SHARDS OF GLASS:
Shame and Its Mitigation in Willa Cather's Work

by
Nancy L. Boisvert

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Nancy L. Boisvert

Advisor: Dr. Marjorie Howes, Ph.D

This work applies current theories of affect to inform an understanding of the role of shame in the process of narration. It begins with a dual-sided hypothesis: experiences of humiliation and its consequence, shame, can initiate and mediate a narrative act, and the narrative process can immediately or over time mitigate and even eliminate the negative feelings of shame. The project particularly draws upon the pioneering affect theories of Silvan S. Tomkins to focus upon the life and written works of Willa Cather. It discovers and traces a poetics of shame as it occurs throughout the narratives she produced over a lifetime. It highlights how the Cathers' forced migration from Virginia to Nebraska resulted in a loss of class and status as well as alterations in family dynamics. These disruptions created the foundations for her perceived humiliations and the shame that motivated her use of recurrent scenes, characters, narrative resolutions and even the very language she chose. This study emphasizes the usefulness of the application of affect studies for literary criticism and cultural studies.

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PREFACE

> We live in an atmosphere of shame. We are ashamed of everything that is real about us: ashamed of ourselves, of our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skins.
>
> --George Bernard Shaw
> *Man and Superman*

> As with all myth . . . essential truth lies in . . . the endless returning of the past in the present.
>
> --Leon Wurmser
> *The Mask of Shame*

During the early 1990s, I began an exploration of the entanglements of humiliation, shame and narrative process. The exploration emerged from my fascination with what I saw at play across a large sampling of literary works of late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century authors whose lives and letters, fiction and nonfiction I had extensively read for several qualifying exams.[1] Collectively, the extensive notes I'd taken during preparation for these exams offered a map onto which I traced various intersections and connections.

Concurrent with the period of time given to reading many, many late -nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century texts, personal life intruded. Our daughter endured a psychotic break following a rape intended as a gift for her sixteenth birthday. My

[1] For my major field exam in literature, *American Realism and Naturalism,* I greatly benefitted from the kind, exemplary guidance of Dr. Christopher P. Wilson. This exam had followed two minor ones: *British Mid-Victorian Fictions in Prose and Poetry*, directed by Dr. Duhamel and *American Autobiography,* prepared under the gently firm advice of Dr. Rosemarie Bodenheimer. All lent to the dissertation topic.

husband, in his prime, suffered an unpredicted kidney failure, followed by dialysis and complications, damaging not only his body but also his self-perceptions. No less heart rending, another daughter struggled in private and public spaces with sexual identity. Wrestling with the conventions of the particular class in which our family was positioned, she debated normative voices and refused to see her evolving self through the judging lenses of homophobic family members and friends. I must admit that my search for a dissertation question was inflected with the close "readings" of my daughters' and husband's emotions and behaviors.

During the turmoil of these events, and as I searched for the dissertation topic that would merit a committee's time and sustain my interest, I had read George Johnson's book, *In The Palace of Memory: How We Build the Worlds Inside Our Heads*,[2] an early and not refined attempt at neurocognitive theory. In this work he collapses the Cartesian distinction between mind and body to argue what is a truism: that an emotional "hurt," like a shard of glass buried deep within a wound only apparently healed, demanded its expression. Sigmund Freud, had, of course, addressed the return of the repressed, but in developing the field of psychology, Freud subordinated the study of affect to the study of biological drives as motivators. Behaviorism further shelved the study of the affects and emotions.

At the time I was searching for a topic for study, I also came across a theorist of affect and human emotion, Silvan S. Tomkins. Tomkins' work reconsidered affects to be primary motivators of behavior. Without wanting to surrender the gains of Freud's work, Tomkins brings into sharper focus the interplay between consciousness and

[2] George Johnson. *In The Palaces of Memory: How We Build the Worlds Inside Our Heads.* New Vintage, 1991.

unconsciousness, between motivational and non-motivational sub-systems as a sort of feedback loop. In a recuperative act, Tomkins moved to posit an ongoing negotiation between a subject and its worlds, a negotiation in which affects mediate what we perceive and how we act. Our perception, he suggests, is not a mirror to nature but a mirror to a mirror in endless feedback loops in which affects intervene. In Tomkins' words: "The world we perceive is a dream we learn to have from a script we have not written. It is neither our capricious construction nor a gift we inherit without work" (I: 13).

His dense work, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*[3] argues *against* the primacy of the *biological drives* as motivators and *for* the more important contribution of the *affects* which, through their magnification of the urgency of drives, make the drives seem more vital to human motivation. His complex theories attracted my attention, invited a careful combing of his ideas. The arguments made me pause. Questions arose. A hypothesis was formed. Reading and re-reading began.

Tomkins identifies, defines and analyzes how both primary and secondary affects function in humans. Especially resonant for me at that time and now are his observations and ruminations regarding shame, an auxiliary affect important in the role of motivation and scripting. His work led me to others who, applying his groundbreaking theories, offered a lens through which I could better examine the texts that I had chosen from the works read during the exams. These selected texts had been written around the cusp of the twentieth century during a time when overt class mobility, instability, and

[3] Silvan S. Tomkins. *Affect Imagery Consciousness.* Four Volumes. Springer, 1962-91. *Vol. I: The Positive Affect* (1963). *Volume II: The Negative* Affects (1963). *Volume III: The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear* (1991). *Volume IV: Cognition Duplication and Transformations of Affects (1993).* Springer. Silvan S. Tomkins. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: Vols. I and II.* Springer: 2008. This reprint is the result of the resurgence and continuing interest in Tomkins's theories. References to Volumes I and II will be according to the reprint unless otherwise noted.

duplicity created a multitude of opportunities for exposed misrepresentations and misappropriations. In fact, representations of humiliation populated many of the works of that time.[4]

During the mid 1990s, any theoretical consideration of the importance of affect, feeling, emotion, and the body was merely emergent. Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's and Adam Frank's *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995)[5] was published after I was many months steeped in Tomkins' work. Their seminal text recuperated Tomkins' work through a distillation of his ideas. As a result, a variety of theories were planted in a newly plowed field of affect study, one that has in maturity produced a rich harvest, demanding the attention of many new as well as venerable scholars.

My recent thorough review of the literature applying affect theory to cultural studies during the last two decades reveals many trans-disciplinary studies of affect, feeling, and emotion that have been pursued by various groups, as one can read in *The*

[4] The Brontes, William Thackery, George Eliot and Charles Dickens are a few whose texts anticipate the surge of North Americans who also began to depict the dynamics of humiliation, its consequent shame, and the coping strategies for both used by the individual and the group. Authors such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Zora Neale Hurston, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald are but a few. Several critical examinations had considered shame-ridden authors. One example is Martha Banta's *Failure and Success in America: A Literary Debate*. UP of Princeton, 1978:305. Her well-known work shed light on Mark Twain, who wrote that "for a man to live past fifty is to know shame, insult, self-contempt for guilty conduct, and the scorching humiliation of exposure." According to Banta, Twain represents "the figure for whom the greatest shame was to have failed, to have suffered from a dire sense of economic poverty whenever he felt himself to be less than that for which circumstances demanded." She also finds Henry James faced "humiliations and guilt" as deeply disturbing to him as any recorded by Twain or [Henry] Adams" and who speaks of an "obscure wound" which may, indeed, be emotional (284). In characters such as Silas Lapham and Jacob Dryfoos, William Dean Howells has depicted the experience of shame following humiliation. Notably, his works abound with characters that hang their head, avoiding the gaze of those who might reflect and expose their failures. Others employ a language of wounding around experiences of humiliation. I think of Gloria Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, James Baldwin's *Another Country*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son.*

[5] Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick and Adam Frank. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Sylvan Tompkins Reader.* Duke University Press, 1995.

Affect Theory Reader[6] edited by Melissa Gregg and Andrew J. Siegworth. At the moment, France, Australia and Canada appear to be at the forefront of the increasing number of interrogations fueled by affect theory, as confirmed by humanities conferences, which make room for such study. Not only social psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and neuroscientists but also literary theorists, historians and cultural theorists now ponder the subject of affects, human feeling, and human emotion, each a distinct experience of the body, not to be used interchangeably but appreciated as they co-operate or not. Scholars examine the social practices of various cultures and subcultures. Gilles Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*), Brian Massumi (*Parables of the Virtual; The Politics of Affect*), and Antonio Damasio (*The Feeling of What Happens; The Strange Order of Things*) are earlier explorers of the generative nature of affects.[7] More recent affect theorists directly address cultural and political considerations. Sarah Ahmed points out the role of affect in "the messiness of the experiential"(30); Anna Gibbs considers how affects engage "an energetic dimension that impels or inhibits a body's capacities for action"(188). Lauren Berlant "names and examines "cruel optimism," the "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility" (94). Elsbeth Probyn reminds us that "different affects make us feel, write, think, and act in different ways." As example, she discusses how "[s]hame . . . reworks how we understand the body and its relation to other bodies or, for want of a better word, to the

[6]*The Affect Theory Reader*. Edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. UP of South Carolina, 2010. Critics cited below are found in this volume. Regarding recent conferences, see *The Affects Project*, a large conference which took place in Manitoba, Canada, bringing together affect scholars from five countries "to do justice to the complexity and promise of recent theorizations of affect." More recently, per Marjorie Howes, an entire conference considered Irish shame.

[7] Gilles Delleuze. *Difference and Repetition.* Translated by Paul Palton. New York: UP of Columbia, 1994. Brian Massumi. *Parables of the Virtual.* UP of Duke, 2002; *The Politics of Affect.* Polity Press, 2015. Antonio D'Amasio. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness.* Harcourt, 1999. *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling and the Making of Culture.* Pantheon, 2017.

social "(74). In his introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seigworth sees in the application of affect theories the potential for an accounting of "the relational capacities that belong to the doing of bodies or are conjured by the world-belongingness that gives rise to a body's doing" (9). I position myself within the growing community of affect scholars and examine Willa Cather's "world-belongingness" as it motivates her writing strategies.

In 2016 Jean-Francois Vernay in *The Seduction of Fiction*,[8] makes a case for the necessity of the return of feeling to the study of literature. Also, the very recently published collection of essays edited by Stephen Ahern, *A Feel for the Text*[9], suggests heretofore unexplored possibilities for the application of affect theories to literature. In his introduction, Ahern writes,

> The challenge for critics is how to develop a critical practice that accounts for the importance of affective phenomena in the psychological models and rhetorical strategies deployed by poets, dramatists, and novelists to depict the forces that move characters to feel, to think, to act. Also requiring attention are occasions when affect breaks free of the text or script to circulate through readers or audience members in ways that are hard to predict yet palpable nonetheless.

Granted, affect theory has its skeptics, such as Ruth Leys, as witnessed by her 2018 *Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique.*[10] Yet, even she admits: "the turn to affect has marked literary and cultural studies ever since it occurred" (38). Contemporary theorists continue to encourage affect studies following the 2008 reissue of Tomkins' original work. Even the politically committed "new materialists" tip a hat to theories that have developed as offshoots of Tomkins's groundbreaking work. Taking Tomkins

[8]Jean-Francois Vernay. *The Seduction of Fiction: A Plea for Putting Emotions Back into Literary Interpretation*. Translated by Carolyn See. Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.
[9] *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice: A Feel for the Text.* Edited by Stephen Ahern. Palgrave studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism.
doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97268-8-1. Accessed 2019.
[10] Ruth Leys. *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique.* UP of Chicago, 2018.

theories a step further, Adam Frank in *Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol*[11] models how paying attention to affect in literary production "can make us acquainted with what motivates composition." He explores how affect migrates from an author to a text to a reader. But none has yet (to my knowledge) taken the approach I take here, nor applied affect theory, particularly the use of Tomkins' theories to Willa Cather.

My hypothesis is dual-sided**: experiences of humiliation and its affective consequence, shame, can initiate and mediate a narrative act, and, inversely, the narrative process can immediately or over time mediate and mitigate the negative experience of humiliation and its consequence, shame.**

Originally, to test the hypothesis in 1993, I explored and analyzed *all* the works of cohorts Willa Cather, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser because they occupied a similar historical moment and similar U.S. American cultures. Together, they create a fairly localized field in which I could explore the similarities and differences of their experiences of and narrative strategies for coping with shame. Furthermore, each offered a large collection of texts that widely display sensitivity to scorn, to ridicule, to humiliation. Parsing the authors' lives and texts, that is, loosening the whole of each to get at the components that recur, I found that for each author early experiences of humiliation, more specifically, early experiences of class and/or status humiliation occurred. Moreover, those humiliations motivated and often influenced the choice of textual material: the themes, the characterizations, the points of view, the narrative strategies, the staged interactions among characters and the imaginary resolutions of contradictions within the texts. After isolating particularly humiliating experiences by combing autobiography, correspondence, fictional and nonfictional

[11] Adam Frank. *Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol.* UP of Fordham, 2015: 152.

narrative as well as critical work and biography, I attempted to locate traces of a particular scene and its transformations throughout the author's literary productions--the transmutations, so to speak. By doing so, I hoped to examine his or her use of narrative process to work through the original scene(s) by re-enacting, recasting and transforming the experience in efforts to gain control over the deeply disruptive, emotional response to the original experience(s). Eventually, I chose to sacrifice inclusivity for exclusivity.

While I make brief use of Theodore Dreiser for illustrative purposes in presenting aspects of the hypothesis, I chose to make Willa Cather the focus of the study. Since the mid-1990s, Cather scholarship has mushroomed. Having immersed myself in the multitude of books, articles, dissertations, conference papers and lectures that have been produced since I last wrote of Cather, I find that the new scholarship strengthens the dissertation's hypothesis.

The publication of scholarly editions of her major works and the publication of 500 letters as well as the availability of nearly over two thousand letters of the three thousand being digitalized on the ever expanding Cather archives site is nothing short of a gift. The growing interest in her Virginia life and southern beginnings had not been considered when I had first visited Virginia, Nebraska and New York to better acquaint myself with the author, searching through material then restricted to paraphrase. Janis Stout's and Andrew Jewells' efforts make Cather's personal life more vivid through her now quotable letters. Thanks to Dr. Jewell and his staff, the online archive enriches scholarship. His forthcoming Cather biography will certainly update the image of Cather, as Sharon O'Brien's biography had two decades ago. Furthermore, the publication of recent scholarly editions of Cather's works and the increasing number of scholars who

trouble the "official" Willa Cather story, as Judith Fetterly points out, present a more complex, intelligent and savvy writer and person. The emergence of the letters and a renewed interest in a biographical approach to Cather sanctions my own approach. New Critics were the first to consider Cather's work. Gender construction critics such as Sharon O'Brien, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, and Judith Butler opened another approach, while Merrill Macguire Skaggs led us along a path to view Cather through her authorship. Walter Benn Michael and Guy Reynolds urged readers to think about Cather in terms of nation and nation building, and Joseph Urgo had analyzed issues of mobility and migratory consciousness. With Skaggs he took on the violence in the novels. Others new historicists and post-historicists have resurrected Cather's "southern connections" and, led by Toni Morrison's reading, reconsider Cather's cultural biases. In a recent essay, Janis Stout, a former New Critic, strongly admits to the important use biography promises "for the purpose of understanding . . . [Cather's] mind and works and her relation to her historical context." In fact, Stout's focus on Cather's letters and subjectivity led her to discount the "aesthete" James Woodress had given to the public. He now joins Stout and Jewell in re-glimpsing Cather through her letters and biographic/ cultural moment to illuminate her mind and work. Andrew Jewell takes Cather's relevance to US culture even father during his University of Nebraska lecture, 26 March 2018. He relocates Cather's observations and themes—immigration, environment, women's capacities—in the present, as important today as when she wrote about them. I am not aware of any light the "new materiaIists" have focused upon Cather to date, though they too incorporate affect studies. Standing upon the shoulders of these and many other critics and biographers who precede me, I look through the lens of Tomkins'

affect theory to offer yet another perspective on Willa Cather's work**.** It appears to me that no one has as yet taken this approach and it still fascinates me—even more so now that her available correspondence and emerging research in both Cather criticism and affect theory strongly support the work I had begun.

The chapters are arranged as follows: **Chapter One** both introduces and lays out the theoretical ground to examine dynamics of humiliation and shame. Here, I also explain my choice of subject to explore the interrelations of affect and narrative: the modern Eurocentric western author living in the United States at the cusp of the twentieth century. This introductory chapter establishes humiliation as a social *act* while acknowledging shame as first an *affect*, later a f*eeling* and eventually an *emotion* as different. It also distinguishes between shame and guilt, often mistaken for one another. The introduction emphasizes that 1) the meanings and the experiences of humiliation vary over time and across cultures and b) the perceptions of humiliation as a social fact triggering an affective experience is influenced by and dependent upon the particular social arrangements that elicit them.

To construct something like a general field as the context for a practice and experience of humiliation at a particular moment and in a particular culture is, I admit, my own attempt to mediate. In justification, I invoke Frederic Jameson's observation that one cannot "enumerate the differences between things except against a background of some more general identity. Mediation undertakes to establish this initial identity, against which then—but only then—local identification or differentiation can be registered." Furthermore, my own act of mediation, taking its cue from Jameson, attempts to understand "the mutual relationships between dimensions of the text and its social

subtext in the more active terms of production, projection, compensation, repression, displacement and the like." Moreover, the analytic that structures this enterprise attempts to de-compartmentalize, to collapse—"at least locally overcome"—any boundaries of specialization. That is, I have made a deliberate choice not to separate social psychology, fiction and (auto) (bio)graphy, nor to partition lived experience, perceived experience, and imagined experience.[12]

Chapter Two, "Wrenches, Jars, and Wounding Contacts," lays out Cather's early years to locate what Cather called the "wrenches and jars and wounding contacts" that made her susceptible to actual or perceived humiliations. Here her shifting class, status, familial and social relations are foregrounded. Just as the publication of her letters underscores the importance of the early years, recent criticism adds weight to the southern genteel influence in her life that I had only surmised when I began the project.

Chapters **Three, Four** and **Five** trace recurrent themes, characters, interactions, narrative strategies and attempted textual resolution in Cather's work, what critic Bernice Slote early and rightly noted as "continuity of an unusual kind," not only "the simple recurrence of image and symbolism" but also "incremental repetition" located in the author's early journalism right through to her critical statements of the middle period and down to the late novels. In 1990 Merrill Maguire Skaggs concurred, observing that Cather "kept returning to earlier insights and images . . . [which] first described in her youth frequently resurfaced years later, though not necessarily to produce the same effects." She observed that "her emotions affected and created her ideas, and that a record of both can be traced throughout her novels"(ix). These chapters attempt to locate

[12] Frederic Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative Act as a Socially Symbolic Act.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981, 42, 44. "wrenches . . ." Willa Cather. "148 Charles Street" in *Not Under Forty.* New York: Knopf: 1922, 63.

not only Cather's "displaced autobiography" but also her displaced emotions.[13] **Chapter Three, "The Early Period: Harboring a Damaged Self in 'The Garden Lodge" and "Paul's Case,"'** takes as its subjects two early short stories published in *The Troll Garden* (1905). "The Garden Lodge" explores some of the first appearances of recurring concerns around what she referred to as "imprisoned selves," the dangers of romantic illusions, and the management of emotions. "Paul's Case" is by her own admission one of the first glimpses of an obvious grafting of the author to her alter egos that she punishes or kills. **Chapter Four, "Invidious Comparisons: Shame and Memory,"** looks at *One of Ours* (1922,) the novel that precedes the middle dark novels. Another important grafting and a re-writing of an early humiliation experience that Cather resolves through her protagonist, Claude, as she admitted to intimate friend, Dorothy Canfield Fisher in a 1922 letter. **Chapter Five** looks at a late work, *Lucy Gayheart (1936*) in light of her relationship to Ethelbert Nevin, whose life and 1901 death deeply marked her and her work.

[13] Bernice Slote. *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principle's and Critical Statements 1893-1896*. Lincoln: Nebraska UP: 1966, 81. Merrill Maguire Skaggs. *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP: 1990, ix. Janis P. Stout. *The Writer and Her World*. Charlottesville; Virginia UP: 2000: xiii.

INTRODUCTION

> Esteem and disgrace are, of all others, the most powerful incentive to the mind, when once it is brought to relish them. If you can get into children a love of credit, and an apprehension of shame and disgrace, you have put in them the true principle, which will constantly work . . .
>
> --John Locke
> *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

> Art begins in a wound . . .
>
> --John Gardner
> *On Moral Fiction*

This enterprise emerges from my extensive encounters with and explorations of British and United States texts written between late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. During the period under scrutiny, authors who appeared to struggle with their own conflicted concerns around class and status displacements often repeatedly depicted such struggles in their texts.[14] These texts raised my curiosity about an author's

[14] The Brontes, William Thackery, George Eliot and Charles Dickens are but a few whose depiction of class conflict involves humiliation and who anticipated the surge of North Americans who also began to depict the dynamics of humiliation, its consequent shame, and the consequences of both for the individual and the group. Authors such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Zora Neale Hurston, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald are but a few. Several critical examinations have made well known shame-ridden authors.. For example, Martha Banta has noted in *Failure and Success in America: A Literary Debate*. Princeton: Princeton UP: 1978, 305. Mark Twain testified that "for a man to live past fifty is to know shame, insult, self-contempt for guilty conduct, and the scorching humiliation of exposure." According to Banta, Twain represents ": the figure for whom the greatest shame was to have failed, to have suffered from a dire sense of economic poverty whenever he felt himself to be less than that for which circumstances demanded." She also finds Henry James faced "humiliations and guilt as deeply disturbing to him as any recorded by Twain or [Henry] Adams" and who speaks of an "obscure wound" which may, indeed, be emotional (284). Notably, his works abound with characters who hang their head, avoiding the gaze of those who might reflect and expose their failures. In characters such as Silas Lapham and Jacob Dryfoos, William Dean Howells has depicted the experience of shame following humiliation. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, I argue, has re-structured the site of her humiliation/s, reforming the home and women's place in it. Using humor to distance herself from the pain, she reconstructs the scene, rendering ridiculous the practices and contradictions that were so harmful. Edith Wharton's narrative strategies challenge and endanger the integrity of her claim to the role of preservationist of old New York's ruling class rituals. Admittedly "malicious", she exposes the ineffectiveness and inadequacies of a class which itself so deftly deployed humiliation a normalizing weapon. Numerous African American texts employ a language of wounding around experiences of humiliation. I think of Gloria Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place*, Toni

sensitivity to situations involving scorn, ridicule and humiliation. I wondered if authors could be investigated for how they (and their works) create a localized field in which to explore the similar and different experiences of and responses to humiliation as well as the strategies, narrative and otherwise, for coping with its aftermath. Such a study would examine how for an author early humiliating experiences influenced and inflected the choice of textual material: the themes, the characterizations, the points of view, the narrative strategies, the staged interactions among characters, and the imaginary resolutions within the texts. It would scrutinize autobiography, correspondence, fictional and nonfictional narrative, as well as biography and critical essays by and about the authors, identifying potentially humiliating situations, paying particular attention to repeated metaphoric references to that situation—when it was recalled, by whom, under which circumstances, in which context, and how it was resolved within the narrative. The project would attempt to trace throughout the author's literary production the transformations of a situation (or scene), and its variously costumed repertory of actors. Doing so would enable the researcher to examine a specific author's use of narrative process to work through the original scene by re-enacting, recasting, and transmuting the occurrence in efforts to gain control over deeply disruptive, emotional response to the experience. Such methodology would make more apparent and distinct the narrative strategies and the benefits specific to an author.

To demonstrate this approach, I undertake such a study here. While, originally, I had planned to interrogate several authors writing during the same period, I have sacrificed extensivity to intensivity by exploring the life and writing of only one author:

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, James Baldwin's *Another Country*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son.*

Willa Cather. After laying out the historical background and theoretical terms and examples to frame this work, the following pages will first identify her painful humiliations and then trace her narrative efforts to transmute the pain that caused shame over a lifetime. Like the fruit of many branches nourished by diverse roots through a shared trunk, Cather's texts similarly and differently transform the early painful experiences that compelled her narratives. But as with the tree which mainly draws from a taproot, Cather's predominant source of humiliation draws mainly from one source, the relocation to Red Cloud that resulted in class and status dislocations that inflected her entire life. She also particularly draws from the deep root of her emotional relationship with her family, particularly her altered relationships to Charles and Jennie Cather, relationships transformed and repeatedly reconfigured in her textual harvest.

Focusing upon Willa Cather, this project explores the dual-sided hypothesis: **experiences of humiliation, and its affect consequence, shame, can initiate and mediate a narrative act, and that narrative process can mediate and mitigate the negative experience of humiliation and its affect, shame.** Shame is unlike guilt; shame does not center upon a transgressive *act* nor motivate the humiliated to initiate reparation between a self and an agent responsible for humiliating that self. Instead, shame centers upon a defective, failed self and typically compels either withdrawal from or attack upon the humiliator. Yet, shame can motivate a safely distant, "hidden" person to authorize a redesign of the scene of exposure: recast the participants, rewrite the script, tell from a different perspective the story of that event, and, thereby, recover the stripped and wounded self, restoring a mantle of self-respect.

That shame consequent to humiliation often initiates representation and narration is a central argument in this work, which examines the compulsion to narrate and, by narrating express psychic pain. To rework a painful scene by reorganizing repeated themes and variously disguised, recurrent figures, is a compulsion that suggests the author's conscious or unconscious desire to compensate humiliations suffered and stave off humiliations feared. To be specific, this work explores how actual and fictional victims of humiliation go on to create narratives that transfigure the scene(s) of their exposure that they may transform their experience of it. For some victims, narrative may even enable revenge, in imagination if nowhere else, upon a person or a group whose power to humiliate must be counteracted, even reversed. Through narrative, the victimized self may acquire potential to shame the humiliator—even if the perpetrator is the self. As Elizabeth Bishop implies in "one Art," a person might discharge the pain of a shameful loss—a lost idealized other, a lost social image, a lost self-respect—if she can but "Write It!" Of course, there is the pain of pain's expression.

Before beginning textual analysis of Willa Cather and her work, I would like to map the ground of my exploration, establish the working terms of this analysis, and offer an illustrative example of shame's provocation of story.

1.0 HUMILIATION, SHAME AND NARRATION

The history of shame is the history of civilization.
--Silvan S. Tomkins

The social meanings and the experience of humiliation vary over time and across cultures. Perceptions of humiliation as both social fact and emotional experience are influenced by and dependent upon the particular social arrangements that elicit them. To construct something like a general field as the context for a practice and experience of humiliation at a particular time and in a particular culture is, I admit, my own attempt to mediate. In justification, I invoke Frederic Jameson's observation that one cannot "enumerate the differences between things except as against a background of some general identity. Mediation undertakes to establish this initial identity, against which then—but only then—local identification or differentiation can be registered." My own act of mediation, taking its cue from Jamison, attempts to understand "the mutual relationships between . . . dimensions of the text and its social subtext in the more active terms of production, projection, perceived experience, and imagined exception, compensation, repression, displacement and the like." By collapsing the boundaries of specialization that traditionally bracket disciplines such as social psychology away from "literature," I engage entanglements that make impossible a separation of lived, perceived, and imagined experience.[15]

Crucial to the experience of humiliation is how participants perceive its scene and the conditions pregnant with possibility for its occurrence. One might apply historian William Ian Miller's observations about violence. Culturally, historically, and

[15] Frederic Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative Act as a Socially Symbolic Act.* UP of Cornell, 1981: 42, 44.

normatively situated, perception of an event "brings to bear the relevant social norms and cultural competences by which the action will or not be comprehended. . . .The classification of an event is embedded in the social norms that govern the situation."[16] Cultural norms are central to the understanding of an event as humiliating, whether the observer is the victim or the victimizer. The observer's perception of a self humiliated indicates personal fears and biases, usually those of their culture and may, in fact, result from an intersection of dominant and alternative cultures. In any case, our emotions are intertwined with our beliefs and with the normalizing worlds to which we belong. Thus, the way we perceive humiliation has to do with systemic differences in the way we have been socialized to locate and respond to humiliation and the allowed actions and language used to respond to it.[17] This fact seems especially relevant to representational forms such as film and literature that, as "art," are both "entirely artificial" and "entirely real," that is, not separated from the ideological contributions that determine the social decisions[18]

1.1 Humiliation Is a Social Act

Humiliation is a social act that dispossesses and debases a person before an audience that need not be external to the person. It occurs among sentient humans who live in a group for whom ranking and status are central and part of daily exchanges, consciously or unconsciously. By bringing to attention a person's misappropriations or misrepresentations, humiliation exposes that person as one out of place, unfitted,

[16] William Ian Miller. *Humiliation and Other Essays of Honor: Social Discomfort and Violence.* UP of Cornell, 1992: 145.
[17] A late nineteenth-century conservative white male Southerner steeped in romantic feudal codes potent with honor and disgrace would not only experience humiliation differently but also respond differently from a liberal woman of color from twenty-first century Queens, New York, or from a reservation Navajo at different points in time. Class markings further inflect the experience.
[18] See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious.*

inadequate, incompetent, impotent. By destroying or merely challenging a private or public social image that the person has maintained, it generates a variety of responses in the humiliated and in the witness/es to its occurrence. The humiliated perceives the exposure witnessed by actual, external person/s or by imagined, internalized other/s, whose introjected eyes the humiliated suffers observing his displacement. In either case, the consequent affect of humiliation is shame.

William Ian Miller illustrates in his book, *Humiliation* (1993), how the social determinants of specific perceptions of shame and humiliation vary through the history of Western cultures.[19] By contrasting the medieval representations of the conceptions and experiences of shame with modern perceptions and experiences of humiliation, Miller argues that only after modern self-consciousness emerges some time during the early seventeenth century does humiliation become a prominent social practice, one intended to deflate pretension. His studies of early feudal societies have led him to observe that the opportunity for and fear of being humiliated has exponentially grown in Western cultures since the Renaissance and that, more specifically, the social practices within the United States offer increasingly numerous occasions for humiliation.[20] Conceding that both humiliation and shame function as punishment for social and moral failure in contemporary Western societies—a punishing dressing down, Miller doesn't convincingly distinguish humiliation from shame. Yet, I think the importance of his attempt to do so lies in his perceptive claims that the purpose for humiliation *across*

[19] William Ian Miller. *Humiliation: and Other Essays of Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*. UP of Cornell UP, 1991, 45.

[20] The opportunities for humiliation since Miller's initial research have mushroomed, almost becoming a daily expectation in our twenty-first century, media driven world. In fact, even in parenting, a return to overt humiliation seems on the rise, not boding well for the next generation. See Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.* Basic Books, 2011.

group boundaries differs from its use within the boundaries of a group whose members consider one another fairly equal in social status. Still, in both groups the social action of humiliation prompts the affect shame.

Humiliation is a particularly useful method of social control in societies for which the communal self takes precedent over the private self.[21] In such societies, shame plays a role in the socialization as well as in the maintenance of the status quo within the group. We feel shamed when we have failed to live according to the group values, standards, and norms to which we have given validity by our membership. For example, in heroic, honor-based societies in which a person's place in the community depends upon the respect of that community, honor and shame are twin prongs that urge the members to create and sustain moral and social behavior and hierarchies. In modern western cultures, like the United States, suggests Miller, the dual dynamics of the avoidance of shame and the maintenance of honor function in certain locations and groups such as the playground and the blue-collar workplace as well as in the machismo cultures of the street gang. Twenty-first century social media should be added as a location and their users a group.

For the majority in modern western societies, however, "humiliation undergirds the creation and maintenance of moral and social distinction and rank . . .It is humiliation

[21] Studies that compare western "individualist" societies with Asian "collective" societies draw the same conclusions. See Shinobu Kitayama et al "Culture, Self, and Emotion: A Cultural Perspective on 'Self-Conscious' Emotions" in Tangney. *Self Conscious Emotion*: 439-464. The field of cultural psychology has produced intriguing intersections of culture, emotion, and behavior, since the *affective turn* had emerged during the mid 1990s, with the resurgence of Silvan S. Tomkins, recuperated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank through their *Shame and Its Sisters*: *A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Affect theory's application to literary works has been slower to emerge. When I began my own research during 1994, I was unaware of anyone working with Tomkins' theories, though I was excited by the potential of his ideas for literary study. Silvan Tomkins. *Affect, Conscious, Imagery*. Volume I, The Positive Affects. New York: Springer, 1963; Volume II, *The Negative Affects*. Springer, 1963; Volume III: *The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear*. Springer, 1963; Volume IV: *Cognition and Script Theory*. Springer, 1991. Tomkins' early research has driven the impetus for the recent field of affect theory, which makes possible this trans- and interdisciplinary project.

that disciplines those who pretend to positions they are usually unworthy of filling" (Miller, 130). One can infer that the *fear* of humiliation, which is the exposure of misrepresentations or inappropriate claims, in fact often helps to sustain arbitrary boundaries in social terrain and mobilizes strategies of vigilance to prevent exposure. To draw upon Miller, humiliation is "the sensation of being exposed in a furtive act [,]. . . of being caught inappropriately crossing group boundaries"(149, 145).

1.2 The Ground

Carl Schneider, who examines the dynamics of shame, exposure, and privacy, finds that "at its core, shame is innately linked to the human need to cover that which is exposed."[22] For Schneider, the very core of shame is a special kind of visibility and exposure. Exposure, derived from *eponere*, "to put out" or "to place out," suggests a spatial context in which things (or people) have their proper fit to some preconceived pattern. He claims that we experience shame "when we are placed out of a context in which we wish to be interpreted." Leon Wurmser,[23] a critic concerned with Charles Dickens's strategies of humiliation avoidance and the compensations he made in its wake, finds that the triad of conditions ripe for shame are failure, exposure and rejection. Both Schneider and Wurmser agree with Miller that the fear of exposed boundary transgressions continues to increase in western societies.

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[22]Carl Schneider, "A Mature Sense of Shame" *The Many Faces of Shame*. Edited by Donald Nathanson. Guilford Press, 1987, pp.194-213, 199-200. Carl Schneider. *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*. Beacon Press, 1977, 35.

[23] Lon Wurmser. "things are not always what they seem: the nature of doubleness in Dickens," *Psychoanalysis and Creativity*. October, 1983. See also Leon Wurmser. *Mask of Shame.* UP of Johns Hopkins, 1981.

The English language which continues to employ only *shame* to conflate distinct emotional experiences, differs from the French and German languages, which each make available words that, in their difference, suggest the earlier and later connotations in the English word and that imply a difference when applied to the personal dimension rather than the communal, social dimension. In terms of Biblical use, one's shame was literally one's genitals, which were to remain covered. The German *schame* and the French *pudeur* (and even *vergogyne*) retain this sense of modesty and chastity of the person. One would be expected to experience shame as a normative cautionary twinge redirecting one to modesty. A few critics consider one's "sense of shame" to be the "discretionary function" vital to collective welfare; it is a *feeling* that makes one hesitate before saying or doing something that would induce the feeling of shame in ourselves or others. These critics do not locate the origin of this "sense" in the socialization process, nor do they acknowledge the person's early socialization to shame-proneness; the smile or frown of the nurturer rewarding or punishing particular actions or responses. In contrast, the pioneering theories of Silvan S. Tomkins centralize socialization: "humans *learn* to lower their eyes and bow their heads to the impediment of their deepest desires"[my emphasis] (II: 40). We can even learn to be ashamed of being ashamed.[24]

The second ideation contained in the English word *shame* emerges as more distinct and modern in the German use of *schande* and the French *honte* to describe the experience of disgrace, scandal, criminal action—a transgression of social customs and standards which has jeopardized the coherence of the community. This shame feelimg

[24] Counter-shame is such a strategy, a compensating posture of defense against anticipated humiliation, scorn, or contempt, and any detection of the person's vulnerability to them. To counter another's detection of a vulnerability to shame, one erects a rigid posture, insistently makes eye contact, and thrusts the chin forward to prevent the self from engaging in the typical behavior of the shamed—the hung head, averted eyes, crumpled body and sagging shoulders.

emerges from an act already completed and discovered. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), definition focuses upon this second aspect; shame is "a disturbed or painful feeling of guilt, of incompetence, indecency, or blameworthiness; a tendency to have feelings of this kind."[25] It is "dishonor or disgrace; a person or thing that brings disgrace or dishonor." Finally, shame is "something regrettable, unfortunate, outrageous." Its synonym, *disgrace*, " loss of favor or grace," blends the reverential and the secular that still inheres in conversation about humiliation in its modern usage. Shame is intimately connected with humiliation in that it is provoked by and consequent upon the social act which achieves the exposure of false claims and is usually followed by the humiliated person's debasement, devaluation, and removal from falsely claimed social, and sometimes physical, terrain.

Humiliation is a more recently constructed word than shame.[26] Both humility and humiliation come from the Latin root *humilis*, "low, lowly," and is itself from *humus*, ground. Humiliation, registered as part of Christian history since the fourteenth century, continues to carry its earlier devotional image of a person prostrating the self in homage before an acknowledged, awe-inspiring, religious figure. The absence of pride or self-assertion is implicit in the willingness to abase the self. During what is commonly

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[25] All definitions are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, online version.

[26] To construct a framework within which to discuss humiliation as a motive to narration, I have drawn from a number of historians, moving from a more general context of western Eurocentric culture to a derivative, U.S. late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century cultures. These will serve as a foundation upon which to construct Willa Cather's particular experience of humiliation, further limited by the more local circumscribing and inscribing cultures in which she was socialized and in which she moved. For general, historical sources see William Ian Miller, *Humiliation*, especially the introduction and chapters four and five; Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self.* New York: Free Press. 1992. Francis Broucek, *Shame and the Self.* Guilford Press, 1991. (especially chapter eleven); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*. Knopf, 1977, especially the first chapter; Hon G. Cawelti. *Apostles of the Self-Made Man.* UP of Chicago, 1965. (Note especially his remarks about the issue of personal responsibility for failure and its relation to self-help literature); Warren I. Sussman. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century.* 1973. Pantheon, 1984. Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of American Narcissism*: *American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectation*. W.W. Norton, 1979.

referred to as the Middle Ages, both peasant and the landed gentry accepted their relative positions in the community they shared, believing that social and economic place in the community's social hierarchy was assigned by God. One accepted one's place with absence of pride or self-assertion. By the sixteenth century, however, the assurance of social positions became less certain and the modern idea of social class emerges as "an aggregate of individuals loosely differentiated by function, wealth, influence and prestige." Classes, especially unstable, mobile middle-classes began to assert themselves *as* classes, separate and identifiable as different from other groups. Social roles became unstable, and the individual, an "I-self" (Michael Lewis's term) emerges, concurrent to the coalition of discrete but unstable classes. Coincidentally emerging were notions and demands for privacy, the perceived refuge from increasingly intrusive surveillance and pervasive strategies of detection enlisted by both state and community.

By 1757, humiliating another person becomes possible as a deliberate lowering or depressing of the dignity or self-respect of that individual. Some historians believe that the shift from an understanding of the word in religious terms to application of the word to secular situations may indicate a change that occurred in the imaging of the self, a greater self-consciousness. Researchers variously implicate the effects of capitalism, industrialism, and Romanticism as instigating the change. In any case, along with increased self-awareness emerged the capacity to fear humiliation, to experience the self as humiliated, and to sustain a prolonged state of shame as an emotional response to humiliation. The OED locates this period as the earliest slippage of humiliation into its modern western usage, that is, to suggest an exposure of an inadequacy or failure to properly occupy a certain social terrain. Adam Smith in 1766 described bankruptcy as

"perhaps the greatest and most humiliating calamity which can befal [sic] an innocent." For some groups, one's place in the community was a mark of salvation or damnation; to be stripped of that place was evidence of disgrace. Humiliation was Providential judgment. Smith's use of the word strikes a new association with class, status and money, and the public arena. Note also the shift of humiliation from one of religious volition to the voluntary abasement of oneself before a god, to one of sufferance of involuntary debasement before the eyes of self and other/s.

While the implication of a personal responsibility for failure does not accrue to the term until around the nineteenth century, particularly evident in the rhetoric of self help literature, a gradual "psychosocial transformation" occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, according to Miller, although Stephen Greenblatt in his thorough analysis of transformations to self conscious identity locates it earlier. Nevertheless, both identify the transformation as heralded and spurred by the increased interest in the psychology of emotions. Miller notes increasing and widespread attention to both manners and emotions as discussed and practiced in western European cultures and their colonies. Specifically pointing to Robert Burton's extensive inquiries into the emotions/passions as only one of the many contemporary considerations which indicate the growing self-consciousness, Miller notes that even key aspects of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century philosophies and political theories exhibit similar concerns as a result of the widespread interest in emotions.[27]

[27] Miller. *Humiliation*. 199ff.; Stephen Greenblatt. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.* UP of Chicago, 1980. William James's 1884 essay "What is an Emotion?" evidences the widespread concern with emotion during the nineteenth century, a concern in the domain of philosophy and theology, prior to a 19th century psychological lens. See also Jan Pamplar. *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*. Translated by Keith Tribe. UP of Oxford, 2015. Pamplar, who wants to move emotion beyond a dichotomy of universalism and social constructivism states that the present interest in the history of emotion "is taking off in all directions"—much like the mid-nineteenth century, I would suggest.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, personality as a concept separate from rank and role takes on new importance in self-definition. The person begins to construct identity through difference *from* rather than similarity to others, believing the self in struggle against a society perceived as demanding conformity. A self is constituted less by rank, role, or geographic location than by actions, accomplishments and affiliation. Concurrently, industrialization altered family patterns in the wake of population redistribution from country to city, undermining the sense of a self tied to a group or a place. Without stable context, the person could create an identity that required constant vigilance to maintain with consistency. Geographic and class mobility, concern with establishing individuality, the predominance of identity and appearance over character, and the increasing importance given to privacy combined to produce a modern society leavened by vigilance that elicited strategies of detection which, in turn, called for further (even hyper-) vigilance. Humiliation, along with its byproduct, shame, was generated in response to a virtually constant monitoring of the constituted self in its relation with others. Thomas Scheff found that such monitoring has become overtly "almost continuous in social interaction [and], more covertly, in solitary thought".[28] The close reader of mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-century fiction can witness not only the satiric analyses of social interactions, the dramas of humiliation's exposure of vanity and the deflation of pretension, but also the subtle and brutal humiliations leveled at victims whose shame we see registered in the texts.

By mid-century, Charles Darwin, responding to the concerns of his age, also studied emotion, publishing his findings in *The Expressions of Emotion in Man and*

[28] Thomas Scheff. *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotions, and the Social Structure*. UP of Chicago, 1990. Scheff notes this in his interrogation of prosaic interactions.

Animal (1852). He claims that blushing "seems to have primarily resulted from the earnest attention directed to the appearance of our own persons, especially to our faces, aided by habit, inheritance, and the ready flow of nerve-force along accustomed channels; and afterwards to have been extended by the power of association to the self-attention directed toward moral conduct." Blushing, he finds, "depends in all cases on . . . a sensitive regard for the opinion of others, more particularly, the depreciation of others." Darwin found that it is not mere self-reflection but "the thinking of what others think of us" which triggers the hiding, evasive behavior which modern man had since come to associate with a negative affect continuum ranging from embarrassment to devastating shame. Humiliation can generate either, depending upon the humiliated person's sensitivity to depreciation by particular others.[29]

Since Darwin, scientific research by sociologists, psychologists and various anthropologists have attempted to understand what "excites the blush." Even Siegmund Freud in his first book—his early work on repression in 1895—claimed that "strangulated affect" caused hysteria; if the client could express the hitherto forgotten emotions, she would begin to heal.[30] He then turned away from any study of emotion and toward what he called the drives. Other inquiries followed. For example, William McDougall asserts in his 1908 work introducing the nascent field of sociology that that which lowers us in the eyes of others excites shame. During 1910, William James, furthering the field of psychology, emphasizes the weight that another's judgment carries. Charles Horton Cooley, following their lead, argued in 1912: "[T]he mainspring of endeavor and the chief interest of the imagination throughout life is a person's perception of his or her self

[29] Charles Darwin. *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*. Greenwood Press, 1969, pp.309-346.
[30] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breur. *Studies on Hysteria. Vienna: Fran Deuticke, 1895.*

in relation and other's perception of that self." Important to my project is his early assertion that this "fact" is "familiar in literature, especially in modern novels," citing George Eliot's perceptive examination of "the loss of a long established social image . . . shattered by the coming to light of hidden truth."[31] That the disgrace is social, the identity shattered, status lost and the exposure witnessed constitutes nineteenth century humiliation. For humiliation to occur, there must be an audience to witness the stripping of the self, even when exposure occurs merely on the mind's stage of the person who perceives the self as being exposed. The set is the social arena, while the phantasy audience may be anyone, even just a self.

