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## 7 Wharton and Cather

*Elsa Nettels*

Wharton and Cather continue to hold places of equal prominence in 20th-century American literature. Organizations devoted to the study of their work publish scholarly articles in their journals and hold regularly scheduled conferences, which have produced several volumes of essays, both published and forthcoming. With the publication of Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree* by Replica Books (1997) and Classic Books (1998), all of the novels by both writers are now in print. Topics of continuing interest to Wharton scholars include the novelist's relation to other women writers and her conception of professional authorship as shaped by definitions of gender and the power of the marketplace. Cather's connections to the South, formed during her childhood in Virginia, have emerged as a dominant theme in the criticism, marked by Joyce McDonald's book *The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather's Southern Heritage*. Critics of both Wharton and Cather are increasingly preoccupied with analyzing the ambivalence or the conflicting attitudes that they see in the novelists' portrayal of characters in multiracial, class-based societies subject to the materialism of a consumerist culture.

### *i* Edith Wharton

**a. General Studies** A highlight of this year's scholarship is Sarah Bird Wright's splendid *Edith Wharton A to Z: An Essential Guide to the Life and Work* (Facts on File). This encyclopedic volume of more than 450 entries contains synopses of all Wharton's works of fiction and nonfiction, including unpublished manuscripts in the Beinecke Library; concise biographies of some 140 family members, acquaintances, and friends; and extended essays on Wharton's interests and avocations such as travel, gardening, and interior decoration, her war relief work, and the

places—countries, cities, resorts, residences, neighborhoods—important in her life and art. Wright gives balanced treatments of controversial subjects, such as Wharton's paternity, her anti-Semitism, and feminism; she analyzes Wharton's love affair with Morton Fullerton and documents her relationships with her editors and other writers, Henry James foremost among them. The longest essays, on major works such as *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, and *The Age of Innocence*, set forth central themes, scenes, characters, and settings, quote Wharton's statements about the works, and survey contemporary reviews and recent criticism. The volume is graced by Clare Colquitt's fine introduction.

Maureen Montgomery provides another valuable resource for Wharton scholars in her social history, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (Routledge). Drawing on newspapers, diaries, memoirs, letters, and etiquette manuals as well as literary sources, Montgomery presents a comprehensive analysis of the rituals and customs by which the fashionable society that Wharton portrayed in her fiction preserved its traditions, determined its membership, and defined the ideals and aspirations of both insiders and outsiders. Placed in the context of Montgomery's wide-ranging study, the weddings, dinners, country house weekends, and scenes at the opera in *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence* acquire fateful significance, powerful evidence of Montgomery's thesis: as women in the 1880s and 1890s enjoyed greater opportunity to appear in public places—at restaurants, clubs, sporting events, the theater—they became increasingly vulnerable to agencies of surveillance such as newspapers and increasingly aware of “the competing demands of propriety and publicity.” Montgomery's book, which includes analyses of “New Year's Day,” “The Daunt Diana,” and *In Morocco*, as well as the New York novels, admirably achieves its aim “to increase readers' awareness of the sociocultural dimensions of Wharton's oeuvre.”

The values of placing Wharton's fiction in the context of the culture of consumerism and display are impressively demonstrated in Margit Stange's engrossing book, *Personal Property: Wives, White Slaves, and the Market in Women* (Hopkins). In the first of two chapters devoted to Wharton, “Edith Wharton and the Problem of the Woman Author” (pp. 36–53), Stange deconstructs the conventional dichotomies—art vs. commerce, public vs. private—by demonstrating Wharton's perception of commercial publication as the means by which she gained, not lost, a sense of private selfhood—“a personality of my own.” Through analysis

of Wharton's 1903 essay "The Vice of Reading," *The Touchstone*, and "The Other Two," Stange develops analogies connecting the writer, the character, and the reader, all of whom by participating in the economies of the marketplace may either affirm "an innate private self" or reveal themselves as mechanical imitators of others' standards.

