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“Fragmentary and Inconclusive” Violence:
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Willa Cather’s relationship to the American past is discussed more often in terms of her nostalgia than her historicism.¹ But while nostalgia is a powerful force in Cather’s novels, we must now recognize that it is often parried by an equally powerful historicist skepticism.² In what follows, I will demonstrate the formal and thematic density of Cather’s commitment to historicism in *The Professor’s House* (1925). With its historian protagonist, it deploys her historicist critique of nostalgia with particular ingenuity, and its ambivalent, incomplete incorporation of Southwestern and Native American cultures registers her wariness of their nationalistic consumption in the early twentieth century. *The Professor’s House* has been described as “fragmentary and inconclusive,” its form marked by the “violence” with which the middle section fractures the narrative.³ It is this form, I argue, in which Cather inscribes the “fragmentary and inconclusive” violence of her nation’s nostalgic conception of Native American history. This Catherian historicist critique, and its implications for our understanding of Cather’s racial ideology, has yet to be adequately explored. Pursuing it also leads us to a larger recognition: *The Professor’s House* demands that we look to its formal structure for historical understandings—that neither historical *nor* formal contexts be ignored in our analysis. Acceding to this demand involves recognizing the necessity that formal preoccupations take a permanent place among the considerations of literary history.

In fact, formalist approaches yield important historical analyses. In this assertion I ally myself with Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, who has argued for a recognition of “form as itself culturally enacted or

staged. . . . form as inseparable from history or materiality.”⁴ Indeed, because formalist analysis adds yet another dimension to the focus on particularity that is so critical to historicist modes of interpretation, it should be understood as fundamental to the historicist project. Attention to form actually dovetails with much recent thinking in literary and cultural studies. In the special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* “Reading for Form,” Ellen Rooney argues: “To recover the category and the work of form in literary and cultural studies is . . . not to transcend the New Historicism, poststructuralism, cultural materialism, feminism, semiotics, postcolonialism, or any of the other critical interventions marking literary studies in the late twentieth century. Rather, the renewal of form as an operation intrinsic to reading enables literary and cultural studies fully to take the pressure of those interventions.” As Rooney contends, attention to form can in fact increase the range and the resilience of many current critical approaches.⁵ Both Dillon and Rooney position themselves in response to the secondary role that formal concerns have played in recent literary and cultural studies—a phenomenon that can be traced, Dillon compellingly explains, to critiques that associate New Critical formalism with “hermeticism or quietism” and poststructuralist formalism with “implied universalism.”⁶ Remaining attentive to the form of Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, I suggest, enables a reading that is both antihermetic and anti-universal. As we attune ourselves to her form’s particularities, we will find that parallel particularities—of cultural context and historical method—grow increasingly importunate.

Cather’s own critical writing enacts the pairing of historical and formal modes of analysis that her work requires.⁷ In a 1938 letter about *The Professor’s House*, Cather explains its fractured form in terms of an exhibition of Dutch paintings she had seen just before she began writing: one often sees, in Dutch paintings, depictions of crowded interiors with “a square window, open. . . . The feeling of the sea that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe—to Java, etc.”⁸ By serving as a model for Cather’s experiment with form, Dutch painting, a distinct national school of art constituted by historical continuity, highlights this novel’s nexus of formal, historical, and national concerns. Over centuries, the Dutch aesthetic elaborated a national identity by carefully policing the boundaries between the nation, conceived as a historical entity, and its other spaces, the

timeless waters cradling Dutch colonial possessions. While the everyday objects characteristic of Dutch depictions of interiors may have periodicity, the other spaces suggested by the “quiet plying” of the imperial nation’s ships act as mythic others that stabilize the nation in time while expanding it geographically. Because the window relieves the stuffiness of a conventional Dutch identity by promising always-new spaces comprehended by the national identity, the experience of Dutchness remains viable. The paintings reveal that the construction of this national identity hinges on perceptions of timeless horizons in service to a time-bound nation, suggesting the degree to which (often ahistorical) ideas of the past undergird conceptions of nationality.⁹ Cather’s Dutch painting analogy positions national identity construction as a formal exercise that invokes historicity in a disturbingly canted way.

The asymmetrical historicity of the Dutch paintings characterizes the relation, in *The Professor's House*, between the small Midwestern town of Hamilton and the Southwestern mesa land. Books 1 and 3, whose plot follows Professor Godfrey St. Peter and his family in Hamilton, correspond to the overstuffed Dutch interior, while the novel’s middle section, “Tom Outland’s Story,” narrates an unpolished, imaginative boy’s explorations of Southwestern cliff-dweller ruins. The middle section’s fresh protagonist, setting, mood, narrative voice, and style provide the window, letting space into the cramped and conventional interior.¹⁰ This unbalanced relation of interior to window, periodicity to timelessness, is exacerbated by Cather’s formal unwillingness to naturalize the relation between the two.

Through its fracture, *The Professor's House* bares the historical (or antihistorical) mechanisms by which nationality is constructed and perpetuated. Critics such as Walter Benn Michaels, Guy Reynolds, and Joseph Urgo have recently called attention to important connections between Cather’s work and historical questions of U.S. nationality.¹¹ The next step is to recognize the privileged position that Cather’s formal design assumes in her negotiation of nation and history.¹² Because *The Professor's House* intertwines formal and national-historical particularities, like Cather’s model of the Dutch painting, our exploration of this intertwining will uncover a set of historical circumstances that Cather’s critique of national nostalgia addresses.

“Tom Outland’s Story” provides a key to this history. In a telling scene in the Southwestern cliff-dweller ruins, Tom Outland learns that

his companion, Roddy Blake, has sold the Indian artifacts that the two excavated earlier on the mesa. Tom's explosive reaction sets forth a vision of Americanness predicated upon national inheritance of the Native American past:

But I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell—nor yours! They belonged 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. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. You've gone and sold your country's secrets, like Dreyfus.¹³

Tom labels Roddy's failure to appreciate the nationalistic significance of the Native American past as treason, the crime for which the Frenchman Alfred Dreyfus was convicted in 1894, though later exonerated. In the vocabulary of Tom's outburst, Cather illustrates the danger of national identification with the Native American past. Too many critics have accepted Tom's assertion of his and his nation's inheritance of the mesa culture without recognizing that the Dreyfus reference, with which this claim is intertwined, is, frankly, wrong.¹⁴ Tom's nationalized link with the mesa embraces the French nationalist discourse on Dreyfus's treason even though, at the time of the novel's composition, Dreyfus's innocence had been established.¹⁵ In other words, the complication inherent in the Dreyfus reference in 1925 directly challenges both the simplified scenario of betrayal that Tom is attempting to enact and the simplified senses of nationality and history upon which it is predicated. Tom is practicing bad history.¹⁶ Like those aligned against Dreyfus, Tom relies on a false narrative generated by nationalist desires.¹⁷

Tom's nationalistic diatribe puts into words a clear but suspect formulation: the nation "owns" the Native American past (although among the individuals sharing this ownership, no Native American population seems to figure). The cliff dwellings of the Blue Mesa once belonged to a now vanished culture, and no living Native American population has an indisputable claim on them; nonetheless, Tom's list of those who do have a claim on the cliff dwellers' past includes the country, the state, the people, and "boys like you and me." The erasure of Native American inheritance has been necessary for this history to become a national possession.¹⁸ Understood in this light, ethical questions drive Cather's engagement with national history in *The*