During the nineteenth century, ubiquitous self-help authors, particularly those in the United States, still confused economic success with moral merit offering a re-articulation of the Protestant belief that spiritual grace was manifest in worldly success and that failure was an inherent defect made evident. Herbert Spencer, distorting Darwin's selection theory, disseminated his philosophy of survival of the fittest. Thus, by spiritual decree and by natural law the saved, the deserving, and the fit succeeded while the damned, the unworthy, and the ill-adapted failed or were, at least, discovered and, at best, exposed as such and cast out. Furthermore, in the modern society for whom appearance was heavily weighted in the scale of success and value, and for whom the epidemics of social climbing and hypocrisy demanded increased detection, humiliation became more profitable. In this society in which the shift in boundaries of public/private created increased areas to be hidden from view, and in which a paradoxical desire to

[31] William McDougal. *An Introduction to Social Psychology.* Oxford Press, 1908; William James. *Psychology*. Holt, 1904; Charles Horton Cooley. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. Scribner, 1912, 182. See especially Chapters Five and Eight. Also see Charles Horton Cooley. *The Looking-Glass Self.* Praeger, 1990.

expose the self to public scrutiny intersected with the desire to detect the hidden, many individuals self righteously see humiliation as the just and deserved deflation of pretension that society effects upon those whose boundary transgressions threaten the cohesion and coherence of the community.[32] Early- and late-twentieth century dictionaries define humiliation simply: "to lower the pride or self –respect of; to cause a painful loss of dignity; to hurt feelings by causing to be or seem foolish or contemptible; to mortify." Exposing transgressed social boundaries and social classes, humiliation does not instigate guilt for an act for which reparation can be made. Instead, humiliation debases and devalues as defective the whole person. And it does so before an audience. Humiliation instigates the affect that Silvan Tomkins says "strikes deepest into the heart of man." While we experience terror and distress as inflicted wounds that can penetrate the ego, we experience shame as "an inner torment, a sickness of the soul." When humiliation triggers the affect shame, one feels "naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth" (I, 118). This affect, shame, becomes a feeling that is eventually recognized as the emotion, shame.

1.3 Distinguishing the Terms: Embarrassment, Shame, and Guilt

Ninety years after Darwin published his seminal work and almost seventy years after Freud refocused his study from "strangulated affect" to drives as primary behavior motivators, Silvan S. Tomkins cleared a return path to the study of affect as primary

[32] For a discussion of deflation of pretension, see William Ian Miller, *Humiliation*. See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* for the paradoxical desire to reveal and conceal that is pertinent to the nineteenth century U.S.

motivators of behavior.[33] He identified nine primary *affects*, sometimes erroneously referred to as feelings or emotions. Accurately defined, affects are identifiable and measurable "alterations of such physiological parameters as the intensity and steadiness of whatever was going on in the central nervous system" during their manifestation. Affects have to do with intensity and longevity and reduction of neural firing. Tomkins indicated the intensity ranges of the nine affects in their labeling. The positive affects are interest-excitement; surprise-startle; enjoyment-joy. The negative affects are fear-terror; distress-anguish; anger-rage; shame-humiliation; dis-smell-disgust. Over fifty years of subsequent clinical research has established affects as transpersonal and transcultural physiological and biological responses to stimulus. But the stimulants of affect may differ across cultures. Because the affect system is an open one, any affect can potentially be activated by any stimulant. Humans can learn to respond with particular affect to any stimulus and can learn to use any stimulus to intensify a positive or relieve a negative affective response. This is also true for some animals, though my focus for this project is upon human affect, feeling and emotion. For example, just as the affect joy may be stimulated by the approach of a smiling nurturing figure, the affect fear can be stimulated by the same nurturing figure's display of rage and the experience of shame may triggered by the advance of that same person if he approaches with a scornful frown and ridiculing words.

[33] Tomkins theories lay fairly dormant until a distillation of his work appeared in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader.* Edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick and Adam Frank. UP of Duke, 1995. Since then what has been labeled an affective turn has generated a multitude of research spreading through all disciplines. More recently, the use of affect as critical theory has come under scrutiny led by Ruth Leys: see *The Ascent of Theory*. Concurrently, however, a surge in the application of affect theory, especially to the literary arts has been swelling. Consider the widely attended 2015 Conference in Manitoba, Canada as well as the more recent international collaborations found in Stephen Ahern's collection of essays. Adam Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson have just published a handbook to further elucidate the theories Tomkins spent a lifetime developing. *A Silvan S. Tomkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory.* manifold.umn.edu. Accessed September 2020.

Bringing into sharper focus the interplay between conscious and unconscious, between motivational and non-motivational sub-systems a sort of feedback loop, Tomkins posits an ongoing negotiation between the subject and its worlds, a negotiation in which affects mediate what we perceive, and how we perceive motivates our actions. Our perception, he suggests, is not a mirror to nature but a mirror to a mirror in endless feedback loops in which affects intervene. In Tomkins's words: "the world we perceive is a dream we learn to have from a script we have not written. It is neither our capricious construction nor a gift we inherit without work" (I: 13).

Since Tomkins's initial work, increasingly refined affect research has distinctly separated affect, feeling, and emotion as discrete components of an experience, though many scholars still use them interchangeably. Donald L. Nathanson, an emotion theorist who worked with Tomkins, had early attempted to summarize the differences among affect, feeling, and emotion. More recently further distinctions have been established among the three. For example, Eric Souse succinctly synthesizes Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi to point out that affect is "a non-conscious experience of intensity" that is always prior to and outside consciousness, that is, pre-personal. A feeling is "personal and biographical . . . a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled." An emotion is "social." It is the "projection/display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be genuine or feigned." I would also add that not only are display rules culture-bound and learned but also learned within a culture are the experiences and even objects around which feelings of shame are normatized.[34]

[34]Donald Nathanson. *The Many Faces of Shame.* Eric Souse. "Feeling, Emotion, Affect" http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>. Brian Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual*. UP of Duke, 2002. See especial 28ff.

For the purposes of this project, I have focused mainly upon the negative affect range that Tomkins labeled humiliation-shame, indicating its intensity range. Unlike Tomkins and those who draw upon his theories, however, I consistently refer to *humiliation* as a shame-inducing action that stimulates the physiological affect shame producing specific feelings which become know as the experience of shame. I will continue to use these terms thusly on the following pages. The responses produced by feeling shame can vary, as will become apparent in my discussion of Cather.

The affect shame, the physiobiological response, appears to have developed later in the evolutionary process of the human, and is referred to by Tomkins as a secondary or auxiliary affect, because for it to occur, either interest or joy have to be present first and then interrupted. Shame occurs in combination with another affect. That is, shame is "an innate affect and a specific inhibitor to continuing interest and enjoyment." Barriers to interest or enjoyment, he claims, "activate the lowering of the eyes in shame and reduce further the exploration or self-exposure powered by excitement or joy." Others' indifference, contempt, or ridicule can equally serve as barriers to continued interest and/or enjoyment, triggering the affect shame. Although initially an innate response, shame requires a perceptual response that has to be learned. Further, whether a person affect as well as the degree of value rendered the person (and in some cases, object) who experiences embarrassment or shame will depend upon the degree and intensity of the creates the barrier that triggers negative affect. Shame, "the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, of alienation," claims Tomkins, "is about inadequacy," the inability to continue joy or interest despite a strong desire to do so. (II: 118)

Though Tomkins initially categorizes shame as a fundamentally biological response to stimuli, he qualified his ostensibly essentialist remark by adding that shame, as a response to environment, alters over time and across cultures, transformed by rules specific to the historical moment and the particular culture socializing the subject. Shame (as well as humiliation, one of its agents) is also influenced by the variable sources or stimuli that instigate it; one's body, work, class, religion, and/or social identity are potential sites upon which humiliation can be acted and about which shame can be felt. Learned deterrents to both humiliation and shame, and learned reducers also influence a person's experience. For example, we may learn to deflect shame with humor, or learn to remove a self from sight/site (if only by breaking eye contact or by allowing one performing self to efface the self threatened by the situation, a splitting of the self, so to speak). We may displace or even project humiliation onto another or, as I will argue, learn to right/write/rewrite the scene of one's humiliation, to allay the psychic and even physical pain shame causes. A local culture's taboos about the expression of particular affects which result from being humiliated also influence the experience by controlling the channel of affect. Taboos may control who expresses which affect under which conditions. For example, taboos attempt to control the expression of anger toward group members—except, of course, in the case of a scapegoat, who protects the group's coherence as the agent of purgation. Taboos may deny a too-direct gaze to a certain class or caste or sex, mandating a covered face or lowered eyes. Perversely, the exhibition of joy, or some other form of positive emotional display is as often policed by taboos as the exhibition of shamefulness, forcing the person experiencing either to repress or displace the affect, or to feel shame when experiencing a tabooed affect. Regardless of the

variables—stimuli, display rules, reducers--, shame functions as a motive if it initiates processes, actions taken, to deter its experience or its threat as a consequence of humiliation. More precisely, I argue that shame functions as an unexplored motive in the narrative act.

Donald L. Nathanson, who worked with Tomkins during the theorist's last decade, confirms his mentor's findings and avers: "no stimulus can evoke a psychological response unless it first triggers an affect." The drives themselves are amplified by affects and only become motivators of behavior when the affect impels the drive into consciousness. For example, only when the hunger drive causes distress does the person seek food. As most can attest, hunger consciousness can be delayed or superceded by intense interest in a project at hand. In fact, Nathanson argues, after Tomkins, that affect is "responsible for *awareness*, for only what gains affective amplification gets into the limited channel of *consciousness*."

Affect, the psychobiological phenomenon, becomes "a *feeling* only when we become aware that it [the particular affect] has been triggered." In other words, when a person feels angry or ashamed, we can assume that anger or shame has been consciously experienced. By the time the person says, "I feel angry," or "I feel ashamed," not only had the affect been felt but also had it become acknowledged by the person speaking those words. The feeling is recognized and categorized as such as a result of the person's history of having felt what is now described as that category of feeling—either angry or ashamed. Over time, the person accretes isolated affects, which have become feelings (those that make it into consciousness, even those experienced briefly) and groups them in memory according to the situations that instigated the particular affect and feeling.

This "assemblage" of affect and feeling with an association to a prior experience of that affect and feeling is an emotion, or as Nathanson more succinctly states," affect is biology, while emotion is biography"-- biography situated in the social. Some people, however, may experience affect, feeling, or emotion without overt acknowledgement; the affect happens, is ever-so-briefly pushed into consciousness but suppressed *as feeling*—as a full blown experience. This is what occurs in "bypassed," affect, an experience at the center of this project and will be discussed more fully below. For now, it is sufficient to understand that while the primary affects are physiologically transcultural and transpersonal, feelings (affects experienced consciously) and emotion (the categorizing of consciously experienced feelings according to association) are personally and culturally idiosyncratic.[35]

Given the widespread conflation of these basic and distinct components, it is no surprise that shame has only more recently been further disentangled from shyness, embarrassment and guilt. Deliberately building upon the cornerstone Helen Block Lewis laid in *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis,* various researchers and theorists during the late twentieth century constructed the symptomatic contours and the experiential architecture in which each occurs. Michael Lewis particularizes shyness, embarrassment and shame into their discrete details and according to the degree of disruption to the psyche and the group. These secondary affects, which become self-conspicuous emotions, emerge later than the primary affects and are more culture specific. They emerge when" [the self

[35] See Tomkins on the "limited channel of consciousness in *AIC, Volume IV:* Chapters 13 & 14. Donald Nathanson, "About Emotion," *Knowing Feeling: Affect, Script, and Psychotherapy.* Edited by Donald Nathanson. Norton, 1996, pp 1-21,13. For a discussion of affect as biology/emotion as biography see Donald Nathanson. *Shame and Pride.* W.W. Norton, 1992, 50ff. Tomkins' early research continues to drive the impetus for the swelling field of affect theory making possible this trans- and interdisciplinary project.

becomes an object to the self," a cognitive capacity that both benefits and taxes when "it allows the child to reflect on the self, to use the self to make comparisons to others, and ultimately to develop evaluative behaviors and processes that guide his or her actions and lead to moral [and ethical] behavior"(213).[36]

For Tomkins, the affect shame occurs as early as three months, when the child experiences the interruption of the joy and interest of communal experience with a nurturing object. The stimulated affect is not a conscious feeling, merely a physiological response in the child. This physiological response can be measured. "Affects are comprised of correlated sets of responses involving the facial muscles, the viscera, the respiratory system, the skeleton, the autonomic blood flow changes, and the vocalizations that act together to produce an analogue of a particular gradient or intensity of stimulation impinging on the organism."

Shyness emerges early, evidences itself long before fifteen months. Shyness is a mild "social anxiety" that keeps those who experience it chary of new encounters and social gatherings; embarrassment usually occurs as a result of focus upon the self and/or a minor "failure of ones self image," Embarrassment emerges only after self-referentiality is available to a child, sometimes after eighteen months at the earliest" and does not require self-evaluation in terms of others or of standards. According to Helen Block Lewis, the feeling of shame emerges long after, during the child's third year when the

[36] Helen Block Lewis. *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*: *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*. International Universities Press, 1971. Michael Lewis. "Embarrassment: The Emotion of Self Exposure and Evaluation." *Self-Conscious Emotion: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride. Edited buy* June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer. Guilford Press: 1995, pp. 198-218. Further references occur in text according to pagination of this edition. Lewis's findings were determined by an experiment during which a child was marked with a smudge on the nose and placed before a mirror. Whether the child touched the mirror or its nose determined presence of self-referentiality.

toddler becomes capable of evaluative behavior, and as Tomkins had established, has language and biography with which to construct a feeling.[37]

Embarrassment differs from shame yet is quite different from shyness. Lewis notes that though the origin of both appears to be a failed self, embarrassment is less painful than shame, as indicated by the person's evidenced desire to *sustain* contact rather than hide from or flee the scene. The respective behaviors are sufficiently different to mark. The embarrassed will possibly squirm, "exhibit a 'sheepish' or 'silly' smile followed by gaze aversion [probably to the side and/or slightly downward] and movements of the hands to touch hair, clothing, face, or other body parts." The embarrassed will often tilt the head in a way that allows for a playful alternating gaze avert-gaze return and may even make a light joke. During the experience of shame, however, speech is momentarily disrupted: the voice stammers, softens, ceases, or, conversely, the person babbles. While expanded capillaries (blushing) may occur in both, the person experiencing shame will usually remain immobile, or visibly collapse body posture, and rarely smile, though some may display a frozen partial smile. More likely a frown and gaze aversion will accompany the lack of neck tonus and body slump will be sustained.

If the affect is registered in consciousness, shame instigates a perception of a whole self-structure negatively judged or found defective or inadequate. The most usual response is that the person feeling shame wishes to remove the offending self from the sight of judging eyes. The shame response is typically to seek reduced facial communication. By dropping or averting the eyes or the head, by drawing in or

[37] Silvan Tomkins. *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Sylvan S. Tomkins*. Edited by Virginia E. Demos. Press Syndicate of the U of Cambridge, 1995, p. 19.

removing the body, the person consciously experiencing shame attempts to reduce the other person's ability to see him, or rather, his seeing the other person see him in his indignity, defeat, or exposed state. The head may even be hung during self-confrontation, adds Tomkins—"lest one part of the self be seen by another part and become alienated from it" (II, 118-121). Feeling an urge to hide, to disappear, the person may employ other defensive strategies: reverse the situation by attack, verbal or otherwise; deflect the pain with humor; disavow the shame experience, which offers short term relief at the cost of long term complications. Below, in a brief illustrative example, before discussing Willa Cather in depth, I use Theodore Dreiser's "Amateur Laborer" to interrogate how the use of narrative is an attempt to recover the stripped self and regain lost self-respect, either/both immediately following the humiliation or/and later, in the privacy and safety of solitude.

Neurologically, a person experiences shame as a reduction in neural firing because humiliation interrupts pleasurable interest or joy in the appraised self, a self which the person *still* desires, does not, maybe cannot reject. "'I want, but . . .'is the essential condition for the activation of shame," says Tomkins. "Insofar as desire outruns fulfillment sufficiently to attenuate interest without destroying it," shame occurs (II: 388).

That there are two types of embarrassment appears to establish a pivotal potential, which may hinge upon the investment and the participant's handling of a situation. For Michael Lewis, the two suggest "a developmental sequence in which embarrassment associated with exposure is transformed into embarrassment associated with evaluation (214). How that is effected he does not claim to understand, however. The first type, closer to shyness, occurs from any focus on the self, even positive focus such as a

compliment, "because complimenting elicits social rules of modesty." The second experience of embarrassment moves closer to shame in its intensity because it stems from a failing in standards. Whether embarrassment sinks into shame—during which the self is perceived as not merely slipping momentarily but mired in defection or dirtiness—depends upon the standard's importance, especially to the core self. Failure at a "core capacity" can devastate (211-214). Further determining the contours of the experience is the interpretation placed upon the particular event and the value given to the participants. What might embarrass one may result in shame in another. What may embarrass in one situation may cause shame in another. What may embarrass one when seen by a specific individual or group may trigger shame when witnessed by another. Feeling embarrassment, one may feel foolish; the shamed, feeling a fool, perceives the self as worthless.

Guilt and shame are more distinct and more easily identified. Helen Block Lewis's 1971 formative research led to an initial differentiation: "The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. In guilt the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not the focus of the experience" (30). Building upon this distinction has allowed researchers during the decades following Lewis's distinction to more precisely measure the elements of shame and guilt in a response. June Price Tangney's research particularly permits a differentiation of the contours of a shame response and shame-proneness from that of a guilt response and guilt-proneness. She also delineates the implications of each for subsequent motivation and interpersonal functioning. Similarly, persons experience

shame and guilt within interpersonal contexts. "We learn to feel shame or guilt over failures and transgression, and these failures and transgressions are themselves defined by significant people in our social milieu" (14). Both shame and guilt, however, have important and different implications for subsequent motivation and interpersonal functioning.[38]

When compared to guilt, shame is "significantly more painful and more difficult to describe." The person undergoing a shame experience feels smaller and inferior to others, believes he has little or no control over the situation, feels powerless. The guilty believes that he can act to repair any damage. Because shame activates a feeling of being watched by others, it initiates excessive, obsessive concern with what an other sees. Unique to shame is the person's split into observing and observed selves. In what appears as a complicated looping movement made up of projection and introjection, the person actively projects what he perceives and then introjects what he has projected as the others' perception of him: "an observing self witnesses and denigrates the focal self as unworthy and reprehensible" (117).[39] This split self impairs functioning as the person obsesses about his global self's devaluation. Because shame involves feeling exposed and rejected by sources that appear outside the self, the self seeks to escape judging eyes. Whereas guilt mobilizes efforts toward repair of the physical or impersonal damage, shame instigates an obsession with self devaluation.. The guilty is concerned with having

[38] For detailed discussions of shame and guilt see not only Helen Block Lewis but also Tangney. "Shame and Guilt in Interpersonal Relationships": 114-142. Tangney et al. "Shame-Proneness, Guilt-Proneness, and Psychological Symptoms: 343-367 in in *Self-Conscious Emotions*. Michael Lewis, Tangney and a number of other more recent researchers draw heavily upon Helen B. Lewis' foundational work, which draws upon Tomkins'. The concept of bypassed shame is important to my discussion of Cather.

[39] Interestingly, the willingness to employ a word like "denigrate," which implies an attribution of dirtiness or blackness to the self, had implications for racist assumptions that bear directly upon "negritude" as a state of defectiveness, unworthiness. This correlation of darker skin with inferiority has its relevance to Cather as well.

hurt another, is other directed; the shamed is concerned with "what a bad person I am," is self-focused. The counterfactual processes involve "mentally undoing some aspect of the self," not addressing the consequences of one's actions as they have affected another. The guilty desires to confess and apologize to aid repair, believing in his agency to remedy; the shamed, feeling powerless, hides, escapes—or strikes against. Various researchers have established that this "defensive, retaliative anger" labeled "humiliated fury" by Helen Block Lewis "can be directed toward the self and toward the real or imagined disapproving other."[40] When '"redirecting anger outside the self, shamed individuals may be attempting to regain a sense of agency and control, which is so often impaired in the shame experience," concurs Tangney (121). In this case, shame-prone individuals will externalize blame. The guilty do not, unless the guilt is complicated by an element of shame. The shame-blame sequence Tangney had observed is destructive to long term interpersonal relationships because the shame-prone are "associated with malevolent and fractious intentions (e.g. a desire to 'let off steam'), and with a likelihood of engaging direct verbal and symbolic aggression, indirect aggression (e.g. harm something important to the subject, talking behind the subject's back, all types of displaced aggressions, and anger held (a ruminative, unexpressed anger)." Further, the shame-prone are less likely to discuss the response and situation in a non-hostile manner and more likely to simply leave the situation; the guilt prone will attempt to diffuse anger by engaging in distracting activity and reappraisals of the other's role in the situation.

[40] See Helen Block, Lewis. *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis,* International Universities Press, *1971*. Thomas Scheff. "The shame rage spiral: A case of an interminable quarrel." *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*. Edited by Helen Block Lewis. Psychology Press, 1987, pp. 109-149; Donald L. Nathanson. *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self.* Norton, 1992.

Whether one is shame-prone or guilt-prone also has implications for empathy. What Tangney calls 'other-oriented' empathic response requires that a person take another's perspective long enough to imagine the situation or event from that other's position, to vicariously undergo the other's feelings or feelings similar enough. The guilt prone is more likely to consistently sustain the other's perspective because unlike the shame-prone, the focus does not stray back to the self. The shame-prone are subject to "egoistic drift," which Tangney say short circuit[s] empathy.[41] That is, a person experiencing shame suffers intense pain that disallows empathic concern at the moment because the wounded self is absorbed with defensive maneuvers that seek to protect it from additional pain. Further, the tendency to blame the other for a transgression that has caused the transgressor shame wipes out possibility of empathy during that moment. That empathy may become retrospectively possible, but requires reconsiderations of the moment, reconsiderations undergone from a temporal and spatial distance.

1.4 "Bypassed" or "Unacknowledged" Shame and Narration

When the person's experience of pleasure or interest is interrupted by the exposure of a transgression or failure, the affect response is shame, whether the one consciously acknowledges it or attempts to bypass its emotional pain by denying the experience, though the body registers it with an involuntary gesture. By-passed shame, usually indicated by a wince, a cringe, or some other reduced physical response, is quickly submerged in the subconscious, "overdistanced," says Helen Block Lewis, who

[41] Tangney recruits this term from Martin Hoffman. *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. 1978 UP of Cambridge, 2001.

coined the term.[42] The person "avoids the pain by stepping outside the self into the 'me' phase of the self, as if the pain were not happening," or happening to another self. The person "swallows" the affect, decreases its intensity but increases its duration. Extrapolating on Tomkin's theory, Lewis points out that shame markers, a feeling's outer indicators, verbal and nonverbal, bodily gestures and paralinguistic clues, are subtle and covert, always beginning with a negative perception of the self. Drawing upon her extensive research, Lewis observes that typically the person suffering from bypassed shame "reports a story or a series of stories, talking rapidly, but not quite to the point" and will complain of "endless internal playing of a scene in which she felt unfairly or critically judged or in which she made an error." That shame "is experienced as obsessive ideation or speech," so that episode of compulsive speaking and thinking about the moment keep the moment at bay, have implications for written narrative as well.

An imbrication of Block's work, Thomas Scheff's analysis of "unacknowledged shame" illustrates that exposure of one's incompetence can, alternately, result in too much feeling and too little ideation. The victim will become flustered, disintegrate into tears or stuttering, or become paralyzed into silence during an intense moment of shame-inducing humiliation. Furthermore, while replicating Lewis's experiments of bypassed shame that resulted in obsessive replaying of scenes, he observed that the person who defers emotional response is less apt to recognize the affect's source as a social one. The only evidence of shame is the person's shift to the humiliator's point of view when

[42] Helen Block Lewis. "Shame and the Narcissistic Personality" *The Many Faces of Shame*. Edited by Donald L. Nathanson. Guilford Press, 1987, pp. 93-132. Thomas Scheff extensively uses Lewis's work in developing his own theory of "unacknowledged shame" in *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotions and the Social Structure.* UP of Chicago, 1990, p. 79. Alice Miller's controversial theories about the psychic abuse of children also points to the importance of coded, compulsive retelling of an emotionally traumatic experience and has, in passing mentioned the authors I closely examine. See especially *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. Translated by Ruth Ward. Basic Books,1981.

narrating the experience. Moreover, in future mental reenactments of the scene, variations on the scene accrue as part of the context. Thus, extended context includes: 1) everything that has happened before, 2) the imaginings of what could have happened instead (the counterfactuals), and 3) speculation about what might happen after. These complement the use of context—the immediate social interaction—its dialogue, gestures, and physical environment. Thus, if studying the variations of the replayed scene can help us to understand the feelings, intentions and motives of what did happen, as Scheff says it can, then studying the various narrations as layers of a recurrent scene may help us to understand the author's experience of a humiliating moment as the motivation behind narratizing it.

During the reenactments the person very often engaged with some other person whose image she creates for an inner social exchange—either the real or imagined: one's spouse, child, parent, superior or subordinate, or even one's self in some other time or guise, younger or older, in another of the many constructed selves. This internal dramatization often results in emotional response. When they imagine the other as approving or accepting, they warm to the recalled or projected scene. When they recall or imagine a critical, contemptuous, or scornful other, they shrivel before the other's eyes, or defensively expand in resentful or indignant defensive anger. Even in these instances, humiliation is a "triadic affair," asserts Francis J. Broucek, "requiring one who humiliates, one who is humiliated, and one witness (or more) whose good opinion is important to the one humiliated."[43] The person can, of course, play all three of these roles: perpetrator, victim, and witness to her own humiliation. In fact, masochists—and

[43] See Scheff's *Microsociology,* pps. 87, 169. Francis J. Broucek. *Shame and the Self*. Guilford Press, 1991: 6.

literary artists, I argue—often position themselves so. Usually, however, when a person feels humiliated, the roles of perpetrator and witness are external to the victim's self, the two positions occupied by another person or a group. Even if the person humiliated is the only witness who, perceiving the self as proper (i.e. fitting), suddenly realizes his own misinterpretations of his social identity, humiliation can still occur.

Some researchers agree that the one who humiliates or the one who witnesses must be valued by the humiliated to trigger the affect shame. For example, shame theorist Andrew Morrison claims that, in fact, "humiliation implies shame in the presence of a highly cathected object." The character and weight of the witness makes a difference in whether the humiliated one is merely embarrassed or, more damagingly, shamed. Donald Nathanson concurs. "We are ashamed to feel evasive in the presence of straightforward men, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one" or "indigently intelligent" in the eyes of the employed manual laborer, as Theodore Dreiser sees himself in the example below. More importantly, the humiliated person's *perception* of the other *as* valued further weights the response to disapproval.

Accompanying exposure, both derisive laughter of an external humiliator or the self-contempt of a mocking self can exacerbate shame, experienced as acutely devastating fully in the present or chronically debilitating when bypassed shame in the present becomes protracted and resurgent in the future. Both innate and learned reaction to failure to obtain a positive response from a valued other—either an external other, an internalized other or a component self sitting in judgment upon another component self whose performance has failed to sustain the ideal self.

Furthermore, humiliation necessarily occurs in social space—in the square, the workplace, the home—even if occurring in the mind. One usually remembers or imagines scenes as dramatized space, though not always, as my discussion of Willa Cather's short story, "Garden Lodge" will later examine. The family arena is fertile ground for the possibility of humiliation, as writers have made readers painfully witness. Very often, it is in families that "projected identification of shame" occurs; a situation in which a self attempts to relocate its own shame feeling by thrusting contempt onto another whom it then treats with disdain or scorn. Of course, that other may willingly take on what is the "borrowed shame" that often results from rigidly kept familial secrets such as abuse, alcoholism, mental ills, or social and/or economic failure. Family scapegoats often function in this capacity, for by doing so, they perversely gain acceptance in the group. Secrets are, in fact, fodder for humiliation, especially when the secret protected is financial, moral or mental failure, and especially in a society like that of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century United State, where the successful and the celebrated were gods and the failed were anathema. In fact, the "toxicity" and "ubiquity" of humiliation abounds in the twentieth century western cultures.[44] These complex ideas around humiliation and shame have relevance to my discussion of Willa Cather, whose shame was predominantly tied to family, class, and status, as will be established below.

As do all affects, shame calls attention to what instigates it. Shame can ensure acceptable behavior, even conformity, by deploying a threat of rejection, expulsion, or abandonment. It can also provoke resentment, the "humiliated fury" underpinning much

[44]See Andrew Morrison's discussions of "projected identification of humiliation" and "borrowed shame" in families. *The Culture of Shame.* Ballantine Publishing Group, 1996, 487. Regarding the ubiquity of humiliation in the twentieth century see Francis J. Broucek. *Shame and the Self.* Guilford Press, 1991

verbal and physical violence, a response that, repressed or bypassed, may also lead to depression or suicide. Certainly the unacknowledged degree to which shame's experience can infect a life is made evident in the analogy that George Johnson makes in his fascinating book, *In the Palaces of Memory: How We Build the Worlds Inside Our Heads (1991)*. Anticipating the onslaught of neurocognitive research of the past few decades, Johnson rejects Cartesian dualism of mind and body, asserting that hurting someone with an idea literally scars, as would hurting someone with a rock, that " every time you walk away from an encounter your brain has altered, sometimes permanently," causing changes imposed against our will. "Someone can say something, an insult, a humiliation—and you carry it inside you like a shard of glass, healed inside a wound.[45]" Like that shard embedded beneath an apparently healed surface, shame's twinges recur, a reminder of the original wounding, painfully re-experienced by the person even as it is expressed from the body.

Demonstrating how painful memories cause permanent damage in the brain, Johnson collapses "the distinction between mental violence, which is protected by law, and the physical violence which is illegal" (xii). The former, he claims, is more damaging because memory, " a construct and not a videotape[,] . . . creates a context for understanding" (65). What our minds perceive will be based upon what is already in storage, and although and while memories shift and change over time, they are still the

[45] George Johnson. *The Palaces of Memory: How We Build the Worlds Inside Our Head*. Knopf, 1991, p. xii. I would like to credit Johnson's book as the jumping off place for this project. I read it at a moment in time when my daughter had been raped on sixteenth birthday, later followed by a psychotic break. During and following her "recovery," she wrote obsessively. Concurrently, I was undergoing a major exam during which I read many, many nineteenth- and twentieth- century texts. I believe that the coalescence of these events made me receptive to recurrent representations of shamefulness in the texts I closely read, which interested me in the lives of the authors as well as how the instigation of shame and its reduction engages narrative.

lenses or filters for what we choose to "see" or understand in any situation, creating its own coding system based upon past experiences.

Silvan Tomkins had thoroughly developed this idea in what he calls a "monopolistic shame theory," which produces "scripts" that motivate a person's actions, and according to which she navigates her environment. Thus, a person's perception of former humiliation(s) sensitizes her to elements indicating a possible reenactment and infiltrates imaginative life and work, as Robert J. Stoller in following Tomkins suggests in his essay "Pornography: Daydreams to Cure Humiliation."[46] Stoller argues that "when we observe the wreckage associated with humiliation, including the ease with which people die for and kill for self-respect, we can accept that humiliation is a fundamental element of behavior, "not only integral to warriorhood, ambition, and competitiveness, but also present in such complex, uncertain gifts as art." Daydream, consciously controlled story for which its author acknowledges responsibility, knowing it was invented to satisfy him," is story "to be shaped until it fits." Like a novelist who often deploys threatening or unacceptable observations through a peripheral, often disparaged character, the daydreamer often uses incomplete or commonly degraded figures because what they say should not count. The daydreamer authors stories that "construct a text with safety features" because daydreams are "secrets pieced together from secrets." At their core is humiliation is of two sorts, says Stoller. "First, to reveal the exact details of the script would be humiliating, too revealing of one's needs. Second, those exact details are inverted to hide from their author, and at the same instant, reverse knowledge of humiliations already suffered."

[46] Tomkins, Vol II, 2008 and Vol III, 1991. Robert J. Stoller. "Pornography: Daydreams to Cure Humiliation" in Donald Nathanson. *The Many Faces of Shame*, pp. 292-307. Of course the classic Walter Mitty daydream comes to mind, but more recent, poignant and pertinent is book/film *Marwen.*

Thus, Stoller's account of narration in daydream suggests a possible motive compelling narrative: the attempt to "ward off then undo the effect of humiliations that, striking from any direction, are defended against by each turn in the daydreamer's script."[47] The compulsive re-workings of themes and figures variously disguised is in part the author's desire, conscious or unconscious, to work through if not undo the effect of humiliations suffered and to stave off the possibility of future ones feared. Narrative may even revenge the humiliated self, in the imagination if nowhere else. The figure whose power to humiliate is neutralized or even reversed; the victim becomes the one with potential to shame the other. Exhibiting a vengeful streak, Cather particularly uses narrative this way, having admitted on several occasions that her greatest wish was "to pay back the loves and hates of her life." She confessed: "Oh, it does my wicked [sic] un-Christian heart good to get even to pay off old scores and make people take back the bitter things they said in those years when bitter things hurt so." She often used narrative to do just this.[48]

Because fiction, much like daydream, can be less guarded than either declared autobiography or intentional correspondence, it often reveals what the author believes should remain concealed, but consciously or unconsciously needs to reveal, to (repeatedly) express from the body/mind. A case in point is Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which Thomas Scheff explores as what he argues is the "first of the modern characters in fiction who respond to oppression by being ashamed of themselves"

[47] See Stoller, 292-295.
[48] Letter to Mariel Gere: 1/10/1898. After Cather's tentative romantic appeal to Louise Pound had been rejected, the shamed young woman wrote an unflattering send-up of Pound's brother, resulting in the Pound family's alienation of her and her own family's criticism. Within the decade, Cather's short story "The Profile," followed upon her humiliating meeting with A.E. Houseman in which Dorothy Canfield had inadvertently side-lined Cather. Another unforgiving portrait is to be seen in the character of Janet Valentine, based upon Anne Nevin. These are just a few examples of many instances when Cather used her pen to "pay off old scores."

(131). Scheff's discussion of the dynamics in play when humiliation triggers the shame affect and feeling is instructive. He also argues that the novel displays class domination enabled and maintained by a colluding subordinate class member who succumbs to and adopts the scorn of the class he perceives as ordinate, an insight relevant to this project. Though the incidents used to demonstrate the dynamic are fictional, art is "a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm." (Jameson, 79)

Scheff locates the "pivotal point in Goethe's novel in the scene that describes the protagonist's humiliation. Exposed as having assumed certain privileges of a class in which he is not a member, Werther experiences but does not acknowledge his feeling of shame instigated by class members he idealizes. He represses resentment toward those who have denied him access to a certain material and social space because he continues to idealize the very class whose representatives scorn him; having adopted their perspective of his own class, he scorns himself, instead. He transforms the denied, unacknowledged shame into Block's "humiliated fury," which he turns upon himself rather than express it. The result is suicide. Of interest for me is Scheff's claim that Goethe drew from his own fear of class humiliation, if not his own experience of it, to stage his protagonist's struggles and response. Furthermore, Goethe depicts how the "idealizing-shaming" process functions in the symbolic treatment: members of subordinate groups have a conflicted shame experience that is generated by both outer and inner scorn and ridicule. More precisely, a person rendered low in status not only suffers a lack of deference from the other group, but also interiorizes images circulated by that group, images which betray scorn toward the low-status person—toward himself.

As a result, shame self-generates. Furthermore, when he fears or is apprehensive of public exposure of his status while transgressing onto the other group's social ground, he confirms the boundaries between the two classes. Werther had momentarily forgotten the boundaries, transgressed them in his claim to social privilege—only to be painfully reminded that he had no right to the claim, which intensifies his humiliation, making more shameful his transgression and incompetency. This process can work in either direction across class boundaries, whether the farmer attends a formal dinner party or the society belle goes to Harlem—though, admittedly, the apprehensions may differ, for instance, their assumptions regarding rightful access. Still, in either direction, any effort to deny still-policed boundaries will make the interloper vulnerable to humiliation, especially if the fraudulent claimant has introjected the other group's real or imagined contempt. This may especially occur in class members who perceive members of other classes in a particularly rigid way, with little permeability between boundaries, with classification of superiority and inferiority generally marked. Learning such boundaries may occur through teaching, modeling or intuiting.

Scheff's instructive analysis demonstrates how fiction can illustrate the microworlds of social interaction, particularly as it illuminates the dynamics of humiliation's consequences upon the participants of those microworlds. His discussion supports my own assertion that the experiences and the fear of humiliation have a larger role in the creative impulse than has been supposed. Moreover, Scheff suggests because fiction offers "extremely detailed renderings of episodes of interaction, which report both outer and inner behavior and experience because the author has tapped both for his or her literary daydreams," one can discover biographical material that may or may not be

mined elsewhere. Accepting the truism that in imaginative work an author draws upon the personal, consciously or unconsciously, and given shame's systemic effect upon the person who suffers it, understanding a scene in which an author suffered humiliation becomes integral to any study of her narrative process. Willa Cather offers a good example, and I am hopeful that my readings of her texts yield thoughtful reconsideration of both her work and the potential use of a theory of affect applied in literary criticism.

For the person who struggles with shame generated by humiliation, deploying various strategies may manage, even sometimes dissipate the negative affects, feelings, and emotions that result. To dissipate the discomfort, the shamed may explode or implode in violence, but she may also manage shame by giving it form through tactile or narrative arts, a more socially beneficial option. Frederic Jameson has written that the literary or aesthetic act "always entertains some active relationships with the Real" and, as a cultural object, "brings into being that very situation to which it also, at one and the same time, is a reaction," able to transform the world it takes up into itself. If so, narrativity suggests a possible alternative to violent expression of negative affective experience in a world that offers increasingly less opportunity for emotional display and more chance of humiliation. For this reason, I am very curious about the dynamics of narrative as authors have often unwittingly deployed it as an antidote to shame. Narration concurrently benefits not only the author, but also the reader sensitized to consequences of actions within the world of the text, enabled to "see," as Dreiser would wish in the example below, and as Cather insists in her short story, "Paul's Case. It is my hope that this attempt to understand the practice of narration as a strategy of emotion

management by Willa Cather will encourage further inquiry and discussion of psycho-cultural connections between shame and narration.

1.5 A Brief Example of Applied Affect Theory: "An Amateur Laborer"

Theodore Dreiser's *An Amateur Laborer*[49] offers a concise example of how the social enactment and emotional experience of humiliation is effected across class boundaries. It provides a subjective account of how the fear of humiliation polices those boundaries. In his text Dreiser narrates his reluctant attempts to gain employment as a manual laborer during a period when his creative powers had ebbed. *An Amateur Laborer* also offers a glimpse of the strategies deployed to avoid both fear of exposure and the shame feeling that even perception of humiliation generates. I offer it before the intensive discussion of Cather to briefly illustrate my approach to her texts.

Biographers of Dreiser foreground the impoverished childhood of the author whose "early yearnings for wealth and success would become dominant themes in his novels," as Donald Pizer notes. Ellen Moyers's observation in analyzing Dreiser's works states: "The journey into the mind of a novelist ordinarily begins with a search for the source of his characters, which in Dreiser's case means, at the outset, no more than the study of his family." She finds that "Dreiser's sense of the interrelatedness of the human family was a tool forged by experience (x). She also confirms his lifelong "anxieties about poverty" and perhaps, more importantly, his awareness that he and his family were "not only poor, but unrespectable" (179, xv), implicit and explicit concerns for Dreiser. W. A. Swanberg agrees. Dreiser was "reared in . . . poverty and humiliation," by a father who called his children "'Idle, good for nothings!'" and "'Loafers.'" as Dreiser's

[49] Theodore Dreiser. *An Amateur Laborer*. UP of Pennsylvania, 1983.

recalls in *Hoosier* Holiday. "Though he would be permanently hurt, he was not crushed." Very likely, storytelling helped him to mediate and mitigate the shameful episodes of his life.[50]

When the town's paper, the Warsaw Gossip, reported that locals ostracized the Dreisers as "trash" young Theodore "was badly hurt by his exclusion." During high school, repulsed by his current job weeding onions, he was found daydreaming and fired. "As always when confronted by such a reverse he conjured up idyllic circumstances where his abilities would be appreciated, his employers would admire him and he would sweep irresistibly to success." At age sixteen, he left Warsaw with hopes of opportunity requiring no hard labor. He arrived in Chicago "wounded, confused, maladjusted." Chicago. There he walked miles as he sought jobs with little success until he finally found a job washing rail cars; he was so inept that he was fired after half a day. He then settled into a job as a dishwasher but lied to his family, pretending to be working in a haberdashery. He remained there, "still smarting so keenly from his rebuffs that he preferred even the Paradiso smells [which made him retch] to job-hunting. . . . He continued to picture himself in the dignity and an ease of selling neckties and gloves in a soft-carpeted store." Eventually, he moved on to a hardware job only to be fired again, hours later, indignant. "Downcast at the thought of a young man of his endowments being forced to such a demeaning labor under men he felt his inferiors" he was convinced that two "ill-clad men" asked him to impossibly lift a stove "'to humiliate him.'" Dreiser's own account in the autobiographical *Dawn*. He quit his next job, one found by

[50] Robert H. Elias. *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature*. Knopf: 1949; revised, Ithaca: Cornell UP: 1970. W.A Swanberg. *Dreiser*. Scribner's: 1965. Ellen Moers. *Two Dreisers*: *The Man and the Novelists as Revealed in His Two Most Important Works, Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy*. Viking Press, 1969. Jerome Loving. *The Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser.* UP of California, 2005. Donald Pizer. *Theodore Dreiser Recalled.* UP of Clemson, 2017.

his brother, Rome, because he was offended "that most of the railroad men seemed to be unshaven foreigners, inferior to him in intelligence and station." The young Dreiser was even more unemployable than his feckless father. During this period Dreiser "would *conjure a compensating picture of himself as a superior person (*my emphasis*),* envisioning himself behind 'a great roll-top desk' in –a large enclosed office' dictating important letters to an attentive secretary." Engaged by a five and dime, he remained a little longer, probably because a literate co-worker reinforced Dreiser's sense of superiority. When Theodore was "rescued" by his teacher, Miss Fielding, who informed him that manual work was not for him, or so the older Dreiser later claimed, he attended university for one year on her dime. Yet, even there, when no fraternity wanted him, " so hurt was he by his feelings of exclusion that he even considered leaving college."[51]

As the biographical material above suggests, Dreiser's sensitivity to rejection and class disparities began early, as did his use of narrative to reverse the negative affect of his many experiences of humiliation and shame. Having thus set the stage with the narrative strategies he deployed for defending against negative affect, I want to discuss Dreiser's posthumously published *An Amateur Laborer*, in which he represents what he calls "the period of my triumph," a time-frame of about sixty days.

Following the problematic reception of *Sister Carrie* and his father's death, the thirty-one-year-old author had undergone a physical, emotional, and creative decline that lasted about three years, from his nervous breakdown in 1901 to 1903. The nadir of that period corresponds to the trying fifty-six days to which Dreiser refers and about which he writes in retrospect. During this time, unable to earn a living by writing, the mental labor by which he had until then sustained himself, Dreiser reluctantly seeks manual labor—the

[51] Quotes in this paragraph are drawn from W.A. Swanberg, 24-9.

distaste for which is exhibited above. Being "unable to write or to earn a living seemed ridiculous" and "resulted in "a cowering fear . . . of contempt, of pity, of heaven knows what all upon the part of my friends, my aquaintances and the world in general," writes Dreiser (11). Admitting himself as "[t]oo keen a judge of life and nature not to realize the makeshift and decline which it all represented"(8-9), he perceives his "lost health and prestige" as a "fallen state" and observes: "Down here, I was out of a place" (5). Confessing personal responsibility for his state in one breath, he defends against accepting any responsibility in the next.

