if I liked Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*. The recommendations were fine: they included some of Cather's contemporaries (Bess Streeter Aldrich, Mary Austin, Edith Wharton) as well as writers associated with place (Wallace Stegner, Marilynne Robinson). The *rationale* for connecting Cather to these writers was tepid, however, as the AI programs responded to my query with imprecise fawning. For example, in response to one query, ChatGPT generated this text: "Ah, The Professor's House! It's a fascinating novel that explores themes of personal reflection, identity, and the complexities of relationships, set against the backdrop of early 20th-century American life. If you're drawn to the novel's introspective tone, subtle portrayal of family dynamics, and themes of change, here are a few books that share similar qualities. . . ."[1]

While it was Cather's depiction of place that first attracted me to *The Professor's House*, I found myself thinking of this novel recently while reading another, *The Husbands* by Holly Gramazio. I must be clear here: I'm not sure that I loved *The Husbands*. But I was struck by the novel's plot, in which a woman named Lauren discovers that every time her husband goes up into the attic, a new husband comes down—and along with her new partner comes a different life, filled with sometimes slightly and sometimes drastically different details. In *The Professor's House*, Godfrey St. Peter grapples with many things —his new house, his evolving relationship with his daughters, his academic career—and what these mean for his life as he ages. In *The Husbands*, Lauren confronts a similar existential question: in a world full of choices, how do we choose a partner, a house, a life? How do we know what is good, what is right, for ourselves?

Choosing our next book to read might be a less fraught question than what St. Peter and Lauren confront in their respective novels. But I hope in this hundredth anniversary year, the human readers of Cather's work will continue to reflect on her writing and the meanings it holds for us.

NOTE

1. Prompt: "I'm actually more interested in Willa Cather's novel The Professor's House. Can you recommend similar novels?" ChatGPT, GPT-4.1, OpenAI, May18, 2025.

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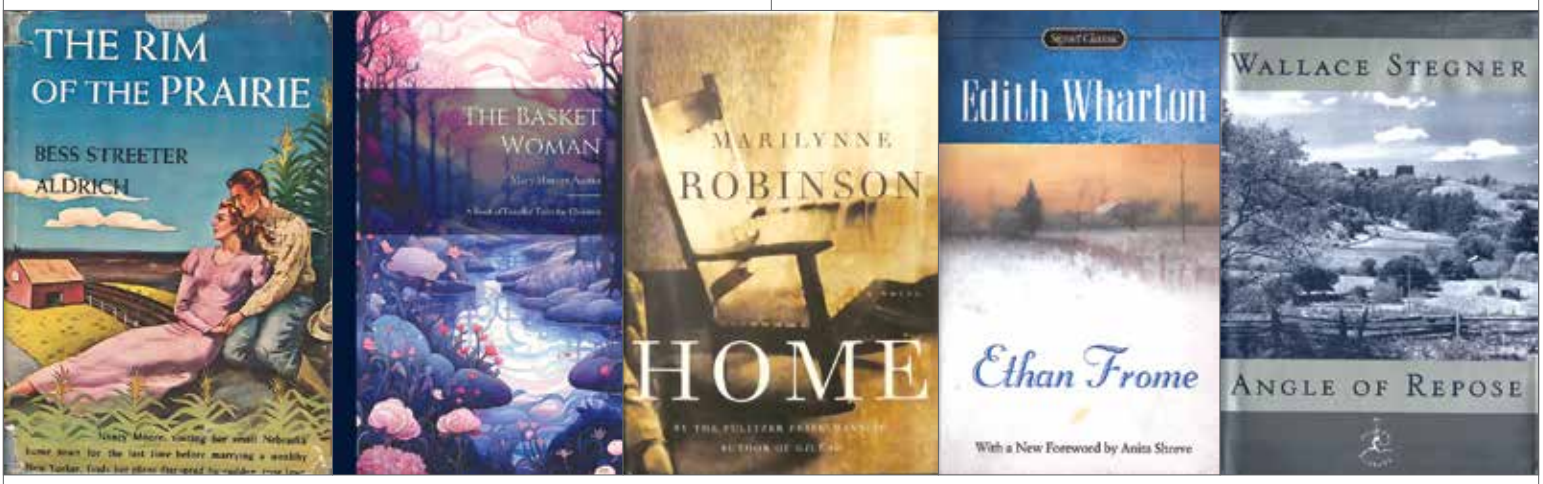


Sample works by authors suggested in response to the prompt.

America, You've Got It Better: Germany and the Mirror of Globalized Art in *The Professor's House*

Elizabeth Wells

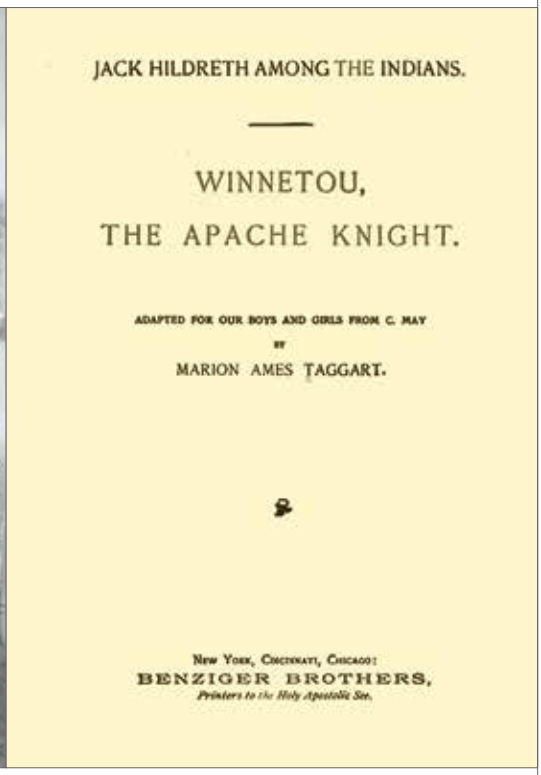
In 1827, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe argued passionately for globalizing national literature in order to prevent it from becoming stale and insular:

> Left to itself every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one. What naturalist does not take pleasure in the wonderful things that he sees produced by reflection in a mirror? Now what a mirror in the field of ideas and morals means, everyone has experienced in himself, and once his attention is aroused, he will understand how much of his education he owes to it. (*Goethe's Literary Essays*)

This passage reads like the mantra for Godfrey St. Peter, who makes his career by turning to France and Spain to uncover new aspects of American history. With global research, Godfrey attempts "to do something quite different" from other academics (33): by drawing on European archives, he creates unique scholarship that captures a world audience. However, by building his own legacy on another country's archives, he mirrors not only the "adventurers" he writes about but also the German collector Fechtig who takes the Blue Mesa artifacts (236). Like Godfrey, Fechtig seeks relics of another country to refresh his nation's identity. This is certainly what Goethe recommended when he described America as a fountain of youth for Germany:

> America, you've got it better
> Than our old continent. Exult!
> You have no decaying castles
> And no basalt.
> Your heart is not troubled,
> In lively pursuits,
> By useless old remembrance
> And empty disputes.
>
> So use the present day with luck!
> And when your child a poem writes,
> Protect him, with his skill and pluck,
> From tales of bandits, ghosts and knights. (America)

In *Willa Cather and the American Southwest*, Matthias Schubnell argues that Fechtig's German identity is based on a historical fact: the Berlin Museum created a "mission to build a world-class ethnographic collection" that fueled an art market for American Indian artifacts (33). Schubnell concludes that Cather likely intended this German reverence for American historical artifacts "to vent her frustration with a perceived decline of American culture," as evidenced by the Smithsonian's disdain for Native objects (41). The Berlin Museum ethnographic exhibits, however, were only a small part of a much larger craze for American Native culture as a form national refreshment. As H. Glenn Penny explains, Germany developed a fixation over two centuries with an idealized notion of American Native culture that manifested not only in the Berlin Museum but more broadly in the Buffalo Bill European tours and especially in the writings of Karl May, who became the Louis L'Amour of Germany with dime novels about cowboys and Indians in the West (65–68). May's novels became so popular during Cather's youth that a museum was established in his honor near Dresden, where an annual festival in his honor continues to this day (Penny 146–48).



Left: Karl May, the author of the (still!) wildly popular German "Winnetou" novels. Right: Title page for the 1898 English translation of May's novel series.

Cather probably did not know May's works, but she did know that globalizing art may result in flat commercial exports that bear no resemblance to the restorative reflections Goethe praised. Indeed, Godfrey's interior journey in this novel involves his dawning recognition that art more often leads to commercial novelty than to the refreshment of conscience and identity he so admired. This realization becomes harder for Godfrey as he sees it happening not only in others—the Outland home converting Tom's "very bones into a personal asset" (48) or Langtry's farm boys returning from Europe newly civilized (57)—but ultimately and horrifically in himself. It explains why he refuses to move into his new house, which, like Outland, is built upon the "very bones" of his country's archival past turned into a personal asset. How can he accept living in a house bought on stolen goods, fueled by a kind of blood money? His crisis is the same as Tom's, who won't touch the money in Roddy's trust because of his horror at the Smithsonian officials' preference for earning ribbons in Paris over preserving their nation's past.

Angelica Kauffmann, *Portrait of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, 1787. Goethe National Museum, Weimar.

But not all foreign art fails to be refreshing. Early in the novel Lillian and Godfrey see a performance of *Mignon*—the French adaptation of Goethe's prose work *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) and excitedly report seeing an actor who resembles "the pictures of Goethe in his youth" (91).

Recognizing Goethe underneath, Godfrey witnesses how a foreign adaptation can revive without erasing an underlying link to the original. This moment foreshadows Godfrey's quest in the finale for "the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter" buried deep under the later versions of himself as "adventurer" author and social being. Alongside Godfrey, readers are invited ultimately to look into Cather's work and ask whether they, too, recognize a revival of authentic truth beneath art's adaptations.

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Color Analysis in *The Professor's House:* Primary, Pure, and Primitive

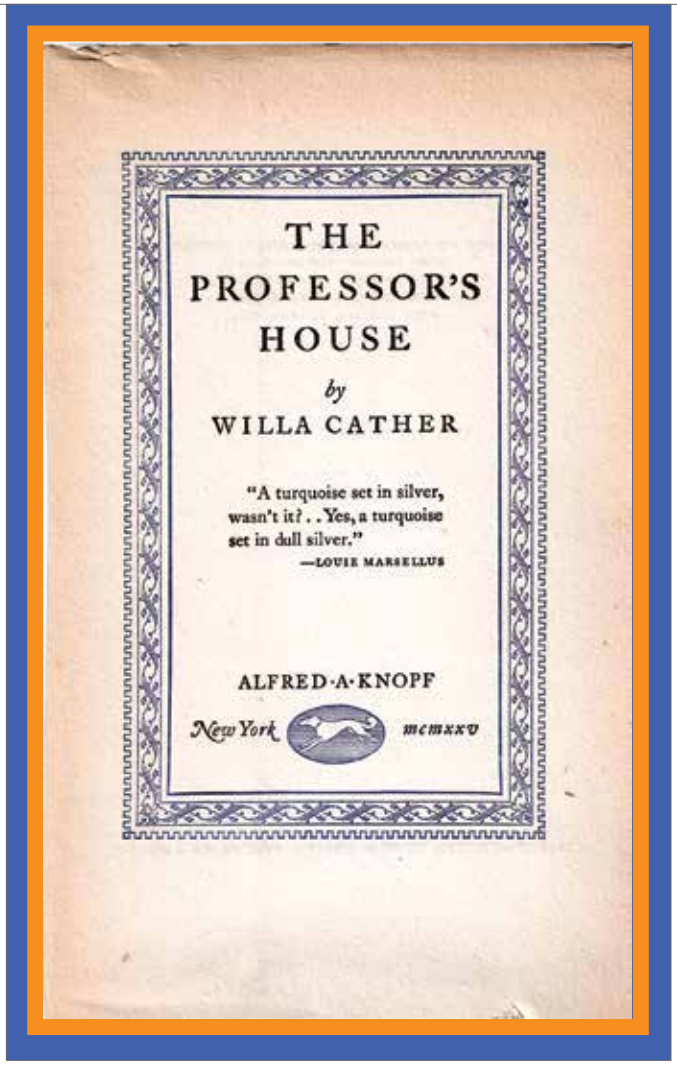
Kim Vanderlaan

Cather uses primary and secondary colors on the color wheel to correspond to Godfrey St. Peter's two selves—and his states of mind while inhabiting each. Primary colors are concentrated or unalloyed "pure" colors which I argue Cather uses to distinguish sublime or life-restoring moments in St. Peter's consciousness—the "primitive" (265), solitary, never married man of the intellect. Secondary colors designate "the secondary social man" (265) and the material world which reduces life's intensity and value. The catalyst for recovering his primary self is annotating Tom's journal. Through revisiting his connection to Tom (and the Cliff City), Godfrey's imagination is rekindled and "the ardour and excitement of the boy" (262)—his original self that was subverted by the grafted social self—reemerges.

Tom's experience with the primacy of the Cliff City hits him like "a religious emotion" (250). The physical landscape of the mesa is described in primary colors: "high above me the canyon walls were dyed flame-colour with the sunset, and the Cliff City lay in a gold haze against its dark cavern" (249). He notes: the

"arc of sky over the canyon was silvery blue, with its pale yellow moon" (249). His experience of sublime completeness is inextricable from the landscape: "there was that summer, high and blue, a life in itself" (252). In a parallel to Tom's mesa, Cather writes that the drawing room of St. Peter's new house was "full of autumn flowers, dahlias and wild asters and goldenrod. The red-gold sunlight lay in bright puddles on the thick blue carpet, made hazy aureoles about the stuffed blue chairs" (74), a composition in primary colors, indicating primacy, creativity and intense life.

Cather's description of both spaces is reminiscent of Godfrey's physiognomy: his "tawny skin with gold lights" (13) matches the mesa top, "red with sunrise and all the slim cedars along the rocks would be gold—metallic, like tarnished gold-foil" (190). Cather uses intense primary colors to convey vibrant and undiluted feelings. The secondary social self (and all the negative associations with the material world) is frequently designated by purple, orange and green. This secondary man, dulled with mixing and grafting, comes to haunt St. Peter: "It had been shaped by all the penalties and responsibilities of being and having been a lover" (265). The coded colors represent St. Peter's familial relationships, which are imposed by his secondary social roles and diminish his primary state. Louie buys Rosamond emeralds—a secondary color mixing yellow and blue—because, he says, "I like the idea of their being out of scale. . . . To me her name spells emeralds" (75). The fact that the necklace is set in old gold (a version of the primary color yellow) does not diminish my argument, as Rosamond's intense material desires degrade the purity of all that is connected to her. St. Peter notes that the clothes Louie chooses for his wife "with a kind of lurking purple and lavender in them are splendid for [her]" (81). Interestingly, the aesthetically appealing coat hides Rosamond's "wide, slightly stooping shoulders" which her father "regretted" (81)—seemingly an allegorical cloak for the unharnessed moral deformity of her enormous avarice. Kathleen, hinted to be St. Peter's favored daughter, is diminished by her spite and envy. After a visit from her sister, she is "very pale; even her lips, which were always pink, like the inside of a white shell" (82). The loss of color indicates diminution, a fading away, an erasure. Even as Godfrey warns Kitty against "self-destruction" (83), Cather describes her "soft hazel-coloured" (83) hair, which parallels the eventual "greenish tinge" (85) effusing her skin as she literally becomes green with envy. These color codes indicate that St. Peter's daughters have unwittingly conspired to efface Godfrey's primary self with less noble traits: avarice and envy, after all, are two of the seven deadly sins.


THE
PROFESSOR'S
HOUSE
by
WILLA CATHER
"A turquoise set in silver, wasn't it? . . Yes, a turquoise set in dull silver."
—LOUIE MARSELLUS
ALFRED·A·KNOPF
New York
MCMXXV

Title page to the first edition of *The Professor's House*.

Just before St. Peter falls asleep the night of his accident with the gas stove, he has been trying to determine "where he had made his mistake, to account for the fact that he now wanted to run away from everything he had intensely cared for" (275). A storm "is coming on" and he sees "orange and purple clouds . . . blowing up from the lake" (275). The normally green pine trees are "blacker than cypresses and looked contracted, as if they were awaiting something" (275). The answer he was waiting for ("Truth under all truths") is that he "was solitary and must always be so" (265). St. Peter's internal struggle, represented by these two sets of colors, almost obliterates his life force—black is the absence of all colors.

Cather's use of primary and secondary colors seems meant to provide signposts for the careful reader—a spectrum indicating certain hues and intensities associated with specific values.

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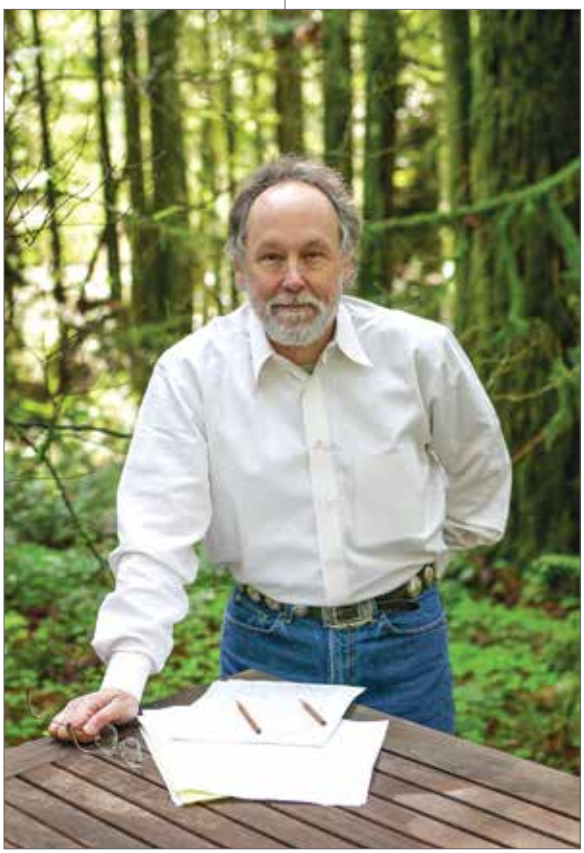
Tom Outland | Barry Lopez

Julie Olin-Ammentorp

"Tom Outland's Story," the second book of *The Professor's House*, is often identified as the novel's equivalent of a bracelet described in the novel, "a turquoise set in dull silver"—a phrase also included in the novel's epigraph. Indeed, in a rather grim novel, Tom's story is a rough yet shining gem. In recent years, however, some readers have questioned Tom's plausibility as a character: after all, how likely is it that an uneducated cowboy would become engaged to a distinguished historian's daughter and a physicist who makes an important discovery—and then die young in World War I, rendering him a "glittering idea" (110)? Readers have further faulted Tom for romanticizing the Ancestral Pueblo, whose architectural and domestic artifacts he uncovers on the Blue Mesa. Yet, as I read Barry Lopez's essays in *Crossing Open Ground* recently, Tom came to mind repeatedly. Lopez's life (1945–2020) and words suggest both Tom's plausibility as a person and the importance of the ideas and attitudes he expresses.

