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ADVERTISING “IN THESE TIMES:”
HOW HISTORICAL CONTEXT INFLUENCED
ADVERTISEMENTS FOR WILLA CATHER’S FICTION

by

Erika K. Hamilton

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Guy Reynolds

Lincoln, Nebraska

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HOW HISTORICAL CONTEXT INFLUENCED
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Erika K. Hamilton, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Adviser: Guy Reynolds

Willa Cather’s novels were published during a time of upheaval. In the three decades between *Alexander’s Bridge* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, America’s optimism, social mores, culture, literature and advertising trends were shaken and changed by World War One, the “Roaring Twenties,” and the Great Depression. This dissertation examines how Cather’s fiction was advertised in periodicals during this time, how literary and historical context influenced advertisements, and how publicity for Cather conversed with and diverged from advertising trends. Each chapter explores Cather’s opinions on publicity strategies such as author photos, reviews, gossip, prizes, speaking engagements and endorsements, while acknowledging the dichotomy between Cather’s theory of art and her willingness to bend her own “rules” in favor of publicity and sales.

In public comments, Willa Cather disavowed any relationship between business and art. “Economics and art are strangers,” she wrote in a 1936 letter to *The Commonweal* (*Willa Cather On Writing* 27). What Cather wrote in theory, she didn’t always follow in practice. She wanted to write fiction for which there is no market demand, but she was interested in sales and actively guided the creation of

advertisements. Her novels and the advertisements for them did not usually follow market trends or current events, but publicity for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* fed off increased interest in books about religion. She shied away from allowing photos of herself, but large photos graced several advertisements placed by her publisher.

This study of Willa Cather's advertising history illustrates her growing popularity as a writer, her fluctuating level of satisfaction with her publishers' commitment to advertising, and her efforts to create a market for her fiction in lieu of creating fiction for the market. It also examines advertisements for Cather in context with her contemporaries, analyzing advertisements for authors such as John Dos Passos, Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis and Bess Streeter Aldrich.

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INTRODUCTION

A study of methods used to advertise Willa Cather's fiction must necessarily acknowledge the dichotomy between Cather's theory of art and her business practice. In the 1973 introduction to *Uncle Valentine and Other Stories*, Bernice Slote lists two drives that motivated Willa Cather: 1) to have a successful career in a business world of men; and 2) to be a great artist (xiv). As a trusted and respected editor at *McClure's Magazine*, Cather was "determined to succeed in business, to win out." Her career as an editor, however, "did not mesh with her most creative forces, her most creative self" (Slote xiii). Her long-time partner, Edith Lewis, said "the hard grind of newspaper work" left Cather without "energy for anything else" (43). Cather's departure from *McClure's* to concentrate full-time on writing was intended to be a move away from the business world to focus more on the world of art, but Cather's business side never left her.

In her public comments, Willa Cather disavowed any relationship between business and art. "Economics and art are strangers," she wrote in a 1936 letter to *The Commonweal* (*Willa Cather On Writing* 27). Despite Cather's "public posturing" against market demand and popular taste, as expressed in "On the Art of Fiction" (1920) and "The Novel D meubl " (1922), Melissa Homestead states that Cather "nevertheless quietly exploited middlebrow institutions, such as book clubs and mass-circulation women's magazines, as a way to reach and engage the common reader" (78). What Cather wrote in theory, she didn't always follow in practice. Brent Bohlke notes in his

Introduction to *Willa Cather in Person* that she “courted and enjoyed public notice, yet she loved anonymity and seclusion. She was enamored of the notice of the press and deeply resentful of the intrusions the press made upon her time and energies. She sought fame but disliked attention” (xxi). What Bohlke describes as a “civil war in Cather’s personality” is further described by David Porter as “rifts” or “divides” in Cather’s life and fiction. In his study of “autobiographical vignettes” and dust jacket blurbs written or co-written by Cather and Lewis, Porter sees Cather as “an author whose first goal throughout her career is to reach the heights” of art and as an author who “repeatedly devoted her writing skills to penning advertising copy and to otherwise promoting herself” (xx). My own study of print advertisements shows this same “jostling” (borrowing Sloté’s term) between art and business. Cather says she wants to write fiction for which there is no market demand, but she is interested in sales and actively guides the creation of advertisements. Her novels and the advertisements for them do not usually follow market trends, but publicity for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* feeds off interest in books about religion. She shies away from allowing photos of herself, but large photos grace several advertisements placed by Alfred Knopf’s publishing firm.

Bohlke and Porter both write about an “interview” printed in the September 5, 1926 issue of the *Nebraska State Journal*. Bohlke says: “This short interview, obviously wrested from her in an inescapable moment, reveals her impatience with the press, her wit, and much about her personality” (89). In 1986, Bohlke thought the interview must have originated with “a New York paper, but no source is indicated by the *Journal*, and the original appearance has not been located” (90). It was determined later that Willa

Cather herself had created and written the fictional interview. David Porter says “the handwritten corrections to the typescript are in Cather’s hand, and comparison of the typing with that of the 1926 sketch confirms that it too is hers” (25). Cather’s fictional interview with herself certainly reveals her wit and personality, but it calls into question her “impatience” with publicity. Reading it as self-promotion rather than a true interview highlights Cather’s playful willingness to bend her own rules. Although she did not customarily supply gossip columns with news about her travel, Cather offers this in the interview: “Yes, I’m going out of town,—it’s rather evident. No, not West this time. I have just come back from three months in New Mexico. Now I’m going up into New England” (quoted in Bohlke 90; Porter 25). As Porter points out, Cather fictionalizes the gossip about her trip to New Mexico which “in fact lasted closer to six weeks than three months” (Porter 315). After offering that point of gossip, Cather announces her upcoming book:

“I suppose, Miss Cather, it’s no use to ask you for the title. You told me several years ago that you never announced the title of a new book until it was completed.”

“Did I tell you that? Well, this time I’ll make an exception. I don’t like to get into a rut about anything. I call this book ‘Death Comes for the Archbishop’” (quoted in Bohlke 90; Porter 26).

This passage illustrates Cather's acknowledgement that she does not always practice her own theory. She said in a 1925 interview (a real interview) that she would not reveal a book's title before the book was finished, but now she makes an exception—not as a favor to an anonymous interviewer, but as a self-promoting favor to herself.

Cather's dichotomy between art and business resonates with my own background as a creative writer. In 2002, when I began studying advertisements for Willa Cather's novels, I was finishing my Master's degree in fiction writing. In the current literary marketplace, agents and book publishers often require that authors submit a plan for publicizing their own work. This plan (for the current market) might include book signings, speaking engagements, media interviews, and an interactive website. Today's fiction writers either embrace the dichotomy of being artists and being in business for themselves or they choose one over the other (artistry at the expense of sales or sales at the expense of artistry). The publishing industry has changed greatly in the last century, but this dichotomy remains. For a creative writer, it is important to look back at the history of literary advertising to understand how it came to be what it is today. Part of this history is how and why authors like Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis played an active role in crafting the content and character of their own publicity.

My initial reason for pursuing this research was an interest in how Willa Cather helped advertise her fiction. As I looked through the pages that surround her advertisements in *The Publishers' Weekly* and other periodicals, I realized the importance of studying her publicity in relation to historical moments and the publicity of her contemporaries. My study of Willa Cather's advertising strategies became contextual as

well as longitudinal, supported and enhanced by matching actual advertisements with what she and her contemporaries mention in letters to publishers and friends. I also paid close attention to articles published in the trade journals of the time that offered advice on advertising strategies, window displays, and the value of critical reviews, supplemented with current scholarship on the history of advertising, the literary marketplace, and Cather's relationship with both.

I have been asked at various times why it is important to study the advertising of Willa Cather's fiction. In response, I give three reasons. 1) Literary market trends follow historical moments. This study shows that Cather's fiction and advertising strategies did not typically follow the market trends or respond to current events. 2) In letters to Ferris Greenslet, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, Cather mentions advertisements for other writers and strongly indicates her wish that Houghton Mifflin do the same for her. This study includes analysis of advertisements for authors such as John Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis and Bess Streeter Aldrich with an eye toward similarities and differences in relation to advertisements for Cather. 3) This "epic longitudinal" of Cather's advertising history (borrowing from Greenslet's description of Cather's novels) illustrates a narrative arc in her growing popularity as a writer and her fluctuating level of satisfaction with her publishers' commitment to advertising.

Willa Cather's novels were published during a time of upheaval. In the three decades between *Alexander's Bridge* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, America's optimism, social mores, culture, literature and advertising trends were shaken and changed by World War One, the "Roaring Twenties," and the Great Depression. For a

first-time novelist, the limited exposure for *Alexander's Bridge* and *O Pioneers!* was understandable, but as Willa Cather became more prolific and saw her advertising budgets decrease rather than increase, she began to yearn for a new type of advertising. Her switch from Houghton Mifflin to Alfred Knopf brought her satisfaction with improved advertisements and increased sales. During the late 1920s, however, her “honeymoon” period with Knopf’s firm ended and her letters indicate a growing sense of frustration with what she viewed as a lack of attention to booksellers and advertising. When *Shadows on the Rock* achieved status as the number-one best seller, however, Cather once again became comfortable and satisfied with Knopf’s handling of her work.

This dissertation examines how Cather’s fiction was advertised in periodicals during this time, how historical context influenced her advertisements, and how publicity for Cather conversed with and diverged from advertising trends. Cather often studied advertisements placed for other authors, picking out what she wanted for her own advertising. Since Cather actively compared her publicity strategies with the strategies for other authors, it becomes important for us to also study the comparisons.

Chapter One begins this study by exploring the advertising trends that were in place before Cather’s first novel was published. This chapter considers the history behind Houghton Mifflin’s reluctance to advertise broadly while also taking a look at the “revolution” in American literary advertising that brought about a shift in advertising trends. The new trends—single title advertisements, name recognition, sales figure announcements, and sensational headlines—offended conservative old-form publishing

companies like Houghton Mifflin, but the trends brought success to publishers who were willing to take risks.

Chapter Two compares and contrasts advertisements placed by Houghton Mifflin and Alfred Knopf to determine what influenced Cather's decision to change publishers. Advertisements for *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* are compared with advertisements for *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, *One of Ours*, Joseph Conrad, Joseph Hergesheimer, Mary Roberts Rinehart, and others.

Chapter Three takes a broader look at the literary market *My Ántonia* entered in 1918 and *One of Ours* joined in 1922. American troops entered World War One in 1917, but American publishers had joined the war effort much earlier in their rush to provide what historian John Tebbel calls "the first of a flood of new books capitalizing on the war" (81). The literary market became saturated with war books. Advertisements for *My Ántonia* were surrounded by notices for hastily written (and artistically inferior) first-person accounts, propaganda pieces, and non-fiction on the history or philosophy of the war. Novels that offered love stories instead of war stories were advertised as an escape from the war's violence. Although *My Ántonia* is not a conventional love story, Houghton Mifflin fit it into that role as part of its advertising campaign. By the time *One of Ours* was published in 1922, a shift was occurring in American public sentiment. The idealism and patriotic pride that ran rampant through advertisements in 1918 was souring into disillusionment. Readers were looking for an interpretation of the war's truth and significance. Cather was not offering *One of Ours* as an interpretation of the war, nor did

she want it advertised that way, but reviewers focused their critique on the last half of her novel and found it unrealistic and dissatisfying.

Chapter Four began as an inquiry into how Willa Cather's Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours* was used in subsequent advertising, but my research revealed Cather's role in the larger context of the controversy and redefinition of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. For the 1923 prize, *One of Ours* competed with Sinclair Lewis' best-selling novel, *Babbitt*. Two years earlier, Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* lost the Pulitzer Prize to Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in a controversial decision in which the deciding body at Columbia University ignored the fiction jury's vote to award the prize to *Main Street*. Lewis' April 4, 1926 letter to his publisher confessed that his "chief reasons" for refusing the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* included "the Main Street and possibly the Babbitt matters" (*From Main Street* 203). While scholarship often mentions Willa Cather's friendly correspondence with Sinclair Lewis and his gushing praise of her work during talks in Omaha, New York and Stockholm, not much is said in Cather Studies about the controversy that was brewing when she accepted her Pulitzer Prize and the small, unintentional way she played a role in the redefinition of the prize for fiction.

The entry of Sinclair Lewis' strong personality into this dissertation offers opportunity to explore how individual styles of publicity match an author's public personality. Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis both moved to new publishing firms early in their careers and took active roles in writing advertisements for their respective novels. They were both enthusiastic advertisers, but their approaches were different. Willa Cather's public personality was poised, dignified, yet richly alive and that transferred

over into her advertisements. She controlled her public image by limiting speaking engagements and not allowing “ridiculous” gossip about her to be placed in the trade journals. Sinclair Lewis was flamboyant, bigger than life, and trendy. His correspondence and publicity overflowed with passion and enthusiasm, so much so that Alfred Harcourt advised him to “stop wearing his heart on his sleeve and play with the cards closer to his belt” (*From Main Street* 50). Sinclair Lewis welcomed gossip. He welcomed controversy—he created it intentionally. While Cather preferred that her work stay in the spotlight while she had enough quiet time to write, Lewis desired the spotlight for his work, for himself, and for the authors he most admired.

Chapter Five studies advertisements for the four novels in between Cather’s Pulitzer Prize and her first book to hit number one on booksellers’ compiled lists of best-selling novels. Originally, my idea was to study how the Jazz Age of the “Roaring Twenties” influenced advertising for Willa Cather’s fiction, but I discovered that the only connection between Jazz Age advertising and Cather’s advertising was an increased use of illustration (but not much of an increase for Cather). Literary advertising in general became more artistic in the 1920s with beautiful landscapes and character portraits. True to the contemporary flapper style, women were pictured with short bobbed hair and short skirts. One remarkable advertisement from 1927, used by E. P. Dutton as cards on New York streetcars, is a sketch of a young flapper kicking a hapless gentleman down the stairs.¹ His boiler hat has flown off, his flask has fallen out of his pocket, and his

¹ See “Billboards for Bookselling” in *The Publishers’ Weekly*, October 8, 1927, pages 1366-1367.

cigarettes are scattering out of their case. The caption reads: “Just to remind you—I like books.” Compared to many of the advertisements from the 1920s studied for this dissertation, Cather’s are typically subdued. Illustrations are limited to one image repeated on the serialization, book jacket and advertisements for *A Lost Lady* (a landscape) and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (a portrait of Latour on his horse). Between 1923 and 1929, Cather’s novels and the advertising for them do not reflect a Jazz Age celebration of the break from tradition, but a modernist feeling of brokenness and reluctance to accept change.

The Great Depression of the 1930s changed the atmosphere of the literary marketplace. While publishers struggled to survive in a world where textbooks and non-fiction produced more sales than fiction, Cather’s sales soared to new heights. Chapter Six is a study of how books were advertised during the Great Depression when Americans were struggling with high unemployment, bread lines, and the Dust Bowl. Advertising moved away from the artistry and humor of the 1920s in favor of a bold, hard-working, busy look. Publishing firms focused on non-fiction because, as Roland Marchand explains, advertisers wanted “to show how the product—in price, function, or symbolic value—was particularly necessary or attractive ‘in these times.’” Advertisers needed to relate their product to the “concerns and anxieties of a depression-shaken public” (288). Despite cautious optimism that the depression would not hit the publishing industry as hard as it hit other industries, firms still lost revenue due to reduced orders from booksellers, reduced or eliminated orders from libraries, and the public’s increased use of the library to catch up on their reading. Cather’s fiction in the

1930s did not relate to the “concerns and anxieties of a depression-shaken public.”

Instead, her novels once again provided an escape from the cares of the day.

As I studied advertisements for Willa Cather’s *Shadows on the Rock*, I was surprised to find Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A White Bird Flying* listed as the second best-selling novel in the nation for three consecutive months. The reason for my surprise was not unfamiliarity with Aldrich, but the disparity in how two Nebraska authors with similar subjects and similar popularity are now studied so differently. Melissa Homestead addresses this disparity and its causes in her essay, “Middlebrow Readers and Pioneer Heroines,” which urges academic readers and college classrooms to place Bess Streeter Aldrich into the context of literary history “by putting her work into dialogue with Cather’s” (76). Homestead suggests that “Cather probably would have disavowed any connection to Aldrich” (77), but I think Aldrich invites this conversation in *A White Bird Flying* with her one sentence about a lady passing “a book store and there are Willa Cather’s books stacked up in a pyramid, and she gets snooty about her being a Nebraskan” (Aldrich 90). Chapter Six is not a conversation between novels, but it does put advertisements for Willa Cather into dialogue with advertisements for Aldrich.

Another Nebraska author appeared on national book lists in 1932, but her novels were distinctly different from the fiction of Cather and Aldrich. Mignon Good Eberhart was a popular mystery writer known as “America’s Agatha Christie” (Cypert 19). She published prolifically and successfully through the 1930s and 1940s, but relatively little is known about her now. Rick Cypert, in his biography of Eberhart, says that she and her friends “are in danger of fading from public consciousness, when in fact, during their

day, their names were commonplace. Their contributions, in whatever form, to the social and cultural fabric of the twentieth century are important to reclaim” (11). In 1935, the trio of best-selling authors from Nebraska were joined by Mari Sandoz with *Old Jules*, a non-fiction work about her pioneer father. Willa Cather rarely, if ever, communicated with Sandoz, Eberhart or Aldrich, but early twentieth century Nebraska literary history would be incomplete without a dialogue about how these four contemporaries were successfully advertised to booksellers and middlebrow readers.

Although this dissertation is designed to be a comprehensive study of advertisements placed throughout Cather’s writing career, there is a distinct focus on advertisements placed in *The Publishers’ Weekly*. I find this focus to be appropriate because the first challenge in getting a new book into the hands of readers is to convince the bookseller to stock and push the new title. Twice each year, early twentieth century booksellers were visited by each publisher’s traveler who introduced the firm’s new line of the “best books for this spring” (or fall). Booksellers had to decide which titles and how many copies to order so the store would meet demand and not be overstocked. Advertisements in trade journals played an important role in this decision because, as Ellen Gruber Garvey says, the book’s advertisement “alerted booksellers that the publisher considered the book important and so should be stocked” (“Ambivalent Advertising” 173). Publishers and authors depended on the booksellers to stock their title well, include it in circulars mailed to store customers, design a window or counter display, hang up posters, recommend it to customers, and have a basic familiarity with the title and author when the book was requested. Repeated advertisements in *The*

Publishers' Weekly kept the title and author in front of the booksellers while also providing a tool for publishers to indicate how fast the book was selling and how well it was received by reviewers.

The reading public in the early twentieth century also learned about a book through repeated exposure. They saw an advertisement in the newspaper, read a book review, saw it displayed in their local bookstore, learned about it through a book club, found it on a best sellers list, watched the movie based on the book, noticed somebody reading it on public transportation, and heard about it through word of mouth. The primary newspaper I have used for this dissertation is the *New York Times Book Review*, but further study should include *The Atlantic Monthly* (or *The Atlantic Bookshelf*), *The Bookman*, the *New Republic*, and the Wednesday Book Page of *The Chicago Daily News*.

CHAPTER ONE

SURVIVING THE REVOLUTION: SUCCESSFUL ADVERTISING STRATEGIES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A revolution occurred in American literary advertising in the late nineteenth century. Advertisements devoted to a single book overthrew hundred-title book lists. Desire for name recognition in publications ambushed desire for anonymity. Bold and bragging headlines rebelled against conservative and modest announcements. Most nineteenth century publishers joined the revolution with creative glee. They established and followed new trends in advertising, some more successfully than others. A few publishers held back. They noticed the new trends, shook their collective heads, and said, “Nothing good can come of this.” Henry Oscar Houghton was one of the skeptics. His nineteenth century comfort with the old strategies helped form Houghton Mifflin’s conservative advertising policy, a policy that was still in place when Willa Cather, in the early twentieth century, became frustrated with what she saw as inferior advertising. Her dissatisfaction focused on publicity for her own work, but the source of the conflict was the company’s nineteenth century distrust of new trends. The new trends—single title advertisements, name recognition, sales figure announcements, and sensational headlines—offended Henry Oscar Houghton and other conservative old-form publishers, but the trends brought success to publishers who were willing to take risks.

Long before this, there had been an intimate relationship between literature and advertisements. Jennifer Wicke, in *Advertising Fictions*, explains that the birth of modern advertising depended on the technology of the printing press in the fifteenth century. As the first books of literature were printed, *avertissement* “became the term for the page printers placed *first*, announcing their work, describing it, and giving their emblem and shop address” (3-4). The *avertissement* was the first book blurb. In the sixteenth century, the *avertissement* “became a complex site for the celebration of individual authors, the prefatory remarks that could set a literary work in a compelling context, paeans to cultural classics, and portraits and poems setting up cults of authorship” (5). Blurbs such as these made Erasmus and Galileo into public celebrities, but the praise did not stray outside the confines of the book. It wasn’t until the late seventeenth century when “publicity techniques called ‘advertising’ had slipped out from the covers of literary works and had helped to create the newspaper” (6). By the nineteenth century, literary work was competing for advertising space in the newspapers with other printed documents and commodities such as medicines and soaps. What had begun as an intimate relationship between literature and advertising became tenuous and strained.

Publishers in the late nineteenth century sought to heal this rift but, as with every revolution, there were opposing sides. On March 22, 1856, an anonymous article in the *American Publishers’ Circular and Literary Gazette* boasted that the publishing industry “numbers among its members none of those purblind old fogies who ‘do not believe that advertising pays’” (“Where” 173). In 1864, an “old fogy” joined the ranks of publishers

when Henry Oscar Houghton helped found Hurd & Houghton, a firm that would later (as Houghton Mifflin) publish Willa Cather's first novels. Houghton did not believe that advertising influenced book sales. He answered an author's complaint in 1883 by explaining that "notices in newspapers are read by very few people except the authors themselves and those specially interested" (quoted in Ballou 324). In the same letter, he claimed the only advantage of placing advertisements in newspapers was to get "the good will of the papers."

Henry Oscar Houghton was in the minority. The majority considered newspaper advertisements to be an effective method of calling attention to a book that would otherwise be lost in the swarm of new titles. Susan Geary explains:

The potential book-buyer of the 1850s had literally hundreds of titles from which to choose. In the year 1855 alone American publishers issued some 2,000 or so separate titles, at least 400 of which were fiction. With all those books jostling each other for notice, publishers were faced with the question of how to call attention to their books and how to persuade people to buy them (371).

The increase in titles published per year, along with the redefinition of best sellers from selling thousands of copies to selling tens of thousands, made it necessary for publishers to promote books more energetically than before. The *American Publishers' Circular*, in an article titled "Where, When, and How to Advertise," asserted that it "is not merely

important—it is absolutely necessary for us to advertise. A book were almost as well not printed as not advertised” (173). Without advertising, a book was doomed to obscurity and little to no sales.

The *American Publishers' Circular* considered the question of where, when, and how to advertise a “puzzling matter to determine” (173). The “how,” at least, had a pattern. Susan Geary bases her analysis of the pattern relationship between new advertising trends and best sellers on the strategy of James C. Derby’s 1853 campaign for *Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio*:

As the book starts to take off and sell, the advertising for it becomes more high-pressured. The size of the advertisements increases, the layout and typography become more insistently ostentatious, the one book crowds others off the page as more and more space is given to it alone, and the fact of its sales potential is exploited consistently. Then as sales peak, the campaign begins to wind down as the sale of the book continues under its own momentum until the market is saturated (Geary 381).

Short notices in book lists were sufficient when advertising campaigns were winding down, but new trends preferred single-title, high-pressure advertisements during the heat of promotion.

Book lists were the old, traditional form of literary advertising. They became regular features in newspapers by the middle of the eighteenth century and sometimes

listed over a hundred titles (Mott 294). Full pages were overrun with columns of book announcements that all looked alike in format if not in content. The announcements listed each book's title, author, price, and perhaps a brief description, but no book was singled out as more important than the others. Mary Noel describes the look of eighteenth and nineteenth century full-page book lists as similar to classified advertisements in "a modern Sunday paper" (67). As with modern classifieds, a person needed to be interested in reading every announcement in order to notice a specific one.