These analogies provide the framework for a compelling reading of *The House of Mirth* in the following chapter, "Lily Bart at the Point of 'Modification'" (pp. 54–71). In her analysis of Lily as "a valuable possession and a consumer of valuables," Stange probes more deeply than most critics into the implications of Lily's construction of herself as "marketable form," analogous to the creative process that produced the novel itself as a commodity of aesthetic value. Also notable is Stange's analysis of Selden as a connoisseur whose appreciation of Lily's value depends on his vision of her potential debasement in the eyes of others. Comparing Lily's story to the narratives of white slaves exploited in the "sexual market" where women's bodies are sold, Stange compares Selden to "the reader of white slavery literature" who perceives the value of the victim in her debasement—as Wharton found the "tragic significance" of Lily's story in the power of her society to destroy her.

Allan Hepburn develops similar analogies between art and commercial transaction in his informative essay "A Passion for Things: Cicerones, Collectors, and Taste in Edith Wharton's Fiction" (*ArQ* 54, iv: 25–52). Finding in Wharton's fiction proof that "art is created in order to be bought," he analyzes "The Eyes" and "The Daunt Diana" to demonstrate resemblances between the storyteller and the collector, both of whom are subject to the "exchange mechanism" of a market in which art must circulate to acquire measurable value and "rumor and hearsay" operate to increase that value. He notes that although Wharton's contemporaries included a number of women who were famous as collectors, only men appear in that role in her fiction. Of possible literary sources, Hepburn emphasizes the fiction of Wharton's friend Paul Bourget, noting a number of parallels between their representations of art collectors and cicerones, who, like storytellers, act as guides and interpreters.

Wharton established herself, not as a collector, but as an authority on architecture and interior decoration, and her formidable knowledge shaped her fiction in vital ways, as Suzanne W. Jones demonstrates in "Edith Wharton's 'Secret Sensitiveness,' *The Decoration of Houses*, and Her Fiction" (*JML* 21 [1997]: 177–200). Focusing on *The House of Mirth*,

*The Fruit of the Tree*, and *The Reef*, Jones illustrates the transformation of places into “provocative presences” that both reflect and determine the mood and actions of the characters. She observes that although Wharton does not equate aesthetic sensibility with either moral integrity or moral weakness, she customarily links “visual sensibility” to the quest for or possession of wealth.

Two good parallel studies with a focus on Wharton, by Abby H. P. Werlock and Dianne Chambers, appear in *Critical Essays on Kay Boyle*, ed. Marilyn Elkins (Hall, 1997). In “Advancing Literary Women: Edith Wharton, Kay Boyle, and *My Next Bride*” (pp. 262–75) Werlock emphasizes the concern of both novelists with the struggle of women entrapped by institutions of patriarchy and victimized by the faithlessness or abuse of exploitative men. Parallels between Wharton’s *Summer* and Boyle’s *My Next Bride*, a novel about an aspiring painter, suggest that Boyle “reenvision[ed] the hopeless fate” of such characters as Lily Bart and Charity Royall and found in the quest for self-fulfillment of Wharton’s Halo Spear a model for the “odyssey toward selfhood” of her own heroine. In “Female Roles and National Identity in Kay Boyle’s *Plagued by the Night-ingle* and Edith Wharton’s *Madame de Treymes*” (pp. 241–61) Chambers establishes the basis for comparison in the novelists’ experience as expatriate writers living in France, their struggle to define the identity of Americans in the encounter with European society, and their representation of the effects of gender, race, and national culture upon the lives of American women living abroad. Particularly striking is the comparison of the two novels, in both of which a young American woman marries into a French family ruled by the matriarch and asserts her allegiance to American ideals of freedom and individual responsibility by sacrificing her hopes of personal happiness and yielding to the family’s will.

**b. Individual Works** The most exhaustively analyzed of Wharton’s novels, *The House of Mirth* once again inspires some of the year’s best criticism. Susan Donaldson establishes a new framework for analysis in “New Women and New Stories: Edith Wharton and Pauline Hopkins,” pp. 97–123 in *Competing Voices*. Her incisive comparison of Lily Bart with Sappho Clark in *Contending Forces* reveals the implications of Lily’s failure to free herself from the stereotypes imposed by others, in contrast to Hopkins’s protagonist, who resists entrapment in the role of decorative object and refuses to let the stories of others define and control her.