If Tom seems an unlikely character, Lopez's career reminds us that "unlikely" lives do exist. Lopez grew up on both coasts of the U.S., considered entering the priesthood, traveled widely, and explored and lived in remote regions and cultures outside the mainstream. Though never quite a cowboy, this prize-winning author was, for a time, a horse wrangler in Wyoming ("Stone Horse" 11)—a decided evocation of Tom.

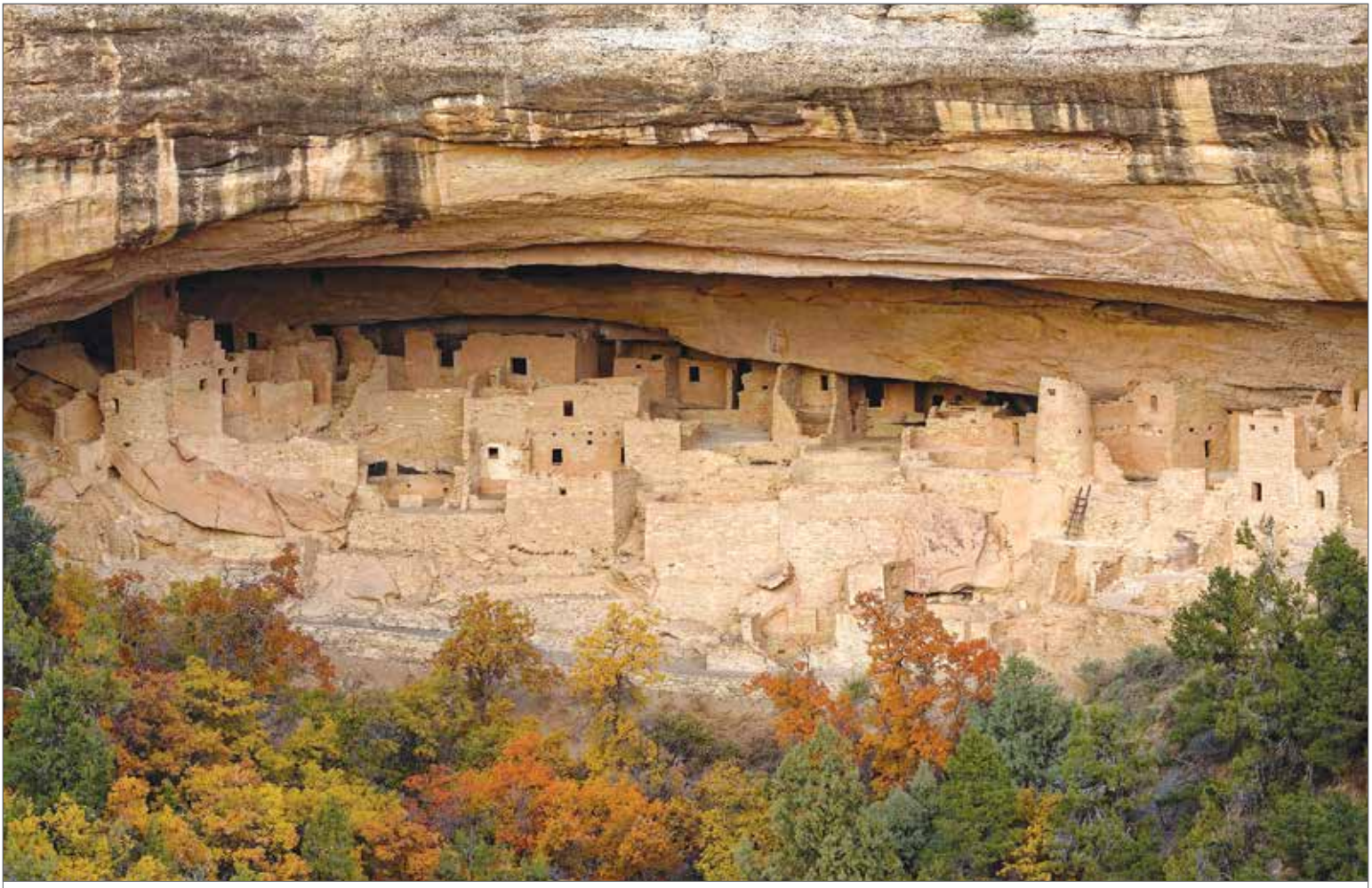
The parallels between Tom and Lopez run far deeper, with the fictional Tom and the actual Lopez expressing the same profound admiration for the Native cultures of the Southwest. In "The Stone Horse," Lopez describes an early-morning visit to an Indigenous artifact, a larger-than-life horse outlined in stone on the desert floor. His essay reflects exactly the same reverence that Tom conveys in his exploration of the "Cliff City," a sense of awe at being alone in a sacred space, outside "the flow of time" (Lopez 9). Both Lopez and Tom are protective of these secluded, little-known places: Lopez wants to save the Stone Horse from looting and tourist traffic; Tom is "reluctant to expose those silent and beautiful places to vulgar curiosity" (203–4).



Barry Lopez, Finn Rock, Oregon, 2003. Photograph by David Littschwager.

Lopez's "Searching for Ancestors," which focuses on Ancestral Pueblo settlements, also parallels Tom's admiration for Ancestral Pueblo culture. Coming upon the Cliff City, Tom immediately appreciates that it "seems to have a kind of composition" with "a beautifully proportioned tower at its center (199); "It was . . . like sculpture" (200). He adds that "the really splendid thing . . . was the setting. The town hung like a bird's nest in the cliff" (211). Writing of similar settlements, Lopez describes "the compelling architecture of their cliff dwellings, the stunning placement of their homes" (167). Like Tom, he admires the details of architecture, of pottery, of water-use in a desert climate.

For both, admiration becomes reverence. Lopez states, "while [the Ancestral Pueblo] flourished . . . they represented an apotheosis in North American culture" (166). Tom senses that "they must have been . . . a fine people" (212), and Father Duchêne calls them "a superior people" (217), expressing a "reverence for this place" (220). Both Tom and Lopez see in such settlements a rare harmony "between the extremes of nature and civilization," as Lopez says (178); echoing Tom's feelings, Father Duchêne states admiringly, "they built themselves into the mesa and humanized it" (220. Further, such places transcend mere fact. Lopez argues that scientific detail should not "obscure" the far more important sense that this people "had an obvious and pervasive spiritual and aesthetic life" (172). For Tom, the mesa became "no longer an adventure but a religious emotion" which he identifies as "filial piety" (250)—an emotion which Lopez's essay title "Searching for Ancestors" also conveys.



Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde National Park. Photograph by Judson McRanie. Creative Commons license.

Indeed, caring for place unites Lopez and Tom—which is really to say, Lopez and Cather. Lopez refers to an Ancestral Pueblo granary he has helped recover as being "like a piece of quartz in the mind" (169)—a trope much like Cather's "turquoise set in dull silver." Cather's turquoise and Lopez's quartz suggest not only the quietly beautiful writing of these two authors, but the places in the Southwest they loved.

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Preservationism in *The Professor's House*

Richard Millington

Late in Book I of *The Professor's House*, there's a passage that is at once unobtrusive and mind-boggling. Thinking back on happier early days in his now "dismantled" house, remembering especially Tom Outland's companionable times with his daughters, the Professor offers this reflection: "When a man had lovely children in his house, fragrant and happy, full of pretty fancies and generous impulses, why couldn't he keep them? Was there no way but Medea's, he wondered?" (124). The dissonance between the relaxed tone and the murderous implications of the Professor's reminiscence might serve as an emblem of my own relation to the novel: of all of Cather's novels, this is the one I find the hardest to bring to any satisfactory interpretive resolution, to know how to find my way, as a reader, between value and emptiness, between sympathy and satire. Or, to put this another way: *The Professor's House*

is a distinguished novel that does everything but solve the problems of meaning it so vividly dramatizes.

While I am tempted to close with this admission of interpretive defeat, in recent years I have been teaching *The Professor's House* in a course called "America in 1925," which used an array of texts published in that remarkable year to explore the transition from an American Victorian culture to a modernist one. In that context, and especially in the company of *The Great Gatsby*, Cather's novel came to look less like an exercise in heroism, or satirical antiheroism, and more like a dispassionate exploration of the conditions of meaning at a particular transitional moment in the unfolding history of American middle-class culture. Here, for instance, we might think of the novel's systematic alertness to the displacement of foundational forms of value—beauty, learning, love, accomplishment—into iterations of consumer culture: expensive fabrics, vocation-driven universities, marriages founded on house decoration, goods exported or imported through Mexico City.

But we might also think of the novel's exploration of a deeper, more resonant problem of meaning, one hinted at in the passage with which I began. This is a world in which the possession of a compelling meaning—those "lovely children in his house, fragrant and happy"—seems to produce, especially on the part of Cather's male characters, the desperate urge to *preserve* that meaning, no matter the cost. This is especially true of the novel's most compelling—and unquestioned—expressions of meaning and value. Thus it is the completion of the Professor's monumental multivolume history that provokes his nearly fatal self-archiving in the old house where he did his writing, and his allied resolution to "live without delight" (282). Thus it is, more complexly still, that Tom Outland both experiences his deepest aesthetic experience of the Cliff City when he has successfully expelled Roddy Blake from it for the sin of commercialization—*and* acknowledges the irreparable interpersonal cruelty of that preservationist act even as he commits it.

What I have been calling the "preservationism" at the center of *The Professor's House* is, I think, a symptom the novel explores, not a problem it resolves. While there are hints of alternative capacities for meaning-making in the novel—Louie's capacity for forgiveness, the example of human solidarity that Augusta fleetingly presents for the Professor as the novel ends—they seem fragile or ingenious when weighed against the St. Peter's insistent sense of injury and loss. Here we may remember that Gatsby is also a preservationist—"Can't repeat the past?. . . Why of course you can!" (86)—and that, taken together, these two novels show us the poignant fragility and potential cruelty of an American modernism built on a cul-de-sac.

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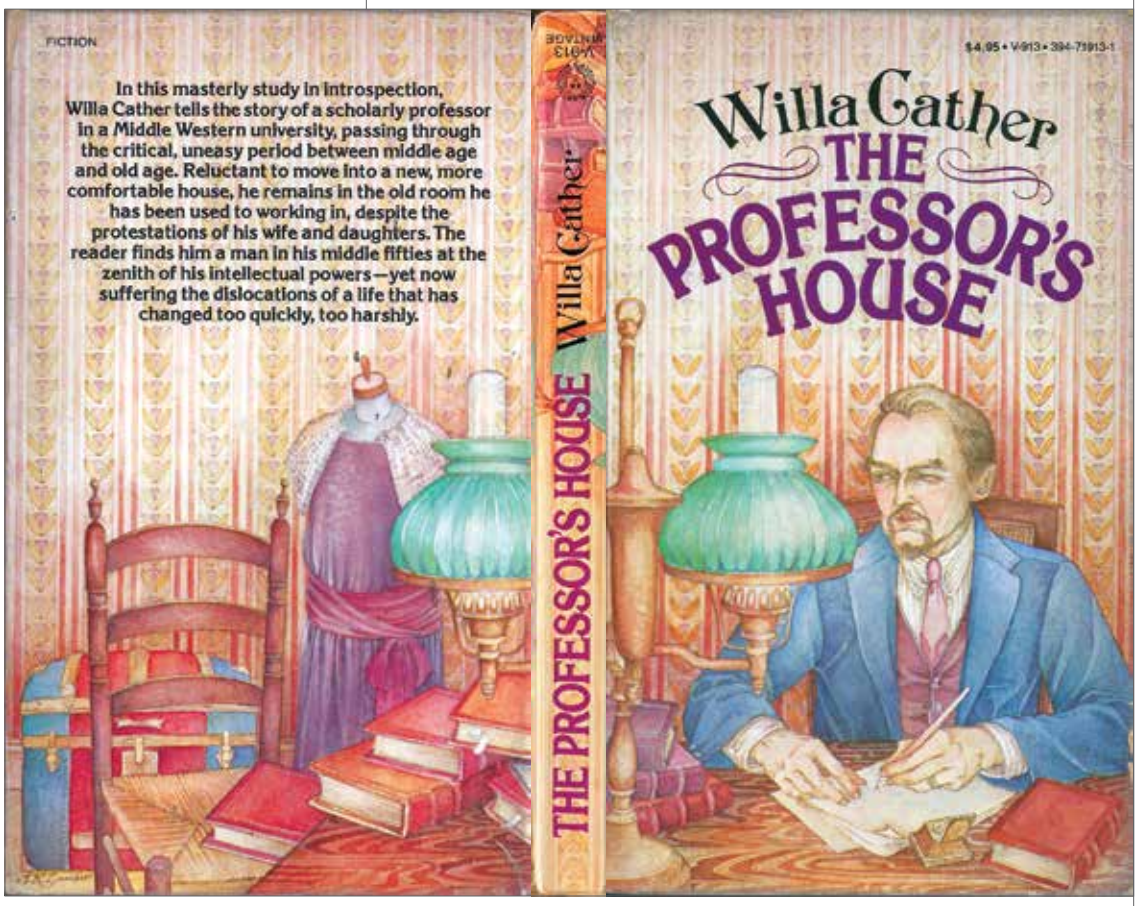

Cover art by J. K. Lambert for the Vintage Books 1973 mass-market edition.

Dear Readers,

My accomplished coeditor, Sarah Clere, and I are very pleased with the brief essays introducing this issue. We found them fresh, various, and provocative, offering new ways to consider *The Professor's House* in its centenary year. In my own 2025 rereading of this novel, I've found myself engaging with a character whom I'd barely noticed before: Augusta. As the essays came in, I found myself hoping that someone would engage with her. In the ten essays, I found only one paragraph and a scattering of sentences. I complained to Sarah–"why isn't anyone writing an Augusta essay?' And she replied: "Why don't you?" So I did. And here it is.

A. R.

Augusta

Ann Romines

Rereading *The Professor's House*, a novel grounded in the male Professor Godfrey St. Peter's point of view, I suddenly found myself—with increasing irritation, I admit—wondering: what are the women thinking in this book? And what are they saying to each other? The book is full of female characters: the Professor's wife, his two married daughters, the wives of his fellow professors at the state university where he teaches. There are apparently no women professors, although when Willa Cather herself attended a similar land grant university some thirty years before, she did have some female teachers. The Professor's university admits female students, but they never speak or are named in St. Peter's classroom, as male students sometimes do and are. The one time a female student actually appears on campus, she is the Professor's younger daughter, Kathleen. To her father, there is "something too plucky, too 'I can go-it-alone' about her quick step and jaunty little head; he didn't like it. . . . He would always call to her and catch up with her, and make her take his arm and be docile" (64). Even his wife, Lillian, with whom he fell passionately in love thirty years ago, is mentally inaccessible to readers. Only once do the St. Peters attempt a brief talk about their having fallen out of love. (See John Flannigan's interesting analysis of this scene.)

There is one striking exception to this female silence, however: Augusta, the sewing woman who has long shared St. Peter's scholarly workplace on the dilapidated third floor of the old rented house that he refuses to abandon for their new house, apparently designed and decorated by his wife, that his latest literary prize has paid for. Augusta sews for St. Peter's daughters and wife in the same shabby and poorly ventilated room where he wrote his prize-winning series of eight books about exploring men. The documents of the Professor's extensive international research are stored in the same room, in a shared trunk, with Augusta's patterns and fabrics and sewing notes. And her largest and most visible dressmaking tools—two female dressmaker dummies—are prominently visible in the shared workroom. Often dressed in bright new dresses in the making, they are as "docile" as St. Peter wants daughter Kathleen to be.

When Augusta attempts to remove the two dummies to her larger and more convenient new workroom in the new house, St. Peter vehemently refuses: "Go and buy some new ones, for your airy atelier, as many as you wish. . . . Go buy, but you can't have my women. That's final" (22). He loves his women's consistent, constant silence. But Augusta herself is not always silent. For example, when she is packing up her thirty years of patterns to move to the new house, she says to the Professor, "When I first came to sew for Mrs. St. Peter, I never thought I should grow gray in her service." The Professor is amazed. "What other future could Augusta possibly have expected?" (23–24). A German immigrant who is devoted to her German Catholic church and its congregation and has other clients for sewing and occasional nursing, Augusta is "tall, large-boned . . . with a plain, solid face, and brown eyes not destitute of fun" (24). St. Peter simply cannot imagine that a woman who looks as ordinary as Augusta would imagine any life for herself other than the well-done labor for which she is paid three dollars a day. But, when she seems to feel the matter is important, she does not hesitate to reproach him—as no one else in the novel except his wife does. For example, she criticizes his critique of religion in his lectures to the "boys" in his classes.

On Christmas morning, Augusta and St. Peter meet on the street, she departing from an early Mass at her church and he on the way to his old house, where he will spend a welcome solitary day in his study. Walking together, they discuss the Professor's limited religious education. He has always thought the Magnificat was about the Virgin Mary, not written by her.

Augusta replies: "Oh no, Professor. . . . Just as soon as the angel had announced to her that she would be the mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin composed the Magnificat" (98–99). Politely, St. Peter does not contradict her, but once he is alone, he thinks with amusement of how unlikely it is that a young woman could have written a text as complex and beautiful as the Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55), which he had probably assumed was the work of one of the male authors of the New Testament, Luke. In fact, none of the females of this novel (with the exception, of course, of its author) is a publishing writer, including the Professor's well-educated wife and their daughters. However, many of the male characters do write and publish, and the Professor, having recently completed a series of eight scholarly books, is now struggling to edit, introduce, and prepare for publication "Tom Outland's Story," a story very much enacted and written by men. In fact, there is no evidence that St. Peter has read any texts by women (except, presumably, the papers of his female students). His research seems to have been grounded in texts and books by men.

How could Augusta have learned to see the Virgin Mary as a writer, while St. Peter cannot? One possible answer is visual art, images she might possibly have seen in Europe as a girl or young woman, before her immigration, and also been exposed to (through reproductions?) in her beloved U.S. church. Janice Anderson, writing about illuminated manuscripts painted in Europe in the 14th-15th centuries, explains that artists were required to always portray certain iconographic Christian figures in the same way. One of the most important of such figures was Mary, who was to be painted with an open devotional book in any depiction of the Annunciation (35). Such images, often stunningly artful, do indeed portray young Mary reading, sometimes writing as well, and often surrounded by multiple books. It is not difficult to imagine this apparently scholarly young woman as a skilled writer. Augusta herself has a "much-worn religious book that she always carried in her handbag" (277), perhaps replicating Mary.