Professor's House. How, the novel queries, can a nation or individuals engage the history of a culturally and temporally other people?¹⁹

Despite the obvious limitations of Tom Outland's strategic incorporation of a Native American past, his view does offer an alternative to versions of American national identity that Cather despised. In a 1924 interview, she railed against the American way of "turning [immigrants] into stupid replicas of smug American citizens." According to Cather, "passion for Americanizing everything and everybody is a deadly disease with us. We do it the way we build houses. Speed, uniformity, dispatch, nothing else matters."²⁰ Americanizing, in Cather's formulation, is the erasure of immigrants' diverse histories—a violation of historicity. The Americanized immigrant is a cookie-cutter house thrown up where a heritage home once stood. In one sense, the America of which Tom Outland speaks, the nation that treasures its ancient Southwestern heritage, at least allows for unique ways of being American. The national interest in the Southwest at this time can accordingly be read as a new recognition of the value of regional and cultural difference within the national whole. This view must be qualified in two ways, however. First, if exemplified by Tom's outburst, this turn to the Southwest resembles the violent, simplifying grab of imperial power. Recognizing no earlier claims on the histories it appropriates, it reenacts the violation of history that Americanization represents. Second, by relying upon the past to anchor national diversity, this scheme threatens to cast such diversity as past, as an object of nostalgia, the timeless space beyond the window rather than the actual periodicity within the Dutch interior. Cather was accordingly ambivalent about the Tom Outland-like inclination to embrace the Southwest, which she saw gaining national popularity.

By the 1920s, Southwestern Native American histories and cultures were being woven into accounts of U.S. national identity by sources as disparate as politicians, writers and artists, social activists, and marketers. These agents were in part responding to the booming market for national history created by the nationalism of the Spanish-American War and World War I.²¹ Anthropologist and Pueblo popularizer Edgar Lee Hewett, among others, promoted Indians as "the first Americans" and their culture as "original American culture."²² By the 1920s, the *New York Times* responded to legislative threats to Pueblo land ownership with a reminder that these ancient peoples were particularly deserving of national respect, due to their status as perhaps

“the oldest democracies on the face of the earth.”²³ The characterization of the Pueblos as, above all, democratic certainly suggests that the reconfiguration of the national vision of Southwestern Indians was a quest for the spiritual forebears of the republic.²⁴ Tom Outland’s passionate mesa-top declaration must be understood as an instance of this historically specific national romanticism.

The narrative fracture of *The Professor’s House* embodies Cather’s ambivalence about the Southwestern focus of the new American national romance. The novel tacitly accepts the relevance of the Southwestern material of “Tom Outland’s Story” and yet stops short of fully incorporating his story into the narrative. The other remains distinctly other.²⁵ “Tom Outland’s Story” stands apart: it receives little in the way of introduction or conclusion; it is a first-person narration, unlike the third-person narration in the rest of the novel; and its diction is simple and direct, unlike the more complex and fussy sentences of the surrounding portions.²⁶ Inconsistencies between the framing narrative and “Tom Outland’s Story” serve to intensify this sense of disconnection.²⁷ Tom himself is virtually unrecognizable in his incarnation, in books 1 and 3, as a scientist and family man in the university town of Hamilton.²⁸ Cumulatively, these features set in place a rift between text and context.

“Tom Outland’s Story” is a retrospective, even in its first telling, adding another deliberate layer of distance between Tom’s account and Cather’s reader. In its context in the narrative, the story is at a further remove—a retrospective remembered by the professor. “Tom Outland’s Story” also visibly maintains its rhetorical distance from the fictional context of its telling. Only a single moment in the section even suggests the professor’s presence at the storytelling, when Tom’s voice resumes after a pause (a new paragraph), qualifying his account of the discovery of a mummy, Mother Eve, with: “Yes, we found three other bodies, but afterward” (*PH*, 192). This statement could be a response to a question, or even a questioning look, but its stimulus is suppressed; the context of the story’s telling does not enter into the section. The rigidly maintained rhetorical separation between professor and story parallels the distance created between story and reader by the novel’s structure. In this way, Cather re-creates in the form of the novel the distance between the conventional American public and the Southwestern culture popularized by intellectuals, artists, and marketers.

These formal rifts enact a kind of decontextualization also evident in theme and plot. Tom is separated, by time and by culture, from the creators and rightful owners of the mesa civilization that so entrances him. He approaches the mesa without adequate critical contextualization. The many parties invested in the figure of Tom in books 1 and 3 also suffer a separation from the contexts of Tom-ness. Such separations constitute the object of history; they indicate the not present. They also provide, through the elimination of context, the occasion for nostalgia. In *The Professor's House*, lack of context functions as enticement. The mesa becomes hospitable to Tom and Roddy because it is empty of its original inhabitants. The separation between "Tom Outland's Story" and the main narrative of the novel elicits from readers interpretations unifying the sections. In these cases and others, separation becomes an occasion for a certain kind of encroachment. That is, the inviolate is not necessarily inviolable. When an object—the mesa, the memory of Tom, "Tom Outland's Story"—seems lacking in interpretive context, individuals interpret it as open to their personal investments. Just so, the separateness of the ancient Indian cultures of the Southwest was taken as an invitation by American cultural nationalists of the early twentieth century. *The Professor's House* suggests that apparent openness to outside investments is often a misperception—which leads to trespasses in the name of licensing possession.

Tom's intrusion onto the Blue Mesa, the most obvious form of trespass in *The Professor's House*, can be taken as a model for the more theoretical trespasses that are also Cather's subject. This trespass, like those already mentioned, is motivated by the isolation of its object. The Mesa Verde that Cather researched, unlike the Blue Mesa that she created, was not impenetrable. As David Harrell emphasizes, it had a contemporary critical context: its artifacts had been examined, and the mesa and surrounding area had been explored, "surveyed, mapped, photographed, and described." In contrast, the fictional history and topography of Cather's Blue Mesa amplify its danger and inaccessibility.²⁹ It is precisely the mysterious separation of the mesa from its physical context that first draws Tom across the river and onto the mesa, which then teases him and Roddy with barely perceptible canyons, fringes of obscuring trees, unpredictable light, and unanticipated weather. Describing the difference between the mesa and the surrounding area is like describing the difference

between “Tom Outland’s Story” and the surrounding narrative. It is a difference principally constituted by estrangement. However, once Tom breaches the separateness of the mesa, he threatens to violate it forever, to rob it of its constitutive separateness. He brings Roddy, Henry, and Father Duchene (and later even the professor) to Cliff City, and he builds a road from the mesa to the plain. Although when Tom and Roddy begin their exploration they are “reluctant to expose those silent and beautiful places to vulgar curiosity” (*PH*, 183), within a year Tom is on his way to Washington to “bring back . . . men who would understand it, who would appreciate it and dig out all its secrets” (*PH*, 202). As enthralling as its strangeness is, this historical entity is perceived as an invitation to its own destruction. It is violated by the very passion it inspires.