As Donaldson notes, Lily's inability to "appropriate the power of story-telling" (her "greatest tragedy") not only nullifies for her the possibility of any alternatives to the traditional marriage plot, but exposes the dependence of the "tale of ideal femininity" upon its obverse, the tale of the fallen woman, into which Lily's society readily casts her, defenseless, when she cannot reveal the truth behind the appearances that compromise her.

One of the year's outstanding articles, William E. Modellmog's "Disowning 'Personality': Privacy and Subjectivity in *The House of Mirth*" (*AL* 70: 337–63) analyzes the novel in the context of debates over the legal definition of privacy at the turn of the century. In his argument, far-reaching in its implications, Modellmog connects Wharton's refusal to portray the consciousness of her protagonist at crucial moments to her desire to preserve the subjectivity of Lily's character and to protect her privacy from others' scrutiny. In refusing to allow Lily to become "an object of knowledge" for either characters or readers, he observes, Wharton resists the argument set forth by Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis in "The Right to Privacy" (1890), an influential essay that grounds legal recognition of the privacy of the self in the ownership of one's home (traditionally a man's possession) and not in the concept of the inviolability of consciousness, male and female. Lily Bart's failure to "own her reputation" is thus traceable to her status as a woman without property, whose story, even if she told it, would have no power in a world "oppressively legal," which denies "the evidentiary weight of private experience."

Keiko Beppu in "The Moral Significance of Living Space: The Library and Kitchen in *The House of Mirth*" (*EWHR*, 14, ii [1997]: 3–7) contrasts Selden's library, masculine space that signifies ineluctable separation, with Nettie Struther's kitchen, where "female solidarity" is possible. Bonnie Lynn Gerard makes the familiar analysis of Lily Bart's conflicting impulses but adds insights of her own in "From Tea to Chloral: Raising the Dead Lily Bart" (*TCL*, 44: 409–27). Gerard shows how the pervasive tropes of food and digestion that express the predatory nature of New York's consumerist society help to establish the basic determinism of the novel, but she also argues that Lily's imagination saves her from an "utterly naturalistic fate." Gerard's conclusion, that Wharton uses literary naturalism as a means, not an end, constructing in the final scenes "a romantic resistance" to crass materialism, is convincing.

Of Wharton's other novels, *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of*

*Innocence* continue to receive the most critical attention. Martha H. Patterson's wide-ranging "Incorporating the New Woman in Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*" (*SAF* 26: 213–36) connects Wharton's financial anxieties and her readings in Darwinian science and eugenics in an analysis of Undine Spragg, whose voracious appetites and "sheer energy" suggest "unregulated corporate power" that must be controlled. Patterson argues that Undine's second marriage to the successful investor Elmer Moffatt transforms Undine into "a well-managed corporate employee" and thus signifies "a shift from entrepreneurial to managerial values." Gerard M. Sweeney in "The Wealth of Abner Spragg: An Insider Narrative" (*SoAR* 63, iv: 48–57) makes a plausible case for Wharton's modeling the Spragg fortune, based on a project to supply cities with pure drinking water, on a similar project (never carried out) advanced by the well-known entrepreneur Joseph Wharton, a distant cousin of Edith Wharton's husband.

Ferdá Asya takes a biographical approach to Wharton's treatment of adultery and divorce in "Resolution of Guilt: Cultural Values Reconsidered in *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*" (*EWWhR* 14, ii [1997]: 15–20). In both novels, Asya argues, Wharton sought to "resolve her guilt" over her affair with Morton Fullerton and her divorce: in *The Custom of the Country* by exaggerating "sexual adventuring" and moral blindness in Undine Spragg to make her own divorce appear less shocking; in *The Age of Innocence* by creating in Ellen Olenska a character in some ways similar to herself, through whose "sacrifice of the personal desire for the communal interest" Wharton vicariously atones for her own past transgression, thereby achieving "fictional acquittal" of her feelings of guilt.