Single title advertisements offered creative alternatives to tedious book lists. They appeared in all sizes—quarter columns, quarter pages, half pages, and full pages. While book lists had just enough space to report the facts, single-titles allowed room for creativity. The extra space was filled with review excerpts, expanded descriptions, headlines in block capital letters, and illustrations. Sometimes, according to the *American Publishers' Circular*, "more real talent [was] displayed by the advertiser of a book than by its author" (174). Larger advertisements (and larger headlines) had the best chance for being noticed. The first full-page advertisement to push one book was placed by John P. Jewett for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Geary 377). Other publishers followed his lead, but paying for a full page, or even a quarter page, to advertise one book was costly (Geary 374). To risk that amount of money on one book demonstrated the publisher's faith in the work and the author.

Name recognition became important in single title advertising. Publishers expected that the name of a famous author would capture a reader's attention more readily than the name of an obscure, unknown writer. Houghton Mifflin's

advertisements—their book lists and their rare single-titles—relied heavily on name recognition and author reputation. The firm routinely awarded higher advertising budgets to books whose authors had proven profitable (Ballou 558). New authors received very little and struggled to attract public and critical attention to their work.

One way to gain name recognition was to write for newspapers. Claire Pettengill, in her discussion of “Fanny Fern’s Newspaper Fictions and the Reform of Print Culture,” observes that literary “marketing strategies presumed a reading audience that would consume both newspapers and novels; newspaper publishers often capitalized on the fame of a writer’s novels, and novel publishers on the success of her newspaper stories” (67). Recognition through newspaper writing depended on a movement away from anonymity. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, newspaper stories and poetry were predominantly published anonymously (Warren 145). Writers were able to publish their work and retain their private lives. Emily Dickinson, who frequently criticized the publishing industry in her poetry, protested the trend toward name recognition. In her 1861 poem, “I’m nobody,” Dickinson “advises other similarly anonymous nobodies not to blow their covers” (Scholnick 169). Most writers stepped out of anonymity, however, because they understood the growing importance of name recognition to literary success.

Fanny Fern and her publishers understood the importance. Although she concealed her true identity at the beginning of her career by assuming “Fanny Fern” as her pseudonym, she built her public reputation as an author by signing her pseudonym to her work. When she published *Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio* with Derby and

Miller, her “racy” newspaper sketches had already made “Fanny Fern” a household name (Geary 381). A single title advertisement for *Fern Leaves* in the June 4, 1853 issue of *The Literary World* begins with the headline, “FANNY FERN’S BOOK,” in large bold type (fig. 1.1). It is the second largest advertisement on the page. The largest is an announcement for *The Works of Shakspeare*. By the time Mason Brothers published *Ruth Hall* in December of 1854, Fern “was already the progenitrix of one of the biggest best sellers of the decade as well as a popular newspaper writer” (Geary 384). Her success attracted the attention of Robert Bonner, known in the late nineteenth century as the “most famous advertiser in America” (Derby 201). Before Bonner became editor of the *New York Ledger*, he discovered “the sales value of celebrity names” through an experiment. He had “signed the name of a famous theologian to his article” and observed that it received more attention than if he had signed it himself (Warren 143-144). From this experiment, Bonner “evolved the idea of printing only original, signed material” and he strove to acquire celebrities to write exclusively for the *Ledger* (Warren 145, 147). Fanny Fern was his first celebrity author, followed by E.D.E.N. Southworth, Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., and many others.

Since Fern already enjoyed name recognition and celebrity status, her book publishers focused on title recognition. Derby and Miller ran the same advertisement for *Fern Leaves* in both the June 4 and June 11 issues of *The Literary World*. The book’s title, “FERN LEAVES FROM FANNY’S PORTFOLIO,” stretches across the center of the advertisement. Other titles advertised on that same page blend into their respective announcements, but the title of Fern’s book jumps out at the reader. It calls for attention.

From December 1854 through January 1855, the Mason Brothers ran an extensive advertising campaign for *Ruth Hall*. According to Geary, they “ran twenty-two separate advertisements [. . .] Certain of these were repeated a number of times, so that altogether they paid for forty-one insertions in the [*New York Daily*] *Tribune*” (385). Pre-publication efforts included eight insertions of three different advertisements. Following publication, twenty-six insertions of seventeen different advertisements were placed in various newspapers (Geary 386-387). The goal of this advertising campaign was not merely to influence sales by mentioning a book once or twice, but to create a best seller by ingraining it into the memory through repetitive advertising.

An advertisement must be bold to ingrain itself into somebody’s memory, but boldness was not in vogue in post-Civil War literary advertising. Frank Luther Mott, in *Golden Multitudes*, states that publishers after the Civil War “failed to keep pace with producers in other fields in the matter of advertising; their announcements were dignified, modest, even shy” (294). Bragging as a marketing ploy was undignified and therefore unacceptable. John P. Jewett, however, was not a shy publisher. He understood that a good sales record breeds more sales. “The most sensational campaign for any book in that decade [the 1850s],” Mott explains, “was the one which young John P. Jewett, of Boston, put on for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in which he told of the mounting sales of that best seller in very much the modern manner” (294). One headline Jewett devised for Stowe’s novel boasted “Ten thousand copies sold in two weeks!” (quoted in Geary 378). As the figures rose, Jewett revised his advertisements to reflect the novel’s phenomenal success.

John Jewett was a trend setter in the literary advertising revolution. He was the first to advertise a single book on a full page and the first to announce impressive sales figures in an advertisement. Encouraged by Jewett's and Stowe's success, publishers imitated Jewett's marketing strategies and authors wrote novels in reply to Stowe's. C. L. Derby (not with J. C. Derby of Derby and Miller) advertised *Life at the South* by purchasing a quarter-page in *The Literary World* and announcing "EIGHT THOUSAND COPIES SOLD" and an "Unparalleled and Extraordinary Sale" with multiple exclamation marks. *Life at the South* is an imitation of, or answer to, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and references to the original abound in the advertisement. "THE REAL 'UNCLE TOM' [was] Now Ready" with its "Narratives, Scenes, and Incidents in *the real* 'life of the lowly.'" Centered within the advertisement, underneath the large block-letter title, is the chosen subtitle in bold: "'UNCLE TOM'S CABIN' AS IT IS."

Two months later, publisher T. B. Peterson placed a full-page advertisement in *The Literary World* for a novel titled *The Cabin and Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters*. Above the title, Peterson announces "8,000 COPIES PRINTED OF FIRST EDITION" and "FIVE THOUSAND COPIES ORDERED IN ADVANCE OF ITS PUBLICATION." Again, these announcements are accompanied by multiple enthusiastic exclamation marks. Like *Life at the South*, *The Cabin and the Parlor* is considered an answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In small type that is difficult to read, the advertisement describes the author's inspiration for the book:

It was conceived by its author long before the publication of ‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.’ When Mrs. Beecher Stowe was supplying the ‘National Era’ with weekly chapters of ‘Tom’s Cabin’ two years ago, it most forcibly occurred to Mr. Randolph [the author] that there were many gross exaggerations of fact, in what otherwise promised to be a very good story.

The advertisement contradicts itself and is too crowded with text, but it is exemplary of Jewett’s influence on advertising trends.

Announcements of sales figures became widespread and seemingly successful. In “Where, When, and How to Advertise,” the *American Publishers’ Circular* asserts that “people like to be in the fashion, moreover, what every body is reading, is supposed to be worth reading” (174). J. C. Derby followed the trend when he announced “6,000 Copies Ordered in Advance of Publication!” in the June advertisements for *Fern Leaves*. In August of 1853, *Fern Leaves* “shot into gaudy prominence” in a half-page advertisement that “blazoned” the title across a page of *Norton’s Literary Gazette* (Geary 382). Above the title appeared the boast, “30,000 SOLD IN EIGHT WEEKS.” On September 15, the same advertisement appeared in *Norton’s Literary Gazette* with revisions: “40,000 SOLD IN FOUR MONTHS” (quoted in Geary 382). In October, Derby and Miller placed advertisements boasting that sales for *Fern Leaves* “were greater than for any other American book—including *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (Warren 109). Derby claims to have sold over 80,000 copies within the first year of publication (213), but Susan Geary and Joyce Warren both believe he only sold 70,000. Still, that was a great improvement since 1829

when a sale of 6,500 copies was considered “the utmost limits to which the sale of a popular book can be pushed” (Geary 366).

The Mason Brothers put their own spin to the announcement of sales. As part of their pre-publication marketing strategy, they delayed the release of *Ruth Hall* from December 11 to December 14 (Warren 123). They claimed a need for more time to meet the “extraordinary” demand for the novel. Whether they had such an excessive demand is questionable. Geary notes that the absence of figures “is suspicious, and their avowal may be more of a prophecy than statement of actual fact” (386). After publication, the firm admitted again that they were having trouble meeting demand. On December 18, four days after the release date, Mason Brothers announced that the first and second editions of *Ruth Hall* were sold out. They were producing 1,500 copies a day for a third edition, but they were still behind in filling orders (Geary 388). Although no figures are cited in the Mason Brothers’ advertisements, they still boast of a high demand that eventually leads to impressive sales.

Not everyone was fond of advertisements that announced large sales and multiple editions. The first issue of *The Round Table* in 1863 lamented that “publishers are fast falling into the van of this clamorous crusade. Books go through their half dozen of editions (in the advertisements) before we can take breath on our race through the first chapter” (“Art of Advertising” 6). The *American Publishers’ Circular* also took issue with such announcements: “this thing has been overdone, and the announcement, ‘5000 sold in five days,’ or ‘12,000 in advance of publication,’ does not produce the effect it

once did” (“Where” 174). To stay ahead in advertising, publishers needed creativity and vision to develop new trends when the old became ineffective.

Modest, shy, and conservative advertisements were no longer effective for creating interest in a book. Trends moved toward bold predictions and sensational headlines. The Mason Brothers’ advertising campaign for *Ruth Hall* focused on three claims: “that the book was a work of genius, that it would create a sensation, and that it would be a best seller” (Geary 385-386). Pre-publication publicity included predictions for a “brilliant future.” The book was “destined to make a sensation” and its success would surpass every other work (Warren 123). After publication, the Mason Brothers shifted their campaign strategy from predictions to persuasion. They were anxious to persuade the public that *Ruth Hall* had fulfilled all predictions. Daily reports shared examples of the “electrifying” effect *Ruth Hall* had on its readers (Geary 386). Review excerpts called the novel “brilliant” and “a work of genius” and helped substantiate the Mason Brothers’ early claim that *Ruth Hall* was “destined to be one of the most popular works ever issued from an American press” (Warren 123). After January 18, 1855, Mason Brothers declared success for *Ruth Hall*. A daily advertisement ran in the *New York Tribune* during the week of February 17 declaring: “The Most Successful American Book | Ruth Hall” (quoted in Geary 389). For two days in April, an advertisement was repeated 23 times among other book notices in the *Tribune*: “*Ruth Hall*, Fanny Fern’s first novel, has proved the most successful Romance” (quoted in Geary 390; Warren 124). Their advertising did what they needed it to do. It called upon Fanny Fern’s name recognition, developed title recognition, and created a sensation.

The new trend toward the bold and sensational offended Houghton Mifflin and a handful of other publishers. Horace Elisha Scudder, editor at Houghton Mifflin from 1864 until his death in 1902, believed that “advertising should describe the book accurately and in conservative terms. False claims harm a book” (Ballou 1, 158). It was not conservative to praise a novel too enthusiastically or to predict best sellerdom before the book was on store shelves. In “Where, When, and How to Advertise,” the *American Publishers’ Circular* advocates “an air of truth and candor” in advertisements.

“Wholesale and unqualified commendation of the book advertised, or its author, often does more harm than good. It is quite possible to ply the adjectives so energetically as to disgust readers who are intelligent” (174). Editors for *The Round Table* agreed that “empty praises not only debauch the public appetite, but react with a nauseous virulence upon the authors who are the objects of the exaggeration” (6). Fortunately for Fanny Fern, the Mason Brothers’ campaign attracted more people than it offended.

Robert Bonner was a self-proclaimed “Napoleon of Advertisers” whose bold layouts and creative, cutting-edge marketing strategies managed to attract while they offended (Noel 85). He created and perfected the strategy of iteration. Iteration consisted of two to four lines of advertising copy (usually a single sentence), headed with a large capital letter, and repeated throughout one or more adjacent columns—sometimes an entire page (fig 1.2).² Some iteration advertisements advised: “Don’t go home without New York Ledger” (Bonner 4). Some urged subscribers to read particular stories in the

² See J. C. Derby’s *Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers*, page 204; Mary Noel’s *Villains Galore*, pages 67-68.

Ledger. Others bragged of celebrity authors, such as: “Fanny Fern writes only for the New York Ledger” and “Mrs. Southworth writes only for the New York Ledger” (4-16).³ Many readers and publishers considered Bonner’s advertisements ridiculous, but “even those who thought it ridiculous invested four cents at the nearest newsstand so as to see just what kind of fool the proprietor of this *Ledger* might be” (Noel 68). Bonner welcomed ridicule as long as it led to a sale or a new idea for iteration advertisements.

Serial installment advertisements were another of Bonner’s original strategies that invited ridicule as well as interest. For maximum visibility, he placed them in large-circulation periodicals such as the *New York Times*, the *Weekly Tribune*, and *Harper’s Weekly* (Noel 69, 71-72). Bonner would pay to print several chapters of a story in a paper other than the *Ledger* and sometimes included an introductory paragraph indicating that the chapters were being offered by that particular paper (Derby 204). On April 17, 1856, *The Gunmaker of Moscow, or Vladimir the Monk* was introduced in the *New York Times*:

We copy the following brilliant and powerfully written story from the *New York Ledger*, the great literary weekly paper. Our readers will enjoy a rare treat in its perusal and we commend it to their attention. The author Sylvanus Cobb, Jr. is decidedly the best newspaper story-writer in the United States (quoted in Noel 69).

³ Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Robert Bonner’s advertisements come from his eight-page advertisement in the May 13, 1858 issue of *The New York Times*.

The serial ran in two issues before it was abruptly interrupted “at the most exciting point” by a statement that “the rest of the charming serial would be found only in the *New York Ledger*, available at all newsstands for four cents” (Noel 69). Another serial was placed in the *New York Times* on May 13, 1858, this time under the heading of “Advertisement.” Only the first chapter was printed and, at the end, readers found the following:

The above is the commencement of this great story, which is now being published in the *New York Ledger*. We give this as a sample, but it is only the beginning of this most interesting, and beautiful tale—the balance, or continuation of it, can only be found in the *New York Ledger*, the great family paper, for which the most popular writers in the country contribute, and which can be found at all the stores throughout the city and country, where papers are sold (Bonner 2).

If a reader became involved in a serial installment, Bonner’s strategy motivated them to buy issues of the “great” *Ledger* so they would not miss the “great” story’s end.⁴

Bonner’s success encouraged publishers to imitate his strategies. The *New York Mercury* and *New York Weekly Dispatch* each placed serial installments and small iterations (five repetitions instead of Bonner’s fifty) in the *New York Times* (Noel 105, 108). Finally,

⁴ Robert Bonner’s reiteration of the word “great” in these advertisements conjures the different meanings of the word—remarkable in size, superior in quality, distinguished, preeminent—all of which he believed described the *New York Ledger*. See the advertisement reproduced on page 31 for more greatness.

readers became frustrated enough with serial installments that newspapers refused to print them (Noel 72).

In the Spring of 1858, the *Tribune* complained that Bonner's advertisements were too large and monopolized too much advertisement space. The *New York Herald* replied that he "should be allowed as much space as he was willing to pay for" (Noel 72). Bonner heard the *Herald's* reply and repaid its kindness by offering \$2,000 to advertise the *Ledger* in all eight pages of the May 6, 1858 issue of the *New York Herald*. He offered the same arrangement to the *New York Times* for their May 13, 1858 issue. These easily became "the largest [advertisements] that had ever appeared in a newspaper" (Noel 73). In the *New York Times*, Bonner filled half pages rather than full pages. The advertisements include incomplete serialized stories and iterations that promote the *Ledger* in general, the *Ledger's* celebrity authors, and the newest story being published by the journal. On page three, short paragraph sketches end with a variation of "Read Emerson Bennett's new story in the *New York Ledger*." A piece on women doctors written by celebrity author Fanny Fern ends this way:

I am certainly as indignant as my censor could be at the alleged unmanly, cowardly treatment some medical ladies have lately received at the hands of the aborigines of a Philadelphia hospital, who are less courteous to the sex than the howling savages described in Emerson Bennett's new story of "Blanch Bertrand, or the Perils of the Border," just issued in that incomparable family paper, the *New York Ledger*.

On the same page, another paragraph takes a heated, controversial topic (the eight million dollar tax levy in New York City) and pivots it into an advertisement for Bennett's unrelated story: "This is nearly the cost of our Federal government under the first administrations, and far more than the cost of Emerson Bennett's new story, now ready in the *New York Ledger*." What Noel describes as "a carefully constructed checkerboard pattern of words which again advised the reading of Emerson Bennett's story" appears on page thirteen (74). On the fourteenth page, a long advertisement praises Emerson Bennett's story, lists the *Ledger's* celebrities, and describes the *Ledger's* merits. These advertisements are not only bold and repetitive, but they are also fun. Bonner includes an iteration advertisement on page six that reads: "At daylight, this (Thursday) morning, the *New York Ledger* will be for sale at all the news offices in the United States, New Jersey and the Sandwich Islands."

Robert Bonner was not concerned about how much money he spent on advertising. His budget seemed limitless. In one year alone, he spent over \$100,000 advertising the *New York Ledger*. Henry Ward Beecher (Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother) was paid \$30,000 to write a novel, Alfred Tennyson received \$5,000 for a poem, and Charles Dickens earned \$5,000 for a story (Warren 147). In the Spring of 1855, Bonner "was determined to obtain a story from Fern" (Warren 145). He offered her \$25 per column, then \$50, then \$75. Fern refused each offer because she thought novel writing brought more profit than serialized stories. Finally, Bonner offered a hundred dollars per column and, "impressed by his pluck and determination," Fern accepted

(Warren 145). Newspapers throughout the country “published his extravagance,” but Bonner capitalized on this publicity (Noel 64). On May 19, 1855, Bonner announced in the *New York Ledger*:

GREAT ATTRACTION!
 NEW STORY FOR THE LEDGER
 by
 FANNY FERN!
 GREAT PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

. . . . It gives us pleasure to state that the most popular authoress in this or in any other country—

FANNY FERN

is now engaged in writing a Tale for the *Ledger*, the publication of which we will commence about the first of June. For this production we have to pay by far the highest price that has ever been paid by any newspaper publisher to any author (quoted in Warren 145).

Accounts vary regarding the total sum Fern received for writing “Fanny Ford.” James Derby and Joyce Warren agree that she was paid a total of one thousand dollars (Derby 203; Warren 146). Mary Noel, however, states that Fern’s serial installments appeared in ten issues, four columns per issue (64). If Noel’s account is correct, Fern would have made \$400 per issue and \$4,000 for the entire story. Regardless of how much Bonner

paid Fern for her story, his investment paid off. In 1856, the *Ledger*'s circulation reached 180,000, "the highest circulation ever reached by any American paper at the time," and later peaked at 400,000 (Warren 147). Although Bonner was advertising serialized stories instead of books and wasn't allowing any advertisements to be printed in the *New York Ledger*, his innovative strategies of repetition, serial installments, bold layouts, and linking fiction (dubiously) with current events were noticed by book publishers and used sparingly by those willing to try something new.

For many publishers, it was clear to see by 1900 that bold advertising paid off. Single title advertisements with confident headlines and predictions had become the norm, but Houghton Mifflin still did not believe that advertising influenced sales. George Harrison Mifflin authorized a study in 1900 to determine whether a correlation between the two existed. Upon completion of the study, the firm concluded:

There is almost no way of telling what benefit or return we get from any particular medium, & when we occasionally try a test advertisement in a single paper . . . the results seem absolutely *nil*. [. . .] We have increased the advertising & seen the sales fall off; we have cut down the advertising & seen the sales increase. [. . .] More & more we incline to believe that formal newspaper advertisements & announcements are the least effective way of making a book go (quoted in Ballou 426-427).

This conclusion confirmed Henry Houghton's long-standing distrust of advertising in periodicals. The firm immediately reduced its advertising budget from \$98,771 for 1900-1901 to \$75,000 for 1901-1902 (Ballou 425, 427). Instead of placing several single title advertisements, Houghton Mifflin remained faithful to its book lists. The company heard constant complaints and demands from its authors for more advertising, for more faith in their work, but the firm again shook its collective head and went about its old ways.

CHAPTER TWO

ADVERTISING CATHER DURING THE TRANSITION YEARS (1914-1922)⁵

Willa Cather's career as a professional novelist on Houghton Mifflin's list began when her editorial position with *McClure's Magazine* was ending. Her first novel, serialized in the spring issues of *McClure's* as *Alexander's Masquerade*, was published as *Alexander's Bridge* by Houghton Mifflin in April 1912. A notice for the book was included in the firm's four-page spread in the March 16 spring announcement issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*. Cather's book was on the first page of the book list, the sixth out of eight titles listed on that page. Since so many titles were cramped onto one page, there wasn't much room for anything except Cather's name, the book title, and a two-line description: "The story of a great engineer and the two women who play a part in his life. The first novel of a short story writer of popularity and distinction." As a first-time novelist, Cather did not have sales figures or reviews from previous books to help woo booksellers into stocking her novel. Instead, Houghton Mifflin used her status as a well-known and talented writer and editor of *McClure's* to assure booksellers that she would have a following.

⁵ Chapter Two is a revised, updated version of a previously published article. See: Hamilton, Erika. "Advertising Cather During The Transition Years (1914-1922)." *Willa Cather as Cultural Icon*, vol. 7 of *Cather Studies*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007: 13-26.

This was the first of many book list advertisements that included *Alexander's Bridge* and, later, *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark*. For a first-time novelist, the limited exposure was understandable, but as Willa Cather became more prolific and saw her advertising budgets decrease rather than increase, she began to get restless for a new type of advertising. In 1920, Cather allowed Alfred A. Knopf's firm to publish *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, a collection of her short stories, as a trial run. On January 12, 1921, Cather wrote to Ferris Greenslet, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, to report that "Claude," later to become *One of Ours*, would also be published by Knopf. Although she had voiced numerous complaints about Houghton Mifflin's handling of *My Ántonia*, she claimed that her main reason for switching to Knopf was advertising.⁶ "My decision is based entirely upon the conviction that his publicity work is, for me, much more spirited and effective than Houghton Mifflin's has been," she wrote. She was pleased with Knopf's publicity for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* because "the influence of the 'strong talk' on the jacket was perceptible in nearly all the reviews, and in his advertisements he did not hesitate to express an enthusiasm about my books."⁷ She refused at first to commit to a permanent break from Houghton Mifflin—she wanted the option of offering them future novels for publication—but she firmly believed Knopf would do the best publicity work for "Claude."

⁶ Charles Mignon, in his Textual Commentary for *My Ántonia*, suggests that Houghton Mifflin's timid publicity for Cather's novels "may very well have had an effect on her move to Alfred A. Knopf" (512). I argue that advertising played a definite and prominent role in her decision to switch publishers.

⁷ See WC to Ferris Greenslet, 12 January 1921.