The first expert Tom brings onto the mesa is Father Duchene, a French priest. As Jean Schwind has noted, Duchene’s interpretation of the mesa—and particularly of “Mother Eve,” a female mummy—amounts to a “frame-up,” structurally enacted in the novel’s form.³⁰ According to Schwind, Duchene’s interpretation of Eve’s end—he believes she was executed by her husband for unfaithfulness—reads a matrilineal, matrilocal society in terms of his own Judeo-Christian beliefs. Distorted by cultural bias, his interpretation serves as a prime example of the kind of bad history of which *The Professor’s House* is wary. Duchene’s suggestion that the mesa reveals “some important points in the history of your country” should also be understood as questionable history (*PH*, 199). After all, in the Dutch paintings after which Cather modeled her novel, the timeless promise of the sea is marked by imperialist ships; that is, the “other” space (here, the mesa) is often imagined as an empty past so that it can be colonized by the contemporary nation. National history and nostalgia work in concert here, against historicism, to serve the appropriative needs of the national imaginary.

By refusing to institute ties between “Tom Outland’s Story” and the rest of the novel, Cather formally refuses to extend the cultural imaginary of conventional 1920s America over this other space. She will not be the Duchene to this narrative. The Southwest of “Tom Outland’s Story” stands apart as formal witness to Cather’s discomfort with, and ambivalence about, the colonial gaze at work in the building of national histories. Ultimately, “Tom Outland’s Story” is connected just enough to the rest of the novel to be problematic. The middle section is both

separate and inextricable from its surrounding sections in much the same way that the mesa is both separate and inextricable from Tom Outland's America. Still, by questioning its own incorporation of "Tom Outland's Story," the novel draws into question Tom's far less hesitant use of the mesa to constitute his America. In other words, the split between the sections of the novel suggests a resistance to Tom Outland's America—to its total incorporation of the mesa—or, more broadly, a resistance to the total incorporation of any historical target by any interpreting agency. By locating the model for this resistance in the very structure of the novel, Cather avoids attributing it to any single agency, ultimately problematizing not the role of possessor or possessed but the very idea of possession.

Tom's most significant trespass on the mesa is not his physical presence but his attempt at possession—the symbolic trespass central to the colonial and nation-building gaze. Tom wants to impose upon the mesa his own sense of its significance. He wants to constitute its meaning. This impulse seems predictable, since most of the characters in *The Professor's House* are habitual meaning seekers, as are Cather's ideal readers. However, this need to fix meaning involves an appropriation.³¹ When Tom's nationalistic fury chases Roddy from the mesa, one of Roddy's parting comments pinpoints Tom's desire: "I supposed I had some share in the relics we dug up—you always spoke of it that way. But I see now that I was working for you like a hired man, and while you were away I sold your property" (*PH*, 221–22). What Roddy calls Tom's "Fourth of July talk" is infused with a sense of ownership violated (*PH*, 221). Although Tom claims that the relics are neither his nor Roddy's, he evidently sees them more as his to deny to Roddy than as Roddy's to deny to him. In the heat of Tom's nationalistic idealism, conventional ideas of ownership and entitlement emerge. The discordant note sounded by these ideas suggests the extent of the hesitation with which Cather approached her Southwestern subject.

After all, what Tom had hoped to do with the artifacts is little different than what Fechtig, their German buyer, plans for them—the principal dissimilarity between their plans (and an inadequate one, as Tom learns in Washington) is the flag flying over the museums. What, indeed, should be Tom's or the Smithsonian's or even Cather's role upon the mesa and among the cliff dwellings? Cather recognized complex questions of entitlement provoked by her own attraction to the ancient Southwest and by other appropriations of its legacy. The

very extent to which the idea of possession preoccupies all narrative threads of the novel indicates her awareness of this issue.

The True America

For a woman who seemed to pride herself on being out of step with her time, in her attraction to Southwestern culture, Cather was for once uncannily in step. The affinity that she felt with the Southwest has long been recognized as one of the wellsprings of her art.³² While the Southwest comes up again and again in her fiction, her first novel with a significant Southwestern dimension proves a suggestive guide to her later literary uses of the Southwest. In *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Thea Kronborg escapes her conventional life for “Panther Canyon,” which is, unlike Tom’s Blue Mesa, a canyon “like a thousand others.”³³ The cliff dweller ruins Thea finds have an effect “like fetters that bound one to a long chain of human endeavour” (*SL*, 280). They “lengthened her past” and drew her into “older and higher obligations” (*SL*, 282). Like Tom Outland, Thea is impassioned and strengthened by her contact with the cliff dwellings; however, her language of fettering and obligation suggests that she cannot control either the nature or the significance of this connection. Unlike Tom, Thea sees the ancient Native American dwellings as neither a national right nor a national possession. Rather, she feels herself “a guest” (*SL*, 279) and finds in the ruins an individual inspiration to resist the worst side of American nationality, its assimilative hometown conventionality. As Thea’s language of obligation indicates, with her response to the cliff dwellings comes great responsibility: her conscience forbids her from separating the artifacts from their physical and cultural environment.³⁴ Cather herself also felt this responsibility.³⁵ Between *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor’s House*, the national popularity of the ancient Southwest grew. As a response to this growing nationalist monumentalization, the impassioned encounter with the Native American Southwest in *The Professor’s House* is more ambivalent and qualified, more broadly preoccupied with the necessity of attending to historical particularity.

In the jingoistic climate of the early-twentieth-century United States, uncovering and inventing the history of the nation had become a central nationalist endeavor. The American West was increasingly recognized by artists, writers, and marketers as a repository of what

Herbert Bashford, writing in 1902, termed “something peculiarly indigenous to our soil and clime.”³⁶ The West bore the imprimatur of Europe far less than the rest of the United States. Its native peoples also provided an alternate cultural history, which saved the United States from relying on European antecedents. The breathtaking ruins of the Southwest were solid evidence of a distinctly American antiquity. Nationalist rhetoric assimilated the Pueblo Indians more easily than eastern tribes, for the Pueblo cultures generally had not been engaged in centuries-long clashes with governments and settlers like more easterly tribes. The Pueblo Indians were sedentary, agricultural, and democratic. The “genuinely” indigenous was consequently at its most attractive and least threatening in the context of the Southwest, and its incorporation could serve to recraft conceptions of Americanness.³⁷

The rhetorical incorporation of these Southwestern peoples into nationalist discourse was barely checked by fears of racial intermingling. In service to the construction of a uniquely American past, the racial difference of Native Americans was significantly occluded from nationalist discourse. The strenuously American Teddy Roosevelt, for one, was said to regret not having “a strain of Indian blood” in his veins.³⁸ In fact, in the twenties, American Indians seemed to be among the few cultures not regarded as other to the United States.³⁹ In 1924, the year Cather completed *The Professor's House*, Congress both granted full citizenship to all Indians (the Citizenship Act) and set some of its most strict limits on immigration (the Johnson Act). As Brian Dippie puts it, “At a time when the embattled Anglo-Saxon could see in other ethnic types only a threat, nativism welcomed the native into the fold.”⁴⁰