Newland Archer, prominent among Wharton's characters who have generated the most controversy, engages Emily J. Orlando in "Rereading Wharton's 'Poor Archer': A Mr. 'Might-have-been' in *The Age of Innocence*" (*ALR* 30, ii: 56–76). As her title indicates, Orlando sides with the opposition, seeing Archer as a "failed man," helpless to break from convention, unable to understand either his wife, May, or her cousin Ellen Olenska, both of whom he objectifies as works of art, fixed in their roles. Orlando supports her interpretation by noting how characters are revealed by the books they read: Archer, whose interpretation of Rossetti's sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*, encourages him in his romantic vision of his situation, and Ellen Olenska, whose preference for the French naturalists suggests her acceptance of painful realities.

The impact on *The Age of Innocence* of Wharton's reading of anthropology, by now well-established, continues to interest critics. In "Pollution Control in Old New York: Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*" (*CEA* 60, iii: 37–49) Sung Gay Chow demonstrates the relevance to the novel of Mary Douglas's analysis of a "high-classified system" with its powerful "elderly authority figures" and its rituals of exclusion and expulsion by which society protects itself from threatened pollution by transgressors of its codes. Gilles Mayné's "About the Displacement of Certain Words in *The Age of Innocence*: A Bataillian Reading" (*EWbR* 14, ii [1997]: 8–14) analyzes Ellen Olenska in terms of Georges Bataille's theory of the scapegoat as an extraordinary person, a "heterogeneous individual," who must be set apart from the ordinary. The essay not only notes the many references to the foreignness of Ellen's clothes, manners, and the decoration of her house, but it also shows how her use of key words, such as *fashion*, *lonely*, *happy*, and *heaven*, invests them with new meanings.

Growing interest in Wharton's portrayal of the figure of the mother and maternal sacrifice has produced some good criticism on *The Mother's Recompense*. In "Victorian Sensationalism and the Silence of Maternal Sexuality in Edith Wharton's *The Mother's Recompense*" (*Narrative* 5 [1997]: 135–42) Tamar Heller establishes Wharton's debt to the 19th-century female tradition of sensationalist melodrama, emphasizing resemblances between Kate Clephane and the heroine of Ellen Wood's bestselling novel *East Lynne* (1861), who likewise conceals her past when she returns to her child after her life abroad with a lover. Heller sees the power of the "Victorian ethos of renunciation and self-silencing" affirmed in the problematic renunciations made by Wharton's transgressive heroine, in whom Heller sees reflected Wharton's own ambivalence toward female desire—her "sympathy for its expression and an increasingly conservative distrust of the socially disruptive consequences of such liberation."

Susan L. Woods sees Kate Clephane's final decisions (to refuse to marry again, to accept the marriage of her daughter to her own lover) as positive acts of self-protection in "The Solace of Separation; Feminist Theory, Autobiography, Edith Wharton, and Me," pp. 27–46 in *Creating Safe Space*. Implicit in the protagonist's "need to control [her] physical space," Woods argues, is the mother's and daughter's incestuous desire for each other, suggested at several points in the novel. Her reading is persuasive, though the mingling of analysis and personal reminiscence will appeal to some readers more than to others.



Angela M. Salas makes a promising start in analyzing Wharton's ambivalence toward maternal responsibility in "Ghostly Presences: Edith Wharton's *Sanctuary* and the Issue of Maternal Sacrifice" (*CollL*, 25, ii: 121–35). Noting that Kate Orme's marrying her discredited fiancé to protect his child from hereditary evil would seem more natural to Victorians than to modern readers, Salas documents Wharton's portrayal of Kate as "a woman of substance and integrity," but she does less to support her claim that the novella is also an "implicit criticism of the mother as 'hearth angel.'"

Of the other essays on Wharton's short fiction, the most substantial is Armine Kotin Mortimer's "Romantic Fever: The Second Story as Illegitimate Daughter in Wharton's 'Roman Fever'" (*Narrative* 6: 188–98). Mortimer's detailed analysis, which identifies the many paired oppositions and the multiple meanings of "roman fever," shows how the "staid, correct first story" reveals in "erupting elliptical fragments" throughout the two women's conversation the long-suppressed, "feverish, illegitimate second story" of Mrs. Ansley's secret rendezvous with her friend's fiancé.