Jean Bourdichon, *Manuscript Leaf with the Annunciation from a Book of Hours*, ca. 1485–90. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Peter Sharrer, 2004.

It is Augusta, of course, who saves St. Peter's life when he has fallen, unconscious, in a room filled with poisonous gas. She drags him into fresh air, calls his doctor, and—at his request—sits silently with him as he rests and begins to recover, reading from her treasured 'little religious book'" (279). "It occurred to St. Peter . . . that he would rather have Augusta with him just now than anyone he could think of. Seasoned and sound and on the solid earth she surely was, and, for all her matter-of-factness and hard-handedness, kind and loyal. He even felt a sense of obligation toward her"—while he no longer felt "any obligations toward his [largely female] family. . . . There was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (281).

To me, the "world full of Augustas" does not seem to be specifically, socially gendered. Early in the book, when Augusta laments her thirty years spent sewing for his wife, the Professor offers a comforting compliment: "What a fine lot of hair you have. . . . I think it's rather nice, that grey wave on each side. Gives it character" (24). This is a compliment specifically aimed at an aging woman whose hair is whitening. But his final compliment of Augusta is one that would honor either a woman or a man: she is "seasoned and sound . . . kind and loyal."

At this point, I began to wonder about Cather's suggestive choice of Augusta's name. (Unlike the novel's other characters, she has only one.) "August," as an adjective, signifies "venerable, majestic, dignified," and "inspiring respect." It can also be a male name or—with the simple addition of another "a," a female name. All the female names in the Professor's family are specifically and exclusively feminine.

And yet, at this novel's end, we can see how closely St. Peter is identifying himself with Augusta. He has just described her as "seasoned and sound and on the solid earth." In the novel's last paragraph he concludes that his own "temporary release from consciousness [which, except for Augusta's rescue, would have been permanent] seemed to have been beneficial" (282). He no longer feels obligated to his family,

but he does feel "the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* [on which his wife, son-in-law, and pregnant older daughter are sailing home to the new house] and the future" (283).

Like the Augusta he newly recognizes (or imagines?), St. Peter feels solidly grounded. And the future he will face will probably be at least partly Augusta's future as well; she will likely be sewing garments and diapers for the coming grandchild.

In his 2001 book, *Willa Cather and Others*, Jonathan Goldberg notes the initial "misogynistic hostility so often on the lips and in the thoughts of the professor" (146) which has distressed me in my latest rereading of this novel. And, like me, Goldberg finds it "worth pausing over Augusta, too often treated as a [stereotypical] figure of maternal rescue and reconciliation." He argues that the Professor's "female-identified moments, or his bonding with Augusta, arguably hint at a potential movement across gender and sexuality, and in the direction of Cather and Edith Lewis," partners for forty years (147).

In his "Preface," Goldberg identifies as a gay man and writes in the context of queer studies. I am a heterosexual woman, grounded in gender studies. And I entirely agree with Goldberg's argument. So I will end by seconding his suggestion and saying, consider Augusta.

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From the Contemporary Reviews

Presumably one should expect a queer, unusual book from Willa Cather. Here it is—a study of a professor who, having achieved his life's masterpiece in the form of a history in eight volumes, suddenly realizes that he has no further use for life. . . .

A. Hamilton Gibbs, "Contamination of Rewards: Willa Cather's Portrait of a Professor to Whom Success Was Extinction," *New York Evening Post Literary Review*, Sept. 5, 1925.

The story is slow discovery by Professor St. Peter—of himself. His family have moved with proserity to a new house, but he clings, hardly knowing why, to his attic in the old house, beside the dress forms where August, the sewing woman used to drape the young girls' dresses. Why is he happier there than in the new house? Why does his family begin to weigh upon his nerves?

Henry Seidel Canby, "A Novel of the Soul," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Sept. 26, 1925

"All of the arts have design, but it's more obvious in painting and in music. This story is built like a piece of music, the theme of St. Peter, then the theme of Tom Outland, and the last part of the book the mingling of the two themes."

Cather quoted in Fanny Butcher's "Willa Cather Tells Purpose of New Novel," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 12, 1925.

The Professor's House has been declared "unsubstantial" beside *One of Ours* and *A Lost Lady*. Perhaps, but as a metaphor for that imperceptible reversal of adolescence that comes over all men, which they call middle-age and which is tragic or not, according as their lives have been spent with our without spirit, it is crystal clear, thoroughly native, unforgettable.

"Empty House: Miss Gather's Clear Native Metaphor for Middle-Age," *Time*, Oct. 12, 1925, unsigned.

If one were a draughtsman, it would be an interesting and and active exercise to make a design which should depict the very curious course of the narrative . . . . And surely at the heart of the design must stand the crystalline chapters called "Tom Outland's Story," the story of the little city of stone, asleep on the blue mesa—symbol of an ideal beauty not to be realized.

Ethel Wallace Hawkins, "The Atlantic's Bookshelf," *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1925.

Tom Outland never actually appears in the book. We see him through the eye of recollection, and in the words of his own story as he told it to the Professor. A strange story, sharing that quality of distinctness from most other stories which belongs to Miss Cather. But Miss Cather runs away with him.

Moses Harper, "Americans All," *New Republic*, Sept. 16, 1925.

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From *The Professor's House* (1925) to *Grounded in Clay* (2022): Representing Ancestral Pueblo Pottery

Lizbeth Strimple Fuisz

In 1922, Willa Cather's friend and biographer Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant hosted a party at her recently renovated home in the Tesuque Valley, near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Attending the event were fellow transplants to the region: Dr. Harry Mera, a county health official and amateur archaeologist; Wesley Bradfield, a curio dealer who had become an archaeologist and museum curator; and Kenneth Milton Chapman, an artist who worked at the Museum of New Mexico with Bradfield and who was an authority on Pueblo pottery design (N. Lewis 173; Chapman and Barrie 174–76; Fricke 76–79). Like other Anglo-American visitors to the Southwest at that time, Sergeant had purchased Pueblo pottery to decorate her home. One of Sergeant's favorite pieces, a large Zuni Ashiwi Polychrome water jar from around 1720, had been broken and left on the porch where it attracted the party's attention (Fricke 77). The damaged pot symbolized to Sergeant and her guests the dangers facing Pueblo pottery: the dispersal of the best pieces to distant museums and private collections and the perceived decline in production due to the tourist trade. This broken pot stirred the group to action, and they formed the Pueblo Pottery Fund. Sergeant and her cofounders wished to create a collection of Pueblo pottery of the highest quality that would contain examples from each of the Pueblos in New Mexico and from the Hopi villages in Arizona, a collection that would stay in Santa Fe to serve as a reference library for Native potters and scholars of their work (Fricke 190, 194). This collection, they believed, could be used to educate both the producers and consumers of Pueblo pottery, reducing the interest in cheaply made ceramic souvenirs that they felt were ruining the craft (Fricke 50). In 1925, the Pueblo Pottery Fund was reorganized as a nonprofit and renamed the Indian Arts Fund (IAF), to which Sergeant eventually donated eight pots and one carved figure (N. Lewis 173). The catalyst for the fund, the Zuni *k'yabokya de'ele* (water jar), was repaired and became the first accession of the collection, IAF 1 (Poon 7; in this publication, see page 22). Over time, the fund's collection has played an instrumental role in changing how collectors and the general American public understand Pueblo pottery as more than utilitarian cookware, ethnographic object, or tourist souvenir (Fricke 24). The collection has also become, as its founders intended, a resource for Native potters as when it was utilized by guest curators from the Pueblo Pottery Collective to express Pueblo perspectives on Ancestral and contemporary pottery in the exhibit and accompanying catalog entitled *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* (2022).

Cather had inspired Sergeant's interest in Ancestral Pueblo pottery.[1] In *Willa Cather: A Memoir*, Sergeant describes a 1914 visit she and Cather took to an exhibit of "some cliff-dweller finds" at the American Museum of Natural History in New York (132), which most likely included Ancestral Pueblo pottery taken from Mesa Verde by the Wetherills (Harrell 32). At the exhibit, they saw "tan pots with rigid designs in relief, and great black and red pots with complex geometrical patterns" that had been excavated by "hard-boiled archaeologists" (133). Sergeant explains that one could "conjure up the women who, under conditions of incredible difficulty and fear of enemies, had still designed and molded them, 'dreamed' the fine geometry of the designs, and made beautiful objects for daily use out of the river-bottom clay" (133). Sergeant records Cather's ability to use language to bring to life the Ancestral makers of the pottery, and Cather's appreciation for the pottery's beauty suggests the aesthetic standards by which Sergeant and her fellow founders will later select works for the Pueblo Pottery Fund. Cather created two characters in her fiction who recognize the beauty of Ancestral Pueblo pottery: Thea Kronberg in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and Tom Outland in *The Professor's House* (1925). Thea responds to the pottery fragments she finds in the cliff dwellings in Arizona as a fellow artist, recognizing the care lavished on the creation and decoration of the water jars. In his evaluation of the pottery found on the Blue Mesa, Tom combines the specialized knowledge of the scientist with the discerning eye of the artist, the same qualities Sergeant and her cofounders felt were necessary to counter the taste in popular souvenir ceramics and preserve the tradition of Pueblo pottery making.

Later in the memoir Sergeant explicitly connects *The Professor's House* to the Pueblo Pottery Fund. Sergeant explains that, in 1925, she received an early copy of the novel from Cather, who inscribed it, "'To Elsie hoping she will like Tom Outland's story'" (224). This inscription suggests that Cather thought Sergeant would find the center section of the novel especially

relevant to her, and Sergeant's interpretation of Book II of the novel confirms Cather's hope. Sergeant offers a laudatory account of Tom Outland's archaeological work, describing him as an "incipient scientist" who carefully excavates the Ancestral site and who acts appropriately in declaring "his finds" to the authorities in Washington (227). She terms Outland the "trustee" of the excavated items who "did not feel the pots were his to sell" (228). Sergeant's interpretation of Book II concludes with an extended parenthetical comment that I quote in its entirety: "(Incidentally the present Laboratory of Anthropology derives from the Pueblo Pottery Fund, founded in 1922 to provide money for the local purchase and collection of *just such fine prehistoric pots* from shepherds, cowpunchers and Indians who otherwise sold them to scouts for museums in the East or in Europe)" (italics added 228). This aside indicates that Sergeant indeed enjoyed Tom Outland's story, seeing in him a kindred spirit who collected pottery responsibly for the common good and with the intention of keeping the pottery out of the hands of foreigners. Sergeant suggests that neither she nor Tom is mercenary in their collecting habits and that they are driven by their recognition of the fine quality of the pieces. Ultimately, Sergeant interprets Tom's experience as it is presented in the novel, as "a story of youthful defeat" (227).

This essay unpacks Tom's story by exploring Cather's complex portrait of the settler colonial processes of excavating, collecting, documenting, and preserving Ancestral Pueblo pottery in *The Professor's House*. Centering Indigenous voices and critiques of archaeology and anthropology in this discussion illuminates the extractive nature of the work Outland and his companions undertake on Blue Mesa as well as the appropriative relationship Tom has to the material culture they excavate. In the novel, Tom is depicted repeatedly in the company of the excavated pottery, which he understands to encapsulate the essence of its Ancestral Puebloan creators, telling the St. Peters, "Nothing makes these people seems so real to me as their old pots, with the fire-black on them" (118). In fact, Outland makes an indelible first impression on Professor and Mrs. St. Peter when he unveils an Ancestral Pueblo water jar in his possession, the extraordinary quality of which is immediately apparent to them (118). Although Outland deeply appreciates the artistry of the pottery he mines from the Blue Mesa and longs to connect with its Ancestral makers, his attempt to understand Pueblo peoples through their pottery results in failure. His desire to safeguard this pottery, while admirable, is also defeated. But what is also true, as demonstrated by the connection between Sergeant's participation in the preservation work of the Pueblo Pottery Fund and the collection's reclamation by Native curators in *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* (2022), is that these stories of colonial connoisseurship and Pueblo cultural survivance are intertwined. *Grounded in Clay* contextualizes Ancestral Pueblo pottery and gives voice to its makers in a way that Cather's novel could not; the catalog's essays and poems provide varied portraits of Pueblo pottery, demonstrating its enduring role in Pueblo life. The multiperspectivity that arises from reading *The Professor's House* and *Grounded in Clay* together offers readers a more comprehensive understanding of the beauty and power of Ancestral Pueblo pottery.

Archaeology in the Southwest

This essay builds on existing critiques of U.S. archaeology and the larger discipline of anthropology as practiced in the geographical region now called the Southwest. Anthropology in its current form encompasses four main fields: archaeology, ethnography, and linguistic and physical anthropology (Redman 10), and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists and ethnographers produced and disseminated a large body of knowledge about Southwestern Native populations and their ancestors while also aggressively collecting Indigenous material culture. Obtained by the U.S. through the Mexican-American War (1846–48), the Southwest region became a locus of archaeological and ethnographic exploration in part because of the numerous well-preserved Ancestral sites that existed alongside living Native communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 52). As anthropologist Audra Simpson (Mohawk) has shown, anthropology as a set of scientific practices only became possible through U.S. territorial advancement, which dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land and transformed Ancestral sites like those in the Southwest into data sets and national monuments. As Simpson demonstrates, these anthropological sciences were also tools through which the U.S. sought to establish and maintain control over Indigenous nations through the production of knowledge and the siphoning of resources. These sciences were implicated in a massive transfer of wealth from Indigenous communities to settler society. Extractivism, profiting by taking large quantities of resources with little concern for the impact on local communities, is often used to describe industries like mining and logging, but it is being "theorized in a more expansive way" to describe other types of settler colonial relationships to Indigenous peoples in the Americas (Norton 77). Applying the concept of extractivism to the collecting of Indigenous material culture by archeologists, anthropologists, and other preservation-minded individuals provides insights into the impact of such practices on Indigenous communities. As Nancy Parezo has explained, "The mere presence of the anthropologists and their trading goods, materials obviously desired by the Native

Americans, combined with the amount of materials taken out of the pueblos, rapidly changed the nature of the material culture inventory in each place" (25). In a story told by Kenneth Chapman, one of the cofounders of the Pueblo Pottery Fund, he records the response of renowned potter Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso) to his request to produce pots with Ancestral designs: "'Why, Mr. Chap," she said, '[y]ou ought to do better than we can, because you have been taking all our old pottery away from us and making pictures of it, and then sending it away, and we can't remember any of the old designs'" (Chapman and Barrie 148–49). Thus, as both a product of and a contributor to Indigenous dispossession, Southwestern archaeology and ethnography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be considered extractive projects. In the period 1880–1915, when archaeology and ethnography developed as intertwined practices in the Southwest, settlers were taking land, appropriating natural resources like water, establishing extractive industries like cattle ranching, and collecting Indigenous intellectual and material cultures and human remains on a massive scale, often by looting graves and Ancestral Puebloan sites.

At the time, Native peoples objected to the incursions of archaeology, which was recognized as a threat to their communities, as suggested in the comment by Maria Martinez above. As another example, when Mesa Verde was first excavated, Wap, a member of the Ute people on whose reservation the Ancestral site rests, protested the disinterment of Hopi bodies, which he believed would make the Ute people ill (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 74). Archaeologist Jesse Walter Fewkes, whom Cather met at Mesa Verde, encountered protests in his work excavating Hopi Ancestral sites in the 1890s (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 76–77). In 1906, when the anthropologist Edgar L. Hewett began excavating in Puyé, an Ancestral Puebloan site on the Santa Clara reservation, a delegation from the Pueblo protested the work, but it was allowed to continue (Scott 16–17; Colwell-Chanthaphonh 74). Heather Harris (Cree-Metis) sums up the distrust that has arisen in Native communities as a result of archaeologists' actions, of "having seen their [Native] understanding of their past denied; their oral histories subjected to derision; the lives, works and remains of their loved ones objectified; their past appropriated and misinterpreted; and their sacred places and things defiled" (39).

Ancestral Pueblo Pottery in *The Professor's House*

The representation of Ancestral Pueblo pottery in *The Professor's House* is woven into its depiction of Tom Outland as an amateur archaeologist whose lack of training in no way prevents his careful documentation and stewardship of the pieces he extracts. As Anne Raine has pointed out, the novel distinguishes Outland's scientific approach to the excavated objects from the mercenary behavior of others who wish to profit from the excavation (135). In doing so, Cather leaves unquestioned archaeology's scientific value, its unimpeded access to Indigenous places, and its right to interpret them. Thus, *The Professor's House* participates in the naturalization of the archaeological practices of excavating Ancestral sites, appropriating Ancestral Pueblo pottery and other items, and generating theories about them. I use the term "naturalization" to indicate the novel's role in the development of everyday understandings of these activities as science undertaken for the common good. As such, archaeology and ethnography are commonly understood to be disinterested, scientifically based practices that can be distinguished from the acts of looting or pillaging (Watkins 193). Indigenous scholars and their allies, however, have demonstrated the violence of such extractive scientific practices. Violence adheres to the assumptions that drive the excavation of Ancestral places, in the process of the physical removal and dispersal of the Indigenous items, in the generation of knowledge about the place, its people, and their works, and in the benefits that accrue to the main actors, such as the archaeologists and collectors.

Outland voices a major assumption guiding archaeological excavation when, in Book II, "Tom Outland's Story," he explains to Professor St. Peter how he first deduced the existence of an ancient site near where he and Roddy Blake were working as cowpunchers. Having extracted "some pieces of pottery, all of it broken, and arrow-heads, and a very neat, well-finished stone pick-ax" from a location in the winter grazing grounds, Tom concludes that the stone tools indicated the existence of an older civilization: "Of course, we both knew there had been Indians all over this country, but we felt sure that Indians hadn't used stone tools for a long while back. There must have been a colony of pueblo Indians here in ancient times: fixed residents, like the Taos Indians and the Hopis, not wanderers like the Navajos" (192). As suggested by his use of the past tense, Tom assumes that the place where he is working is "an empty country" filled only with the remnants of a long-dead people, disconnected from living Native communities like the Taos, Hopi, or Navajo peoples (192). This type of assumption undergirds the work of many archaeologists. For excavation to take place, a place must be "transformed into discontinued, dead archaeological space" that has been "spatially removed from the descendants of those who left behind what is being investigated" (Wobst 22). Thus, when Tom later encounters the cliff dwellings on the mesa, he can begin excavating in the firm belief that the people of the community who built these places are dead, or, as he says, "I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries" (200).

“Artist Once Known”

In museum collections, the attribution “Artist Once Known” is increasingly used in place of the “Artist Unknown” label to signify that the maker of the object was a respected member of her community and continues to be valued by descendent communities, as demonstrated in the *Grounded in Clay* essays discussed here. This label reflects the ongoing collaboration between tribal communities and museums to redress the inaccuracies, erasures, and other forms of violence appearing in the settler colonial practices of collecting, exhibiting, and preserving Native material culture.