> While admitting that I myself was wretchedly to blame for all my misfortunes, which now assailed, and while constantly condemning myself as a person wholly unfit to ask favors either of Providence or society, I yet . . . felt perfectly sure that there was an element of fatality about my troubles, that they were foreordained—worked up by invisible and adverse powers.

Like a not-so-young fatherless, displaced and impotent Hamlet, he finds that "time was out of joint" (13).

Despite economizing, Dreiser finds himself desperately low on funds but unable to go to family. Citing pride, he really fears rejection because *he* had never helped *them*. Publishers, journalists, and newspaper editors refuse him work or financial advance, he complains; they merely meet his want with scorn, and force him to see his own wretchedness. He turns to manual labor as a last resort.

> Although I was really anxious to find something to do I was perfectly willing to do anything which I could, the fear which I had of becoming the mark of someone's humor was a powerful deterrent. What would people think, was the question that I asked myself over and over . . .what would the other persons who command in the world of labor and who have such a sneering contempt for indigent intelligence think? I should be looked upon as a freak by intelligent underlings, a failure by self-sufficient older ones—a poor broken down author who was more to be pitied than blamed, but a rather consequent and useless person at that. (13)

Implying that he has falsely claimed his writing as labor, that he had misrepresented the task's difficulty as well as his work's value while in the labor market, he ponders, "Would they, the real workers and toilers of the world find a place in their midst for me? . . . They would not have me. People were expected to keep their places in this world" (14). Now out of place, he lays claim to another, but this claim is also problematic for him. He does not really desire a place among the class of manual laborers, nor does he believe that he belongs among them, voicing aversion too frequently. Finally, with few choices left, he approaches the industrial district with the stated intent of seeking work. Nearing the establishments, however, he would see someone looking out at him and begin to worry over how he looked to them, not wanting to appear destitute. His fear of their discovery of his misrepresentation contradicts his claim that his appearance indicates his higher status. "Always I would think of my own work, hard as it was, would contrast my own appropriateness to that with my appropriateness to this [manual labor] and hurry away" (17).

On one occasion, having worked up the courage to request work, he is humiliated by the clerk's loud sneering rebuff, "You couldn't do the physical work here." Dreiser falls back "abashed" because the loud voice had drawn the attention of others who, then, witness the rejection and his exposure. To compensate, Dreiser recounts in the next paragraph the vivid daydream in which he, the indignantly assertive author, forces his way into the trolley-car conductor's office, where the manager, unlike a mere clerk, "could tell by my appearance that I was not exactly the ordinary run of man." He understands Dreiser's situation and readily offers him work. Encouraged by his vision—an empowering internal narrative--, Dreiser heads immediately to the conductor's office,

intent upon speaking to the manager, only to meet with the rude rejection of yet another clerk who does not "see," who lacks "the faculty to grasp what it means to be the other man," complains Dreiser. He painfully recalls, "I could have written an essay that morning on how nature meets want with inexperience and pain with those who cannot see. Blind! Blind! Blind!" (19). His inadequacies for claiming membership in the class of the manual laborer exposed, Dreiser shrinks before "curious eyes," "sharp eyes." He feels as though he is "sailing under false colors" when the clerks repeatedly greet him with a pleasantry that disintegrates into brusque rudeness when he inquires about a job. "I was only conscious that I was out of place and they knew it. I felt like an imposter slinking out for it seemed to me that I had in my own indefinable way misrepresented myself. . . . I had not turned out to be what he took me for" (20).

Despite the brash clerk in the conductor's office, Dreiser decides to return early Tuesday to register for a position on the cars, but he balks upon approaching the building before which a crowd of veteran laborers already queued. His reluctance especially increases after seeing other men of his own class--men unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with physical labor but, like him, seeking it as a last resort. Dreiser observes that, like him, they are "ashamed to go up. They, too, were a little better dressed . . .not so strong-looking and not so coarse" as the crowd; they, too, "pretended to be anything but heading for this particular institution though one should see by their averted glance that was just the thing they were trying to do." As Dreiser and the men circle the building to gather courage, to evade the knowing eyes of the men watching from the line, they "exchange that shamed look of understanding. . . . It was very painful," says, Dreiser. In fact, the shame is too painful; he retreats before the "sharp

eyes" of the watching laborers, protesting that the difference he felt "was not based on a sense of superiority—far from it. I was only conscious that I was out of place." (21).

He is shamed by what he perceives to be his humiliation: the publicity of his inappropriate claim to that line of laborers. Of course, his projection onto the laborers of the knowledge that he is "out of place" is in part the projection of his own desire to be perceived as separate from them, above them, better than them. His aversion to manual toil and his construction of mental toil as an action not only more difficult but more prestigious is apparent, even in his sour-grapes rationalization, when he speaks of his tenuous rise on the wave of success. To be "raised for one short moment on the crest of affluence, seen by the world as a doer of something, envied by some as a possessor of something" is really but "a vanity and a travail of the flesh," he writes (5). The repeated references to his ability to write as a "power" which had been "taken away" from him, a power that allows him to remain up, above, on the crest of the wave of success and fame, combines with his voiced awareness of the respect which he assumes the laborer to have for mind, for show, and for other illusions by which he claims to no longer be deceived.

That the proud author had made every attempt to retain an appearance that denied membership in the class of manual laborer only indicates the boundaries he himself perceived existing between the manual and the mental laborer. That he should then attempt to claim terrain by crossing those boundaries placed him in a position that invited humiliation, exposure of his unfittedness to that space.[52] That he did not belong in the class of manual laborers and was guilty of making false claims is evidenced in his fearful expectation of the laborers' "sneering contempt for indigent intelligence" (12). Believing that he had somehow *fallen* from his place but is unfitted to this new place, Dreiser

[52] Dreiser's crossing or transgressing is an inversion of Werther's (Goethe's).

perceives that he has failed. But this failure is less important in creating a context ripe for humiliation than what both the clerks and Dreiser perceive to be his false membership claim. Dreiser's exposure occurs before his own eyes as well as those of the clerks and bystanders, through whose eyes Dreiser imagines himself as he projects his assessment of his failure onto his construction of their assessment of him. That misrepresentation makes Dreiser vulnerable to humiliation and the shame it generates. The emotional pain effected by the experience of humiliation will later motivate Dreiser to revisit the scene and to write *An Amateur Laborer.*

Dreiser's response to his experience of humiliation and the shame generated by it displays three common strategies. First, during the experience, he narrows his range of accountability, claims limits to his competence. This is exactly what Dreiser does later in *An Amateur Laborer*; he ambivalently represents his attempts to transgress a class boundary. Humiliated by his need to cross it, policing the boundary with his fear of being discovered crossing it and his fear of being discovered as not belonging there, he is clearly humiliated when he does attempt to cross, to stake his claim. He experiences the rejections as his having been "caught" as a trespasser, publicly exposed as an imposter, an interloper. Being so "caught" is variably expressed as "losing face," being "exposed," unmasked," "stripped naked." Those humiliated by the publicity of their social misappropriations and personal misrepresentation often thus voice their emotional response to their public dressing down. Second, Dreiser attempts to defuse the potency of his humiliators by placing *them* in a position of humiliation, by pointing to their blindness to humankind and the pain caused by their inability to "see." He displaces shame (berating the clerk) to reject its pain. One may also ignore shame, "bypass" it,

thereby decreasing or momentarily evading the intensity of pain only to increase its duration, as evidenced by its later reemergence elsewhere.[53] The third response to shame consequent upon humiliation is to withdraw, to leave the falsely claimed territory (as Dreiser does a number of times). He slinks into a self imposed exile of sorts, perceives the entire self as a failed self.

When a complicated and intense need for self-esteem confronts the contempt of another or others who have caused and/or witnessed the humiliation, the humiliated person may verbally or physically lash out in defense of what he perceives as a loss of honor, as disgrace. Dreiser did not respond so, in this instance. He does, however, become convinced of a need to avenge the wrong incurred through his exposure, which had unjustly (as victims often believe) lowered or debased him before the eyes of another, especially a valued other, even if that other is the self perceiving the self humiliated, which Dreiser did. We can see this happening to the Dreiser self who values the "power" to write, to occupy the place of an author respected by those who sustain awe for mental production.

As example, consider the passage in which Dreiser splits himself into the spectacle of failure and the indifferent spectator of that failure. Here, he manifests the idea of the self or one of the selves that constitute the subject called Dreiser) before the eyes of the self who watches. Evidencing the classic response of detachment from the humiliated self, Dreiser points to "that strange duality of person" (37) he experiences.

> One of these [selves] was a tall, thin, greedy, individual who had struggled and thought always for himself and how he should prosper, but was now in a corner and could not get out, and the other was a silent, philosophical soul who was standing by watching him in his efforts and taking an

[53] While Freud investigated this process in his studies of the repressed Helen Block Lewis, however, coined the term "bypassed shame " in her cogent study of the phenomenon.

> indifferent interest in his failures. . . . [It was] the other who sat in judgment over all that I did and seemed to brood apart . . . over my fate[,]. . . laugh at me. He was not sorry for me. He was not ashamed of me. He seemed rather to look upon me as I looked upon those flies I had so often caught in the paste of a paper, or the moths that I had watched turning about my lamp and burning their wings. (25, 27)

This move to detach from the humiliated self is typical. Another form of such detachment is humor, created as a strategy to take control of a potentially humiliating situation. That is, like using a homeopathic remedy, the humiliated instigates a ridiculing of the self which, because it can be controlled, is less shameful; humor deflects focus away from the threat of a more painful shame anticipated. The humorist joins ranks with those who might scorn him, defuses the anticipated pain of impending contempt by humorously preempting a projected scorn. Often, the humorist will employ narrative—with caustic humor. Mark Twain immediately comes to mind. Cather, too engages in a similar gambit when she scornfully caricatures herself in the alter-egos she creates—and, sometimes, destroys. Narrative is, in fact, a strategy that re-enacts the shame experience—usually with a difference. In recasting and transforming the experience as well as the scene of humiliation, the narrative response need not necessarily occur immediately, as it occurred in Dreiser's compensatory daydream; it may occur later, when the author consciously or unconsciously uses the narrative process to mitigate lingering, unresolved pain, as Dreiser does when he later recalls and reenacts his experience on *An Amateur Laborer.*

2.0 "Wrenches and Jars and Wounding Contacts"

> I suppose that is why I never run out of material to write about. The inside of me is so full of dents and scars, where pleasant and unpleasant things have hit me in the past. I do not so much invent as remember and re-arrange. And I remember unconsciously. Faces, situations, things people have said so long ago simply come up from my mind as if they were written there. They would not be there if they had not hit me hard.
>
> --Willa Cather to Carrie Miner Sherwood
> April 29, 1945

> An artist has an emotion, and the first thing that he wants to do with it is to find some form to put it in, a design. It reacts on him in exactly as food makes a hungry person want to eat. It may tease him for years until he gets the right form for the emotion. . . . The situation counts greatly for the writer who makes his stories out of the ideas he picks up, but very little for the one who writes from his personal experience and emotion.
>
> Willa Cather, interview
> *New York World*, 1925

While the humiliated may employ narration to discharge negative affects and the feelings they produce, they do not deploy the same narrative strategies, nor do so for the same reasons. For example, prolonged efforts to mitigate the lingering shame of early humiliations led Charlotte Perkins Gilman to reform the *site* of their occurrence—the home and woman's place in it, deflecting her pain through often humorous narration. Willa Cather, however, recast and restructured the *relationships* that caused her pain, sometimes developing narrative strategies and representations to avenge and revenge perceived wrongs. For both authors, humiliations occurred within the context of complex experiences derived from family failures and fraught relationships. For Willa Cather the vulnerability to shame-inducing exposure derives particularly from her relationships to

family, especially her father. That she held him as well as herself partly responsible for her susceptibility to disgrace complicated that relationship. As a result, she creates, even punishes, textual figures whose self-delusions she rudely debunks. Close observation of these figures as they interact with other characters allows the reader to move closer to Cather's complex emotional nexus and to her narrative efforts to discharge and dispel residual negative affect. Such observation disputes James Woodress' portrayal of the happy family. It also modifies Eudora Welty's remark that Cather "let the past come flooding into the present." Certainly, as Welty suggests, the historical past informs the present for Cather and the worlds of her texts. More importantly, Cather's personal past filters and contaminates her texts.

Friend and critic, Dorothy Canfield Fisher implies that Willa Cather typifies the immigrant American who accepts as definite the break with an anterior life. Responding to critics during a period in which appreciation for Cather's works had begun to wane, Fisher offered her official hypothesis about her friend's work. In a 4 June 1933 article, she asserts that "the one real subject of all her [Cather's] books is the effect of the new country—our new country—has on people transplanted to it from the old traditions of a stable, complex civilization. . . . Miss Cather's work is all about an experience which no one but an American can have."[54] To substantiate, Fisher points out that the author had "wrestled with the grave problems and perplexities of transplantation" not only in books but personally.

> [S]he lived through the typical American experience of going from a stable old society to live in a new world. . . . Americans are the only people who have given to the shift from the old to the new life the stern dignity of the irrevocable. . . . English and French colonists seem to take the attitude of those married people

[54]Dorothy Canfield Fisher. "Willa Cather, Frontier Daughter." *Sunday World-Herald.* Magazine Section,, p. 7.

> who can't bear to give up thinking of themselves as somebody's children rather than as grownups; for whom not their own but their parents' house is home. . . . Americans have no choice but to accept the definite break with the past.

Yet, Fisher belies her remark and casts doubt upon such a "definite break" when she says that Cather "was born and lived for what is traditionally the period of life which most influences personality in a state which had the tradition of continuity and stability as far as they could exist in this country, and in a class which more often than any other is always stubbornly devoted to the old ways of doing things." Fisher insists that by the time the eight-year-old Virginian was transplanted to Nebraska, the young Cather had already been "marked to the marrow of her bones by her experience of life lived according to an old, stable, orderly, and unquestioned tradition." By contrast, Fisher claims, Nebraska offered "social chaos and anarchy." Certainly, Fisher offers the keynote speech in a critical colloquy that centers on Cather's transplantation. Her observations also offers a departure point for my own foray into Cather's work, because Cather's response to Fisher's article has led me to infer that the author could not break with the past. Responding to Fisher's article, Cather wrote on 22 June 1922 to thank her friend for erecting a façade. "I'm grateful to have so good a front presented to the public." Admitting an aversion to reading about herself, an act that only made her more "self conscious," she says, Cather corrects Fisher, claiming that her

> chief happiness . . . is in forgetting the past as if it had never been. No, I don't mean 'the past' but myself in the past. As soon as I think of myself as a human figure in that past, in those scenes (Red Cloud, Colorado, New Mexico) . . . I am not there as a person. I seem to have been a bundle of enthusiasms and physical sensations, but not a person"[55]

[55] All letter citations are taken from *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather.* Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout. Knopf, 2013.

Re-experiencing the pain that resulted from her actions there, she confesses to having fled herself and her images for many, many years. Cather is most content, she says, when she outdistances those bruising impressions: "I have been running away from myself all my life . . . and have been happiest when I was running faster." Notably, in this letter Cather doesn't refer to Virginia, her first "past." The move from stability and order of her Virginian origins to the chaos of ostensibly suspended class differences may have removed former disadvantages for some but demanded conflicted realignments for other. Yet, as Elaine Scarry has reminded us

> What is 'remembered' in the body is well remembered. . . . The presence of learned culture in the body is sometimes described as an imposition from without . . . But it must at least in part be seen as originating in the body, attributed to the refusal of the body to disown its own early circumstances, its mute and often beautiful insistence on absorbing into its rhythms and postures the signs that it inhabits a particular space at a particular time. The human animal is in its early years 'civilized,' learns to stand upright, to walk, to wave and signal, to listen and speak, and the general 'civilizing' process takes place within particular 'civil' realms, a particular hemisphere, a particular nation, a particular state, a particular region. Whether the body's loyalty to these political realms is more accurately identified as residing in one fragile gesture or a thousand, it is likely to be deeply and permanently there, more permanently there, less easily shed than those disembodied forms of patriotism that exist in verbal habits or in thoughts about one's national identity. The political identity of the body is usually learned unconsciously, effortlessly, and very early . . .

Scarry goes on to cite Pierre Bourdieu who writes of the transmission of cultural "manners" from one generation to the next:

> 'The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given the body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through

> injunctions as insignificant as 'stand up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand.'[56]

We can assume that the young but thoroughly acculturated Virginian, Willa Cather, had been steeped in the local and regional social codes before embarking for Nebraska. She had been socialized by the gentle, soft spoken father who had studied law in Baltimore. A man who read Shakespeare's plays as well as the poetry of Robert Burns and Lord Byron, he spent many reflective hours herding sheep with his little girl among Back Creek hills. Her mother valued and modeled Southern gentility, gracious manners and personal finery, even when finances did not allow such. Long, curling tendrils of carefully arranged hair cascading over ruffled dresses and the serious but lady-like demeanor the daughter exhibits in photos of this early period evidence Jennie Cather's hand. The young girl learned the Southern codes of honor through her grandmothers' and mother's frequently retold stories and memories of a proud Confederate past and a brother who lost his life defending it. Jennie cherished his sword and flag. Post-Civil War, stripped of their material goods, traditional livelihood, and political autonomy, many Southerners continued to practice a feudal code of honor that operated as strategic psychological defense in the face of their impoverished condition, as psychic compensation for the dressing down they had experienced. Stories of what had been sacrificed were important; class markers, such as dress and manners, an appearance of gentility and noblesse oblige, had to be upheld.

Young Willa would have been saturated with Back Creek language and the tales and legends told by the mountain people and African-American servants, recently freed but working for wages or board. Many of them labored on the Cather estate,

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[56] Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* UP of Oxford*, 1985, pp. 109-111.*

Willowshade, especially during the busy seasons. For it was an *estate* that William Cather had placed in his son's hands when he and his wife followed the older son, George, to Nebraska. George and Francis, his new Boston bride, had set out to homestead right after they were married, shortly after the Civil War. As steward of Willowshade, Charles Cather and his young wife, Jennie Boak Cather removed themselves and their little three-year old daughter, Willella, from grandmother Boak's modest home, where the young Cather family had been living since Charles and Jennie had married. The large three-story brick structure, Willowshade, fronted by a raised, white-columned entrance still stands though the shading willows were cut long ago. The house boasts many rooms, including a very large kitchen which had been dominated by an eight-burner stove around which a fairly large staff spun, made candles, churned butter, and canned many jars of preserves to stock the numerous pantry shelves. Although the rocky terrain of Back Creek is unsuitable to farming, raising sheep to be sold in Baltimore kept Charles busy on the 230-acre property. Shearing and butchering also took place there, providing food and the wool to stuff quilts made by the women. Nightly, servants would either sit around a quilting frame or tear old cloth into strips for rug braids, according to Edith Lewis, Cather's housemate and companion for forty years.[57]

Willowshade was a lively place when Willa lived there, a cornucopia for an imaginative, precocious child. She freely roamed through the large house and large barn,

[57] Edith Lewis. *Willa Cather Living*. Knopf: 194: 8. Throughout, I gratefully draw upon this and other biographies of Cather's life. Mildred Bennett. *The World of Willa Cather*. 1951 UP of Nebraska, 1960. E.K. Brown, with Leon Edel. *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography*. UP of Nebraska,1953. James Woodress. *Willa Cather, A Literary Life*. UP of Nebraska, 1987. Sharon O'Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*. UP of Oxford, 1987. Unfortunately, I did not have access Andrew Jewell's forthcoming biography. Specific references will occur parenthetically within the text.

and enjoyed an available, attentive father who recited or sang to her as they tramped the hills together, carrying her on his shoulders when her stride tired of keeping pace with his. She had the sheep dog, Vic, to love or taunt as she chose. He was the dog for whom a solicitous Charles repeatedly made little socks when the rocks wore the animal's pads. Vic is the same dog that broke his chain to hasten after the Cathers as they left for the train station, waiting to reluctantly head West because William had ordered that Charles sell the estate after the barn mysteriously burned. William Cather had also directed Charles to take his young family to join his father in Catherton, Nebraska, called New Virginia by the local settlers. Cather would later complain of the clannishness of this Catherton group, by no means in a flattering tone. Evidently offered little choice, Charles and Jennie auctioned off all their possessions. One can imagine a tearful scene at the train station. In fact, according to Edith Lewis, "It was one of Willa Cather's saddest memories of a time that was all of it tragic for a child of her loving nature—loving passionately, as she did, every tree and rock, every landmark of the countryside, all the familiar faces, all their 'things' at Willowshade, all their 'ways.'" Because there she had experienced "freedom from all tension and nervous strain[,] . . . she felt the break cruelly" (8). In an early, often quoted interview given before she became circumspect and guarded, Cather herself in a resentful tone refers to the move as making her feel "jerked away [from her beloved hills] . . .thrown out into a country as bare as a piece of sheet iron."[58] Nebraska would offer a stark physical and emotional contrast to the stability and peace she had experienced at Willowshade.

[58] Interview 9 August 1913, *Philadelphia's Record* in *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches and Letters*. Edited by Brent Bolke. UP of Nebraska, 1986, p. 10.

The Virginian kitchen, redolent of inviting aromas and filled by mellifluous country voices telling fascinating tales, was both haven and motherlode for a fertile, quick imagination. No doubt the future author benefitted from the fascinating stories and legends casually exchanged by the women in the kitchen while they canned preserves or sat around the quilting frame, under which Cather spent many hours, spellbound. The Blue Ridge country folk and African-American women were repositories of rich metaphor and fantastic local tales. A Mrs. Anderson apparently knew everything about everyone, including all the family histories and legends, Cather had told Lewis. Evidently, Mrs. Anderson was a storyteller par excellence whose mountain language, wit, and humor always told more than she said, according to Cather. Mrs. Anderson's daughter, Marjorie (Margie), is the simple girl who had worked for Jennie since before Willa's birth and who accompanied them to Nebraska, living with them until her death. The special relationship that developed between Margie and Willa is re-produced in various endearing characters[59] such as Mahailey and Molly. The early kitchen stories were further enriched by the stories used to teach Willa, first at Willowshade, later at the ranch on the Nebraska Divide, and then in the Red Cloud home: the grandmothers used narrative to teach the little girl at home. Grandmother Boak who lived with the family until her death in particular repeatedly read from the Bible, from *Peter Parsley's Universal History* and from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Surrounded by story and loving attention, Willa was a young home tutored girl.[60] School must have paled beside

[59] Most blatant is the tender relationship between Claude and Mahailey in *One of Ours* and the portrayal of Molly in "Old Mrs. Harris," although snippets are elsewhere.

[60] Sharon O'Brien especially sees the early female nurturance crucial to Cather's development. While our arguments differ concerning the motivation of Cather's creativity (to be expanded upon later), I agree with O'Brien that when Jennie later became emotionally unavailable, Cather turned to warm and storytelling immigrant woman as substitutes, thus recapturing her Virginia experience.

these learning experiences. Despite a year at Mr. Smith's in Gore, Virginia, she managed to avoid the classroom in Nebraska until high school, which she only attended a couple of years, according to her sister Elsie. Instead, Cather continued to learn from storytelling immigrant women around her and the rich libraries to which she would later gain access by befriending their owners.

Cather's dislocation, not only geographic but also economic, social, familial, and psychological, occasioned a devastation of identity—an "erasure of personality," as she termed it. She had been accustomed to the rhythms of Back Creek life, to the slow meandering alongside her father and his dog among the quiet hills. Her body and mind had been acculturated and nurtured in a warm, spacious kitchen, enfolded in redolent aromas of food made by indulgent servants who nourished her with vivid narratives and rich metaphors as well. Her sense of her self and class position within the community emerged in the courtesy extended by neighbors who valued hospitality, despite the region's Reconstruction poverty. To have been carted off in February to barren Nebraska and the stern rule of Grandfather Cather was the geographic, cultural and emotional wrench at her core.

2.1 The Shame of Interrupted Desire

In a 1908 article for The Literary Review, Willa Cather wrote that while enjoying tea-time in Annie Fields home at 148 Charles Street, she would think: "The ugliness of the world, all possibility of wrenches and jars and wounding contacts, seemed securely shut out. It was indeed the peace of the past, when the tawdry and the cheap have been eliminated and the enduring things have taken their proper places." This sentence

encapsulates a number of Willa Cather's lifelong concerns, heard in her letters, interviews, speeches and works. Underscoring a sense of threat, she reiterates that the "atmosphere" was such that "one seemed absolutely safe from everything ugly." She recalls that the gracious Mrs. Fields "had a beautiful patience with Synthian ignorance." Cather would later change this to" Boethian ignorance." While both refer to people considered ignorant by Athenians, Cather's specific change of reference is telling. While the Synthians are savages and uncivilized people of a chill wilderness, the Boetians are western neighbors who are ignorant, dull and countrified, without cultural refinement. Cather admits that *she* never pretended cultivation to Mrs. Fields, claiming, "I would have to pretend too much." More importantly, she records how the genteel woman generously forgave "the true artist . . . [for) vanity, sensitiveness, selfishness, indecision, and vacillation of will." Perhaps the older, more self-protective Cather found this sentence to be too revealing, because in 1920 she removed it when she edited the essay for inclusion in *Not Under Forty*. For Cather was indeed a person who vacillated, was often indecisive. She was both vain and self-conscious, self-promoting and reticent, standoffish and needy, selfish and generous, exhibitionist and recluse. In short, she was, indeed, "a writer of conflict and ambivalence," as Janis P. Stout has observed, Such ambivalence is found threading its way through her fiction, her non-fiction, and, most glaringly, in her letters.[61]

[61] "The House on Charles Street" *New York Evening Post: The Literary Review.* 24 November 1908. "148 Charles Street." *Not Under Forty*. Knopf, 1922: 173-4. For another take on Cather's ambivalence see Janis P. Stout. *The Writer's And Her World*. UP of Virginia, 2000, p.1. In part, I agree with Stout that "the defining events" of Cather's life were "displacements." However, Stout uses this to argue Cather's "personal vascillation between a powerful homing instinct and an at least powerful need to move, to go forth"(13). But dislocation is not the defining event, albeit an early and major one.

Ambivalence, itself, arises from holding two or more objects, places, emotions, or desires in contesting value, shifting in hierarchy of preference or importance. Ambivalence results from value conflicts, wherein an object is both distressing and enjoyable. In my discussion of Willa Cather, thinking about her ambivalence, I want to focus on the affect shame. The affect shame is not only deeply rooted in ambivalence but also causes further ambivalence. It is the affect most linked with love and identification and is instigated by the incomplete reduction of enjoyment encountering barriers. Shame emerges when one must reluctantly turn away from an object that has rendered positive affect in the past and that is still desired and cannot be or will not be renounced, despite internal or external demand for renunciation. Desire unsettled, desire interrupted. The humiliating exposure of desire interrupts it.

I focus upon shame in discussing Cather's ambivalences because that affect is a dominating motivational factor in her life and works. As is well known, we are driven by motives both conscious and unconscious and, according to personality theorist Silvan S. Tomkins, the primary motivation system in humans is not the drives but the complex affect system, as noted above. It is as a result of this system that any person can be motivated to act in seemingly irrational ways because any affect can be attached to, i.e., affectively invested in any object, tangible or intangible. Such objects of investment could be geographic spaces, houses, people, knowledge, creativity, excitement, peace, health, sickness, approval, acceptance, or a sense of security. The objects of affective investment that I have just cited are very familiar to longstanding students of Willa Cather.

According to Tomkins, although a primary affect such as startle or surprise is initially a physio-biological response, a secondary, auxiliary affect such a shame is culturally-specific and learned. Because responses to and management of secondary affects are learned, a person, through living practices such a risk taking, error, and achievement determines the means of maximizing its own self-rewarding responses and minimizing its own self-punishing responses. Importantly, counteracting response management can be either conscious or unconscious. In fact, the conscious or unconscious pursuit of positive affects such as joy, excitement or interest can be deployed to counter negative affects such as fear or shame. Here, I will briefly review several of Willa Cather's shame experiences and the subsequent avoidance strategies motivating her actions. To do so, I consider several of Cather's objects of affective investment: the interruption of joy or interest they gave caused the shame drove both motivations and ambivalence and prompted avoidance strategies.

As a result of Cather's well-discussed geographic, status and class dislocations, insecurities and problematized loyalties plagued her life and are displayed in her texts. For example, her struggles with and against her parents' romantic idealizing Southern gentility frustrated her even as she applauds honor, chivalry, tradition and domestic rituals. As I noted above, the parents continued to practice a genteel Southerness in a town that sometimes ridiculed their ways. Despite her criticism of what she spoke of as idle Southernness, Cather later adopted a life in which Southern genteel social values figure greatly.[62] Her attraction to the well placed, culturally enriched and wealthy is weighted by her desire to remain beloved by the elderly immigrant women and childhood

[62] For a detailed examination of how the adult Cather practiced a southern gentility see Virginia B. (Lady Falls) Brown. "Willa Cather and the Southern Genteel Tradition." Unpublished dissertation. Texas Tech University, 1989.

friends from Red Cloud. Her desire to please often gives way to defensive petulance when criticized privately or publicly. Her ostensible grandiosity alternates with self-disparagement to reveal the fragile, insecure self beneath.

First, I'd like to consider the initial dislocation not only from Virginia but from Willowhade and its genteel life, the interruption of the idyllic, pastoral days enjoyed there with her locally respected, healthy parents, and her experience of idealized images of them, particularly of her gentle father. From her displacement from what was original, proper and secure, all other interruptions follow. First, she was wrenched away from the physical comforts of the three story brick home, the lush green hills and valleys and babbling brooks, "such a beautiful place with its six great willow trees, beautiful lawn, and the full running creek with its rustic bridge . . . [s]till lives in my mind" she said in 1943 letter. She was relocated to a chill, barren, flat landscape in the middle of winter where, she remembered, "I heard my father say we had to show grit." Second, she was dislocated from her place within the family and the community, even as the dynamics of that family structure itself was unsettled. In Back Creek, she was the only daughter of apparently doting, social parents who reigned in Willowshade and were respected by the neighbors and mountainfolk. In Nebraska, she became one of several grandchildren that included not only her younger brothers but also two orphaned cousins; the family was now headed by stern, religious Grandfather Cather. Her idealized images of her parents were also unsettled. Even as an adult in a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather cast her recently deceased father as "handsome . . . a sweet southern boy" who "never hurt anyone's feelings" (1928). Charles, who was unlike his "aggressive older brother George, who was intent on making money and participating in public affairs" may not

have measured up to paternal expectations in Nebraska (Bennett, 23-4). Not only did the adoring daughter witness her father's displacement as head of household and his subservience to his father, who left Charles little time for social niceties such as his violin playing, cards or leisure for reading poetry, but she also watched her mother align with the grandfather. Further, her mother's additional pregnancies and recurrent sicknesses made the once-social belle distanced. Thus the eldest daughter was placed in a wholly different relationship to her parents.

After eighteen months of adjustment in the Catherton colony of resettled Virginians, Charles moved his ever-growing family into a disordered, cramped, rented house in town where the young girl was aware of the criticism of town gossips who made the Cathers' Southern ways an object of ridicule and even scorn, both privately and publicly. Jennie's "fine ways" seemed as out of place as Charles's soft-spoken chivalry and lack of business sense in a practical community driven by ambition and hard business dealing. Reading the late autobiographical "Old Mrs. Harris" is merely the last text in which Cather struggles with the desire for the ideal parents she loved in the Willowshade environment and reality of those same out of place parents in Red Cloud. As Tomkins reminds us, "disenchantment. . . the destruction or contamination of the idealized figure jeopardizes the very possibility of id, evokes shame, and threatens radically the sense of identity. . . The ideal figure now evokes contempt as well as continued love, the two contesting," provoking varying degrees of alienation from the once idealized figures (99). "The necessity of hiding shame and its sources enormously increases the stress of adolescence . . . serv[ing] either to destroy self-confidence or consolidate" it (173-174)." In Cather's case both occurred, evident n her emotional struggles.

Affective responses are caused. That is, specific conditions activate, monitor and reduce affects that motivate us. From these first two objects of affective investment—Virginia and her parents--, the young girl, I believe, experienced shame when the positive affect derived from places and persons in Virginia was rudely interrupted. She was wrenched from security, leaving desires that lasted a lifetime. To counter that shame, she developed remedial strategies to reduce it.

For example, as a young girl, Willa began her lifelong seeking of ordered homes, of cultured families wherever she went. As I noted above, she would later maintain her own ordered life, which upon close inspection allowed for the lost, genteel Southern life. First seeking the quiet and spacious home of the Miners of Red Cloud and of the McClungs in Pittsburg, among other well-connected and cultivated people, she would later establish herself in New York apartments that replicated those homes that were, in part, stand-ins for the lost Willowshade. It should be noted that each time she had to sever ties with spaces that became important to her, she reprised the first wrenching from Virginia. Consider her disturbed responses to the selling of the Judge McClung's 1180 Murray Street home in Pittsburg, where for five years she had lived with Isabelle McClung and where for many years following her move to New York, she continued to visit and write in an attic studio. To her brother Douglas, she writes: "The loss of a home like that leaves one pretty lonely and miserable." Even more disturbing to her was the leveling of the 5 Bank Street property in New York where she and Edith Lewis had created a home for 15 years. In early 1917 she had written to her mother that she loved "to run [her] apartment as methodically and regularly as a well-kept house. It really means 'success in life' to me to be able to do that." Ten years later, she was forced to

leave 5 Bank Street and resided for five years at the Grosvenor hotel, unable to begin again in a different space. Then she was uprooted by the 1938 hurricane damage to the Jaffrey, NH inn where for a decade she had returned every fall to write in a tent on the property. Still missing it in 1945, she reminds her brother Roscoe: "My best books were written in Jaffrey." In addition, WWII interfered with travel to her summer cottage on Grand Manan, Canada denying her access to yet another important location about which she wrote lovingly in the late short story, "Before Breakfast. " Finally, the loss of the Red Cloud property, quietly sold by her sister, greatly disturbed her. By 1944, her emotional strength waning, Cather had complained, "Nobody belongs anywhere anymore." The close reader finds these dislocations evidenced in the novels written during each loss, most notably in the darker middle novels: *A Lost Lady* (1923); *The Professor's House* (1925); *My Mortal Enemy* (1926).

Another strategy was to attach herself to figures outside the home, people who allowed a recuperation of idealization: not only the cultured people to whom she attached herself, but also the homesick, storytelling, maternal immigrants who until the end of her life provided the approval and appreciation that she needed and proudly acknowledges in her letters. Her mother's jealousy of the visits to these same women is telling. Substituting for the often absent Charles were the older men to whom Cather attached herself and whose skills she emulated, men such as Dr. Keeby, Mr. Ducker, and Mr Miner. Notably, many of her texts criticize ineffectual males who, like her father, fail in properly supporting the family, are often absent and sometimes became the focus of town derision, despite the fact that she dearly loved her flawed father.

The pursuit of knowledge also helped to counter shame caused by the interrupted pastoral life and failed idealization of her parents as well as the town's scorn of her and her parents' eccentricity. In her 1919 essay, "The Education You Have to Fight For: A Personal Sketch of the Prairie School House" Cather asserts: "It takes courage, of course, to do what one wants in this world, and the smaller the community, the harder it is to defy public opinion." For her and other young prairie dwellers, of "unusual pluck and endurance" education took on

> the glamour of all attainable things. Young people believed education would satisfy the very hunger of youth. I think that the thirst for knowledge must have been partly a homesickness for older things and deep association, natural to warm-blooded young people who grow up in a community where the fields are naked and the houses are small and crowded, and the struggle for existence is very hard. The bleakness all about made them eager for the beauty of the human story.

But knowledge as an object of affective investment also created the potential for shame when her research mistakes were exposed or her writing negatively criticized, sometimes publicly. Consequently, she became very vigilant in avoiding errors that might reveal an inadequacy and thus a barrier to her claim to knowledge, which gave her joy. Cather even wrote letters of defense and explanation to both critics and readers, either to counter outright criticism or derail anticipated criticism.[63]

Additional interruptions of positive affect created further ambivalences that inflected her life: Two obvious examples are 1) her curtailed friendship with Louise Pound and 2) her fraught meeting with A.E. Houseman. Both instances depict situations in which she failed to hold the attention of the other in whom she felt interest and joy -–

[63] "The Education You Have a Right to Fight for: A Personal Sketch of the Prairies School House." her anxiety about mistakes but may be outside the scope of this paper as is the constant presence of an anticipation of punishment when she or one of her characters enjoys something or someone too much. Yet, both are worth noting.

rejection in the first, indifference in the second. Both are interruptions of desire. Both are events that initiate shame, because, as Tomkins claims: "any learned restraint of the expression of any affect when such restraint is not completely accepted, will evoke shame" as expression contends with restraint". Cather's conflicted desire for acceptance and approval by Pound was indeed unsettled by Pound's refusal to reciprocate the intense affection young Cather offered, creating the barrier provoking the emotions she wrote of in her letter to Mariel: Admitting "disgust" with her own behavior regarding the Pounds, she asks, "[W]ill I ever be done making a fool of myself? . . . I have been a monumental idiot. . . . Most of my idiocy has come from liking somebody or something too well. . . . It's a curse to be built that way" (2 May 1896). Similar emotional distress led Cather to collapse into raging tears after her failure to connect with Houseman, the poet with whom she expected to bond. We can infer the deep shame she felt not only at the moment of meeting in London, when she felt her inadequacy revealed to others but also from the letter written twenty years latter to Dorothy Canfield in 1922 when she refers to the "wound" of a "sensitive roughneck" met with her own "helpless ignorance."

That "wounding contacts" strongly affected her is hinted at in many letters. As early as 1890s Cather wrote of the shame she early experienced as she sought acceptance and approval. In a January 1897 letter to Mariel Gere, shortly after she became situated in Pittsburgh, Cather boasted that she was doing "just the kind of work that everyone always said I'd never be able to do—work requiring care and judgment" and bitterly remarks, "Oh, it does my wicked un-Christian heart good to get even, to pay off the old scores and make people take back the bitter things they said in those years when bitter

things hurt so." By September she confided to her Red Cloud friend, tentatively, "here I get a good deal of --well, of admiration, people think I am cleverer than I am and of course that is pleasant." Thirty years later her letter to her brother Roscoe recalled their 1898 visit to Wyoming when they sat wondering about their future in a world "so slippery that one might slip into space at any moment." She had included a book's end page, headed "Summit of the Rockies, August 30, 1898," which, she said "had brought back that time and its perplexities . . . vividly." On it she had copied Shakespeare's Sonnet 29: "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, /I all alone bemoan my outcast state /And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,/And look upon myself, and curse my fate. . . my self almost despising."

By 1925 her cogent essay about Katherine Mansfield's work revealed her own ambivalence concerning human contacts. There she praises Mansfield's understanding and depiction of "the secret accords and antipathies which lie hidden under our everyday behavior," how "human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life . . . never wholly satisfactory . . . every ego . . . . half the time greedily seeking them, and half the time pulling away."[64] To Zona Gale she later conceded that "one cannot live isolated in a test tube" although she argued: "most contacts are pernicious . . . [h]aving a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way" (25 November 1929). In Cather's works we witness the subtle ways in which contacts are pernicious.

This leads me to the most important remedial strategy that Cather used to counter the negative affect that resulted from unsettled, interrupted desires that provoked the shame and ambivalences of her life: Words. Words are a learned object of affect. What

[64] Letter to Roscoe 17 September 1941. The essay about Katherine Mansfield first appeared in 1925 in *The Borzoi 1925: Being a Sort of Record of Ten Years of Publishing Knopf.* Knopf, 1925.

I mean by that is that words, particularly the writing of words can reduce negative affect if they offer positive affect. One learns to desire words. Through her words Cather exhibited her knowledge and achieved acceptance and approval; her control over the production of her words gave to her a strong sense of identity and, it could be argued, security for most of her life. In fact, it was the original publication of her words and the praise they garnered that redirected her from a young pursuit of medicine to writing: Tomkins explains how words affect: "Because speech [words] enable the expression and evocation of affects, [they] become a primary instrument . . . to maximize positive affects, to minimize affect inhibition, and the power to achieve these strategies.." Indeed, Willa Cather was an author who repeatedly insisted that feeling was everything. Narratives and words that allowed and channeled emotion were important to her.

Yet, she was a woman who struggled with keeping emotions in check. In fact her narratives themselves display the emotional struggles of characters who by Cather's own remarks place on display her own ambivalences around emotion. In 1935 she asserts, "I have never tried to write a story that was not the outcome of some rather sharp personal experience." In 1941, she admits that the characters and places about which she has written had "taken hold of me in some personal way which I cannot explain." In 1943 she writes of her early short story, "Paul's Case": "that is the way stories are usually made--a grafting of some outside figure with some part of the writer's self." And to longtime, childhood friend, Irene Miner Weisz, she insisted that the "root" of any story with vitality "must be a real feeling—<u>a strong personal feeling</u>. . . . the strong feeling that comes out of the living heart is the thing <u>most necessary . . .</u>" [Cather's emphasis]. To Carrie, Irene's sister, Cather complained: "You can never get it through people's heads

that a story is made out of an emotion or an excitement, and is not made out if the legs and arms and faces of one's friends or acquaintances." Furthermore, she emphasized, one just cannot "fake or counterfeit . . . real feeling, feeling in people who try to govern their hearts with their heads."[65] Most revealing is, of course, the letter to childhood friend, Carrie Miner Sherwood (4/29/1945) in which she admits her lifelong emotional turmoil:

> "[T]hings have always hit me hard. I suppose that is why I never run out of material to write about. The inside of me is so full of dents and scars, where pleasant and unpleasant thing have hit me in the past. I do not so much invent as remember and re-arrange. And I remember unconsciously. Faces, situations, things people have said so long ago simply come up from my mind as if they were written there. They would not be there if they had not hit me hard.

[65] See 29 May 1935 letter to Marie Mattingly Meloney; 12 February letter to Mr. Watson; 15 March 1943 letter to Mr. Philipson; 5 January 1945 letter to Irene Miner Wesiz; 27 January 1934 letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood.

3.0 THE EARLY FICTION: HARBORING A DAMAGED SELF IN "THE GARDEN LODGE " AND "PAUL'S CASE"

> . . . any learned restraint on the expression of any affect, when such affect is not completely accepted, will evoke shame.
> --Sylvan S Tomkins
> Affect Imagery Consciousness

> . . . a story can be made out of a feeling as naturally as it can be made out of an incident.
> Willa Cather, Letter 10/9/1906

"The Garden Lodge" and "Paul's Case" are two early short works published in Willa Cather's first collection of stories, *The Troll Garden* (1905).[66] This first collection of stories sounds themes ands settings and characters that reappear throughout her work. "The Garden Lodge" was written either during Willa Cather's brief relationship with pianist and lyricist, Ethelbert Nevin, or shortly after his death from a stroke in 1901. Nevin is a figure very reminiscent of her father, Charles--sensitive, imaginative, genteel. A number of Cather's cohorts and later literary critics suspect that Cather's admiration for and relationship to Nevin was more than platonic or artistic. I agree. In fact, his death inspired a number of the early poems collected in *April Twilghts* (1903), as well as Nevin-like characters who appear in a number of her works, such as "A Death on the Desert" (1905)/1920), "Uncle Valentine"(1926) and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935).[67] In the second story, "Paul's Case" Cather grafts several of own negative affect responses and management strategies onto the protagonist. I have chosen these two stories because, as

[66] Willa Cather. *The Troll Garden*. Knopf: 1905. Editors Janis Stout and Andrew Jewell are the most recent to find this true." *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. Knopf, 2013, p. 87. Said told her friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher that it was a book "which in itself contains many keen disappointments," Letter 1/5/1905. She had garnered quite a bit of criticism from family and friends for her thinly disguised depictions.
[67] Cather is known for her use of prototypes, often after they have died.

early work, they are less guarded as displays of the divisiveness and "liability to exposure and erasure" that Janis Stout finds in Cather's work. These stories suggest Cather's damaged, managed selves, her struggles with emotional control, and the presence of shame.