Three essays center on the fiction set in New England. Stuart Hutchinson in "Unpackaging Edith Wharton: *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*" (*CQ* 27: 219–32) finds Wharton's portrayal of New England rural characters reductive and superficial, lacking the diversity, energy, and "human dignity" of Sarah Orne Jewett's and Mary Wilkins Freeman's characters. His essay suggests that a good argument could be made against Wharton's dismissal of Jewett and Freeman as sentimentalists, but his condemnatory tone, bound to create resistance in readers less hostile to Wharton, weakens his argument.

Reiner Kornetta in "Edith Wharton's 'The Angel at the Grave' and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*" (*EWWhR* 14, ii [1997]: 21–24) argues for Hawthorne's novel as the source of Wharton's story and sees in her portrayal of characters imprisoned by family tradition a rejection of Transcendentalism in favor of Darwinian science. In "Wharton's 'Bewitched'" (*Expl* 56: 198–201) Gerard M. Sweeney bases his argument that this ghostly tale may be Wharton's darkest picture of New England on her portrayal of Deacon Hibben, a minor character who gives sensible advice and appears to be normal but whose blotched face, indicating syphilis, identifies him as a hypocritical "sexual sinner" suggestive of "the pathology of the entire community." For Michele S. Ware in "Making Fun of the Critics: Edith Wharton's Antic-

ipation of the Postmodern Academic Romance,” pp. 151–59 in *New Directions in American Humor*, the “hidden moral corruption” in the New York literary world of “The Legend” reveals Wharton’s “skepticism and ambivalence about literary acclaim, authorial power, and the motivations of the scholar/critic.”

Frederick Wegener, the editor of *The Uncollected Writings of Edith Wharton* (see *AmLS* 1996, p. 272), has made available a long-forgotten essay by Wharton, “Les Oeuvres de Mme Lyautey au Maroc,” published in French in the journal *France-Maroc* in 1918 and reprinted for the first time, with an English translation by Louise M. Wills, in “Edith Wharton: An Unknown Travel Essay” (*TSWL*, 17: 11–33). In a substantial introductory essay supplemented by extensive notes, Wegener highlights the importance of Wharton’s visits to the hospitals and nurseries established in Morocco by Mme Lyautey, the wife of the resident-general of the French Protectorate. Although omitted from *In Morocco*, Wegener notes, Wharton’s essay extolling the medical charities as exemplifying the virtues of the Protectorate is consistent with her approval of French colonial administration in that work.

## ii Willa Cather

**a. General Studies** Joyce McDonald’s *The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather’s Southern Heritage* (Alabama) makes a strong argument for the presence of a “Southern sensibility” throughout Cather’s work, from *O Pioneers!* to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, her only novel set in the South. Through perceptive analyses of poems in *April Twilights* as well as more than a dozen novels and stories, McDonald develops her thesis that Cather’s Southern heritage is most fully reflected in her use of elements of the pastoral, e.g., idealization of a past age, identified with childhood; celebration of order, tradition, and the simplicities of rural life over the commercialism and anomie of modern society; defense of patriarchal hierarchy supported by the idea of noblesse oblige; and veneration of the classics, especially the poetry of Vergil. McDonald traces in Cather’s fiction a progression that she sees as unique to Southern literature, from the “need to reclaim the pastoral ideal,” through “disillusionment and alienation,” to “historical reconciliation” and “reclamation of [one’s] ancestral roots.” McDonald treats the thorny issues of race and slavery in a balanced way, noting both Cather’s idealization of “benevolent forms of power” and the presence of an “undertone of irony” created by

interpolated stories and allusions that evoke the “historical realities” of violent conquest and exploitation.

Another valuable survey of central elements in Cather’s fiction is Janis P. Stout’s chapter in *Through the Window, Out the Door* (pp. 62–104). In Stout’s analysis, Cather strikingly illustrates in her own life and in all of her fiction conflicting needs to move outward and to return home, a “dual impulse” that Stout sees as a tradition in women’s fiction, mediated in the image of the “open window,” which affords “visual or mental passage” from one realm to the other. Stout gives most space to *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, and *The Professor’s House*, seeing Alexandra Bergson and Thea Kronborg as Cather’s characters who best exemplify self-fulfillment won in freedom and sustained by “a sense of secure rootedness.” In Cather’s later novels, beginning with *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Stout notes a progressive “withdrawal inside protective walls,” an “emotional retreat” to enclosed spaces, accompanied by the novelist’s turn to the more distant past.