This pot, once owned by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, catalyzed the formation of the Pueblo Pottery Fund.

Artist Once Known, K'yabokya de'ele (Zuni Water Jar), ca.1720, clay and paints, 22.9 × 33 cm (9 × 13 in.).

Photographs by Peter Gabriel Studio, courtesy of Peter Gabriel Studio/School for Advanced Research.

These two are the objects discussed by guest curator Lorraine Gala Lewis in *Grounded in Clay.*

Left: Artist Once Known, Mesa Verde Ladle, c. 1150–1300, clay and paints, 5.7 × 30.1 × 14 cm (2-1/4 × 11-7/8 × 5-1/2 in.).

Right: Artist Once Known, Mesa Verde Mug, ca. 1150–1300, clay and paints, 11.5 × 10.2 cm (4-1/2 × 4 in.).

This is the bowl discussed by guest curator Joseph Aguilar in *Grounded in Clay*.

Artist Once Known, Tewa Bowl, c. 1690–1700, clay and paints, 16 x 41 cm (6-5/16 x 16-1/8 in.).

The dehumanizing violence of that belief, that these places are ruins unrelated to living communities, is clarified by Porter Swentzell (Santa Clara Pueblo/Khap'o Owingeh):

> It is important to note that these "sites" are not merely "ruins." They are places where people lived for generations—places where people shed the strength of their arms, their legs, their breath, and their hearts. When people do that, they are forever a part of that place, no matter how much time has passed. The ground still murmurs with the treading of their feet, and the air carries the sounds of their voices and songs. Visiting these "ruins" must be conducted as though the occupants were still there—because they are. (76)

Mesa Verde, the historical inspiration for Tom's Blue Mesa, is one such place that is connected to Indigenous peoples of the Southwest. For example, Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, founding and long-term director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, has described the Hopi's deep connection to the Mesa Verde region, concluding: "We don't abandon these sites" (Kuwanwisiwma and Bernardini 80).

Due to their assumption that the site is dead and disconnected from the living, Tom, Roddy, and their cook Henry Atkins feel no hesitation about excavating the cliff dwellings and extracting items located there without consulting anyone about their right to do so. In the time in which the novel is set, many archaeologists similarly felt entitled to excavate. As archaeologist Joe Watkins (Choctaw) explains, "The archaeological profession has been intent on operating from the worldview that the rights and wishes of science outweigh that of particular cultural groups" (201). Watkins calls this worldview "scientific colonialism" which "co-opt[s] the heritage of indigenous populations through an apparent perception that the information is a resource for the taking by those specially qualified to understand its hidden meaning" (201). That Tom sees scientific justification and value in the work they do on the mesa is indicated in the repeated desire to have professional archaeologists confirm the importance of what they have excavated (214, 220, 223). That Tom co-opts and takes ownership of this place is indicated in his repeated usage of possessive pronouns, the cliff dwellings being called "our discovery," "our find," and "our city" (203, 215, 211).

In addition to these assumptions, the novel suggests that the violence of extractivism also adheres to the physical removal of the items from the archeological site. The act of digging is a leitmotif in "Tom Outland's Story" (192, 205, 210, 223, 238, 243) and the intrusive nature of excavating and removing items is indicated by the need to clean up the archaeological site. Tom explains that he and Roddy "cleared up any litter we'd made in digging things out" before Tom goes to Washington and later Tom "worked at clearing away the mess the German [Fechtig] had made in packing—tidying up the ruins to wait another hundred years" (221, 250). These descriptions accurately reflect the haphazard nature of archaeology fieldwork in the Southwest in this period, when excavation and dispersal were likely to damage the pottery and other delicate items (Parezo 17). The fragility of the pottery is underscored in the novel by Tom's concerns about leaving the Ancestral Pueblo pottery at the train station (118) and about taking "some good pieces of pottery—not the best" to Washington (224).

Historically, after uprooting Indigenous materials from their homelands, archaeologists and collectors transported them to geographically distant venues (Redman 240), an extractive practice that is incorporated into the novel. The Ancestral Pueblo pottery mined from the Blue Mesa ends up in the following locations: in the Professor and Mrs. St. Peter's Midwestern home (207); in Washington, D.C., in the possession of Dr. Ripley, "the authority on prehistoric Indian remains" (233); and in Europe in the possession of the German collector Fechtig (236–38). Thus, in the story, several settler colonial actors are implicated in the pottery's dispersal: the archaeologist, the private collector, and the museum. These outcomes reflect the massive collecting movement that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when thousands of items were mined from Ancestral Puebloan places and from their living descendants to form private and public collections in the U.S. and abroad. For example, from the 1870s–1910s, Smithsonian personnel collected an estimated 34,000-plus objects, many of them pottery pieces from living communities such as the Zuni, Hopi, Acoma, and Laguna, but some of them items removed from archaeological sites (Parezo 11–13). Some of the pottery pieces collected from living communities included Ancestral Pueblo pottery that was still in use (Parezo 20, 31).

The novel also represents how archaeology generates theories about Indigenous peoples based on their material culture. Although it appears "as dispassionate analysis, an objective effort to understand many groups of people" (Simpson 175), the knowledge produced by archaeologists and ethnographers often misrepresents the communities in question and ignores Indigenous ways of knowing, thus operating as a form of epistemic violence. Anthropologist Margaret Bruchac explains how collected Indigenous materials are "organized, analyzed, catalogued, curated, and interpreted" by anthropologists according to their own concepts and methodologies, often with little Native input, and these settler colonial theories about what

the objects mean and how they were used become authoritative (13). In the novel, as the Ancestral Pueblo pots are dug up and circulated, they accrue meaning as evidence of the superiority of the society that produced them. Following anthropological thinking of the time that hierarchizes societies by their stage in cultural evolution (Parezo 19), Tom ranks Pueblo societies as more highly evolved than the nomadic Navajo, who were perceived to be at a lower stage of development. There was also a belief amongst archaeologists and ethnographers that pre-contact pottery was superior to contemporary pottery, which was subject to outside influences (Parezo 22, 24). The reader is first introduced to Tom's theories about the pottery in Book I when, in response to a question from Mrs. St. Peter about Pueblo pottery, Tom answers, "I think the very best is the old,—the cliff-dweller pottery" (117). Tom then takes a pot out of his bag to demonstrate the cliff-dweller's superior craftmanship, "an earthen water jar, shaped like those common in Greek sculpture, and ornamented with a geometrical pattern in black and white" (117). This description is echoed in Book II in Father Duchêne's estimation of the pottery: "The shapes and decoration of the water jars and food bowls is better than in any of the existing pueblos I know, better even than the pottery made at Ácoma. I have seen a collection of early pottery from the island of Crete. Many of the geometrical decorations on these jars are not only similar, but, if my memory is trustworthy, identical" (218). Positioned as an expert in these matters due to his long familiarity with living Pueblo communities, their cultures, and their languages, Father Duchêne confirms Tom's belief in the exceptionality of the cliff-dweller's pottery. Rather than situating these pots within a Pueblo tradition, both Father Duchêne and the narrator employ a Western-art-history frame of reference in comparing the Ancestral Pueblo pottery to ancient European forms. Moreover, the chronological order of these remarks is reversed by the narrative, suggesting that Father Duchêne's speculation about the similarity between Pueblo and Cretan pottery, uttered first, has become an objective fact by the time Tom displays the pottery he has brought with him to the St. Peters. Thus, the way in which Father Duchêne's theories circulate in the narrative suggests how settler colonial knowledge production about Indigenous peoples works: speculation becomes fact through repetition, and non-Native frames of reference are utilized in interpreting objects.

The novel also suggests the role publication plays in the dissemination of settler-colonial knowledge about Indigenous peoples. St. Peter plans to publish Tom's diary, a record of what Tom, Roddy, and Henry found at the site. Tom describes the process they followed for ordering and categorizing the excavated artifacts: "We numbered each specimen, and in my day-book I wrote down just where and in what condition we had found it, and what we thought it had been used for" (210). St. Peter further describes this account: "There was a minute description of each tool they found, of every piece of cloth and pottery, frequently accompanied by a very suggestive pencil sketch of the object and a surmise as to its use and the kind of life in which it had played a part" (262). Tom's descriptions, theories, and illustrations act as ethnographic labels for the collection. Such exhibit labels, as Margaret Bruchac has shown, can "become tools of erasure when they replaced Indigenous identifiers" with settler colonial representation, which is the case here (13).

Using the pottery as evidence, Tom and Father Duchêne then construct what anthropologist Audra Simpson has called a "declensionist narrative," a story concocted by anthropologists like Franz Boas about the inevitable decline and eventual disappearance of Indigenous nations that aids settler colonial control of Indigenous populations and their lands (167). For Tom and Father Duchêne, the pottery of present-day Pueblos epitomizes this decline, as it is not as good as what was produced "before Columbus landed," when the Ancestral Pueblo pottery was last in use (118). Since pottery contains the essence of the people who make it, in their way of thinking, the decline in the quality of the pottery also signals a larger decline in the culture of Pueblo peoples.

Moreover, their theories about what happened to the cliff-dwellers sever Ancestral Puebloans from their living descendants. Initially, Tom theorizes: "This village had never been sacked by an enemy, certainly. Inside the little rooms water jars and bowls stood about unbroken, and yucca-fibre mats were on the floors" (206). Tom's authoritative "certainly" suggests the accuracy of his theory about the village's abandonment. Later in the narrative, Tom's theory is developed and confirmed, as he explains to St. Peter: "Father Duchêne suggested what [Smithsonian archaeologist] Dr. Ripley, in Washington, afterward surmised: that the tribe had been exterminated, not here in their stronghold, but in their summer camp, down among the farms across the river" (216). Constructed in this manner, the cliff-dwellers are a unique civilization with no descendants, their village abandoned due to a catastrophic attack. Archaeologist Michael Wilcox (Yuman/Choctaw) explains how this type of scientific theorizing functions to justify and legitimate settler colonial beliefs about the inferiority of Indigenous peoples: "Archaeology is the perfect source, a politically neutral data set from which social failure and contemporary marginality can be reverse-engineered" (123). Wilcox enumerates various strategies used by archaeologists in crafting these narratives of decline and collapse; they disarticulated the Ancestral Puebloans from their descendants by inventing fictional entities like the "Anasazi," ignored Indigenous

histories of migration in the Southwest, obscured the role of colonial powers in Indigenous dispossession, and treated sites as scientific objects "instead of a part of the living cosmogram of contemporary Pueblos and their neighbors" (124). These narratives, like those of Tom and Father Duchêne, are the products of the excavation of Ancestral sites and the theft of material objects.

The novel tracks how the extraction of the pottery benefits non-Native characters like Fechtig, who purchases the bulk of the collection, and Bill Hook, who is paid to haul the collection off the mesa. It is Tom, however, who especially benefits. The description of Tom's "princely gifts" (120) suggests the transfer of wealth that occurs through excavation and collecting. When Tom gifts Mrs. St. Peter a museum-worthy water jar, he makes an indelible impression. St. Peter recalls his wife's comment: "Well, this is something new in students, Godfrey. We ask a poor perspiring tramp boy to lunch, to save his pennies, and he departs leaving princely gifts" (120). Reflecting on the accurateness of his wife's observation, St. Peter repeats this description: "Fellows like Outland don't carry much luggage, yet one of the things you know them by is their sumptuous generosity—and when they are gone, all you can say is that they departed leaving princely gifts" (120). The adjectives St. Peter and his wife employ in these comments suggest both the high quality of the gift and of the giver. By bestowing valuable gifts, Tom demonstrates the quality of his character and earns their respect. In this passage, Tom's aesthetic appreciation for the pottery rather than its commercial value marks him as a connoisseur, which—coupled with his first-hand knowledge of Native peoples—suggests his expertise to his audience. Thus, the extracted pots benefit him personally in these interactions.

Tom's characterization melds the qualities of the scientist and the artist (Harrell). As a collector and steward of Ancestral Pueblo pottery, Tom personifies and naturalizes what Joseph Aguilar has called "the colonial mindsets of connoisseurship, anthropology, and art history," prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when collections of Pueblo pottery were being formed ("Asserting Indigenous Intellect" 11). In forming these collections, settler patrons asserted their knowledge of and claim over Pueblo pottery, which they believed was deteriorating and in need of saving. But what is also true about these collections is that they can be utilized by Native peoples for their own needs, as is the case with *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery*.

Ancestral Pueblo Pottery in *Grounded in Clay* (2022)

As addressed earlier, Cather's novel represents various ways in which Ancestral Pueblo pottery has been made to serve settler colonial interests, while historically there were objections to the excavation and appropriation of these materials. Indigenous efforts to change these extractive relationships have continued across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, with activism aimed in part at reforming museum collecting and exhibiting practices (Riding In). In our current moment, existing collections, many started in the heyday of Southwestern archaeology and ethnography, are being reworked to serve Indigenous interests. I focus here on one such project: *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery*, in which members of the Pueblo Pottery Collective curated an exhibition of pottery chosen from the collections of the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and from the Vilcek Foundation of New York. The IARC collection began as the previously discussed Pueblo Pottery Fund, cofounded by Sergeant and her friends. I specifically examine the catalog for this exhibit—published in 2022, a hundred years after the founding of the fund—in which the guest curators, all from Pueblo tribes of the Southwest, produce culturally relevant representations and tribally specific knowledge about the pieces. As Pueblo Pottery Collective member Joseph Aguilar (San Ildefonso) explains, these essays and poems demonstrate how pottery plays an important role in "the retention and transmission of certain aspects of Pueblo culture, history, and identity" ("Asserting Indigenous Intellect" 11). This exhibit and its catalog signal a reconnection of Pueblo people with their material culture, helping to reverse the extractive processes through which the collections were first formed, and it promotes epistemic justice by replacing settler colonial constructions with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

In the catalog to the *Grounded in Clay* exhibit, the short essays and poems by the guest curators that accompany their pottery selections decenter settler colonial archeological and art-historical theories about Pueblo pottery. The Native curators take control over the representation and interpretation of these objects, asserting their own knowledge about their communities, their histories, and their homelands. Many establish relational, genealogical, and place-based understandings of who they are as Pueblo peoples, rejecting racialized anthropological constructs of Indigeneity developed in part through the collecting and interpreting their material culture by outsiders. The curators assert their communities' continuity across time and space, producing their own histories of the Southwest. They reject the settler colonial notion of the "ruin" as a dead, abandoned space available for archaeological and ethnographic investigation (Wobst 22; Scott 12).

These intellectual moves, for example, are evident in the essays by the guest curator Lorraine Gala Lewis (Laguna, Taos, Hopi), who selected two pieces of Ancestral Pueblo pottery from Mesa Verde, a "Mesa Verde ladle" (ca. 1050–1300) and a

"Mesa Verde mug" (ca. 1150–1300), for inclusion in the exhibit (82–83; in this publication, see page 23). In her essays, Lewis, who is a potter, explains her connection to the Ancestral places of the Southwest, establishing a genealogical and place-based understanding of herself as a Puebloan. In "The Journey of a Little Clay Ladle," Lewis writes:

> For those who have come and gone before us, our creation of pottery shows our connection to the environment. Our ancient ones gave us a glimpse into their perspective on everyday life. I draw strength when I visit their home; I breathe the same air, walk the same paths, drink water from the same source, see the same sunrise, moon, and stars. I feel their presence surround me. They share their life with me. This is what I feel when I hold the ladle in my hand. (82)

Here Lewis links the past to the present and herself to her ancestors through the physical object, which catalyzes this acknowledgement of their relationship. In her piece on the mug, "Strength from Our Ancestors," Lewis expands on this connection: "I have been very fortunate to visit such historically important places as Bandelier, Puye Cliffs, Mesa Verde, and Chaco Canyon. I love walking the same paths as those walked by my ancestors, following their footsteps, feeling their presence, seeing pottery, and studying drawings. . . . In these surroundings, I always feel a sense of renewal and balance. This is reflected in my re-creations of ancestral pottery" (83). Asserting her place in a tradition of pottery making, Lewis counters the construction of these sites as dead spaces and rejects a declensionist narrative that represents the diminishment of Pueblo material culture and peoples over time.

Through their close study of the pottery, the guest curators also correct misconceptions about their material culture. For example, in reference to her selection of an "Acoma jar with bird designs" from the early 1900s, Erin Monique Grant (Colorado River Indian Tribes) explains that, when she first encountered the jar, "it was labeled with an incorrect description" that stated that the design on the pot was that of a fish (113). Grant conducted her own research, including discussions with relatives from Acoma, and determined that the design was "a thunderbird" (113). She concludes, "I state again: Pueblo voices should always be prioritized when one talks about, interprets, and exhibits Pueblo pottery" (113). Joseph Aguilar (San Ildefonso) elaborates on the problem of the existing collection labels in reference to the "Tewa polychrome bowl," circa 1690–1700, that he chose: "While we are certain that Tewa people created and used this bowl, the descriptor 'Tewa polychrome' has made American anthropologists comfortable making a number of assumptions about Tewa life that may not be in line with Tewa people's ancestral knowledge" ("Pottery's Burden" 27; in this publication, see page 23). Aguilar concurs with Grant in the need for Pueblo perspectives: "When understood through the agency of Pueblo people, pottery reveals the spirit of Pueblo people themselves" ("Pottery's Burden" 27). These essays act as exhibition labels that replace any misguided attributions or inaccurate assumptions by the patrons, collectors, and museum curators who have helped build and maintain these collections.

In accessing the "material wealth and technical knowledge" contained in these items (Krmpotich 160), the guest curators explain their appreciation for the skills of the original makers. Tazbah Gaussoin (Picuris, Diné/Navajo), for example, elucidates her experience: "As I continue my education and career in the museum field and learn more about the process of making pottery, so my knowledge of and respect for these master Indigenous artists grow" (109). Contemplating an "Ancestral Puebloan bowl" (c. 1150–1200), Ramson Lomatewama (Hopi) writes about what drew him to the bowl originally: ". . . it was about the intimate relationship taking root between me and the person who gathered the clay, prepared it, and shaped it. I felt a connection between us: two artists relating to our respective media, creating with purpose" (125). In expressing what close interactions with the pottery reveal, the Native curators contravene a settler colonial archeological and art historical practice of anonymizing the work of potters from the past, who under primitivist theories, were vessels of tradition, "rather than the owners, creators, or architects of the culture under consideration" (Watkins 201). Tara Gatewood (Isleta, Diné) recognizes the original maker of the "Isleta jar" she selected: "To see the marks of my ancestor's fingers across the pot is priceless" (102). From his personal response to a "Tesuque jar" whose representation of turkeys, or "*pindii*" in Tewa, made him smile, Tony R. Chavarria (Santa Clara) theorizes about the pottery's creators: "The potters of the past speak to us now and into the future. . . . They have passed on the knowledge, meaning, and responsibility of creating culture in clay. We must retain this practice because it is more than art; it is an integral part of who we are as Pueblo people" (52). Chavarria points to the centrality of clay in his understanding of himself as a Pueblo person.