Differences in advertising strategies are evident in issues of the *New York Times Book Review*, *The Publishers' Weekly* and the *New Republic* from 1914 through 1922. If Cather perused issues of the *New Republic*, as she likely did, she would have seen differences between Houghton Mifflin's book lists and Alfred Knopf's signed letters.⁸ Houghton Mifflin's full-page advertisements often listed and briefly described ten to thirty books, sometimes including excerpts from positive reviews. The company's few exceptions to their book list strategy included a December 1914 full-page advertisement devoted to Emerson's journals and a July 1921 back-cover quarter-page for *Legends*, Amy Lowell's poetic retelling of eleven legends and myths. Houghton Mifflin occasionally promoted poetry collections in the *New Republic*, but their advertisements focused primarily on nonfiction, such as biographies and histories, to reflect the periodical's attention to domestic and international affairs. Alfred Knopf also placed book lists in the *New Republic*, but his offered more enthusiasm and substance. Within a short description of a book, either non-fiction or fiction, Knopf included a mixture of subject and plot synopses, excerpts from reviews, and his own recommendations. Adolph Kroch recalls in his essay, "To Alfred Knopf from a Bookseller," that Knopf's lists were "not sales talks, but literary dissertations and elucidations of a publishing

⁸ The following descriptions of advertising techniques are summaries of the many advertisements studied in issues of the *New Republic*, 1914 through 1922: Alfred A. Knopf for Richardson book, *New Republic* 2 February 1918: iii; Knopf for Grant Watson novel, *New Republic* 9 February 1918: 66; Houghton Mifflin Co. book list, *New Republic* 7 November 1914: back cover; Houghton Mifflin book list, *New Republic* 14 November 1914: back cover; Houghton Mifflin for Amy Lowell's *Legends*, *New Republic* 27 July 1921: 252; Houghton Mifflin for Emerson journals, *New Republic* 12 December 1914: back cover; *New Republic* 17 April 1915, Literary Supplement.

program that was clear, incisive, uncompromising” (41). Some Knopf advertisements did not look like lists at all, but like personal letters to a friend complete with paragraphs and his signature in script. In these, Knopf marketed himself as a publisher who was more concerned about literary quality than market demand.

Houghton Mifflin anticipated Alfred Knopf’s letter-style technique in an October 3, 1915, quarter-page advertisement for *The Song of the Lark* in the *New York Times Book Review* (fig. 2.1). Unlike Knopf’s, Houghton Mifflin’s “letter” does not end with a personal signature in script. It also fails to announce the book’s title in large, bold typescript. To discover what the advertisement promotes, one must read through its first four lines. Readers who scan the page for bold titles and headlines may miss it altogether. The first lines are elegantly formal: “Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Company take pleasure in announcing a new and impotent [sic] novel.” This is not a personal, enthusiastic announcement, like when a friend rushes to the table, pushes a book forward, and gushes, “You have got to read this. It is so good!” Instead, the advertisement reads like a black-tie event where guests stand and politely applaud as the book is escorted to the stage for a prepared introduction—an impressive formality quickly forgotten when the book is mistakenly called “impotent” by the host rather than “important.” This black-tie event was scorned by Cather when she expressed dissatisfaction with Houghton Mifflin’s “timidity in advertising” and “formal introduction” of her books (WC to Greenslet, 19 May 1919).

Cather wanted advertisements to exude sincere enthusiasm and excitement (WC to Scaife, 30 October 1915). Instead, the announcement for *The Song of the Lark* exudes

detachment. It classifies the novel as a “study” and “panorama,” terms that sound heavy and academic. Except for the word “glorious” in the first paragraph, the synopsis reads like a vague book report. The second paragraph indicates that Cather handles her theme “in a big way,” but does not explain what that means. Does it mean that *The Song of the Lark* is a long novel (which it is) or does it mean something else? The advertisement’s last sentence finally shows some enthusiasm: “*The Song of the Lark* will stand high among the really worth while novels of the year.” While this statement promotes Cather’s work as important and worthwhile, it is overshadowed by the misspelled word in the first sentence. Houghton Mifflin had a company rule that advertising layouts “were to be studied with the same painstaking attention” given to advance copies of books (Ballou 426). The poor copy editing of this advertisement suggests that it did not receive the proper “painstaking attention” and that *The Song of the Lark* was not as important to Houghton Mifflin as they wished to indicate.

Houghton Mifflin had hoped to draw more attention to the novel by including a photograph in advertisements. In a July 1915 letter to Cather, Ferris Greenslet warned that the “Publicity Department says we cannot hope to sell more than 400 copies of ‘The Song of the Lark’ unless we have a new picture of you to be used in connection with the campaign. They also say that if they could only use that kodak of you and Fremstadt [sic] we should probably sell a hundred thousand right away!” Dorothea Lawrance Mann, poet and biographer, said in 1931 that “few authors are brave enough to refuse the use of their pictures.” Photos on advertisements had “become a kind of shibboleth with modern publishers and authors. At times they seem literally to believe that without a

picture a book cannot sell" ("Author's Face" 231). Cather, who was not fully comfortable with the idea that photographs sell novels, wanted to avoid associating Olive Fremstad, the famous opera singer, with Thea Kronborg. When Miss A. Van Tuyl of Houghton Mifflin originally asked for a new photo in May 1915, Cather responded:

I lament the costum [sic] of publishing photographs of authorines. I meant to read "Men of Iron." The publishers sent me a photograph of the author; fat woman with no neck, big stupid face set on her shoulders. I'll never read it. Now, if I have a prejudice against her type of face, mayn't hundreds of people perfectly well have a prejudice against mine? I can see it, for actresses and singers; but authorines, for the most part, possess countenances that do but discourage one with their wares (WC to Miss Van Tuyl, 24 May [1915]).

Despite her protest, Cather offered to have her photograph taken for the advertising campaign. She asked Van Tuyl if the photo should be "conventional" or "informal," perhaps of her "feeding squirrels or doing folk-dances." When Van Tuyl responded on May 25, she agreed merrily "about the lady who wrote 'Men of Iron', though I am going to read the book as soon as I can forget her face."

It has been a mystery as to which "authorine" possessed such an ugly face that Cather did not want to read her book. In *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, the editors explain that *Men of Iron* "was actually a Howard Pyle book from 1891. She may have

been thinking of the recent success *The Iron Woman*, which she referenced in 1912. However, the ‘authorine’ who wrote it was Cather’s friend Margaret Deland” (203). Perhaps a better suggestion is the historical novel, *The Man of Iron*, written by Richard Dehan and published by the Frederick Stokes Company in February 1915.⁹ Although Dehan wrote under a masculine pseudonym, the publishing industry knew she was a woman. Her real name was Clotilde Graves. She was born in Ireland, but moved to England with her family when she was nine years old. Graves was already a successful playwright in London and New York under her own name when she published her first novel in 1911 as Richard Dehan.

Advertisements for *The Man of Iron* began appearing in *The Publisher's Weekly* in August 1914. At the same time, the Stokes Company was advertising S. S. McClure’s *My Autobiography*, ghost-written by Willa Cather and published on September 4, 1914. Both books appear in a September 26 three-page announcement of Stokes’ autumn titles. *The Man of Iron*, originally intended for publication in October, is listed third out of five new fiction titles and its front cover is one of three jackets illustrated in the left column. “A novel of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870,” the advertisement announces. “Tremendous in power, this is not only a first-rate story, but will also be of great interest in comparing the last great war with the present” (1069). At the top of the next page, *My Autobiography* is listed alongside a photo of S. S. McClure. The ad copy, repeated from a September 5 advertisement, suggests that the “handsome volume offers unusual

⁹ My thanks to Kari Ronning, who provided the initial clue that led me to Richard Dehan and *The Man of Iron*.

opportunities for profitable bookselling,” including appeal to “every foreign born customer, especially Irish Americans” because of McClure’s Scotch-Irish heritage (1070). Later in October, McClure’s book was advertised “in steady demand regardless of the war or any other conditions.” It was “more praised by reviewers than any biography issued for months,” a vague assertion but still drawing upon the power of positive review (1315). Meanwhile, the delay of publication for *The Man of Iron* allowed Stokes an opportunity for a full-page advertisement announcing, “This is not a hasty war publication, but a solid, dramatic novel of immense timely interest” (1226).

Paragraph-length descriptions of both books appeared in *The Publishers’ Weekly* “Christmas Bookshelf” issue on November 21. The blurb for *The Man of Iron* focuses on the main characters: Otto von Bismarck, former Chancellor of Germany, “the man who spent a lifetime of preparation and finally plunged ruthlessly into war in order to cement the German Empire;” P. C. Breagh, “a young Irish war correspondent, hot-headed, plucky, proud, resourceful;” and the “heroine,” not named in the text but described as a “highly-strung French girl, daughter of an army officer, who, under the press of circumstances, finds herself at the front.” The blurb goes on to explain that “Richard Dehan (Clotilde Graves) is herself the daughter of an Irish army officer, and she has lived in the barracks, seen action, and knows the army and war from the inside,” thereby establishing her credentials for writing this war book (106). A few pages later, S. S. McClure’s *My Autobiography* is hailed as “a most unusual human document,” an “inspiring story,” and “a fascinating narrative, as he tells it in a quiet style, well colored

with humor and anecdote” (135). Through multiple advertisements and repeated praise, the Stokes Company was setting the stage for both books to succeed in the market.

Photos from 1880 to 1900 show Clotilde Graves as a young woman with a slender face, sloping shoulders, and a neck she began covering in high collars as she grew older (fig. 2.2). Advertisements for *The Man of Iron* display illustrations of Bismarck, either with a drawing of his stern face (fig. 2.3) or a reproduction of the jacket cover with Bismarck standing, arms crossed, as the “highly-strung French girl” (Juliette) kneels in front of him (fig. 2.4). Graves may have gained enough weight as she aged to match Cather’s description, but in 1914 she was struggling with a serious illness that postponed the publication of *The Man of Iron* by four months. It is possible that Cather and Van Tuyl were jokingly referring to the jacket illustration of Bismarck’s face, which conveniently fits Cather’s description: big face, no neck, broad shoulders.

Instead of having photographs in advertisements, or drawings of big stern faces, Cather preferred optimistic predictions and meaningful excerpts from reviews. In the spring of 1915, Cather expressed jealousy over Doubleday’s publicity methods, which she said made her feel “wistful” (WC to Greenslet, 28 March 1915). She may have seen Doubleday’s advertisement for Joseph Conrad in the March 13, 1915, issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*. This eye-catching announcement, with its headless statue and fearless predictions, exudes a bold confidence and enthusiasm that are lacking in Houghton Mifflin’s announcement for *The Song of the Lark*. Unlike the tucked-away title in Houghton Mifflin’s advertisement, Doubleday prominently displays Conrad’s title, *Victory*, in large, bold letters that are difficult to overlook. The bottom corners

advise that Conrad's *Chance* was voted "the Best Novel of 1914" and that Doubleday predicts "double the sales of *Chance*" for *Victory*, a prediction repeated in the second paragraph of the announcement's text. The text praises *Victory* for the "directness of its narrative" and "extraordinary power and swiftness of its action," but also claims that *Victory* has more "popular elements" than Conrad's previous novels.¹⁰ The first paragraph clears up possible confusion over the title. *Victory* is not a war novel, as the title suggests, but a "romance of Axel Heyst and Lena, the girl from a travelling Ladies' Orchestra, and their strange life on the deserted South Sea island of Samburan." The novel addresses an individual's isolation from other individuals—not a nation's conflict with other nations.

Besides the bold title, optimistic predictions, and enthusiastic praises for *Victory*, Doubleday's advertisement does something else that appealed to Cather. It includes a quotation from H. L. Mencken: "a tale indeed!" Cather often prodded Greenslet and R. L. Scaife, Houghton Mifflin's advertising director, to take advantage of positive comments her work received. She suggested review excerpts and rewrote advertising copy to include quotations. On October 19, 1915, more than two weeks after publication of *The Song of the Lark*, Scaife wrote to Cather, enclosing an advertisement proof to be printed in *The Transcript*. He remarked that "the reviews which are appearing are stunning, and any further announcement must include the *Nation*, which I have just seen this morning, and which is the best yet." Cather replied to Scaife on October 30 and said

¹⁰ Critics have suggested that *Victory*, while alleged by Doubleday to be better than *Chance*, is actually not very good.

The Transcript advertisement was uninspiring. She considered it damning to promote a book with empty phrases such as “an uncommonly interesting novel” or “unquestionably a novel of distinction.” A review’s enthusiastic tone was more important and influential than words of commendation. She suggested using quotations that had some “pull in them” such as: “glows with the color and exhilaration of Colorado” and “vibrates with that indescribable thrill which Stevenson has called the tuning fork of art.” Cather sent Scaife a revised advertisement that included review excerpts from the *Nation*, the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, the *New York Tribune*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. Two days later, she wrote to Greenslet and asked him to let Scaife know about quotable reviews in the *Boston Advertiser* and *New Bedford Standard* (WC to Greenslet, 1 November 1915).

When an advertisement for *The Song of the Lark* appeared in the November 20, 1915, issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, it included a review quotation. The excerpt, however, ignores all of Cather’s suggestions, including her disdain for empty commendations. It praises *The Song of the Lark* as “a distinct improvement on her previous novels, ‘O Pioneers,’ and ‘Alexander’s Bridge.’ It is unquestionably a novel of distinction.”¹¹ This excerpt, which includes a phrase Cather condemned in her letter to Scaife, seems to say that *The Song of the Lark* is a “novel of distinction” because it is “a distinct improvement.” It further implies that Cather’s previous novels were inferior to *The Song of the Lark* in one or more unnamed ways. This ambiguous advertisement is overshadowed by the “glorious romance” of *The Fortunes of Garin*, “a brilliant story” in

¹¹ The exclamation mark missing from *O Pioneers!* again suggests that Houghton Mifflin’s advertisements for Cather did not receive proper attention or care.

K, and the “brightness, sparkle, vivacity, rollicking humor” of *Little Miss Grouch* (as praised by the *Boston Advertiser*). A better, more exciting quotation would have described *The Song of the Lark* and Cather’s previous novels with clear, positive, enthusiastic adjectives rather than obscure praises.

Three years later, in December 1918, an article in *The Publishers’ Weekly* explained that every advertisement should impress a book upon the reader’s mind. The article stated that the advertising director’s job “is not merely to prepare a series of striking announcements, but to see to it that the idea behind the advertising, the point of view of his house in publishing the books, penetrates the minds” of all booksellers and buyers (1963). The director must “present the facts attractively; he must place this knowledge before the public in such a way that they are impressed.” A successful advertisement “attracts, creates interest, kindles desire, convinces and impels action.”¹² That action, of course, is to buy the book being advertised. While this article was not published until 1918, its ideas can be applied to advertisements from 1915. Does the November 20, 1915, advertisement for *The Song of the Lark* impress? Does it create interest in the story or kindle a desire to buy the book? Sadly, the answer is “no.”

¹² The 1918 Book Ad Contest, sponsored by *Publishers’ Weekly*, asked booksellers to select three advertisements and explain why they were the best that appeared in *The Publishers’ Weekly* from September 14 to November 16, 1918. The contest judges weighed each nomination against three “fundamental principles” of advertising—phraseology, pictorial construction, and typographical display (1963). An honorable mention was awarded to a Houghton Mifflin advertisement nominated by a bookseller who explained that she had never seen a bad advertisement from the company. Houghton Mifflin’s advertisements, in general, were not poor in quality, but the company’s low expectations and budget for Cather’s novels did not encourage them to do their best when advertising her work.

At least one Houghton Mifflin advertisement, an advertisement for *My Ántonia*, managed to impress. It was so well done that it attracted the attention of the man who would later publish *One of Ours*. Alfred Knopf, in his “Miss Cather” essay, describes “an oddly dignified advertisement” for *My Ántonia* that he saw in the fall of 1918 (205). Perhaps he saw the September 29, 1918, advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review* (fig. 2.5). While this quarter-page does not include review quotations, it does show more enthusiasm. The title immediately catches the eye with bold typescript and is followed by a list of Cather’s previous works: *The Song of the Lark* and *O Pioneers!* “etc., etc.” This list not only invokes the memory of past novels to help sell the new novel, but also suggests that Cather has written more than three books. She is a prolific novelist with an established and growing reputation. The paragraph that follows is rich with enthusiasm. It praises Cather’s “rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth.” While *The Song of the Lark* was classified as a study or panorama, *My Ántonia* is “a love story of profound human appeal.” In the last few lines, Houghton Mifflin describes the book as “one of the really notable American novels of recent years. We unreservedly recommend it to every lover of good fiction.” The very bottom is signed in script: “Houghton Mifflin Company.”

This advertisement is no longer a black-tie event, but a fancy dinner party where a guest wishes to gush about the new book, but must do so within the manners of polite society.

It is possible that Willa Cather helped write the text for this advertisement. The wording is similar to the blurb printed on the first edition dust jacket for *My Ántonia*.

David Porter says the beginning and the end of the blurb were written by Ferris

Greenslet, but the middle “has no counterpart in his house memo and must have been added either by Cather or with her approval” (40). The middle text, which Cather may have written, says this: “Miss Cather has the rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth. MY ÁNTONIA is a love story, brimming with human appeal.” If Cather did write this, and Greenslet wrote “we unreservedly recommend it to every lover of good fiction,” then the added enthusiasm was not an improvement on Houghton Mifflin’s part, but a sales pitch added by Cather.

Despite the improved enthusiasm in Houghton Mifflin’s advertisements, either by Greenslet’s pen or by Cather’s, she continued to be dissatisfied. In her five-page grievance letter to Greenslet, she expressed admiration for Knopf’s advertising of Joseph Hergesheimer’s *Java Head* (WC to Greenslet, 19 May 1919). She said that Knopf’s splendid publicity work had improved Hergesheimer’s reputation and career, even if it did little to increase sales. Throughout 1919, Cather’s letters are peppered with references to Knopf’s advertising strategies and her requests for Houghton Mifflin to follow Knopf’s lead.¹³ She may have seen the *Java Head* advertisement in the January 12, 1919, issue of the *New York Times Book Review*. Unlike Scaife, Knopf did not wait long to include review excerpts in his advertisements. By January 12, *Java Head* had been on store shelves for only one week and yet it was “an instantaneous success.” This advertisement includes five enthusiastic reviews. The first says that *Java Head* is “a strange, most unusual, beautiful, intriguing story” and another calls Hergesheimer “one of

¹³ See WC to Ferris Greenslet, Saturday [May 1919]; WC to Ferris Greenslet, 7 October [1919]; WC to Ferris Greenslet, 17 November 1919.

the great novelists of the period.” This was what Cather wanted in her advertisements— instantaneous and enthusiastic review excerpts.

While Cather appealed for better advertisements, Houghton Mifflin decreased its advertising budget for her novels. The firm distrusted any link between advertising and sales (Mignon 512). They still referred to the study authorized by George Harrison Mifflin in 1900 that led them to conclude “formal newspaper advertisements and announcements are the least effective way of making a book go” (Ballou 427). In May of 1919, Greenslet indicated to Cather that he was unsure if more advertising would help sell her novel. “Possibly more advertising of ‘My Ántonia’ would have resulted in larger sales,” he said, “but for whatever reason, it did not react as it should” (Greenslet to WC, 23 May 1919).

This distrust of advertising did not stop the firm from awarding higher allocations to books whose authors had proven to be profitable. If a previous book was a best seller, the company was confident that the author’s new book would repay advertising costs in high sales. In 1914, Houghton Mifflin allotted over \$6,000 to advertise Henry Sydnor Harrison’s novel, *V. V.’s Eyes*, because his first novel, *Queed*, had done so well (Ballou 558).¹⁴ Eleanor Porter’s *Just David* received an allocation of \$4,000. The novel

¹⁴ Greenslet often referred to the success of *Queed* in his letters to Cather. On March 30, 1915, he wrote to her about “the historic case of ‘Queed’ which went in the front door of the Doubleday shop and left by the back and led the six best sellers for nearly a year under our imprint.” On November 1, 1915, while discussing strategies for advertising *The Song of the Lark* in women’s colleges, Greenslet commented that “[s]omething like this was used very successfully in launching ‘Queed’ while Harrison was still unknown.” Houghton Mifflin was very proud of its success with Harrison’s first novel and that pride carried over into the advertising of his next.

accumulated 100,000 advance orders for the *Pollyanna* author and became a best seller in 1916. On May 2, 1916, Cather wrote to Greenslet that she was glad *The Song of the Lark* was still selling. “Of course,” she continued, “on your account as well as on my own, I would like to be as live a proposition as, say, Mrs. Porter. But neither for your sake nor for my sake would I, even if I could, produce that product for which our public is so eager.” *The Song of the Lark* had received an advertising budget of \$1,000 (Crane 48). Three years later, *My Ántonia* received only \$300 (58). That \$300, in 1918, could buy twelve full-page advertisements for \$25 each, or maybe twenty half-page advertisements, but there would be no funding left for review copies or display material. Ferris Greenslet assured Cather that *My Ántonia* would be well-advertised. “You may be very sure,” he wrote, “that we are thoroughly alive to the importance of the book, and shall not hide its light under a bushel” (FG to WC, 22 October 1918). These words did not match up, however, with the \$300 advertising allotment that reflected the firm’s lack of confidence in the selling power of her novels.

Greenslet sought ways to prove to Cather that Houghton Mifflin was interested in supporting her work. In letters enclosing an advertisement or a publicity postcard, Greenslet wrote this or something similar: “I state this merely as additional corroborative evidence of my statement that we, by the mere light of nature, uninstigated and unprodded, have thorough belief in your books and function persistently in respect to them” (FG to WC, 22 August 1919). In the later months of 1919, Houghton Mifflin created a new advertisement for *My Ántonia*. On the back cover of Thomas Capek’s non-fiction book, *Czechs in America*, the firm included text from a letter written by F. J.

Sadilek of Saline County, Nebraska, who Willa Cather had visited while writing *My Ántonia*. When Cather's copy of the book arrived, she wrote to Ferris Greenslet:

The idea of advertising *Antonia* so conspicuously on the back cover is a splendid one, so good that I hate to see it spoiled for many people by a stupid mistake. The Bohemian who wrote that letter is a prominent man among his people in Nebraska, as you say; he is well known all over the state; but his name is SADILEK, and your advertising people have printed it Sadiler! Now, I very much doubt if Sadiler could be a Bohemian name at all. Such a needless mistake destroys part of the authenticity and force of the letter. I have several perfectly needless mistakes of that sort against your publicity department (WC to FG, 7 January 1920).

Greenslet replied a day later that “the name was conveyed to us as Sadiler. The mistake in the final letter of the name is, as you say, of course, unfortunate. I don't believe, however, that it will greatly impair the force of the advertisement” (FG to WC, 9 January 1920). Because of past errors in advertising copy, Cather had made an agreement with Greenslet “that every line of copy to advertise any of my books” should be shown to her in proof so she could catch mistakes like this. Greenslet's attitude that the misspelled name didn't matter was just one more annoyance that pushed Cather toward Knopf.

Cather explains her switch from Houghton Mifflin and “the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand” to the “search for something for which there

is no market demand” in her 1920 essay, “On the Art of Fiction” (8). She explains that, “in the beginning, the artist, like his public, is wedded to old forms, old ideals, and his vision is blurred by the memory of old delights he would like to recapture” (8). As a new novelist, Cather was “wedded” to old literary ideals (particularly noticeable in her Jamesian novel, *Alexander’s Bridge*). She was therefore well-matched with the old-form, long-established, market-minded Houghton Mifflin. In her 1922 essay, “The Novel D meubl ,” however, Cather refuses to write novels “manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people” because “fine quality is a distinct disadvantage in articles made for great numbers of people who do not want quality but quantity” (36). In both essays, Cather indicates her desire to set herself apart from trends in the literary marketplace by writing quality work that has no market, but her insistence on advertising shows her competing desire to create a market for her work. “Books like mine require a special kind of publicity work,” she wrote to Greenslet on May 19, 1919. She wanted to write what she liked, but also have a publisher who would “spend money in pushing it, to lose money for the first year or two in pushing it.” Cather’s jostling motives of art versus business required a publisher who not only valued quality and experimentation, but gladly spent money to advertise and create a market for it.

Knopf’s advertising demonstrates a dichotomy that is well-matched with Cather’s. His advertisements position him as a publisher who is more interested in books with literary, artistic value than wide-sale value. The success of his business, however, depended on sales. In a February 9, 1918, advertisement placed in the *New Republic*, Knopf wrote:

The representative of one of the largest American publishers told me that his house was about to reject, against his judgment, two unusual novels by a new writer—Grant Watson. He urged me to get hold of them; and succeeded in this. [. . .] I read the novels with the greatest interest and enjoyment, and accepted them immediately (66).