In December 1917, Mabel Dodge received from her then-husband Maurice Sterne a letter that began: “Do you want an object in life? Save the Indians, their art-culture—reveal it to the world!”⁴¹ After following Sterne to New Mexico, Dodge soon married Pueblo Indian Tony Luhan. In the years that followed, Mabel Dodge Luhan became an unstoppable force in bringing the attention of mainstream America to the American Southwest.⁴² She was also instrumental in drawing a substantial group of artists and writers to the American Southwest in the period after World War I. Ansel Adams, Mary Austin, Witter Bynner, Robinson Jeffers, D. H. Lawrence, Georgia O’Keeffe, Jean Toomer—and Willa Cather—all visited Luhan, and some stayed on to

settle in the area. These artists joined Elizabeth Sergeant and Alice Corbin Henderson in vocal support of Southwestern Native Americans and in a prolific Southwestern-influenced artistic output. Luhan also hosted the prominent Progressive reformer John Collier, who would become the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1930, and Elsie Clews Parsons, a prominent anthropological popularizer of the region. Luhan's connections were fundamental to the national re-visioning of the area. The group painted, sculpted, and photographed the region and its native peoples; founded and edited periodicals; published collections of essays, fiction, and poetry dedicated to the Southwest; and established presses for the publication of their material. Luhan and her friends significantly furthered American ideas of the civil and property rights of Southwestern Indians, the moral and aesthetic value of traditional Native American lifestyles, and the idea of Native American art and culture as American heritage.

Many of these thinkers were first galvanized into active public support of the region by the controversy over the Bursum Bill of 1922, which threatened to confirm all non-Indian land claims by settlers who could prove continuous possession of their lands. Passage of the bill promised significant land losses for the Pueblo Indians. As D. H. Lawrence noted, response to the Bill was at a fever pitch when he arrived in New Mexico in 1922: “[I]t’s Bursum, Bursum, Bursum!”⁴³ Luhan considered the publicity surrounding the bill “invaluable.” In a letter to Mary Austin of December 1922, Luhan wrote: “That it began in politics does not prevent its being channelled into aesthetics. Please get busy and write—write. . . . Don’t you *want* to write about indians? Any magazine will publish things about them now.”⁴⁴ It is telling here that Luhan writes dismissively of political activism in the name of Southwestern Native American cultures. For Luhan, the bill was principally a political controversy that created print space and interest for her program of cultural appropriation. She marshaled her forces to respond to the demand, writing of Lawrence that “it was for this I had called him from across the world—to give him the truth about America: the false, new, external America in the east, and the true, primordial, undiscovered America that was preserved, living, in the Indian bloodstream.”⁴⁵ Luhan’s words make clear how actively nostalgia figured in the construction of this newly revised national narrative.

The limitations of Luhan’s project were growing evident by the

time *The Professor's House* was published. In his introduction to *Mesa, Cañon, and Pueblo* (1925), Charles Lummis, an early popularizer of the Southwest (indeed, the one who coined the term *Southwest* in reference to the region), denounced “the self-seeking charlatan, who neither studies nor learns, nor brings to light new knowledge, but calmly appropriates the research, the ideas, and even the characteristic language of others, and struts in borrowed plumes.”⁴⁶ Lummis’s accusation of appropriation is double-edged, for he, like many of the writers indicted by his charge of charlatanism, was a transplant from the East. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to imagine that the “translations” and “transcriptions” of Native American songs and stories being published by American anthropologists and writers fall within the bounds of his criticism. Hamlin Garland, who himself published collections of American Indian tales, had argued earlier that from the beginning of New World literature, American Indians had been used as “material.”⁴⁷ Mary Austin’s *The American Rhythm*, for one, “re-expresses” American Indian songs as an exercise in elaborating the context of “a new verse form” that arises from “the necessity of restating the national consciousness in terms of the burgeoning American outlook.”⁴⁸ Here, again, Native American forms are used as material. Like Tom Outland with the mesa and the professor with the memory of Tom, Austin “makes something of” her Indian songs: a new sense of American art and Americanness.

Cather was familiar with Luhan’s group of Southwestern writers, artists, and intellectuals, and she was close to several, making her contact with a Southwestern-Indian-inspired nationalism inevitable.⁴⁹ Her outsider status gave her a position from which to critique their complex mix of primitivism, idealism, political activism, nostalgia, and cultural pessimism. As Cather perceived, the rhetoric of this movement interweaves quasi-nationalist celebration with unperceived trespasses and violations. Even Austin, among the most culturally sensitive and politically committed to the cause of the Southwestern Native American in the New Mexico artists’ colonies, was often guilty of depriving Native Americans of agency. In 1924, as Cather was completing *The Professor's House*, Austin wrote in *Forum* that Native American culture should be considered “a National Asset, having something of the same valuation as the big trees of California and the geysers and buffaloes of Yellowstone.”⁵⁰ Although Austin was uncommonly receptive to the

power of the natural environment, her grouping of Native American culture with trees and geysers suggests that, to some degree, she classifies this culture as inanimate. Relying on the evaluating agency of her own eye (and the national eye that she seeks to guide), she associates Native American culture with nonagents. Austin's slip reveals an attitude that, according to Leah Dilworth, was widespread in turn-of-the-twentieth-century understandings of Southwestern Native American cultures. The associated railroad and hotel companies advertising Southwestern tourism in this period tended to depict the region's Native Americans as passive anachronisms, "objects of consumption or exchange among tourist subjects . . . available for the production of tourist narratives but . . . [unavailable for] dialogue."⁵¹ The tourist industry placed Southwestern Native Americans in the domain of nostalgia rather than historicism, selling travel to the Southwest as a voyage into a timelessness, much like the timeless seas plied by imperial ships outside the windows in Dutch paintings. By excluding historicism from the popular set of approaches to Southwestern Native American cultures, these promotions virtually foreclosed the possibility of Native American participation in history-making or even simple historicity—just as Tom Outland does.

Possession and the Ethics of National History

Nostalgia of the sort promoted by the tourist industry used Native American cultures to reinvigorate the national self-image without allowing their true participation in a national community. Nostalgia similarly skews Tom Outland's priorities. Although he calls upon "boys like you and me" to legitimate his claim on the mesa artifacts (*PH*, 219), he promptly sacrifices the only real community with whom he has shared these artifacts, the very "boy" to whom these words are spoken. The ideal national past that the mesa artifacts represent takes precedence, for Tom, over any local attachments: when he claims the artifacts as inheritance, he cares "more about them than about anything else in the world" (*PH*, 216). The local community is thus surrendered for the nostalgic national ideal. This locally focused inhumanity brings to life the more abstract inhumanities performed in the name of nostalgia and serves to suggest how profoundly unsuited nostalgia is to the brokering of a flexible and inclusive community, national or not.