Other curators make claims similar to Chavarria's about the importance of the clay itself to Pueblo values and ways of knowing. In one of the two essays that frame the catalog, Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha'p'o Owingeh/Santa Clara) tells the story of Jar Boy, "half clay, half human," which illustrates her community's close to connection to the land: "The details of Jar Boy's story may

change depending on the storyteller, but the theme is always the same: we come from the earth; we are the earth" (17). Naranjo Morse elaborates on how this connection is realized through pottery making: "From the moment we gather clay, our prayers connect us to the land, acknowledging a collaboration held sacred for centuries between human and clay. The clay offers herself, and we promise to make her proud. Cultural practices such as this have taught Pueblo people a way of life that is conscious and sustainable, even in more complex cultural times" (21). Like Chavarria and other curators, Naranjo Morse emphasizes that the knowledge of clay has been passed down: "We are composites of our ancestors. Lonnie Vigil and other contemporary potters credit their knowledge of clay to family members . . . who have freely shared their cultural knowledge with new generations of Pueblo people. The result has been the rich tradition of Pueblo pottery" that has sustained Pueblo people (21). She concludes: "Our ancestors gifted these traditions of clay work so that new generations are inspired to unearth culture, community, and their sense of self in the land from which they come" (22). Working the clay connects many of the curators to their ancestors and to their homelands, providing a sense of self and belonging.

Lastly, the essays are full of stories of the intimate connections the curators feel when in the presence of the pottery, with several that describe how the pieces speak to them. Reencountering a "Laguna/Acoma dough bowl" ca. 1830–50, Max Early (Laguna) explains, "The pottery bowl was a delight to examine. . . . It felt as if I had found a long-lost relative . . . and we were reacquainted. I whispered a greeting in my Keres language and asked the spirit of the bowl to tell me more about itself. To the Pueblo people, their pottery vessels have lives as individual beings of creation" (69). Observing a canteen ca. 1915 by Maria (Poveka) and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso), Evone "Snowflake" Martinez (San Ildefonso, Cochiti) describes her experience of the "spiritual presence" of the piece when holding it (138). She is given a childhood memory of "Ko'o Paa," the sister of Maria Martinez who would have contributed to the piece, possibly "the shaping, the sanding, or the polishing" (138). The articulation of these personal experiences threads through the essays, as the guest curators theorize what makes Pueblo pottery individually and collectively meaningful to them, the descendants of the original makers of these pieces. Such linkages between the past, present, and future suggest the resilience of Pueblo pottery traditions. Despite settler colonialism's active dispossession of Indigenous people's lands and material culture through mechanisms like archaeology and ethnographic collections, *Grounded in Clay* demonstrates that Pueblo pottery traditions have persisted and adapted over time and will continue to do so.

As a settler scholar, it's important to me to think deeply about which narratives have been given precedence and which ones can teach me new ways of understanding. Reading *The Professor's House* and *Grounded in Clay* side-by-side offers me a multiperspectival accounting of Ancestral Pueblo pottery. I appreciate opportunities like this one in which the research and writing processes have allowed me to reckon with forms of knowledge and representation that have informed and limited my own scholarship. In contemplating these representations of Ancestral Pueblo Pottery, I acknowledge the complicated histories of Indigenous–settler colonial relations in which the often-violent salvaging of Ancestral Pueblo pottery is bound up in the survivance of Pueblo traditions. I'd like to imagine Cather and Sergeant attending the *Grounded in Clay* exhibit. Maybe, as in 1914, Cather would be "tense and low-spirited" beforehand and then be buoyed up by the tremendous beauty and diversity of the pieces (Sergeant 133). Yet, rather than Cather "conjur[ing] up" the makers of the pieces with "her lyrical gift of speech" (133), maybe she would quietly appreciate the ways the living descendants of the original makers give voice to the pottery:

> Many journeys are embedded in the clay by those who created the vessels. When a pot is shaped, it is given life and carries the memories of its maker's life stories and songs. If you listen carefully, you may hear one of these stories. It may be for only a moment, and the sounds may be faint and distant, but if you listen closely, you may hear the pots recall a fragment of the many memories they hold. (Martinez 138)

NOTES

1. Unless I am quoting someone else's terminology or highlighting settler colonial constructions of Indigeneity like the "cliff dweller," I follow the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center's recommendations to use the terms "Ancestral Pueblo" or "Ancestral Puebloan" when referring to the ancestors of today's Pueblo peoples and the material culture they created.

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Cather's Cowboy

Robert Thacker

> To people who live by imagination at all, [the power of romance, recalled] is the only life that goes deep enough to leave memories.
>
> Cather, "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902), 280

Writing as part of a series published by the *Bookman* in May 1926 called "My Favorite Character in Fiction," Cather's near-exact contemporary Wisconsin author Zona Gale named Tom Outland, saying that her best response "is to name the one which is occupying my thought at the moment." Of him, she asks, "but what amour or personal adventure which Tom Outland might have had could be so emotionally thrilling as the passion and hope and the understanding which he puts into this quest?" Outland, she writes, "expresses the love of the unknown" which we all hunger for. "In him Miss Cather creates a living being, passionately pursuing an objective that has no personal taint" (323). A woodcut of Outland with the Blue Mesa behind him by Anne Merriman Peck accompanies Gale's essay. There Outland is but a young man, not a cowboy.

Tom Outland as imagined by the illustrator Anne Merriman Peck to accompany Zona Gale's "My Favorite Character in Fiction" in the *Bookman*, May 1926.

Yet cowboy he is, a fact that is my subject here, and more than that, once Outland discovers the Blue Mesa ruins he is, just as Gale wrote, a man on a quest. Here I want to assess just what sort of cowboys Outland—and his cowboy partner Roddy Blake—are. Through them, Cather took up the mythic presence of the cowboy, drawing upon its power, extending its contemporary significance, and also, ultimately, undercutting it. Thus I begin with the historical facts surrounding the discovery of Mesa Verde before looking at the contemporary myth of the cowboy as it was when Cather wrote *The Professor's House*.

In both an essay published in 1990 and his magisterial *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House* (1992), David Harrell describes Tom Outland's fictionalized discovery of Mesa Verde's Cliff Palace ruins in *The Professor's House* by asserting that "It is still a humble cowboy, a sort of western Everyman, who makes one of the grandest archeological finds of the century" ("Willa Cather's Mesa Verde Myth" 137; *From Mesa Verde 99*). In both cases Harrell is especially interested in the ways Cather took up the historical story of Richard Wetherill and Charlie Mason's discovery of the ruins in December 1888, writing that "If Cather knew these facts, she chose to rearrange them" (*From Mesa Verde* 99). She also uses them to create some of the novel's most evocative scenes. Analyzing this within "Tom Outland's Story," Harrell asserts that the "humble cowboy," the snow falling on Christmas Eve as Tom first glimpses the ruins while he seeks his wayward cattle, and Tom's later reverence for the mesa itself, are facts Cather saves from the Wetherill episode. Yet the true subject of "Tom Outland's Story" as she wrote it is found, just as Gale wrote in 1926, in the feelings of two cowboys, who together combine their resources and talents to make singular discoveries on the mesa. It is their quest.

Beyond the facts of the Wetherill find, Cather's tale of a romantic quest is her own. It is one that she had long contemplated and written before she had herself been to Mesa Verde, since "Tom Outland's Story" echoes a recurrent image of romantic yearnings and youthful discovery seen in earlier work, especially "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902) and "The Enchanted Bluff" (1909). Ladette Randolph writes that "the Outland story describes the discovery of priceless artifacts and the frustrated attempts of a well-meaning cowboy to garner serious attention from the nation's museums where they might be properly stored, forced instead to watch helplessly as they're sold to the highest international bidder." Howard Horwitz calls the 1888 discovery of Mesa Verde by Wetherill and Mason "an event so highly charged that it led to the passage of the Antiquities Act of 1906." Horwitz asserts that "The legend of Cliff Palace—a cowboy follows stray cattle to discover fabulous ruins on American soil—was a myth of America discovering the origins of culture." For Horwitz, "Mesa Verde both established American culture as aboriginal and defined American expertise as a folk legacy" (Horwitz 353–54).[1] So Cather had the place, Mesa Verde, and its discovery and drew on its history to create her own person for that discovery, Tom Outland. Just as Randolph and Horwitz note, the mesa as a long-abandoned place with its artifacts, discovered toward the end of

the nineteenth century, was a crux laden with powerful historical meaning. Cather realized as much and created the romanticized cowboys in "Tom Outland's Story" to embody that discovery.

But just why did she decide to make Outland a cowboy, a "humble" and "well-meaning" one, an everyman figure, "passionately pursuing an objective that has no personal taint"? An answer to this question lies in the ubiquitous presence of the cowboy as an emerging popular culture figure throughout Cather's lifetime, a mythic presence she adapted into Outland. As I have already written, Frederic Remington's ubiquity throughout Cather's youth is a compelling fact and, certainly, once she arrived at *McClure's* in 1906 his images and sculptures were unavoidable. Indeed, about ten years after his death in late 1909, she mentions him by name and also creates another artist figure in part modeled on him, Burton Ives in "Coming, Aphrodite!" (1920). In March 1908 when she was in Boston, Cather bought and had framed a group of prints for her brother Roscoe as decoration for his newly built home in Lander, Wyoming; among them was Remington's *Caught in the Circle* (1900) along with other images, one each by N. C. Wyeth and Maxfield Parrish. In her letter to Roscoe accounting for her success Cather calls these three "the real modern fellows" (*Complete Letters* no. 2057).

In 1912, returned from her well-known first trip to the Southwest where she had visited her brother Douglass in Arizona, Cather wrote to her friend the poet Louise Imogen Guiney and reported that the people she saw out there were "so outrageously over-nourished and self-satisfied and so busy living up to Owen Wister and Remmington" (*Complete Letters* no. 2021; see also Thacker "Then a Great Man in American Art"). Wister had published *The Virginian* in 1902; one copy was included among the Cather family books, while another was owned by Cather herself.[2] That novel, along with Remington's images and sculptures, defined the figure of the mythic cowboy from then until the present. As historian John Jennings has written in his recent study of that novel, "Wister, with his two accomplices, Frederic Remington and Theodore Roosevelt, literally created the popular image of the cowboy. The alchemy performed by these three is both fascinating and, in places, quite unexpected. Together they manufactured a myth that has been extraordinarily powerful and lasting" (xii). Jennings offers a historical prototype, a Virginian, for Wister's cowboy protagonist. Beyond her personal comments to others about Remington and Wister, whose works she knew, Cather was of course a Virginian herself.

By the time Cather got to *McClure's* in 1906, the West and the Western were omnipresent and certainly figured in the magazine she edited, wrote for, then ultimately managed from 1908–12.[3] When, years after *The Professor's House* was published, Cather wrote to a friend offering an explanation for the positioning of "Tom Outland's Story" as the second book set between St. Peter's personal and family story in the first and third books—that is, as she wrote, "inserting the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*"—she asserted famously that "I wanted to open the square window [often found in Dutch paintings] and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa." In "On *The Professor's House*" she acknowledges that Mesa Verde "actually was discovered by a young cowpuncher in just this way": "Dick Wetherell as a young boy forded the Mancos River and rode into the Mesa after lost cattle" (30–32). And Wetherell was, Cather knew, a cowboy, a "cowpuncher."

In one of the best critical commentaries on *The Professor's House*, Richard Millington has written that "if 'Tom Outland's Story' is a window, it is also a mirror, and meaning in that narrative, for all its absorbing authority, is also an effect of displacements and substitutions" (76). That is, Tom's feelings and actions are paramount in his narrative, but the tale does not offer what might be called a complete story. Given this, Tom Outland the cowboy is no mythic stereotypical figure alone, he *is* as Gale noted, "a living

Frederic Remington, *The Fall of the Cowboy*, oil on canvas, 1895. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Amon G. Carter Collection.

being, passionately pursuing an objective that has no personal taint." Combining these two observations, I would hold that Outland and his story reflect what Millington calls the "displacements and substitutions" around him—the pervasive pettiness of Book I, the lack of interest he finds in Washington, Roddy's misunderstanding of what they were about on the mesa—while also including the ambitious goals of romance Cather had envisioned in early stories. This is based primarily in what Cather was trying to do with the cowboys she created, and that involved the popularity of the cowboy in the American story. Arguably, Outland (and Blake) are model cowboys: loyal, honest, and committed.

Theatrical poster for the 1929 "all talking" film version of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, with Gary Cooper as the title character.

In *Picturing a Different West* (2007), Janis P. Stout's book on Mary Austin and Cather, Stout argues that Cather sought to portray in her fiction a "different west," that is, a region that includes cowboys, both real and mythic, but where they are not the primary focus. Similarly, Wallace Stegner offered much the same idea and wrote *The American West as Living Space* (1987). Stout and Stegner envision an alternative West apart from cowboys and their doings. So too "Tom Outland's Story" draws upon cowboys to make a different, more anthropological point about the Blue Mesa ruins. These two notions are just what readers find in the story, a tale of significant discovery by cowboys, a tale infused by what Cather called "the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa" through that open window she wrote of in "On *The Professor's House*." Departing slightly from Cather with his assertion that the story "is also a mirror," Millington sees her inserted *nouvelle* as "a moment of stunning depth and meaning followed by an equally stunning lapse into inconsequence" (71). Put another way by Roddy Blake just before he disappears from the mesa, from Tom Outland's life, and from the novel altogether, "it would all come to money in the end. 'Everything does,' he added" (243).

That Outland is a cowboy when he discovers the Cliff House on the Blue Mesa on Christmas Eve is, as I have said, a fact Cather got from the Wetherell story. Given the pressing weight of the Western myth—the myth of the cowboy—when Cather wrote Tom Outland's story, her decision to make Tom a cowboy, therefore, is both factual *and* mythic. The factual basis is one thing, but the mythic is another: there the feelings Tom had—those that Cather wrote about and that Gale perceived—are paramount; Tom's feelings define his character and animate the text as he pursues his quest and then tells his story to Professor St. Peter. Long gone in the novel's present, dead in the Great War, Tom is "a glittering idea" for the other characters, as Scott McGregor describes him in Book I (110).

Thus the cowboy myth was all around Cather when she established herself as a different sort of western writer. Yet its accoutrements are not wholly absent in her works. At the beginning of *My Ántonia*, for example, there is Jim Burden's mention of the dime novel he buys on the train west, "The Life of Jesse James," and at the Black Hawk station Jim thinks that Otto Fuchs "might have stepped out of" its pages (4–6). But this strikes as an acknowledgement of reader expectations before moving on to the story proper, to this "different" pioneering West. So too the circles on the prairies seen in *My Ántonia* putatively made by Native Americans. These acknowledgements of the Western myth's pull are both subtle and necessary to Cather's purpose in her second rendering of prairie pioneering. She knew she was writing about the West of the 1880s, which was frequently seen through the Western myth of the cowboy. And when she was writing *My Ántonia* she had already tried her hand at Tom Outland's Western story. Indeed, as John N. Swift has argued, for a time Cather thought about Outland's story in the vein of such writers of Westerns as Zane Grey. In "Willa Cather in and out of Zane Grey's West," Swift treats Cather in relation to the popular Western and suggests a variety of comparisons between the regions each writer offers; as such the two of us are covering some of the same ground. As he quite rightly asserts at the outset of his excellent essay: "In her fictions and elsewhere in her life Cather frequently invoked the landscapes and themes of the American 'Western': the Protean, multimedia genre, rooted in the fantastic inscription of European desires on the American continent and people, which achieved its most self-conscious and finished form in almost exactly the period of Cather's writing career, from Wister's *The Virginian* in 1902 to the midcentury films of John Ford and others" (1).

The leading voice of the American West during the twentieth century, Wallace Stegner frequently dismissed its most pervasive myth, the Western. Like Cather in 1912, he wrote of people "so eager to adopt and wrap themselves up in the myth," people who made far more of the cowboy, a "very mean, dirty, low-paid job," he once called it, than was warranted (Simons 30, 31; see also Thacker "Historical Memory"). Stegner also commented directly on Remington and Wister, asserting "Remington—active, restless, aggressive, ironic, as romantic as Wister but in less literary ways—was primarily an eye, a quick, accurate, unsentimental eye, and a hand that could record swiftly what the eye saw." For his part Wister similarly "set out, as Remington did, to preserve and record the facts of range life. But he wanted to do it in fiction, which outlives fact." As he differentiates between Wister's imagination and Remington's eye, Stegner makes this apt observation: "It was from the seed of fantasy and myth that the Virginian grew. He existed in Wister's mind before Wister ever saw Wyoming. What he saw there, and what Remington taught him, was documentation, corroboration" (Foreword vii, xiii). So too Cather with Richard Wetherill and Charlie Mason's 1888 discovery of Mesa Verde. A Virginian herself, Cather drew upon the feelings Wister used to create his Virginian's powerfully mythic character amid the western facts Remington had recorded to create another sort of cowboy altogether in Tom Outland.

During the time E. K. Brown was deep in his Cather biography in the late 1940s, he gave a series of lectures at the University of Toronto later published as *Rhythm in the Novel* (1950). Discussing *The Professor's House* there he offers the following sentence, one that has long struck me as absolutely right: "The surprise for the reader who really reads the novel is not the startling intercalated story: it is the strange third part" (77). Brown builds on this to end his discussion of the novel with the assertion that Cather's "arrangement and interweaving" of themes is like the sonata form; it leads to "the shock, the revelation in the final part, [which] are highly and stirringly experimental" (78). But what of the role of "the startling intercalated story," "Tom Outland's Story"? Brown passes it by in order to assert that in "the strange short third part" the "common quality between life in the Middle Western college town and life in the Cliff Dwellers' village is that both kinds of life end in death, we know how to measure them, the ancient and the contemporary."

Given this, it is "the startling intercalated story" that moves *The Professor's House* from the stuffy interfamilial pettiness of "The Family" to what Brown calls the "Great chords" that sound in "the strange short third part" of the novel (77). They sound there because of what Tom discovers in his life and on the mesa with Roddy, Henry, and Father Duchêne. Describing his feelings during his time studying on the mesa after he and Roddy have argued and Roddy has left, Tom tells St. Peter that "This was the first time I ever saw [the mesa] as a whole" (249). He continues, "For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion. I had read of the filial piety in the Latin poets, and I knew that was what I felt for this place. It had formerly been mixed up with other motives; but now that they were gone, I had my happiness unalloyed" (250). Tom studied, and he "didn't worry much about poor Roddy," and so was "frightened at [his] own heartlessness" (251). Tom also knows that he has betrayed his country's heritage and so lost his closest friend. But he was not "worried about poor Roddy" since he had "had his future unalloyed." Thinking back as he finally tells his story to St. Peter, he comments that "Troubles enough came afterward, but there was that summer, high and blue, a life in itself" (252). Seen another way, and further, by this point Tom's experiences in Washington and since discovering the sale of the mesa's artifacts, have undercut the centrality of his friendship with Roddy. Back from Washington, their previous relation is no longer that of cowboys.