This large publishing company (Knopf does not give its name) was likely concerned about the sales potential of Watson’s unusual, experimental novels. Knopf, however, was interested in the literary value of Watson’s work and accepted it without hesitation, hoping to create a market for it through advertising.

Unlike Houghton Mifflin, Knopf did not reserve generous advertising budgets for only his best-selling authors. Instead, he was generous with all of his authors. During a 1961 presentation to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Knopf read from letters he had received from Clarence Day, Jr. about Knopf’s generous publicity work. Day, who was already on Knopf’s list of authors when Cather joined, published a collection of drawings that Knopf remembered as a failure (“Random” 96). Regarding that failed book, Day wrote to Knopf:

You gave me a first rate get up, fine reproductions, and a great deal more advertising than you should have. You spent all the money on the book that even an author could ask. No publisher could have done more for me than you did and I don’t believe I know any who would have done half as

much. The horrible failure of that book to sell was all my fault, not yours (96).

Even after the failure of the book of drawings, Knopf continued to spend extra money and time promoting Day's work. In early 1935, when Knopf published Day's *Life with Father*, Day wrote the following in a letter to his publisher:

I hope you are keeping your head and not throwing your money out of the window by advertising before it [*Life with Father*] takes hold. Studying your form chart, however, I haven't much confidence in you. You've gone mad and wasted good money on me in the past, and I suspect that sooner or later you will do it again ("Random" 98).

This time, Knopf's money was well-spent. In 1961, Knopf remembered *Life with Father* as "one of the most widely read and perhaps the most greatly loved book we ever published" (95). Although Day's eventual success happened in 1935, long after Cather switched to Knopf, Day's publication history from 1920 to 1935 demonstrates how Knopf, unlike Houghton Mifflin, was willing to spend and lose money on an author who had not yet proven profitable.

Accounts vary regarding Cather's first meeting with Alfred Knopf, but he offers similar versions in "Miss Cather" and a paper he presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society. During the presentation, Knopf said:

I think it was in 1919 that there happened to me the sort of thing a publisher dreams about but doesn't often experience. A lady named Willa Cather walked unannounced into our small offices on West 42nd Street. [. . .] She expressed surprise to learn that I knew who she was, and you must remember she had already published *My Ántonia*, so I didn't think I was very clever. She liked the kind of advertising we were doing (it must have been on a very small scale because we were very small publishers in those days). ("Random" 99)

In her 1940 essay honoring Knopf, Cather explains that she was impressed in 1919 (and afterwards) by Knopf's sincere enthusiasm for his authors and his willingness to "take any amount of pains with a book" despite a lack of funds ("Portrait" 12). Knopf's approach to his authors and advertising inspired Cather to allow him to publish and advertise a collection of her short stories in 1920 as a trial run. The collection was *Youth and the Bright Medusa*.

This trial run began with a short story that explored the struggle between creating art to satisfy the market and creating art to satisfy the self. Bernice Slote suggests that Eden Bower and Don Hedger in "Coming, Aphrodite!" represent two different concepts of success. Eden Bower seeks fame and money while Hedger searches for a new kind of art (Slote xx). In the story, Eden asks Hedger, "Why don't you paint the kind of pictures people can understand, and then, after you're successful, do whatever you like?" Hedger says he already is successful because "I work to please nobody but myself." He doesn't

want to have “a public” because “a public only wants what has been done over and over” (66). Cather’s statements in “The Novel D meubl ” and “On the Art of Fiction” publicly position her as an artist, like Don Hedger, who does not create for the market, but creates to capture the thoughts, feelings, pleasures and desperations that interest her. In practice, however, Cather was a mixture of Don and Eden. She wrote what she liked, but she also sought sales to support herself. The dichotomy between art and business, prevalent in both Cather and Knopf, is split into two extremes in “Coming, Aphrodite!” The merging of Cather and Knopf in publishing *Youth and the Bright Medusa* shows how the two motives could work together.

Knopf’s September 29, 1920, advertisement for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* shows plenty of enthusiasm and praise (fig. 2.6). While Houghton Mifflin rarely advertised fiction in the *New Republic*—mostly because of the journal’s “somewhat limited field of critical endeavor” (Greenslet to WC, 23 May 1919)—Knopf chose that periodical to advertise Cather’s newest collection. He displayed confidence and faith in her work by listing her collection at the top of a full-page book list in a medium that printed more advertisements for non-fiction than fiction. Above the collection’s title is the announcement: “A new Book by the author of ‘My Antonia’ [sic], etc.”¹⁵ This is a bold statement by Knopf, especially since Cather had not yet broken from Houghton

¹⁵ Most advertisements studied for this chapter, regardless of whether they were placed by Houghton Mifflin or Alfred Knopf, do not include the accented “ ” in Antonia’s name. A notable exception is a Houghton Mifflin advertisement in the September 28, 1918 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*. Subsequent advertisements in *The Publishers’ Weekly* printed “Antonia” without the necessary accent.

Mifflin. By referring to *My Ántonia*, Knopf draws on the popularity of the Houghton Mifflin book to help increase sales of the Knopf book.

The advertisement's first sentence establishes Cather as an important author who should be noticed: "There are not many living writers from whom a new book commands the attention with which each successive volume of Miss Cather's is now awaited. There seems to be no disputing the fact that she is our foremost living woman novelist." Knopf teases readers by implying that a new book is forthcoming, but does not say what it is. One must read on: "In the stories in the present volume she deals with youth's adventures with the many-colored Medusa of art." This sentence does two things. First, it answers the question, "What is the next book about?" Secondly, it explains the book's unusual title so confusion over its meaning will not decrease sales. Fanny Butcher, a book reviewer and friend of Cather, explains in her memoir that "a title has often made the difference between a winner in the literary horse race and the forgotten nag" (363). By explaining the title, Knopf tries to keep the book from being forgotten. The third sentence explains Cather's unique style with strong words: "Each tale is marked by the amazing ardor and restless energy of imagination which is peculiarly Miss Cather's; by a quick, bold cutting into the tissues of human experience and emotion that makes each of them a new discovery about character and life." Cather accused Houghton Mifflin's advertising of being timid, but Knopf's aggressive technique includes non-timid imagery of cutting human tissue.

Knopf did not wait for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* to be reviewed before he included quotations in the advertisement. Instead, he found reviews of Cather's past

work and used those, again drawing on the reputation she established with Houghton Mifflin. He even included a review excerpt from a periodical in Sweden, proving that Cather's work was not only read nationally, but internationally as well. Knopf did not have to wait long, however, for quotable reviews about *Youth and the Bright Medusa* to appear in newspapers and journals. The collection was an immediate success. Edmund Pearson's review in the October 3, 1920, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* enthusiastically advised: "Don't fail to read Willa Cather's latest book if you have to beg the price of it" (24).

Almost two weeks after the *New Republic* advertisement for *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, a different advertisement appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* (fig. 2.7). It is a short book list with interesting contrasts to Houghton Mifflin's list from five years earlier (fig. 2.8). While *The Song of the Lark* is promoted in the bottom corner of Houghton Mifflin's advertisement—overshadowed by the intriguing, central, diamond-shaped panel advertising Mary Roberts Rinehart's *K*, "The Novel That Has Swept The Country"—*Youth and the Bright Medusa* appears at the top of Knopf's. The Houghton Mifflin book list does not refer to Cather's previous works, *Alexander's Bridge* and *O Pioneers!*, but the Knopf list immediately refers to Cather as "Author of 'My Antonia.'" Houghton Mifflin offers a simple, but flawed description of *The Song of the Lark*, "the story of a prima donna's life, from childhood on a Western ranch to international fame—a story of ambition, of triumph and of love" (Thea grew up in a Nebraska town; not on a ranch), but Knopf offers a review excerpt from the *Nation* about *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, "one of the most poetical interpretations of American life that we possess."

While *The Song of the Lark* struggles to compete with the intriguing and fascinating books surrounding it, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* leaps off the page with its announcement of “eight distinguished stories!”¹⁶

With *One of Ours*, Knopf continued to invest in advertising that took advantage of Cather’s reputation. An announcement in the September 10, 1922, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* takes full advantage of her visibility, something she said Houghton Mifflin did not do (fig. 2.9). It includes a photograph of Cather, mentions *My Ántonia*, and proclaims “that Miss Cather was the only woman in the list of five leading American writers who have emerged in this decade.” This statement, coupled with Burton Rascoe’s comment that “Miss Cather is the one woman of indubitable genius that we have,” elevates Cather as an important American novelist. Knopf goes on to introduce *One of Ours* as “an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age.” If this is not enough to send readers to bookstores, Knopf continues his push by describing Claude Wheeler as “a sort of American Hamlet” and praising Cather’s “daring, impatient mind, her subtle and flexible style.” This advertisement is careful to not mention the book’s war aspect, but hints of the war are present.

Early in the development of *One of Ours*, Cather decided that she did not want the public to know she was writing a World War One novel. Alfred Knopf explains that she was “greatly concerned that no word should get abroad in advance of its publication that

¹⁶ Differences in advertisements of Houghton Mifflin and Alfred Knopf are discussed in Susan J. Rosowski’s Historical Essay in the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *A Lost Lady*. The essay offers valuable insight into what Cather saw as major differences between advertising strategies; Cather’s transition to Knopf so “Claude” would receive better advertising; and the effect of Cather’s Pulitzer Prize on book sales.

this novel touched on the war at all” (“Miss Cather” 206). Knopf reassured her in September of 1921 that it seemed “too soon to run any advertising that would make it clear that *One of Ours* was a war novel” and that the book must be advertised “as a fine novel and leave it to its opponents to emphasize the war aspect” (207). On February 5, 1922, Cather enclosed suggested text for the *One of Ours* dust cover and wrote to Knopf that Edith Lewis, her partner and collaborator, “says that it’s very difficult to write an ad for a story when the author insists that the theme of the story must not be whispered in the ad!” (*Selected Letters* 308).¹⁷ Although the September 10, 1922, advertisement does not specifically mention the war, it does allude to it. The war is “the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of his [Claude Wheeler’s] nature.” It is the “ever deepening sense of national drama, of national character.” These references conceal without misleading. Anyone surprised by the last half of *One of Ours* could return to these and recognize their subtle overtones of war.

While Cather was careful to conceal the appearance of war, she was not as strict about concealing her own appearance via photograph in the September 10 advertisement. Michael Schueth weighs Cather’s protest to Miss Van Tuyl about “the practice of publishing images of authors” against Cather’s other complaint “that her photographs were not sent out to newspapers and magazines to be published with reviews.” Schueth concludes that “the distinctions Cather made here between publicity and book design were ones she implemented: her picture never appeared on dust jackets or frontispieces.

¹⁷ Edith Lewis, a professional advertiser for the J. Walter Thompson Company, helped Cather write advertisements and book blurbs. She also helped review manuscripts and page proofs.

However, she did approve photographs for use in those materials less connected to her actual work” (52). Cather understood “the crucial role of photographs in book publicity,” but she wished to control her own public image. Collaborating with photographers, Cather developed and maintained an “iconic image” that she used in publicity (Schueth 64). Her chosen image was not informal—she did not folk-dance with squirrels. Instead, she sat for professional and conventional photographs. For *One of Ours* and *A Lost Lady*, the “iconic image” was Cather in a white blouse and embroidered teal jacket.

The text for the dust cover of the First Edition’s second printing, likely written by Willa Cather and Edith Lewis, features an advertising letter similar to the September 10, 1922, announcement printed in the *New York Times Book Review*. A comparison reveals a long list of phrases used by both, either word-for-word or revised. Both refer to Cather as “one of the few writers of today who refuses to be hurried,” a comment that affirms her desire to prioritize the literary quality of her work over timeliness of publication. The advertisements also indicate that *One of Ours* is Cather’s “first long novel since *My Antonia*,” reminding readers of her established reputation as a novelist. Other repeated phrases include: “an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age;” she “lavished” and “poured” her “subtle and flexible style, all the passion of her daring, impatient mind” into presenting “a single figure—a sort of young Hamlet of the prairies;” “Claude Wheeler’s stormy youth, his enigmatic marriage, and the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of the boy’s nature;” and “behind the personal drama there is an ever deepening sense of national drama, of national character, working itself out through individuals and their destiny.” These repeated phrases exude

excitement and invite curiosity about the work. They exclaim to browsers in bookstores, who may only glance at dust covers, that this is a novel worth reading.

Along with similarities, there are also notable differences between the dust cover's letter and the advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review*. The letter on the dust cover adds that *One of Ours* is an "intimate" and "haunting" account "told with almost epic simplicity" of a boy's "struggle with life and fate." According to this description, the novel is a coming-of-age story that is simultaneously simple in its delivery and epic in its hero's journey. The journey is not described explicitly, but again is hinted at. The dust cover claims that nothing "Miss Cather has ever written has quite prepared one for this book—and yet everything that she has written has been a preparation for it." This builds suspense and an eagerness to determine what is new, and yet so familiar, about this book. The answer, of course, is the war aspect. The familiar part of *One of Ours* is the first half because it shares the same setting as most of Cather's previous novels—a Nebraska farming community modeled after Red Cloud—and it follows the lives of those who grew up there. In a letter to H. L. Mencken dated May 30, 1919, Cather mentions working on a new novel whose first half is easy to write because it pulls itself along without much help from her, much like her other prairie novels. She is concerned, however, about the difficulty ahead in writing the last half. She does not share details with Mencken, but the difficult part she refers to is Claude's participation in the Great War. Although Cather had covered the war as a journalist, she had never written about it in fiction. Therefore, none of her readers, or so the dust cover claims, would expect her typical Nebraska prairie novel to become a war novel.

While some critics were thrown off and put off by the novel's war aspect, it did not adversely affect sales. Cather had hoped to receive 10,000 advance orders for *One of Ours* (Lewis 115). Instead, Knopf's aggressive advertising led to 12,000 advance orders. He printed 15,000 copies at first, but immediately printed another 10,000 to meet demand. In contrast, *My Ántonia* did not sell well until *One of Ours* won the Pulitzer Prize and boosted sales of all Cather titles. Houghton Mifflin's first printing of *My Ántonia* ran 3,500 copies (Crane 58). Edith Lewis reports in *Willa Cather Living* that "the initial sale of *My Ántonia* was small—in the first year it brought about \$1,300, and not quite \$400 in the second year" (108).¹⁸ From a business standpoint, this did not provide enough financial security for Cather to focus on her novels full-time. Royalties for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and *One of Ours*, combined, were approximately \$19,000 (115).

The success of Knopf's publicity work for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* is evident in the dust cover's advertising letter for *One of Ours*. Knopf had previously relied on novels Cather published with Houghton Mifflin, especially *My Ántonia*, to take advantage of her reputation with her former publisher to help advertise her new work. The publication of Cather's short story collection was so successful that Knopf felt comfortable announcing "Author of '*Youth and the Bright Medusa*'" in bold type near the top of his announcement for *One of Ours*. *My Ántonia* is also mentioned in the letter, but only in smaller type tucked within the fifth line of text. By the time *One of Ours* was

¹⁸ These sales figures were compared with Houghton Mifflin's production records and confirmed during research for the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *My Ántonia*. See James Woodress' Historical Essay in the Scholarly Edition for more information about early reception and sales figures.

published, Knopf no longer needed to rely on Houghton Mifflin's previous work to establish Cather's long-term reputation as a prominent novelist.

One of Knopf's many advertising techniques that appealed to Cather from the beginning was his strong interest in establishing long-term reputations for his authors. Knopf, who began his publishing firm in 1915 when he was twenty-three years old, was still establishing his own reputation as a New York publisher in 1919 and 1920. His fortune was therefore linked with the fortunes of every one of his authors. His success depended on theirs and he referred to his publishing business as a "personal affair" ("Random" 101). Knopf admired his authors, a fact Cather appreciated. Edith Lewis states that Knopf "made evident, not only to her [Cather] but to the world in general, his great admiration and belief in her" (116). This was an important contrast to Cather's claim that Houghton Mifflin showed little faith in her work.

In response to Cather's grievance letter in 1919, Ferris Greenslet voiced his belief that, if she were to switch publishers, she "would, in the end, fare worse" (FG to WC, 23 May 1919). Instead, she fared better. In 1940, Cather wrote the following: "I have always been proud that I asked young Mr. Knopf to take me over, with not so much as a hint from him that he would like to have me. It was a rather sudden decision. Did it work? The answer is, twenty years" ("Portrait" 26). Cather's decision to switch publishers—her move away from publicity devoted to formality and current trends in the marketplace in favor of publicity devoted to enthusiasm and literary quality—finally helped establish her as a prominent author and American icon.

CHAPTER THREE

TO SELL THE WAR (1918-1922):

ADVERTISING STRATEGIES FOR BOOKS ON WORLD WAR ONE

When advertisements for *My Ántonia* appeared in 1918 in *The Publishers' Weekly*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and similar periodicals, they were surrounded—and nearly overpowered—by advertisements for novels and biographies about the Great War. Advertised titles included *The Fighting Fleets*, *The Mind of the Soldier*, *The Cross of Fire*, *My Company*, and *The Call of the Offshore Wind*. American troops joined the war in 1917, but American publishers had joined the war effort much earlier in their rush to provide what historian John Tebbel calls “the first of a flood of new books capitalizing on the war” (81). The literary market became saturated with war books, creating a fierce competition among advertisers. Advertising directors had to convince booksellers and the reading public that the war book their firm was publishing was better than those published by other firms. *My Ántonia* seemed out-of-place in a war-time literary market, which valued non-fiction that informed and encouraged readers and shaped public opinion. In theory, Cather claimed she did not write for the current market. In practice, her novel fit awkwardly into a new market that opened up during the war.

At the same time Houghton Mifflin was advertising *My Ántonia* on a \$300 budget, E. P. Dutton and Company was implementing an aggressive advertising campaign for Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. The novel

was a pro-Allies war story written by a Spanish novelist, editor, and outspoken politician (Mott 241). Dutton’s advertisements for the novel were as outspoken and insistent as the novel’s author. In the September 22, 1918, issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, Dutton advertised *The Four Horsemen* five times—once on page 405, twice on 407, and twice again on 408 (fig. 3.1). Each advertisement began with the heading, “The Greatest War Novel,” followed by the title in bold and the author’s name. Each indicated that the First Edition was “exhausted,” a Second Edition was ready for purchase, and a third was “in press.” Through repetition, these advertisements entrenched the novel’s title in the reader’s memory.

Herbert Houston, Vice-President of Doubleday in 1918, believed “endless repetition” in advertising, “done in a graphic, interesting, informing way, would presently create in [. . .] communities an expectation—people would be on the *qui vive*,” or on the alert, “to watch your advertisement” (1616). Herbert Houston and Robert Bonner had the same idea. Bonner, the late nineteenth century’s “most famous advertiser in America,” had created the advertising strategy of iteration in the 1850s to urge readers to buy issues of his popular story magazine, the *New York Ledger* (Derby 201). Bonner’s iteration technique was borrowed and modified by Dutton’s advertising director to create publicity for Ibáñez’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Instead of repeating a single sentence several times in one advertisement as Bonner did, Dutton placed several advertisements—some close together, some not—that repeated a group of promotional lines. And instead of every advertisement including the very same text, Dutton included a different review excerpt in each. One quoted a review from the *New York Times Book*

Review and another quoted from the *Chicago Evening Post*. “A great novel,” says a quotation from New York’s *The Globe*, “one of the three or four outstanding novels of the war. [. . .] Seems to settle things more than any other novel written about the war” (408). The repetition caused readers to expect to see an advertisement for *The Four Horsemen* in each Sunday paper, and the different quotations encouraged readers to read each one instead of passing over them.

Dutton’s strategy to place Ibáñez’s novel prominently before the public eye appears to have worked. In 1918, *The Four Horsemen* sold 500,000 copies, placing the novel among the “half a dozen war books” published during the Great War that “were prominent in the monthly and yearly lists of best sellers” (Mott 240-241, Tebbel 87). In 1919, *The Four Horsemen* topped the *Bookman*’s list of best-selling fiction (Mott 329). By late 1921, Dutton was still frequently advertising the novel in the *New York Times Book Review*—still keeping the novel well within public view. On September 3, 1921, *The Publishers’ Weekly* reported that George Palmer Putnam and a banker friend compiled a list of 100 great books about the Great War. Included on that list was Ibáñez’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

The publication of war books such as *The Four Horsemen* and others on George Putnam’s list was considered essential to the war effort. An April 1918 article in *The Publishers’ Weekly* asserts that book publishing is essential in a time of war because it keeps the public informed and encourages the Army to push forward to victory. Fiction, especially, helps “stimulate public interest and stiffen public appreciation for the great efforts of the Allies” (“Book Publishing” 1165). These sentiments were echoed by

Herbert Houston of Doubleday in his May 1918 remarks to the eighteenth annual Convention of the American Booksellers' Association:

There is a real service, a real obligation, a real duty which you booksellers and we publishers owe not merely to ourselves, but to the cause of freedom in this time and period when freedom is menaced, because of that false idea that books are not essentials. The fact that it would put the book-trade out of business is after all incidental. It is not the harm that it would do to us, not the loss to our businesses, but the loss to the spirit, to the fighting edge, to the morale of the free nations that are to-day on that fateful battle line in France. As I look at it, the book-shops are not merely centers of the intellectual life of their communities, they are conservers of the fighting spirit of the free nations in this time of test and trial (1615).

Most American publishers and booksellers viewed the buying and selling of pro-Allies war books as an act, display and promotion of patriotism. In his opening address to the same convention, Association President Ward Macauley called on all booksellers to be patriotic. "Before we are booksellers," he said, "we must be men and women and citizens of this greatly beloved America. Nothing else must weigh in the balance against our country's good. We should rightly be leaders in so helping to shape public opinion that democracy may speed onward. [. . .] Those who influence the reading of a great nation have a mighty responsibility" (1602).

Ferris Greenslet of Houghton Mifflin subscribed to this belief that publishers and booksellers should inspire in the reading public an American patriotism that was pro-Allies and anti-German. In 1914, he told his colleagues and persuaded Houghton Mifflin's board of directors that "the publisher's job was to inform his countrymen, who must be made aware 'of evil ambitions' loosed on the world" (quotation from Ballou 566, see also Tebbel 82). In 1916, he helped coordinate activities for the Vigilantes, a secret group of writers with strong emotional ties to England and an interest in "patriotic publicity" that would shape public opinion and "push the nation toward intervention" (Tebbel 86-87). In 1917, his close relationship with Wellington House, known as "the propaganda division of the British Foreign Office," led him to reject H. L. Mencken's manuscript, *The Battle of the Wilhelmstrasse*, because it was anti-British (Ballou 551, Tebbel 83). Also in 1917, Greenslet helped organize the United States' Committee of Public Information, a governmental committee that encouraged suppression of books that were pro-German, pacifist, or pessimistic about the war (Tebbel 83, 89, 91). Through Greenslet's editorial direction, Houghton Mifflin published over one hundred war-related books during the Great War, with cumulative sales of at least 1,500,000 copies (Ballou 551, Tebbel 82). Many of these were propaganda pieces commissioned by a pro-Allies group supported by Greenslet.

One of the propaganda books published by Houghton Mifflin and supported by the Committee of Public Information was Ralph Paine's *The Fighting Fleets* (Tebbel 83). An advertisement placed in the September 22, 1918, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* appealed to parents with its question, "Is your boy in the Navy?" If so, this book

was essential because it offered the “only *complete* and *authorized* account of what every branch of our naval forces is doing ‘over there.’” The accounts may have been authorized, but they were not objective. The book’s pro-war leaning is evident in the advertisement’s mention of “the peril he cheerily faces and the splendid deeds he and his mates have done.” Many of the book’s 81 pictures must have shown Navy boys having a grand old time at the war. Ellen Ballou, in her history of Houghton Mifflin, says that Paine’s *The Fighting Fleets* served its “immediate purpose” as propaganda and was soon forgotten (568). It did not make Putnam’s top-100 list of war titles.