3.1 "The Garden Lodge"

"The Garden Lodge" recounts Caroline Noble's struggle to wrench herself free from any resemblance to her family's passive romantic idealism and pretentious aestheticism by setting up barricades against any urge in that direction. To evade futile romanticizing and unreasoned emotion, Caroline marries a practical businessman many years her senior. But when tenor Raymond D'Esquerre inhabits her garden lodge for a spring, engaging her as his piano accompanist, her defenses drop, allowing sexual desire to overcome her in the misty morning hours two weeks after he has left. Recalling his voice and his touch, she phantasizes with an abandon that leaves her physically and emotionally exhausted, clearly enacting an instance when the ego-ideal concedes control to an ego that allows irrational forces to surface, i.e. that the self she strives to be is undermined by the self she denies in order to become the ideal self she imagines. Cather also depicts the humiliation that accompanies the failure of concession to one who has claimed dominance over such irrational urges. What follows is shame. As Tomkins explains: "It is the learned inner restraint on any affect in competition with the wish to express the original affect which constitutes the stimulus to shame" (II: 162).

The narrative tracks the surge of romance and desire in Caroline during her encounter with Raymond D'Esquerre, symbolically "ensconced in the apple orchard." None believed Caroline capable of being affected by the tenor's presence in the seductive

garden "so riotous with spring . . . [and] burst into impassioned bloom." To all she had appeared "cool-headed, slow of impulse, and disgustingly practical; . . .she had herself so provokingly well in hand . . .always mistress of herself in any situation." The immature author's narrator confides that those fond of stamping Caroline "materialist" could not know the "extenuating circumstances" which gave her the impression of self control and capableness. With every effort to make the reader understand the crisis in the pages that follow, Cather heavy-handedly fills in the background of Caroline's childhood, one which closely resembles her own—if not in facts, certainly in feeling and dynamics. In "a shabby little house under the vacillating administration" of a father who "usually neglected his duties," Caroline survived. "[I]t was not a cheerful home for a girl to grow up in." She hated the "never ending conciliatory overtures to the butcher and grocer." Caroline, reviewing their life "candidly," finds that the she had hated the

> shrine of idealism; vague, distressing, unsatisfied yearnings had brought it low enough. . . . From her childhood she had hated it, that humiliating and uncertain existence, with its glib tongue and empty pockets, its poetic ideals and sordid realities, its indolence and poverty tricked out in paper roses. . . . [F]rom the time Caroline could reason at all she could not help thinking that many things went wrong at home.

The little girl who wanted to lie in bed when "vague dreams" overcame her would, nevertheless, "clench her hands and go to help her mother take care of appearances." This predilection of a young girl for vague dreaming repeatedly occurs in Cather's alter egos. Also, the admission of well-hidden poverty behind false airs of superiority frequently and directly appears in work written late in her life, a time when ego defenses weaken. Both recur in a her late story, "Old Mrs. Harris."

Caroline, having "served her apprenticeship to idealism and to all the embarrassing inconsistences which it sometimes entails," wanted "the luxury . . . of

having nothing to hide, not even in the matter of stockings, and she was willing to work for it." She feared a romantic nature," the part of one that sets up an idol and the part of one that bows down and worships it." She feared it even more than poverty. Thus, when old enough to direct her life, Caroline had left the "house of misfortunes" and, later, married a practical Wall-Street tycoon almost two decades older, setting him as a barrier between her and what she refers to as Klingsor's garden, "that world of visions and quagmires and failure."

The allusion to Klingsor's garden is, like most if not all of Cather's allusions—worth examining for its gloss on and centrality to her narrative. As Cather's close friend Elizabeth Sergeant advises, an obscure spot in Cather's text is always worth further consideration. Like the oblique remarks in her letters made public, the obscure in her fiction rewards attention. In this case, the allusion helps a reader better understand the ambivalent struggle between equally strong attraction to a practical materialism and to an impractical idealism.

In Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal (1882),* Klingsor is the knight rejected by the brotherhood at Monsalvant who dedicate themselves to guarding the spear that pierced Christ's side and the cup which caught the blood from Christ's side, the Holy Grail.[68] At the curtain's rise, King Amfortas, enticed into Klingsor's garden of romantic idealism, has been wounded in a struggle with Klingsor, to whom he loses the holy spear. With the spear, Klingsor conjures the imaginary gardens that he populates with temptresses who lure knights from lives of purity. Throughout Cather's texts artists are often similarly

[68]My understanding of *Parsifal* is based upon two entries: *The Golden Encyclopedia of Music*, Edited by Norman Lloyd. Golden Press, 1968, pp. 401-03; *Encyclopedia of the Opera*. Edited by David Ewen. Hill and Wang, 1963, pp. 380-402.

tempted by romantic delusions and physical appetites that threaten to compromise an almost religious pursuit of art.

Amfortas is destined to be healed by a "guileless fool," a term the author uses to refer to herself in letters to friends. Parsifal is the forest youth—or country bumpkin—who heals Amfortas by recovering the spear and dipping it into the wound of the fatally stricken knight, but not before he, too, has been tempted by the enchantress, Kundry, who serves the knights, but who sometimes falls under Klingsor's magic. Kundry lives in "a nightmare of agonized guilt" for faltering in her struggles against destructive romanticism. After healing the wounded knight, Parsifal is acknowledged as the brotherhood's leader, and Kundry, absolved of her sin, her lack of control against romantic illusion, dies repentant. A religious drama, *Parsifal* is often performed during the Easter season, a time of reconciliation and reparation. That Parsifal must dip his pen-like spear into the king's wound to heal him is certainly very suggestive when set against the relationship of Cather to her father, especially considering that Cather used the same image/metaphor elsewhere to describe the origin of powerful writing and recruited the same Parsifal legend buried in the plot of *One of Ours*, written twenty years later.[69]

Two weeks after D'Esquerre leaves, Caroline's husband, Howard suggests that he and Caroline raze the lodge. The suggestion prompts an unexpected protest from the usually unsentimental wife. That night, unable to sleep, Caroline visits the lodge. The

[69]Cather's early journalism reviews are collected in *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters*. Edited by Brent Bolke, UP of Nebraska, 1986. They are rich locations for mining her pronouncements about art, which often find their way into her more mature works in revised form. For example, she finds in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* "the part of the picture that cannot dim, for it was painted in blood"(372). Her *Lincoln Courier* entry for 25 February 1899 finds Richard Realf's poetry of a "high order . . . a man's blood spilled out on paper, it is the cry of [a] man who probed the wound in his bosom with his pen." To describe one her favorite actresses, Minnie Maddern Fiske, Cather invokes Olive Schreiner's "The Artist's Dream" in which an artist is discovered to have created his pictures by having dipped his paintbrush in his open wound which lies over his heart. (451, 661-2).

thick, hot air "presages storm," which for Cather functions as it does for Shakespeare, a symbol for mental and emotional turmoil. Moonlight floods the area, and its light is very symbolic in Catherian texts. (Nevin had composed "La Lune Blanche" especially for Cather, as she boasts in her letter to Carrie Miner.} "The long, low room, radiant with moonlight which streamed through the bow window and lay in a silvery pool along the waxed floor," too obviously recalling Hawthorne's similar scene in "The Custom House" Prelude to *The Scarlet Letter*. The moon's penetrating beam lights the part of the room--of Caroline—normally in shadows but ever present. Phallic poplars stand in relief against the sky. In this setting Caroline acknowledges her "falling. . . . into that luxury of revery" that she had "determinedly denied herself." With D'Esquerre, she reflects, she had challenged herself. "Like the swimmer who tests herself against the power of the ocean," she had thought herself able to overcome the "undercurrent of her consciousness," her attraction to the tenor. Flooded with thoughts of him, she loosens her nightgown at the neck, glancing out at the poplars.

It was not what he was, ponders Caroline, but what he suggested to the imagination.

> His appeal was all the more persuasive and alluring that it was to the imagination alone, that it was indefinite and impersonal as those cults of idealism which so have their way with women. What he had was that, in his mere personality, he quickened and in a measure gratified that something without which—to women—life is no better than sawdust and to the desire for which most of their mistakes and tragedies and astonishingly poor bargains are due.

Like music, which provokes and teasingly defers gratification until its resolution, D'Esquerre "produce[d] atmosphere . . . and the beautiful illusion." Flocking to his performances, women of all types "entered into the same romance, . . . and dreamed in

terms as various as the hues of phantasy, the same dream . . . They yielded up their heat . . . at this Eucharist of sentiment." Deluded by his presence, the theater would be "charged with the ecstasy of fancy." But she was moved most by him when he was not performing, not making love to an audience. It was his tacit admission of disappointment ,. . . the helplessness of the enchanter to at all enchant himself—that awoke in her the illogical, womanish desire to in some way compensate, to make it up to him."[70] He recalled her eighteenth year to her but to have those feelings occur when she was well past youth which could explain those intense passions was "humiliating and impossible." Like the dream-spinning father—fictional and actual—D'Esquerre prompts irrational emotions in the woman who has for years defended against the desires of the girl. The incapacity of any of these men to greatly satisfy the phantasies they invoke is made clear, however.

Like emotional needs too long repressed, the "storm had held off unconscionable long." The heat, the close atmosphere, and the moonlit night oppress her defenses. Caroline recalls the role D'Esquerre had practiced there: Siegmunde during the first act of Wagner's *Walkure*. Though "she *heard* him clearly' sing the female lead's line, "Thou art the Spring for which I sighed in Winter's cold embrace," he did not sing those words [my emphasis]. Cather has deliberately altered the lyrics. Projecting her own needs onto the tenor, Caroline imagines a questioning pressure in the hands beneath her breasts. She had "exulted, then, in her self-control" but during the sultry night she succumbs, dropping the defenses years had taken to build[71]

[70] These thoughts and feelings are repeated in *Lucy Gayheart* over thirty years later and will be discussed below in Chapter Five.
[71] It is interesting to consider that Alexander, the protagonist of *Alexander's Bridge* (1912) undergoes a similar struggle with his suppressed self. He, too, had spent years subduing—and lost the battle to—an

> The storm broke and the rain beat in . . . and [she] began fighting over again the battles of other days, while the ghosts of the slain rose as from a sowing of the dragon's teeth. The shadows of things, always so scorned and flouted, bore down upon her merciless and triumphant. It was not enough; this happy, useful, well-ordered life was not enough. It did not satisfy, it was not even real. No, the other things, the shadows—they were the realities.

Caroline rues her denial of the sensual pleasures. Perhaps "the people in Klingsor's garden were more fortunate, however barren the sands from which they had conjured their paradise," she muses, rationalizing that her parents' sustained illusions had, in turn, sustained them.

Caroline endures her unreined emotions until nearly dawn, "her laboring breast, rising and falling under her open night dress." Finally, "the shadows had their way with Caroline." She reflects that the "horror was that it had not come from without, but from within. . . . [I]t was the expression of something she had kept so close a prisoner that she had never seen it herself; it was the wail from the donjon depths when the watch slept." The "thing [had] been loosed to straighten its limbs and measured itself with her, so heavy were the chains upon it, so many fathom deep it was crushed down into darkness." Had D'Esquerre physically been there, "it could scarcely have hurt her self-respect so much. As it was, she was without even the extenuation of an outer impulse, and she could scarcely have despised herself more" had she actually approached him; her lack of control has been exposed to her. That "thing," her suppressed affect, her passionate self, which demands its due is not under Caroline's control, as it was not for Cather who had been enchanted by Ethelbert Nevin. (Later, briefly attracted to a golden skinned Mexican man, Julio, Cather would write Elizabeth Sergeant about a happiness not felt since

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imprisoned captive. See also Thea's struggles beneath her nightdress *in Song of the Lark* (2015) and the scene in *One of Ours* during which the protagonist, Claude, naked under the moonlight, dwells on captive selves. Other characters suppress caged natures throughout her work.

childhood, a happiness that dredged up memories.) Her letters are filled with hyperbolic descriptions of his physical merits, a breathless enjoyment of the gentle, soft-spoken companion whom she may have fought—or not.[72] Furthermore, the man who provokes Caroline's desire is one who dredges up thoughts of her illusion-driven father, as did the two men, Nevin and Julio, who were important enough to Cather that she rhapsodized about them to friends. One does not wonder that so thinly dressed a story as "The Garden Lodge" was denied further print by an author who became increasingly self-protecting and self-managing. In Tomkins' discussion of the person shamed by humiliation, he notes how, having defended against a desire or behavior, the individual will proceed to punish those who gratify the same desires and behaviors for which one self feels shamed—if only before an internal self which rejects that desire or behavior. That is, defending against her own suspicions of inappropriate desire, destructive to her ego-ideal, Cather punishes in her fiction those who exhibit, but more importantly, gratify desires she denies herself through control, desires which could threaten her ambitions.

3.2 "Paul's Case"

> Given the gift of self consciousness, we can dream new versions of ourselves for old, waking as well as sleeping, our response to the world is essentially imaginative; that is, picture-making. We live in our pictures, our ideas. I mean this literally. We first construct pictures of the world and then we step inside the frames. We come to equate the pictures with the world . . . Dreaming is our gift; it may also be our tragic flaw.
>
> Salmon Rushdie
> *Imaginary Homelands*

[72] See Elizabeth Sergeant, 80ff. Regarding Nevin, see her letters also letters to Carrie Miner 1/28.98 and Anne Nevin 2/7/1901. O'Brien insightfully remarks upon the passionate scenes in both *O! Pioneer* and *Song of the Lark*, and the Julio figure in *Song of the Lark.* Brutal punishment for inappropriate love occurs in several texts.

Speaking of her fiction, Willa Cather told friend Carrie Miner Sherwood that although people accused her of idealizing and exaggerating everything, there was just one thing that could not be "counterfeited or faked": "real feeling, feeling in people who try to govern their hearts with their heads."[73] In "The Garden Lodge," Cather had offered her reader insight to the struggles of such governing. In "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament", she depicts another struggle, that of concealing and revealing a hidden self—or in her words, a captive self. Cather was practiced in such struggle, and in her texts, she grafted her struggle onto others. She drew from and spoke through the lives of her characters, giving them scripts from her own personal, familial and social dramas, as she does in this short story, which first appeared in *McClure's* April 1905 issue but was reworked for inclusion in *The Troll Garden*.[74] *McClure*'s advertised the volume as "stories by a new writer who gives promise of developing into a psychological novelist of extraordinary power."

Briefly, Paul is a Pittsburgh high school misfit. Forced by his father to abandon his position as an usher in the theater, where he feels most fitted, he must get a "real job." Shortly after being hired, he steals money from his employer to go to New York where for a week he lavishly spends the funds performing a life he had only pictured. His location discovered, he impulsively commits suicide rather than return to his former life in Pittsburgh. That Paul may be a real person or even a composite of real people does not preclude Cather's appropriation of his voice and actions for the expression of her own—her predominant practice. Relevant is the remark made in a story Cather published in

[73] See letter to Sherwood dated 1/27/1934.
[74] Willa Cather. "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament." *McClure's Magazine*. 25 (May1905), pp. 74-83. *The Troll Garden.* McClure, Phillips & Company, 1905.

1902, "The Treasure of Far Island." The authorial voice judges children's "normal attitude" toward the world to be that of an artist for whom "the entire external world, like the people in it, had been valued solely for what they suggested to the imagination, and the people and places alike were mere stage properties, contributing more or less to the intensity of . . . inner life."[75] Paul's case suggested to Cather's imagination what she perceived to be her own case—and what could have been her own ending. As important is that the text demonstrates how she mobilizes a personal narrative to highlight ideological contradictions and conflicts that a materialistic culture's ideals efface. Paul's desires, actions, and resolutions emerge from his distortions and from shame created by his culture.

Shame, often the result of narcissist injury, plays its greatest role in childhood and adolescence, when children internalize the reproaches, the degradations, and the disappointments which result from failure to attain the ideals either consciously or unconsciously established by the parents, and by extension, the cultures which socialize them. Parents, peers, and educators, both secular and religious, are the first "instruments of culture through which meanings, values, and taboos are transmitted."[76] (Now, media technologies have joined this group.) Instruments of culture hand a child the molds to which she is expected to fit, and they serve the primary cultural injunctions in the form of scripts such as success ethic, independence/self-sufficiency, and conformity, three of many western cultures' favorites. When the child fails to comply, the cultural

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[75] Willa Cather. "The Treasure of Far Island." *New England Magazine*, 27(October 1902) pp. 234-249. *Cather's Short Fiction*. Edited by Mildred Bennett. Dodd, Mead & Company, 1957, p. 276. For a discussion of the prototypes for Paul, see Timothy W. Bintrim and Mark Madigan's "From Larceny to Suicide: The Denny Case and Paul's Case." *Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather*. Edited by Joseph R. Urgo and Merrill Maguire Skaggs. UP of Fairleigh Dickinson, 2007, pp.109-23.

[76] See Gershen Kaufamn. *Shame: The Power of Caring*. 3rd ed, , revised: Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman: 1992 , chapters one and two, See especially. R. Browne. *Forbidden Fruits: Taboos and Tabooism in Culture.* Popular Press,1984.

representatives punish with reproach, contempt, and/or rejection, either forcing compliance or motivating strategies for avoidance, such as withdrawal, deviance or defiance. Paul crawls in through the cellar to avoid his father's inquires and reproaches, sheepishly slinks into class after his self-aggrandizing lies have been exposed, exhibits haughty independence and defiance in the face of ridicule or scorn. He also steals money to flee the castigating environment. In addition to experiences potent with shame, there is the necessity of hiding shame and its sources, which enormously increases the stress of adolescence.[77]

Psychoanalytic studies suggest that a child learns inferiority only after suffering disillusionment about his or her specialness. Violating ego-ideals is violating internalized standards that we have learned are worthy of love. Shame arrives when the child's experience of failure also include abandonment or separation from a nurturer who either walks away or excludes the child, thereby denying satisfaction of emotional needs.[78] Denied opportunity for affirmation of idiosyncratic needs, the bridge which enables mature growth, the young child often denies the self that invokes the parental disapproval in order to (re)connect with the parent and in doing so prepares fertile ground for dependence upon the approval of others to form a sense of self-worth. Such a child will learn to lie to avoid disagreement, fear abandonment, anticipate humiliation and shame. The child may also learn to deny emotional needs by flaunting a false self. Furthermore, the repeatedly shamed child will internalize not only what is said about her but also how she is treated—as defective, damaged. Self-doubt—about the whole self or one of the

[77] See Tomkins, II 173ff. See also Richard Sennett. *Hidden Injuries of Class.*
[78] Daniel Stern. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. Basic Books: 1985; Heinz Kohut. *The Restoration of the Self.* International Press: 1977.

selves—becomes entrenched, shame becomes scripted. One cannot wonder at Paul's fear of the self he experiences as "dark thing in the corner."

A youth who has a weakened sense of self has a stronger need to aggrandize an idealized self. Such a child is "captured by self-images and the exaggerated concern for how one appears to others and oneself" and is an unhealthy narcissist, says Francis Broucek in *Shame and the Self*. He reminds the reader that Narcissus became entranced not by his self but by his image, his reflection. To the extent that one is excessively preoccupied with or dominated by concerns about one's image, one's status and/or social identity, one's self as an object in space, an object for other, to that extent one is narcissistic. While the primary, healthy narcissist moves freely between the sense of self dwelling within the lived body and a state of self-objectification for an other, the secondary or pathological narcissist, like Paul, "quite literally "los[es] the indwelling sense of self in the other (internalized or not) who becomes the reflecting pool." While primary narcissism in its mature form leads to creativity, empathy, and humor, secondary, or pathological narcissism, emerges from the sufferings of repeated humiliations. The result can be "a pretentious show of self-importance," an "obsession with illusions of endless success, power, radiance, beauty, or ideal love" with "exhibitionism, a cool indifference or rage . . . [and] shame." In addition, secondary narcissism prompts "a conviction of entitlement . . . overidealization." In either case, primary or secondary, narcissists act to avoid shame. "Shame is the instigating force in the creation of the idealized self," says Broucek.[79]

[79] Francis J. Broucek. *Shame and the Self*. Guilford Press, 1991, pp. 50ff. See also, 98ff. Tomkins also weighs in on shame's role in narcissism, a "keystone" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's term) for self-psychologists. He more cogently discusses shame's role in the depressive personality, especially relevant to Cather's late years.

Both Cather and Paul engage in creating an ideal self, a composite self, a desired self. "The goals of the self relate to ideals, internalized through self identification with the parents, especially the idealized parent as represented by the super-ego's ideal." Unfortunately, construction of a secure self is often further complicated by conflicting parental ideals, which lead to a gap of self-doubt. Shame inheres that gap between the image of self as it "ought" to be and the self as experienced (or perceived), widened by divided loyalty to ideals on either side of that gap. As a result, narcissism, healthy self-interest, becomes pathological when it becomes "compulsive and unstable." When the defective self is exposed and the person humiliated, the shame that results punctures narcissistic self-esteem. In agreement with Broucek and following ego-therapists such as Heinz Kohut, Michael P. Nichols stresses that the self is constructed in social interaction—first and foremost in the initial social arena—the family—a microcosm of its immediate culture and of the larger society. Those who fail to find affirmation of self worth remain: "burdened by grandiose ambitions" which continue to subject them to "the shame of repeated failure to live up to aggrandized, wishful self-images."[80] In Paul's case, these grandiose pretensions are repeatedly exposed to his classmates and later to the theater group. In Cather's case, she too was known for exactly such behavior in exactly the same environments. In both cases, the need for self-admiration led to a more the fitting place for the expression of the ideal self, a place, Paul believes, where "it would be impossible for anyone to humiliate him." Paul discovers, however, that he is incapable of keeping that place. Cather worked extremely hard over a lifetime to manifest her ideal self and to justify her rightfulness to that place.

[80] Michael P. Nichols. *No Place to Hide*: *Facing Shame So We Can Find Self-respect.* Prometheus Books, 1995, pp. 117-121.

An avid student and teacher of Latin, Cather would have known that the derogatory slang label, "a case," originated in the belief that Latin cases were a falling away from the dominant, *casus* the Latin for "a falling." Paul's literal falling—his suicide on train tracks—follows his figurative falling away from dominant cultural prescripts for success and conformity, homilies rendered by his father, his teachers, and the respectable classes of Pittsburgh. That Cather does not entitle the story "Paul's Case: A Study *of* Temperament" but, instead, "Paul's Case: A Study *in* Temperament," suggests a number of responses to the text that co-operate.

First, the reader could consider Paul's case as a warning; that is, she could examine the set of circumstances as one would study a statement of facts to set precedents for dealing with such future problems, all definitions of *case.* Carlos A. Perez has done just that in "Paul's Case: The Outsider. "[81] In it he argues that Paul is "a classic portrait of alienation" and attempts "a psychological autopsy" similar to that which the Los Angeles Police Department conducts in suicide cases. Accurately, he finds Paul's "innate strivings in conflict with his environment" and notes the "deliberate 'quashing' of aspirations by his social milieu; the responsibility for this grinding down process is clearly placed on that environment" (153). Perez finds that Cather cannily depicts the "lack of interaction between [Paul] and his worlds." He credits Cather with exposing the "dehumanizing tendencies of authoritative institutions," and with revealing that the social groups that resent Paul's nonconformity are incapable of seeing his aggression as self-defense. Rightly, Perez concludes that Cather has created a "profile of an insecure, frustrated, defensive, frightened, and impotent youth [who] transcends the temporal

[81] Carlos A. Perez "Paul's Case: The Outsider." *Youth Suicide Prevention: Lessons from Literature.* Edited by Sara Munso Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker: UP of South Florida, 1989.

locale of the story" (153). Paul's defensiveness is, he claims, perpetuated by "a lack of knowledge of alternative methods of survival." (154). Paul impulsively sees suicide as the only solution.

Second, the reader could also consider Cather's intimation that Paul is a "study," that is, as a "careful consideration of a subject" leading to "an acquisition of knowledge or learning," which the OED also defines in its obsolete sense of "a state of perplexity, anxiety or agitation, doubt or uncertainty as to a subject or a course of action". I prefer, however, to consider the definition found in Webster's Dictionary: "a work of literature or art treating a subject in careful detail and made primarily for the instructive exercise of the maker." If we consider Cather as maker and her story as what's made, an understanding of the benefits of *making* as examined by Elaine Scarry is helpful.

Elaine Scarry has cogently argued in *The Body in Pain* that there is a "double consequence of making." The "act of human creating includes both the creating of the object and the object's recreating of the human being, and *it is only because of the second that the first is undertaken.* . . . The human act of projection assumes the artifact's consequent act of reciprocation. . . [T]he object is only a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the maker."[82] More important to this project, is Scarry's observation that "the original relationship between an artifact and its maker [here, Cather's study and Cather] stems from the maker's problems in sentience," that is, problems arising from the maker's capacity for feeling that does not necessarily involve thought or perception. One of this project's core premises is that, as Scarry argues, the act of creation can eliminate pain, at the very least

[82] Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford UP: 1985: 267,310,307. Emphasis is mine.

mitigate it; the artifact deconstructs and displaces the maker's pain, which had initiated the need for creation. In her words,

> Work and its 'work' (or work and its object, its artifact) are the names that are given to the phenomenon of pain and the imagination as they begin to move from being a self-contained loop within the body to becoming the equivalent loop now projected into the external world. . . . Work is, then, a diminution of pain: the *aversive intensity* of pain becomes in work *controlled discomfort*. (170-171)

Furthermore, by transforming what was originally interior and private (pain) into something exterior and sharable (a work, a study), others can absorb the experience of pain that initiated its projection onto the work. More recently, Adam Frank has further explored this idea in his work on the role of affect in "transferential poetics."[83] Through sympathy if not empathy, Cather's compassionate reader can interiorize that pain. The beneficial result which occurs in addition to the maker's own diminution of pain, says Scarry, is that "by transporting pain out onto the external world, that external environment is deprived of its immunity to, unmindfulness of, and indifference toward the problems of sentience" (285). Thus, if we use Scarry's terms, we might see "Paul's Case" as an example of Cather's "translation of a counterfactual wish into the projective act of labor"(315). That is, experiencing her own painful sentience and her shameful sufferance of humiliations as a result of her inappropriately expressed sentience, and wishing the pain of shame gone, Cather creates the study of Paul. As an exercise for its maker, it diminishes her own pain by projecting it and remakes her self by an instructive attention to not only Paul's wasteful end but also to his problematic beginning. By making evident the source of his pain in the contradictory socialization he has suffered, she points to her own. During her study of Paul, then, Cather reaffirms her own ability to allay aversive sentience, pain, with "work," exactly what Paul cannot do.

[83] Adam Frank. *Transferential Poetics: From Poe to Warhol,* Fordham Press, 2015.

Such a reading diverges from a predominant emphasis upon reading Paul as homosexual or as deviant.[84] Understandably, many critics perceive in Paul a homosexuality signifying Cather's own—either overt, repressed, or latent.[85] While it is possible that sexual identity gave Cather great struggle, gender identity issues certainly factored into Cather's unstable core self, leading me to agree with critics like Sharon O'Brien who perceive Paul as, in part, a male version of Cather. However, to suggest that Paul is solely an embodiment of Cather's struggle with homosexual desires seems to reduce the possibilities of a more over-determined signification. To argue for his representativeness only as Cather's revealed homosexuality not only reduces the dimensions of Paul's struggle but also forecloses upon the complex constellation of benefits which resulted from Cather's *writing* the story. Here, in this chapter, I suggest another possible reading of the story, one that shifts the field of focus slightly. I agree that Paul is to some degree an alter-ego or surrogate for Cather, as are many of her characters, and I concede that Paul's highly sensitive, even excessively sensitive responses to his surroundings, are also Cather's. Granted, Paul's behavior may indicate a closeted homosexuality and display Cather's own understanding of the costs, as some critics have argued. I would, however, like to consider that Paul may also demonstrate the survival tactics of a damaged and continually threatened self, which can have multiple sources. Further, I suggest that Cather's study of Paul served to allay the anger, shame, and resulting unspoken emotional pain in which she felt mired during the time in which

[84] When I collected the number of critics and essays that foreground an argument for Cather's homosexuality, it created a page-long footnote. Rather than attach it, I have chosen to state that the argument is a predominant one.

[85] Lillian Faderman, Deborah Lambert, Sharon O'Brien, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, John Flannigan, et al. Increasingly during the late twentieth century, critics cite Cather's homosexuality as if it were a matter of fact.

she wrote the story, as discussed below. Writing about Paul began as a projection of that pain and became for her an affirming lesson in the efficacy of work. Additionally and finally, I maintain that she insists that her readers, familial and strange, see both Paul's pain and understand his cultures' role in it. She will not let us safely distance ourselves.[86]

3.3 Conflict

That Willa Cather understood Paul's painful identity struggles and desire to express a different self is better comprehended by brief recall of her own conflicted youth.[87] In peace and order, doted upon by parents and others, Willa lived an idyllic life in the verdant woods of Virginia for her first nine years. It was rudely interrupted when she was "jerked away" (as she says) to the open, barren space of unsettled land, experiencing "an erasure of personality." If life directed by stern relatives in Catherton, Nebraska were not unsettling enough, a further shift in class and drop in status occurred eighteen months later when, unsuccessful as a farmer, Charles moved his growing family to Red Cloud, adding three more children after the move. The original nine family members and hired girl moved into a rented, shoddy, cramped, and crooked little house that Cather often depicted with ambivalence if not abhorrence. Easily understood is the appeal of orderliness, quiet, and beauty in the series of homes to cultured families she befriended, homes so unlike her own cluttered, noisy, chaotic, and privacy-depriving house. Sometimes mocked and scorned by the hardier ambitious Westerners who

[86] A *Lincoln Journal* entry for 13 January 1885 records Cather 's observation that the women of the stage knew "that to feel greatly is genius and make others feel is art."
[87] Cather wrote to her Aunt Franc explaining the creation of the protagonist in her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912). Speaking to his "moral flimsiness, " Cather wrote: "one has to have had either an unusual knowledge for a peculiar sympathy with the characters one handles. . . . [Y]ou must, by some accident, have seen into your character very deeply." She suggests, "Maybe there's a weakness in me that makes me able to handle the weak [characters] better—I don't know."

ridiculed Charles's Southern drawl, gentility and lack of business savvy as well as his wife's "fine-haired" ways, the Cathers also suffered the raised eyebrow or indifference of visiting Easterners for whom they appeared as merely crude western frontier folk. While Cather critics certainly pay heed to the creative importance of her dislocation, they often neglect to see that the move had resulted in part from what could be seen as the father's failures. He had displaced the family from its *rightful* social class and shorn them of their status. Of course, class may or may not confer high status; however, the two are intertwined, for a group's status is a question of 'the recognition they are granted for what they do and the authority that recognition confers." Yet, as shame theorist, Francis J. Broucek writes, "having one's status ignored, disregarded, denied or negated, generates a shame response that points to a severe strain between a self and an ideal self."[88] Further complicating matters is that the cultural and geographical dislocation occurred during years that a child learns the social codes necessary to negotiate her way through the worlds in which she moves, creating further tension between the ego and the ego-ideal, "the internalized voice of what our parents say is worthy of love." The collateral cost for failing to live up to the standards dictated by the ego-ideal is shame. But what happens when the ego ideal is itself conflicted, torn between parents' contradictory expectations and their own failures? As pioneer of shame theory Tomkins avers,

> There is no other single wish of the normal child more important than the wish to be like the beloved parent. Any impediment to such identification evokes shame and longing and ultimately may heighten the investment of affect in becoming more like the parent who has created a barrier to such identification. (III: 222)

Thus, during adolescence, the most difficult time in the constructions of a core sense of self, when Willa most needed to love her parents without reservation, parents whom she

[88] Francis J. Broucek. *Shame and the Self*. Guilford Press, 1991, 8.

came to perceive as flawed, she adopted a series of behaviors and personae and met criticism with defiance. Paul acts similarly.

Cather's insightful portrayal of Paul illustrates how shame avoidance drives both conformity and the flaunting of it. She understood the oppression of needing to be watched and of being watched, and the pain of both. She had confided as much to Ned Abbot in a letter about her affectations and pretentiousness and the remarks that cut her deeply during those early years.[89] Most importantly, she appears to know what Michael Nichols claims: "Harboring a denied defective self-image requires constant defensive vigilance."[90] In "Paul's Case" she uncovers for her reader the shame "script" that drives a person to counteraction and vigilance lest exposure and humiliation happen again. Here she displays her own lifelong "sense of liability to exposure and erasure." Furthemore, Cather understood cultures' contributions to creating that defective self, the shaping, molding and circulating of ideals and goals that help to define the defective.

Suggesting another insight to Paul is Cather's use of *temperament,* derived from the Latin *tempura*, a mixing. Actions were first attributed to temperament during the medieval period, when four humours were believed to predetermine personality. When out of balance, a predominant, excessive humour would negatively affect a person who would then be required to temper it, as he would an appetite. Cather understood the struggle for temperance. "The Garden Lodge" displays one type of such struggle. After all, as her friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher writes, the author had always possessed "a

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[89] Abbot Manuscript Collection Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln Nebraska

[90] Michael P. Nichols, 249. Refer to Tomkins's script theory. Frank and Sedgewick do a great job in clarifying its complexity. See their *Shame and Its Sisters: A Tomkins Reader*, UP of Duke, 1995, pp. 179-195. See Cather's letters where she often apologizes for a depressive state, for anger, for impatience or intolerance. For Cather's "sense of liability . . ." see Janis P. Stout. *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*. UP of Virginia, 2000, p. 10.

ravenous appetite" for "the best," as well as a too-active romantic imagination and mood volatility, as Cather herself admits in her correspondence more than once.[91]

The more modern definition of *temperament*, "a disposition that rebels at restrictions," came to be associated with artists during the modern period. The aptness as a description of the young Cather needs no explanation. We might infer, then, that Cather would like the implied reader to understand Paul as "mixed up"—a site of conflicting ideologies, of contradictory, introjected ideals, of aesthetic inclinations distorted by restrictions and "pictures" in consumer society, of needs unmet, displaced. We should do so, however, against a backdrop of Cather's conflicted relationship with parents whom she loved and wanted desperately to be loved by, but whom she also resented as the causes for her recurrent humiliations. Moreover, when she failed to perform "up to standard" or in accordance with shifting cultural ideals or conflicting ego-ideals, she experiences a failed self. When criticized for her overcompensating personae, the (self-proclaimed) "sensitive roughneck" suffered shame, exhibited defiance, and sought escape. Privately, she poignantly refers to hurt caused by family, by friends, by village gossips and scornful townspeople, passages often painful to read; publicly, she maintained haughty reserve. Both are embedded in Paul and in her texts.[92]

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[91] Dorothy Canfield Fisher. "Willa Cather, Frontier Daughter." *World Herald.* 4 June 1933. For Cather's admission of her appetites and volatile nature see her correspondence, especially letters to brothers Douglas and Roscoe and to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, and Mariel Gere. With them she is most open about herself, her emotional struggles and her painful suffering of rejection.

[92] In letter to Sergeant Cather writes: "[W]hen I'm hurt like a beast, I'll always become a beast," 4/28/1914. In letter to Douglas 7/8/16, she writes of an impending visit home, "I won't stay after I begin to get on anybody's nerves. I shall always be sorry that I went home last summer, because I seemed to get in wrong at every turn. It seems not to be anything that I do, in particular, but my personality in general, what I am and what I think and like and dislike, that you all find exasperating after a little while. " She has found that "one can never please the people they want to please. . . . I won't sit around and weep. I can't hurt as badly as I was last summer. . . I won't expect too much, and I mean to enjoy any goodwill or friendship I get from my family." She writes that "the disapproval" of the previous summer, "my belting" has "taken all the fizz out of me . . . I think you'll find me easier to get on with. Time is good for violent people" (7/8/16).

Cather's description of her dislocation as "an erasure of personality" suggests her experience of a spoiled identity. While her letters to Dorothy Canfield and other intimate friends best attest to her feeling "out of place" and her fear of being exposed as such, the often cited 1913 interview registers her resentment in being "jerked away from [her beloved hills] . . . thrown out into a country as bare as a piece of sheet iron."[93] Yet, Cather was not only sensitive to spaces but also to her place in them. Like the "writer of internal exile," whose "attachments to place have been complicated by feelings of alienation, marginality, or exclusion," Cather would "flit" from one place to another her entire life; the need for travel would come upon her frequently suddenly and urgently. She fled the prairies where she said she "could not hide." In the East she felt out of place. Even in Annie Field's home, where she said she felt safe from "all possibility of wrenches and jars and wounding contacts," she could never belong, admitting, "I would have to pretend too much." In 1902, feeling excluded from a conversation during a visit to A.E. Houseman, she fled his rooms to dissolve into a convulsion of tears and rage. She would revisit this scene twenty years later, writing her friend Fisher, "I know I was sullen and defiant for a good many years—like Paul in "Paul's Case," all mixed up."[94] Her entrenched shame script for "predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling . . . scenes" potent with exposure and humiliation was always at hand.

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[93] Interview 9 August 1913 in the Philadelphia Record in *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches and Letters*. Edited by L. Brent Bolke. UP of Nebraska, 1986, p. 10.

[94] Regarding the "internal exile," see J. Gerald Kennedy. *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing and American Identity.* UP of Yale, 1993, p. 25. For Cather's need to travel and to hide see Elizabeth Sergeant's Memoir (49) and Cather's letter to Sergeant (4/20/1912). Regarding Cather's stay with Annie Fields see Willa Cather's essay, "148 Charles Street" in *Not Under Forty,* Knopf, 1922. The A.E. Houseman visit is further explored in Chapter Four. Claude, protagonist of *One of Ours* (1922) undergoes a similarly humiliating experience in France. See letters to Fisher 1922. In a very long, self-deprecating and revealing letter, to Canfield (Fisher), early spring 1905, Cather admits to feeling "very provincial and helpless and ignorant" and apologizes for "a terribly low streak of something both ill tempered and ill bred."

Cather's empathy with young Paul's pain and his desire for a more cultured life (as he perceived such) results from her own emotionally conflicted youth and desire of the life to which she felt entitled and which she perceived as having been taken away as a result of her family's dislocation. She learned to vigilantly patrol her own emotions, romantic tendencies, unconventional behaviors, and self-deceptions that often made her vulnerable to painful exposure and criticism.[95] Like Paul, the adolescent Willa was drawn to the theater and its inhabitants; her letters and journal pieces exhibit the pleasure she took in the world on the boards.. She, too, brandished grand ambitions to mostly tolerant peers; she could, however, concede to deflation under the indulgent but policing smile of cultured neighbor, Mrs. Miner. Friends wrote of her "ravenous" appetites for books and music as well as fine meals, expensive clothes and beautiful "things", of her fanciful mind and also of her stormy impulses.[96] Her early correspondence, journalism, and fictional narratives suggest that she made great efforts (that sometimes failed) to repress the flagrant, impulsively emotional nature that often exposed her to scorn, ridicule, or rejection.[97]

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[95] In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Cather writes of "the trying and complicated [McClung] household " restraint necessary" and that "Isabelle has taught me what a sham I am."

[96]Sergeant recalls, "When Willa talked of what she hated, her whole personality changed. Her chin hardened, her shoulders pushed forward and one felt that the rigors of her life had made her tough or touchy. Her emotional nature was disciplined on the surface; but not far below burned a fiery furnace. [sic] When the wrong kind of person—for her—approached with seeming kindness, an uncontrollable antagonism flashed out" (117). Mildred Bennett writes that Carrie Miner and Helen Sprague, childhood friends, corroborate Sergeant's claims (30-31). Cather "was violent—stormy as the tempests she so much enjoyed at sea. . . . For those she loved, her feeling was so intense that she would tremble at parting. She did not want people to come to physically close to her unless she willed it, but she could be impulsive and capricious. . . . If she met people with who she had no sympathy she was revolted and she made no pretense to the contrary. . . . If a person Willa disliked were in the vicinity, she could scarcely endure it—pacing the floor, stamping her foot, and repeating the offender's name with bitterness" (221-2). Conversely, with childish impulsivity she embraced McClure in a bear hug and soundly kissed him on the stage during a dinner in his honor, Edith Lewis recalls her first sight of Cather in heated verbal sparring. Too numerous to cite, Cather's letters make reference to having made a fool of herself in numerous ways as a lack of either physical, emotional, or verbal restraint.

[97] There are so many documented instances of these, many discussed above in the body of this work: Louise Pound's rejection of her is an early one. Cather's sensitivity to criticism appears in her voicing a

Cather felt shame not only when others charged her with being a young woman overstepping boundaries of proper emotional constraint or laying claims to terrain gendered masculine, but also when she failed to sustain detachment from emotional entanglements. Rather, her fecund imagination and highly emotional, sensual, sometimes even lusty nature required constant patrolling and even punishment of her textual alter-egos to deter her from seeking its gratification in her life.[98] Diana, the chaste maiden with whom several critics associate with Cather is not merely the huntress averse to heterosexuality. As Cather would have known, Diana is also associated with Selene, the lunar figure known for appetites that led to grief. Equally impulsive in action and rapid thought, Cather, like Diana, frequently exhibited emotional outbursts of both negative and positive affect, though with age she usually managed caution and tact. Even as an adult, she responded to criticism with the defensive posturing witnessed in her surrogates. Experiencing sound and color emotionally, she often admits in her letters and journalism to visceral responses to certain voices, sensitivity to the tones, a tendency to be volatile and intensely emotional. Her preference for dramatic clothing and vivid colors prompted maternal criticism and the notice of more than one acquaintance. That Cather's practiced containment of her sensual nature, vulnerable to rupture, was achieved at great emotional expense I have no doubt. According to Tomkins, "the learned inner restraint on any affect in competition with the wish to express the original affect," is destructive to the self. It is the inhibition, the disruption of expression of any affect—

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literal inability to sometimes read family letters and in her early observation that the world's scorn is 'The bitter of all punishments" (W&P, 140). It is no wonder that Sergeant remarks that Cather was "like an iceberg, the greater part of her load was submerged" (108)

[98] This is apparent in "The Garden Lodge" above.

interest, joy, shame, anger, contempt-- that may cause shame, adding to psychic pain. (162).

3.4 Human Idealism and Human Weakness[99]

Cather wrote the short story "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament" when she was living in Pittsburgh with Isabelle in the McClung's home. Judge McClung's family was cultivated, wealthy and well connected. Cather, "always gravitated rapidly toward famous people." recalls Dorothy Canfield Fisher. During return visits to Lincoln, Willa took "the greatest satisfaction" in displaying "the proof that she was fully accepted in a place which entirely so outshone Lincoln in money and variety of cultivated activities." Louise Pound simply "found Cather's bragging in this vein to be unseemly. . . . Whatever else attracted Cather to Isabelle McClung, it is not incidental that the family lived in a section of Pittsburgh where the neighbors then had names like Carnegie and Frick."[100] Fisher remembers that Cather "felt that somehow she got off on the wrong foot in Lincoln." In Pittsburg she "had that wonderful opportunity, which every young person should have, of a *fresh start*, a beginning in a place where nobody knew a thing about the past with its associations and lack." In a letter to Mariel Gere, Cather herself writes, "It's like beginning a new life in broad daylight away from the old mistakes." She admitted, "Gad! How we like to be liked!" (25 April 1897)

[99] In a 3/4/97 Nebraska State Journal entry written five years before "Paul's Case" Cather reviews Wagner's *Tannhauser.* Its theme, she says, is " the great conflict between human ideals and human weakness which is at the heart of all great dramatic situations."

[100]See Fisher's ten-page letter of 10 December 1950 written to Cather's first biographer, E.K. Brown. Both Fisher and Pound are quoted in Robert Thacker's "She Knows it too well to Know It Well." *Cather Studies* Number 10. UP of Nebraska, 2015, p. 310.