Thus the mutual dependence of cowboys, shown in "Tom Outland's Story" through the relations of Roddy and Tom, is initially at the core of the story he told. The two meet and befriend each other through acts of individual generosity, the one to the other: Tom getting the drunk Roddy home with his winnings at cards, then getting him to deposit the money in a bank. Roddy reciprocating when Tom has pneumonia, quitting his job on the railroad, the two becoming cowboys and so discovering the Cliff Dwellers' ruins. Working together on those ruins in a methodical way with shared enterprise, but then arguing and going their separate ways, the two men are no longer cowboys. Tom's facile attempts to find Roddy and so reconcile are empty—each man's life taking a new direction, as Tom understands after his summer alone on the mesa, after having his "happiness unalloyed." Looking back as he ends his story told to St. Peter on a rainy night, told "before the fire in the dining-room" (174) to an empathetic audience of one, Tom says "But the older I grow, the more I understand what it was I did that night on the mesa." That is, confronting and blaming Roddy in ways the other does not understand, breaking their shared values, their shared trust. "Anyone who requites faith and friendship as I did, will have to pay for it. I'm not very sanguine about good fortune for myself. I'll be called to account when I least expect it" (252–53). Just as Tom anticipates, that accounting came through his death in the Great War.

As the "short strange third part" of *The Professor's House* begins and Professor St. Peter meditates on chance, on the boon that chance afforded him years before by Outland's sudden

appearance that day in Hamilton, when "into his house walked a boy who had grown up" "in the great dazzling South-west country which was the scene of his explorers' adventures." Outland was "a boy with imagination, with the training and insight resulting from a curious experience; who had in his pocket the secrets which old trails and stones and watercourse tell only to adolescence" (259). That experience was his youthful cowboy discovery of the Blue Mesa, an elemental revelation by chance which largely directed the balance of his life, and to a considerable degree that of Professor St. Peter too. The Professor recalls his visit with Tom to the Southwest when the young man used the copy of Fray Garcés's diary to guide them along the route the priest followed during the 1770s. He recalls their similar research visit to Old Mexico, and he regrets their planned but never accomplished trip to Paris together (259). Through these recollections on chance, Cather offers via St. Peter's point of view her salient characterization of the effects of the Great War: "Time, bearing away the youth who was struggling snatch his palm—or was it to lay a palm? Not that it mattered. It might have mattered to Tom, had not chance, in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself" (260–61). So Tom Outland has vanished just as his cowboy compadre Roddy has, though his vanishing is into death, the ultimate absence which awaits us all.

Writing about the style of *The Professor's House* in her brilliant *After the World Broke in Two* (1990), the late Merrill Maguire Skaggs commented that there Cather "deliberately keeps most attention on externals" and thereby "she conveyed what Tom can and cannot do: He can explore new territory, act decisively, collect data systematically and dependably; he cannot interpret reliably what he finds. For analysis he needs to go to Father Duchêne or to Washington to find 'an archaeologist who will interpret all that is obscure to us'" (*After* 67–68; *Professor's House* 220). Skaggs also points to the final sentence Cather offers to both end "The Family" book and to introduce "Tom Outland's Story," where she quotes the novel: "It was nothing very incriminating, nothing very remarkable; a story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about—until he grows older" (174). Skaggs asserts that it is a sentence which "reminds us that we cannot entirely or naively trust *any* sentence from the narrator who largely speaks from the Professor's point of view." Books I and III offer "syntax and style" that is "as complex as the Professor's mind—full of subordinate clauses and grammatical intricacies. Tom's story, conversely, like Tom, is straightforward, energetic, 'primitive'" (*After* 67; original emphasis).

When Gale wrote of Outland in *The Bookman* she asserts that through her cowboy protagonist Cather "creates a living being, passionately pursuing an objective that has no personal taint." That last word, "taint," is critical to Gale's sense of Tom's character and to the quest he is on, but more especially it gets at Cather's accomplishment through Tom's "intercalated story"; throughout her novel—which Cather characterized when dedicating a copy to Robert Frost as "'really a story of 'letting go with the heart,'" quoting one of the poet's poems back to him, all of Tom's experiences are paramount (Sergeant 215). That is, it is the meaning of Tom Outland's life which all the other characters seek to find, McGregor's notion of Tom as "a glittering idea." Tom, a cowboy linked with another cowboy, Roddy, each man described specifically as to characteristics, motivations, and goals, and each genuine; they are, each absolutely, as Stegner wrote, living "a life calculated to make a man careless of everything except for the few things he really valued." Or as he also said of the type, "They honored courage, competence, self-reliance, and they honored them tacitly" (*Wolf Willow* 136). Finally, when Outland at last tells his personal story—after holding it back for so long—to St. Peter who, as his empathetic audience of one, recalls it and "creates" the text of "Tom Outland's Story," it is a cowboy story of discovery, exploration, and revelation—far more sophisticated and complex than those usually found in the Western type, one "very remarkable" (174) in fact.

NOTES

1. Cather was doubtless aware of the relation between the creation of Mesa Verde as a park and the passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906 (see "Creating Mesa Verde National Park"). In addition to Horwitz's detailed discussion of the relation of *The Professor's House* to what he calls "the narrative of American anthropology," I would also suggest readers see Aronoff. See also Rosowski and Slote.

2. A 1904 edition of *The Virginian* is among the Cather family library held in the archives of the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud. Cather gave her mother a copy of Wister's *Lady Baltimore* in 1906 and, in 1912, a copy of *The Virginian* to "Auntie Sister"—Sarah Ellen Boak Seymour Andrews, her mother's sister—in 1912. That Cather owned a copy herself is confirmed by its listing on an inventory of her library Edith Lewis had made after Cather's death, now held in the Charles Cather Collection, University of Nebraska–Lincoln. I thank Melissa Homestead and Tracy Tucker for help with this information.

3. When Cather arrived at *McClure's* in spring 1906, she was immediately immersed in Western texts. For example, a survey of its volume 27 (May 1906–October 1906) shows it filled with classic Western material. There is a Montana story, and other such stories all illustrated with Western images by artists N. C. Wyeth and Ernest L. Blumenschein. Wyeth has the cover image of the September number for "'Montana': The Last Stand." The frontispiece opposite

page 451 is "The Prospector" in black and white, also by Wyeth. Between December 2017 and June 2018 I was able to study the bound *McClure's* held by the New York Society Library (vols. 1–32, 1893–1908) and found that Western fiction and articles, often with cowboy figures, were frequent.

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The Professor's House and the Value of Words

John Swift

Willa Cather scholars generally agree that her early career in journalism in Lincoln, Pittsburgh, and New York presented her with what James Woodress calls "a real question for an aspiring writer who had to hack out a living in journalism. Could one serve the gods of art and the marketplace without being corrupted?" (100). They agree also that by the autumn of 1908 she was answering that question with an increasingly firm "no." She had not exactly been "corrupted" by her attempt at double service, but, as she put it in a famous, anguished letter to Sarah Orne Jewett, "I have not a reportorial mind," and editing gave her "the kind of life that makes one feel empty and shallow and superficial, that makes one dread to read and dread to think . . . five years more of it will make me a fat, sour, ill-tempered lady" (*Complete Letters* no. 0145). It was actually three years before she made the break, leaving journalism and *McClure's* in 1911 to "serve the gods of art" full time.

I think that most Cather scholars would also agree, though, that the decision for art and the repudiation of the marketplace were neither as clear-cut nor as final as this story of choices implies. In this essay I consider the relationship of art—or, more specifically, written words—to the marketplace (and commercialism generally) in *The Professor's House*, published well over a decade after Cather left *McClure's*. It is Cather's most openly anti-materialistic novel, by her own account a reflection of a modern culture "crowded and overstuffed with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies" ("On *The Professor's House*" 31). It also appears to me an exploration, and in some ways a critique, of the minimalist aesthetic that she had proposed in 1922 in "The Novel Démeublé," beginning with the novel's opening pages' depiction of Godfrey St. Peter's literally unfurnished house. Serving an art that's somehow outside or above the marketplace of commodities is at best an elusive goal in *The Professor's House*—and that that may not necessarily be a bad thing.

Words in the Marketplace of Language

I will begin by revisiting a memorable passage early in "The Novel Démeublé" in which Cather distinguishes between "the novel as a form of amusement" and "as a form of art."

> One does not wish the egg one eats for breakfast, or the morning paper, to be made of the stuff of immortality. The novel manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people must be considered exactly like a cheap soap or a cheap perfume, or cheap furniture. Fine quality is a distinct disadvantage in articles made for great numbers of people who do not want quality but quantity, who do not want a thing that "wears," but who want change,—a succession of new things that are quickly threadbare and can be lightly thrown away. Does anyone pretend that if the Woolworth-store windows were piled high with Tanagra figurines at ten cents, they could for a moment compete with Kewpie brides in the popular esteem? Amusement is one thing; enjoyment of art is another. (36)

Her attack on mass production and consumption is clear enough, and with it Cather begins to assemble a set of oppositions—the fine and the cheap, the durable and the disposable, the rare and the common, quality and quantity—with which to frame her argument for simplification and excision in art.

But I'm particularly struck by the question about "Tanagra figurines" and "Kewpie brides." The former were ancient realistic molded statuettes, relics purloined from Mediterranean burial sites and prized by nineteenth-century museums and art collectors; the latter, wildly popular cherub dolls mass-produced as toys throughout the twentieth century. Cather's main intention in invoking them was presumably to voice a favorite complaint about the cultural illiteracy of modern audiences. But her choice of a specifically *economic* terminology, the fundamental principle of supply and demand (whereby scarcity drives up the prices of goods), suggests an unexpected materialism, and perhaps an accompanying anxiety, at the beginning of her argument. It raises unsettling possibilities: is any artwork indeed simply a commodity, like other commodities, whose value is established in the market? Is artistic greatness then merely passing fashion? Is "high art" the product of socioeconomics rather than the creative imagination? Three years after "The Novel Démeublé," she returned to these questions and brought them into the foreground of *The Professor's House* in an extended inquiry into the value (in all senses) of words.

The novel concerns writers and their work, and I will focus on three: the popular journalist Scott McGregor, the scholar Godfrey St. Peter, and the diarist Tom Outland. Scott's work—a syndicated daily prose poem and "uplift" editorial—very clearly

serves the gods of the marketplace. "Manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people," it is priced accordingly: "twenty-five beans" per poem, Scott tells his sister-in-law Rosamond, who "detested to hear sums of money mentioned, especially small sums" (45–46). He recites for her a sample prose poem of just twenty-five words:

> "When your pocket is under-moneyed and your fancy is over-girled, you'll have to admit while you're cursing it, it's a mighty darned good old world." (46)

At a mere dollar each, these words may indeed seem "cheap." But cheapness is in the nature of syndication, which generates profits by the mass marketing of relatively inexpensive written products. Cather knew the practice very well; her employer and friend S. S. McClure claimed to have invented newspaper syndication in the U.S. in 1884, and she had ghost-written his detailed account of that invention in his autobiography in 1914.[1] So though Scott may complain that his daily writing chore "keep[s] my nose to the grindstone" (45), it has given him the income to marry Kathleen, and it buys them comfortable middle-class domesticity—a "spick and span bungalow," a Ford for him, modest furs for her, summer holidays in Oregon.[2]

St. Peter's salaried day job, his work in the lecture halls and committee meetings of the university, seems in some ways as commercial as Scott's writing. Like Scott, he took a demanding job early in his career "in order to marry at once" (51), and for twenty-five years he has labored dutifully (if not always passionately), "earning his living during the day; carrying full university work and feeding himself out to hundreds of students in lectures and consultations" (29). He complains to Horace Langtry that "we have hosts of students, but they're a common sort" (55), and Lillian chides him for "talking to those fat-faced boys as if they were intelligent beings. You cheapen yourself, Godfrey" (70). The university is evidently a kind of syndicate too, manufacturing cheap and easy education for the masses. But unlike Scott, St. Peter has an unpaid night and weekend job, the solitary writing of the *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, a scholarly project that he characterizes at its inception as "this dazzling, this beautiful, this utterly impossible thing!" (26). We never see or hear this work directly as we do Scott's prose poem, but Cather consistently describes it as the very antithesis of syndicated work, untouched by the cheapening processes of mass production and consumption. The project is "something quite different" from "the usual thing" (33): uncommon, singular, emphatically *not* for the masses, defying "all the foolish conventions" (34), an "experiment" in which "a few young men, scattered about the United States and England, were intensely interested" (34).

In *The Professor's House* Cather has apparently distributed her own life's experiences, as a prolific commercial journalist and as a passionate acolyte of high art, between the characters of Scott and St. Peter.[3] Such a reading makes some immediate (if broad-brush) sense, but St. Peter's unhappiness, to which the novel persistently returns, raises another troubling question: is entering the service of Woodress's "gods of art" itself somehow a guarantor of unhappiness? Scott seems satisfied with his life as a popular journalist, despite his father-in-law's suspicions to the contrary. But St. Peter repeatedly expresses disappointment or regret, from his rueful observations of Augusta's dressmaking forms in the first chapter to the lonely moments "trying to see where he had made his mistake" (275) before his near-death at the end. Was his life's "mistake" in fact his passion for the fine, the rare, the uncommon in every sense? His answer, in the novel's final paragraphs, appears to be an oblique, resigned "yes," as he accepts the necessity of a life "without delight . . . without joy, without passionate griefs" (282).

St. Peter's unhappiness has three related sources, all of them having to do with the nature of words and language, the tools of his trade. First, in the course of *The Professor's House* he discovers to his chagrin that literally nothing—"no thing"—can rise above or escape the marketplace: written productions, like all representations, are material things, and all such things can be desired and possessed, and thus bought and sold. St. Peter's books are, as things, merely higher-priced versions of Scott's poems and editorials, written under less clearly stipulated terms. They too have brought him creature comforts—a new house, maidservants, a bedroom and bath of his own—and, despite his occasional ironic attempts to distance himself from "what were called rewards—among them, the Oxford prize for history" (34), those rewards have indeed made him a wealthy man in a world of commerce and consumption, a world where, as Roddy Blake says of the Blue Mesa's relics and all else, everything "would come to money in the end" (243).[4]

Second, while both words and money may result from and represent some idealized intention, they can never *recover* its original presence. St. Peter makes clear that what he values in his own writing is not the material representation—the product itself—at all, but rather the infinitely more precious (to him) generative idea, emotion, or creative desire behind and prior to the representation. When Lillian asks him if he would have preferred to spend his Oxford prize on something other than the new house, he responds:

> If with that cheque I could have bought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house. But one couldn't get that for twenty thousand dollars. The great pleasures don't come so cheap. There is nothing else, thank you. (34)

The "great pleasures" of this kind can't in truth be bought at all, because they aren't things but subjective ideas or private emotional states. To enter the marketplace as goods they must undergo translation into the material forms of language; they must become words.

Finally, this translation is always inadequate and inaccurate. Around the turn of the century, Ferdinand de Saussure insisted in his University of Geneva lectures that words acquire meaning only in public language ("*langue*"), "the social side of speech [utterance or "*parole*"], outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; [language] exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community" (14). The consequence of the social and contractual nature of language—an agreement among individuals to attach a single idea to any given word—is inevitable imprecision: "Among all the individuals that are linked together by speech, some sort of average will be set up: all will reproduce—*not exactly of course, but approximately*—the same signs united with the same concepts" (13, emphasis mine). Thus writing itself is not only a commodity, but also a necessarily imprecise and compromised version of the beauty or truth that it set out to portray. This is, of course, a pervasive theme in literature, arguably the main theme of early twentieth-century modernism, and Prufrock's exasperated complaint: "It is impossible to say just what I mean!"

Early in *The Professor's House* St. Peter, echoing the romantic confidence of *A Lost Lady's* Captain Forrester,[5] affirms the creativity of desire: "A man can do anything if he wishes to enough. Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process" (30). But the declensionist arcs of *The Professor's House*'s various stories (also like those of *A Lost Lady*) qualify that confidence drastically.[6] Early in the novel, St. Peter turns down Rosamond's and Louie's offer of a share of Outland's fortune, his struggling words encapsulating his dilemma:

> In a lifetime of teaching, I've encountered just one remarkable mind; but for that, I'd consider my good years largely wasted. And there can be no question of money between me and Tom Outland. I can't explain just how I feel about it, but it would somehow damage my recollections of him, would make that episode in my life commonplace like everything else . . . my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue. (62–63)

"Your bond with him was social," he tells Rosamond, "and it follows the laws of society, and they are based on property. Mine wasn't, and there was no material clause in it" (63). But "material clauses" are the literal stuff of sentences, and the translation of an ideal into "the vulgar tongue," the public, "commonplace" *lingua franca* that is any language, is simply what writers do: a betrayal of sorts, and exactly the betrayal that St. Peter proposes in planning "to edit and annotate [Tom Outland's diary] for publication" (168) during his summer without family. It's no wonder that he experiences a bad case of writer's block.

Tom Outland's Diary

Tom Outland's diary is presumably loosely based on *The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde*, the Swedish scientist/adventurer Gustaf Nordenskiöld's account of his 1891 exploration of Mesa Verde's "ruins": a detailed catalogue, with photographs, maps, and sketches, of the mesa and the relics that the Wetherill brothers were finding there, many of which he bought from them and sent back to Sweden, providing Cather with the model for the German Fechtig. Cather knew of the book and mentioned it in both her 1916 *Denver Times* article on her Mesa Verde visit and her 1938 letter to Pat Knopf (portions of which, very slightly revised, were published as "On *The Professor's House*" in *Willa Cather on Writing*); since Nordenskiöld had arranged for its translation and publication in English in 1893, it seems likely that Rosowski and Slote are right in assuming that she "knew it at the time of her visit" (87). *The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde* is a massive work of observation and description, crowded with detail, exhaustive and exhausting for the reader. At one point Nordenskiöld himself, looking out for that reader, acknowledges the overwhelming accumulation of things to be observed and described: "I photographed a few other ruins in Pool Cañon . . . but a description or figure of them would only be a tedious repetition of what the reader has seen above" (59).