Popular among war books were biographies written by military men who had been active in the war. In his review of Captain R. Hugh Knyvett’s biography, Frederic Taber Cooper said, “it is the new blood, the man in the trenches, the professional soldier and amateur at letters, from whom the books have come which have not only stirred the blasé reading public into wide-awake attention, but have reached out and gathered in a big circle of new readers who had not hitherto formed the habit of buying books” (1264). Houghton Mifflin published several biographies, but the advertisement that stands out most is for *My Company* by Captain Carroll Swan (fig. 3.2). This title does not appear on any list of top-100s or best sellers, but the advertisement’s illustration is remarkably eye-catching. In the forefront, a distinguished American officer sits straight-backed at a small desk. He looks young, respectable, and brave—a boy who would make any American hometown proud. In the background is a dark battle scene that looks very much like the epic battle for Troy except with modern weapons. The book is billed as “the first story by an American Officer of our part in the great Allied offensive.” This advertisement

appeared in *The Publishers' Weekly* on November 16, 1918, five days after the Armistice was signed. A week later, an advertisement with the same illustration appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* with added text. "The great Allied offensive" from the first advertisement became "the great Allied Victory Drive" and "the splendid part played by American lads in the German defeat." The elaborate illustration was designed to catch the reader's attention and the text written to encourage patriotic pride.

Advertisements for first person war accounts sometimes included a short scenario from the book, maybe two or three paragraphs long, that closed at a critical point with a statement such as "the story is too good to tell here." An August 17, 1918, article in *The Publishers' Weekly* describes an advertisement that uses this strategy to tease readers into buying the book by making them wonder what happened next:

Another war book uses three-column newspaper space to tell its virtues. The illustration is splendidly drawn and shows a weary prisoner in a German military camp. And the opening paragraph or two runs:

"They thought I was a peasant. Under the baggy, shabby peasant's clothes was a uniform of the British royal flying corps. Behind the shambling gait of the peasant was hidden the bold stride of the soldier.

"For here was a German sentry, and there, by a strange twist of fate, was Lieutenant Pat O'Brien, Irish-American aviator, born in Chicago, escaping from a German prison camp."

It is quite natural to want to find out about brave Pat. A great deal more is told in this three-column ad, but it possesses many of the characteristics of a thrilling continued story. In this case you must buy the book to read the next installment (507).

Serial installment advertising such as this was another technique borrowed from Robert Bonner and modified from whole chapters to short snippets. The scenarios offered less build-up than Bonner's chapters and more of an immediate cliff-hanger designed to send readers scrambling to bookstores for the whole story.

The public's desire for biographical war narratives influenced the way war-related fiction was advertised. This influence is evident in Henry Holt's descriptions of Dorothy Canfield Fisher's collection of fictional stories, *Home Fires in France*. The Publisher's Note in the opening pages advises that the book "is fiction written in France out of a life-long familiarity with the French and two years' intense experience in war work in France. It is a true setting-forth of personalities and experiences, French and American, under the influence of war." This note appealed to readers of biography who preferred fact over fiction, real people over made-up characters, and true war experiences over unrealistic escapades. An August 3, 1918, advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* further promoted the book as factual fiction by quoting a pre-publication review that called it "the finest work of fiction—if fiction it can be called." Two weeks later, a short blurb in *The Publishers' Weekly* announced that a "cable has just been received saying that General Pershing accepts the dedication to him of Dorothy Canfield's stories based on

fact.” No review quotation could be a stronger motivation to purchase a book than General Pershing’s acceptance.

Considering the book’s dedication to a war general, it is curious that *Home Fires in France* was advertised on August 24, 1918, as “not a war book but the story of those who have kept the home fires burning” (fig. 3.3). Previous advertisements had linked the book to the war by explaining that Fisher had gained her war experience through her husband’s duty at the front and her work among blind survivors. This and other advertisements, however, make a distinction between a story set during the war and a “war book” describing battle scenes. Fisher’s stories are set in war-stricken France, but, as an August 10 advertisement states, “there is no bursting shrapnel, no roar of guns.” The August 24 advertisement makes it clear that *Home Fires in France* is about people and families and not about war battles. The photograph, especially, reinforces the book’s focus on the wartime family. It is not a picture of a straight-backed soldier or an epic battle but of a lone mother—of Dorothy Canfield Fisher—and her two children.

Homes Fires in France was released the same month as Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia* and advertised in the same periodicals. Advertisements for *My Ántonia* often emphasized that the book presented an alternative to war-stricken settings, ignoring the characters’ own experiences of terror and destruction in their pioneer prairie setting. The advertisement directly below the announcement for *My Ántonia* in the September 29, 1918, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* declares that “a good love story is especially welcome now” (fig. 2.5). Love stories provided an escape, although temporary, from the realities of war. This may be why *My Ántonia* is advertised by

Houghton Mifflin as “a love story of profound human appeal,” although the novel is not a love story in any conventional sense. In a November 2, 1918, Houghton Mifflin book list advertisement, the word “romance” appears in descriptions of six of the eleven titles, including *My Ántonia* (fig. 3.4). Three of the five remaining titles had been described in earlier advertisements as a romance or love story. These love stories were promoted by Houghton Mifflin as a “war-time prophylactic,” a protection against “daily preoccupations” and the onslaught of war books.

Willa Cather’s editor, Ferris Greenslet, believed her decision to leave Houghton Mifflin was due, in part, to his distraction with the war, “a devotion which so absorbed his energies as to prevent him from giving her the editorial sympathy and encouragement” she needed (Ballou 565). When it came time to publish her own novel with scenes from the war, she turned to Alfred Knopf. Her January 12, 1921, letter to Greenslet postulated that her decision might relieve him since he often sighed about the War and grumbled about the West.¹⁹ In response, Greenslet wrote: “Pax vobiscum! And best wishes for the prosperity of ‘Claude’. As for me, I am planning to spend the evening reading the Book of Job” (FG to WC, 14 January 1921). Knopf neither sighed nor

¹⁹ On December 3, 1918, Ferris Greenslet advised Willa Cather via letter to follow *My Ántonia* with a novel about “Eastern life,—Pittsburgh or metropolitan” because that was “the soundest policy from both business and literary prestige.” He didn’t believe *My Ántonia*’s Nebraska setting had “enough attraction and interest for the average novel reader,” but that “a novel of Pittsburgh or New York life done with the ability of ‘My Antonia’ and ‘The Song of the Lark’ ought to be good for a sale of 20,000 or more at the first go-off. It would reward you more largely in royalties, and would extend much further the radius of your reputation, so that if another novel ‘of the soil’ were to follow it, the sale even of that, I think, would be enlarged accordingly.”

grumbled about her new novel, although he agreed with her decision not to let the public know she was writing a novel about the Great War. From the time Cather began writing *One of Ours* to the time it was published, there was a shift in American public sentiment. The idealism and patriotic pride that ran rampant through advertisements in 1918 had soured into disillusionment and the realization that World War One had not ended all world conflict.

As the publication date approached for *One of Ours*, disillusionment had not yet translated into a disinterest or refusal to read about the war. According to a brief paragraph in the September 3, 1921 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*:

That dread subject is always in the thoughts of many people who, to their neighbors and friends, appear either to have forgotten their late experience or to wish to forget it. They have not forgotten it. They cannot forget it. They do not wish to forget it. They feel—tho they may be wrong in that—that there is in it a mystery of terrific significance, and their minds never cease to look back at it. They wait for an interpretation (676).

In February 1922, Willa Cather wrote another letter to H. L. Mencken, who Maxwell Geismar later called a “prophet with his whips and scorpions and, if all else fails, his boulders” (13). She said the book “may be a complete mistake, and you would be a good man to smell out falsity, if it’s there, for you are just a little prejudiced against the subject matter, and against the sentiment on which the latter part of it is built—or, rather, the

sentiment by which it moves and draws the next breath” (*Selected Letters* 309). In this, she is still careful not to reveal that the Great War permeates the last half of the book, but she betrays her feeling that he may not like the subject. She continues by acknowledging that her subject is time-sensitive and that the current disillusionment may spoil the feeling behind her story. “If Claude’s emotion seems real to you,—scoffer that you are!—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.” She ends her letter by offering Mencken permission to do what he was well known to do if he didn’t like a book: “if I’ve done a sickly, sentimental, old-maid job on him, tell me so loudly, like a man, rub it in, pound it down; I’ll deserve it and I’ll need it for my soul’s salvation” (310). Mencken obliged.

In October 1922, H. L. Mencken wrote in *Smart Set Magazine*:

What spoils the story [of *One of Ours*] is simply the fact that a year or so ago a young soldier named John Dos Passos printed a novel called ‘Three Soldiers.’ Until ‘Three Soldiers’ is forgotten and fancy achieves its inevitable victory over fact, no war story can be written in the United States without challenging comparison with it—and no story that is less meticulously true will stand up to it (141).

A year before *One of Ours*, on October 2, 1921, Dos Passos’ publisher placed an advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review* explaining why they published *Three*

Soldiers: “This explanation is made because it seems but fair to state frankly the facts about a book that is certain to become a subject of heated controversy. The author would ask his reader to remember that he writes as a novelist—not as an historian.” The advertisement reveals a concern that the reading public will not appreciate Dos Passos’ “truthtelling” of “the intense anguish of many youths who suffered bitter disillusionment in the decay of an idealism that alone made possible their surrender of personal liberty.” This advertising copy correctly anticipated criticism that Dos Passos’ novel was too bitter or historically inaccurate. Reviewer Harold Norman Denny called the novel an “embittered diatribe” that was “glaringly untrue” and “totally ignorant of the psychology of the man in the fighting forces” (1, 22). “There is an uproar among the critics,” Caroline Singer wrote in her October 1921 review of *Three Soldiers*. Some critics of the book “ask for those flashes of idealism with which soldiers were endowed. Perhaps Dos Passos believes that the heights of idealism were occupied by non-combatants who experienced nothing of the army life in which men are constantly [sic] physically active, moving like automatons, while hearts and minds are still” (1352). If John Dos Passos wanted to provoke conversation, he did a good job of it.

After Ferris Greenslet read a review copy of *One of Ours*, he suggested that “something might be started on the line of ‘here at last is the final and convincing answer to Dos Passos’ whose book I find is still reverberating in many quarters” (FG to WC, 22 August 1922). He warned that Alfred Knopf would have “a man-sized job selling it owing to the fact that the public is pretty sure to take it as straight ‘War book.’” He offered a few revisions to details in the last half of the novel but, overall, Greenslet liked

One of Ours and called it “authentic, vital, convincingly real, it bleeds with life every where you prick it”—valuable praise from a publisher so involved in the war effort.

Cather had hoped for good reviews from H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, who had been friendly toward her other novels, but they dismissed *One of Ours* as sentimental war fiction. Mencken thought there was “a lyrical nonsensicality in it that often grows half pathetic; it is precious near the war of the standard model of lady novelist. Which Miss Cather surely is not” (141). They missed that Cather was revealing the ugliness of American culture by sending her Claude to beautiful, if war-torn France. Steven Trout notes in *Memorial Fictions* that “*One of Ours* stresses the attractiveness of French culture in comparison with the debased American version in precisely the manner that one would expect of a novel written by a devout Francophile and, by the early 1920s, exasperated critic of mainstream American values” (70). In contrast to the filthy, muddy war and the grey Nebraska towns, Cather’s (and Claude’s) “France enters the text as a burst of color after chapters of sepia-toned misery” (Trout 71). Comments by H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway do not address her criticism of American culture, but instead focus on how her romantic French town and limed cement trenches ignore the lice, filth, influenza, and venereal disease that infected the American soldiers in France.

Despite the criticisms, unfavorable comparisons, weariness of war, and Claude’s untimely transformation from a disillusioned Nebraska farm boy to an idealistic American soldier, *One of Ours* became a best seller and, in 1923, made Willa Cather the first Pulitzer Prize winner from the Great Plains. Among war novels in particular and war books in general, Alfred Knopf’s advertisements for *One of Ours* are unique. They

do not claim that Cather's novel will stir up patriotic pride or embittered controversy.

They do not advertise it as a "war book" or "not a war book." They simply advertise *One of Ours* as "an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age."

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTROVERSY SELLS: ADVERTISING THE PULITZERS
OF WILLA CATHER, EDITH WHARTON, SINCLAIR LEWIS

Immediately following the announcement that Willa Cather's *One of Ours* had won the 1923 Pulitzer Prize for novels, Alfred A. Knopf placed advertisements announcing:

WILLA CATHER'S

ONE OF OURS

Wins Pulitzer Prize

Story of Iowa farm boy, in peace and war, adjudged best American novel.

The announcement in the June 2, 1923 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* includes a photo of Cather, in her teal embroidered jacket, below the headline and to the left of the description of the prize (1696). Cather looks calm and serious in her photo—calmer than the crowded text printed in small type so that all three paragraphs can squeeze in between the large headline at the top and the “Also by Willa Cather” section at the bottom. The advertisement lists the “brilliant short stories” of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, the reprinted *April Twilights and Other Poems*, and *A Lost Lady* “In Preparation (Fall, 1923).” Knopf was not going to lose this opportunity to push Cather's other works (those published by Knopf, but not by Houghton Mifflin) while leaving a teaser for her

upcoming novel. The advertisement boasts: “ONE OF OURS will live. We predicted it at its publication. Our prediction has been confirmed by the wide praise it received from the most prominent literary critics throughout the country and now by this crowning award.” The text ends with advice to booksellers to keep the book well-stocked so nobody will miss any sales.

Three puzzling issues present themselves in this advertisement. The first issue deals with Claude’s placement on the map—is *One of Ours* a story of an “Iowa farm boy?” This seems like an obvious error. Of course Claude was from Nebraska! Knopf’s publicity department clearly did not pay close attention to detail when crafting this advertisement. Or did they? How many people, upon seeing this error, wondered if maybe they were wrong and picked up a copy of *One of Ours* to read through it until they found mention of Nebraska?

The second puzzling issue is the advertisement’s claim that *One of Ours* received “wide praise [. . .] from the most prominent literary critics.” Dorothy Canfield Fisher gave it a positive review in the *New York Times Book Review*, but controversy existed between public opinion and the disappointing criticism offered by several of the “prominent literary critics” of the time. In September 1922, Willa Cather wrote to her sister Elsie: “Lots of my old best-friends don’t like it; Mencken thinks it is a failure, Fanny Butcher wails forth her disappointment. [. . .] Sinclair reviews it—as a failure—in tonight’s Post. ‘Why the devil should a woman write a war book?’ Well, why should she? This one was ‘put upon me’ I didn’t choose it” (*Selected Letters* 324). The criticism of H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis, and other critics lambasted the second half of

Cather's novel, but praised the first half as truthful and full of literary skill. Mencken reviewed the first half as "excellent writing" that "deserves to rank almost with 'My Antonia'" (140-141). The "wide praise" was for part of the novel, but not the whole.

The third issue with this advertisement speaks to the controversy that was brewing years before Cather won the Pulitzer Prize. Each year, the Pulitzer was awarded to an American novel that "best presents the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood." The prize prioritizes books that uphold manners and morals, but it does not mean to award the very best novel of the year. Publicity, however, tends to translate it that way. Knopf's advertisement claims that *One of Ours* was "adjudged best American novel." The advertisement goes on to give a full description of the prize, but the phrase is still there in bold for all to remember: "best American novel." In truth, *One of Ours* was chosen as the best American novel presenting the "wholesome atmosphere of American life," but this too presents a conflict. In the first half of the novel, Claude Wheeler seeks to escape everything about his Nebraska home. He "mostly creates traps for himself," says Steven Trout, some of which he could have avoided (61). Claude feels unmanned by the sexual frigidity and aloofness of his wife. He feels limited by his mother. He feels misunderstood and frustrated by his insensitive father. He feels disdain for his brother Bayliss. His only escape is a timber claim where he feels "unmarried and free" to dream and smoke and read ... until a new escape opens for him with the United States' entry into World War One. This is the "wholesome atmosphere of American life" that won Willa Cather the Pulitzer.

Almost two years earlier, a November 12, 1921 piece in *The Publishers' Weekly* reminded the book trade that “Edith Wharton’s novel, ‘The Age of Innocence,’ was awarded the Pulitzer prize as the best novel of the year” (1664). The Pulitzer award that year generated a controversy that did not resolve itself until more than a decade later. According to an editor’s note in *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, the 1921 “Pulitzer Prize jury for fiction voted for Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*, only to have their choice rejected by higher authorities and the prize given to *The Age of Innocence*” (419). Both books were published in the fall of 1920 and were included in *The Publishers' Weekly* October 9, 1920 “Selling Talks Manual” (fig. 4.1). The magazine’s editors collected blurbs from publishers about their leading fall books and created a 24-page manual to make available to all bookstores for distribution to customers and for display on counters. *The Age of Innocence* and *Main Street* appear on the same page of the manual (1045). *The Age of Innocence* is listed first and features a different book jacket than the one pictured ten pages earlier in the same issue. *Main Street* is listed in the middle and is the only title without a matching book cover or illustration, but the blurb submitted by Harcourt, Brace is interesting. Depending on the reader’s opinion of small towns, the blurb could be seen as entertaining, engaging, or offensive:

Most of us have known Main Street, and most of us have left it—gladly. We have praised the dear old swimming hole, and gone back for visits—and returned to the city with speed. But in ‘Main Street’ an eager girl goes from a city, where she has been happily inconspicuous, to live the fish-

bowl existence of a doctor's wife in a small town where her every movement is commented upon, and every lightly spoken word remembered, and only in the end does she learn the great secret of life in being content with a real world in which it is never possible to create an ideal setting.

Sinclair Lewis was fond of stirring controversy through his novels, but the possibility of *Main Street's* offensiveness created a controversy he didn't at first expect.

The winner of the prize that year, Edith Wharton, had an early influence on Willa Cather's writing. In Cather's February 6, 1922 letter to H. L. Mencken, she explains that she had "a long apprenticeship to Henry James and Mrs. Wharton" to help her "see the American scene as it looked to other Americans" (*Selected Letters* 309). Wharton was a prolific author in the 1920s, producing 14 volumes in the span of seven years. According to the editors of her *Letters*, "she was writing so much and so variously that she sometimes lost track" (418). She began writing *The Age of Innocence* as an escape from the "stored-up emotions" elicited by the war and as a return to her "childish memories of a long-vanished America" (*Backward* 369). She wanted to remember the world as it was before the destruction of the Great War.

Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* was introduced to the publishing industry on September 4, 1920 with a simple, roomy, full-page advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* (fig. 4.2). At the top right-hand corner of the advertisement is a black and white

photograph of Wharton in an oval Victorian frame. Below the frame is a dignified announcement:

D. Appleton and Company, New York and London, confidently present Edith Wharton's new novel, 'The Age of Innocence,' as the literary treat of the year. 'The Age of Innocence,' the first long novel Mrs. Wharton has written in several years, is a story of American high society, with all those remarkable qualities which made 'The House of Mirth' supreme in its field (497).

In the lower left-hand corner of the advertisement, a small paragraph lists October 1 as the publication day and assures booksellers that the new novel "will be heavily advertised by full pages in many high class magazines and weeklies, and by large space advertisements in newspapers." "High class" is the theme of this advertisement, matching Wharton's style and taste for good manners. There are no bold letters. All type is in italics, giving it a soft feel. There is a lot of white space. Instead of being cramped and crowded full of text, the advertisement leaves breathing room. This story of "high society," advertised in "high class magazines," might imply that only "high class" customers would appreciate the book, but the advertisement also mentions Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, a top ten best-selling novel in both 1905 and 1906. Although Wharton published eight novels between *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, this

advertisement attempts to reach beyond a high-class customer base to appeal to the larger public who bought and enjoyed *The House of Mirth*.

One week after *The Age of Innocence* was published, another attractive advertisement appeared in the October 9 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* to remind booksellers that “a tremendous national advertising campaign in magazines and newspapers” was backing the book (fig. 4.3). “The beautiful three-color jacket, posters, circulars, window display features, etc., are potent dealer helps” (1035). This reminder, plus Appleton’s information and one sentence claiming Wharton as “America’s foremost woman novelist,” is the only text on the page. The majority of the full-page advertisement shows a reproduction of the book jacket in black and white. The front cover, with “The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton” written in slanted script, is illustrated by a drawing of a beautiful young girl (is it May Welland? Ellen Olenska?).

An October 16 advertisement reveals that the picture is of Ellen Olenska (fig. 4.4). A cropped close-up of the girl is placed to the right of a headline reading “Was She Justified In Seeking a Divorce?” (1171). In italics underneath, the plot is laid out:

Why was this American girl forced to leave her brutal Polish husband?
 Why did Ellen, Countess Olenska return to New York, seeking to forget?
 Whispers came all too soon that she had been compromised in the artistic continental society from which she had fled. But in the narrow New York Society of the 1870’s she was welcomed back, and the whispers of far-off Europe ignored, until she and Newland Archer are swept together by

mutual attraction, and the old, old question is renewed, shall she create a scandal just because she is unhappy?

This advertisement has a lot of text, minimal white space, and large bold letters announcing the book's title, but it also leads readers into the drama of the story while reasserting Appleton's claim that Wharton is "America's greatest woman novelist" by quoting from reviewers who agree.

The Age of Innocence is featured three other times in this same issue. The front cover of the October 16 issue features "Appleton Books That Will Sell" with *The Age of Innocence* listed first and promising "the treat of the year for qualities of sheer entertainment" (1113). This second appearance of "treat" as a description of *The Age of Innocence* reinforces that the book will give readers a type of unexpected joy that only comes around once in a while, but it also minimizes the story as a frivolity. On page 1142, a note in "Among the Publishers" announces that *The Age of Innocence* "will be published by Appleton next week," a short delay from the original publication date. Several pages later, a book review by Katherine Perry states that "in this absorbing tale the almost metallic brilliance which in the 'House of Mirth' dazzled the reading public hypnotizes the eager eye which would not lose one significant word" (1195). She concludes that readers will revel "recognizingly in her clean-cut distinction of style, the inerrant aptness of adjectives, the viviseptive phrase" (1196). Perry's choice of words in describing Wharton's "viviseptive phrase" is reminiscent of Knopf's statement that stories in Cather's *Youth and the Bright Medusa* cut "into the tissues of human

experience and emotion,” a statement printed less than three weeks before Perry’s review appeared. All of this publicity concentrated into one issue helped plant *The Age of Innocence* firmly in booksellers’ minds as the publication day approached.

By November, *The Age of Innocence* was ranked third as a best-selling novel in the United States. *Main Street* was eighth on the list. A January 8 advertisement announced *The Age of Innocence* as “A Best Seller Everywhere” (51). White space, soft italics and illustrations disappeared from this advertisement. The title and author’s name are printed in bold. The center of the advertisement boasts that the novel is “proclaimed by more than two hundred critics to be one of the finest novels of 1920.” This statement is followed by short one-sentence excerpts from fourteen positive reviews. On January 29, Appleton’s advertisement for *The Age of Innocence* and Zona Gale’s *Miss Lulu Bett* label the two books as “Today’s Best Sellers and Tomorrow’s” (235). The advertisement claims that *The Age of Innocence* “has taken its place as the most brilliant success in the world of American fiction for many a season” (235). Although *The Age of Innocence* wasn’t being talked about as often as *Main Street*, its advertisements were enthusiastic, attractive and confident that this book could stand up against any other.

Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*, like Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, was introduced to the publishing industry with a simple, roomy, full-page advertisement (fig. 4.5). The straightforward advertisement, placed by Harcourt, Brace and Howe in the July 3, 1920 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, simply says (4):

We have the big novel
of the fall

MAIN STREET

By

Sinclair Lewis

Ready September.

Not only was this a small introduction to what would become a big book, but it was also a continued debut of a young publishing firm that would soon have several best-selling books by Sinclair Lewis, Dorothy Canfield, and other authors to its credit.