When Tom has severed all ties save those to the nostalgic national

ideal, he feels that it is “the first night that all of me was there” (*PH*, 226). He is all in himself, whole because he has no context, and he understands the mesa in the light of this sundering of ties:

This was the first time I ever saw it [the mesa] as a whole. It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you see where they are leading. Something had happened to me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession. (*PH*, 226)

This moment is the fulfillment of Tom's nostalgic identification. He is, according to his own use of the term “possession,” both possessed and possessing; he and the mesa have only one tie, to each other. Such possession invariably results from, and produces, simplification.⁵² Considering that Professor Crane of Hamilton, earlier in the novel, critiques Tom's careless laboratory procedure, Tom's mesa-top analogy of a “series of experiments” is troubling. According to Crane, Tom's sense of his experiments was often premised upon anticipated rather than actual results. Just so, his understanding of the mesa is based upon what he already knows and feels rather than upon any effort to understand the mesa's actual nature. Tom's methods are intellectually unsound, and the language of wholeness in which he expresses them is fraught with irony. The wholeness that Tom conceives severs links to context and community. It falsely regards the object, individual, or mesa as whole only when separate.

By selling the artifacts, Roddy dispenses with context, severing the material link between Tom and reality. In the period that follows, Tom steers clear of context, knowing that it will cramp his nostalgic reverie. He refuses to return to his diary, the uncoordinated and unsimplified text in which he has recorded the material minutiae of the mesa. Tom prefers to continue at the level of theory and myth rather than recognize the concrete particulars of the past. The words with which he describes his unwillingness to retrieve the past underline his awareness of its historical value: “It would have been going backward. I didn't want to go back and unravel things step by step” (*PH*, 227). The steps are the methodical markers of a true historicist method; the backward unraveling, the sign of an intelligence gauging its relation to the past. Tom recognizes such method and materialism as threatening to his new ideal perception: “Perhaps I was afraid

that I would lose the whole in the parts" (*PH*, 227–28). The alternative, the historicism proposed by the form of *The Professor's House*, does, indeed, lose the whole in the parts, but it does so willingly and productively.

The tension that Tom perceives between whole and parts also speaks to a tension characteristic of the constitution of the American nation. By putting into play the competing interests served by different understandings of the Southwestern Native American past, Cather embeds the conception of a nation of parts in the form of her novel. However, Tom's language of wholes and parts also speaks to a specific historical vision in ascendancy by 1925. The New, or Progressive, history, whose most well-known proponent was Charles Beard, conceived of history as an affair of parts rather than of wholes. In his attention to the competing economic interests at work in the formation of the United States, Beard rejected earlier American historical approaches relying on grand theories of the nation or its great men.⁵³ By refusing to lose the whole in the parts, Tom aligns his nostalgia with earlier versions of national history and with reactions against the Progressive historians. By undercutting Tom, the form of *The Professor's House* aligns itself with the Progressive history of the 1920s. Like the Progressive historians, Cather's novel understands good history, what I have termed historicism, as depicting an ever shifting web of interrelations and competing affiliations and interests.

In other ways, however, Cather's vision of history is ahead of her time. She conceives of historicism as an ethical activity to an extent that Beard would not reach until the cultural crises of the 1930s. The ethical historicism of the novel becomes most clear in the material and social isolation of the empty mesa, when Tom becomes a little "frightened at my own heartlessness" (*PH*, 228). Even Tom recognizes that the fulfillment of his nostalgic affiliation necessitates his neglect of the fundamental connectivity of most human understandings. Edith Wyschogrod describes the historian as "covenanted to the dead";⁵⁴ Tom, the nostalgist, is without covenant. Historicism, on the mesa and in 1920s America, is a social and intellectual responsibility, while nostalgia is an evasion of it. Cather's understanding of the ethical value of historicist particularity is in fact very much in line with recent readings of the ethical understandings enabled by literary texts. Martha Nussbaum, for one, finds in Henry James's work the ethical understanding that "general and universal formula-

tions may be inadequate to the complexity of particular situations; that immersed particular judgments may have a moral value that reflective and general judgments cannot capture.”⁵⁵ The “immersed particular judgment” of which Nussbaum speaks is precisely that to which Cather’s ethical historicism seeks access. In Tom’s case, nationalist nostalgia becomes the universalizing force that attempts to sunder his and the mesa’s particular connections and covenants. The decontextualization of the historical object I have discussed, which is so often the precursor to appropriation, emerges as the very opposite of Nussbaum’s immersion.

And yet *The Professor's House* asks: How is such immersed particular judgment to be sustained in the case of an absent object? Tom Outland himself represents the test case for such a project, for the first and third sections of the novel detail the battle over *his* history. At a family supper early in book 1, which provides the first mention of Tom in the novel, appropriative tensions simmer, and family members clash over entitlement to his various legacies, spiritual and material. In this struggle for possession, Tom’s figure has been evacuated of any original meaning.⁵⁶ Although the professor wants to intervene in this circuit, his scholarly edition of Tom’s diary similarly seeks possession. That is, as much as “Tom Outland’s Story” details an episode of “making something of” something, it must also be understood as subject to this process.

The professor wishes to use Tom’s story for his own purposes. Professional history of the 1920s similarly claimed to put the past in service to the present. Although the Progressive historians claimed to put history to work for their own purposes because they resisted being subjected to outmoded understandings of the past, in the hands of the nostalgic Godfrey St. Peter, the manipulation of history seems more visibly self-serving. Admittedly, the professor’s commitment to professional history does complicate his possession of his object. Although the publication of Tom’s diary seems an attempt to copyright Tom, academic publication makes demands of the professor that end by undermining possession. For the diary “[t]o mean anything,” the professor must supply an introduction (*PH*, 150). His writer’s block suggests his unwillingness to provide the account with even the minor contextualization that prefatory material entails. In attempting to assert his possession of Tom, St. Peter will need to expose his abstract ideal to the precariousness of historicity. As Hayden White writes: “In

order to qualify as ‘historical,’ an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened.”⁵⁷ The professor’s unwillingness to relinquish his treasured object to the flux of time and social relations accounts for his compositional difficulties. He cannot write the introduction because his motivations are at odds with modern developments in his discipline.

The professor’s earlier history writing aligns him with the more traditional forms of history against which the Progressive historians of the 1920s reacted. For the professor, history writing has been an exercise of imposing significance. For his eight-volume work, *The Spanish Adventurers in North America*, “the design . . . unfolded in the air above him, just as definitely as the mountain ranges [of the Sierra Nevadas] themselves. And the design was sound. He had accepted it as inevitable, had never meddled with it, and it had seen him through” (*PH*, 89). As St. Peter becomes more familiar with his subject over the course of his life, he never contemplates deviating from his original conception. His idea, formulated in Spain and then imposed on New World materials, seems the essence of the imperialist gaze. His method of composition involves bringing “the notes and the records and the ideas” back to his own space, where they “were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history” (*PH*, 16). The academic’s self-imposition becomes evident in the reference to “his” history and his determination of the “proper place” for each item. And yet Tom’s diary is a different affair, more intimate, more raw—for which Europe may not be able to provide an “inevitable” design. Dealing with Tom’s diary necessitates the New World’s making sense of itself, rather than deferring to the Old World’s nostalgic designs (such as the open window and empty sea of Dutch paintings). In this sense, the professor’s struggle with the historical approach to the Tom Outland material very much resembles the 1920s American struggle with the significance of Southwestern Native American cultures for the nation’s self-understanding. Both the yearning for possession and the ethical demand for historicist particularity seem to become more importunate with the more proximal context.