"Paul's Case" was written shortly after the summer of 1902, after Cather had made her first visit to Europe with Isabelle, after the humiliating encounter with A.E. Houseman. During 1903 she wrote to Canfield (Fisher) of a depressive state, of losing a contest with failure, and of having lost her will. She complained that she been suffering the usual barbs of her mother's tongue and had been severely reproached by Red Cloud voices and a disgraced family for having written "A Wagner's Matinee"—perceived as critical of their local culture. The young author swore to her friend that she would give them all something more to feed their wrath. Twenty years later she would admit that "Paul's Case" was a painful story to write.

Paul is another of Cather's many orphans;[101] a motherless high school misfit, he rejects his drab, monotonous Pittsburgh surroundings and respectable, bourgeois neighbors. He attempts to perform a life modeled not only on images from Sunday supplements which he pastes into scrapbooks, but also on staged scenes, behaviors and dress he observes as a Carnegie Hall theater usher. Collaborating with school officials, Paul's father persuades the theater manager to bar Paul, exposing his son to the troupe as a "bad case" who lives in a world of phantasy. Forced to get a "real" job, Paul "gets a life."[102] He embezzles money from his new boss, flees his poverty and the grimy steel town, and steps into the frame of New York City to realize an idea of himself that has

[101] Long-time Cather scholar, David Stouck early noted that "orphan is more than a romantic convention in WC's fictions; it suggests a psychological state central to her art." *Willa Cather's Imagery*. UP of Nebraska, 1975, pp. 37-8. Hiroko Sato agrees that her protagonists "are almost always children from broken homes." See "Willa Cather in Japan" in *The Art of Willa Cather*. Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner, eds. Nebraska UP, 1979: 91. NB: The mothers are always dead; the fathers are ineffectual--if alive.

[102] This phrase is taken from the introduction of *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis UP,1992, p.2. Smith and Watson point out that for "centuries, America has been . . . a promising place where people have come to get a new life, to re/form and remake themselves as social subjects 'free' of a variety of constraints they experienced in the culture and locations they left behind" (4). Paul does exactly that when he goes to New York. Like many other immigrants, Paul finds that the old life follows and that the fruits of his promised land must be bought.

teased and haunted him for years. However, bittersweet experience in his imaginary homeland leads him to conclude that money, after all, "was everything, the wall between all he loathed and all he wanted."[103]

As the site of Cather's personal struggle with ego-ideals which, in fact, replicate larger social struggles, Paul displays aspects of the author and her family, the mix of romantic reverie and materialism that her own superego had internalized from her parents' unconscious ideals. Cather, too, was a mix. She oscillated between love and unacknowledged scorn for a father who, like Paul, was imaginative and desirous of peace and quiet leisure but incapable of providing it, and she admired and resented the "fair-haired" distant and critical mother whose love of fine things is well-documented. Furthermore, Cather had been a deviant and a dreamer in a town that associated worth with labor for accumulation (of money, of land, of equipment, of social capital), a town that frowned upon flamboyance and indiscrete gender categories.[104] Like Paul, she loved to indulge her appetites for color, for haute cuisine, for music, for theater, for the dramatic in general and knew first hand the humiliations of poverty, repeated reproach, the look of contempt, the smile of mere tolerance. Like Paul, she felt the relief of finding her "place" surrounded by her kind. Like Paul, she had discovered that money was necessary to ensure the peace, leisure, and "simple" beauty important to her father and the material pleasures her mother so enjoyed. Willa had learned to desire both. As a result, her editorializing narrator understands the young aesthete's need for less mundane pursuits even as she isolates, examines and condemns Paul's flaws. The narrator affirms

[103] In *Song of the Lark*, Thea comes to the same conclusion, in an emotional scene in Dr. Archie's office, where he describes her breathing as if as a being were "struggling to be free and to break out" of her. Looking restlessly about, she says, "To do any of the things one wants to do, one has to have lots and lots of money." *Lucy Gayheart* also refers to the necessity of money for the finer things.
[104] The local Red Cloud newspaper pointedly referred to girls who act like boys as "unnatural"

Paul's desire for beauty; the reader is encouraged to admire Paul's sensual appreciation, praise his imaginative capacity for picture making. Paul "needed only the spark, the indescribable thrill that made his imagination master of his sense, and he could makeup plots and pictures enough of his own." In this sense Paul resembles another earlier Catherian figure, Douglas Burnham, who's "fecund fancy" gives him "the right to be autocratic" because his "inventive genius" sparks and feeds the fancy of the other children in their collective play world.[105] But, like Paul, he is "a victim of his own conceit . . .[whose] fancies seemed weighty realities." Still, the author separates herself from Paul, whom she denounces for and who is doomed by a "debauched" imagination fed on materialism; seduced away from work his is a wannabe without will. Cather understood desire; she, too, believed herself entitled, meant to live a "fine" life. Unlike Paul, Cather worked hard for it, pursued it, achieved it. In this story, however, she tried to understand failure. This is where Cather turns to Paul's socialization.

Paul as a site of struggle is crushed between two ego-ideals, one represented by a dead mother he cannot remember but who had knitted in red worsted wool "Feed my lambs," and another represented by a father who feeds Paul little but reproach and stories financial success to encourage his only son to climb the clerical ladder. Paul's teachers add to the diet of contempt, spooning in measures of conformity.[106] Hungry, Paul feeds himself upon images and scenes in the theater, Horatio Alger stories, and the consumption habits of the rich and famous. Making allowances for Paul, the narrator

[105] Willa Cather. "The Way of the World." *Home Monthly*. April, 1898 in CFS, p 397.
[106] In a 1924 article of *The Scholastic*, p5, 32 (found in the Fisher Collection), Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote that young people needed to know Cather's work because Cather knew that the nation was "advancing into a society which tries hard in many ways to crush out the fresh living feeling in human beings, which tries to make them work so intensely they have no vitality left to feel, or to make them ashamed of emotion and wish to hide it, or to make them think that money and material possessions are better things to keep than warmth and human sympathies." She writes that "life" struggles against "those who try to deaden life." As early as "Paul's Case," we find this theme central.

muses, “Perhaps it was because, in Paul’s world, where the natural always wore the guise of ugliness, that a certain element of artificiality seemed to him necessary in beauty.” She does, however, castigate him for a passivity and lack of patience that leads to theft and suicide.[107]

Despite his suave airs, Paul’s poverty emerges upon close inspection. His shoddy extravagant clothes do not fit the skinny and concave frame that has outgrown them; his collar, though velvet, is frayed. His eyes glitter and his face in repose has the tired, defiant look of Cather’s sculptor.[108] His most evident habit is his “conscious expression” of vigilance. Paul is “always glancing about him, seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something,” understandable in one “accustomed to lying,” a habit he has found “indispensible for overcoming friction.”[109] The discomfort he causes teachers and the viciousness with which they attempt to make him “contrite,” to crush his spirit, seem disproportionate to his infractions of impertinence and absence. His “hysterically defiant manner,” an unconcealed contempt as he mocks them with an obsequious courtesy, and his undisguised physical aversion to them invokes their anger.

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[107] Here I use the term *aesthete* in its original meaning of one sensitive to beauty, not in its late nineteenth-century application of a dilettante. Another passive artist is found in Mr. Shimerda, of *My Antonia*, who could not wait for spring and commits suicide; he also dies in in January.

[108] See Willa Cather’s “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” in *The Troll Garden.* This is another narrative on which provincial petty economies of townspeople and radically differing parents, brutally portrayed, seem responsible for an artist’s conflicted emotions. Here, Jim Laird, the sculptor’s childhood friend accuses, ”You drummed nothing but money into their ears.” Severely reproached by Red Cloud voices and a disgraced family for writing “A Wagner’s Matinee,“ another story highly critical of provincial minds, Cather swore to Canfield that she would give the tongues something more to feed their wrath and produced “The Sculpture’s Funeral.”

[109] Many of Cather’s characters, especially her surrogates, look apprehensively around to see if they are being watched or about to be exposed. Thea, for example, is “unable to forget her poverty in the richness of the world opened to her.” When Harsanyi plays the piano, she is “sullen” and “crouched” in a corner, looking nervously from right to left “as if she were being watched, or as if she were naked and heard someone coming.” The same can be said about their responses to music—to the scenes and story of the music not its form, to the personality of the singer, not the work. They are swept away by the suggestion, as was Caroline above. Captive selves are staples--in bottles, or in “the donjon,” or in cages. Claude, for example says almost these exact words about the possibilities of the freed self.

Cather seems to understand Paul's counter-phobic exhibition that courts disapproval to master his dread of it. Irritated by Paul's expressive eyes, considered unnatural in a boy, and his eyebrows, "habitually rising in contempt," the teachers expose their vulnerability to his derision of them; they attack. Though they feel "humiliated to have felt so vindictive toward a mere boy," to have vented such vituperation on one whose cramped shoulders and sunken chest evidence his physical defenselessness, they verbally tear at him with an uncontrolled vigor that the narrator compares to hoodlums tormenting an alley cat. What taunts them is that he will not fit. Paul leaves on their wave of reproach, haughtily whistling the "Soldier's Chorus" from Wagner's *Faust*, but glancing back to see if they are watching. He even glances around just before he leaps to his death.

Directly contrasting the ideal life Paul "pictures", the narrator depicts a scene from respectable but dull Cordelia Street. It is a "conventional, standardized street lined with standardized houses populated by standardized citizen; all the families "were exactly alike as their homes, and a piece of the monotony in which they lived." The narrator further offers a view of an average Sunday on Cordelia Street. Families on respective stoops of "cramped porches pretending to be at their ease," their "squabbling children" tumble over and around "protruding stomachs and sprawling legs," which their "high pitched, nasal voices" joining the talk of money floating on the air. The "burghers of Cordelia Street . . . smil[e] to see their own proclivities reproduced in their offspring" and proudly compare their children's saved pennies. Paul's father, on the top stoop, talks to a young clerk "with a future." The young clerk's nearsighted spectacled eyes belie his vision and imply a sterile imagination. He has married upon the advice of his steel-magnate boss, "to curb his appetites" and expenditures, both to be funneled into the real

romance-–making money. He and his also near-sighted wife have produced four near-sighted children, all expected to follow their father's footsteps. Paul crouches at his father's feet on the bottom step, eager for escape. The narrator confides that each time Paul enters the street after his "orgies of living" at the theater, Paul feels "loathing" and "the physical depression which follows debauch." Assaulted by common kitchen odors, Paul, now focalizing, experiences "a shuddering repulsion for the flavorless, colorless mass of everyday existence; a morbid desire for cool things and soft lights and fresh flowers." With each return to the neighborhood Paul suffers "feeling the waters close above his head, "the hopeless sinking back forever into ugliness and commonness"[110] His home environment is worse. To escape his father's criticisms and relentless reproach, he crawls in through the cellar, where he spends the night awake, less fearful of the dark than waking his father. Waiting is the dinginess of Paul's room, the yellow wallpaper, the caking bureau, the greasy collar box, his wooden bed beneath the shadow of the homiletic symbols of patriotism and religion. Waiting in the bathroom are the grimy zinc tub, dripping spigots and the cracked mirror that reflects a multiply fractured self.

Considered as odd by many, frail among those who value strength and pluck, imaginative in a city of standardization, fastidious in a city of grime, his need to be appreciated initiates a turn to the theater. Cather also sought the theater and the people whose flair and imagination would have allowed hers to appear more normal, less conspicuous, in the communities where she had "taken her knocks from local busybodies," as had her genteel parents.[111] Paul's real living takes place at Carnegie Hall

[110] The *feeling* of "waters closing overhead" is a very common image in Cather's texts until it becomes a reality for Lucy Gayheart, who actually drowns.
[111] "knocks" Woodress, p. 55 In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather writes that her "chief happiness" was "in forgetting the past as if it had never been. No, I don't mean 'the past,' but myself in the

and on the stage of his mind. Both stages serve as Paul's "wishing carpet." He wants "to see, to be in an atmosphere, float on the wave of it, be carried out, . . . away from everything." The reader witnesses another side of Paul in Carnegie Hall, "his secret love," his "portal to Romance," where "like a prisoner set free, he felt within himself the possibility of doing or saying brilliant things." Unlike his outgrown, shoddy clothes, Paul's smart usher uniform fits him well. In the theater he is lively and proud and a favorite usher among the attendees. There, Paul had only to hear the opera music and "his sense were deliciously, yet delicately fired." He responds to what the symphony suggests to him, not to the execution of its form."[112] Cather's Pittsburgh friend George Siebel, describes Cather's similar response to music. Music is vital for both author and her surrogates; music evoked pictures, scenes and stories. In the theater, responding emotionally, Paul" breathed like a prisoner set free," feels the music "loose" his "captive second self," which "stirred and struggled there like the Genius [sic] in the bottle." Significantly, Paul's *Genius* does not struggle in an opaque lamp, but in a transparent bottle; Paul is aware that his activities are constantly on view.

After the theater, standing outside the Schenley Hotel where the "better class" of artists and big manufacturers stay, Paul often hung about watching people enter and leave, feeling himself entering into the life pictured in the Sunday supplements. "an exotic, a tropical world of glistening surfaces and basking ease" behind closed doors. "There it was, what he wanted—tangibly before him . . .but mocking sprits stood guard at

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past. . . . I seem to have been a bundle of enthusiasms and physical sensations, but not a person. . . . I have been running away from myself all my life (have you?) and have been happiest when I was running fastest. " During her mother's long illness, she was held "close to myself and to the beginnings of things, and it was like being held against things too sad to live with" (6/22/1933).

[112] In "The Garden Lodge," the protagonist is also swept away by what the music suggests, but not by the music itself, as does Lucy Gayheart and Thea and Claude. In fact, numerable characters in her work respond similarly.

the doors." Closed out, he wonders "whether he were destined always to shiver in the black night outside looking up at it." The narrator, quick to discredit her focalizer's phantasies brings the reader inside to correct the misperceptions shaped by journalism and passed through Paul's romantic lens.

When Paul's father derides his son before the theater troupe, taking away his last refuge, the actresses, "hard-working women, most of them supporting indolent husbands or brothers," see just another indolent male and laugh bitterly at his "fervid and florid inventions." Yet, Cather problematizes their categorization of Paul, not allowing the reader to accept the reductive description. On some level, she knew that adolescents who conform as well as adolescents who flaunt conformity do so out of shame. Some, like Paul and the young Cather, display affectations and mannerisms to mark themselves unique, despite the risk of ridicule. Humiliated at the theater, Paul rationalizes that he has no choice but to leave, having planned this entry into New York "over a hundred times." He embezzles a thousand dollars from his new employer to get there.

Upon arrival in New York, Paul engages rooms at the Waldorf and during a two-hour binge of deliberate consumption, selects dress clothes he had seen adorn the poised men in the Sunday supplements or on the stage, not forgetting silk undergarments and a red lounging robe, adding a scarf-pin and silver-encased brushes from Tiffany's. He fills his rooms with jonquils and violets, Cather's favorite and those of her parents. (Jennie always chose to wear violets and Charles grew jonquils in his garden.). Champagne and excellent cigarettes (both of which Cather was fond) complete his *mis en scene*. He has done his homework well, constructed his imaginary life in detail. When he slowly dresses

before a mirror he approves the sight: "he was exactly the kind of boy he wished to be." The narrator observes:

> There was this to be said for him, that he wore his spoils with dignity and in no way made himself conspicuous. His chief greediness lay in his ears and in his eyes, and his excesses were not offensive ones. His dearest pleasures were the gray winter twilights in his sitting room; his quiet enjoyment of his flowers, his clothes, his wide divan, his cigarette and his sense of power. He could not remember a time when he felt so at peace with himself. The mere release from the necessity of petty lying, lying every day and every day, restored his self-respect. He had never lied for pleasure, even at school; but to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys; and he felt a good deal more manly, more honest, even, now that he had no need for boastful pretensions, now that he could . . . 'dress the part.'

Certainly, Cordelia Street had commented on Paul's unmanly concern with beauty and flamboyant attempt at refinement, even a possible effeminacy. Similarly, the policing editors of Red Cloud's local newspaper, the *Chief*, made public the "unnaturalness" and genuine unloveableness of unfeminine girls such as tomboyish young Willa. True, Paul's spectator activity, like watching himself in a mirror as he dresses, may seem perverse to some, lending support to those critics who discern a homoerotic element in such activity, especially since, as Elaine Showalter points out, the use of mirrors and exhibits of "unmanly narcissism" were conventions indicative of homosexual literature at the turn of the century. But one can also read this moment as tense with anticipation and apprehension for Paul because he anxiously witnesses his transformation into the appearance of the young gentleman he had always imagined himself "meant to be" and feared that he is not. This time there would be no one to "awaken" him from his reveries, no father glaring scornfully from the top of the stairs, relentless in his disappointment. No teachers would undermine his show of superiority, no classmate to question his stories. Among "his own people" he has "no desire to meet anyone " nor is he in lonely

sitting in his box at the Met. He wishes only "to watch the pageant."[113] He exhibits the peace of mind that comes with a feeling of security and belonging.

"Having "loosed" his ideal self, the "apprehensive dread" that has haunted him throughout childhood dissipates. Sounding much like Alexander Bartley, Cather's double-natured protagonist of Cather's first novel, Paul recalls that there "had always been the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him—and Paul had done things that were not pretty to watch, he knew." I grant that a number of critics approach this admission as suggestive of a latent homosexuality. However, I read this passage as Cather's attempt to point to Paul's denial of the emotions and appetites considered inappropriate in a place that harnesses appetite for productivity that should result in coins in a bank, a place where exhibition of such a self would be vulnerable to contempt, derision, scorn, humiliation. In New York, Paul allows that suppressed, hiding self, once feared, to emerge, to fully de-monstrate itself[114] and experiences a "curious sense of relief . . . [H]e had at last thrown down the gauntlet to the thing in the corner." He had watched this other self resist cultural terms set in Pittsburgh and the larger culture, resisted being fitted to the grimy standardized steel town, another rivet in the machine the grimy standardized steel town. The defensive flamboyance and posturing he displays to set him apart in Pittsburg is no longer necessary in New York, the narrator implies, who sees a contented youth valuing pleasures Cather often claimed as her own.

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[113] "The Passing Pageant" was the name of Cather's journal column of theater reviews.

[114] One has to consider that Paul's emotionality was monstrous or at least abnormal in the terms set by nineteenth-century rationalism, which argues that anything that interfered with productive labor was a disturbance. "Alienists" (early psychologists) such as F. Paulhan (*The Law of Feelings*. Translated by C.K. Ogden. Harcourt Brace, 1930) wrote during 1884 that "an affect is the expression of a more or less profound disturbance in the organism, due to the fact that a relatively considerable amount of nervous energy is released without being able to be used in a systematic manner." Freud's ideas regarding emotion are, in fact, developed from Paulhan's theory, which Cather seems to question.

Those who argue for Paul's latent homosexuality to hint at Cather's often point to another moment—the interlude with the Yale student, "wild boy from San Francisco" who offers to show Paul "the night side of the town." This may be a nod to Frank Norris some of whose work Cather admired. However, Cather separates Paul, herself and her textual style from this Californian boy. Paul and the boy begin the evening in "the confiding warmth of a champagne friendship" which flows into a drinking spree lasting until early morning, but the awkward coolness with which they part suggests that Paul is not a wild boy. Paul is blinded by his projecting of "world-shine" onto the boy. Impressed with the idea of accompanying a Yale boy he imagines, a representative of the world he wishes to enter and now sees himself capable of inhabiting, in fact—if only for a time. Assumptions for both have been rudely dispelled. Paul, in fact, seems physically uncomfortable with whatever that night held. According to Tomkins, it is common to intoxicant-fueled evenings that when a shame-prone person's inhibitions loosen, allowing tabooed affects and thoughts and hidden selves to emerge in perceived camaraderie, the fall-out is a deep retrenchment in negative affect. The emotionally "cool" Yale boy, deceived by his misperception of Paul, and Paul's exposure of his own misrepresentation to the Yale boy likely account for the coolness. To reduce the scene only to the aftermath of homosexual encounter seems to reduce its importance in Cather's exploration of her own fears of humiliation and proneness to shame when her inferior background or infamous expression of emotionality emerges.[115]

At one point, a storm swirls outside as Paul awaits to disembark his carriage after a simple ride in Central Park. Cather, who loved "weather," frequently used this

[115] See Sergeant's remark about Cather's impatience with herself around her sense of inferiority, her Nebraska background and affect displays.

Shakespearean objective correlative. To Paul, the storm signifies the "power abroad in a world bent upon taking away . . . that fleeting feeling." He reflects, "If one had that, the world became one's enemy . . . to make one let go of it."[116] Several of Cather's other protagonists, particularly Thea and Lucy also express this fear. Paul easily loses his grip, but Cather will not let it go. She will work for the life she desires.

Cather, too, gravitated to the operatic opulence, anonymity, and sensual gratification of the large city. Paul's observation that in New York he "felt at peace with himself" even echo's the author's own remarks. "His release from the necessity of petty lying . . . restored his self respect." The empathic narrator confides that the youth had never lied "but to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys." In New York, however, he "felt a deal more manly, more honest, even now that he had no need for boastful pretensions." That he felt" more manly" in New York implies that he hadn't felt so in Pittsburgh, where the dominant social construction of manliness available to him erected constricting standards from which he had fallen so short. Here, he feels no remorse, no loneliness—only a sense of fittedness. Here he can be the ideal. Here "it would be impossible for anyone to humiliate him, " he thinks, with relief. That he is in no way conspicuous on the streets of New York confirms his fit to the part for which he so perceptively and accurately dresses and

[116] Upon exiting the concert hall where Wagner's music pursues her into the street, the winds of stormy weather and the jostling people make her conscious "of the brutality and power of those streams that flowed in the streets, threatening to drive one under." She thinks, "There was some power abroad in the world bent upon taking away from her that feeling with which she had come out of the concert hall. . . . If one had that, the world became one's enemy, " "people, buildings, wagons, cars, rushed at one to crush it under, to make one let go of it.. . . All these things and people . . .were lined up against her, they were there to take something from her. " Thea resolves," Very well; they shall never have it. Hey might trample her to death, but they should never have it. As long as she lived that ecstasy was going to be hers." Thea, like Cather, was determined to "live for it, work for it, die for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height." (159-160?) A similarly intense scene takes place in Dr. Archie's office after her family ha heaped scorn on her (193-95). Lucy Gayheart will undergo a similar moment.

performs. But it is a costume, nevertheless, a costume and a role with no substance, and the play must end for lack of financial backing.

Paul fails to see his own fate—the inevitable, early death of the flower forced to bloom too soon, cut off from its source of nourishment. An analog to Paul's too early entry to New York, the result of the community's attempt to force his bloom, the flower prefigures Paul's inability to grow, his passivity, and his early death. Paul is surrounded by hedonists who are "hot for pleasure," by the "glaring affirmation of the omnipotence of wealth . . .the plot of all dramas, the text of all romances, the nerve stuff of all sensations . . . whirling about him." His impotent desires consume him and he "burnt like a faggot in a tempest." With infertile longing, Paul "set his teeth and drew his shoulders together in a spasm of realization" that desire was everything, observes the narrator. The narrator does not judge Paul's desires so much as his lack of willpower and ineffectual actions, the futile desire that leads only to unfulfilled dreams and frustrated fantasies. Cather valued an imaginative refined intelligence and could empathize with the pain of ridicule and reproach, but she could not understand the passive or impatient nature that failed to strive to manifest its vision. This intolerance made her impatient with the most important figure in her life, a father she wanted to be successful and to retain his imaginative, gentle and poetic self.

When on the eighth day Paul finds the entire affair sensationally exposed in the Pittsburgh papers—the theft, the flight, and his father's determination to drag him back in ignominy—Paul's inventive imagination too easily envisions scenarios "worse than jail." Desperate, he enjoys his final days as "himself, and in his place." Though he drinks himself into forgetfulness of waiting Cordelia Street, he wakes to find "the tide of

realities wash over him . . .[as] memory of successive years on front stoops [fall] upon him lie a weight of black water"; he watches himself go under. With less than one hundred dollars in his pocket, "he knew now, more than ever, that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted."[117]

In his final moments, Paul knows the "folly of his haste . . . with merciless clarity." His insistence upon the immediate self-gratification that led him to New York rather than to a place safely distant, and his rash suicide, which precludes all he has left undone, remain vivid to the reader. Desire drives him until, crushed by a train lapping up the miles, a perfect symbol of an increasingly mechanized, profit-driven, grasping modern world, "the picture making mechanism", the imagination that had made him dissatisfied with his life ceases its "disturbing visions. "He had looked into the dark corner at last, and knew. It was bad enough, what he had seen: but somehow not so bad as his long fear of it had been." True, he was not "manly" as his socializing culture had constructed that category, but neither was he unnatural, or abnormal. An aesthete, perhaps, a dilettante, maybe, decadently sensual, certainly, but his sensitive, imaginative orphan soul had felt a kinship among New York's leisured classes.

[117] Again I refer to S*ong of the Lark*, written over a decade later: Humiliated and angered by her family. Thea Internally rants that's she knew that her brothers Gus and Charley were her enemies, "among the people whom she had always recognized as her natural enemies. Their ambitions and sacred proprieties were meaningless to her, but she had believed other family members, "though they had no particular endowments, *they were of her kind*, not of the Moonstone kind."[Italics in text]. She seeks out intelligent, well-read, well off well-dressed, gentle Dr. Archie. In his office she passionately confides, with "stormy" eyes, "To do any of the things one wants to do, one had to have lots and lots of money. . . . [I]t's silly to live at all for little things. . . If you want a big thing, you've got to have nerve enough to cut out all that's easy, everything that's to be had cheap." Archie, uncomfortable with Thea, "She was goaded by desires, ambitions, revulsions that were dark to him." Leaving the town, feeling resentful of her earlier provincial self, she doesn't plan a return. "The desert wad so big and thirsty; if one's foot slipped, it could drink one up like a drop of water." See pps. 189-193.

Though Paul conceded in his bitter defeat that the "revolt against the homilies by which the world is run," is "a losing game," Cather disagreed.[118] She would enact the revolt, proving its possibility with her life and her work. Eventually, she would learn to protect and then to repair her damaged self through her writing. She learned to withstand the pain of her mother's reproaches, and she proved her difference from her father, even as she continued to pursue his ideals. Paul's case instructs the reader and Cather that a culture's repressions only distort its' members needs, that any system motivates and even encourages the destructive behaviors it also condemns. Using humiliation, shaming the deviant into normalization, only forces the person to narcissism in which the desired self is lost—or hidden, in protection. The loss results in a paralysis, an inability to act. That is the real loss that Cather captured in trying to understand Paul's case. Incapable of allowing and sustaining his ideal self, for working for what he desired and an impatience to gratify his desires is what a reader remembers as Paul's fatal flaws. Cather also criticized the systemic shaming enacted upon Paul by cultures that feed its young on contradictory homilies of success, independence, and conformity that instigates dependence upon external approval and defensive flaunting of the "rules" and precipitates failure. She spoke of a modern moment then—and now. She gave her readers and herself Paul's suicide as a warning. It was a story made for its maker. More than a quarter of a century later, Cather was still disentangling her skein of emotions, her ambivalence toward her parents and their Southern ideals, and the homilies of a culture that effaced harmful contradictions. That these ideals remained in conflict within the dominant culture, between her parents, and within Cather herself added to her shame—

[118] See Willa Cather's "the Gold Slipper" in her 1920 short story collection, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. Scholarly Edition. Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 2005. In that story Kitty Ayershire makes a similar complaint against the "homilies" of the world, but overtly rejects them to her advantage.

shame for her perceived deficiencies, for those of her parents and for the nation's mistakes.

4.0 *ONE OF OURS*: MEMORY, INVIDIOUS COMPARISON AND SHAME

"The obvious is obscure because it is unexamined"
Donald Nathanson, 2008
Preface to *Affect Imagery Consciousnes*

"As a man is, so he sees."

William Blake
Letter, August 23, 1799

Many critics concur that Willa Cather's technique of indirection extends to how she reveals and conceals herself in narrative. David Porter identifies a "self-referentiality" but cautions that 'it would be wrong-headed and misleading to suggest a one-to-one correspondence between her fiction and her life." Merrill M. Skaggs, who finds Cather "the most autobiographical of writers", notices that Cather "leaves traces of her intellectual struggles and passions in the texts of the novels." Janis P. Stout, with whose observations regarding Cather I often agree, declares that Cather was "indirectly writing about herself," agreeing with David Stouk's earlier claim that the author "transmuted her own experiences." Writing of *O Pioneers!,* Stout finds Cather's work "keenly visual and replete with observations of emotions and social groups," adding that she not only observes the characters but also "translates herself into them." I cannot agree more with Stout here, especially when she goes on to say that through her work "Cather explored her present feelings as well as her childhood memories." Cather herself had acknowledged as much. To close friend Stephen Tennant, she admitted: "Nearly all my books are made out of old experiences that have had time to season. Memory keeps what is essential and lets the rest go" (28 March 1927). To lifelong friend, Irene Miner

Weiz, Cather said that her father had pointed out that many incidents in her texts had happened to her. Yet, she claimed that she honestly believed that she had invented them: "They simply came into my mind"(6 January 1945). To Irene's sister, Carrie, whom Cather calls her "true friend," she confides that only Carrie and Roscoe, Cather's beloved brother, had always realized

> that things hit me hard. I suppose that is why I am never out of material to write about. The inside of me is so full of dents and scars, where pleasant and unpleasant things have hit me hard in the past. I do not so much invent as I remember and re-arrange. And I remember unconsciously. Faces, situations, things people said long ago simply come up from my mind as if they were written down there. They would not be there if they hadn't hit me hard. (29 April 1945)

Nor would she "remember and re-arrange" those memories as material for her work unless something in the moment of the recollection of them had not hit her hard.[119]

Cather does translate herself into the characters, their emotions and their social situations; she does so to analyze, understand and transform her present as well as alter earlier memories of her past. In fact, throughout her career, the author appropriates one or several characters in just about every text to re-consider her affective responses in and to her past—particularly responses to humiliation and shame. These memories are triggered by present analogues of those experiences. Memory, triggered by a present affective experience is retrieved, re-worked, transformed and reconsolidated in a more acceptable form to be made available for future use. Affect plays a major role in each process. What memory originally stores, how it is stored, how it is retrieved as well as how it is beneficially altered and reconsolidated into memory for further retrieval is in great part determined by affect states. To explore this idea I have drawn upon Silvan S.

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[119] David Porter. *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather*. UP of Nebraska, 2008, p. 232. Merrill M. Skaggs. *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather*. Virginia UP, 1990, 10. Janis P. Stout. *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*. UP of Virginia UP, 2000, pp.110-112. David Stouk. "Historical Essay." Willa Cather. *O Pioneers!* Scholarly Edition. UP of Nebraska, 1992, p. 287.

Tomkins's theory of affect and memory to consider *One of Ours*, Willa Cather's 1922 novel.

4.1 Memory and Affect

The most recent research about the role of affect in memory processes is being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Phelps, the William James Fellow at Harvard. During her keynote speech, given at the Association for Psychological Science Convention May 2019, she discussed her explorations of how affect arousal plays a role in the consolidation, retrieval, transformation and re-consolidation of memory. Her work focuses upon the negative affect fear, on fear memories and how recalling and tweaking them can mitigate fear.[120] By extrapolating from her experiments and conclusions regarding fear and applying them to shame-provoking humiliation memories, I find that her work re-enforces Silvan S. Tomkins' earlier findings regarding the role of affect in memory processes. Phelps's experiments reaffirm that emotion is not only integral to memory consolidation but also strengthens and updates memory, one might say re-writes memory of negative affect, a finding relevant to this project. She claims that memory is being constantly updated and that "[w]hatever caused one to retrieve that memory is important to future use of that memory." Her experiments, which use affect arousal to retrieve, re-write and then reconsolidate the re-written fear memory, have implications for the role of narrative in re-writing shame-inducing humiliation memories, for re-encoding memories to mitigate shame, an important affect in decision-making.

[120] Elizabeth A. Phelps. "The Impact of Everyday Emotion" APS Convention May 23-27. Keynote speech. Viewed on You Tube, July 23, 2019.

Phelps' current research in part extends Tomkins's: 1) asking how affect determines and alters what we remember and 2) asking how affect motivates our decisions and our actions. Writing about memory, Tomkins argues that what is retained as a retrievable memory is "information that, in the competition for the limited channel of consciousness, has succeeded in being transmuted into a report." A *report* is that which is brought into consciousness and, allowed into consciousness, more likely to be retained as memory. The report "is automatically sent first to reverberating transient storage" as a memory engram. A memory engram is "'the trace of a past experience [that] produces permanent structural modification at a specific site in the brain." It is the co-assembly of an affect with its trigger. One does not store an experience or a scene in its entirety; more likely, certain elements of an experience, particular aspects of a scene are more easily stored for recall. Thus, according to Tomkins's theory, affect and its physiological arousal determine what we retain as memory, raising the co-assembled experience into consciousness. The density of the neural firing that occurs during the triggering of the affect determines the likeliness of attention, retention and storage. Of course, not all stimuli that flood our senses are permanently recorded in such a way as to be retrieved, even in a momentary and particular scene. Again, "only information which in the competition for consciousness has succeeded in being transmuted into reports, " become memories.

For the individual, "the connected history of his scenes . . . as he *experienced them* are most real, and precious or horrible, independent of what they 'really are'." Series of repeated, similar co-assemblies eventually become what Tomkins calls an *image*. These images are biased by life experiences made up of scenes that the

recurrences of affect and trigger co-assemblies have brought to attention and, together, over time, become what Tomkins calls "script theories." A *script theory*, varying from weak to strong, is a summary of a larger set of affect experiences that plays a role in what one will expect to experience in future interactions. That is: "The existence of a shame script theory guarantees that the shame-relevant aspects of any situation will become figural in competition with other affect relevant aspects of the same situation." That is, each recurrence of X (trigger +affect) makes the individual's brain more likely to seek that familiar co-assembly, making it increasingly likely that the individual will attune to certain elements of an experience, thereby re-enforcing their script theory.[121]

The collection of repeated conscious attention to particular elements strengthens a script. A shame script, for example, can evolve through repeated ridicule, indifference, rejection or disappointment by a valued object, producing an expectation of more of the same, despite continued desire for respect, acceptance, or validation rendered by that same valued object. [122] Furthermore, a shame theory not only alerts an individual to the immanence of shame but also prompts particular strategies for minimizing its probability. I expand upon these dynamics below in the discussion of Claude, the protagonist of *One of Ours*. His shame script, strengthened over time, leads him to expect failure, to initiate self-derogating, invidious comparisons, to expect humiliation, to expect to "feel" shame, (affect experienced so often that it is recognizable *as a feeling*) and to act in specific ways when he anticipates shame.[123]

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[121] Silvan S. Tomkins. *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. N.Y, New York Stringer: 2008, pp. 411ff.
[122] Here, I wish to remind the reader of the freedom of the attachment of affect to any object. An object may be a being, one's body, an inanimate object, a place, a job, a goal, respect, acceptance etc.
[123] Silvan S. Tomkins. 1989,120ff. I draw upon this volume because it expands and creates a more nuanced exploration of his original comments concerning memory as they first appeared in 1963. Pagination in the "400"s is from the 2008 reprint of his 1962-1963 work.

An individual doesn't choose what to store or not store, though one may choose what to memorize, i.e. in Tomkins' words, a person will "learn how to reproduce past experience and retrieve information that has been permanently stored, without reliance on sensory input." Think of learning the alphabet or musical notes or scores, although these experiences, too, could carry affective resonance depending upon the scene in which the information is memorized. (Think of a contemptuous teacher.) Further, "the relationship between storage and retrieval is collusive in that what is retrieved becomes more and more what is stored", much like a literary canon or a Google search. "In this way," says Tomkins, "the individual becomes slowly both the beneficiary and the victim of the world he had most often experienced and remembered"--beneficiary of positive affect, victim of negative affect.[124] One can better comprehend Cather's use of recurrent themes, characters, situations and scenes, given Tomkins's theory of scenes stored as the result of affect/trigger co-assemblies:

> Any scene that can neither be solved nor renounced will prompt repeated searches for replays closer to the heart's desire for restitution, for revenge, for confrontation. These are experienced as variants. A present moment may become an analogue for a previous scene.

Similarly, Cather's inability to resolve or renounce particular content prompts the repetitions found in her work—but they are repetitions with difference.[125] For example,

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[124] In an interesting but relevant aside, Tompkins notes that in 86-82 BC an unknown teacher of rhetoric in Rome wrote *Ad Herennium* in which the writer states that the mind does not easily retain the banal, but "better remembers the exceptionally base, dishonorable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous" and that "incidents of childhood we often remember best." This might result of course from the dense neural firing that takes place in the brain when the resulting affect in these encounters occurs.

[125] The recurrent elements in Cather: a character's need to escape family unable to understand a seemingly misfit child, distant mothers balanced by warmer mother figures, feminized or ineffectual father figures balanced by heroic ones, gossiping town members, greed, mechanization, wastefulness, disenchantment with a modern religion of newness set against what is timeless, anti-marriage comments, "captives" (repressed natures struggling to break free), sensitive natures pitted against coarser ones, inhibited affects. One could go on. The phrase "repetition with difference" I draw from Tomkins; it does not reflect the position of Gilles Deleuze, who also benefitted from Tomkins' work and entitled a major text *Repetition with Difference.*

in *One of Ours* Cather clearly demonstrates her need to revisit unresolved memory. After the author heard that her cousin, G.P. Cather, had died at Cantigny, France during WWI, posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, and after she read his letters home to his mother, a flood of memories followed. Her response to his letters became the analogue affect triggering the retrieval of memories of her own struggles in Red Cloud and of her humiliating first visit to Europe in 1902. She would later explain that she had to write about him, although she held off for six months. Calling the work "so cruelly personal, so subjective," Cather found Claude's struggles in the prairie and his first experience in Europe "all too painfully familiar." Writing the story, she said, stood between here and anything else. "I couldn't get through him to other things. It wasn't affection, but realization so acute that I could not get away from it . . . Some of me was buried with him in France, and some of him was left alive in me." In Carrie Miner Sherwood's copy of *One of Ours*, Cather would inscribe that writing the book was "more draining than any of her other books."[126]

4.2 First Visit Abroad --1902

During the late 1890s through 1902, Cather's world rapidly expanded in Pittsburgh where she had begun to move in elite social circles of cultured families through newly acquired friends, admitting to Lincoln editor, Will Owen Jones, "I do the society act too much." To Mariel Gere she admitted, "Socially my life here is more pleasant than it has ever been or than I ever thought it could be anywhere. . . . 'Gad: how

[126] See letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, 8 March 1922. Also note that Cather had made similar remarks an occasion, particularly referring to other works that have now been perceived as drawing heavily upon her own experiences; the blatant examples are *My Antonia, Song of the Lark,* "Old Mrs. Harris" "The Best Years." Carrie miner's book is cited in Stout, p. 164.

we like to be liked." During 1899 Cather befriended the well-bred socialite Isabelle McClung and was further elevated into a social milieu that included Judge McClung and his circle, the Carnegies, the Mellons and other Pittsburgh elite. Cather had always attached herself to the elite wherever she was.[127] She had also moved into the musical circles of the tenor composer, Ethelbert Nevin. It was shortly after Nevin died in early1901, that Isabelle invited Cather to live at the large 1180 Murray Hill home. This was a definite step-up from East-End boarding-house rooms.

In the posh McClung home situated in the best section of Pittsburgh, Cather occupied two rooms on the third floor and Isabelle became a cultivating influence upon her, as Cather often remarked. In fact, by 1902, Isabelle took her on her first European holiday. They arrived in Liverpool on June 26th and traveled through England to France, returning to Pittsburg in late September. To help fund her travels, Cather had arranged to write travel letters for the Nebraska State Journal, as did many women who wrote journals and letters to be published during or after their journeys.

One of the major anticipations of the vacation was a desired meeting with A.E. Housman, the English poet with whom she felt a strong affinity. Since she had encountered his first volume, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1897, Cather believed that she had found the artistic soul matching her own. She sought him in Shropshire, saturating herself in the locations he had described in his poems. Failing to find him there, she procured his address from his publishers and, without advance warning, she and Isabelle descended upon him in his London home, joined by Dorothy Canfield, who was engaged in graduate study at the Sorbonne. In Houseman's presence, Cather found herself incapable of making *any* sort of connection with him, unable to even hold a conversation.

[127] This observation was made by Louise Pound.

She retreated to stiff silence as Dorothy easily engaged him in a lively discussion of philology. The reticent poet and rather dry scholar apparently came alive as he talked with the well-bred, refined and well-educated Canfield. Once upon the street, evidently, Cather broke down into enraged tears and made a scene, given various remarks in her letters to Canfield in early and later years, as seen below. To make things worse, in France, Cather's poor French suffered by comparison to Canfield's fluidity. While this is a rather brief description of the humiliating scenes of 1902, I'd like to more closely examine the emotional fallout revealed in her travel letters and the dynamics of the scene which became indelibly marked in Cather's mind, emotional dynamics available when, over fifteen years later, she wrote about the "sensitive, roughneck" prairie boy in France.

Beginning with a July 1 entry,[128] the tone of Cather's early travel letters is light, a bit condescending when comparing the common folk with those of Nebraska, but the language and the descriptions are positive, nevertheless. Anticipating the well-known juxtapositions that inform her poetics, she wrote: "Constant comparisons are the stamp of foreigners; one continually translates manners and customs of a new country into the terms of his own before he can fully comprehend them." Even her observation of an event in which the poor were fed, finds her blithely describing them as "eager and pleased as children" and "smiling with satisfaction" at the food they were given.

Her July 11 travel entry is written from Ludlow, Shropshire—A.E. Houseman country. Not surprisingly, she exalts "the unchangedness and time-defying stillness" of the area. In a long entry she rhapsodizes over Houseman and Shropshire, over "the singularly individual beauty . . . the hillside fields, the brooklands and villages which

[128] All references to the travel letters are taken from *The World and the Parish* unless otherwise indicated. Willa Cather. *The World and the Parish: Articles and Reviews 1895-1902.* Edited by William Martin Curtain. UP of Nebraska Press. 1970.

moved a modern singer to lyric expression of a simplicity, spontaneity and grace the like of which we have scarcely had in the last hundred years." In the effusive 6 July 1902 letter to Dorothy Canfield in Paris, a letter Cather wrote shortly after arrival in Ludlow, her words tumble onto the page in a tone of excitement. "Somehow it makes it greater to have it all true." She and Isabelle have repeatedly read the poems "until our eyes are blind and our reason distraught." Everywhere "ivy, ivy, ivy, walls and walls, the ruined splendor of a thousand years . . . a thousand scarlet poppies flaunted their color and nodded and balanced themselves in the wind." She follows with a poem she has composed about the poppies, adding the declaration: "I'll not quit Shropshire till I know every name he uses," signing off, "A light heart to you from me, Willie."

Then the meeting with Houseman occurs mid-July. While her travel entry mailed July16th doesn't sound bitter notes, the entry entitled "Seeing Things in London," sent July 22nd,, does. With trenchant wit, Cather now describes a gloomy London and its gin-soaked masses. George Kates calls it "the least balanced and certainly the most compulsively and strangely written article" of the travelogues. He attributes it to her "encounter with a depressed world" that "reflects a discomfort so acute as at times to verge on torture, wrung from a provincial girl now plunged into the dregs . . . of metropolitan existence."[129] I don't agree. I suggest that the vitriolic language underscores the fallout of her humiliating visit to Houseman. In the heart of the Old City of London, where "the hard, garish, ugly mask of the immediate present drags one's attention away from the long past it covers, " she writes with disgust of the "absolutely gin-soaked" working class of London. Her scathing portrayal of "the London shoddy" is

[129] Willa Cather. *Willa Cather in Europe: Her Own Story of the First Journey*. Edited by George Kates. Knopf, 1956. For July 1 entries see Curtain, pps. 890-896. For July 22 entries see pps. 906-917. For "Merry Wives of Windsor " see 917-920

mean at best; London is no longer enjoyed for "the newness, the bigness, and the glitter of the untried" (an early July entry). Lodged in "the so-called respectable part of town," she could find no city "more gloomy, more ugly, more glum, more cruel than in London." She thinks that "possibly *all the failures of this generation* [my emphasis], the world over, have been sent to London, for the streets are a restless, breathing, malodorous pageant of the seedy of all nations . . .none so depressing as the London shoddy" under "the muddy day skies and leaky night skies." Even the shop girl with her "stooped shoulders" and "cheap jewelry" comes under attack as one who "seldom bathes" and "considers toothbrushes necessary only for members of the royal family." Her joy is merely "gin-fed."