Harcourt, Brace was a younger firm than Alfred Knopf's. When Sinclair Lewis and Alfred Harcourt met, they were working across the street from each other at different publishing companies in New York and began to meet for lunch. Harrison Smith, former publicity man for Harcourt and editor of Sinclair Lewis' collected letters, explains that, "in the course of these meetings Harcourt realized that he had found a writer who had a capacity for enthusiasm and indignation, an astonishing memory for detail, and a new approach to contemporary American life" (Smith x). Lewis had published four novels with Henry Holt, but he wanted to free himself from his job as editor and advertising manager at George H. Doran's firm. He wanted "freedom from routine tasks so that he could devote all of his energy to writing the novels that were forming in his mind" (ix).

When Harcourt resigned from his job at Henry Holt in 1919, he confided to Lewis that he didn't know whether he should find a job with another firm or start his own. Lewis traveled from Sauk Center, Minnesota to New York City to tell Harcourt: "don't be such a damn fool as ever again to go to work for someone else. Start your own business. I'm going to write important books. You can publish them. Now let's go out to your house and start making plans" (xi). Sinclair Lewis' *Free Air* was one of the first books published by Harcourt, Brace and Howe. As a former advertising manager, Lewis had plenty of ideas for how to advertise the book. On June 30, 1919, he suggested an advertising idea to Alfred Harcourt (7):

Whenever you see the sign
 FREE AIR
 before a garage think of
 the one book that makes motoring romantic
 FREE AIR.

Soon afterwards, Lewis received \$3,000 for *Free Air* movie rights and spent \$2,000 of that to buy stock in the Harcourt, Brace and Howe publishing firm.

Advertisements for Sinclair Lewis novels exude the energy and passion of his own personality. Every method of advertising, according to Dorothea Lawrance Mann, "from the using of a photograph to the lecture or radio talk depends largely upon the

personality of the author concerned” (“Are We Selling” 2441). Lewis was brimming with eager optimism when he wrote to Harcourt on November 27, 1920 (49):

Alf, we've got 'em all by the ears! Harcourt, Boni, Knopf, Huebsch will dominate the publishing world and me—oh hell, I'll go home and read a book about real estate as preparation for

FITCH

by the author of Main Street

First printing:

50,000.

Harcourt appreciated Lewis' enthusiasm but advised him on November 27 to be more cautious. As success continues and grows, Harcourt explained, “one has to stop wearing his heart on his sleeve and play with the cards closer to his belt. I should think that with an author whose fortune seems sometimes to depend a good deal on the whim of the public, the jealousies that grow up are apt to be even more acute” (50). Lewis thanked Harcourt for the advice and promised to curb his enthusiasm, but it was hard for him to contain. “Bully ad, the rooster crowing over Main Street sale,” Lewis wrote to Harcourt on December 28 after reviewing the ad copy (59). The rooster advertisement (fig. 4.6), placed on the back cover of the January 1, 1921 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*, reproduces the July 3, 1920 announcement and pairs it with a newspaper advertisement from December 20 that lists the dates of all nine printings, October 23 through December

17, below a statement from William Allen White that *Main Street* “ranks with ‘The Scarlet Letter’” (48). The bottom of the advertisement predicts “100,000 in 1921— Watch Our Advs.”

In early 1921, it was effortless to watch for *Main Street* advertisements because, at least in *The Publishers’ Weekly*, one appeared every week. One week after the rooster advertisement appeared on the back cover, a new *Main Street* advertisement appeared on the front cover. “Just Watch The Traffic On Main Street,” it advises. “Main Street will be the big novel for the spring as it has been for the last six weeks of 1920.”²⁰ The advertisement shares positive review excerpts from H. L. Mencken, William Allen White, Heywood Broun, and others, including an opinion by an *Atlantic Monthly* writer who decided “there is now no reason why anyone should ever write another novel about contemporary life in a small country town” (49). Toward the bottom of the advertisement, “another great novel” is announced—Dorothy Canfield’s *The Brimming Cup*. The next week’s advertisement boasts “Everybody is Advertising Main Street” and reproduces an announcement created independently by Butterick, publisher of three magazines, to encourage advertisers to read *Main Street* and learn from its characters.²¹ On January 22, the *Main Street* advertisement repeats its prediction of “100,000 for 1921” (183). The first paragraph states: “We see the clear signs of such an additional sale, and so have contracted for more advertising for the spring than we have so far done.” The January advertising blitz ended with this announcement on January 29 (238):

²⁰ See *The Publishers’ Weekly* 8 January 1921: 49.

²¹ *The Publishers’ Weekly* 15 January 1921: 98.

HERE THEY ARE

ARRIVED!

We now have two sets of plates of

MAIN STREET

and two editions are continuously and simultaneously on press.

After January, Harcourt, Brace continued to place frequent advertisements for *Main Street*, sometimes as a single-title advertisement and sometimes sharing space with Dorothy Canfield and other authors on the firm's list.

“Single ads are evanescent, ephemeral structures,” Jennifer Wicke says in *Advertising Fictions* (13). In other words, single-placement advertisements appear once and then are gone like vapor—perhaps to be remembered or perhaps not. Repeated advertisements are more successful at establishing themselves into people's memories. In *The Adman in the Parlor*, Ellen Gruber Garvey explains that “a shift in reading practices” due to “the burgeoning availability of cheap printed matter” led people to “read extensively, taking in large amounts of printed information, studying it less closely, and learned to skim and to skip along the way.” To address “the problem of their ads getting lost in the sea of reading matter,” advertisers began to place “extensive” or repetitive advertising, “hoping that if the ad bobbed up often enough it would be remembered” (201). Taken as one lump sum, the January *Main Street* advertisements can be compiled and paraphrased to say that “EVERYONE” is purchasing *Main Street*, reading *Main*

Street, talking about *Main Street*, praising *Main Street*, so much so that, not only was 100,000 a realistic goal for 1921, but was also easily met in just four months. By February 26, Harcourt, Brace is no longer saying that *Main Street* is the “big novel of the Spring.” Instead, they claim “it is not merely a popular novel for a few months; it is one of the great works of American literature” (598). Sinclair Lewis cheered on the constant placement of advertisements, expressing his willingness to decrease his royalties so that advertising could continue through the fall of 1921 and into the next spring.

This constant advertising would have been a large expense for a new firm—or even for an old, established firm. In an article titled “What \$1,000 in Advertising Will Do,” Polly Street, the promotion manager at Frederick Stokes, demonstrates what can be done with a limited advertising budget of \$1,000 for a first-time author in the spring of 1928. For this imaginary campaign, she decided to restrict advertising “in the newspapers to New York City” because the potential of a book to become a best seller is typically first discovered in New York (1076). With \$1,000 of advertising money, Street discovered that she could place 12 newspaper advertisements (\$741.14), two advertisements in magazines (\$79), two quarter-page advertisements in *The Publishers’ Weekly* (\$40), one quarter-page in the *Retail Bookseller* (\$10), space in the company’s Spring Catalog (\$50), reproducible photos of the author (\$9.86), and 175 review copies to be sent to reviewers and booksellers (\$70). Newspaper advertisements would be placed in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*’s book section, and the *New York World*. A 50-line advertisement, either as a 3.5” x 4” double-column or a 3.5” x 2” single-column, cost \$57 in the *New York Times*, so only four advertisements

were planned for a total of \$228. Four advertisements of similar size in the *New York Herald-Tribune* cost \$36.75 each for a total of \$147. The \$79 allocated for magazine advertising covered a 1/7 page advertisement in the *Atlantic Monthly* and a 1/7 page advertisement in *Harper's Magazine*. Street noted that this budget outline does not include funding for display material or circulars and, although it funded four consecutive weeks of advertising, “there is precious little chance for the valuable repetition” (1077).

Sinclair Lewis recognized the risk Harcourt, Brace was taking in spending so many advertising dollars on *Main Street*. “I don't see how a publisher could possibly get behind a book more actively and more intelligently than H B & H have behind M St!” he wrote to Harcourt on November 17, 1920 (46). *Main Street* was eighth on the “Books of the Month” best seller list for November, but it rose to fifth in December, second in January and February, and first in March 1921. As the book climbed up the list, it received increasing amounts of free publicity. “An Uncorrected Galley” (a monthly column in *The Publishers' Weekly* that reprinted amusing snippets from other publications) reprinted a short blurb from *Life* magazine on April 30, 1921. The piece, titled “Progress,” says this: “It is reported that seven hundred and twenty-eight small towns thruout the United States have voted to change the name of their principal thorofare from ‘Main Street’ to ‘Broadway.’ Who says that we pay no attention to our native American literature?” (1320). *Main Street* had become part of the mainstream vocabulary. Less than three weeks before the Pulitzer Prize was announced, a short piece in *The Publishers' Weekly* remarked that “the best of all publicity that can come to a book is to have its title become part of the everyday language” (“Book Titles” 1417). The

article explains that “‘Main Street’ has practically come to stand for a general idea” and that towns are changing their street names “to avoid a definite connection with so well recognized an idea.” Whether people loved the book or hated it, they were talking about it. They were thinking about it. The book had the public “by the ears.”

When *The Age of Innocence* won the Pulitzer Prize in June of 1920, *Main Street* was still hanging on as the number one best-selling book in America, followed by *The Brimming Cup* by Dorothy Canfield. *The Age of Innocence* had fallen off the list of top six best sellers, but still remained in high demand in public libraries. Appleton had three Pulitzer award-winners for 1920, including Zona Gale’s “Miss Lulu Bett,” a novel published by Appleton that won the Pulitzer for its stage adaptation. Appleton wasted no time in advertising the awards, placing an advertisement in the June 4, 1921 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly* announcing “This Year’s Prize Winners” and listing both titles in large bold print next to a description of their respective prize (1681). One week prior to the awards, Appleton had included both titles in their May 28 list of “Novels for Summer Reading.” The advertisement’s blurb for *The Age of Innocence* predicts “great and continued popularity” for the novel because of its “universally acclaimed literary art and universally recognized popular appeal” (1583).

Despite this prediction of “continued popularity,” Edith Wharton was surprised and a bit amused by winning the Pulitzer. She wrote to Bernard Berenson, an Italian Renaissance art historian, on June 7, 1921 and shared her amusement:

Apparently every self-respecting American magazine has refused ‘The Old Maid’ on the ground of immorality! I suppose one of the periodical (in both sense) waves of pruriency has set in.—But meanwhile Columbia has awarded me the—Pulitzer!!—\$1000—prize for the best novel of the year (441-442).

She chuckles over the irony of receiving a prize that is meant to award “the highest standard of American manners” and morals when, at the same time, her short story is being rejected based on claims of immorality. She is no longer laughing in her letter to Sinclair Lewis, dated August 6, 1921, but instead shows graciousness and her respect for the young author of *Main Street*. She tells him:

the kind Appletons have smothered me in newspaper commentary; & when I discovered that I was being rewarded—by one of our leading Universities—for uplifting American morals, I confess I did despair. Subsequently, when I found the prize shd [sic] really have been yours, but was withdrawn because your book (I quote from memory) had ‘offended a number of prominent persons in the Middle West,’ disgust was added to despair.—Hope returns to me, however, with your letter, & with the enclosed article, just received.—Some sort of standard is emerging from the welter of cant & sentimentality, & if two or three of us are gathered together, I believe we can still save fiction in America (445).

Harrison Smith, editor of Sinclair Lewis' collected letters, lists Hamlin Garland, Stuart Sherman, and Robert Morss Lovett as the Pulitzer Prize Committee who recommended *Main Street* for the 1920 prize. "Their choice was *Main Street*, but the judges rejected their nomination and selected Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. A lively dispute in the press followed the announcement" (203). The dispute did not sour relations between Lewis and Wharton, however. Lewis and his wife soon visited Wharton at her home near Paris and the two authors became friends.

While *Main Street* was being advertised, reviewed and discussed, Sinclair Lewis was busy planning and writing his next novel. "Mustn't let too long a time elapse between *M St* and next," he wrote to Harcourt on November 11, 1920. He was trying to decide on his main character's name, which would become the title of the book:

Pumphrey, you say, is too freakish a name. I don't think, tho, that the title name ought to be too common—like Jones, Smith, Robertson, Thompson, Brown, Johnson—for the reason that then people will associate the name not with the novel but with their numerous acquaintances who have that common name (42).

Lewis considered the name "Fitch," but decided in favor of George F. Babbitt. The name "sounds commonplace yet will be remembered," he said in a December 17 letter to

Harcourt, “and two years from now we’ll have them talking of Babbittry” (57). He reaffirmed his decision seven months later on July 12:

I think that Babbitt is the best name for him—and the best title for the book as well. One remembers name-titles really better than apparently more striking titles, and it so causes the public to remember the name of the central character that he is more likely to be discussed. I haven’t yet thought of any other satisfactory titles. The following are the only ones I’ve thought of: POPULATION 300,000—GOOD BUSINESS—SOUND BUSINESS—A GOOD PRACTICAL MAN—A HE-MAN—THE BOOSTER—A SOLID CITIZEN—ZENITH—and none of them satisfy me. Are there any of the above which you like better than Babbitt? (77)

Babbitt may have been the best title on this list. “Population 300,000” may be difficult to remember; the next two suggestions sound like business textbooks; “A Good Practical Man” and “A Solid Citizen” are too vague and sound like self-improvement pamphlets; and the main character is a little too fumbling to be a “He-Man.” Zenith has a good ring to it, but indicates the story will focus more on the city and less on the man.

Perhaps Lewis’ statement that “one remembers name-titles really better than apparently more striking titles” would have been good advice as Willa Cather tried to decide between “Claude” and “One of Ours” as the title for her novel. She had called it “Claude” throughout her time writing it, but Knopf suggested a change. In an August 26,

1921 letter, Cather delivers to Knopf “a sad blow for you. The novel will have to be called ‘Claude.’ I did the best I could by the other title—I lived with it for months,—and I hate it vehemently. It sounds like an Alice Brown title—an evasion, an apology. ‘Claude’ is the only title for this story” (*Selected Letters* 303). She had a change of heart, though, after a visit with Fanny Butcher in Chicago. She wrote to Knopf on September 1 that she “had a long talk with Fanny Butcher about the title, and am again shaken—not as to the rightness of Claude, but as to the wisdom of using it. She begs and implores me not to! Now, I will be quite satisfied with ‘One of Ours’” (305). Claude might have been too common of a name like Jones or Brown, easily associated with a real person known to the reader. “One of Ours,” as a title, has multiple meanings. Claude could be “one of our” Nebraska farm boys or he could be “one of our” American soldiers or he could be “one of our” American citizens who feels trapped by personal and societal expectations.

Cather wrote about the controversy and success of *One of Ours* in her October 4, 1922 letter to fellow author Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant. She said, “the book is selling quite amazingly. For the last week it has sold ahead of ‘Babbitt’ and ‘This Freedom’ in Chicago and Minneapolis” (*Selected Letters* 326). In October, *Babbitt* moved from sixth to second on the “Books of the Month” best sellers list while *One of Ours* debuted at seventh. Cather’s book rose to sixth in November, just below Dorothy Canfield’s *Rough-Hewn*, but fell to tenth in December while *This Freedom* was first and *Babbitt* was second. *One of Ours* rose back up to sixth in January, but disappeared from the list in February. *Babbitt* stayed on the list at second before falling behind newer titles.

“Babbitt,” like “Main Street,” became affixed in everyday vocabulary. Martin Light, in his preface to *Babbitt Studies*, explains that “when the word ‘babbitt’ thus entered the lexicon, Lewis, who had earlier been a blurb writer for a publisher and who was something of a showman and self-promoter himself, did not hesitate to use the word frequently” (iv). H. L. Mencken encouraged this when he reviewed *Babbitt* for the October 1922 issue of *Smart Set Magazine*.²² He praises Lewis’ depiction of the “Babbitt type” and says, “as an old professor of Babbitry I welcome him as an almost perfect specimen—a genuine museum piece. Every American city swarms with his brothers” (139). Babbitt “is America incarnate, exuberant and exquisite,” but “it is not Babbitt that shines forth most gaudily, but the whole complex of Babbitry, Babbittism, Babbittismus.” To this day, “Babbitt” remains in the dictionary as a term referring to someone, especially a professional, who conforms to middle-class expectations without questioning them.

George F. Babbitt was a 46 year-old real estate man who viewed items as an accumulation of special features that could be advertised. A study of the advertising language in *Babbitt* confirms why Simone Weil Davis includes Sinclair Lewis in her list of authors who dealt “consciously with selfhood in the context of a commercial culture.” Authors like Lewis are “just as likely to borrow the discursive style of the copywriter or to reference particular advertisements and brand names as they are to depict their protagonists in the act of shopping or sales. The realism they all typically employ,

²² Mencken’s “Portrait of an American Citizen” in the October 1922 *Smart Set* begins with his positive review of *Babbitt*, which gave him “vast delight,” and continues with his disappointed review of Cather’s *One of Ours*.

whether sardonic or frank, is an engagement with the mode of the advertisement” (Davis 13-14). In the first several pages of *Babbitt*, material items are described by listing modern features that might set the item apart from inferior models. Babbitt’s clock “was the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all the modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial” (3). He also had an impressive water-cooler, “up-to-date, scientific, and right-thinking,” painted in the words of advertising rather than everyday thought. “It possessed a non-conducting fiber ice-container, a porcelain water-jar (guaranteed hygienic), a dripless non-clogging sanitary faucet, and machine-painted decorations in two tones of gold” (34). This tendency to describe items through advertising language indicates Babbitt’s heightened sense of materialistic pride, but it’s also a product of his career-induced mindset on how to sell houses by highlighting best features.

Babbitt’s form letter to prospective home buyers depicts houses in the same way as Babbitt describes his own water-cooler. One bargain home, for instance, was “A corker! Artistic two-family house, all oak trim, parquet floors, lovely gas log, big porches, colonial, HEATED ALL-WEATHER GARAGE” (37). Sinclair Lewis took current advertising trends and exaggerated them to make Babbitt’s letter “diligently imitative of the best literary models of the day; of heart-to-heart-talk advertisements, ‘sales-pulling’ letters, discourses on the ‘development of Will-power,’ and hand-shaking house-organs” (36). One trend overused in Babbitt’s letter is the reference to “you.” Roland Marchand in *Advertising the American Dream* explains that writers of advertising copy in the 1910s “were admonishing each other not to think of their audience as an

anonymous crowd, but rather to imagine themselves selling the product to an individual customer” (10). Babbitt is not writing to an anonymous crowd, but to any man with a wife, kids, flivver, and a “handsome carved mahogany escritoire.” A. A. Shields discusses the importance of using the word “you” to make advertisements more personal. He says “you” instead of “we” helps make “the subject of the advertisement the person of most importance—the reader” (2316). Successful advertisements should reflect the perspective, concerns and experiences of the reader, and not the opinions and hopes of the advertiser. Ads that forget the “you” look “at the matter from the wrong side of the fence.” Babbitt’s sales letter often refers to “you,” but it begins with “I.” A word count reveals that “you” or “your” is written nine times while variations of “I,” “we” and “us” occur twelve times. Babbitt offers the customer “a whaleuva favor” (“Honest! No kidding!”), but he really wants the potential customer to do him a favor by buying a house from him because “that’s how we make a living—folks don’t pay us for our lovely beauty!” (36). In comparison to Houghton Mifflin’s black-tie formal advertisements and Alfred Knopf’s personal yet professional letters, George Babbitt’s letter bursts through a neighbor’s front gate, sits on the porch without invitation, and explains loudly to the surprised neighbor that he has shopped around and found something for the neighbor to purchase if only the neighbor would kindly fill out this blank.

Babbitt engages in some literary advertising as well. When George Babbitt has the house to himself one night, he goes into his daughter Verona’s room and looks through her books (271):

Conrad's "Rescue," a volume strangely named "Figures of Earth," poetry (quite irregular poetry, Babbitt thought) by Vachel Lindsay, and essays by H. L. Mencken—highly improper essays, making fun of the church and all the decencies. He liked none of the books. In them he felt a spirit of rebellion against niceness and solid-citizenship. These authors—and he supposed they were famous ones, too—did not seem to care about telling a good story which would enable a fellow to forget his troubles. He sighed. He noted a book, "The Three Black Pennies," by Joseph Hergesheimer. Ah, that was something like it! It would be an adventure story, maybe about counterfeiting—detectives sneaking up on the old house at night.

In this passage, full of Babbitt, the stylized advertising language is gone. Lewis does not praise the books or tell what they are about, but he does inspire a curiosity about them that could compel readers to seek out the named books. *Figures of Earth: A Comedy of Appearances*, by James Branch Cabell, was published in 1921 when his previous novel, *Jurgen*, was in court over obscenity charges. *Figures of Earth* was dedicated to "six most gallant champions" who had defended *Jurgen*, including Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Mencken, and Joseph Hergesheimer. *The Three Black Pennys* from 1917, the first book Hergesheimer published with Knopf, tells a story about three generations of a wealthy, Pennsylvania ironmaster family. Lewis was not only interested in self-promotion, but he also actively promoted books written by authors he admired.

Babbitt was no longer listed as a best-selling novel when the Pulitzer Prize was announced in June 1923. When Cather received Alfred Knopf's cable announcing that she had won, she considered the prize's impact on business and told him that she hoped "the publicity will stimulate sales and will be good for you as well as for me" (*Selected Letters* 339). The Pulitzer gave *One of Ours* a three-month come-back on the best seller list, placing as high as seventh. In a June 30, 1923 "useful hints to busy booksellers" advertisement, Alfred Knopf advises booksellers to "keep on pushing ONE OF OURS. As an instance of how well this book is going, only last week one of the biggest jobbers rang me up and said that he missed so many copies that he thought he'd been robbed. He wasn't robbed—he was sold out!" (1913). To guarantee his credibility, Knopf promised to send the jobber's name and number of copies sold to anyone who requested the information. Meanwhile, Cather received more good news from Houghton Mifflin that *My Ántonia* was selling well at the rate of 500 copies per month.²³

Sinclair Lewis was not a fan of *One of Ours*, but he did not hold a grudge against Willa Cather for winning the prize. He remained a supporter and cheerleader for both Cather and Edith Wharton. His irritation with the Pulitzer was directed at the process by which the prizes were awarded and the inconsistency in the meaning of the award. In a confidential letter to Alfred Harcourt on April 4, 1926, Lewis confessed:

²³ See Willa Cather to Alfred and Blanche Knopf, 16 May [1923], printed in *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, page 339.

I hope they do award me the Pulitzer prize on *Arrowsmith*—but you know, don't you, that ever since the Main Street burglary, I have planned that if they ever did award it to me, I would refuse it, with a polite but firm letter which I shall let the press have, and which ought to make it impossible for any one ever to accept the novel prize (not the play or history prize) thereafter without acknowledging themselves as willing to sell out. There are three chief reasons—the Main Street and possibly the Babbitt matters, the fact that a number of publishers advertise Pulitzer Prize novels not, as the award states, as “best portraying the highest standard of American morals and manners” or whatever it is but as the in every-way “best novel of the year,” and third the whole general matter of any body arrogating to itself the right to choose a best novel (203).

He began planning his response so it would be ready to send to the media immediately after the award was announced. This would not be a quiet refusal.

Arrowsmith, like most Sinclair Lewis novels, had been creating a public buzz ever since it was announced in February 1925. It received lavish advertising and publicity before and after publication. Harrison Smith, known as “Hal” to his colleagues, was in charge of the publicity campaign and his enthusiasm was well-matched with Lewis'. In a March 6, 1925 letter to Lewis, Smith reported:

In short, Arrowsmith is going over with a bang. There are reviews everywhere—publicity everywhere—ads everywhere. *Vanity Fair* devotes a page to the photo with the twisted column and the enigmatic Lewis at its base; *Arts & Decoration* (God save the mark!) another; the rotogravure sections of newspapers will have you; and the women’s magazines cry for them. Even the biographical squib by that imposingly unknown critic Oliver Harrison [the pseudonym of Harrison Smith] is selling and will probably have to go into another edition (177).