The nostalgic professor is thus torn between historical form and his yearning for possession. By the final portions of the novel, he is in a

position comparable to Tom's as he stands alone on the mesa with the decontextualized object of his nostalgia. Nostalgia has prevailed at the cost of his allegiance to all social bonds. The professor's wife, Lillian, has earlier noted that his "ideas were best" when he was his "most human self" (*PH*, 142), a self born, as he notes, of the conjugation of the verb "to love," a self abandoned along with historicism and the will to live. The professor has sacrificed ideas for the *idée fixe*, historicism for nostalgia, ethical responsibility for isolation, and ultimately, life for death. The retreat from the flux and responsibility of historicism produces a bittersweet possession, one for which he "will have to pay," as Tom observes (*PH*, 229). At its darkest point, the novel asserts both the ethical necessity for historicism and its practical impossibility.

Perceiving the isolating and distorting capacities of possession, *The Professor's House* both suggests and denies us relatedness, suggests and stops short of appropriation, suggests and withholds a coherent narrative. If "Tom Outland's Story" can be taken as a formal corollary of the Southwestern materials it treats, then Cather's novel ends by posing questions and underlining tensions about the national use of the past. After all, the spiritual inheritance of the Native American Southwest cannot be definitively settled. Even interpretations of what constitutes appropriation are all over the map. Through demonstrating the indispensability of historicism, *The Professor's House* approaches these problems of inheritance and appropriation multivocally. The fracturing of the novel works to postpone the determination of authority indefinitely and to disseminate the spaces from which articulation is possible. The attempt of any voice to control access to the cultural materials of which the novel is built is fruitless. Cather's narrative strategy formally recreates the instability that, in the content of the novel, acts as a check on the most egregious violations of any legacy. In this sense, *The Professor's House* demonstrates the capacity of the novel form to resist totalizing appropriative narratives—and the capacity of the nation form to do so equally.

The instability and inconclusiveness to which *The Professor's House* resorts in order to resist the violence of possession recur in a late unpublished fragment Cather wrote on artistic method. In "Light on Adobe Walls," Cather breaks off before she ever touches upon her interpretation of the walls. This inconclusiveness is the most extreme demonstration of her ambivalent relationship with the Southwest. Her need to bring such inconclusiveness to bear upon the subject of

artistic method suggests that she recognizes her own inevitable complicity, and that of her creative method, in the dance of attraction and repulsion between the contemporary world and the historical objects it idealizes.

Unlike “Light on Adobe Walls,” *The Professor’s House*, despite its innovation and radical disjunction, is a novel. It respects generic conventions enough to offer a close to the narrative (in the time-honored manner of a reopening, of sorts). A brush with death at the end tears the professor from the realm of nostalgic possession into which he has drifted in pursuit of the Tom Outland project. After passing through death, the professor cannot return to nostalgia. Death repositions him in the “real” (PH, 257). He finds himself reconnected with Augusta, the family seamstress, who, “[s]easoned and sound and on the solid earth,” has pulled him out of the noxious world of his study (PH, 256). Augusta is prosaic but, for the professor, filled with potential. In “a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound” (PH, 257), involved in relations where idealization has not been substituted for true response and responsibility, St. Peter suddenly accepts the fact that meaning comes through context—through outward bindings. In this formulation, while stopping short of the social activism that Beard paired with his historical pursuits, Cather intimates that an ethical relation to one’s contemporary community is indissoluble from an ethical understanding of history. The professor’s language of binding recalls the “fetters” with which Thea Kronborg is bound to the Native American past. Bound by ethical responsibility to the past, these figures cannot assert mastery over it. Possession must give way to flux and changeability, instability and constant revision.

If the professor can reenter life by rediscovering the values of prosaic particularity and relatedness, then these might be taken as the paramount values with which Cather believes that Americans must navigate their complex relation with a Native American heritage. The structure of the novel forbids any conclusion more assertive than that. The restraint enacted by the form of the novel, however, proposes a new, third position through which to approach the culturally other. By formally refusing to impose coherence upon the longstanding and complex relations between U.S. national cultures and Native American cultures, Cather formally refuses to assert possession of her own historical moment. This Cather is not at all the nostalgic author that we have come to expect. Nor, however, is she an outright critic of

the racial politics of her period. The indeterminacy with which she approaches questions of appropriation leaves her own racial politics very much in doubt. In fact, *The Professor's House* seems to suggest that no political approach to Native American cultures and histories, including Cather's own, is unassailable. Cather's use of indeterminacy is at best a conditional solution to an ethical problem of historical representation. She remains bound, and vexed, by having "covenanted" with "the dead."

By embedding the dense historicity of a cultural moment in the structure of her fiction, Cather asserts the necessity of recognizing the ethical demands of historicism in even the novel form. *The Professor's House* is a finely tuned vehicle for asserting the inextricability of fictional method and historical moment, for it structurally enacts both the temptation and the impossibility of dispensing with context. The "fragmentary and inconclusive" violence with which Cather was accused of rupturing her novel, and which must also be read as suggesting the violence performed by certain national histories, should thus also indicate to us the violence that we, as critics, can perform when we attempt to extricate readings from our own texts without fully attending to their formal contexts. Formal analysis delivers the very particularity that historicist, cultural, and ethical methods of criticism increasingly require.

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Notes

I would like to thank Robert Ferguson, Ann Douglas, and the members of the University of Toronto Twentieth-Century Group (summer 2001) for their helpful comments.

- 1 For an early, influential example of the strain of criticism focusing on Cather's nostalgia, see Granville Hicks, "The Case against Willa Cather," *English Journal* (November 1933); reprinted in *Willa Cather and Her Critics*, ed. James Schroeter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), 139–47. For an excellent discussion of gender implications in allegations of nostalgia, see Sharon O'Brien, "Becoming Noncanonical: The Case against Willa Cather," *American Quarterly* 40 (March 1988): 110–26.
- 2 I use *historicism* to mean what Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. describes as an approach in which "what happened is described and thereby interpreted in terms of when it happened and what happened around it at the same time or over time, depending upon whether synchrony or diachrony is

- emphasized" (*Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995], 33). I admire the sinuous phrasing of Berkhofer's definition for its emphasis on the multiplicity of relations and allegiances intersecting in a past event. I understand nostalgia, on the other hand, as more restrictive, recognizing the past as attractive but only in terms of its sundered relationship with the present, and thus excising it from any other relations. For more on nostalgia, see Lawrence W. Levine, "Progress and Nostalgia: The Self Image of the Nineteen Twenties," in *The American Novel and the Nineteen Twenties*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), 37–56. The dense recent history of the term *historicism* cannot be summed up here; for an introduction to its "new" form, see H. Aram Veenser, ed., *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
- 3 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Second Best," *Nation*, 23 September 1925; reprinted in *Willa Cather and Her Critics*, ed. Schroeter, 56; Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942), 255.
 - 4 Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Fear of Formalism: Kant, Twain, and Cultural Studies in American Literature," *diacritics* 27 (winter 1997): 47.
 - 5 Ellen Rooney, "Form and Contentment," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (March 2000): 18. In Rooney's polemical words, the trend away from formalist modes of analysis "has eroded our ability to read *every genre of text*—literary texts, nonliterary texts, aural and visual texts, and the social text itself" (26).
 - 6 Dillon, "Fear of Formalism," 46–47. For other approaches to the question of form, see the articles in "Reading for Form," ed. Susan Wolfson, *Modern Language Quarterly* 61; Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997); and Marianne DeKoven, "The Politics of Modernist Form," *New Literary History* 23 (summer 1992): 675–90.
 - 7 In an essay on Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather asserts that in the best fiction, "the design is the story and the story is the design" (preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925]); reprinted in Willa Cather, *On Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art* [New York: Knopf, 1949], 49). When the story is history, as in *The Professor's House*, then the history is the design and the design is the history.
 - 8 Willa Cather to "a friend," 12 December 1938, in *On Writing*, 31.
 - 9 On uses of the past in the construction of an American national identity, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); see also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).
 - 10 According to Guy Reynolds, Cather's Dutch painting analogy is not entirely accurate. In the Dutch paintings, he explains, "the interior and exterior views are indissolubly linked as aspects of the same civilization;