Included in this travel letter is the description of her visit to a Latin quarter loved by Dorothy, Cather says. Uncharacteristically, Willa, who loves the romance cultures, finds them "not a little pathetic" as they wind along the street in a religious procession. She points to the "oppressive greyness[,] . . . oppressively ugly city" of "cold, grey London" as she surveys those gathered to watch, the "howling, hooting, heathen London mobs; men drunk, women drunk, unwashed and unregenerate," the onlookers held back by police. (Curtin, 907-90). The scene might, of course, invoke Hogarth, but the tirade sounds more vengeful, more personal. Notable, too, is the lack of letters between late July and early August: only a couple of brief notecards, a curt, impersonal and practical one to Dorothy and a similarly terse one to Charles in which she writes, " The tomb of Napoleon is the only thing I have ever found in the world which did not disappoint." By August 8th, the travel article sent from Paris, about Dieppe and

Rouen,[130,] evidences a more tempered tone. Yet, when Cather wrote Mariel Gere August 28, she only briefly mentions Dorothy.

I would agree with Kates, who wrote of Cather's travels, her "impressions went deep in 1902." I argue that not only the geography and culture but also the shame experienced in London went deep. Kates who perceptively remarks that that "keen disappointment . . . never ceased to have peculiar significance" for Cather, is more astute when he writes: "All of us see what by our own nature and personal experience we are destined to see" (124, 127). In fact, what we see, which details we select, which words we choose to describe those details are determined by affect scripts which direct and sensitize us to certain aspects we come to expect in every scene, based upon the collection over time of affect-trigger co-assemblies.

Thereafter, Cather's attitude toward Houseman altered as a result of that 1902 humiliation. In a 14 June 1903 letter to Viola Roseboro, she admits that she had been "Houseman's bond slave" mentally, since his first volume appeared six years earlier. But she no longer rhapsodizes over the poet, offering, instead, an unflattering portrait. Not only is his book unknown in his town, but also the library copy hadn't yet had its leaves cut, says Cather. "He lives in an awful suburb in quite the most horrible boarding house I ever explored. He is the most gaunt and grey and embittered individual I know." As a mere instructor in Latin inscriptions at the University of London, he earns little. "The poor man's shoes and cuffs and the state of the carpet in his little hole of a study gave me a fit of dark depression." Not everyone can care for his work, she says, even though it is

[130] These two cities, visited while Dorothy is still with them, also play a role in Claude's development in *One of Ours*.

"remarkable technically," and he "has kept all his Classical philology out of his verse." Philology was, of course, the very topic of discussion that engaged Dorothy and the poet.

Cather's attitude toward Dorothy changed as well. In an unusually long letter to Dorothy, 28 March 1903, Cather began a physical avoidance of her friend. Evidently, Cather was to have visited her but pleads feeble excuses in a "poor me" letter filled with drama and a litany of excuses, while claiming to be "so sick with disappointment" in being unable to visit Dorothy. Especially after the "wretched misunderstanding of things last fall," she so wants to please Dorothy, she claims. In a very short July letter sent from Wyoming, Cather brags about her increase in salary, of being named head of the high school English department and then complains that her "duty" to be in Red Cloud prevents her from visiting the Canfields in Vermont. Then, in the short letter written the day after Thanksgiving with the McClungs, Cather employs a number of excuses for not sharing her recent work with Dorothy, ending with a breezy apology for letting Canfield's letters go unanswered. It is no surprise that Canfield does not write to Cather for six weeks. In January 1904 she had complained to Canfield of the six-week silence and by early March Cather's plaintive letter suggests Canfield's coolness. Now, she says, she has fallen into a depressive state, her "winter of discontent."[131] Evidently, Dorothy has admitted (and Willa agrees) that they are in a "snarl." Although Cather says that she can't understand why, she writes:

[131] I should note that Cather often succumbed to depressive states, particularly after literary or personal criticism or rejection, after problems her body presented, or after suffering loss of relationships or living spaces. Many references in her letters attest to this. Sometimes, after having first adopted a defensive posture toward any offending object, she would later speak of nervous exhaustion or dark moods. According to Tomkins, as discussed above in the introduction, such reactions are indicative of the sufferance and attempt to escape shame for having suffered humiliation in some way: first the countering, then the succumbing to shame, having lost the desired object—praise, acceptance, control over one's body, security of a home space.

> Of course, I've always been conscious that I was ill tempered and ungrateful and that I behaved very childishly abroad two years ago, and frankly, I don't see how you could overlook it. There is just a terribly low streak of something both ill tempered and ill bred that comes out in me too often. It is surely not your fault that I didn't understand French and that I felt very provincial and helpless and ignorant, and its [sic] incredible that any grown person should have behaved as I did. It makes me ill to think of it, it surely does. . . . Oh, the whole thing was simply beastly!—and I've no one but myself to blame. I suppose I am one of those perverse beings who get stiff and haughty when they know they are in the wrong, for I've felt a little constrained ever since, knowing all the while that the unpleasantness was all of my manufacture. That's an ugly thing to admit, but its only fair to own up to one's pettiness. It is just a grudge against myself that in some way gives me a sense of aloofness.

Cather continues. Living with Isabelle has taught her what a "sham" she is "and has always been. . . . I played to myself and posed to myself until my poor spirit will never hold up its head again." She signs simply, "Willie." It is an intriguing, reflective and revealing letter. There is little wonder that the stories she was working on, the stories of *The Troll Garden* (1905), written between 1902 and 1905 are so bleak and embittered. In fact, she would write friend Elizabeth Sargeant, 27 June 1911, that all she could now see in the stories of *The Troll Garden* was "the raging bad temper of a young person *kept away from the things she wanted* [my emphasis]."[132]

Around the same time she wrote to Canfield, Cather wrote to Will Owen Jones (6 March 1905), hinting of the reproach from him and the Red Cloud community after the magazine release of one of those stories, "A Wagner's Matinee, in which she says she simply used local descriptions and "a few of my own recollections." Upset by having received "a ringing slap" in Owen's Nebraska State Journal column, she admits that her own family also "are quite insulted—they say it isn't nice to tell such things." She decides to delay the publication of *The Troll Garden* until the following fall as yet

[132] To Will Owens she tried to explain the early "warped" stories: "If a young man—or woman sits down in the cornfield and howls, it is because he--or she—"hadn't found the right food and went about half-nourished" (29 May 1914).

another "snarl" arises between Cather and Canfield, as the January 1905 letter to Dorothy Canfield reveals. Canfield demands that the story entitled 'The Profile" be deleted from Cather's forthcoming volume, claiming that it is closely based upon a friend's disfiguring facial scar and will devastate the woman if the public reads it. The friend is one who had joined Canfield and Cather in France. Cather refuses. As a result, Dorothy uses her father and his connections to eventually persuade Cather's publishing house to delete the story. Understandably, the distancing, which began in 1902 after Cather felt humiliated by her own invidious comparison to Dorothy in Europe, deepened during the intense disagreement over Cather's short story, finally ending in a breach that lasted for over fifteen years.[133] Following the fiasco, Cather confides to Viola Roseboro during the winter of 1905 that she is "feeling eternally disgraced in the eyes of everyone connected with the firm.. . . . You get to wanting to stay at home just to hide your own dullness—you're so afraid you'll be found out and your shameful nakedness exposed."

Though Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield eventually exchanged a few notes regarding their work, the personal bond remained frayed. In response to Fisher's positive review of *Song of the Lark* (1915), Cather took the opportunity to reach out to thank the still-distanced friend, but in typically self-derogating comparison, she spoke of their respective audiences, flattering Fisher that her review will help because, after all, Cather's readers are merely the German brewers, while Fisher's are the upper crust and the university folk. Furthermore the Red Cloud community trusts Fisher's morally higher opinions. Later, responding to Fisher's 1921 Yale review of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, Cather writes on March 21st: "No other person would mean as much in Red

[133] See Mark Madigan for extensive details of the breach, "Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield Fisher: Rift, Reconciliation, and *One of Ours*." *Cather Studies* I, Edited by Susan Rosowski, UP of Nebraska, 1990, pps.115-129.

Cloud, where you and your work are much beloved," an implicit contrast with herself and her own work. She ventures: "Are we never, I wonder, to come together for a talk again? . . . I'm not fierce anymore."

In a follow up letter dated 8 April 1921, Cather literally begs Fisher to see the changes in her personality, insisting that her younger self "was the fool of me . . . the wrong headed and tormented fool of me. Discouraging years those were, you know." She admits, "I know I was sullen and defiant for a good many years," but now "I am reasonable." In a letter filled with exclamation points, she repeatedly says that she just wants to please her friend.[134] Evidently, Fisher's response was reticent because the tone of the following letter of 6 January 1922 letter is tepid; Cather has pulled back to politeness. But this will soon change after Cather asks Dorothy to read proofs of *One of Ours*, the work begun December 1918.

4.3 Claude

> "[I]t is a long journey between being burned at the stake and being able to write about it agreeably.
>
> Willa Cather
> Letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, 7 April

Almost twenty years would pass before Cather overtly mined her humiliating 1902 experiences in Europe. In *One of Ours* (1922) she would relate the story of Claude, another "wrongheaded and tormented fool" through whom Cather recalls her own "discouraging years." Here she traces the escape of yet another young struggling captive soul from a community perceived as callous and misunderstanding, portraying the affects

[134] This desire of wanting to please a valued object is repeated so very often in Cather's letters to her family and close friends, especially after some falling out or criticism.

that motivate Claude's behaviors. In displaying the conflicted interiority that drives him, the author explores her own.

Cather did not begin *One of Ours,* or what she always referred to as *Claude,* immediately after learning of her cousin's 28 May 1918 death in Cantigny, France. Only after hearing of Lt. G.P. Cather's death and reading his letters home, and after meeting many returning American soldiers did Cather begin to write the novel. In June she wrote G.P.'s mother, Cather's Aunt Franc, that she had seen her cousin's name in the New York Times, "under that glorious title 'killed in action' which sets men apart from their fellows." She is "proud" to bear the name of the young man who, always restless on the farm, had finally found a "place of honor" and judges his directing fire from a parapet "a useful sort of bravery[,] . . . so much more useful than if he had brought in a wounded comrade." When she again writes to Aunt Franc, 11 November 1918, Armistice Day, she is already narratizing his death: "I like to feel that G.P. and the boys who fell with him, who went to far *to fight for an ideal and for that only* [my emphasis], became and are God's soldiers." By December 2nd she wrote her publisher Greenslett that she had begun two new books.

Throughout the winter she spent much time visiting wounded soldiers and entertaining others, dining with them in her home or joining them in the theater and elsewhere. To Meta, brother Roscoe's wife, Cather wrote that a Marine had told her: "'There's one subject you can always pull the Marines together on---La Belle France.' . . . And what it has done for them! Street boys, farmer boys, any old boys. . . . I've always loved France so much that I can't help but get tearful when the lads talk about her" (28

December 1918). By January 6th she had written four chapters that she said "wrote themselves," but would let no one see a word until much later.[135]

The novel *One of Ours* is ostensibly about a discontented, floundering, highly sensitive young man of the prairies who enlists in the American Expeditionary Forces during WWI only to die in his first battle. Growing up on a large, successful modern farm, the son of an economically stable family, Claude is a misfit by his own standards. Restlessly seeking something to admire, but terribly afraid of "being fooled," he suffers one misperception after another. With intended irony, other focalizers and the narrator repeatedly undercut his perceptions. Yet, the authorial empathy for the often misguided, foolish, "clumsily romantic" boy reveals Cather's intimate understanding of the experiences and emotions that motivate his actions.[136] Despite having had his romantic expectations repeatedly debunked, he appears to be driven by abstract ideals to join the American Expeditionary Force. But he is more strongly motivated by a desire to escape prairie life and to close the door on his past, or, as Cather more aptly said of herself, to escape himself in that past.

The first two thirds of the book invite the reader to experience Claude as a youth in a prairie environment, a youth fraught with Cather's own ambivalences. The remainder of the novel is seen through the eyes of the young man's brief first encounter with French culture during the WWI. "In his feeling for France, Claude is Cather," avers

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[135] I believe that, as with *Saphirra and the Slave Girl* (1940), Cather's memories poured out and had to be carefully culled before seen. Of the composition of that book, she said that she had disposed of enough material to weigh five pounds. "The rush of Virginia material, when once I began to call them up, was heavy upon me. I wrote many chapters of Virginia ways and manners, just as things came back to me, for the relief of remembering them in a time of loss and personal sorrow. That 'eased' me, and comforted." (Letter to Ferris Greenslett, 28 November 1940) See letter to Alfred Knopf 6 January 1919 regarding the four chapters.

[136] Cather often refers to herself as both "foolish" and "romantic." She called Claude "clumsily romantic" in her 28 August 1921 letter to Greenslett.

Janis P. Stout, referring to the Francophilia, which the author and her protagonist share. While this statement is accurate, the complicated reasons for that cultural affiliation emerge in the novel about Claude.

Indeed, the novel *is* about Claude despite the many disparaging reviews attacking what was perceived to be a war novel attempted by a woman with no knowledge of war. Distressed, Cather insisted publicly and privately that the narrative is not a "war novel"; it is and had always been about Claude, the protagonist, based upon her cousin Lt. G.P. Cather, who was, she says, like her but different.[137] An attentive reading of the novel discovers a story centered upon Claude's experiences, his emotional entanglements with family, townspeople and soldiers, his idealizations, his disappointments, his struggles around class, status and self worth. It is most definitely about Willa Cather. G.P. Cather/Claude Wheeler is merely an analogue trigger for unresolved memories in which invidious comparisons she made about herself in relation to others at key moments are replayed and reworked through the very similar experiences Claude Wheeler undergoes.

4.4 The Making of a Cynic

The reader first meets the nineteen-year-old Claude Wheeler eagerly anticipating the day at the traveling circus in town. His tousled red hair stands "in peaks like a cock's comb," a fool's cap. Fastidious, he shuts the door on disorder and avoids or disregards anything disagreeable as he readies himself. After washing the car he expects to drive to town, he joins his parents for breakfast, where he is about to be disappointed—and made

[137] Letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, 8 March 1922.

the focus of ridicule--by his father. Nathan Wheeler[138] is a successful, imposing man who found illness in others "humorous" and who "liked to tease and shock diffident people."[139] The narrator concludes: "He was a jolly, easy-going father, indeed, for a boy who was not thin-skinned" (9-10).

As soon as Mr. Wheeler is seated, he winks at Ralph, the youngest, just before dashing his middle son's hopes for a pleasurable day in town. In his "deliberate, State-of-Maine drawl" he states that "the boys," Claude, Ralph and the hired hands, whose coarse and dirty habits so disgust Claude, are to take a load of putrid hides to town in the old wagon drawn by mules. The other males at the table break into laughter. Claudes' face reddens and he retreats to stiff silence, thinking: "It was like his father's idea of a joke." Mrs. Wheeler, silent, also suspects a humiliating joke at Claude's expense. "She had learned that humour might wear any guise" and had often been the butt of her husband's cruel jokes (6). Once, during cherry season, she told her husband that her weak back hindered her picking. "Claude remembered that she persisted rather complainingly." Nathan walked out and returned to tell her that cherry picking would no longer pose a problem. Claude, then a happy little boy of five, eagerly accompanied his mother to find the "bleeding stump of the tree" lying next to the rest of its sawed-off beauty. Enraged, he screamed, cried, flailed and kicked as his mother insisted that he stop. Inhibiting his display of affect, she made him promise to say nothing about the tree

[138] The prototype is George Cather, Charles's coarser older brother. By comparison, the always gentle, soft-spoken, financially challenged and ineffectual Charles suffered in the community, a comparison Cather could not have failed to register. The name, Nathan Wheeler, is that of Lyra Wheeler Garber's father. Garber figured largely in Cather's youth and served as prototype for Marion in *A Lost Lady,* Cather's next novel, also initiated by the flood of memory following Garber's mid-1921 death.

[139] Cather herself berated weakness or infirmity. When Olive Fremstad called Cather's dangerous erysipelas, the result of a pin scratch, "'silly'", Cather wrote: "People who go and have grotesque accidents are clowns. . . . People minus their leg or their hair are roaringly funny and ought to be laughed at and exhibited, not coddled." During this time she hid from others, lacking "self-respect." (Letter to Sergeant 24 Feb 1914). Claude suffers the same infection and self-contempt.

to his father, trying to rationalize the cruel act, disallowing Claude's anger and grief. Claude kept his promise, though Mr. Wheeler saw the anger in his young son, who displaced it into angry eyes and an "expression of scorn. Even then his lips were only too well adapted to hold the picture of that feeling," observes the narrator. "A violent temper and physical restlessness" became "the most conspicuous things about Claude when he was a little boy"(25), characteristics Cather herself would later display.

These and other scenes hint at the affect inhibition that exists in a family of strangled communications, of silences.[140] The resulting affect hunger in Claude is evident in his expressed affection for Mahailey, the slow-witted caregiver modeled on the similarly slow Marjorie who lived with Cather's family. Mahailey is the only character that consistently demonstrates unconditional affection for Claude—and "only when they were alone"—states the narrator. Returning from school, he "knew Mahailey was gladder to see him come home than any one except his mother." When Claude sees Mahailey, "[c]onfused emotions surged up in [him]. He went in quickly and gave her a bear hug", but only gently embraced his mother "with the almost painful tenderness he always felt, but seldom was at liberty to show."

Mahailey is an important focalizer whose perceptions and spoken observations often closely echo Cather's own. The reader pays attention to Mahailey who, says the narrator, is "shrewd in her estimate of people." Claude, too, "thought her judgment sound in a good many things. He knew she sensed all the shades of personal feeling, the

[140] On silences in the Cather home, see Ann Romines, "Violence, Silence and Privacy: The Problem of Family Feeling in Cather's Late Fiction." *Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather.* Edited by Joseph R. Urgo and Merrill Maguire Skaggs. UP of Fairleigh Dickinson, 2007, pp.57-72.

accords and antipathies in the household . . .[141] She is the one who correctly interprets Claude's silence and behaviors, recognizes Mrs. Wheeler's enmeshment with her son, and passes judgment on the rest of the family's problematic actions. It is Mahailey who anticipates the fallout of Mr. Wheeler's cruel jokes. It is she who hides things from greedy Ralph, the youngest son. Mahailey privately doubts the wisdom of Claude's marriage, doubtful about "what it was the preacher did to make the wrongest thing in the world the rightest thing in the world" (158). It is she who anticipates and counters community gossip. She also knows that Claude will go to France even before he announces it. Tellingly, it is not of his mother that Claude thinks but of Mahailey when he wakes in comfort in an ordered French home during a brief leave.

Much like Cather, Claude never returned home "without emotion." "He both loved and hated to come home. He was always disappointed, and yet he felt the rightness of returning to his own place. Even when it broke his spirit and humbled his pride, he felt it was right that he should be thus humbled." (40-41)[142] Nathan Wheeler takes particularly cruel pleasure in humbling his wife and middle son, in interrupting their desires. Mrs. Wheeler's defense against her husband is to lose herself in religious meditation and rereading her old books. "Her personal life was so far removed from the

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[141] Cather expressed this sentiment several times. An example is cited above in her 1925 praise of Katherine Mansfield's depiction of "the secret accords and sympathies which lie hidden under our everyday behavior . . . how human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life . . . never wholly satisfactory."

[142] In various letters, and through thinly disguised autobiographic protagonists such as Thea and Lucy, Cather expresses similarly ambivalent sentiments. See particularly the heartrending letter to Douglas, 8 July 1916, in which she speaks of the disapproval she has received at home. "I shall always be sorry that I went home last summer. . . . It seems not to be anything that I do, in particular, but my personality in general, what I am what I think and like and dislike, that you all find so exasperating after a little while." She muses that the disapproval has been good for her. "I've had my belting." She resolves that she "won't expect too much " from her family in the future. A 6 December 1919 letter to Jennie attempts to deflect some previous criticism in which she tells her mother that she had a burst of temper at the bottom of the page but has "cut out" the offending words. See also letter to Jennie 2 March 1927, though others could also be cited.

scene of her daily activities that rash and violent men could not break in upon it." Unlike his mother, however, Claude fears his father's cruel humor, having developed and strengthened a shame script.

> Claude couldn't bear ridicule very well. He squirmed before he was hit; saw it coming. Mr. Wheeler had observed this trait in time when he was a little chap, called it false pride, and often purposely outraged his feelings to harden him, as he had hardened Claude's mother, who was afraid of everything but schoolbooks and prayer meetings when he first married her. (24-5)

Silvan Tomkins points out that such "hardening" can backfire. He claims that "when any negative affect is produced by another person or class in a position of control, then denied overt expression by a controlling person who produced the affect and yet cannot be completely suppressed . . . . [the] oppressor grows more oppressive in imagination and the humiliation is deepened." In addition, as we will see with Claude, the child learns to self-loathe and to expect failure, often becoming scornful. Cynicism can then emerge as a strategy to be used in an attempt to reduce shame. In fact, cynicism "may function not only as an outlet for counter contempt but as a vehicle for expressing some of the self contempt generated by the presumably oppressive conditions. . . Not only do those around him fall short but so does he" in the endless invidious comparisons he draws. (Tomkins, 238ff). Yet, the openly scornful cynic privately sustains the partially suppressed desire. Cather understood the emotional dynamics that produce the cynic and the environment that fosters it. In fact, as early as 1891 in her college essay about Hamlet, she contends that his cynicism stems from deep disappointment. "It is the tenderest, deepest feeling that, when once embittered became most acrid. That man who has never hoped, never dreamed, never loved, never suffered is never a cynic." Thus, only those who, humiliated, experience the shame that results from desire interrupted

develop cynicism. Given that Cather wrote the novel's self-promoting blurb, which refers to Claude as a Hamlet of the prairies,[143] it is of interest to consider that in 1891 she also claimed, "The keynote of Hamlet's character is merely this: He was very sensitive, he felt intensely, and he suffered more than other people, that was all." She could have been speaking of Claude—or of her young self whom people "cut deeper" then, when there was "enough to be ashamed of."[144]

After breakfast, on the way to the barn, Claude displaces his humiliated fury by kicking a young dead chicken, his rigid, drawn shoulders suggest a suppressed anger, a "determined self-control" (7). This suppression of affect repeatedly occurs. For example, later in the novel, again winking at Ralph, Nathan flatly informs Claude that he will not be returning to town to continue his education. Instead, he will remain home to take care of the farm while Nathan and youngest son, Ralph, go off to work a newly acquired ranch in Colorado. Intentionally baiting, Nathan "looked with twinkling eyes at his son's straight, silent figure in the corner." Shading his eyes with his hand Claude says nothing, feeling as if a trap had been sprung on him." Neither does he later voice his displeasure when his new bride shuts him out of the their sleeper car on their wedding night. Yet his body and tone speak to the reader.

When Claude does make it to town to the circus, he seeks his friend, Bohemian Ernst Havel. Not surprisingly, he goes out of his way to avoid his father. Avoidance is a classic learned defense strategy engaged when one anticipates or fears the possibility for humiliation. Finding Havel, Claude "felt he had closed the door on his disagreeable

[143] See Porter, *On the Divide,* regarding Cather's production of self-promoting blurbs. For Hamlet essay see Slote, *The Kingdom of Art,* pp. 426-36.
[144] See letter to Fisher late May 1902. On 10 January 1898, she had written Mariel of the desire to "make people take back the bitter things they said in those years when bitter things hurt so." The "townspeople" are usually depicted harshly as greedy, gossiping, hard-hearted, judgmental, condescending types.

morning" (11). But he hasn't. Although he would like to take his friend to dinner at the hotel, to do so would be considered an extravagance by those who adhered to what Claude, cynically, will repeatedly refer to as "the Wheeler way." Here, for the first time, we are introduced to the oppressive voice in Claude's mind that interferes whenever he desires to act in a way he perceives as unacceptable to family expectations and incur ridicule. This internal oppressor remains with Claude until the end.

> If his father or Bayliss heard that he had been [to the hotel]—and Bayliss heard everything—they would say he was putting on airs, and would get back at him. He tried to excuse his cowardice to himself by saying that he was dirty and smelled of hides; but in his heart he knew that he did not ask Ernest to go to the hotel with him because he had been so brought up that it would be difficult for him to do this simple thing. (11)

Knowing Claude's restraints, Havel has brought a picnic, and, knowing that Claude dare not venture into a saloon, he has brought beer. In humiliated fury, Claude "rips open" a pickle jar, thinking: "He was nineteen and afraid to go into a saloon, and his friend knew he was afraid." "The boy felt bitterly about the way in which he had been brought up, and about his hair and his freckles and his awkwardness" and his name and his clothes; "he knew that he looked like a green country boy" (28-9). "He sneered at himself for his lack of spirit" and while acknowledging that he can't assert himself with his father or mother, he insists to himself that he could with the rest of the world. Of course, the narrator undercuts this assertion in the very next sentence as she often does his other self-delusions. Claude's thoughts exhibit Tomkins's description of one who has repeatedly suffered at the hands of a self-righteous parent inhabiting the role of representative and defender of norms. Such sufferance may encourage

> a masochistic displacement of oppression, and humiliation, to the ideological realm of objective norms towards which the individual can abase himself without total surrender to the one who originally imposed the norms. Such self-

> flagellation can be understood as vicarious oppression humiliation in which the internalized norms act as the vicarious oppressor, and self-abasement becomes the vicarious avowal of humiliation. (438)

That is, "the Wheeler Way" becomes the internalized norms against which Claude resists but to which he anxiously submits. Cather, who fought against "Red Cloud ways"—and sometimes "Southern ways"--, understood the battle.[145]

Thus, Havel's uncomplicated intellectual curiosity and forthrightness, attract Claude. "The Bohemian boy was never uncertain, was not pulled in two or three ways at once. He was simple and direct. . . . . Claude felt that his friend lived in an atmosphere of mental liberty to which he himself could never hope to attain" (12). In the same way he is attracted to the Erlich family's open camaraderie. Wide-ranging intellectual sparring and free expression of affect make him desire inclusion in their circle, albeit self-consciously, ambivalent about his worthiness. But Claude will deny himself the pleasures he experiences with the Erlichs, rationalizing through invidious comparison that he doesn't belong to their class, their world.

Having established Claude's tendencies toward faulty perceptions, which emerge from romantic desires in conflict with a shame script, and having laid the grounds for his affect hunger and for the cynicism with which he meets the world in which through his invidious comparisons he will always fall short, Cather heavy-handedly inserts a paragraph set apart both in space and tense, directly commenting upon Claude. The reader is meant to pause. Claude

> has no friends or instructors whom he can regard with admiration, though the need to admire is just now uppermost in his nature. He is convinced that the people who might mean something to him will always misjudge him and pass him

[145] Consider the many times and ways she textually criticized prototypes of Red Cloud. For early examples, one merely reads *The Troll Garden* stories. In *O Pioneers!* she illustrates the small-mindedness of townspeople. In *Song of the Lark* she negatively depicts "Moonstone-ness" In "Old Mrs. Harris" the town's criticism of the Harris family is evident. In *Lucy Gayheart* gossips abound.

> by. He is not so much afraid of being lonely as he is of cheap substitutes, of making excuses to himself for a teacher who flatters him, of waking up some morning to find himself admiring a girl just because she is accessible. He has a dread of easy compromises, and he is terribly afraid of being fooled.

To be fooled, to expose himself as a fool, would subject him to humiliation. To avoid such exposure, and the shame that follows, Claude repeatedly falls back on his shame script theory to remain vigilant.

4.5 The Cynic's Invidious Comparisons

Silvan Tomkins writes of those operating from a shame script theory: "Often the individual haunted by humiliation and shame will compare himself with an ideal specially constructed to defeat him. Even if held in esteem, he will find ideals by which he can victimize himself by comparing himself to predetermined disadvantage."[146] Furthermore, this dynamic "appears linguistically as a radical increase in the use of comparative, relational words," a practice Cather and Claude share. Thus, an individual can reduce any achievement by invidious comparison. Even an esteemed person can sustain self-contempt through unfavorable comparison to "an aspiration just this side of omniscience and omnipotence," says Tomkins. I am reminded of Cather's initial voiced pleasure of each new work, usually followed by belief that it just isn't good, followed by pleasure if critics praise, later followed by her criticism of the work and a false recollection that few praised it. This happened with her poetry volume, with *Alexander's Bridge*, *My Antonia*, *Song of the Lark*—just to name a few. More poignant is the self-contempt often evident in her unguarded letters.

[146] For Tomkins' discussion of invidious comparison as a shame reducing strategy see pps 238ff.

Tomkins discusses this "perceptual overdetermination" that operates as self-monitoring. The individual will ask: "Is what I've done shameful?" "Is he trying to humiliate me?" "Will he find out I am inadequate?"[147] Shame can manifest itself through invidious comparisons whereby several scenarios are possible. One type of comparison is when the whole self is conflicted when finding itself among perceived superiors; the initial embrace of a belief in belonging later falls victim to the shame script temporarily held at bay. This dynamic occurs in Claude's encounter with the Erlichs. The second scenario occurs when the (whole) self selects a perceived superior against which to compare, confirming a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I am a nobody. I am worthless." Claude does this on several occasions, most obviously when he meets Lt. David Gerhart in France. A third dynamic occurs when one part of the self, judging another part of the self, must either reject and destroy that offending self or forgive it. Literature is filled with such. One need only look at the work of the authors I mentioned at the outset of this work. This third option is what Cather does throughout her texts. She does so here, with Claude, burying a part of herself with him: forgiving the part of him that she accepts in herself, and damning the parts she rejects.

Claude's perceptual overdetermination is at rest when in a "proud moment," just having made an impressive football touchdown, he allows himself to accept Julius Erlich's invitation to accompany him home. "Claude consented before he had time to frighten himself by imagining difficulties," says the narrator. He "was perhaps less tied-up in mind and body than usual. He was so astonished at finding himself on easy,

[147] The reader sees this occur often in the novel, from the outset when Claude wrongly thinks his neighbor is implying that he is weak to the very end when he thinks that David has doubted his bravery.

confidential terms with Erlich that he scarcely gave a thought to his second day shirt and his collar with a broken edge,--wretched economies he had been trained to observe."

The Erlich home and family comprise an environment quite different from his own. "Here was none of the poisonous reticence he had always associated with family gatherings, nor the awkwardness of people sitting with their hands in their lap, facing each other, each one guarding his secret or his suspicion, while he hunted for a safe subject to talk about." After dinner, he seeks a corner from which to watch the others as the camaraderie continues in the room filled with books, laughter and the lively exchange of ideas. Mrs. Erlich is charmingly maternal to all, leaving Claude enchanted, surprisingly unembarrassed and unselfconscious. Before any visit Claude "racked his brain for things to talk about," having been taught that "you weren't supposed to say much; it was supposed to be beneath dignity to explain oneself or talk about ideas." Doing so "was because you liked to hear yourself talk" like Ernst Havel, whom his family thought "very conceited and foreign." But, thought Claude, "Since you never said anything, you didn't form the habit of thinking." So, becoming comfortable at the Erlichs, he practices "airing his opinions" in words he had never used. Self consciously, he would "blush and stammer." He "caught" himself, "as if he were trying to pass a lead dollar" and let someone finish his sentence. "The Erlichs thought him a clam." Claude particularly enjoyed spending time with Mrs. Erlich who fed his affect hunger with her fluttering domesticity, attentiveness to his thoughts, her sympathetic ear. (38-40) Nevertheless, he goes to the Erlichs only "as often as he dared." More often, he stood on the sidewalk "looking with desire at the lighted rooms within." His original discomfort lay in their perceived class and status, believing them to be wealthy, educated and

cultured, but later concludes that they merely knew how to live "by judicious indulgence in almost everything he had been taught to shun." James Westermann, a member of the family that provided the prototype for the Erlichs, states that the way the novel portrays the family, their home and Cather's visits are quite accurate, giving credence to my argument that Cather portrays her own complex emotions here.[148]

When Nathan withdraws his son from further education, Claude refrains from visiting the Erlichs. Avoidance is, after all, one of Claude's shame avoidance strategies.[149] When he does return to their parlor, "he thought he could never go back to the farm" (69).[150] But, typical to the shame-prone, an invidious comparison begins to grow in Claude's mind, reinforcing his unworthy self. He really didn't belong. He had nothing to offer the Erlichs. "[T]hey had been going on, and he had been standing still. . . . The thing that hurt was the feeling of being out of it." Going there had "only made him more discontented with his lot; his frail claim of their kind of life existed no longer." Besides, he thinks, he had been disloyal to his mother when he was happy with Mrs. Erlich. She had no chance any more than he at those better things. Shortly after his final visit, while writing a long letter to the Erlichs, he contemplates "the beauty of the submissive way in which the country met winter."[151] Later, Cather uses the same

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[148] For Claude's first encounter with the Erlichs, see pp.34-7. For Westermann,'s remarks see James Woodress. *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, p82. James Shively writes that Will Westermann told him the same.

[149] When Claude finds that Gladys, his close friend has been seeing his brother Bayliss, he is ashamed for and by her and so avoids her. (95) Later in the novel, he arrives at a conclusion that most sensitive people—his mother, Gladys, Mahailey, himself--are "imprisoned captives of their unappeased longings and futile dreams." Cather uses these very words and the image of a captive soul when writing about her other autobiographical protagonists. Having avoided his increasingly estranged wife, Enid, by pretending sleep, he wakes, "ashamed" of his thoughts the night before anddecides to "avoid thinking' as much as possible. (171)

[150] This sentiment occurs in several of Cather's works. See "A Wagner Matinee,' in which another starved character doesn't want to go back to the farm.

[151] The symbolism of being "covered over" and of "going under" is explored in detail in the next chapter's discussion of *Lucy Gayheart.*

imagery of blanketing snow to signal Claude's sense of shame as he locks his house after the failure of his marriage." He wondered how he could go on "unless he could get rid of this sick feeling in his soul." Looking at the snow, he thinks "how much better it would be if people could go to sleep like the fields; could be blanketed by the snow, to wake with their hurts healed and their defeats forgotten (184).

Several years later, following failures on the farm and an unsuccessful marriage, Claude enlists as a soldier, motivated not only by idealism, but also by the opportunity to escape what he perceives as his defeated past and futile future, made quite clear as he thinks during his Atlantic crossing: "I am all here. I've left everything behind. I'm going over"—as if the Atlantic were the River Lethe.

> Here on the *Anchises* he seemed to begin where childhood had left off. The ugly hiatus between had closed up. Years of his life were bottled in the fog. The fog had at first become a shelter; a tent moving thru space, hiding one from all that had been before, giving one a chance to correct one's ideas about life and to plan the future. The past was physically shut off; *that was his illusion* [my emphasis]" (246).

Cather will more strongly dispel the idea of being able to bury the past when on the battle field Claude suffers the noxious gases that arise when he disturbs dead bodies sunken in what he misperceives as a swimming hole and when Claude and his men try to cover over a dead hand which insists upon reappearing despite repeated burial efforts.

In France, when meeting Lt. David Gerhardt for the first time, Claude's initial response is to revert to his shame script. The moment he met Lt. Gerhardt's eyes, Claude "felt in a flash that he suffered by comparison with the new officer; that he must be on his guard and must not let himself be patronized" (279). Claude unconsciously marks David's class difference, what his troops call his "breeding," yet he doesn't understand why he feels "ill at ease with him," becoming vigilant against the smallest slight. In fact,

in predictable defensive countermove, Claude later patronizes David who is confused by simple lumber measurements. As they walk to the residence they will share, Claude assesses David as one who

> seemed experienced; a finished product, rather than something on the way [like himself]. He was handsome, and his face, like his manner and his walk, had something distinguished about it. A broad white forehead, under reddish brown hair, hazel eyes with no uncertainty in their look, an aquiline nose, finely cut--a sensitive, scornful mouth, which somehow didn't detract from the kindly, though slightly reserved expression of his face. (280-8)

When they arrive at Mme. Joubert's, Claude's hackles rise again over the ease with which Gerhardt demonstrates his French during conversation with their hostess, replaying Cather's own sense of inferiority in comparing herself to the also "finished" Dorothy in 1902. "He was quite disheartened by the colloquy." This "'Easterner'" spoke Mme. Joubert's "perplexing language as readily as she did herself, and he felt irritated and grudging as he listened." He hoped to practice his French, "but with this accomplished young man about, he would never have the courage." Also, Mme. Joubert's ease with Gerhardt, "for some reason, discouraged him." Sensitive to class and status, he "suspected that Gerhardt knew a good many things as well as he knew French, and that he tried to conceal it, as people sometimes do when they feel they are not among their equals; this idea nettled him."

Claude's relationship with David evolves, borne out by the fact that Claude begins to quietly speak his mind in a personal way and neither goes stiffly silent nor exhibits contempt for David or for himself. He merely admits his own inadequate understanding. It is further borne by his belief that he believes David is the kind of man whom he could admire without reservations; David becomes someone Claude can envy, emulate, wish to be. Once again Claude thinks that he can break with the past. "The

nervous tension in which he had lived for years now seemed incredible to him . . . absurd and childish, when he thought of it at all. He did not torture himself with recollections. He was beginning all over again" (332). But shame's door doesn't close. Past negative affects continue to inform and motivate the present, though, understood, they can be mitigated. Although Claude's shame script weakens through his trust in David's straightforwardness and empathy, it briefly inflects one more encounter. This is as David plays his dead friend's beautiful violin while he and Claude visit the friend's parents.

First, when asked to play tennis, Claude's sense of inadequacy kicks in. David notices that he "stood stiff and unbending by the window." Asked why he isn't changing, Claude replies "scornfully." "'Why should I?. . . . I've never had a racket in my hand." When David returns from playing, Claude has been able to accurately take stock of what he is feeling, an indication of his growth. His "flash of temper had died down," but his face was "perplexed and miserable." Biting his lip, he admits that in the grand house with the cultured French family, "I'm out of place. . . . I guess I've always been more afraid of the French than of the Germans. It takes courage to stay, you understand. I want to run." Then that evening, as David plays a violin for the family, Claude listens and reflects.

> [H]is lips compressed, his hands on his knees, Claude was watching his friend's back. The music was a part of his own confused emotions. He was torn between generous admiration and bitter, bitter envy. What would it mean to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power? If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here tonight a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it; tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. If one were born into this world a bear cub or a bull calf, one could only paw and upset things, break and destroy, all one's life. (337-8)

He continues to doubt his worth. When he sees David looking at him with approval after storming a German-defended room, he wonders, "Had David doubted his nerve?"(349). When met with the order to select two soldiers to go back for a group of men, he hesitates, uncertain. David and Hicks don't wait for his decision but act directly. Claude flagellates himself, thinking "with the deepest stab of despair," "Only a man who was bewildered and unfit to be in command of other men would have let his best friend and his best officer take such a risk" while he was sheltered in place (363). Even his last decision is fueled by shame. Confused by the enemy's sudden behavior he thinks: "he ought to be clever enough to know" what they were up to "but he was not." (365). In the end, his last act, directing fire on the parapet, is not the choice of a brave man but of a man fearing that his men were going soft as they looked at him "questioningly," a man acting to save face.

4.6 Mitigated Shame

By February 1922 Cather was readying the novel for publication that summer. On the 6th, she wrote Fisher, asking her to read the proofs. Claiming to know France less well than Fisher, she asked her to identify anything "misleading as to facts, or false to taste.. . . . If the things that touch him may be wrong," she says, she will correct errors and delete any "indiscreet phrase or incident." It was a canny way to get Fisher to read the novel. Fisher's response to the first set of pages prompted Cather March 8th to reveal the prototype to be her cousin and to note his similarity to and difference from her. "He never could escape from the misery of being himself except in action, and whatever he put his hand to either turned out ugly or ridiculous. There were years when we avoided

each other. He had contempt for my way of escape, and his own led to absurdities."[152] She said that she had never thought of him as subject matter because "it was all too painfully familiar. It was just to escape from him and his kind that I wrote at all." But, she writes, from the moment she read his letters, her mind had filled with him. She couldn't move on to other things. "The too-personalness, the embarrassment of kinship, was gone. . . . . It wasn't affection, but realization so acute that I could not get away from it." She was "all mixed up by accident of birth. Some of me was buried with him in France, and some of him was left alive in me." She continued, "It's a misfortune for me and my publisher that anything so cruelly personal, so subjective, as this story, should be mixed up with journalism and public events with which the world is weary and of which I know so little." He had given her "three lovely, tormented years. He has been in my blood so long that it seems to me I'll never be quite myself again."

Responding to Fisher's review of the second set of pages, Cather replies on 13 March. She had hoped to hide that the novel engages the war, but she couldn't have written about him, otherwise. His act, the citation, the letters home had obviously offered insight. "The war gave him to me. I never knew him till then. And it gave him to himself. He never knew himself till then. He was—not there! . . .The queer thing is that someway I care about him more than I did about the others." Cather had a large emotional investment in Claude, more accurately, in Claude's story. While the external events mar it, she writes, "run through it ugly and gray and cheap", those same events

[152] In fact, a cameo of her and the way she did escape her life might appear in Captain Harris Maxey, suggesting the emotional underpinning of the young woman who sought the culturally advantaged and well-connected. A poor southern Maxey, "was very ambitious, not only to get on in the world, but as he said, to 'be somebody.' His life at the University was a feverish pursuit of social advantages and useful acquaintances. His feeling for 'the right people' amount to veneration. . . . His whole manner, tense and nervous, was the expression of a passionate desire to excel" (246). Cather, herself had early expressed the desire to be somebody, to be useful.

"pulled it out from utter unconsciousness." Yet, even without them it would be a good book, she claims.

A letter Cather wrote 21 March finds her thanking Fisher for "giving Claude so much feeling and sympathy," happy that Dorothy had found what was intended, "a narrative that was always Claude." Fisher must have asked about her next work because Cather remarks, "Oh, it's an external affair. It's not Claude." She adds:

> How I laughed when you lighted upon Claude and David's violin. . . . That, my dear was the way you made me feel when we were in France together that time; and that was the way I made my poor cousin feel. You never meant to, you couldn't know it? Neither could David! Neither could I, when Grosvenor's lips used to twitch and curl. It's the way helpless ignorance always feels, and so many of the best of ours felt in France. This book gathered up everything. Even you did not escape."

The 7 April letter is the most revealing of the month of exchanges. Cather states that she would rather Fisher than anyone write the "authoritative" review of Claude. Responding to a question, she writes, "I don't know how much of the character is Grosvenor. It's a good deal me, a deal one of my brother's—a sort of composite family portrait." Then, in a more personal tone she confides:

> Well, I've accomplished something if after twenty years I've got across to you what the roughneck, the sensitive roughneck, really does feel when he's plunged into the midst of ---everything. It's not only his vanity that suffers—though that very much--; he feels as if he has been cheated out of everything, the whole treasure of the ages, just because he doesn't know some language or play some instrument or something. Those experiences are very terrible—they have even effected the history of the world. . . .
>
> …the emotional picture is you and I, in France twenty years ago. And now, after so long a time it "gets" you. I have my revenge! In a very joyful form, too! And that's the way old suffering and old chagrins ought to workout in the end. But it is a long journey between being burned at the stake and being able to write about agreeably. No ray of hope gets across to one then.

She, too, was like all those "uncultivated thousands who were brought up against an older civilization," who had brought back another type of "wound that would ache at odd times

all their lives." Now, she told her friend, the emotional part of her that had "the power to care" needed a long rest. She wrote, "I paid out everything I had."

4.7 Aftermath

Anticipating negative reviews, however, Cather had, even before writing Fisher, sent a thinly disguised plea to H.L. Mencken, a great supporter of her work and a leading critic. She hoped for his understanding of what she had attempted. On 2 Feb 1922 she asked him if he would read an advance copy of *One of Ours* out by mid summer.