St. Peter, however, reads Tom Outland's diary quite differently, in language that recalls Cather's at the end of "The Novel Démeublé":

> There was a minute description of each tool they found, of every piece of cloth and pottery, frequently accompanied by a very suggestive pencil sketch of the object and a surmise as to its use and the kind of life in which it had played a part. To St. Peter this plain account was almost beautiful, because of the stupidities it avoided and the things it did not say. If words had cost money, Tom couldn't have used them more sparingly. The adjectives were purely descriptive, relating to form and colour, and were used to present the objects

> under consideration, not the young explorer's emotions. Yet through this austerity one felt the kindling imagination, the ardour and excitement of the boy, like the vibration in a voice when the speaker strives to conceal his emotion by using only conventional phrases. (262)

Nordenskiöld's account of Mesa Verde is a profoundly material (perhaps even oppressively "over-furnished") catalogue; Tom's Blue Mesa diary, ostensibly identical in subject matter and technique, leads St. Peter to thoughts of "austerity" and the beauty of "the things it did not say," and eventually to an encounter with an immaterial presence very like that of "the thing not named . . . the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed" ("The Novel Démeublé" 41–42). How may we understand the dramatic distance between these two representations of the mesa, cliff dwellings, and relics?

Put simply, Tom's diary occupies an unusual position in the pathway that we have been considering, whereby ideas become material words and documents, their meanings delimited by the language community that uses them and their prices established in the marketplace. Like the words of the *Spanish Adventurers*, Tom's words are never seen directly by the reader of *The Professor's House*. But whereas Cather tells us clearly about St. Peter's work's reception and his own response to its success, Tom's diary has had no readers other than St. Peter himself. It is effectively a set of material signs—"signifiers" in Saussure's best-known terminology—awaiting entry via St. Peter's editing and publication into the social/commercial community where they will acquire public meaning and value. But in this waiting place, for the moment, St. Peter is free to find in the diary what he wishes, and he recovers "the thing not named" there: Tom, his own Tom. But as desire turns to public words, the diary will lose its magic and become more like *The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde*; it will become a meticulous catalogue of classified things, informative but repetitive, and even, at times, tedious. Most important of all for St. Peter, it will lose Tom's "kindling imagination, the ardour and excitement" that he senses without reading them on the page.

St. Peter will be complicit in this loss. He understands that for publication "he must write an introduction," because:

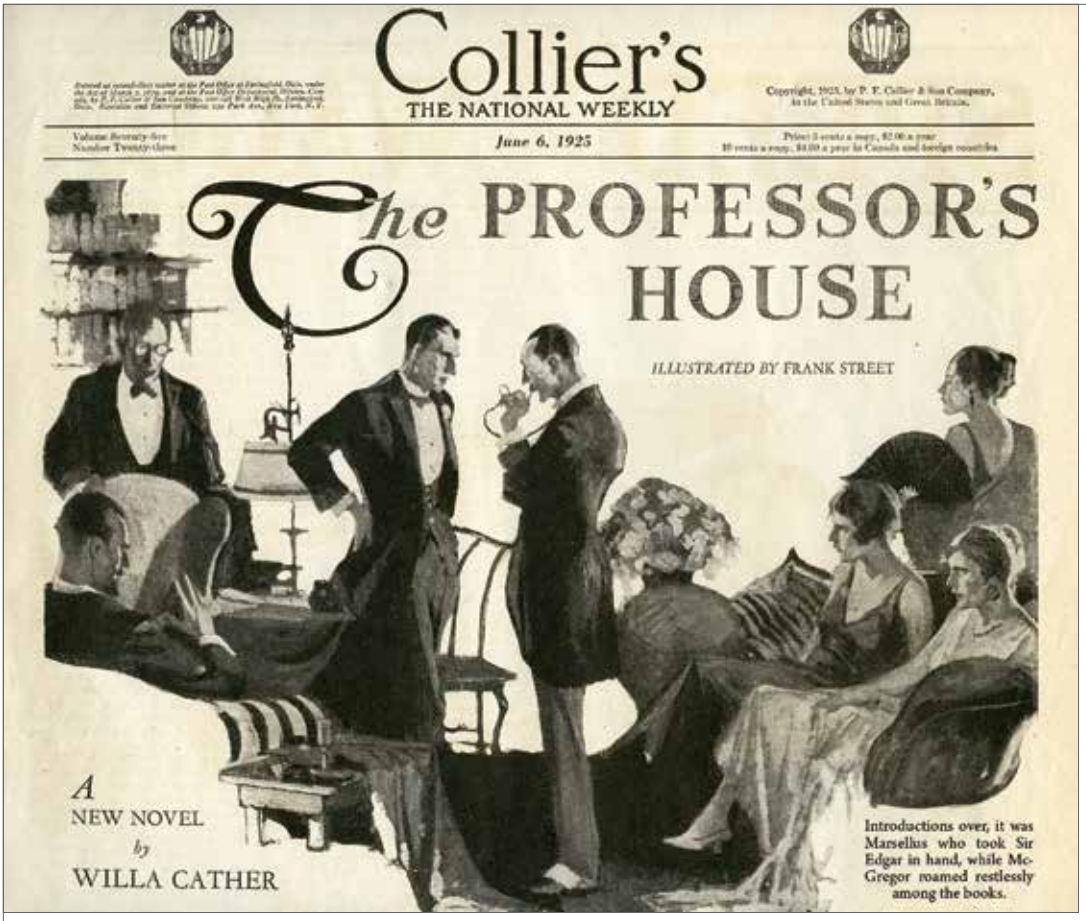
> To mean anything, [the published diary] must be prefaced by a sketch of Outland, and some account of his later life and achievements. To write of his scientific work would be comparatively easy. But that was not all the story; his was a many-sided mind, though a simple and straightforward personality. (168)

Here is the core of what I earlier called St. Peter's intended "betrayal" of Tom Outland, which would be a self-betrayal as well: in order to make Tom's diary meaningful to readers, he must translate Tom himself, in all his fine uniqueness, into common language, the conventional, leveling "vulgar tongue" of the social world and the marketplace. But at that prospect, St. Peter's writing "hand becomes self-conscious, feels itself stiff and clumsy" (168); the diary remains unedited, unpublished, and mute at the novel's end. In its most extreme—and, I will argue, wrong-headed—reading, the elitist minimalism of "The Novel Démeublé," for which the finest language is the sparsest, ends here, on a bare stage, in silence.

Thus St. Peter ceases to write at all in his final attempts to remain above the vitiating compromises of language, money, and social intercourse generally. He envies Tom for having died and escaped "the trap of worldly success" into which he himself has fallen, envisioning it as a spiderweb of conventional social behaviors: "He couldn't see Tom building 'Outland' or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton. . . . [Tom's hand] would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to 'manage' a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that" (261). So with his own complicated, growing family closing in on him, when the accidentally blown-out stove in his study offers an opportunity St. Peter breathes in the gas and falls asleep. He does escape, not into a triumphant Housmanian death like Tom's,[7] but into continuing joyless, untransfigured life; not through any willed choice of his own, but through the unthinking reflex of a body that doesn't want to die, and the accidental presence of Lillian's seamstress-caretaker Augusta, "the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from" (280).

What St. Peter Missed

I won't end by condemning Godfrey St. Peter, as many readers have done, for what he calls his "apathy" toward his family and "the human family" (283, 275) generally, or by pitying him (as he does himself) for the ways in which the world has disappointed him. He is, after all, simply a character in a novel, and I read him here as a kind of hypothesis, an exploratory instrument with which Cather returns to and reconsiders the apparent anti-materialism of "The Novel Démeublé." The Professor's disdain for the commonplace, material, and conventional may indeed lead him to isolated silence, but it seems to me to represent at best an incomplete interpretation of the minimalism that



Frank Street's illustration for the opening page of the Collier's *serialization, June 6, 1925.*

calls for "throw[ing] all of the furniture out of the window" ("The Novel Démeublé" 42).

I will conclude by looking briefly at some things that St. Peter has missed. I mean that literally: in *The Professor's House*, the third-person narrator's point of view attaches relentlessly to him, except in two remarkable scenes that play out in his absence. Cather had developed this narrative technique and used it twice in her preceding novella *A Lost Lady* to allow the reader glimpses of Marian Forrester's infidelity long before Niel Herbert can acknowledge it. She does something similar in two after-dinner scenes in *The Professor's House*, both involving Scott and Kathleen McGregor, where narration continues out of St. Peter's sight and hearing.

In the first, after the dinner party in Chapter 2 of "The Family," St. Peter and Sir Edgar retreat to the library to discuss "some technical matters," while Lillian takes Louie off to examine a "new rug in her bedroom" (44, 45). Irritated by Louie's appropriation of the Outland name for the new house, Scott mutters "Outland, outlandish!" as Rosamond pretends not to hear; Kathleen reminds him that he has writing work yet to do; he recites his prose poem for Rosamond, ends it with "Bang, bang!," and flings his cigar butt into the fireplace. Later, as Scott and Kathleen walk toward their car, he recalls Louie's dinner-table description of Rosamond as Tom's "virtual widow," and asks "what the hell is a virtual widow? Does he mean a virtuous widow, or the reverseous? Bang, bang!" (46). In the second, after the Christmas day dinner of Chapter 9, Kathleen and Scott drive home together, talking about Rosamond, and Kathleen declares "vehemently" her love for Scott. He "pinched off his driving-glove between his knees and snuggled his hand over hers, inside her muff"; she reiterates her love. Scott thanks Kathleen for telling him a secret from her past—a love affair with Tom before his marriage to Rosamond suggests itself but isn't named—and she reassures him that "you were the real one. . . . You know you *are* the real one, don't you?" (108–9). "I guess!" he replies emphatically.

What might the Professor have learned had he been present for these conversations? I can only sketch an answer. First, he might have found that while language is indeed the commodified and cheapened expression of ideas, at once diminished and imprecise, it is also alive and fun, largely because of the unstable relationships between words, their sounds, and their meanings—which, being socially imposed, are always multiple. I think of Scott's coupling of "Outland" and "outlandish," or his complication through sounds ("virt ual"/"virtuous"/"reverseous") of Louie's tame phrase "virtual widow," a complication that suddenly opens unexpected questions about Rosamond's sexuality. The very slipperiness of meaning, the tendency of words to lead their readers to other words rather than to single anterior truths, makes all writing potentially the source of profound meanings. Scott's prose poem, an epigram concerning the human necessity of imagined desire (the over-girled fancy) that outruns reality (the undermonied pocket), deserves and rewards consideration as much as the novel's only other directly quoted poem, Longfellow's translation of "The Grave" (272). And it's a lot less gloomy.

Willa Cather understood these things. The high-spirited liveliness of her early journalism and letters makes its way into her major mid-career works as an energetic love of allusion, as if the social and historical worlds were a communal tapestry of words and meanings from which her art could be drawn. She wrote in all registers and borrowed unabashedly. Tom Outland's crowning achievement, the Outland engine/vacuum/gas that St. Peter calls the "something new" that Tom had given the world (261), came from a 1905 *McClure's* science fiction story by Rudyard Kipling (Bennett); St. Peter's near-asphyxiation and subsequent sense of being "outward bound" with "a world full of Augustas" may owe something to Sutton Vane's sentimental supernatural play *Outward Bound*, which played at the Ritz Theater on 48th Street in winter and spring of 1924 and featured a young couple's failed suicide-by-gas-stove attempt (384). Cather's art is always ambiguous, but it is anything but private.

Second, and more simply, if St. Peter had listened and looked in on Scott and Kathleen in the second of these scenes, he would have seen something that has eluded him throughout the novel: love, expressing itself in conventionally banal words ("oh, Scott, I do love you very much! . . . Yes, I *do*!"), but simultaneously in physical touch, tenderness, and care—a glove taken off, the grasping of hands, a head dropped against a shoulder. This love doesn't pretend to be immaculate; its words and actions occur in a moment of remembering Kathleen's earlier lover Tom, whose hands we see her squeezing twice in St. Peter's memories.[8] The scene recalls an earlier moment of missed connection when St. Peter and Lillian come briefly closer at the opera, and she speaks obscurely of their past love and of someone "who came between us," again presumably Tom (93). But unlike Kathleen and Scott, St. Peter finds neither loving words nor loving touch; instead "he took up one of her gloves and began drawing it out through his fingers," and they turn away from one another and draw apart (93). Cather knew better than St. Peter about this, too: knew that love can find a way to speak in commonplace words and gestures and somehow transcend them and their limitations in the very act. The miraculous event was simply passion, and she sought it out in all of her work.

NOTES

1. Cather wrote (as McClure): "My plan, briefly, was this: I could get a short story from any of the best story-writers then for $150.00. I figured that I ought to be able to sell that story to 100 newspapers throughout the country, at $5 each" (*My Autobiography* 168).

I got along by paying my authors $10 or $20 on account. I paid out a little less than I collected, and my actual working capital was the money I owed authors. I made no secret of this . . . they realized that my syndicate was a new source of revenue which might eventually become very profitable to them. And it did. (169)

Thacker has persuasively argued for the formal importance of Cather's ghost-writing experience to both *My Ántonia* and *The Professor's House*. Willa Murphy also connects the aesthetic of "The Novel Démeublé" with Cather's friendship with McClure in "Throwing the Furniture Out of the Window: Ulster Protestant Plain Style and Cather's Aesthetic."

2. All of these markers fall short of the Marselluses' Norwegian manor house, chauffeured Pierce-Arrow, taupe and emeralds, and summer in France, and the McGregors' resentment and envy are understandable. Nonetheless Scott makes quite a lot of money. If each prose poem earns $25, then a year of five-day weeks would bring in $6,250 (and leave two weeks for the Oregon vacation), a salary which, adjusted for inflation, would be around $115,000 today: not princely, but not the "three dollars a day" earned by Augusta's sewing (126), and not the weekly $47.50 averaged by the skilled workers in American pressrooms where the syndicated poems and columns of 1924 were printed ("Wages and Hours of Labor" 46). This salary calculation doesn't take into account Scott's editorials.

3. I have found no examples in Cather's early journalistic career that offer a clear parallel to Scott's prose poems and "uplift" editorials, although she tried her hand (particularly in her early years in Pittsburgh, for the *Home Monthly* and the *National Stockman and Farmer*) at a large range of popular genres, including children's stories and practical advice. Woodress devotes two dense paragraphs to "the autobiographical parallels between Cather and St. Peter" (368), focusing mainly on their families, their careers as novelist and scholar, and their attachment to homes and rooms.

4. The fictitious Oxford prize was generous: five thousand British pounds in the early 1920s was worth more than $26,000, or nearly half a million dollars today (Nye). Bowen has estimated the average full professor's salary in the 1920s at fifty-two selected public American land-grant institutions to be $4,500 (39). St. Peter does not acquire the wealth that Rosamond and Louie flaunt, but a windfall of five or six years' salary would have been transformative—and should have allowed him to buy the fur coat that he denies himself in Chicago (153).

5. "A thing that is dreamed of . . . is already an accomplished fact" (*A Lost Lady* 52).

6. I have in mind any and all of the novel's pervasive narratives of disappointment, usually in the form of a fall from an original ideal into a practical, commonplace reality. These range from minor

allusions in passing to major plot structures, from the story of the physics building (141) to the watering-down of the university's curriculum and scholarly standards (55–56) to the loss of passion in St. Peter's marriage or his growing estrangement from his daughters. Taken together, they create a generalized purgatorial landscape of loss. "Tom Outland's Story" itself—which St. Peter ruefully characterizes as "a story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about—until he grows older" (174) is a special case, since Tom doesn't grow older, but dies with his "sensitivity" and idealism more or less intact.

7. Cather's admiration for A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and its poem "To an Athlete Dying Young" (from which Cather took a central image for her 1915 short story "Consequences," which ends with a suicide to escape aging) is well documented. See Nettels and Thacker for further analysis of Housman's presence in *The Professor's House*.

8. "A flush of pleasure would come over Tom's face . . . if Kathleen caught his hand and tried to squeeze it hard enough to hurt, crying: 'Oh, Tom, *tell* us about the time you and Roddy found the water hole dry'" (123, italics in the original) and "'But Tom, you were on the section gang that year! Why do you mix us all up?' Kathleen caught his hand and squeezed the knuckles together, as she did when she wanted to punish him" (172).

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John Swift, professor emeritus of English, Occidental College, has published widely on Cather and other modern authors. A past president of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and issue editor of the *Willa Cather Review*, he lives in Georgetown, Maine, with his spouse Cheryl (professor emerita of biology and environmental science, Whittier College) and their many dogs. They currently co-teach an interdisciplinary course in the Midcoast Senior College, "Jack London's Wolves, Dogs, and People."

Robert Thacker is professor of Canadian Studies and English emeritus, St. Lawrence University. He has served on the Cather Foundation's Board of Governors since 2003, is its immediate past president, and has been a coeditor of this *Review*. He has been thinking about Cather and cowboys for a long time. His latest book, *Alice Munro's Late Style: "Writing Is the Final Thing"* (2023) has just come out in paperback from Bloomsbury Academic.

Kim Vanderlaan teaches composition, American literature and literary theory at Pennsylvania Western University (formerly California University of Pennsylvania), where she is a professor of English. She has been published in such journals as *Western American Literature*, the *Willa Cather Review*, *Journal of American Studies*, *Journal of American Culture*, *American Literary Realism*, *The Explicator*, *Impost*, *Northern Appalachia Review*, and others. She divides her time between California, Pennsylvania and Robbinston, Maine.

Elizabeth Wells teaches composition and literature courses as an adjunct lecturer at SUNY Cortland. She has published articles on Willa Cather in *Modern Fiction Studies*, the *Willa Cather Review*, *Cather Studies 14: Unsettling Cather*, and forthcoming in *Cather Studies 15*. She is currently at work on a book to be titled *Unfit: Disability in Willa Cather's Works*.

For Young Readers

Meet Tom Outland

In this issue of the *Willa Cather Review*, we're celebrating a novel that Willa Cather published 100 years ago, *The Professor's House*. The Professor is an adult, of course, but his best friend is much younger, a teenaged orphan and cowboy, Tom Outland. Tom is working in New Mexico, taking care of cattle with his cowboy friend Roddy. The cattle are always running away from them, swimming across a river to a nearby mesa that people seemingly can't reach (a mesa is a mountain with a flat top). But on a snowy Christmas Eve Tom manages—with a swimming horse—to get across the river and join the cattle. On the mesa he discovers a tall and beautiful tower and a pueblo (village) of little adobe houses, still full of furniture, tools, clothes, and ancient food. The people who lived there have obviously been gone for hundreds of years. Fascinated, Tom and Roddy carefully explore the pueblo and display things they find, including handmade pottery that was used for cooking, eating, and storage of precious water. Some of these pots are works of art.

As an orphan who has never known his own family members, Tom feels that these long-ago Native People are his ancestors, and that their pueblo and its contents are an important part of American history and should be studied and displayed in museums, where modern Americans, like us, can learn from them. So, with Roddy's help, Tom packs up some of the best old pottery he has discovered and travels to Washington, D.C., where he hopes the Smithsonian, the capital's largest museum, will become interested in the two cowboys' discoveries and send scholars West to study the "Blue Mesa," as Tom lovingly calls it.