the views of interior and exterior Dutch scenes complement one another. But in *The Professor's House* we are given far more violent contrasts; the shift in perspective is used to juxtapose conflicting orders of American civilisation. The wrenching of the narrative results from the enormous disjunctions between the various 'Americas' which Cather has let into her narrative" (*Willa Cather in Context* [London: Macmillan, 1996], 147). Although I agree that the different sections of Cather's narrative represent different "Americas," I do not attribute the novel's disjunctions to their incompatibility. The violence of Cather's formal experiment lies not in contrast or opposition but in simple disconnection. The shifts between sections are unnerving mostly because they fail to unite disparate parts into the "whole" novel that we might expect. In other words, the Americas remain unconnected rather than in active discord.

- 11 Walter Benn Michaels reads *The Professor's House* in light of the racial and nativist thinking that he aligns with modernism (*Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* [Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995]); Guy Reynolds reads Cather's novel with attention to its formal attempt to contain the cultural energies of an increasingly diverse nation (*Willa Cather in Context*); and Joseph Urgo sees the novel as a reflection of a culture of transit, migration, and historical impermanence (*Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* [Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995]).
- 12 Although Reynolds provides an indispensable beginning, he traces the formal symptoms of historical tensions rather than reading the form of the novel as itself a historical intervention.
- 13 Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 219; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *PH*.
- 14 Michaels's argument in *Our America*, for example, is based upon a reading of Tom as inheritor of the Native American past, and Reynolds reads Tom Outland as, among other things, a "savage" (*Willa Cather in Context*, 125).
- 15 There is little doubt that Cather believed in Dreyfus's innocence. Her-
mione Lee points out that "in 1899 Cather wrote a stirring tribute to Zola's
defense of Dreyfus, speaking of 'the courage of the hand that penned
J'Accuse.' There is no evidence that she changed her mind" (*Willa Cather:
A Life Saved Up* [London: Virago, 1989], 251).
- 16 Julie Abraham persuasively reads much of what I will term "bad history,"
or nostalgic history, in *The Professor's House*; see *Are Girls Necessary? Les-
bian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Abraham
notes that history has a split nature in the novel, which brings about "the
betrayal of history as well as betrayal by history" (55). This split nature
makes it helpful to consider history, or the relation to the past, under the
two terms of nostalgia and historicism.
- 17 In his superb "Affect-Genealogy: Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather,"
Christopher Nealon argues persuasively that Cather "used such histori-

- cally 'false' cross-racial identifications to fashion a very real, historical place for herself" in terms of her sexual identity (*American Literature* 69 [March 1997]: 30–31). I only disagree with Nealon insofar as he accepts Cather's affective affiliations as "an evasion of history" (30). I would argue instead that Cather is engaged with, and struggling against, the historical violations that these affiliations entail, and searching for a means of affiliation that does less violence.
- 18 According to Urgo, "Cather's text suggests that original meaning is largely absent in a culture of migration. . . . What is important is not what the text was meant to say when it was written, or even whether it reflects its own time accurately, but the extent to which it provides a framework for comprehending contemporary phenomena and surviving in a new environment" (*Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration*, 35). Although the elusiveness of "original meaning" is a preoccupation in the text, I remain unconvinced that the Cather who was frustrated with negative reviews she received in the 1930s and eventually stopped giving interviews, stipulating also that her unpublished correspondence not be quoted, would depict "what the text was meant to say" as unimportant. Cather's famous strategies of evasion are evident attempts to control access to the text for fear of its misinterpretation.
 - 19 Edith Wyschogrod handles this question perceptively and at length in *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998). Wyschogrod identifies a tension in the conveying of history that is embodied, I believe, in the structure of *The Professor's House*: "[W]hen the historian speaks in the name of the other, she preempts the speech of the other, whereas if she remains silent the other is consigned to invisibility" (38).
 - 20 Willa Cather, "Restlessness such as Ours Does Not Make for Beauty," interview by Rose C. Feld, *New York Times Book Review*, 21 December 1924, 11; reprinted in *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters*, ed. L. Brent Bohlke (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986), 71–72. Cather's parallel between nationalization and house building is particularly suggestive in the context of a novel so preoccupied with the literal and figurative implications of the professor's unwillingness to give up his old house for a newly built one.
 - 21 See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), 144–45; and T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 68–75.
 - 22 Edgar Lee Hewett, "The Art of the Earliest Americans," *El Palacio* 13.1 (1922); quoted in Molly Mullin, "The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art 'Art, Not Ethnology,'" in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley

and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 169. Mullin suggests that Hewett might even be considered a “professional cultural nationalist” (178).

- 23 “New Struggle Ahead of Congress on Disposal of Indian Lands,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1923, sec. 8, 4; quoted in Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1982), 277.
- 24 The Pueblo Indians were also often described as “peaceful cultivators” (Dippie, *Vanishing American*, 277). This depiction differentiated them from the warlike Indians against whom the nation’s rhetoric and force had been mobilized but also, I believe, pursued the parallel of democracies in their infancy and played upon the figure of the Jeffersonian farmer.
- 25 Jonathan Goldberg reads Cather’s commitment to alterity, of which this is merely one example, in terms of sexuality and gender; see *Willa Cather and Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).
- 26 The only introduction or context provided for the middle section is a short paragraph that breaks from a contemplative description of routine summer evenings that Tom and the professor used to spend together. On one evening, the paragraph announces: “Tom at last told the story he had always kept back.” The tone of this transition is dismissive: “[The story] was nothing very incriminating, nothing very remarkable” (*PH*, 155). The seven chapters of Tom’s account, remarkable for their sheer difference from the preceding narrative, then follow, dividing the novel into two parts, not completely connected. The section that follows “Tom Outland’s Story” opens without reference to it.
- 27 According to the first section of the novel, after rebuffing Mrs. St. Peter’s questions about his past, “Tom never took up the story of his own life again, either with the Professor or Mrs. St. Peter” (*PH*, 106). But “Tom Outland’s Story” renders this statement untrue, emphasizing the disjunction of the two sections.
- 28 The Tom Outland depicted in the professor’s sections is a forward-looking inventor, characterized in large part by his unwillingness to talk about his past. “Tom Outland’s Story” foregrounds the part of Tom least salient in his relations with the St. Peters family and the community of Hamilton.
- 29 David Harrell, *From Mesa Verde to “The Professor’s House”* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1992), 98, 104–7.
- 30 Jean Schwind, “This Is a Frame-Up: Mother Eve in *The Professor’s House*,” in *Cather Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Susan Rosowski (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993), 72–91.
- 31 Elizabeth Ammons identifies “[a]ppropriation and silencing” as themes and products of Cather’s work (*Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991], 136).
- 32 For the formative role that the Southwest played in Cather’s evolution