> If Claude's emotion seems real to you . . . if his release makes something expand the least bit behind your ribs or under your larynx; then, I shall know that in spite of the damnable nature of the material I've got to port before the perishable cargo spoiled. Remember: this one boy's feeling is true. This one boy I knew as one can only know one's own blood. I knew the ugliness of his life and the beauty—to him—of his release. He can't help what went over this country, any more than you or I can. His own feeling was fine; and by an utter miracle one so disinherited of hope, so hopelessly at odds with all his life could ever be,-such an one found his kingdom; found conditions, activities, thoughts that made him glad he had lived. You see I absolutely know this; some of him still lives in me, and some of me is buried in France with him. But the presentation, of course, can make any truth false as Hell, as Mr. Othello said; and the pity of a true knowledge and a true desire is always that it should be so at the mercy [of] the feeble hand—the hand that very fullness of truth makes unsteady."

The letter was of little avail. Menken led the pack of pans.[153] He, like many critics, likes the first half of the book, acknowledging "a scene she knows most intimately" and the "interpretation of characters that have both her sympathy and her understanding," Despite that, he finds "a lyrical nonsensicality in it that often grows half pathetic." It is war fought out "on a Hollywood movie-lot." She was deeply hurt by his and other reviews.

[153] H.L. Mencken. "Portrait of an American Citizen." *Smart Set*. (October 1922, 140-2) *Willa Cather: The Contemporary Reviews.* Edited by Margaret Anne O'Connor. UP of North Carolina, 2009. O'Connor, pps.141-143.

In the midst of the many negative reviews attacking Cather's supposed lack of war knowledge, Dorothy did write a glowing and perceptive review of *One of Ours*[154] She begins the review by noting that the novel had "one unvarying purpose, to tell the story of Claude, that the "whole purpose of this novel, [is] to make us see and feel and understand Claude,. . . imprisoned and baffled . . . in a bare, neutral, machine-ridden world." The war was a door that led him "away from the world where he had been born but did not belong." Cather did not portray the plenty and beauty of the Midwest in which others could thrive, but in which Claude's "seeking nature" was starving. Then, trying to shore up her friend, personally, Fisher makes some interesting remarks. First, she suggests that only in losing her personality could the author imagine the hero. Otherwise, how could "a mature, sophisticated, traveled cosmopolitan like Miss Cather . . . sink herself so wholly in this simple-hearted, great souled, untraveled, unfulfilled American farmer." By saying this, Fisher flatters both the older and the younger Cather. Unfavorably comparing David to Claude [herself to Cather], for whom she has "deep respect and love as one of [her] own," Fisher says that David is "thin, hardly worthy of all of Claude's wistful, overestimating admiration." Fisher ends the review by pointing to what she believes to be the climax of the book, the scene in which David plays the violin. David's capacity to create the music "reveals to poor Claude a Promised Land of Beauty from which quite casually, through nobody's malice, and yet, irretrievably, he had been shut out"; she hears his "cry of suffering" and "anguish." Cather must have been moved.

[154] The review was published in the New York Times, 10 September 1922, p.14. See *Willa Cather: The Contemporary Reviews,* pps.119-121.

Writing *One of Ours* allowed Cather to mitigate the shame and self-contempt she sometimes exhibits in her letters and works. Through Claude, she recalled, transformed and reconsolidated her memories of her youth in Red Cloud to some degree—but only to some degree and only in parts. She would again recall aspects of her young self—albeit different aspects--yet again in *Lucy Gayheart*, working through other painful, shame-inducing moments to transform memory and another bit of herself would be laid to rest.

5.0 "VICARIOUS SHAME: THE HUMILIATED FATHER[S]"[155]: ENCHANTMENT AND DISENCHANTMENT

The theory that an individual emotionally attaches to persons similar to those with whom unresolved business exists[156] explains much of Willa Cather's attraction to Ethelbert Nevin. He was in many ways an analog of her father, Charles, to whom Cather was "unusually devoted," accounting for her display of "grief mixed with fury" and her "lost control" after his death. It was her intense attachment to this man that made her susceptible to vicarious humiliation when Charles's identity and status were altered after the move to Nebraska, when he was made the butt of town humor for his Southern ways and upbraided in the local papers for his role in a banking issue. For Willa, who gloried in the fact that her skin and blue eyes were like his, Charles was the good shepherd.[157] An avid reader of Shakespeare and Byron, Charles's expressed his Virginian gentility in soft-spoken courtesy and polished presentation. His chivalrous approach to women and his lack of aggressiveness and confrontation in all matters is seen not only in the characters modeled after him but also in Cather's references to him in her letters.[158] A gentle man who always called Willa "Daughter," he was unable to resist his wife's or children's

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[155] The quoted part of this chapter title and all references to vicarious humiliation are taken from the Silvan Tomkins section on vicarious humiliation and shame. Vol.II, pps. 130-159

[156] While the initial attachment theories of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth focused upon infant attachment. More recent researchers have focused upon the experiences of youth and adolescence as determining factors in adult attachment. While this is beyond the scope of the paper, see a brief example, David J. Wallin. *Attachment in Psychotherapy*. Guilford Press, 2007.

[157] See Bennett, 1961, p. 26-7 for Cather's response to her father's death.

[158] Especially see short stories "El Dorado: A Kansas Recessional" (1901) and "Old Mrs. Harris," (1932). Critics generally agree that the characters are drawn from Charles. He appears in her novels in various guises as well, as argued above. Multiple letters refer to Charles's dislike of confrontation. See 7 July [1914] letter to brother Roscoe regarding Cather's concerns about Charles's being badgered by brother Jim and hiding in the bathroom to avoid him. Cather also remarks that Father would give in as long as they badgered him enough. In her 7/2/34 letter to Roscoe she wrote that their father "had left to all of his sons some of his fine courtesy" which it made them "just a little more chivalrous" then other men.

demands. It was her problematized relationship to this once idealized father that informed her equally complex and unresolved relationship to the composer, Ethelbert Nevin, a man she often describes much as she does her father. They were slight boy-men, forever youthful in face and attitude, sensitive, poetic, ineffectual in business, unable to provide economic stability for wife and children, men taken in hand by stronger, more materialistic women. Unlike Charles, Nevin enjoyed the class and status Cather believed that her father had relinquished upon their move to Nebraska, where she witnessed his fall from the idealized parent she had known in Virginia. Thus, Cather's similarly enchanted attachment to an idealized Nevin—more importantly, to the life he represented--and her later disenchantment, a vicarious humiliation, mirrors to some degree her initial attachment to the idealized father whose feet of clay were exposed. Just as Cather expresses her unresolved business with her parents and town through her work, she displays her endopsychic struggles concerning Nevin through her varying textual versions of him between 1903 and 1935. Through these repetitions with difference, she revisits her relationship to him to dispel shame she felt.

According to Silvan Tomkins, one suffers vicarious humiliation when witnessing the shame of a beloved other, particularly an idealized other, such as a parent, one with whom one forges a strong identification. Furthermore, an individual's capacity for empathy and for identification, for living through others, enables vicarious shame by what happens to those others, and by what they do or fail to do. "To the extent to which the individual invests his affect in other human beings, in institutions, in the world around him, he is vulnerable to the vicarious experience of shame" (II: 149). In fact, even the shame *response* of the idealized other with whom a person identifies or with whom she

has experienced joy becomes a source of humiliation. The ashamed look of the other initiates a barrier to enjoyment between self and other, interrupting desire for engagement, if only temporarily.

When the idealized other has been exposed as flawed, enchantment collapses into disenchantment, trust is interrupted--trust placed in the other and also trust placed in the self who has misperceived the other as ideal. A double shame bind occurs. That is, witnessing the humiliating exposure of the other results in both vicarious shame and classic shame. The self who misperceived the object as ideal, and who still desires attachment to the humiliated and still beloved other, experiences shame because of her misperception. In bifurcation, an enchanted, misperceiving-self experiences shame before a dis-enchanted, embittered judging-self. Such an experience functions in much the same way as does betrayal by a trusted other, for in a sense, disenchantment is exactly that. To develop an understanding of Cather's motivation to create variants of the Nevin relationship, I necessarily quote at length from Tomkins' discussion of betrayal. However, please note that while Tomkins speaks of betrayal, I find that the same process applies equally to disenchantment.

Tomkins claims that the betrayed will first compare the new knowledge with a prior, innocent reading of the betrayer's character, drawing possible reasons for the self's innocence and for the other's duplicity. The betrayed will even generalize a view of the nature of human beings and of the nature of human condition, the very approach Cather takes in her later exploration of the actions and motives. Then the betrayed "may consider the possible alternatives for the threatened relationship and alternative consequences of alternative decisions." Vivid present and past scenes come into conflict,

accompanied by wishes to forget/deny those scenes that interrupted the joy of the relationship. Third, a need to organize memories for the future emerges. What is later retrieved, says Tomkins, will, in part, depend upon "future purposes" of the rememberings, "purposes that change as a consequence of successive retrievals." He explains:

> [I] may search for and retrieve the bittersweet memories of how it was before the betrayal; but having increased my longing by replaying these idyllic memories, I now retrieve the critically wounding scene, further *transformed* by the bitterness that has been accentuated by the contrast with the reward of the remembered good scenes. And so I fall more deeply in hate with that other, supported by my ability to both retrieve and further transform that hated scene with additional fresh, present insights. What one initially chooses to remember one may later choose to forget, to transform so to soften the memory or to harden the memory. The more important the memory, however, the more nuclear, the more it will continue to support an ever increasing family of remembrances to suit ever-changing purposes. So long as pain remains attached to that betraying but still desirable other, there will be unceasing search for past good and bad scenes in the attempt to solve the insoluble nuclear scenes. The ability to forgive or forget *may* be entirely contemporary. However, *it may also be a member of a much longer set of analogues scenes having their origin in early childhood* [emphasis mine].

I emphasize here to point to the foundational role Cather's relationship with Charles plays in her initial relationship with Nevin and in her (re-)experience of disenchantment and disruption.

Furthermore, as Tomkins emphasizes, "Any scene that can neither be solved nor renounced will prompt repeated searches for replays closer to the heart's desire, for restitution, for revenge, or for confrontation. These are experienced as 'variants,' the detection of differences around a stable core." As this project has argued, in agreement with many recent critics, Cather did indeed create variants of the same places and people

and situations.[159] Separating itself from the work of those other critics, however, this project has argued that early shame, the disruption of desire, was at the core of her creativity and her very apparent replay of figures, places and events. This final chapter continues to support that position by tracing her "variants" of the recurrent figure of Ethelbert Nevin.

5.1 Willa Cather and Ethelbert Nevin

"I feel as though my own youth had died with the man . . .

Willa Cather
Letter to Anne Nevin, 1901

When composer Ethelbert Nevin died at 3PM on February 17, 1901, Willa Cather was quite shaken. From Washington D.C., where she had been temporarily employed, Cather immediately telegraphed Nevin's wife, having been told of the death that very afternoon. In her seven page follow-up letter, dated 23 February 1901, Cather confesses to "Dear, Dear Mrs. Nevin" that though she had begun many letters, the writing of them were "impossible. . . . For the last week tears and I have not been strangers. . . .I suffer the same hurt," though "in an infinitely less degree," she tactfully adds. While acknowledging that many friends will mourn him, Cather insists that "there is no one whose love or sorrow is more sincere" than her own; her "heaviness and loss" when she thinks of him "so many times in the day and the night" are, she says, almost unspeakable. In grief and fury, she recalls that during the last time she had seen him he said he was going away "'where people could not say unkind things anymore.' Oh, I hope those

[159] For Tomkins' discussion of betrayal, see III: 558-61 . Beginning with the early critics such as Bernice Slote and Ann Romines right up to the more recent Cather critics such as Janis Stout there is general agreement about the repeated elements to be found in Cather's work.

people will suffer and suffer and suffer!" For Cather he was "the embodiment of all the happy privileges of art and of all its tragic sadness. . . a shepherd lad strayed out of Arcady into this dreary land of dullness and uniformity and shop-keeper standards." She thanks Anne for having "saved him and the wonder of him for us all as long as [she] could, otherwise he would have lashed himself out long ago." Then she invokes the lines Shelley wrote of Keats upon that poet's death: "'He had outsoared the shadow of our night;/ Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,/And that unrest which men miscall delight/Can touch him not, nor trouble him again.'" Finally, she closes: "With a loyalty that shall last as long as I live."

Despite an incongruous sentence offering help with his papers and biography, the long, effusive letter suggests that her affective experience of Nevin, his life and his death had been more than platonic. During the following years, Cather would rework her understanding of him and of her short-lived but complex relationship to Nevin. Versions of him and what he represented to her would re-appear at various junctures in her work, sometimes to the dismay of his wife and other Pittsburgh citizens. First, he would inflect the work she produced following his death: several poems in *April Twilights* (1903) and the early short stories, "A Death in the Desert" and "The Garden Lodge" (both published in her 1905 *The Troll Garden*). Decades later she would again recall Nevin in "Uncle Valentine" (1925) and, finally, in *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), her penultimate novel.[160] In this work she would lay both Nevin and her young relationship to him to rest. This chapter focuses primarily upon that final retrieval *Lucy Gayheart*. However, briefly tracing the earlier narrative appearances of Nevin types and the affect attached to them

[160] While Nevin types appear in all of these works, "Uncle Valentine" was such a close resemblance that many in Pittsburgh protested it and Mrs. Nevin cut Cather from her life until 1935. Cather never did learn to be discrete.

will better elucidate Cather's final resolution of the early experience. Doing so will also suggest why Cather drowned both Lucy Gayheart and Sebastian Clement, the older musician whose untimely death young Lucy mourns.

5.2 Enchantment

Cather met Ethelbert Nevin for the first time after he had returned home to Edgeworth, Pennsylvania in September 1897. The young Cather had recently begun working for the Pittsburgh Leader, owned at the time by the composer's brothers, who had inherited it from their father. But it is likely that she and Nevin were introduced by the Nevin family's close friend and next-door neighbor Mrs. Slack, whose musical evenings Cather attended. That is not to say that she was not familiar with the composer's work. In fact, she admits in her first article about him, "I had known Nevin's songs ever since I was old enough to differentiate sounds at all."[161] But when the young Cather attended his 1898 homecoming recital at Carnegie Hall with what she says was "considerable smothered excitement," she finally encountered the man whose songs had been woven into her youth and was enchanted.

By that time Nevin's private life had become problematic.[162] According to biographer John Tasker Howard, he had become "two persons—one something of the former Ethelbert; [sic] with the old time charm and the boyish enthusiasms, the other a neurotic, unhappy creature who could not conquer the enemy that lay within himself

[161] "Ethelbert Nevin: Return of Narcissus," *Courier*, February 5 1898. *The World and the Parish*, 532-538.
[162] For my understanding of Nevin and his possible appeal to Cather, I am indebted to the two biographies that draw heavily upon his own words. Vance Thompson. *The Life of Ethelbert Nevin: From His Letters and His Wife's Memories*. Boston Music Company, 1913. Archive.org/details/ehthelbertnevin. John Tasker Howard. *Ethelbert Nevin*. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1935. Archive.org/details/ethelbertnevin. Howard's biography is based on hundreds of letters, dozens of friends, Nevin's extensive diaries and his account books. Also helpful was Timothy BIntrim. "Cather's 'Rosary' and Nevin's Legacy in April Twilights (1903)." *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review.* Fall-Winter. 2012, pp. 28-33.

(221)." He was a closet alcoholic, increasingly dependent upon its stimulation; the episodes of nervous prostration experienced in youth had worsened; he was often ill and frail, sometimes canceling concerts. His moodiness swung from manic enthusiasm and hyper-production to deep depression and apathy. Toward the end of his life, when public performance proved too stressful, the secretive drinking not always apparent to friends and family began to overtly alter his sweet disposition. His last seven years, writes Howard, "were to present a constant interplay of light and shadow [and] . . . morbid introspection" that sometimes made him hurtful, even "made him violent with those he most loved." His wife, Anne, began to fill the role of a mother, to "guide him . . . to steer his enthusiasms into fruitful channels" (47). In fact, his late letters to his wife sound quite like those written to his mother during his youth abroad.[163] Having suffered years of financial problems as a result of his extravagances, his wife had finally become the manager of every part of his life—professional and personal. Explaining his return home as the response to his mother's illness, Nevin arrived in Vineacre during September1897 to recover from financial straits and nervous exhaustion. However, the love of his life, his mother, died the following August, actually intensifying his frailties.

Publicly, Nevin maintained the persona of a flighty but charming artist, an indulgent host, entertaining the fortunate few who gained entry to his circle of musical Sunday afternoons and evenings at home. In the review of his 12 January 1898 homecoming concert Cather offers her first public admiration of him, the lithe figure who

> sprang upon the stage a youth scarcely five feet three in height [he was 5'7"], with the slender, sloping shoulders and shapely hips of a girl. . . .[b]arely thirty-two, in fact, with the face of a boy of twenty [he was almost thirty six]. I have never seen a face that mirrored every shade of thought, every fleeting mood so quickly and vividly . . . so gloriously young.

[163] Both Nevin biographers include many letters home to his mother and his wife.

The "shepherd boys who piped in the Vale of Tempe centuries ago might have looked like that . . . not that his face is comely, far from it; it is the youth and joy of him, the lyric soul that shines through him . . . [164] Projecting her own emotions, as usual, Cather perceived that what was in his face was what he played: "tender, hopeless, infinitely sad, the poetic melancholy of the immortally young, of those who always suffer sharply as youth suffers." Amused, she recorded how the roses " kept going up over the footlights until they were stacked half as high as the piano and the applause did not cease." She would use this same line, almost verbatim, *twice* in the 1903 *Scribner* version of "A Death in the Desert."[165]

Cather's article emphasizes that when they met the next morning at the family home, Vineacre, their first hour was taken up with talks of his life abroad. To the eager, impressionable young woman he spoke of life in Florence and the Tuscan hills, of his life and concerts in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, "of all that free and glorious life of production and art." To her he was the "essence of genius; that exquisite sensitiveness, that fine susceptibility to the moods of others, to every external thing." He shared his love of roaming the surrounding hills and woods gathering wildflowers, his great enthusiasms for George Eliot, George Sand, Maupassant and Flaubert and his reverence for Shakespeare and Goethe. Furthermore, he was a Wagner acolyte, having heard Wagner's Ring Cycle at Bayreuth as well as his *Parsifal*—twice. Nevin and Cather also shared a close

[164] Note that Cather often speaks of Nevin using words that she, her friends and her biographers employ to describe her father, Charles.

[165] *Scribner,* January 1903. Cather heavily edited the story for inclusion in *The Troll Garden* (1905) and again later in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920). Interestingly, she doesn't ever really discuss his music, admitting that her friend Toby Rex (music critic and close Lincoln friend, Julius Tynedale, Jr) "has always accused me of too great a tendency to interpret musical compositions into literal pictures, and of caring more for the picture than for the composition itself." George Seibel, close Pittsburgh friend, concurs in a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, " Even Edith Lewis agreed.

friendship with Arthur Burgoyne.[166] Their twinned interests must have created instant communion. In addition and of no minor importance was Cather's appreciation of Nevin's lifestyle and his expression of good taste. His very rooms find their way into her later work.

In her January 10th 1898 letter to Mariel Gere, Cather had already shared her private enthusiasm about the "fellow of thirty with the face of a boy and the laugh of a girl." Calling him the "greatest of American composers," she thought him the "prince and king" of all the people she had met during the previous year and boasts of a shopping trip together during which the gallant carried her parcels and bought her white violets "as big as a young moon." Although spring found her in Washington and summer in the West, Cather returned that fall to what Janis Stout found to be a full social life, when the young writer began to spend increasingly more time with Nevin. She became a frequent guest at Vineacre, according to Kathleen Byrne and Richard Snyder, who find that she traveled frequently by train to spend musical afternoons and evenings at Queen Anne's Lodge, the multiple-room music studio Nevin had created on the property.[167] While they conclude that she "was completely captivated by Ethelbert Nevin, they deny Cather any stronger emotion than "an enthusiastic crush." They do determine from their many interviews and research in Pittsburgh that she was attracted to what Nevin had, strong artistic talent—but also "what she was determined to acquire," the lifestyle of the successful artist.[168] While I agree with their conclusion that Nevin's *lifestyle* increased her admiration, (much as

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[166] Arthur Burgoyne is recreated in *The Professor's House* (1926).

[167] Kathleen D. Byrne and Richard C. Snyder. *Chrysalis: Willa Cather in Pittsburg 1896-1906.* Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1980, p. x. They also believe that "vibrations starting from Cather's Pittsburgh years continued to resonate throughout her lifetime. . . . Pittsburgh and her people became part of Willa Cather's emotions, intellect and psychology." (95)

[168] *Chrysalis* p.33. Elizabeth Sergeant was surprised to find Cather "so respectful of wealth and swagger," and observed that "she enjoyed the protected, delicate nurtured life of the well-to-do." See *Memoir*, 48, 25.

Sebastian's does Lucy's), I find evidence of a stronger emotion, as usual, in her fiction. By 10 October 1899, Cather wrote to Dorothy Canfield, that upon her return from a brief trip to Chicago, Ethelbert had immediately sent a note and a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets, which she kept her entire life. She would shortly after mention that she had been spending all her spare time with "Bert," the "lovable man" who would dedicate *La Lune Blanche* to her in February 1900. It was a song based upon a poem by Verlaine, a poet favored by both.[169]

Mrs. Nevin's overt response to the adoring young westerner is not recorded. Anne Nevin, who was coping with her husband's private alcoholism and erratic temperament, his impulsivity and lack of financial capability was also managing his productivity, his publishing arrangements, his contracts and his public persona, according to Howard.[170] Furthermore, since the death of Nevin's mother, the care of the entire household had devolved upon her. It is no wonder that, as Byrne and Snyder claim, Anne "may have developed some hostility toward this woman who showed up a little too frequently" but was never asked to stay as a guest. But then, of course, few were made privy to the troubled Nevin—his less gracious doppelganger.[171] Nevertheless, Cather's extensive 15 July 1899 *Courier* [172] article, "An Evening at Vineacre,"offers the insider's view of one of the musical evenings. One of six privileged guests who have entered "Arcady" that evening, Cather describes a bit of the main house, proceeding to offer

[169] This information is in a letter to an unknown recipient with an unspecific date but determined to be sometime 1898. See Janis Stout Stout. *Calendar of Letters*. UP of Nebraska, 2002, #55.
[170] Howard, P. 322. Between 1899 and 1900, Cather may have influenced more songs, given their names and subject matter.
[171] Cather's use of the doppelganger is discussed below.
[172] The article first appeared in "The Passing Show" and was later folded into "The Man Who Wrote Narcissus" published in the *Ladies Home Journal* November 1900. See Curtain, W&P, pp. 626-37.

glimpses of its resident, the young prodigy "so sensitive and tender of heart and so grieved in pain that his family instinctively kept unpleasant things from him."[173]

She follows with a description of Queen Anne's Lodge, (named after Mrs. Nevin early in the marriage).[174] Recounting a conversation with the father, Robert Nevin, a man of "authority," she recalls his remarks, which sound rather Catherian: "'We are all creatures of sentiment, we live and die by it . . . it is the strongest force there is.'" This pronouncement, she says, "explains" the son, "who was in youth never taught to be afraid of sentiment . . . not afraid of simplicity, of directness." His songs have, "a breath from some world brighter and better than ours, an exhalation of roses and nightingale notes and southern nights." She rhapsodically goes on . . . and on. I agree with Janis Stout who surmises that Cather was more seriously involved with him than is suspected. [175]

[173] The Cathers followed this habit with Charles.
[174] The epigraph for section II of her article, "Queen Anne's Lodge," comes from a Nevin song and suggests an "insider's" access. It will be important to important to the reading below of "Uncle Valentine". "To Arcady hasn't never been? / Hark, while I give the mystic key, / The password that shall let thee in to Arcady!" The interiors of house and Lodge will also be recalled in her fiction.
[175] Stout offers a letter that Francis Gere sent to her sister Mariel, claiming that Cather was writing "'love-sick'" poems to the married composer who was addressing romantic songs to her, an "absurd" idea, according to Frances. Sharon O'Brien suggests a brother/sister relationship, using the Sigmund/Siegrfried model. She disregards that the pair responded romantically to each other. This is not to say that Cather and Nevin were sexual, given that Cather had voiced that the sexual element was a potential drawback to her relationship with Preston Farrar. (see letter to X).

5.3 Disenchantment

If someone close to me has an identity crisis in which he struggles desperately trying to find himself amidst his many changing selves, I may hang my head in vicarious shame at his self-alienation and hopelessness. . . .After having experienced shame through sudden empathy, the individual will never again be able to be entirely unconcerned with the other.

Silvan S. Tomkins[176]

By 1900 Cather appears to know Nevin more personally. Her depiction of him, published in the November *Ladies Home Journal* article that year, is of a human—a flawed human--not a youthful god or shepherd. In fact, her description mirrors Howard's characterization of the increasingly troubled man. She speaks of his temperament as the "blending of the *blithe* and the *triste* that gives his music its peculiar quality, now exultantly gay, now sunk in melancholy, as whimsical and capricious as April weather." He never does what he says he will do and impulsively acts without telling others of his plans. Now he is "a slight, delicately constructed man, all nerves, with a sort of tenseness in every line of his figure." His hands are "never still when he is talking, and his gestures are quick and impulsive, like his manner of speech. . . . Although he is often ill he works almost incessantly," juggling multiple compositions and proofs at any one moment. An insomniac, he works late in to the night, "wandering restlessly about the house reading the later French poets." Defensive, she denies that he is "in any sense a recluse, and though crowds annoy him and social functions exhaust him he is

[176]*Affect Imagery Consciousness,* 2008, pp. 408, 409.

peculiarly dependent upon the society of his friends."[177] He is the "jolliest father" who spends hours romping with his children and telling them stories.[178]

In what could be interpreted as a slight, Cather notes that Anne, a Pittsburgh girl, is definitely not an artist, except "in sympathy." She had been engaged to the young composer just before he left for Europe to study music. Patient for two years, Anne, accompanied by her father and sister, set sail for Europe, resumed the courtship; the result of the pursuit was that Nevin returned home to be married. This observation is followed by ellipses, a habit Cather has of trailing off and letting a comment *sit.* Now, she continues, Mrs. Nevin "is practically his business manager, is thoroughly posted in all her husband's work, and is his most constant if not his most impartial critic." In fact, from early1899 going forward, Anne was often absent, traveling for business. Nevin remained at home composing, holding his musical gatherings, and writing letters to his wife, to whom he invariably reports his behavior. Truly, writes Howard, Anne was a "canny" strategist who demanded that her husband produce, even persuading him to change his loyal agent and publisher (for increased profit) and to sign over his royalty interests to her (285). She must have been proficient because in the end, Nevin produced 600 songs, over 100 during his final few years at Vineacre. By 1903 she had moved to Blue Hill, Maine, building a palatial "Arcady." Describing Anne in the 15 July 1899 Courier piece, Cather had viewed her from a distance. That distanced had been reduced by 1900. Initially, Mrs. Nevin had seemed a Botticelli Madonna "a good deal like her

[177] This sounds like the later Cather herself who would increasingly withdraw from wider society.
[178] The once-ideal-playmate father of Cather's Virginia youth, after several false business starts on a ranch and in Red Cloud, eventually worked in Lincoln, requiring absences from home. Note the pleasure taken in Nevin's playfulness with children.

husband's music . . . of the same idealism and delicate sympathy and sweetness."[179] No longer. Nevin, in a letter to his wife agreed that Miss Cather's earlier assessment was astute, but adds that Anne was also his "discords."[180]

For no discoverable reason, Cather resigned from *The Leader* during the spring of 1900 but remained in Pittsburgh that summer, not returning home as usual. She did travel to Washington during late fall. The Nevins also left Pittsburgh that fall. Anne, overwhelmed by household and business responsibilities, by extensive travel on Nevin's account, experienced the nervous strain that led her to orchestrate a re-location to New Haven, Connecticut, arguing that Nevin, like the later restless Cather, needed frequent travel and change of scene to work. At Anne's instigation, they left Vineacre sometime during October, taking an apartment near the Sturgises, longtime close friends of both. On 2 February 1901, Cather wrote Preston Farrar, a former suitor, for help in procuring a teaching post. Indicating that her family was very eager for her to attain a post, she wrote that she preferred to remain in Pittsburg for "personal reasons." Of course, she had met Isabelle McCLung by then and perhaps their growing friendship and Isabelle's nurture of Cather's talent may have factored into those personal reasons, but Cather's relationship with Nevin and his circle may have been another factor; perhaps she believed he would return in the spring. When she did return to Pittsburgh during March, shortly after Nevin's death, Cather moved in with Isabelle.[181] Other than the letter to Mrs. Nevin, I haven't yet found any record of Cather's emotional state at that time (letters are scarce),

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[179]. Byrne and Snyder confirm Stout's report than in 1925 that the Nevin family and other Pennsylvanians were "'upset'" about "Uncle Valentine" (1925), a Cather story in which many identified "close parallels'" between Nevin and the central character, a gifted composer who suffered a coarse, materialistic wife. Dorothy, the Nevins' daughter claims that the wife does bear characteristics of her mother.
[180] John Tasker Howard, p. 322. This is the only reference to Cather that he uses.
[181] Cather had moved six times between 1896 and 1901.

but a February 21 letter to William Alexander of the Ladies Home Journal requests the return of a Nevin picture she had sent him. In addition, from Red Cloud that summer Cather writes George Seibel that the winter had been difficult; she had lost twenty pounds "from overwork," she claims.[182]

Cather did not attend Nevin's funeral, although her letter to Anne promised a return to Pittsburgh within the week. Yet, her final article regarding Nevin implies her presence. In it, invoking the Greek proverb, "Whom the gods love die in youth," Cather tried to explain Nevin's early death. Then, using language familiar to readers of her letters and earlier journalism, language that anticipates her future themes, she writes that his personality had preserved all the "enthusiasm and painful susceptibility of youth." He had found life "as full of penetrating and wounding experiences as he had found it at eighteen. . . He had been unable to place any sort of non-conducting medium between the world and himself, no sort of protection to break the jar of things." He was "disturbed by the machinery of life, oppressed by the slightest neglect from anyone near him, sensitive to the criticism of strangers, enervated by the gloom of an overcast sky." Cather might be describing herself, and, in fact, has used many of these phrases in reference to herself. Frequent change of environment was almost necessary to him, she says. All his life "he was torn by the conflict between his love for the old and intimate surroundings of his childhood and the feverish restlessness that periodically took possession of him," says the equally feverish traveler. He was of those who "found that matter of living inordinately hard and perplexing." For him, death became "the decent cloak that covered the scar of

[182] Also interesting is a later letter to Dorothy Canfield dated 1903 in which Cather thanks her friend for writing to Mrs. Cather. The result was the first letter in two years that she could bear to read, she tells her friend. This suggests to me that the 1901 return home did not go well, similar to the overworked-Lucy's fraught return to Haverford following Sebastian's death.

a wound. " A little later in the review, she notes that Katherine Fisk sang his songs, but specifically names *La Lune Blanche,* "which bears [her] initials in the dedication," she states proudly. Then with a subtle, knowing prick, she points out that narcissus adorned his buttonhole. "His wife, whose complete understanding of him was one of the most wonderful things I have ever known, who knew so well all that was most fitting for him, had put them there." Anyone who really knew the man, knew how much he detested the song those flowers represented, what he called "that nasty little Narcissus" song that popularized him.[183] Cather had said as much elsewhere. She nears her closing with the sad observation, "There are those who believe that death will befriend him better than did life."

5.4 Cather's Early Endopsychic Struggles with Nevin

"We usually bleed a little before we begin to discern."
Willa Cather,
"A Death in The Desert"

The texts that draw heavily upon Cather's short-lived unresolved relationship to Ethelbert Nevin emerge shortly after his death and later during periods of time that focus public interest upon him or his work. Allusions first appear in early poems and short stories written within a short time after his death and published between 1902 and 1905. Critics increasingly concur that several of the early poems find their inception in Nevin's

[183] In a letter to Byrne, Helen Seibel recalls that Cather often "was capable of sharp, sometimes cruel comment." (p 99, n4). Further, they relate that the children at Mrs. Slack's , the Nevins' next door neighbor hung around her when she visited to see what she would say. She was known to be and satirical.

death.[184] These early works idealize a fallen Nevin, laying the responsibility for Nevin's decline at the feet of those who, misunderstanding him, cast aspersions, whose bitters words fatally wounded a sensitive artist. A less ideal Nevin emerges in the thinly disguised story, "A Death in the Desert" (1905).[185] Extensive revisions were made after its first publication, before it was collected in *The Troll Garden*, and again before it appeared in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. As is usual in Cather's work, the early version is the most revealing.[186]

In "A Death in the Desert," the reader finds Nevin in the physically absent but spiritually present Adriance Hilgarde, a composer whose "youthful indiscretions were forgotten in his mature achievements." Here Cather begins to split off Nevin traits, admitting some flaws but justifying them. She will continue to deploy this splitting strategy in her later retrieval of Nevin in "Uncle Valentine" and, with more complexity, *Lucy Gayheart*. Here, she introduces the kind Windermere Hilgarde, a ten-year-younger brother to a composer very much like Nevin. A "dead ringer" for the older artist, the brother constantly suffers misidentification, so strong is their likeness.[187] During his travels many mistake him for the composer of popular romantic songs. In fact, in the opening scene of the story, as Windemere travels from Chicago to Cheyenne, a man who

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[184] See Timothy Bintrim. "Cather's 'Rosary' and Nevin's Legacy." *Willa Cather Memorial Newsletter & Review.* Fall-Winter, 2012, pp.28-32. Also see Bernice Slote's introduction to *April Twilights*. UP of Nebraska, 1990. Particularly read poems: "Sleep, Minstrel Sleep"; "The Poor Minstrel"; "Arcadian Winter"; " The Death of Marsylas"; "A Likeness:"; "In Rose Time".

[185] First published in *Scribner's Magazine*, 33 (Jan 1903), pp. 1090-121. Cather.unl.edu. Later included in *The Troll Garden.*

[186] In Cather's early texts "some of her characters were her classmates and friends, thinly disguised, and some of those victims took bitter offense at having their peculiarities this publicly expose. Willa made some lasting enemies—apparently without realizing at the moment that she was doing so." Cather never did learn her lesson. In practice says Bennett, "Her powers of invention manifested themselves far more strongly in her autobiographical data then they ever did in her fiction." (Bennett, pp.182, n230)

[187] "Windemere" becomes "Everett" in later versions. He is ten years junior to Adriance, whose name originates in Nevin's close friend, Harry Adriance, whom Cather knew well. Like Windemere, Nevin's actual brother, Arthur, also ten years junior gave up a musical career.

turns out to be a reporter for The Chicago Commercial,[188] repeatedly glances at him while whistling the "Spring Song" that had "made its young composer famous in a night" a dozen years earlier. The song "was the sort of thing that a man of genius outgrows as soon as he can," says the narrator. Eventually, when Windemere identifies himself, the large, florid, coarse man slaps his knee and exclaims, "You're his double."

Arriving in Cheyenne, Hilgarde's appearance provokes an apparent, deep disturbance in a woman who turns out to be Katha*r*ine Gaylord, his brother's former student, who still greatly admires the composer, though she hasn't seen him for some time.[189] Dying of tuberculosis, she has returned to "the bleak, lifeless country" of the West and to her brother Charley to die. Charley invites Windemere to visit his sister, filling in her backstory for him and the reader. Though gifted, "she didn't come of a good family," he admits, and "had to fight her own way from the first." She had, "outgrown her family," Charley confides, "There is scarcely a connection point at which we touch any more, except in our recollections of the old times when we were all young and happy together."[190] Now, he explains, Katharine is dying and is alone, "out of her own world, and she can't fall back into ours."

Windermere awaits Katharine in her studio in which a "haunting air of familiarity" perplexes him until he recognizes it as a copy of his brother's studio; "all in Adriance's taste , . . .it seemed to exhale his personality." The full description, deleted

[188] The unflattering description of Commercial reporter may be payback for that paper's negative review of Nevin's concert. Early and late, Cather openly admitted she liked to "payback her loves and hates." For example, after Red Cloud's outraged reception of "A Wagner's Matinee," Cather huffed that she would write one that would make them even madder.

[189] Choosing a vehicle to speak through, as she typically does, Cather may have used a prototype who had died in 1915, Katherine Fisk. Fisk had sung at Nevin's funeral and had also sung his song cycle, *Captive Memories*, in concert during 1899. Note the change from Katherine to *Katha*rine.

[190] See Cather's letter to Mariel Gere in which she confides: "In the years I have been away I have kind of grown away from my family and their way of looking at things until they are not much comfort " (Red Cloud 5/2/1896).

in future versions, boasts items that conjure Nevin's rooms. Shortly after entering, Katharine comments on the "uncanny" likeness between brothers, recalling the "oval face" of the boy-man with "shoulders slender and rather girlish." Katharine's description of Adriance is much like Cather's of Nevin as described in her articles. Though over thirty, with silver-streaked hair, he "had the face of a boy of twenty, so mobile that it told his thoughts before he could put them into words or music and responded to the nerve-centers of his sensitive brain as the keyboard to the touch." Future versions delete the more accurate descriptions of the artist and the room. The narrator interjects, citing a reporter's observation that "the shepherd boys who sang under the oaks of Tempe must certainly have looked like young Hilgarde." The phrasing is lifted right out of Cather's 1899 article. The comparison "had been appropriated by a hundred shyer women who preferred to quote," interjects an *authorial* voice.

Windemere spends three weeks in Cheyenne while the singer enters her last struggles with death. Slowly, one version of Adriance emerges through Katharine's memories, quickened by the brother's resemblance. Windemere's thoughts offer another, less ideal. The two versions co-exist in the text, even as they co-exist in Nevin. In this manner, the text mirrors Cather's internal struggle, her retrieval of alternative memories of Nevin. But in this early work, the young woman wants to excuse the artist's behavior by contrasting Windemere, who lacks what makes his brother a great artist. Windemere, had "resolved to beat at no more doors that he could never enter."[191] He is of "a certain lovable class of men who never accomplished anything in particular . . . painfully timid in

[191] Cather uses this phrase in *Song of the Lark*, where Thea does breakdown the door, and elsewhere, speaking of successful, passionate artists.

everything relating to emotions." Adriance, the true artist, is driven and pursues everything with passion—in the moment.

In the climax of the story, Katherine asks Windemere to read aloud a recent letter from the composer. Not deluded, she knows it had been written at the younger brother's prompting. Windemere thinks the poetic letter "consistently egotistical, and seemed to him even a trifle patronizing, yet it was just what she had wanted." Adriance always did the "opportune, graceful thing except when he did cruel things." He was "bent upon making people happy when their existence touched upon his, just as he insisted that his material environment should be beautiful . . . and when they were no longer near, forgetting, for that was also part of Adriance's gifts." Windemere wonders "whether all gift-bearers, all the sons of genius, broke what they touched and blighted what they caressed thus." His own duty was "to comfort as best he could one of the broken things his brother's imperious speed had cast aside and forgotten." Acknowledging his brother's "charm and intensity and power," he also knows the "whirlwind flame in which Adriance passed, consuming all in his path, and himself even more resolutely than he consumed others." Here, one clearly hears Cather's struggle to come to terms with Nevin's double nature.

Arguing for Adriance's egocentricity, echoing Cather's letter to Anne, and revealing a little of the author's early anger, Katharine criticizes the composer's "wasting of himself," his "lashing himself out on stupid and uncomprehending people until they take him at their own estimate." Her indignation escalates:

> Certainly there is a sacred and dignified selfishness, which properly belongs to art and religion. You know how he wastes his time and strength in those idiotic social obligations, which he takes so seriously—in chivalrous

> attentions to vapid old women who knew his mother, and in writing wedding marches for every pink-and-white-thing who asks him. [192]

Like Cather, Katharine had admired the composer before they met. "His early music was the first that ever really took hold of me." Conceding the "saccharine quality of his earlier work," she finds that his mature work spoke of "*the tragedy of the soul, this shadow co-existent with the soul . . . the tragedy of effort and failure, the thing Keats called hell."* I emphasize here because not only is this observation indicate Cather's better understanding of Nevin, but also because in her final retrieval of Nevin in *Lucy Gayheart,* this co-existent shadow returns.

During their conversation following the reading of the letter, Katharine confides to Windemere her long-held deep feelings for Adriance and their one treasured silent embrace, interrupted by his wife's arrival.

> What a relief to tell someone. I used to want to shriek it out to the world in the long nights when I could not sleep. It seemed to me that I could not die with it. It demanded some sort of expression. And now that you know, you would scarcely believe how much less sharp the agony is.

Following her revelation, Katharine flatters herself that she has been able to conceal her feelings when she chooses, though the "more observing" may have seen, claims the narrator. "Discerning people are usually discreet and often kind, for we usually bleed a little before we begin to discern." This ambivalent need to conceal and reveal her feelings also appears in *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather's final re-assessing of Nevin.[193]

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[192] Since the very beginning of her career, Cather had equated art with religion. Howard's biography mentions Nevin's "wedding marches" and his accommodating charm with all women.

[193] Elizabeth Sergeant wrote that Cather was wary in her letters, which were more like her casual talk because she "feared the betrayal, in part, of the heat and abundance that surged up in her" when off guard in correspondences to close friends. It is this "emotional aura" that Sergeant found remains off the page but felt. The closes friend also remarks that she had to be very careful whenever she spoke of Cather's characters. The writer would flare up at criticism of them.

Voicing the perspective of Cather's judging self, Windemere's disenchanted observations about his brother counter Katharines's deliberately sustained enchanted memories and suggest an author who is no longer the bedazzled girl for whom Nevin was nearly flawless. While Katharine's dying choice is to remember the pre-fallen composer, Cather, acknowledges but justifies Nevin's flawed genius. In her next retrieval of Nevin, she attributes the cause of his flaws to others.

5.5 Reframing Memory

Cather's next attempt to mitigate her shame regarding Nevin is seen in "Uncle Valentine (Adagio non troppo)"(1925). Cather critics now point to the close parallels between Nevin and the fictional composer, Valentine Ramsey, giving credence to the early account of Pittsburgh resident, Ellen Schillinger, who said that the close similarities not only disturbed Edgewater and Sewickly neighbors but also angered Anne, Nevin's wife. "Mrs. Nevin who labeled the story 'disgusting, degrading and revolting,' cut Cather until her death."[194]

When compared to "A Death in the Desert," this later story offers an even less idealized, more probing portrait of the gifted composer, his family of origin and his "canny" wife. Evident in this story is Cather's ability to both retrieve and further transform her memories with additional insight. As Bernice Slote perceptively notes in her early analysis, the story is "of a time and memory . . . both bitter and sweet,"

[194] Mildred Bennett found "Willa made some lasting enemies—apparently without realizing at the moment that she was doing so." Cather continued to upset people by her too-realistic portrayals. In practice, says Bennett, "Her powers of invention manifested themselves far more strongly in her autobiographical data then they ever did in her fiction." (Bennett, pp.182, n230) Ellen Schillinger. "Pittsburgh Recalls Willa Cather." *Book Marks.* 1 (Feb and March, 1963). Quoted in Byrne and Snyder. There is at least one exception to the estrangement. Sometime in1933 Cather visited Anne during the time John Tasker Howard was writing a biography of Nevin. Noteworthy is that he makes little reference to Cather, while Nevin's friend, Vance Thompson, freely quotes Cather's articles in his 1913 biography.

mirroring "Cather's own feeling about her entry into a world of artists . . . in which her friendship with Ethelbert Nevin had a particular glow" (xxiv). Slote finds Cather's reality and fiction "recombined[,] as a kaleidoscope makes a new pattern out of bits and pieces." But like Sharon O'Brien, she sees merely a brother/sister dyad and, pointing to the Wagnerian Ring Cycle allusions, suggests that Cather depicted "Gotterdammerung," the outright destruction of the gods in a battle with evil. However, in German mythology "gotterdammerung" also refers to the "twilight of the gods," their decline, a decline in which they are culpable.