In *The Place of Literature and the Cultural Phenomenon of Willa Cather* (Distinguished Professor Lecture Series, University of Nebraska) Susan J. Rosowski draws most of her illustrations from *My Ántonia*, but her authoritative essay illuminates all of Cather’s work. Establishing the experience of loss and the fear of annihilation as the “bedrock premises” of the fiction, Rosowski shows how Cather responded to change and displacement—by precision in representing people and places, by using myth to make local and everyday life timeless and universal, and by capturing the voices of characters who preserve the past in the stories they tell. Rosowski dispels the common misconception that Cather disliked science by providing the most detailed account yet of her scientific studies at the University of Nebraska and the importance of botany in particular in developing her powers to observe and describe natural phenomena “in precise, scientific detail.”

Two essays protest current trends in criticism and argue for new approaches to Cather’s fiction. Richard Middleton in “Against Allegory: Re-imagining Cather’s Modernism” (*WCPMN* 42: 44–46) contends that the familiar modes of criticism, such as the biographical, historicist, and cultural, have imposed an abstract—that is, allegorical—framework on Cather, “an essentially anti-allegorical writer,” and he proposes making “the experience of reading the work an object of study.” James Seaton in “The Prosaic Willa Cather” (*ASch* 67: 146–50) questions the value of continuing to play “the gender and sexual orientation cards” in account-

ing for Cather's negative treatment of romantic love. Seaton sees her fiction as expressive of "the prosaic outlook" that mistrusts "grand passions" and affirms the importance of the ordinary, but an outlook that also shows "art, religion, and everyday life [to be] inextricably connected."

The *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter and Review* (recently renamed) includes several well-researched articles on lesser-known events in Cather's life. Cynthia Griffin Wolff in "New Cather Biographical Data: 'Valentine' Sentiments" (41: 60–62) describes documents discovered at the University of Pittsburgh that are signed by or attributed to Cather, including a letter, a poem, and a "Valentine collage" to Ethelbert Nevin, all of which confirm her passionate devotion to the composer and her anguish at his death in 1901 at age 38. Li Zhu and Tim Bintrim in "The Chinese Connection: Cather and Pittsburgh's Chinatown" (42: 1–5) document Cather's growing sympathy for Chinese immigrants as reflected in three early stories, "The Conversion of Sum Loo," "A Son of the Celestial," and "Affair at Grover Station," and in her 1902 essay about the merchant Yee Chin, "Pittsburgh's Richest Chinaman," here reprinted for the first time. Christopher Sten in "City of Pilgrims: Willa Cather's Washington" (42: 25–29) describes Cather's three visits to Washington, D.C. (1898, 1900–1901, and 1917), and he contrasts her enthusiasm for the city, expressed in 25 newspaper articles written during her second visit, with Tom Outland's depressing views of it in *The Professor's House*. Sharon Hoover's "Chatting with Willa Cather While Kneading Bread" (42: 35–39) presents the accounts of 25 persons, including friends, students, writers, fellow classmates, and journalists, who knew Cather and describe her appearance, personality, conversation, and style as a teacher and editor.

**b. Individual Works** The fourth volume of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition (Nebraska), *Obscure Destinies* ("Neighbor Rosicky," "Old Mrs Harris," and "Two Friends"), includes maps, illustrations, and extensive notes. In the "Historical Essay" (pp. 199–241) Kari A. Ronning describes the sources and composition of the three stories, the persons on whom characters were modeled, and the book's early reception, noting how critics' political views influenced their reviews. The "Textual Essay" by Frederick M. Link, with Kari Ronning and Mark Kamrath (pp. 323–70), includes an analysis of Cather's revisions based on recently discovered typescripts of "Old Mrs Harris" and "Two Friends" and comparison of the magazine versions and the book texts of all three stories. This

volume, like its predecessors, exemplifies the fine art of bookmaking, always of particular concern to Cather.