- as a writer, see Sharon O'Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).
- 33 Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 272; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *SL*.
- 34 "Thea had a superstitious feeling about the potsherds, and liked better to leave them in the dwellings where she found them. If she took a few bits back to her own lodge and hid them under the blankets, she did it guiltily, as if she were being watched" (*SL*, 279). Thea's guilt identifies her bond as moral or ethical, while her sense of being watched combines her own conscience with an outside agency, possibly that of the original cliff-dweller culture.
- 35 According to Elizabeth Sergeant, "It had seemed [to Cather] a sacrilege to take anything for oneself from those cliff dwellings" (*Willa Cather: A Memoir* [1953; reprint, Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986], 123).
- 36 Herbert Bashford, "Western Writers and Creative Literature," *Sunset*, 9 June 1902, 145; quoted in Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820–1920* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1990), 207.
- 37 This process should not be confused with government-sponsored assimilation initiatives; for the most part, those desiring to fold Indians into the national narrative were staunchly against "Americanization" of the Indian. What was being attempted was a reformulation of Americanness, with the assistance of the Indian; assimilation suggested the opposite process (see Mullin, "Patronage of Difference," 169).
- 38 "President Roosevelt's Desire," *American Indian*, February 1928, 4; quoted in Dippie, *Vanishing American*, 250.
- 39 For considerations of the Native American figure in the American popular imagination, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998); and Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001).
- 40 Dippie, *Vanishing American*, 257. Walter Benn Michaels argues that part of the embrace of the Indian involved the devaluation of citizenship as a measure of Americanness: "[T]he new valorization of the Indian points toward an interest in an essentially *pre*-national (i.e., pre-Revolutionary or, in Dixonian terms, pre-Civil War) America, an interest that one finds everywhere in the 1920s . . . and that repudiates the political nationalism of the Progressives: Americanism would now be understood as something more than and different from the American citizenship that so many aliens had so easily achieved" ("Anti-Imperial Americanism," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease [Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1993], 374). The rhetoric of the twenties does seem to shift from a formal to a more spiritual citizenship, but this does not necessarily imply restriction of Americanism. Many of the figures I survey were involved in a nonnativist romantic reconceptualiza-

tion of the nation. According to theorists of nationality such as Benedict Anderson, this turn to the prenatal, the annexation and embellishment of a history for the nation, is often the hallmark of an aggressive promotion of national identity (see *Imagined Communities*).

- 41 Maurice Sterne to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 30 November 1917, *Movers and Shakers*, vol. 3 of *Intimate Memories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933; reprint, New York: Kraus, 1971), 534.
- 42 For a chronicle of Luhan's efforts, see Lois Palken Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996).
- 43 D. H. Lawrence, "Certain Americans and an Englishman," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 December 1922; reprinted in *D. H. Lawrence and New Mexico*, ed. Keith Sagar (Salt Lake City, Ut.: Gibbs M. Smith, 1982), 14–15.
- 44 Mabel Dodge Luhan to Mary Austin, December 1922, *Literary America, 1903–1934: The Mary Austin Letters*, ed. T. M. Pearce (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979), 172–73.
- 45 Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York: Knopf, 1932), 52.
- 46 Charles Lummis, introduction to *Mesa, Cañon, and Pueblo* (New York: Century, 1925), 7.
- 47 Hamlin Garland, "The Redman as Material," *Booklover's Magazine*, August 1903, 196.
- 48 Mary Austin, *The American Rhythm*, 2d ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930; reprint, New York: Cooper Square, 1970), 9–10.
- 49 Elizabeth Sergeant, for instance, first visited the Southwest at Cather's suggestion and later wrote a memoir of Cather. According to Cather's inscription in Austin's copy of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather "wrote the last chapters of this book" in Austin's "lovely study" (quoted in Marta Weigle and Kyle Fiore, *Santa Fe and Taos: The Writer's Era, 1916–1941* [Santa Fe, N. Mex.: Ancient City, 1982], 25). After a falling-out, Cather denied writing any of the novel at Austin's home. Edith Lewis, Cather's longtime companion, warmly remembers visits with Luhan in Taos in 1925 and 1926; see *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (New York: Knopf, 1953), 143. Cather met the Lawrences in New York early in 1924, when she was writing *The Professor's House*; see Lee, *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up*, 256.
- 50 Mary Austin, "Our Indian Problem: The Folly of the Officials," *Forum* 71 (March 1924): 286; quoted in Dippie, *Vanishing American*, 281.
- 51 Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 80.
- 52 Such damning simplification recurs in Tom's influence on the professor's histories: Tom made the later volumes more "simple and inevitable" (*PH*, 234).
- 53 For more on the Progressive historians, see Ernst A. Breisach, *Ameri-*

- can Progressive History: An Experiment in Modernization* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993); and Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1968). For a survey of trends in historical scholarship in the United States, see John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1965; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989).
- 54 Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering*, 10.
- 55 Martha Nussbaum, "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 182. Here Nussbaum is particularly addressing John Rawls's idea of considered judgment, which relies on universality rather than particular context.
- 56 Accusations of appropriating Tom Outland's legacy are most often levied at Louie Marsellus, the husband of Rosamond St. Peter, Outland's fiancée at the time of his death. At business and professional gatherings, Tom Outland's name is "served up" by Marsellus, according to Scott McGregor, the professor's other son-in-law (*PH*, 94). However, as the professor notes, Louie is admirably generous, and his "serving-up" is in fact a manifestation of this generosity. Unlike the St. Peterses, Louie does not require conformity with some idea of his own in order to share what he possesses of Tom's legacy. Louie's summer home, *Outland*, whose name so violates the professor's proprietary feelings about Tom, doubles as a public memorial to Tom. As Louie explains to the family: "We are going to transfer his laboratory there, if the university will permit, all the apparatus he worked with. We have a room for his library and pictures. When his brother scientists come to Hamilton to look him up, to get information about him, as they are doing now already, at Outland they will find his books and instruments, all the sources of his inspiration" (*PH*, 31). Of course, Louie's belief that all of Tom's sources of inspiration can be gathered together at Louie's country home (even with Rosamond thrown in, as Scott jokes) is naive and a touch imperialistic. Nonetheless, the Tom Outland collection represents one of the best examples of historicism the novel presents, as it is committed to the contextualization of its object and unwilling to restrict itself to any one vision of Tom. The material culture of Tom Outland enables everyday people, those untouched by him before his death, to connect legitimately to some aspect of him. Louie's collection proposes Tom Outland as a historically relevant social figure in addition to a private memory. Of course, the ethics of collecting and collections are not untroubled. For more on historical ethics, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984); Stephen D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); and George Stocking Jr., ed., *Objects and Others:*

Essays on Museums and Material Culture (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

- 57 Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.