“God bless you!” Lewis replied to Smith on March 21. “The ads are corking—the use of the arrow as symbol for the book is superb. I should think they would hit everybody square in the eye” (179-180). The weekly advertisements placed in *The Publishers’ Weekly* make ample use of the arrow iconography. In several advertisements, a symbol of a right-pointing arrow replaced the “Arrow” in “Arrowsmith.” The February 14 advertisement asks booksellers to “remember it is different from *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, not a satire, but a romance” (510). The words of a song are included so bookselling staff can sing “The Song of Arrowsmith,” either to their own tune or to music supplied by Harcourt, Brace on request. The next week, as if to reinforce their claim that *Arrowsmith* is “a romance—not a satire,” the advertisement is dominated by a line drawing of the United States. In the middle, where Missouri and Kansas and Nebraska should be, a gigantic arrow with “ARROW” written near the shaft and “SMITH” written near the point pierce through the lower Midwest or, as the advertisement says, “right thru the heart

of America” (704). The March 7 advertisement shows a target with an arrow in its bull’s-eye. *Arrowsmith*, by “one of the major prophets of our Time,” is “just out” and has hit its mark (765).

On July 4, four months after the publication of *Arrowsmith*, a curious page entitled “More or Less Social Notes” appeared in *The Publishers’ Weekly*. It is framed like an advertisement, although it’s unclear who placed it because it’s not signed and the second paragraph reads: “We have been informed that Harcourt, Brace and Company printed an enormous first edition” (18). The narrative sounds like author gossip, except it’s about characters from two different best-selling novels, written by two different authors, published by two different firms. “The spectacle of a well known man of science being pursued all over the country by a charming young lady is amusing to the elite of our cities at the present time,” the “social note” says. “Since his divorce in the last chapter Dr. Arrowsmith has been a most popular bachelor, and if the indiscreet but nevertheless Constant Nymph catches him, our best wishes go with her” (18). Divorce in the last chapter? Should a spoiler be in an advertisement? The note ends with news that Sinclair Lewis is visiting his father back home in Sauk Center, Minnesota. Whether this was a note placed by the editors of *The Publishers’ Weekly* for fun, or a clever advertisement designed by Harcourt, Brace to look like something else, it does accomplish one thing—it draws and keeps a reader’s attention.

Sinclair Lewis’ long-awaited chance to strike back at the Pulitzer Prize committee came in late April 1926 when he received a confidential letter from Frank D. Fackenthal of Columbia University. The letter announced “that the prize of \$1000, established by

the will of the late Joseph Pulitzer for the best American novel published during the year 1925 has been awarded to Arrowsmith” (*From Main Street* 209). Lewis was ready to respond. A few weeks earlier, he had written to Harcourt: “I hope you will not think that my decision in this matter is altogether insane. Certainly it is not too hasty a one; I have been thinking it over any number of times during the last five or six years” (206). On April 26, Lewis wrote again to Harcourt enclosing the Frank Fackenthal letter and a draft of his refusal. “Well, doggone it, it’s happened,” Lewis wrote. He asks Harcourt and his staff to review his letter, stating that he has “tried to make it as unflamboyant—and as short—as I could while including everything necessary.” He confesses it is “an asinine, fantastic, useless, expensive gesture, refusing this prize. But ... I can do no other” (209-210). The day his refusal went to press, Lewis asked Harcourt to keep him apprised of “what writers and publishers say privately about my Pulitzer Prize insanity. Lots of them will just call it publicity-hounding” (212). On May 2, Lewis’ letter refusing the prize was sent to the Pulitzer Prize Committee, the Associated Press, *The Publishers’ Weekly*, booksellers, and one hundred authors including Edith Wharton, H. L. Mencken, and Willa Cather.

Refusing the Pulitzer Prize in such a public way risked offending the authors he admired, but it fit his inclination toward stirring controversy. In *The Economy of Prestige*, James English notes that “refusing a prize outright” brings profit to an artist who has “already accumulated a wealth of symbolic capital [...] which accrues not to just any recognized aesthetic innovator but only to those who are also resolute social oppositionists or heretics” (218). These artists “carry out a broader ‘mission of prophetic

subversion,' a political mission in which the existing social order is consistently denounced, and the rewards it places within reach are consistently rejected" (219).

Consistency was key and Sinclair Lewis addressed that in his letter.

The nine-paragraph refusal letter touched on all three points Lewis had outlined to Alfred Harcourt, from the constant misinterpretation of the award's meaning to the arrogance of any group that would represent itself as "a pontifical body with the discernment and the power to grant the prize as the ultimate proof of merit" with or without the guidance of "supposed advisers" (*From Main Street* 213). He warns about the dangers of writing for any other reason besides literary expression. He said "the seekers for prizes tend to labor not for inherent excellence but for alien rewards; they tend to write this, or timorously to avoid writing that, in order to tickle the prejudices of a haphazard committee" (212). Literary prizes such as the Pulitzer, "amateur boards of censorship, and the inquisition of earnest literary ladies" compel writers who seek approval "to become safe, polite, obedient, and sterile" (213). Willa Cather was preparing to travel to New Mexico with Edith Lewis when this news broke. It is not clear when she received his letter, or how she responded, but even if she didn't agree with the whole of his letter she would have agreed with his theory that an author should not write to be obedient to a prize or a literary market. The dichotomy of literary expression versus business sales was strong in both Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis.²⁴ They did not create

²⁴ I use "literary expression" here instead of "literary art" because Sinclair Lewis' fiction does not have the same artistic quality as Cather's. James Woodress says, "the reader who plunges into Sinclair Lewis, for example, is likely to hit his head on the bottom, but in Cather there is no danger. He can dive as deep as he wishes and stay down

fiction for a current market, but through publicity and reputation created a market for their fiction.

Whether or not Sinclair Lewis meant to be a “publicity-hound,” his wide distribution of the refusal letter to all media sources in the major American cities caused a great stir. “Dear Red,” Alfred Harcourt wrote to Lewis on May 5, “you certainly got a run for your money on the news of your refusal of the Pulitzer Prize” (214). There were stories in the *New York World* and the *New York Times*. The only picture on the *Tribune*’s front page was a photo of Sinclair Lewis along with a front-page story. *The Publishers’ Weekly* May 8th article on the Pulitzer Prizes included the sub-headline: “Sinclair Lewis Refuses the Prize Awarded His Novel, ‘Arrowsmith.’” A large photo of Lewis at his typewriter was placed below the headline and the first sentence read: “The refusal of Sinclair Lewis to accept the Pulitzer Award made to his novel ‘Arrowsmith’ has followed so swiftly upon the announcement of the awards that attention is for the moment somewhat diverted from the winners to the award” (1543). After listing the prizes and award recipients, the article prints the full copy of Sinclair Lewis’ letter. Another article in the same issue questions whether Lewis was sincere in his refusal, but concludes that his letter:

does not sound as if it were written for a whim, for publicity, or in a pique;

it is too consistent with Sinclair Lewis’ constantly expressed point of

as long as he can” (294). This difference in depth reflects the difference in purpose. Sinclair Lewis’ novels were written to make a statement. Cather’s were written to explore a love or an interest.

view. ‘Main Street’ and ‘Babbitt’ were novels of rebellion against widely accepted standards and points of view and now Mr. Lewis rebels again, this time against the theory that the prize rewards the artist, with the argument that the prize hampers the artist and does him more harm than good (1539).

The irony of Lewis’ rebellion is that, even though he refused the \$1,000 for the prize, his name and novel remain attached to the 1926 Pulitzer. No other novel was named in its place. Every list of past Pulitzer Prize winners includes *Arrowsmith* as the prize-winning novel for 1926, with or without a notation that he declined.

Lewis’ refusal thus brings to mind a statement by Mark Twain: “To refuse awards is another way of accepting them with more noise than is normal.” Before *Arrowsmith* won the Pulitzer, Alfred Harcourt expressed to Lewis that the prize would “be a great help in getting *Mantrap* started” (*From Main Street* 202). On May 8, when *The Publishers’ Weekly* was printing Lewis’ refusal of the prize, Harcourt, Brace was advertising his newest novel, *Mantrap*, in the same issue. The refusal did not stop Harcourt, Brace from mentioning the prize in the advertisement. The right-hand side of the advertisement is a full-length photo of Sinclair Lewis in suit and tie, left elbow bent and hand raised to his waist. He looks like he’s about to say something very serious. The top left-hand corner announces, “EXTRA! Lewis wins the Pulitzer Prize!” (1500). Although he refused the prize, he’s still the winner of it. He made his point to the

committee and to the publishing industry, but he did not distance himself completely from the trappings he railed against.

The question of the Pulitzer Prize came up again when Sinclair Lewis became the first American to win the Nobel Prize in November 1930. When the press asked him why he had chosen to accept this prize after refusing the Pulitzer in 1926, he explained that the two prizes were different in how and what they awarded. While the Nobel Prize is awarded for “the most distinguished work of an idealistic tendency” across the spectrum of an author’s career, “merely meaning that such work shall not be simply a commercial and machine-like production reaching vast popularity,” the Pulitzer Prize awards “obedience to whatever code of good form may chance to be popular at the moment.” To prove that the Pulitzer didn’t award based on literary merit, Lewis claimed “it is sufficient criticism of the prize to say that in the last few years it has not been awarded to Cabell’s *Jurgen*, Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*, Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, or Cather’s *A Lost Lady*” (297).

It took another five years for issues with the Pulitzer to be addressed. An article in the May 11, 1935 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly* asks:

Are literary awards a help or an irritant to publishing and authorship?

Sometimes they seem primarily the latter when the judges disagree among themselves or the public disagrees with the judges, but the stimulating effect of the important awards on the fortunes of authors is indisputable,

and announcements such as the Nobel Prize or the Pulitzer Awards are front page news (1832).

In 1935, the Columbia School of Journalism made three changes to the Pulitzer Prize awards. For the first time, they kept decisions secret, even from the winning authors, until the prizes were announced. Another change was that juries were to present their recommendations to the Advisory Board by “submitting lists of eligible winners without stating their preferences.” This change was “adopted because of friction in the past between the juries and the advisory board” (1828). The third departure changed the wording of the prizes. For novels, the language was changed from “the best novel presenting wholesome American life and manners” to “the best novel preferably dealing with American life” (1832). This new wording takes out the wholesome, mannerly, morally conscious aspect of the previous award and adds the wishy-washy "preferably" that can either be recognized or ignored with no consequence.

Sinclair Lewis’ call for authors to follow his lead and refuse the Pulitzer Prize was largely ignored. Winning the prize became a turning point in many writing careers, including Willa Cather’s (Woodress 334). Advertisements for *A Lost Lady* announced that the prize-winning *One of Ours* had reached 60,000 copies and was continuing to sell. An advertisement for *The Professor’s House* predicted that the book might win Cather a second Pulitzer. In 1928, as sales for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* reached 60,000 after only four months, an advertisement gave a nod to *One of Ours* but said the sale of the new novel would continue for many years to come, more like *My Ántonia*.

CHAPTER FIVE

ADVERTISING CATHER IN A BROKEN WORLD (1923-1929)

Much has been written about Willa Cather's statement in *Not Under Forty* that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" (v). World War One had broken the population into the young generation of "forward-goers" and the older generation of the "backward." The late 19th century had inspired enthusiasm in the older generation for a growing vision of "a civilized future in a civilized world" where the inevitability of war was no longer possible (Cooperman 6). Americans were hopeful for continued growth, progress and peace. The Great War brought an end to these hopes. In August 1914, Henry James lamented that "the plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and horror" dispels the "fool's paradise" of an improving world of cultural maturity and intelligence (Cooperman 8). Optimism turned into hopelessness. When the war ended, Stanley Cooperman says "the world itself was broken" (56). For Edith Wharton, the loss of lives on the warfront was horrible, but the homefront "gutting from within" of American rules of conduct was even more devastating. In *A Backward Glance*, her autobiography published in 1934, she observes, "what had seemed unalterable rules of conduct became of a sudden observances as quaintly arbitrary as the domestic rites of the Pharaohs" (6). She associated post-war civilization with a roofless house exposing all taboos and transgressions.

Willa Cather also mourned the loss of the old ways and “deplored Prohibition, the Jazz Age, the flapper, the relaxation of moral standards, the deterioration of taste, the scramble for money” of the 1920s (Woodress 476). She depicts the split between the backward and the forward in her short story, “The Old Beauty,” set in Aix-les-Bains, France in 1922. Gabrielle Longstreet was a “brilliant” lady of the 1890s “whose manners, dress, conventions, loyalties, codes of honour, were different from anything existing in the world today” (5). When she was young, she admired her elders. Although she didn’t understand them at the time, a soft pleasure “came into her face when she put out her hand to greet a hero of perhaps seventy years” (22). In her own old age, however, Gabrielle is not admired by the youth. Except for the narrator and Chetty, she’s mostly alone. Gabrielle had “thought, once the war was over, the world would be just as it used to be. Of course it isn’t” (44).²⁵ She says to Seabury, “I think one should go out with one’s time” (46). Most of her friends are gone, but their framed photos travel with her.

The years between 1915 and 1925 not only saw a break in social standards, but a stark transformation “from an agrarian and provincial society (the States) to an industrialized urban world power: the U.S.A.” (Geismar ix). Maxwell Geismar calls this decade “The Years of Loss” with its motif of a “final conquest of the American town, and the values of an older rural life, by the New Economic Order of the industrialized cities” (x). Cather’s *A Lost Lady*, written in 1922-1923, was set in the middle of this struggle. Jean Stafford’s 1973 analysis of *A Lost Lady* claims that Marian Forrester “is lost in a

²⁵ In her autobiography, Edith Wharton writes: “The war was over, and we thought we were returning to the world we had so abruptly passed out of four years earlier” (362).

deeper sense, in a historical sense: she lives in the wrong place at the wrong time, during ‘the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneers’” (quoted in Rosowski *Birthing* 94). The future of Sweet Water changes from promise to failure. Crop failures cause farmers to abandon their land and return to the East or go to Denver. “The railroad officials were not stopping off at Sweet Water so often,—were more inclined to hurry past a town where they had sunk money that would never come back” (24). Marian Forrester attempts to adapt to this and other changes in her life, including a bank failure and her husband’s death, but her adaptation is a regression into childishness and dependency. Instead of surrounding herself with friends her own age, she invites young boys to her home for dinner parties that scandalize the women in town.

Alfred Knopf’s August 4, 1923 *Publishers’ Weekly* advertisement for *A Lost Lady* does not represent this brokenness. The novel is described as a “romance of the old West; not the West of the pioneer this time, but of the railroad aristocracy that grew up when the great trans-continental lines were being built across the plains” (416). The advertisement implies that the story takes place at the peak “of that lavish, generous, careless era” and that “a whole epoch lives again in the little group of people so wonderfully [sic] pictured here.” On November 21, 1922, Cather explained to Knopf in a letter that she desired to “find a few qualities, a few perfumes, that haven’t been exactly named and defined yet.” She said *A Lost Lady* “is an example of what I mean; it’s a little, lawless un-machine made thing—not very good construction, but the woman lives—that’s all I want” (*Selected Letters* 329). Knopf’s advertisement agrees that Marian Forrester does, indeed, live. Marian, “full of feminine mystery and charm, stands

out with irresistible fascination.” The description of *A Lost Lady* is repeated, nearly word-for-word, in Knopf’s September 16 advertisement in *The New York Times Book Review*. The *New York Times* advertisement, however, does not call it a “lavish, generous, careless era” and admits that the “irresistible” Marian Forrester is “inscrutable in her weakness and her reckless courage” (15). Both advertisements claim that Marian “is one of Miss Cather’s greatest triumphs.” She is a triumph because she is conflicted, confused and flawed. Her outward appearance is poised and charming, but inside there’s a brokenness she can’t always hide.

Advertisements for *A Lost Lady* were placed in *The Publishers’ Weekly* almost every week leading up to the September 14 publication date. Each one mentions *One of Ours*, Cather’s Pulitzer prize-winning novel of 1922. The August 18 advertisement announces that *One of Ours* “is now in its 60th Thousand and selling better than ever before” (535). The September 1 advertisement claims that, “ever since its publication, one year ago this month, *One of Ours* has been steadily on Best Seller lists throughout the country” (648). *One of Ours* had only been off the best seller list for one month when *A Lost Lady* made its first appearance in October at sixth place. The publication of *A Lost Lady* followed so closely on the heels of the Pulitzer Prize announcement that Cather’s new book was able to feed off the interest generated by the prize-winning status of her previous novel.

Another similarity in the *Lost Lady* advertisements is the recurring illustration of a country road lined by poplars, leading to a large house in the distance. This woodcut became the public image of the book through its continuous use on several publicity

mediums. It was commissioned for the serialization of *A Lost Lady* in *Century Magazine* before it became the cover art for the first edition jacket. Instead of a jacket full of advertising text, *A Lost Lady*'s front panel is simple and uncluttered with the illustration, centered, and "A Lost Lady by WILLA CATHER" up above, followed by a note that she's the "Author of ONE OF OURS." The August 18 and September 1 advertisements both include a reproduction of the jacket so viewers will become familiar with it and recognize it when copies appear in stores. The reproductions become progressively larger as the publication date approaches. The August 4 advertisement includes the illustration, but not as part of a dust jacket. On August 18, the illustration is shown as part of the jacket, but it's a small reproduction in the upper left of the advertisement. On September 1, the reproduction is larger, centered at the top of the page and shaded like the green jacket.

A third similarity is the use of advertising to announce the size of the first and second editions instead of offering further description of the story. The August 18 advertisement announces that "the first edition consists of twenty thousand copies, the largest edition I have ever printed of any book, and I have already ordered a second printing of six thousand copies" (535). This statement, which ends with Alfred Knopf's signature in script, signals a change in the tide of demand for Willa Cather's books. The statement is repeated in the September 1 advertisement along with a note that "there is also a large paper edition of 200 copies for sale" at \$10.00 each (648). By September 15, just one day after publication, an advertisement lists three editions of *A Lost Lady*. This advertisement has a different design than the previous ones. It is laid out like a

reproduction of a thick book with the book's spine pictured at left and pages evident on top and to the right. The book's "front panel" on this advertisement does not include the drawing from the dust jacket, but includes the title in handwritten script as it appeared on the hard cover of the first edition. It also lists the number of copies in each edition: 20,000 copies in the first and 6,000 each in the second and third editions, for a total of 32,000 "copies printed before publication" (754).

During this time, Cather was struggling with a form of publicity that was free to publishing firms, but invasive to the private lives of authors. William Webster Ellsworth, who retired from The Century Company in 1915 after nearly 40 years with the publishing firm, says in his autobiography that "one great asset" unique to publishers is the creation of "a commodity that the newspapers will talk about" (169). Other manufacturers don't have this advantage:

"Alas," says a friend of mine who makes collars, "why may I not send two hundred boxes of my latest collars to two hundred editors with the knowledge that each of them will give me from five inches to a column of free descriptive advertising as they give your books? Why will they not print the personal item that the inventor of my best shape in turnover fronts, two inches high in the back, will spend the summer camping on the Yukon?"

Cather understood the importance of free publicity, which is why she solicited book reviews from her friends, but she didn't want the kind of publicity that divulged her personal life. She had agreed to sit for a commissioned portrait in commemoration of her 1922 Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours*. The portrait was to be given to the Omaha Public Library, but she didn't want it to be a splashy affair. She wrote to one of the committee members, Judge Duncan Vinsonhaler, on August 27, 1923 to ask: "Won't you do what must be done just as quietly and simply as possible. I like to feel that you want my picture because of a feeling of friendliness, because I've pictured truthfully the life you know" (*Selected Letters* 344). She was worried that Margaret Badollet Shotwell, writer for the *Omaha Daily News*, would "turn all this nice feeling into cheap newspaper copy and make me heartsick about it." Shotwell had already written to Leon Bakst, who was painting Cather's portrait, to ask "about my eyes and my nose, how he would define my personality, what flower he thought appropriate for me, etc. As if any painter would give an interview on the physical characteristics of his sitter. Why, the woman must be mad!" (345). Cather was offended by this "vulgar horn-blowing" and asked Judge Vinsonhaler to "tell this lady that I hate such methods, that I don't want to be 'boosted' in this way, and I don't like being made ridiculous." Either the message did not get through to Margaret Shotwell or the message was ignored.

On September 15, 1923, *The Publishers' Weekly* reprinted a poem, "Will Willa be Willa," written and published by Margaret Shotwell in the *Omaha Daily News* (783).

The rhyme asked:

Will Willa be soulful?
 Will Willa show guile?
 Will Willa be costumed
 In Bakst's Russian style?

Since Omaha women
 Are paying the price,
 They're hoping and praying
 Bakst's Willa be nice.

This was the kind of ridiculous publicity Cather feared. Not only was it printed in Omaha where her hometown friends and family could see it, but it was also printed for a national audience of booksellers, publishers, and fellow authors.

Dorothea Lawrance Mann, in "Are We Selling Books or Authors," says that any new writer in the 1920s "must embark on his career with the realization that the greater his success the more completely he has left privacy and reticence behind him" (2439). Publicity is meant to "build up such an interest in the author that it will hold over from book to book," but the difficulty is that advertisers build up "an interest in one thing in order to sell another—since an author and his books are not inseparable." She says readers can enjoy a good book without knowing the author's name or background. Sometimes, Mann warns, "familiarity can breed contempt, and the newspapers can play up almost any public figure till the readers are heartily sick of them" (2440). Publishers

must moderate their desire to receive free publicity for their authors by avoiding the trivial and limiting gossip to what is interesting or valuable. Mann says “there are a certain, very few, authors whose doings are always interesting” to the public, but “it is pure hokum to suggest that all authors are always interesting, or that—to be very conservative—one-half the things printed about them in any way influence people to read their books” (2440). It was better for publishers to say nothing about an author in the gossip column than to share something uninteresting.

Author gossip had become profuse in *The Publishers' Weekly*. In the early 1920s, the gossip column was called “Among the Publishers.” It briefly became “In and Out” in the mid-1920s before changing to “In the Bookmarket” and “They Say That.” The December 24, 1921 issue shared the good news “that F. Scott Fitzgerald takes joyously to his new role of father. He sent the following wire to his wife’s parents [...] announcing the birth of his daughter, Scottie: ‘Lillian Gish is in mourning; Constance Talmage [sic] is inconsolable, and a second Mary Pickford has arrived” (2010). On December 4, 1926, “In and Out” shared a story about Sinclair Lewis’ visit to the White House. He’d been having dinner with Bob Sherwood when “the White House office called and suggested that the President would like to see Sherwood’s circus slides. Of course he went and Lewis too, and there was an audience of 40, including beside Mr. & Mrs. Coolidge, the Secretary of War and Governor Brewster of Maine” (2148). Sinclair Lewis was a glutton for this kind of publicity. On May 12, 1928, Lewis “announced that he will be married this month to Dorothy Thompson” and the “honeymoon will be spent touring England with a motor caravan which Lewis will drive while his wife attends to the cooking and

other domestic duties” (1972). When Harcourt, Brace’s publicity director asked Sinclair Lewis for “a line or two about what you are doing” in October 1929, Lewis replied, “if the world yearns for news, tell it I am staying in these Vermont hills until the snow drives me out by threatening to barricade me in.” He was reading, writing and “overseeing my wife overseeing the gardener plant delphiniums” (*From Main Street* 281-282). On November 9, 1929, *The Publishers’ Weekly* announced that “Sinclair Lewis is remaining in Vermont until the snows drive him out by threatening to barricade him in; he is writing short stories until he can turn to a new novel; he is visiting the local Rotary clubs” (2294). The potentially offensive comment about his wife and the delphiniums was replaced by a note that would please any local Rotarian.