Marilee Lindemann explores the interplay of sexual and racial politics in *O Pioneers!* in one of the year's most theoretically sophisticated essays, "Fear of a Queer Prairie: Figures of the Body and/as the Nation in Willa Cather's Early Fiction" (*WCPMN* 42: 30–34). To replace the familiar dichotomies, male and female, masculine and feminine, Lindemann proposes the opposition of the "normal" and the "queer"—a word repeated in the novel—which she defines as the deviant, the "ec-centric—off-centered." Describing the novel as "obsessed with bodies" that can mark "racial or ethnic difference," Lindemann posits connections between the threat of disorder signified by disfigured or "queer" bodies and the determination of individual characters, the community, and the entire nation to maintain "socially constructed" ideals of normality and social order. In Lindemann's reading, Alexandra Bergson, with her physical and emotional strength and her dazzling white skin, is the ideal figure in "an allegory of nation-building predicated on the repudiation or containment of the 'queer.'"

William Howarth analyzes several passages in *My Ántonia* to illustrate the interplay of nature and human consciousness in "Ego or Eco Criticism? Looking for Common Ground," pp. 3–8 in *Reading the Earth*. Drawing on principles of ecology and geology, he argues that Cather sees landscape in "conflicted ways"—as vast and unknowable but also as subject to cultivation and exploitation.

Jessica G. Rabin's "Camelot, Back Creek and Sweet Water: Arthurian Archetypes and Southern Sensibility in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*" (*WCPMN* 42: 39–44) is a traditional study of similarities in theme, character, and imagery between Cather's novel and such medieval romances as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Most interesting is the view of Niel Herbert as a "would-be Lancelot and a chastened Gawain" whose attachment to Marian Forester is in reality "displaced affection" for her husband.

The ongoing debate about Godfrey St. Peter, Cather's most controversial figure, continues in four essays on *The Professor's House*, once again the novel to receive the most critical attention. John Hilgart's thoughtful analysis of Cather's modernism, "Death Comes for the Aesthete: Commodity Culture and the Artifact in Cather's *The Professor's House*" (*SNNIS* 30: 377–404), presents St. Peter as defined by devotion to "an idealized past" that reflects "friction" between Cather's hostility to mod-

ern mass-produced culture and the formalist aesthetics of “The Novel Dèmeublé.” Arguing that the “privileged objects” celebrated by Cather and the characters lose meaning when detached from their “context and history,” Hilgart sees both St. Peter and Tom Outland as engaged in a futile effort to isolate and preserve the Blue Mesa as a timeless “autonomous aesthetic object.” To Hilgart, the contrast between St. Peter, fixed in his “formalist idealism,” and Jean Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, who accepts change and modifies ritual to accommodate local conditions, suggests that Cather and her characters could achieve a “synthesis of contending meanings” only in novels of past eras.

Chip Rhodes in *Structures of the Jazz Age: Mass Culture, Progressive Education, and Racial Discourse in American Modernism* (Verso, pp. 54–65) likewise argues that St. Peter, in his hostility to the present, is seeking to deny “historical realities” and live in a “fantasy of escape.” Rhodes insists, however, that Cather does not share St. Peter’s escapist desires or participate in his sense of alienation but instead presents him as a cautionary figure, doomed to “inevitable failure” in his attempt to “escape history” by living in the past. Charles L. Crow in “The Patrimony of Blue Mesa: *The Professor’s House* and Museum Theory” (*WCPMN* 41: 53–57) takes a new approach to the novel, but he is no less critical of the characters than is Rhodes. Placing the novel in the context of current debates about the functions of museums and the ownership of works of art, he compares Tom Outland on the mesa to the curator of a museum and rejects as “absurd” Tom’s claim that the objects he catalogs and displays are his patrimony. But Crow argues that Cather sees Outland in positive terms and endorses his view of himself as the “spiritual possessor” of the mesa.

The exclusion of women from the Blue Mesa and other sacred places in *The Professor’s House* is the subject of J. Gerard Dollar’s “Misogyny in the American Eden: Abbey, Cather, and Maclean,” pp. 99–105 in *Reading the Earth*. Dollar compares Tom Outland’s story with Parsifal’s quest for the Holy Grail, notes the association of female sexuality with temptation and corruption in both Wagner’s opera and Cather’s novel, and emphasizes that Outland and St. Peter, in yearning for “an untainted original world,” see the mesa as a place of “pure male identity and male purpose.”