"Uncle Valentine" opens with a conversation between Louise Ireland and her young American student in Paris during the 1920s. The student has favorably discovered the re-issued songs of the dead composer, Valentine Ramsey. When she asks what prevented his further production, Ireland replies, "marriage, money, friends, the general social order," and directs the student to an American woman, Margaret, who knew him. Margaret, another of Cather's orphans, is the main focalizer; we hear the story through her memory of a time when she was in her late teens. "Yes," she begins, "I had known him in a lovely place, at a lovely time, in a bygone period of American life; just at the incoming of this century which has made all the world so different." For a time she had lived with her aunt Charlotte, a special childhood friend to Valentine, the next-door neighbor. Like the Nevins' home in Vineacre, which sat above Pittsburgh, the Ramsey's home, Bonnie Brae in Greenacre, sits atop Fox Hill just outside and above an industrial city. Literally outside the door is Charlotte's home, which mirrors Braeface, the home of the Nevins's neighbor, Mrs. Slack, in whose home Cather was a frequent visitor. Mrs.

Slack's six girls (daughters and nieces) served as Ethelbert Nevin's "Little Choir" on Sundays, as do the young girls of Bonnie Brae for Valentine Ramsey.[195]

Cather's fictional portrait of the Ramseys is devastating. These men, father and sons, are the only inhabitants of Greenacre, "strange" and "lonely" alcoholics, according to their rigid housekeeper, Molla,[196] who once defended herself by claiming that "a woman who managed a houseful of alcoholics must be a tyrant, or the place would be a sty." Recalling Nevin's father, Jonathan Ramsey, a widower bespattered with cigar ashes and dust, spends his days secluded in his study often writing historical pieces and poetry to his dead wife. His son, Morton, daily stops at a bar for lunch as well as before and after the train commute to his business; his accountant vigilantly corrects his boss's mistakes daily. The narrator observes, "Nobody ever saw Morton thoroughly intoxicated, but nobody ever saw him quite himself." Another son, Roland is a former prodigy who had shone between the ages of twelve and fourteen, when he was first was sent to study in Germany; he returned, "nerves broken," more musical but unable to endure the stresses of playing publicly. He would on occasion retreat into solitude and silence, remaining at the piano for hours. Roland also keeps a diary, as did Nevin, whose entries, cited by both Vance and Howard, speak to these very issues. Valentine, also a heavy drinker, has just returned from Paris, disgraced for having run off with a singer, thereby forcing his wife to seek divorce in an attempt to save face. In youth, Charlotte had encouraged Valentine to study in Europe, but (to Charlotte's dismay) within a year of his leaving, Janet

[195] Byrne and Snyder record that Margaret Slack's six little girls "watched [Cather] closely and somewhat warily because of her sharp tongue" (35). Locals attest that Cather's "use of words was deft; whether intended to praise or prick, she penetrated with a thrust quick and true." Her remarks were often "acidly hilarious comments on the Pittsburgh scene, not intended to endear her to some of its more pretentious citizens" (ix). Her portrayal of the Ramseys testifies to this.

[196] When Nevin returned to Vineacre in 1897, five adult sons lived with their parents.

Oglethorpe "followed him up and married him." Impetuously engaged just before he left to study abroad, Nevin was also successfully pursued by Anne in Germany.

Cather's portrayal of Valentine's wife, Janet Oglethorpe Ramsey fairs no better than the author's depiction of the men, but for different reasons. That Nevin's daughter, Doris, remarked that her mother had many traits in common with Janet Oglethorpe poses questions about Cathert's portrayal. Both were shrewd daughters of rich, influential industrialists and older than their husbands.[197] Both aggressively pursued their husbands and controlled the day to day as well as a husband's affairs. Valentine finds that "Janey is alright for her kind . . . but all wrong for me"--one of those "irreproachable" women who "might do her duty and defile everything she touches."[198] His vitriolic description of her is as "a common, energetic, close-fisted little tradeswoman, who ought to be keeping a shop and doing people out of their eyeteeth. . . . She bargains in her sleep." Her manners are even worse, only practiced in public. "Everything about her 's bunk, except her damn money," he confides. Heated, he complains, "I tell you I was paralyzed by the flood of trivial, vulgar nagging that poured over me and never stopped"; her "'managing'" had become the bane of his life, leaving him no choice but to flee. In a selfless act, close friend, Louise Ireland, had willingly sacrificed her reputation to rescue him from his marriage by running away with him. Ireland is a woman of more or less irregular behavior, "erratic, impudent, self-indulgent but pure in heart." Cather could not have better described herself in this *wish* scenario. In the wake of disgrace and gossip,

[197] Doris Nevin, daughter of Anne and Ethelbert is also the source for Ellen Schillenger's account of Anne's reception of the story, says Snyder, who interviewed Doris.
[198] In *Lucy Gayheart* Harry Gordon makes similar observations about the banker's daughter whose merits he weighs against Lucy's as he considers marriage.

Valentine has returned divorced, alone, and short of funds. Yet, for the "golden year"[199] in which Cather sets the story, the composer is happy to be among his own kind, in his place--until Janet again curtails his freedom.

More important than Cather's decision to make the composer scathingly depict his wife is her interesting fragmentation of Nevin characteristics into brothers--Valentine, Morton and Roland. Val, the lively, flirtatious composer who accompanies Charlotte on a Christmas shopping trip much as Nevin did Cather, is extravagant, capricious and impractical. He is the (mostly) manic Nevin, impetuous, boyish, charming but petulant, poetic and admittedly restless, always wanting "to do two things at once, be at two places at once." Marjorie imagines Val and Charlotte shopping together in town (recalling Cather's outing with Nevin), picturing Charlotte and free-mannered Valentine in contrast to wooden men in the grimy, damp, noisy town where no one was as free, men "imprisoned in their harsh Calvinism, or in their merciless business grind, or in mere apathy—a mortal dullness." As a young focalizer, Marjorie imagines a post-stroll hotel lunch, accompanied by good French wine (Cather's favorite afternoon pastimes). "What a day she had had!" says the girl. But this blithe Valentine can in an instant become intolerant and anti-social. For example, he rudely disappears from the Christmas Eve party Charlotte has arranged to repair his image. He is "proud and sulky" with the guests; petulantly and "wrathfully" he objects to those Charlotte has invited, "all the most objectionable old birds in the valley." At one point when Charlotte angrily chides him for his rude incapacity to realize the cost of his words and actions, he uses charm to deflate the tension.

[199] On 31 December 1932 Cather consoled friend Zoe Akins who had recently lost her husband of less that a year: "In our real, personal lives a week is often longer than ten years. I remember one summer that was longer than the twenty-five years that had followed it."

Morton is the ineffectual, grandiose alcoholic whose well-intended schemes remain stillborn and whose mistake-ridden business accounts are corrected up by his staff. Roland exhibits Nevin's most morbid, depressive traits. The young prodigy, grown into a morose, nervous and withdrawn man silently drifts through the house, keeping to the shadows. He watches Val practice, but then fades away without a word, wraith-like. Valentine calls him "a coffin of a man" and shivers when near him, telling Charlotte, "What haunts me about Roland is the feeling of kinship." When he discovers him behind the curtain, tear-stained faced, "soaked" in alcohol, he asks, "Do you suppose that's the way I'll be keeping Christmas ten years from now, Charlotte?" Then, in a signature move, "a sign with him that a situation was too hopeless for discussion," Val "drop[s] his head into his hand and rumples his hair as if he were washing it."

At this point in time, Cather has begun to see the self-destructive behavior of Nevin's double nature, to accept her witness of his decline, which was the impetus for her vicarious shame, but she is not ready to acknowledge her own idealization of him. That will occur later. Now, in 1925, blaming "marriage, money, friends, the social order" for his decline and her own disenchantment is easier. In September everything changes, just as it did during September 1900. As in the poems, a cold wind foretells the encroaching winter in Arcady. There is an implication that something—a falling out or a drawing close--has happened between Charlotte and Val, but just a vague suggestion. Marjorie finds Charlotte isolated with a headache and Valentine, "silver head" in his hands again, alone in the music room. Then the narrative shifts focus to Val's loss of a freedom to roam the surrounding woodlands, fields and valleys, an activity Marjorie believes had been necessary to his creativity. His crass former wife and her new bourgeois husband

have bought the adjacent property. Marjorie recalls that he was found in his study having drunk a bottle of whiskey and half-bottle of rye, lying on his sofa, eyes rolled into his head. She remembers that from that point his health and personality declined and that all were glad to see him go. Two years later, leaving Louise Ireland's apartment in Paris, Val is killed by a truck.

In "Uncle Valentine," Cather had attempted to explain Nevin's final decline and death partly as result of Anne's treatment and removal of Nevin from Vineacre. But Cather also laid responsibility at the door of the inhabitants of Vineacre, depicting the decline of the gods and, as a result, their defeat by the hands of lesser beings, philistines like Janet. Val himself speaks to that decline. Self-condemning, he sees his brothers and himself as "[s]ons of an easy-going, self-satisfied American family, never taught anything." In his anger he claims to approve that his son "will be an Oglethorpe! He'll get on and won't carry this damned business any farther," and so it was, concludes the authorial voice, the "wave of industrial expansion swept down that valley, and roaring mills belch their black smoke up to the heights where those lovely houses used to stand. Fox Hill is gone, and our lovely wall [of roses] is gone**."**

Whether through betrayal or disenchantment, Tomkins informs us, the "loss of the love object may be a source of shame." Further, that loss can be experienced differently, "dependent upon the imagery and the interpretation which is concurrent with the shame. It may be felt as an alienation, as a rejection, as a defeat, an intolerable loneliness, as a temporary distancing between the self and the other**,** as a poignant, bitter-sweet longing"(392). Cather had begun the story with her memory of the composer in "a lovely place, near that "wall where red roses grow, " but closes with bittersweet words:

"The roses of song and the roses of memory, they are the only ones that last." In "Uncle Valentine," Cather had come to understand and admit that her relationship to the flawed Nevin was intertwined with the life she enjoyed in Vineacre. Her loss had been doubled.[200]

5.6 Going Under

> Writing is a queer business. . . . [O]ne has to have had an unusual knowledge or a peculiar sympathy with the characters one handles. One can't always write about what one most admires—you must, by some accident, have seen into your character very deeply. . . . Maybe there's a weakness in me that makes me better able to handle the weak people better . . .
>
> Willa Cather to Aunt Franc Cather
> Letter 2/23/13

> I am working on a book about a silly young girl, and I lose my patience with her.
>
> Cather to Zoe Akins
> Letter, 8/26/33

Despite Cather's return to the Nevin material during the early twenties, she had not resolved the nuclear scene(s) built upon her relationship to Nevin. In *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), she would yet again reframe her memories to recall her attraction to and misperception of Nevin. About a year after "Uncle Valentine" was published, she wrote Louise Guerber Burroughs (10/25/[1926]): "I'm flirting with a little story that's been knocking round in my head for sometime. Title 'Blue Eyes on the Platte,' . . . a rather frivolous and decidedly sentimental, love's-young-dream sort of thing," she judges. But the resulting book is not frivolous. Instead, this final comprehension of her relationship

[200] As a result of their Pittsburgh interviews, Byrne and Snyder concluded that, "One side of her nature luxuriated in the relaxed air of good breeding" at the Nevins'. Pound and Sergeant had earlier expressed similar observations about her.

to Nevin becomes a complex accounting of affects, motives and actions as Cather inscribes herself into the characters that encapsulate her affective experience. In *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather again recreates a version of Nevin. She also recreates a version of her young self during the period in which she met and lost him. She drowns both. In this work, the author splits Nevin into Sebastian and his *doppelganger*, Mockford, embodying the *"shadow co-existent with the soul . . . the tragedy of effort and failure,"* Katharine Gaylord's description of what Adriance's later work conveyed. In addition, Cather splits herself as well--into young Lucy, middle aged Harry and that part of Sebastian facing a moment of late life assessing--; as the older, judging, Cather, in contempt, calls to account her younger self, because the "day of counting costs comes along in the end."[201]

In his lengthy analysis of the shamed self, Silvan Tomkins observes: "To the extent to which I maintain interest in myself or enjoy myself, I can be ashamed of myself." I can also experience shame in viewing a younger self in which I maintain a positive interest. But, when "I have no interest in yesterday's self, I cannot become ashamed of that self today." Experience that radically increases the difference between my younger self and my self today reduces the shame I can feel about the behavior of my old self. However, if I reject my earlier self completely, "then I may respond with contempt and disgust for myself." In such instance," the part of the self that becomes the object of contempt to the judging self will be rejected" making it easy for the judging self to more easily destroy the rejected part of the self.[202] Thus, in Cather's case, if the older author continued investment in her young self--the misperceiving self enchanted by an idealized Nevin--, shame would continue as the dominant affect. Considering that she

[201] Harry reminds Lucy of this certainty, p.106.
[202] Tomkins, pp. 362-9.

destroys that young self in drowning Lucy after establishing Lucy's flaws, I suggest that the affect, contempt, had, over time and through the repeated retrievals and transformations of her memories--through writing--replaced the shame she earlier felt. In *Lucy Gayheart*, a novel about perception and memory, Cather safely buries both Nevin and her young self. In a poignant letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, written as she was composing *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather had thanked her for "the front" presented to the public in an article about the author. Cather confided that her

> chief happiness is in forgetting the past as if it had never been. No, I don't mean 'the past', but myself in the past. . . .I seem to have been a bundle of enthusiasms and physical sensations, but not a person. Maybe everyone is like that. He can see a kind of shadow he throws, but not the real creature. I have been running away from myself all my life (have you?) and have been happiest when running fastest. Those last three winters of my mother's life held me close to myself and to the beginnings of things, and it was like being held against things too sad to live with. (6/22/33)

While it appears that although the idea for the *Lucy Gayheart* story had nagged at Cather as early as 1926, perhaps even as she wrote "Uncle Valentine," the novel was actually written during the early 1930s after her mother's August 1931 death. A letter to Blanche Knopf of 24 July 1932 indicates that she had begun a new book, "an experiment; if my interest grows, I'll go on with it. If it bores me, I'll drop it. It's about a young thing this time. If I finish it, I'll simply call it by her name, 'Lucy Gayheart'." Concurrently, Anne Nevin had summoned Cather to her home sometime during the early 1930's, interrupting their longstanding estrangement. Although there is no record of the conversation, I suspect that it centered upon Nevin, because during the early 1930's John

Tasker Howard's biography of Nevin was in progress. Coincident with Howard's work, Cather's novel, *Lucy Gayheart,* appeared in 1935.[203]

Simply plotted, the novel is often read as a testimony to a vivacious young country girl. Book I introduces the main Haverford characters during Lucy Gayheart's visit home for Christmas, then follows Lucy back to Chicago, where she had been studying music and is to perform as temporary accompanist for singer, Sebastian Clement. When her hometown friend, banker Harry Gordon, arrives in Chicago planning to propose marriage, she declines. He returns home, spitefully marries another and begrudges Lucy further friendship. The baritone drowns shortly later in Italy. In Book II, mourning the singer, Lucy has returned home, but ill-fitted to her former life, she decides after a time to return to Chicago. However, shortly before she leaves, during a tempest of blinding anger, she falls through thin ice and drowns. Book III, set twenty-five years later, focuses on Harry and his memories of Lucy. These are the facts, so to speak, but that facts are suspect Cather suggests in a conversation between Harry and Lucy in the Chicago museum. When Harry complains to Lucy that French expressionism distorts, she explains that some figures '"are to represent objects, and others are meant to represent feelings, merely, and then, accuracy doesn't matter.'" When Harry protests, "'Facts are at the bottom of everything[,]" Lucy disagrees (101). This conversation is a road sign for readers, joining Cather's undermining narrator and intrusive author to direct the reader's movement through a complex text many have considered "light."

In fact, the novel was ignored after receiving mixed reviews. While *New Yorker* critic, Cliff Fadiman, found Harry's twenty-five-year repentance "merely vaguely

[203] Howard's work is more objective than the 1913 hagiography written by Vance Thompson, Nevin's close friend. *Lucy Gayheart* serialized in the *Woman's Home Companion* between March and July and published as a book in September.

irritating," an anonymous *Time* reviewer credited Cather as "a facile psychologist" who "ferrets out the secrets of human emotion." A perceptive London *Times* piece appraised it "a subtle story of motives and accidents, infinitesimal in themselves but carrying lasting consequences." Its reviewer, recognized "the experience of a lifetime, a sure knowledge of young passion and old griefs." Cather's friend, critic Fanny Butcher, saw the "deathless power which the dead . . . exert."[204] Cather, herself, did not speak highly of the novel. To Carlton F. Wells she wrote that the "story verges dangerously upon the sentimental (since youthful hero worship is really the theme of the first two parts of the book)" (7 January 1936). To her future biographer, E.K.Brown, she quipped that it "picked up after all the Gayhearts are safe in the family burial lot" (10/7/46). Yet, Jan Hambourg, Isabelle's husband, found it to be the best thing she had written. Seventy years later, Linda Chom reconsidered its merit and discovered that Cather's late novel is "both better and different from its critical reputation,[205] arguing that Harry Gordon is the "overlooked narrator of the whole novel" and "the mental complexion decisively shaping the novel." While I don't agree with that argument, I do find that Harry's shaping of "his" Lucy both in life and memory is important to an understanding of the work, as is the narrator's deliberate undercutting of his version.

Mourning and memory, or, more accurately, *memorializing* dominate *Lucy Gayheart.* In fact, the first four pages of Book I offer a framing perspective to which the

[204] Reviews are found in *Contemporary Reviews* pps. 450-2; 445;453; Butcher letter quoted in David Porter's historical essay in the scholarly edition of *Lucy Gayheart.* Cather had written to Zoe Akins praising Prosper Merimee's "Columba": "the most terrific happenings slide easily and noiselessly into the narrative, as they always do in life, when the stage is never set for the moment that uplifts us or destroys us. The un-expectedness of life is what makes it interesting; the events are logical, but we never see this cause and effect, until after the events have happened."

[205] Linda Chown. "It Came Closer Than That: Willa Cather's *Lucy Gayheart.*" *Cather Studies.* Vol 2, UP of Nebraska, 1993, pp. 118-139.

novel returns in Book III. The perspective is that of Harry Gordon remembering Lucy. As first-person narrator, Harry seems separate from and yet a part of the townspeople:

> In Haverford on the Platte the townspeople still talk of Lucy Gayheart. They do not talk of her a great deal, to be sure; life goes on and we live in the present. But when they do mention her name it is with a gentle glow in the face or the voice, a confidential glance which says, "Yes, you too remember?' They still see her as a slight figure always in motion.

To him, her walk is "like an expression of irrepressible light-heartedness." In fact, he claims, although eighteen-year old Lucy went to study music in Chicago, she was "too careless and light-hearted to take herself very seriously. She never dreamed of a 'career'.'' He insists that she had done it merely for pleasure and to help her father, a man of simple pleasures, "an intelligent man with 'lazy eyes'," but one who "wasn't a good manager." A bit of a good-natured dandy who enjoys his tobacco, sports a flower in meticulously chosen daywear, and prefers leisure musical pursuits and playing chess to paying his mortgage, Mr. Gayheart was "a town character, of course, and people joked about him"(3-5). Even his daughter, Pauline, found her father "queer, not at all like the real business men of the town" (169).

The reader will return to Harry in the last section of the book in which he remembers *"his"* young Lucy much as Jim Burden remembers *his* young Antonia in Cather's 1918 book, *My Antonia.* Both men's memories emerge from the compensatory nostalgia of unfulfilled lives. Similarly, Lucy creates a version of *her* Sebastian Clement, who drowns in Italy, his accompanist clinging to him, pulling him under in a death that recalls the fatal bridge builder's death in Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912); he, too, is dragged down into black waters by a clinging other. As early as this first novel, a "double nature" causes tragedy. In each case, survivors create false memories

serving their own needs, memories that in no way accurately reflect the person who more clearly emerges through the narrative itself.[206] Consistent, Cather constructs a text that undermines Lucy's construction of *her* Sebastian as well as Harry's construction of *his* Lucy, and exposes an older singer's need for *his* young girl. In fact, Harry Gordon, who privately and silently lives with regret and shame for his last punishing acts toward Lucy retains in memory a version of her necessary to his ego. He memorializes her because, as he says in the last line, she "was the best thing he had to remember." On the final page of the novel, he does, however, remove one item from her room, an item incongruous with his memorialization--Sebastian' s photo.

An omniscient narrator takes over from Gordon, stepping back in time to introduce young Harry and Lucy, to establish their characters and the motivations for later behaviors.[207] This narrator undercuts Harry's credibility as portraitist as well as Lucy's perceptions. A wealthy banker's son eight years older than Lucy, Harry consistently acts with self-serving deliberation. His words and his silences are as calculated as his actions. The narrator judges Harry "immensely conceited, " but notes that his "self-possession was very reassuring to a mercurial, vacillating person like Lucy" (18). Townspeople call him hard in business; he "took advantage of borrowers in tight places; but neither his person nor his manners gave a hint of such qualities." Mrs. Ramsey, the town founder's widow and Lucy's friend, finds Harry only "handsome on the outside" (147). When Harry joins Lucy for part of her return to Chicago after her

[206] Jim Burden "did not want to find her aged and broken." He admits, "In the course of twenty years one parts with many illusion. I did not wish to lose the early ones." But Antonia is "battered," toothless, a body worn with work and the birth of ten children." Ignoring all this, he finds *his* Antonia in her eyes. "Some memories are realities and are better than anything that can happen to one again." (*My Antonia*, 328).

[207] Cather admired the way X developed her characters in the beginning so that their later actions were consistent (or intentionally not) with their person and motives.

Christmas visit home, he displays his self-interest. First, he comes aboard and heads for the dining car, neglecting to invite Lucy and the other students. Upon his return, he launches into a self-inflating monologue, unaware of Lucy's annoyance at his tightfistedness. Any show of extravagance on his part was "the outcome of forethought" and for gain, thinks Lucy. Second, while observing Lucy, he weighs the benefits of marrying her, the poor town watchmaker's daughter, against those of marrying rich Harriet Arkwright, a "good manager," who "had the kind of authority that money and social position give" and a father who could advance his career. He had been stringing both girls along for some time. His objections to Harriet are aesthetic: her plainness, her lack of charm, bad manners, and her coarse voice, which could "deflower a flower." The narrator confides that for Harry Miss Awkright's "stock was going down. He meant to commit the supreme extravagance and marry for beauty. He meant to have a wife other men would envy him"(22-3). A perceivable change in Lucy has forced his hand. She seemed more aloof, "as though she held herself away from him and from everyone else in the town," he thinks. "She was not there in the old way. . . . Lucy wasn't an artless, happy little country girl anymore; she was headed toward something." Harry, "full of his own plans," must act, but when he later prepares to propose, the narrator makes clear his motivation: "There was a part of himself that Harry was afraid to live out in the open (he hated a sentimental man), but he could live it through Lucy. She would be his excuse for doing a great many pleasant things he would not do on his own account" (107).

Harry's fears are warranted because Lucy, too, felt that in Haverford "she had scarcely been herself at all; she had been trying to feel and behave like someone she no longer was." She had met singer Sebastian Clement before Christmas and, returning to

Chicago, she experiences the return train as "escape, change, chance, with life hurrying forward . . . to the city where the air trembled like a tuning fork with unimaginable possibilities." The city has become Sebastian, has become "the place where so many memories and sensations were piled up." Her "city of feeling rose out of the city of fact" (24-7).

In a second temporal backstep, the narrative recounts Lucy's first attendance of Sebastian's concert. Even before he begins to sing she is emotionally stirred, unsure whether the personality or voice so affects her. Lucy, like Cather and Katharine in "Uncle Valentine," had known his songs in youth, but the man beguiles her. While he sang six Schubert songs, Lucy "felt that there was something profoundly tragic about the man." During the last song, *Die Doppelganger,* Lucy envisions a scene, a dark cloud passing over the moon. Emerging from her "picture-making," she sees only the pale, lame accompanist, Mockford, dragging one foot across the stage. Sebastian had been obliterated.[208] When Lucy returns home to "a feeling that some protecting barrier was gone," a heavy-handed authorial voice comments: "Some peoples' lives are affected by what happen to their person or their property; but for others fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts—that and nothing more." (30-32)

During Lucy's attendance of the second concert, the evening she returns from Haverford, specifically noted as January 4th[209], Sebastian sings the entire Schubert song cycle of *Die Wintereisse.* With any over-determined allusion that Cather deploys, or when one finds her altering an event, a fact, a time, and especially lyrics, one needs to

[208] In Cather iconography, the moon is central when it appears. In her letters and throughout her works she features the moon at crucial moments. As early as 1893, she writes to Mariel Gere, "Moonlight . . . obliterates what is ugly, softens what is harsh." Its disappearance would imply the revelation of the ugly and the harsh.
[209] Cather had attended Nevin's "homecoming" concert almost to the day.

take a moment to follow her lead.[210] In fact, Sebastian later directs Lucy: "When I am eccentric, catch step with me. I have a reason or think I have" (42). A good example here is her use of Franz Schubert's last song cycle, his Schwannengesang" ("Swan Song"). During the late 1920s, Cather had begun to immerse herself in chamber music in general and Schubert's song cycles in particular. She both bought records of performances and repeatedly attended concerts, according to Edith Lewis. She had also read the 1928 centennial collection of Schubert's letters, published by Knopf, a record of his which she found "heartbreaking . . .when one thinks of all that lay behind them."[211] Metaphorically, the *swan song* has come to mean "the final gesture," based on a belief that a swan, previously silent, sings beautifully just before death. Cather particularly refers to its songs *Die Doppelganger* (The Double) and *Die Wintereisse*, (The Winter Journey), arranged using poems from Henrich Heine's "The Homecoming" and written in despair near end of his life. In *Der Doppelganger*, the speaker/singer visits the house where his lover once lived. The man he sees standing there in torment looking at the house is his double. It isn't a stretch to consider that Cather, who often created doubles and dual natures, suggests Sebastian's other nature as a pale, lame, snake-like double whose clinging embrace pulls the singer to his death, nor that she casts her young foolish and tormented self in Lucy, traits of her older, self-serving persona in Harry, and her aging self in a regretful Sebastian who also exhibits much of Nevin's anguish in this complex reassessing.

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[210] In the essay, "'Dock Burrs in Yo' Pants'", John Urgo reads Cather's *Saphhira and the Slave Girl* from exactly this position. Elizabeth Sergeant also similarly advises that any "obscure spot . . . was worth puzzling over." *Memoir*, p. 75. To Carlton F. Wells, Cather wrote of changes she had made to the Elijah lyrics; she told him: "to a writer all those slight changes in language have great importance—perhaps an exaggerated importance" (1/7/1936).

[211] Re: attendance of concerts, see Edith Lewis. "heartbreaking…" in letter to Yehudi Menuhin (1/22/[1938]).

As Lucy listens to the concert, an authorial intrusion introduces Lucy's capacity for misperception: Lucy "attributed to the artist much that belonged to the composer. . . . She kept feeling that this was not an interpretation, this was the thing itself, with one man and one nature behind every song." Actually, "Sebastian did not identify himself with the melancholic youth; he presented him as if he were a memory, not to be brought too near into the present. One felt a long distance between the singer and the scenes he was recalling, a long perspective." The speaker of the passage suggests the author's awareness of her own long perspective, inviting the reader to *discern* a meta-text, as Cather did in "Uncle Valentine." In a moment of foreshadowing, Lucy, during the remainder of the concert, struggles with a "passion that drowns like back water." (30-31)[212]

David Porter rightfully casts Lucy as a darker counterpoint to the young Thea in *Song of the Lark*— the one "compliant, complacent, even a bit spineless," the other driven to success. He also finds that as with Thea's story, "Lucy's story too contains much of Cather."[213] I agree, but suggest it is important to note that Cather criticizes much in Lucy that she criticizes about her young self in her letters, unpleasant traits biographers have since recorded. Cather rejects the erratic drive and impulsivity apparent in Lucy's every shifting mood, frequently depicting her as uncertain, lacking purposefulness. Lucy is often swept up in the current of the moment: She moves through

[212] Cather often used this image to stand for overwhelming emotion. As early as the often quoted 1913 interview, speaking of her "erasure of personality" and feelings upon arriving in Nebraska, she remarked, "I thought I should go under." In a letter to Elizabeth Sergeant, Cather, voicing second thoughts about *My Antonia,* wrote: "the waters of bitterness simply closed over my head" (12/3/18). Also see Sergeant (pps.29-31) regarding Cather's indignant response to Sergeant's remarks about O'Neill's *Strange Interlude.* She 'hotly" responded, as, her words trailing off she "disappeared under water."

[213] See Porter 's interesting essay, "From *The Song of the* Lark to *Lucy Gayheart* and Die Walkure to Die Wintereisse*." Cather Studies: Willa Cather at the Modernist Crux. Edited by* Ann Moasley, John Murphy, Robert Thacker. UP of Nebraska, 2017, , pps. 149-169. Skaggs sees a tie to Paul's case here in Lucy's lack of ambition. In fact, Lucy and Paul share several of young Cather's traits such as "picture making", projection, desire for the things and perceived lifestyle of the artist, contempt for the philistine, etc.

the streets to the studio "her mind racing ahead of her, like a little boy following a kite" (62), or like "a twig or a leaf swept along the current" (75), a thing "carried along on a rushing river"(132). When Lucy decides to return to Chicago, she has "something like purpose," says the narrator and expects the girl to change her mind. "Lucy had hoped she could go at once. Perhaps by March she would have lost her courage and be sunk in apathy again"(186). Overwhelmed whenever emotionally fraught, Lucy is referred to or frequently refers to her self as "tired." Judgmental and intolerant, she measures Harry against *her* Sebastian and Haverford against *her* Chicago, telling her teacher Auerbach: "Family life in a little town is pretty deadly. It's being planted in the earth, like one of your carrots here. I'd rather be pulled up and thrown away." (Claude similarly depicts life in a small town--Chinese torture, buried but for the head.) Cather piles on the criticism. Lucy is secretive and critical, embarrassed by her family and home. She lies to Pauline about having "had a nervous smash-up" because of overwork (just as Cather had to George Seibel). Barely tolerant of her sister's untidiness and eating habits, Lucy "hadn't the least idea of what Pauline was really like—never considered," says the narrator, adding that she considered Pauline "'good', that is, 'fussy and a little tiresome." Lucy even expresses distaste in the dusty shop clutter of "lackadaisical" father "always weeks behind his repairs." At home she complains of the cramped space, the short distance between kitchen and parlor, and of the flimsy walls. "When she looked about this house where she had grown up, she felt so alien that she dreaded to touch anything. Even in her own bed she lay tense, on guard against something that was trying to snatch away her beautiful memories, to make her believe they were illusions and had never been anything else" (172, 156).

Earlier, to audition for Sebastian Lucy had played "Vision Fugitive" from Massenet's *Herodiade,* based on Flaubert's novel. Following the allusion, the reader finds that in the aria, Herod sings of following the "fugitive gleam" what to him represents the lost Salome. One translation reads: "One as wretched as I/Gladly surrenders to the beguiling gleam / that beyond ice, night and terror / Shows him a bright warm home / And a beloved soul beyond. / Only delusion is a gain to me." In Haverford, mourning Sebastian, the dissatisfied Lucy remembers that she had been chasing "something" and tells herself that Sebastian "had made that fugitive gleam an actual possession. With him she had learned that those flashes of promise could come true, they could be important things in one's life. . . . She wanted flowers and music and enchantment and love,--all the things she had first known with Sebastian." She tells herself that she "must go back into the world and get all she could of everything that had made him what he was." "She would have it all"—and begin "at once." "Let it betray her and mock her and break her heart, she must have it!" (183-5)[214]

Lucy is also petulant. When Sebastian teases her about taking pleasure in love, she irrationally spouts, "Yes, I do! And nobody can spoil it" and flees. The narrator adds, "When she was a little girl she used to run away after she had been scolded, . . .faster and faster, and if she could leave her hurt feelings behind. Now in the same way she went hurrying across the city." She mulls his words, her words, the scene—a classic shame response. She rebukes herself. Why "had she exposed her wound and her anger! Pauline had often told her that one day she would come to grief from blurting out everything. . . If she couldn't keep her feelings to herself, she must stay away" (70-1).

[214] The *Heriode* translation is taken from David Porter's historical essay in the Scholarly Edition of *Lucy Gayheart* (308). The reader finds very similar words spoken by Thea in *Song of the Lark.*

Finally, Lucy is self-righteous and indignant, traits that Harry {and Cather} shares. In fact, that very indignation on the part of both costs Lucy her life. Shortly before she is to leave, Lucy responds to rumors connecting her to Sebastian followed by her sister's presuming to arrange piano students for herby stomping out in a huff. Lucy heads toward the river, intending to vent her anger by skating, despite the blustery weather. Angry energy spent during the walk, she reasonably seeks a ride from Harry, who happens along. But Harry, still self-righteously punishing her for rejecting him, thereby embarrassing him in the community and, more importantly, ruining his plans for living through her, denies her a ride home in his cart. Through a friendly mask he pleads business matters. In reprimand, she shouts his name, "angry and imperious . . . as if she had the right to call him back" (197). "Such a storm of pain and anger boiled up in her." In a shame-rage spiral, she stomps on along the road. At the riverbank, Lucy straps on her skates, "her blood racing," and in "blinding anger" launches onto the ice, paying no attention to the thin surface until it cracks beneath her feet. Misperceiving the depth, she tries to stand but is hooked and dragged below by branches lodged beneath in the rushing current.

Pauline's descriptions of Lucy cast further aspersions that emerge from Cather's own sense of how her family viewed her.[215] The authorial voice confides that because her sister and father were "not like other people," Pauline "had to be 'normal' (a word Pauline used very often) and keep up the family's standing in the community. . . Pauline

[215] I believe that Cather here draws upon traits of the females in her family. Letters abound with the frictions. Cather never lived up to her mother's expectations, even though as Willa aged she became more like autocratic like her. Sister Elsie, particularly, was very critical of her, as letters attest, and Jessica and Willa had little in common from the beginning. Even after Cather's funeral, Roscoe's daughter comments to her mother on how little alike they were. Also, recall Cather's essay on Katherine Mansfield's take on "family" (see above) in *Not Under Forty*. Stout points out that Cather was collating this collection of essays while writing the novel.

told herself that she had 'put up a front,' given the oddities of sister and father" (168-9). The author editorializes here. In her own way, Pauline loved her sister *and* hated Lucy. "Personal hatred and family affection are not incompatible; they often flourish and grow strong together." Pauline tolerated the child as a "personal ornament reflecting credit on her self," for having raised motherless Lucy, tolerated her "bursts of temper" and her intermittent running away from home (both Cather tendencies). Lucy "usually got over her tempers out on the high road, but if she were shut up for punishment it only made her worse" (194). The sister's "sorest jealousy" set in, however, when Lucy excelled in school and was thereafter awarded preferential treatment by their father and the community.

In the relationship between Lucy and Sebastian, Cather reveals a hard won understanding of Nevin and her idealization of him. She belatedly understands his need for her and her youth. During their first meeting, the singer smiles" indulgently" at her ignorance, her naïve uncertainty, finds her "teachable." He effectively and easily charms her, directing his valet to open closets and drawers for her to wonder at the opulence and order. A "man must be rich and successful indeed to live in such beautiful order," Lucy thinks as she attempts to similarly order her room (45). In her mind, Harry is "crude, like everyone else she knew," whereas "nothing ever came near Sebastian to tarnish his personal elegance." She surmises that the baritone's "simplicity . . . must come from having a great deal and mastered a great deal. If you brushed up against his life ever so lightly it was like tapping a deep bell; you felt all that you could not hear." To Lucy, Sebastian suggests a life greatly different from her own, one that made her feel happy and frightened, "small and lost." She idealizes Sebastian, who (like Nevin, and like her older

self) kept "well behind his courteous, half-playful, and rather professional manner [,] . . . a manner so perfected that it could go on representing him when he himself was either lethargic or altogether absent." She clings to the valet, because he is more equal in status, "as if he were a protector among things that were new and strange."

Because the singer's distancing amiability "puzzled" and "discouraged" Lucy, she stalks him, assigning emotion to him. Unobserved in the streets, "his face struck her as melancholy." He "whom she used to see secretly, was his real self," she convinces herself (49). At a funeral (to which she has followed him) his face is all "anguish and despair." On another occasion, seeing him leave the Cathedral and not flagging a cab in his "usual manner," "she knew that he had been there with a purpose that had to do with the needs of his soul"(55). Admittedly, what attracts her to him is what seems to her is "the look of loneliness and disappointment"—and his studio and lifestyle. (45-55)

In her descriptions of how Lucy felt in the studio, Cather easily retrieves the feeling of being at Vineacre with Nevin. By February, their time spent in his studio has come to seem as though they were "shut away from the rest of the world . . . .the city below was blotted out." Her "sense of struggle vanished; her mind was like a pair of dancing balances brought to rest. Something quieted her like a great natural force." Bringing to mind Cather's experience of Anie Fields' 148 Charles Street and Nevin's Vineacre, Lucy found in the studio that, "[t]hings took their right relation, the trivial and disturbing shut out. Life was resolved into something simple and noble—yes, and joyous; a joyousness which seemed safe from time or change." (75). Lucy thought that the very "air one breathed in that room was different from any other in the world" and a "special kind of light there which kept a soft tint of gold, though the fog was brown and

the smoke hung low outside." (93). "To her it was full of the man himself." The "quiet and comfort" she enjoyed was because of him. She believed that she "was thus lifted up above the sweating streets because of his concern for her" (131).

Furthermore, just as Cather had entered Nevin's life during his decline, Lucy enters Sebastian's during a low point. Returned to America only for the money, he no longer plays important venues, his marriage to a cold, "managing" wife is perfunctory, and his own sense of mortality weighs heavily upon him, given that two close friends die within the first few weeks of his arrival. Cynicism and despair have settled upon him. "Now, all in a moment, it came over him that when people spoke of their dead youth they were not using a figure of speech. . . . Emptiness, that was the feeling." Youth was "forever and irrevocably gone." Sounding much like middle-aged Nevin and the older, increasingly depressed Cather, Sebastian "had clung to a secret belief that he would pick it up again, somewhere. This was a time of temporary lassitude and disillusion, but his old feeling would come back; he would turn a corner and confront it. He would waken some morning and step out of bed the man he used to be." But reading his friend's obituary, Sebastian begins "remembering everything, and everything seemed to have gone wrong."[216] Cather's poignant explanation of his need for Lucy reveals her own evolved understanding of Nevin's desperate needs, realized from a point in time when she was in her late fifties and slowly drawing similar conclusions about aging and about mistakes made in life, as seen in her late letters.

Sebastian latches onto Lucy, despite his apparent knowledge that seeking sympathy from a young girl posed problems. Like Harry, he, too, rationalizes Lucy's

[216] Among the many troubling letters Cather wrote in her later life, one to Roscoe during an episode of "nerves" she write "after I write a letter to any of the family, I lie awake all night, and all my past failings and failures go through my head like a horrible cinema film." (Probably September 1938)

difference; her feeling toward him was “more like a chivalrous loyalty than a young passion.” In her eyes “he read devotion there, and the fire of imagination; but no invitation, no appeal. In her companionship there was never the shadow of a claim.” Unlike other women, she did not “put out tentacles” (77-80). Thus convinced that he will find a sympathetic ear without attachment, he rushes Lucy to dinner, where he drinks heavily while reminiscing of his youth and his former relationship in France with the recently dead friend. Sebastian’s state of mind suggests that the now aging author understood Nevin’s melancholy more clearly, as well as the appeal she held for him and what had been gained from the relationship: a foolish young girl introduced to the rich life of a doting famous musician, a troubled man stimulated by the adoration of a bright young girl. Echoing Cather’s own sentiments as well as Nevin’s, Sebastian admits to Lucy, “I love young ardor, young fire.” In private he tries to replicate her unaffected laughter, and despite his long silent embrace of her at the doorway, he doesn’t want to make love to her, but to ”introduce her to all matter of places and culture.” When Lucy begins to believe that she is important to Sebastian, Mockford, representing a less gracious and dissenting voice, dispels any such thoughts. When Mockford implies Lucy’s unimportance to Sebastian, suggesting that she is merely a diversion for the bored artist who has returned to Chicago because he needs money, that she is such a “sympathetic” subject, so easy to train, Lucy flushes blushes because Mockford has exposed “her position as an outsider must see it,” as an “inexperienced country girl, with no education.” Fleeing the encounter, Lucy eventually admits to herself that her relationship to Sebastian was “an accidental relationship between someone who had everything and someone who had nothing at all,” but then convinces herself that she appeals to him for

that very reason. She knew that "it was all playing make-believe . . .except for her feeling—that was real." In previous pages the reader has seen the elated Lucy move obliviously through the city's streets on her way to Sebastian, but here Cather underscores the flighty mood shifts that accord Lucy with her perception of the moment and, in turn, color the way she experiences the world around her. Unsurprisingly, the now shamed Lucy suffers the "sullen rain" and notices all the lonely outcasts. "She thought she had never before seen so many sad and discouraged people" (58-63). In the relationship between Lucy and Sebastian, Cather reconsiders the appeal she had for Nevin and Nevin for her but despite coming closer to an understanding, she admits that self-deception dies hard.

In Book III Cather re-introduces Harry, now fifty-five, leaving Jacob Gayheart's funeral, "an occasion for remembering . . . Years ago he used to fight against reflection. But now he sometimes felt a melancholy pleasure in looking back over his life; he had begun to understand it a little better" (214). Yes, Harry has come to understand himself *a little better,* but the narrator makes perfectly clear that residues of self-deception can be consciously protective. Twent*y* five years have passed since Lucy's death. The narrator follows Harry back to his comfortable room behind the newer bank and, while he is lost in reflection, fills in the ways in which Harry had changed as a result of Lucy's death. The reader learns that he followed Lucy's dead body back to town but left town that night. He did not attend the funeral, which led, predictably, to town gossip about his cold treatment of her and her death. No one spoke directly to him about his absence but spoke of it in his hearing. He never spoke of it nor of the last contact they had along the road. His later erratic unbusiness-like behavior worried his bank clerks. His marriage was

fruitless and his home cold. During the War he personally funded and headed an ambulance unit, deliberately placing himself in danger. He courted Mr. Gayheart and quietly took care of his financial needs, and upon his death arranged that the house never be sold. Lucy's room is exactly as it had been, but because it is to be inhabited, he removes one item--Sebastian's photo.

"He, and he only, knew why he had been brutal to Lucy Gayheart when she came home." He had married Harriet to save face and out of spite, "hurting himself in order to hurt someone else." When Lucy, broken, returns to town, he continues to perceive her as "so slight, so fine, so reserved" and so "gathered up and sustained by something that never let her drop into the common world . . . unapproachable . . . aloof and alone." More than ever "he knew what he wanted," and though he "knew that she had some desperate need of him . . . Harry tells himself, she deserved to be punished." (214-16).[217] The omniscient narrator reveals that, "under his resentment and his determination to punish, there was a conviction lying very deep, so deep that he held no communion with it. After they had both been punished enough. . . [t[hey would be together again." One "such as Harry, knows he is going to have his own way; feels resourceful enough to leave all his blunders behind."(216). This misperception, like his misperception of what Lucy tried to tell him in Chicago, and his misperception of the girl herself, result in Lucy's death. At first he felt conscious guilt for his actions, but learned to rationalize that she had lived her best years. Then he tried not to think of her at all. Finally, he chose to remember the version necessary to him: her laughter, her "one face, one figure, that was mysteriously lovely," her fleeting footsteps in the cement. He is "not a man haunted by remorse"

[217] While outside the immediate focus of this work, the frequency punishment found in Cather's work (and in her letters), is also remarked upon by William Curtain and is relevant. Cather's last known work is a fragment that was to have been called *Punishment.*

remarks the narrator, because Lucy to him is no longer "a despairing little creature standing in the icy wind and lifting beseeching eyes. . . .She has receded to the far horizon line, along with all the fine things of youth, which do not change" (224).

Cather's understanding of how memory can be recalled and transformed to suit the affective needs of the one who remembers speaks to the work she had accomplished through her own efforts. For Cather, early humiliations and shame fueled her narratives right until the very end of her life. Over time, writing to retell those narratives transmuted painful affect and their persisting memories. Over time, and through narrative, Willa Cather was able to mitigate the shame she suffered as a result of her parents' geographic, class and status dislocations

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