Tom's story is based on a true story that Willa Cather heard from a young cowboy while on a trip to New Mexico. When Cather was asked which of her books she would recommend for young readers, her first choice was often "Tom Outland's Story," Book II of *The Professor's House*. If you would like to read Tom's story and learn what happened to the pueblo on the Blue Mesa, go online to cather.unl.edu/writings/books/0010. And if you would like to see pictures of pottery similar to what Tom (and Willa Cather) admired, go to page 22 in this issue.

The Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde, Colorado. The "Blue Mesa" that Tom Outland explores in Cather's novel is closely based on Mesa Verde.
Haines Photo Co., Library of Congress, loc.gov/item/2007661996.

Children Living on a Mesa

When Willa Cather wrote about Tom Outland's discovery of a very old Native American village built on top of a mesa, you may have wondered what life was like for girls and boys like you, growing up in such a place. Cather's story of Tom never mentions Native American children. But, when we editors began planning this page for young readers, I, Ann Romines, immediately remembered a favorite book that my grandmother read to me when I was six years old. Soon after Cather wrote Tom Outland's story, a young writer, artist, and teacher named Muriel Fellows, who was also an anthropology scholar, wanted her elementary school students in Pennsylvania to learn more about what the lives of children growing up on a mesa were like. She decided to write a book about Hopi children living in their tribe's ancestral lands, in what is now Arizona. The Hopi Nation has lived there for more than 1,000 years. The Hopi village of Oraibi, formed before 1100 C.E., is believed to be the oldest continuously occupied settlement in what is now the United States. Hopi children are still growing up there today.

Some Hopi children, like those we meet in Muriel Fellows's book, grew up in loving Hopi families who taught them tribal traditions and may have attended a local school and learned some of the same types of things you are learning in school. But other Hopi children suffered abuse. Some were sent by the U.S. government to faraway boarding schools that did not allow them to speak their own language or practice their native Hopi culture. These children were often lonely and homesick. Some of them became ill and died.

Muriel Fellows's book, published in 1936, does not picture a specific Hopi village. Instead, it shows some traditional Hopi customs so that children who may never get to travel to a Hopi village may enjoy learning about Hopi culture. As a six-year-old (and later), I loved meeting Hopi children on a Western mesa and seeing their pictures. Their lives were so different from my life in a small town in Missouri—and yet I found that we had much in common too. That book became a life-long favorite—I still own it! And I am so happy to share it with you today. Here are some stories and pictures from *The Land of Little Rain* for you to enjoy.

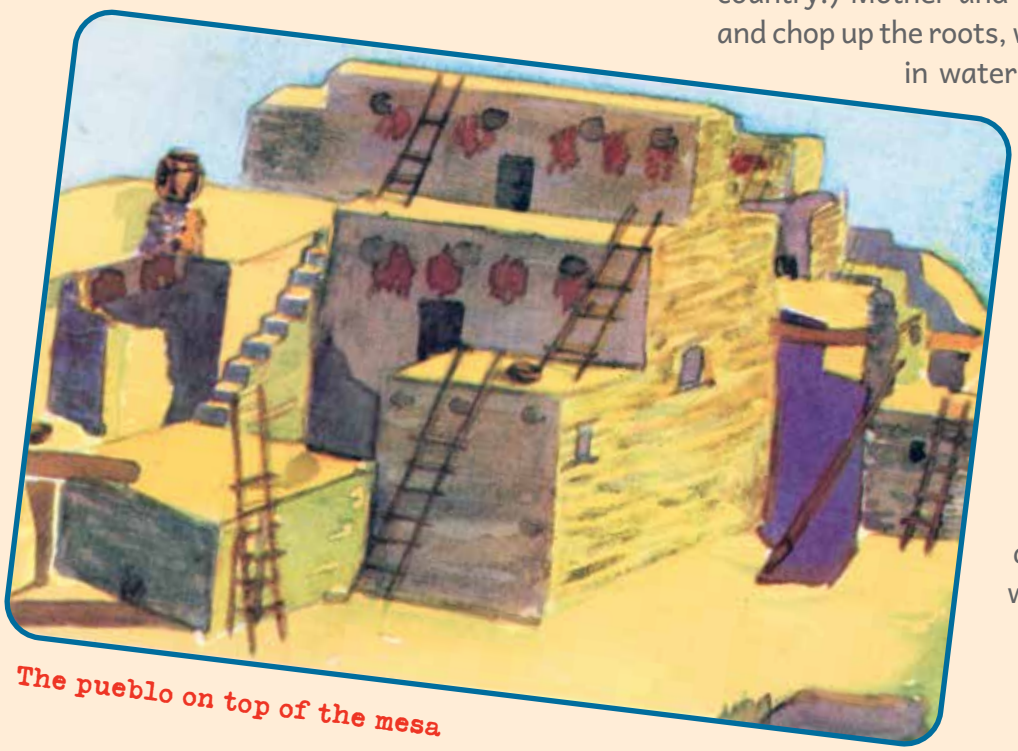
As the book begins, we meet a Hopi boy, Sah-mee (age seven), and his younger sister, Moho. Sah-mee is excited to be going on his first rabbit hunt with the men and boys of the pueblo; the Hopis hunt wild animals for meat. Sah-mee wants to be a great hunter, so as he is walking to join the hunt, he shouts and beats the bushes to bring out rabbits that he can kill. But only one animal runs out—not a rabbit but a "tired and frightened" baby fox. Sah-mee forgets about being a great hunter and impressing his father. Instead, he picks up the baby fox and pats it gently. "I will not harm you," he whispers. "I will take you home to Moho and she will keep you as a pet." Moho is delighted, and the little fox is safe.

Sah-mee is afraid of what Father will say when he finds that his son has killed no rabbits. But Father surprises him. He says. "You are a good boy. . . . I am glad that you remembered that a good Hopi never kills a baby animal."

The Hopi people are farmers, raising corn and other vegetables and fruits which, along with wild meat from animals such as rabbits, keep the people of the pueblos nourished. But the plants must have water to live. Hopi country is very dry—it seldom rains there. That is why the title of this book is *The Land of Little Rain*. The pueblo (village) where Moho and Sah-mee's family lives is built on top of the mesa. The local Hopi community lives there. You can see in the picture, from the many windows and ladders, that many people live here. Early in the book, the children's mother decides that the family needs a new house (they have been living with Grandmother). She visits all the women of the pueblo, asking them to help her build this new house, and they agree. Although men help with heavy tasks, "Mother and the other women did most of the work of building." They work with adobe, a combination of clay, rocks, and other organic materials. The children help, and Moho and Sah-mee's favorite task is trampling down the mud on the house's flat roof with their bare feet, until the roof is hard and dry.

After much work by family and friends, the children and their parents are happily settled in the new house.

One morning Moho is anxious to wash her hair, but she has no shampoo. If this were your problem, or mine, we would probably go to a store and buy some. This is not an option for Moho on the pueblo. Instead, her mother and brother climb down to the desert, carrying their hatchets, to find a yucca plant. (Yucca is a strong and very common wild plant, which grows in many regions of this country.) Mother and son find a plant, dig it up, and chop up the roots, which foam up like shampoo in water, for Moho. Yucca's leaves are long, strong, and sharp; Mother packs up a bunch of them to make into paintbrushes to use while decorating the beautiful pots she makes from clay. In the picture on the next page, you can see Moho washing her hair in yucca shampoo and using a clay water jug decorated by her mother with a yucca paintbrush.



The pueblo on top of the mesa

Moho washes her hair

Sah-mee takes the remaining yucca leaves to Grandmother, who uses them to weave beautiful baskets.

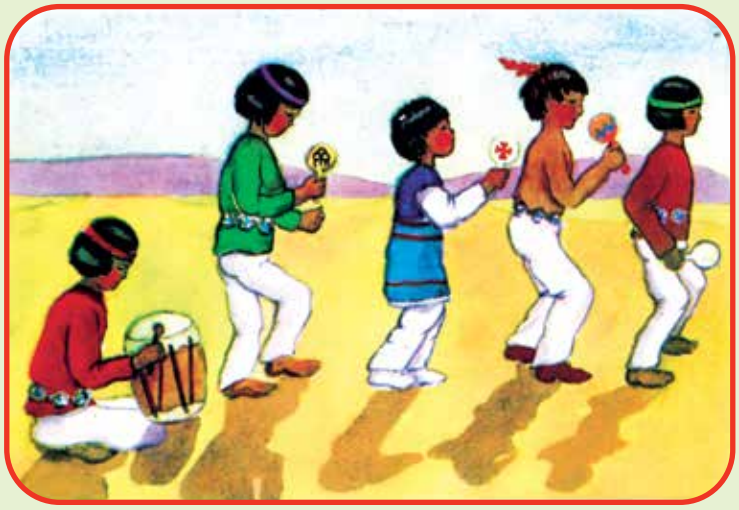
Father and Mother are worried. Their crops—corn, beans, squash—are drying up, for there has been no rain "for many days." Father says, "If the corn does not grow, our people will starve." Father makes a prayer stick to "ask the gods to bring us rain." He stands the stick upright in his cornfield and prays to the rain gods, asking them "to send rain to the Hopi . . . farms." Sah-mee follows his father's example and makes a prayer stick and says the same prayer. "But still the rain did not come."

Three days later, the Katchina dancers come to the pueblo. Father explains: "Long, long, long ago, the Katchina gods lived on this earth. They danced in the villages and brought rain. But now the Katchina gods come no more. So the Hopi men dress as the Katchina gods dressed. They dance in the villages to bring rain."

Moho and Sah-mee watch from the roof of their house as the Katchinas dance in the street below, singing and shaking rattles and chanting a prayer for rain. When the dance is over, they run through the streets, giving handmade Katchina dolls to children. The dolls represent the rain gods or other figures who influence the coming of rain.

These Katchina dancers still dance in Hopi country every summer, and they still give Hopi children Katchina dolls. Sah-mee and Moho are delighted with their dolls. And the next day—it rains.

Grandmother weaves baskets



Sah-mee plays his drum for the Rain Dance

The rain brought by the Katchina men with their dancing, music, and prayers does revive the dying plants growing on Hopi farms. But only briefly. To continue growing and provide needed food, the plants must have more rain. So the parents are soon worrying again about starvation. And their children begin to think of ways they could help to bring that much-needed rain.

As the summer goes by, there is less and less rain, and parents worry about the danger to crops and lives. One day, as Moho and Sah-mee are playing with friends, their friend Piba says, "Let us have a Rain Dance." Everyone agrees, with excitement: "Yes. . . . Perhaps we can bring rain for the crops. Then how pleased our mothers and fathers will be." Sah-mee, who has just made his first drum and is learning to play it, will make music for the dancers. And Piba adds, "We need rattles to make the sound of falling rain. . . . We must shake them the way our fathers do." Like their fathers, the girls and boys spend days getting ready for their dance and making their own rattles, painting them with bright rain pictures "to please the Rain gods."

In a few days, the children gather for the Rain Dance. As you can see in the picture, "Sah-mee beat his drum. All the children formed in line. They shook their rattles" and "danced on their heels and toes as they had seen their fathers do. They shouted and sang." And the dance went on until it began to get dark.

After their family supper, Sah-mee and Moho are very tired and sleepy, but as they go to bed, they can see "that there were no stars, and great clouds were sailing in front of the moon." They hear Father say to Mother, "Rain has come to bring new life to our thirsty crops," thanks to the children and their dance. "Then Sah-mee heard the patter of the rain. He knew that the storm would not last very long, but the rain would save the crops for his people. . . . Out in the desert a coyote howled. . . . Then all was quiet in the little houses of mud and stone clustered on top of the mesa in "The Land of Little Rain."

If you enjoyed learning about Moho and Sah-mee and want to read more stories about Hopi and Pueblo children, here are some suggestions:

The Butterfly Dance written and illustrated by Gerald Dawavendewa (Hopi)

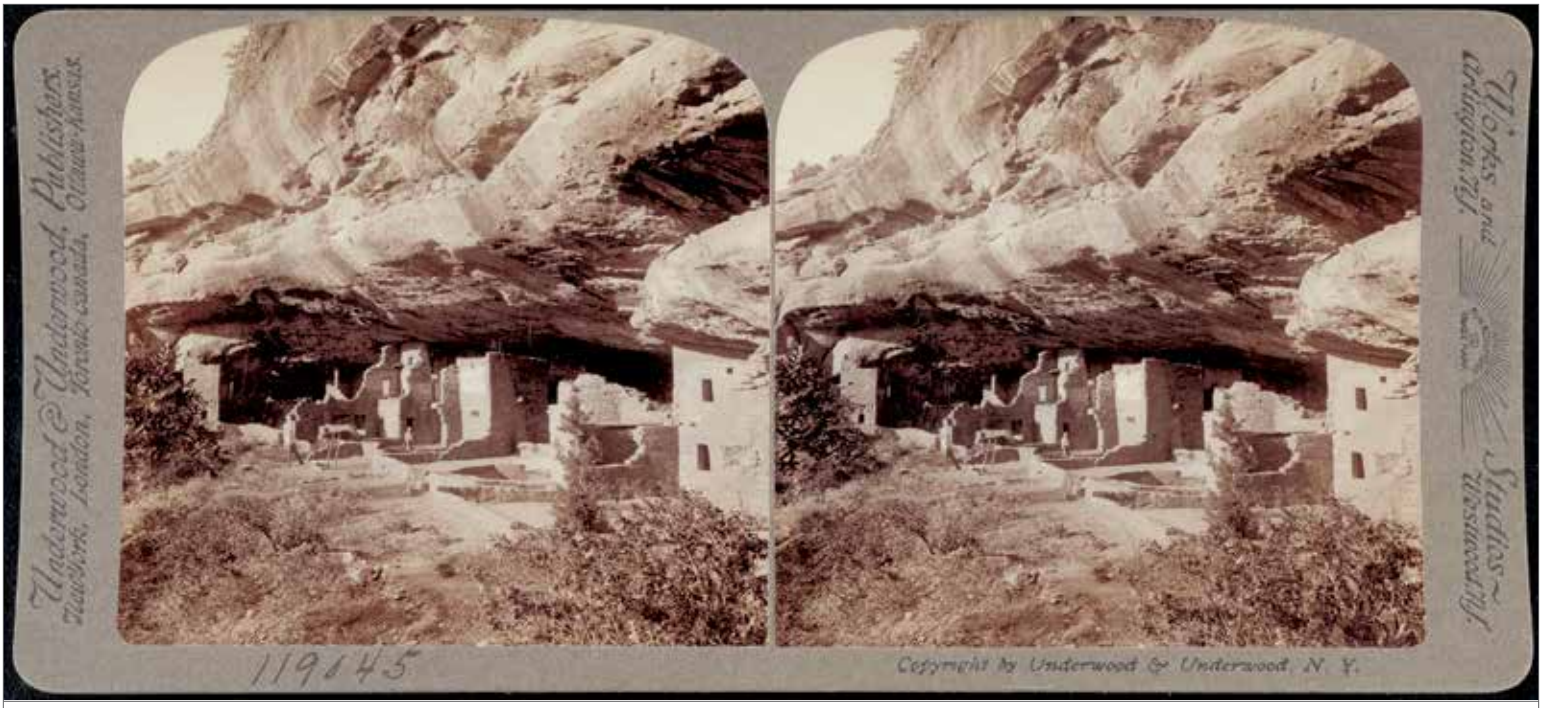
Celebrate My Hopi Corn written by Anita Poleahla (Hopi) and illustrated by Emmett Navakuku (Hopi)

Coming Home: A Hopi Resistance Story written and illustrated by Mavasta Honyouti (Hopi)

Shaped by her Hands: Potter Maria Martinez written by Anna Harber Freeman and Barbara Gonzales (San Ildefonso Pueblo), illustrated by Aphelandra (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin descendant)

Finding My Dance written by Ria Thundercloud (Sandia Pueblo, Ho-Chunk) and illustrated by Kalila J. Fuller

Coyote and the Sky written by Emmett Shkeme Garcia (Santa Ana Pueblo) and illustrated by Victoria Pringle



Cliff Dwellings at Mesa Verde, stereograph photograph by Underwood and Underwood, 1910. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, control number 2018647903.

Willa Cather REVIEW

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The National Willa Cather Center

The *Willa Cather Review* welcomes scholarly essays, feature stories, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should generally not exceed 5,000 words, although longer essays may be considered. Scholarly essays should be submitted via our online portal at www.willacather.org/wcr. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the *MLA Handbook.*

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The Willa Cather Foundation

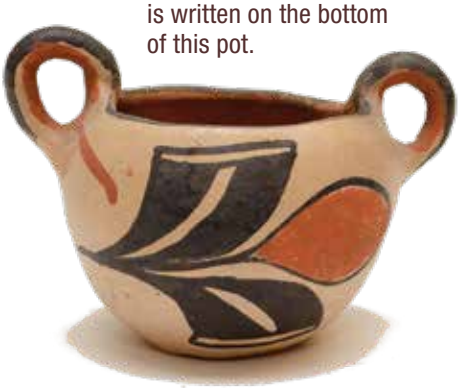
Pottery in the Collection: Gifts Beyond Value

These three Southwestern pots at the National Willa Cather Center likely date to the early 20th century. Though our records do not state that these pieces belonged to Willa Cather, they were given to the Willa Cather Foundation by donors who also donated Cather family materials.

This may be an example of Tularosa-style black-on-white decoration.

WCPM Collection, OBJ-4-3560-734

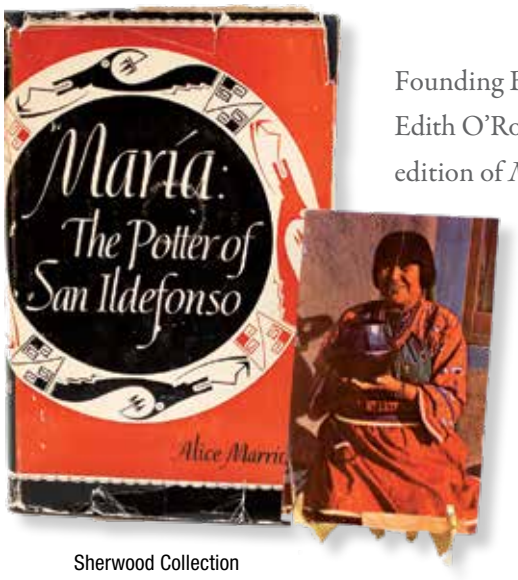
"Bot in Lamy 1919" is written on the bottom of this pot.



WCPM Collection, OBJ-4-3560-734

An example of Acoma polychrome pottery, undated.

WCPM Collection, OBJ-4-3560-734



Sherwood Collection

Founding Board of Governors member Frank O'Rourke and his wife Edith O'Rourke, from Taos, New Mexico, sent this autographed first edition of *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* to fellow board member Carrie Miner Sherwood. Edith O'Rourke later followed this gift with a postcard showing Maria Po've'ka Martinez with one of her famed black-on-black pots.

THE NATIONAL
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