Dollar makes a similar argument in “Desert Landscapes and the ‘Male Gaze’: Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*” (*WCPMN* 41: 6–9), drawing on feminist theory to compare Cather’s novel with Thoreau’s

*Walden* as works that approve control of “elemental nature” (including human sexuality) by the superior will of “the celibate male.” Dollar supports his claim that the novel “celebrates the conversion of nature into landscape” by noting the pervasive mistrust of the earthy and primitive throughout the book and by comparing the ordered landscape in the opening scene in Rome to the cathedral built at the end.

Judith Beth Cohen addresses the controversial issue of Cather’s use of history in “Father Martínez: Folk Hero or Dangerous Infidel? Rereading Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*,” pp. 146–59 in *Rethinking American Literature*, ed. Lil Brannon and Brenda M. Greene (NCTE, 1997). Cohen contrasts Cather’s portrayal of Martínez as a benighted sensualist and predator with historians’ descriptions of Martínez as an influential leader concerned for the welfare of the poor. Denying that “allegiance to an artistic purpose” necessarily justifies “deliberate distortion of history,” Cohen argues that Cather should have invented a name for Martínez—a “fictional mask,” such as she gave Bishop Lamy, the model for her protagonist, Jean Latour.

Linda K. Karell analyzes the ambiguous nature of Cather’s representations of order and stability in an illuminating essay, “Safe Space and Storytelling in Willa Cather’s *Shadows on the Rock*,” pp. 147–62 in *Creating Safe Space*. To maintain the harmony and security of “safe space,” Karell argues, certain stories must be “violently suppressed,” and the institutions and daily rituals that create safe havens for women may also subject them to domination, repression, and abuse. To illustrate the “internal debate” created by narrators’ contradictory stories, Karell analyzes the most problematic character in the novel, Jeanne LeBar, whose self-willed isolation has elicited a “series of contradictory interpretations” from both characters and readers alike.

Cather’s last completed novel, discussed at length in the books by McDonald and Stout, is the subject of one article, Li Zhu’s “Race, Place and Language: The Southern Idiom in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*” (*WCPMN* 41: 72–75). The discussion is valuable for noting that the speech of all the main characters varies, depending on their relationship to and status of the persons they address. In Li Zhu’s view, Cather’s representation of language reflects a positive appreciation of the multicultural, multiracial character of the United States.

Several articles compare Cather with other artists. Janis P. Stout in “Remembering *Trilby*: Willa Cather and the Unwilling Singer” (*WCPMN* 41: 10–12) sees Cather’s interest in George Du Maurier’s novel, which she

reviewed in 1894, reflected in *The Song of the Lark*, in which Thea Kronborg, like Trilby, rises from humble origins to become a celebrated singer but owes her success to her own will, not to the hypnotic power of a Svengali.

The proposal (not accepted) of the photographer Laura Gilpin to provide illustrations for an edition of *The Professor's House* is Jonathan Goldberg's starting point in "Photographic Relations: Laura Gilpin, Willa Cather" (*AL* 70: 63–95). Goldberg devotes most of his analysis to Gilpin's work, but he points out similarities between Cather's portrayal of the Blue Mesa and Gilpin's text of *The Mesa Verde National Park* (1927), argues that their representations of Anglo and Indian figures afforded both women "access to same-sex female desire," and notes that each woman explored the Southwest with a female friend with whom she lived for many years.

Deborah Williams's "Cather, Woolf, and the Two Mrs. Ramsays" (*CE* 61: 29–40) makes a persuasive case for seeing Cather's portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay in *Lucy Gayheart* as "an affiliative gesture" toward Virginia Woolf that unites the two novelists in a subtly revealed "aesthetic sisterhood." When *Lucy Gayheart* is framed by *To the Lighthouse*, Williams argues, the importance of Cather's novel as "an indictment of American culture" becomes clear, and Lucy emerges not as a failed artist (the usual reading) but as an "aesthetic critic," similar to Woolf's Lily Briscoe, yet one unable to sustain "an impressionist perspective" in a materialistic society. Williams's exemplary essay, like the relationship that she presents between Cather and Woolf, could itself serve as "a model to read the literary landscape of female modernism."

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