The Bookman also had a regular feature in the 1920s called “The Gossip Shop.” In October 1925, “The Gossip Shop” reported news from Denver “that Willa Cather spent the first two weeks of August there, incognito. She was gathering some authentic tradition about the region for her new novel of Mexico and, being absorbed in her work, was desirous of no attention or publicity” (231). Before granting Cather some privacy, *The Bookman* announced that she had “succumbed to one of those new cretonne jackets.” Announcements printed in *The Publishers’ Weekly* gossip columns about Willa Cather did not share her vacation plans or her new wardrobe. Instead, they announced her literary achievements. “Current Clippings” in the March 8, 1924 issue of *Publishers’ Weekly* reported that William Allen White had listed Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, Zona Gale and Dorothy Canfield as the four women “writing the best fiction in America” (838). On June 9, 1928, a notice announced that Cather “was honored by Columbia

University on Tuesday of this week with the honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters. In conferring the degree President Nicholas Murray Butler spoke of Miss Cather as possessing a style of rare and charming beauty” (2391). “In the Bookmarket” announced on April 18, 1931 that “Willa Cather has been given the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of California” (2007). In June 1931, Cather wrote to Dorothy Canfield Fisher that she was on her way “to Princeton tonight for another of those degrees you are always joking me about” (*Selected Letters* 443). Although she joked about them, Cather preferred “gossip” about her honorary degrees instead of anything ridiculous or embarrassing like Margaret Shotwell’s poem.

A different poem about Cather was published in *The New York Times Book Review* on September 20, 1925, but this rhyme was offered by Knopf’s firm to help advertise her new book, *The Professor’s House*. The poem was reprinted from “Keith Preston’s verses written when Miss Cather first began to loom large on the American horizon” (22). It began:

Blithe Mencken he sat on his Baltimore stoop,
Singing, “Willa, git Willa! git Willa!”
The red-headed Lewis joined in with a whoop,
Singing “Willa, git Willa! git Willa!”

The poem was written before the publication of *One of Ours*, but H. L. Mencken’s and Sinclair Lewis’ praise for *A Lost Lady* made this poem relevant again. The two-column

advertisement by Knopf, which mentions several different Borzoi books, ends the first column with this poem and begins the second with a review excerpt about *The Professor's House*, "A Novel of American Life." Laurence Stallings, a playwright and war veteran, says "the reader is held thrall'd by Miss Cather's characters, and once again he is excited and stimulated by the exercise of following the sudden angles and turns of her plan" (22). This excerpt has some "pull" in it. Instead of using empty phrases, Stallings uses active words—excite, stimulate, exercise, sudden. According to this review, reading *The Professor's House* is not a passive activity. The reader will be absorbed into the action, following its twists and turns.

But do twists and turns really exist in *The Professor's House*? The "action" is a remembrance of the past and a struggle against moving on to the new. In Cather's post-1922 fiction, characters have difficulty accepting "the definite break with the past" and struggle to adapt and re-create themselves (Woodress 452). Whereas *O Pioneers!*, *Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, and *One of Ours* all portray movement from childhood to a promising future (Claude dies a hero), *The Professor's House* presents its main character in the present, looking backward, unable to let go of the past and unable to see any hope for the future. Professor Godfrey St. Peter struggles with the expectation that he must leave his study in the attic where he wrote his prize-winning histories to move with his family into a new house purchased with his winnings. James Woodress says that St. Peter's "problem is the problem of every thinking person: how does one live in a world of change? How does one face the future when the old verities have been blown away and the world has entered a new era of chaos and uncertainty?" (371-372). St. Peter's dislike

for change mirrors Cather's own. Mildred Bennett, in *The World of Willa Cather*, explains that Cather "hated change—change in herself, in her family, in her home town, in the countryside" (145). She missed the old when it was replaced by the new. She thought new clothes and a new house must be lived in for a while before they become beautiful because "the beauty lies in the associations that cluster around it, the way in which the house has fitted itself to the people" (quoted in Bennett 147). When the novel begins, St. Peter is "alone in the dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters" (11). At the novel's end, he finally looks forward instead of backward, but his acceptance of change results from a nearly fatal accident rather than a conscious decision.

The Professor's House was introduced to the publishing industry as "a best seller and a contribution to American literature" in Alfred Knopf's June 27, 1925 advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* (2028). The book shares the full-page advertisement with thirteen other titles, but has the bottom quarter of the page to itself. Knopf advises booksellers to "arrange your schedule for displays of this country-wide best seller to coincide with our national advertising campaign." The new novel is, of course, "her best work" and "will make a new Cather record." With well-placed advertisements from Knopf and help from booksellers everywhere, *The Professor's House* is expected to "be the backbone of this fall's book business." Cather's novel did not become the top best seller in the nation, but it did debut on the September best seller list in the seventh spot. In October and November, it placed sixth, and then fell to eighth in January.

Two advertisements in August, leading up to the September 4 publication, list reasons for why booksellers and the public will want to purchase and read *The Professor's House*. Roland Marchand in *Advertising the American Dream* explains that advertising trends shifted in the mid-1920s from objective descriptions of the product to a subjective appeal to emotions and purchasing motives of the consumer (12). Knopf's August 8, 1925 advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* claims that *The Professor's House* is "a book to rouse your native pride." It is written by Willa Cather, "the great novelist, the only American woman whose work holds its own among the contemporary masterpieces of world literature" (485). The layout of this advertisement is fragmented, much like the fragmented structure of the novel. Each purchasing motive is enclosed in a separate text box arranged asymmetrically on the page. The four motives listed on August 8 are described in further detail in Knopf's August 15 advertisement (537). Combined, they say *The Professor's House* should be read:

- (1) If you want to know the *feel* of America—the richness of its earliest civilization, the struggle of its pioneer life, the ideals of its contemporary youth.
- (2) If you are interested in the environment which your son and daughter find in college; if you care to see the cross currents of family life; if you appreciate original characters drawn in a striking way.

- (3) If you wish to know American life—life in the small railroad town of the South [railroading], life on the Western ranch [ranching], life among the professional classes.
- (4) If you enjoy a good story superbly told.

The fourth motive only appears in the August 8 advertisement, although the later one says “I take great pleasure in introducing to you a story superbly told” (537). In the first three motives, the underlined text appears in both advertisements. The text not underlined appears only on August 15. The additional text in the first motive seems especially important in regards to “Tom Outland’s Story.” The original motives had all pointed to something contemporary: American life, contemporary youth, college life, family life, professional life. If a parent purchased *The Professor’s House* to learn more about “the environment which your son and daughter find in college,” the parent would be disappointed to discover that very few scenes occur on a college campus.²⁶ Mention of “the richness of its earliest civilization,” however, points to the cliff dwellings on the mesa—a deceased and forgotten indigenous civilization—that become an important piece of Outland’s story.

²⁶ This list of motives is a reformatting of the first edition dust jacket blurb for *The Professor’s House*. Although Willa Cather and Edith Lewis often wrote text for dust covers, David Porter hears “little of Cather’s voice” in the blurb (45). He says he “cannot imagine Cather herself perpetuating the absurdity of casting *The Professor’s House* as an introduction to college life” (46). Cather’s October 1925 letter to Alfred Knopf says she “did hate the text of the first edition jacket enormously,” indicating that she likely did not write it (*Selected Letters* 373).

The next addition to the first purchasing motive isn't as easy to explain. "The struggle of its pioneer life" relates better to *O Pioneers!* or *My Ántonia* or perhaps *A Lost Lady*. Can the cliff dwellers be called pioneers? Is Tom Outland the pioneer? Godfrey St. Peter writes a pioneering study about pioneers in his *Spanish Adventures in North America*, but is that enough to claim that readers should purchase the book if they wish to read about the struggle of pioneers? A possible explanation is found in Cather's letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, dated February 27, 1924. She writes:

Poor Knopf, anyhow! Just when he has got his booksellers where they can sell most any old book I do about the West, I refuse to have anything to do with the West, but have gone charging off on certain stories of embarrassing length—or shortness—that have nothing to do with locality—or geography whatever! My familiar spirit is like an old wild turkey that forsakes a feeding ground as soon as it sees tracks of people—especially if the people are readers, book-buyers. It's a crafty bird and it wants to go where there aint no readers (*Selected Letters* 355-356).

The August 15 advertisement is "an open letter to booksellers," containing eight paragraphs that list purchasing motives and remind booksellers about Cather's reputation. The booksellers expect to see a book from Cather about the West. "The struggle of its pioneer life" fits this expectation, even if it doesn't fit the novel itself. The majority of this advertisement tells booksellers that they have a special relationship and feeling for

Willa Cather and her novels. Knopf explains that booksellers “want to own and to read ‘the new Cather book’ as soon as possible. There exists a sort of kinship between this author and the world of Booksellers who are as anxious to establish her as America’s foremost woman author as her publisher and her friends, the critics” (537). He thanks booksellers for introducing “the present generation of readers [to] Miss Cather’s books which are ‘best-sellers’ today and will also be the classics of tomorrow.” This kinship “is undoubtedly more marked in the case of Willa Cather than of any other American author.” This extensive praise of the booksellers’ interest in Cather encourages them to push her new novel—not because of its familiar theme or setting, but because it is written by an author of established reputation.

A third advertisement, printed August 29, provides a different kind of list. This does not list purchasing motives, but reasons why Knopf believes *The Professor’s House* will be another best seller for Cather. “It is a fine story well written” and “a probable choice for the Pulitzer Prize” (669). Because of “the enthusiastic support of every enterprising bookseller,” the “first edition was sold out three weeks before publication” and “advance orders for it have been double that of any previous Cather book.” The only phrase repeated from another August advertisement is the expectation that the book “will rouse every American’s native pride.” This “native pride” moves away from stories about immigrant pioneers (such as Alexandra and Antonia) and focuses instead on families who have been in the United States for multiple generations.

Two weeks after the novel’s publication, Knopf placed another advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly* announcing that *The Professor’s House* was “the most discussed

novel of the year” (848). Literary critics and booksellers gave it mixed reviews, “but all agree that any book by Miss Cather is an event.” Excerpts from three booksellers and two critics are included in the advertisement. Fanny Butcher’s quotation is unimpressive (“I think *The Professor’s House* is great”), but Adolph Kroch’s shows more enthusiasm (“The best line I can give you on Willa Cather’s new book is ‘Rush another 250’”). The only thing unimpressive about Kroch’s inclusion is the misspelling of his name into “Krock.” Critics Harry Hansen and Stuart Sherman elaborate on the “event” of a new Cather book. To Hansen, each new book by Willa Cather “has come to mark a milestone in American literary progress.” Meanwhile, Sherman says, “Miss Cather is not merely one of those rare writers who have taken a vow never to disappoint us. She is also indubitably one of the true classics of our generation. She is not merely entertaining. She is also important. *The Professor’s House* is a disturbingly beautiful book.” The fragmented structure of the novel puzzled some reviewers, but Knopf turns this into a selling point: “A book that can set the critics and the reading public by the ears—that can puzzle, delight and disturb in turn is a book that you can sell.” And it did sell. By October 31, 55,000 copies had been printed and more “have been sold than have ever been sold in a similar period—10 weeks—of any book by Willa Cather—our most dependable novelist” (1516). To help boost upcoming Christmas sales, a limited “holiday gift edition” in “brilliant green and blue” was announced.

The next Christmas season saw the publication of Willa Cather’s *My Mortal Enemy*. It was a small book—only 122 pages in comparison to the 283 pages of *The Professor’s House* and the 459 of *One of Ours*—but it was beautifully designed with

black-print-on-yellow illustrations heading each chapter. Illustrations offered clues about the chapters: Myra's necklace, the Driscoll's wrought-iron fence, the sleeve-buttons, the closed door, the candles, the lone figure on the hill. When a reviewer questioned the designation of *My Mortal Enemy* as a "novel," Cather didn't disagree. She wrote to Blanche Knopf on October 24, 1926, asking her: "Don't you think it is perhaps a mistake to advertise that book as a 'novel,' Blanche? It's not really that. Couldn't the ad writer call it a 'Story,' merely? That would arouse less antagonism" (*Selected Letters* 387-388). *My Mortal Enemy* was advertised sparingly in *The Publishers' Weekly* without a full-page advertisement to itself. In those shared advertisements, Cather's book was referred to as a "novel," a "book," and a "product."

The first page of Knopf's September 25, 1926 two-page fall announcement of upcoming titles lists *My Mortal Enemy* as one out of eleven new novels. The list occupies the bottom third of the page and leaves no room for descriptions even though booksellers are encouraged to "estimate your sales for these titles" (1090). Booksellers are expected to form opinions based on author reputation rather than knowledge of the product. Authors listed include Joseph Hergesheimer, Carl Van Vechten, Elinor Wylie, J. S. Fletcher, and Fannie Hurst. Six books are listed in the first column and *My Mortal Enemy* is listed third in the second column. The majority of the advertisement focuses on imagination as "the basis of the book business." The reader uses imagination to transmute "black and white symbols on a page into scenes and ideas to delight his mind." Publishers use imagination to forecast "the demand for a book on the basis of what he knows of the book and of the public." And booksellers use their "imagination even more

vividly than the other two, for he must judge of books very often only by a title and a reputation; and his judgment must ensure his livelihood.” This advertisement says nothing about an author’s imagination in creating fictional characters, scenes, settings, relationships and conflict. The author is pretty well forgotten in this narrative as booksellers base their “imaginative forecast” on “confidence in the publisher” and familiarity with customer interests.

The only substantial advertisement placed in *The Publishers’ Weekly* for *My Mortal Enemy* appeared on October 2. A slender column on the left-hand edge of the advertisement calls attention to Joseph Hergesheimer’s *Tampico* and a list of non-fiction books that were published the day before. The larger right-hand column concentrates on *My Mortal Enemy*, illustrated by a small, neat line-drawing of Willa Cather’s head, sloping shoulders and collared shirt. The advertisement’s headline says “Prestige and Quality” and goes on to explain in smaller type that those words “have been the rallying cries of modern advertisers when engaged in keeping before the public a well-known and well-approved product” (1368). Knopf follows this with an introduction to “a new book of great significance” and a reminder “of the position held by Miss Cather and of the very active interest in her work.” The advertisement does not call *My Mortal Enemy* a “novel.” Instead, it is a “book” and a “story,” but it’s also called a “product.” The specific book as “product,” however, contradicts the previous reference to the “well-known and well-approved product.” *My Mortal Enemy* is not well-known yet, but Willa Cather is. That makes Cather the “product,” bringing us back to Dorothea Lawrance

Mann's statement that publicity encourages "interest in one thing in order to sell another" (2439).

Advertising the author is not the same as advertising a specific book. "No one has ever found the sure way to advertise a book," William Webster Ellsworth of The Century Company says in his autobiography:

The manufacturer of soap or candles or breakfast food has a decided advantage in the matter of advertising;—he can think of the future—the publisher has only the present to consider. If a man likes a special kind of soap he will get another cake next month, and later his wife will order a box from the grocer, and his children will grow up and go out into the world and wash off its grime with that particular soap; but, alas for the maker of 'Hugh Wynne' and 'The Turmoil.' Of each of these one cake will suffice. The reader of 'Hugh Wynne' does n't go forth and buy another copy as soon as he has read the first; in fact, that is the last thing he does. He is through with 'Hugh Wynne' forever, and he turns to another book, an entirely fresh one, probably born in the brain of another writer and turned out from the factory of another publisher. For he is not even impressed by the publisher's name (167-168).

These would be harsh words for the advertiser who writes: "These are Borzoi books!" In the absence of a "well-known and well-approved" title that can be advertised and

purchased for generations, literary advertisers attempt to make the author into the “product” that is repeatedly bought. Unlike soap, however, that can be expected to stay the same in size and purpose, an author is always changing. The purchased product—the book by a specific author—differs from the previous book bought in size, characters, setting and theme.

The focus of a literary advertisement, whether on author or specific title, depends on the medium in which it is placed. When placing an advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* for the newest book by a best-selling author, it is assumed that the booksellers and publishers who read that periodical know the author's reputation and selling power well enough that they will be interested in the new book without needing much description of its content. In periodicals with a large public readership, however, it cannot be assumed that potential readers will be motivated to purchase a new book based solely on the name of the author. Some readers will have favorite authors and mark their calendars for when the newest book will be available, but the majority will base their purchasing decisions on whether the description of the new book interests them.

An advertisement in *The New York Times Book Review* on October 31 for *My Mortal Enemy* looks very different than the advertisements placed in *The Publishers' Weekly*. It doesn't talk about imagination or reputation or products. Instead, it simply reproduces page 25 of the book, exhibiting the unique design of the page's top border. This isn't the most beautiful design in the book, however, so this particular page must have been chosen for another reason. Page 25 introduces the brokenness of *My Mortal Enemy* through Nellie's conversation with her Aunt Lydia about Myra and Oswald:

“Happy? Oh, yes! As happy as most people.”

That answer was disheartening; the very point of their story was that they should be much happier than other people.

These first few lines effectively take the place of a blurb because they introduce potential readers to the book’s conflict. The narrator thinks Myra’s and Oswald’s story of brave, young love should have a happier-ever-after, but it doesn’t. Why not? The page doesn’t explain, so readers must purchase the book to find out. The advertisement continues below the reproduction of the page: “From the beautiful edition of Willa Cather’s New Novel MY MORTAL ENEMY.” The book is in its “3rd large printing before publication” and is on sale for \$2.50 “at all bookstores.” This seems to be a high price for a 122-page book in 1926. *The Professor’s House* was \$2.00 and *A Lost Lady* (at 174 pages) was \$1.75. The higher price, likely due to book design costs, may have had an impact on sales. *The Publishers’ Weekly* listed *My Mortal Enemy* as “promising fiction,” but it never appeared on a month’s list of best sellers.

In September 1926, Willa Cather was working on her next novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, when she received a letter from Alfred Knopf asking if she would speak at a book fair for the Joseph Horne Company. She responded on September 8: “I’d like to oblige the Joseph Horne people, but if I once began that kind of thing, there’d be no end of it. One has to do that sort of thing thoroughly, as Edna Ferber does it or not do it at all. In these days, NOT doing it is a kind of publicity in itself” (*Selected Letters*

385). She had done a lecture tour in Nebraska and Chicago in late 1921 while she was writing *One of Ours*, but she considered it a distraction. In 1924, she hired Sarah Bloom to “handle her correspondence, turn down unwanted engagements, and head off people who wanted to take up her time” (Woodress 353). Cather’s speaking engagements decreased in number, but they did not end altogether. She declined “unwanted engagements,” but some invitations intrigued her and motivated her to bend her rule against lecturing.

In the fictional “interview” of Cather by Cather in the September 5, 1926 issue of the *Nebraska State Journal*, she says the “lecture-bug” is the “greatest obstacle American writers have to overcome.” She says writers should avoid lecturing to have enough time and peace of mind in which to write. “Besides, lecturing is very dangerous for writers,” she says. “If we lecture, we get a little more owlish and self-satisfied all the time. We hate it at first, if we are decently modest, but in the end we fall in love with the sound of our own voice” (quoted in Bohlke 90-91; Porter 26). It is difficult to take Cather’s opinion on lecturing seriously when it is couched in this self-promotional self-interview. David Porter believes “the interview zeroing in on the addictive dangers of the ‘lecture-bug’” is “an admonition one senses Cather is voicing above all for herself” (31). After this “interview,” Cather lectured at Bryn Mawr College.

The timing of Knopf’s first advertisement for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in *The Publishers’ Weekly* was advantageous. There was a growing interest in books about religion. In the spring of 1927, four of the best-selling non-fiction titles explored

religious topics.²⁷ Meanwhile, Sinclair Lewis was returning to the best-selling list for fiction with his new novel, *Elmer Gantry*. A January 1, 1927 advertisement on the front page of *The Publishers' Weekly* acknowledges, “a whisper has spread that Mr. Lewis has been ‘writing a preacher novel.’” True to form, the novel was expected to stir up controversy. The advertisement warns that “controversy roused by ‘Main Street’ was small compared with the discussion inherent in ‘Elmer Gantry.’ The book is a great novel about a group of people whose lives are spent in the atmosphere of organized religion” (1). *Elmer Gantry* became the number one top seller in its first month (March) and stayed there until July of 1927. The atmosphere in the literary marketplace was just right for Cather’s novel about two Catholic priests.

Another piece of interest fell into place one week before the first advertisement appeared for Cather’s new novel. Alice Corbin Henderson’s “A Santa Fe Bookshelf: A Selective List of Books on New Mexico and the Southwest” was printed in *The Publishers' Weekly* on June 11. Henderson had moved from Chicago to Santa Fe in 1916 and was a published poet with an interest in New Mexico and Native American issues. For *The Publishers' Weekly*, she compiled a list of books as a “general introduction” that would “make a ‘full man’ out of any reader who wishes to know something of the literary background of New Mexico” (2248). Under “Novels and Stories of New Mexican Life,” Henderson included “Death Comes to [sic] the Archbishop,” which was “in press” (2250). Cather’s novel was seventh in a list of 23 fiction titles, so it did not stick out or

²⁷ See “The Spring Prospects” in the March 12, 1927 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*, page 1056.

call attention to itself. The advantage to its inclusion in this well-timed list was that it marked *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as an authentic representation of New Mexico. It also offered booksellers additional titles that could be grouped thematically with Cather's novel in a display.

On June 18, a striking advertisement called attention to the publication date for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. In the ad, "THUNDERBOLT" is printed in a broken, uneven font above a small September 1927 calendar. Friday, September 2, is circled and three seemingly hand-drawn lightning bolts point to it. This dramatic design is a departure from the usually dignified, quiet announcements for Cather's work. The title and Willa Cather's name appear in the center of the advertisement in large print, followed by a physical description of the 306-page cloth book and plans for special signed copies for collectors (2307). Thunderstorms link Cather's introductions to Tom Outland's Blue Mesa in *The Professor's House* and the Ácoma mesa in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Tom Outland describes the Blue Mesa and the "black thunder-storms [that] used to roll up from behind it and pounce on us like a panther without warning. The lightning would play round it and jab into it" (193). Likewise, as Bishop Latour and Jacinto approach the Ácoma mesa, "dark clouds began boiling up from behind it, like ink spots spreading in a brilliant sky" (98). The two men were climbing the rock to reach the village when "deafening thunder broke over their heads." As they watch the rain from under a ledge, Bishop Latour observes "the distant mountains bright with sunlight. Again he thought that the first Creation morning might have looked like this, when the dry land was first drawn up out of the deep, and all was confusion" (99). Like the two mesas, Cather's

newest novel is introduced with thunder and lightning that plays around and jabs at the September 2 publication date. The advertisement is not dark, however. There are no rolling storm clouds. Instead, there is the bright openness of white space.

The next week's full-page advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* has a different look with an illustration that was commissioned for the serialization, used on the dust jacket's front cover, and repeated in multiple advertisements. The illustration is a drawing of a caped Latour crossing the desert on his hard-working horse. In the serialization, Latour is featured against a Santa Fe sky with a church in the background. On the dust cover and advertisements, the landscape disappears and the illustration focuses on Latour and his horse.

The June 25 announcement does not describe the physical make of the book or how many copies will be in each edition. Instead, it provides a summary of the book's scene, characters and story. A year earlier, as Cather prepared *Death Comes for the Archbishop* to be serialized in *the Forum*, she wrote to Miss Chapin on September 24, 1926 advising her that "it's rather a mistake to emphasize the landscape—to me that suggests ornamental descriptive writing, which I hate." She enclosed advertising text that placed more stress "on the people than the scene." The suggested text began:

Miss Cather's new narrative, *Death Comes*, etc. recounts the adventures of two missionary priests in the old Southwest. Two hardy French priests find themselves set down in the strange world at the end of the Sante Fe

trail, among scouts and trappers and cut-throats, old Mexican settlements and ancient Indian pueblos.²⁸

The June 25 advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* borrows loosely from Cather's suggestions. "The Scene" is described as the "early pioneer days of the American Southwest" (2377). "The Characters" include Kit Carson, Don Manuel Chavez ("whose story is one of the living legends of New Mexico") and Father Jean Marie Latour ("Soldier of the Cross"), along with "Indians, Mexicans, priests, and others." This advertisement goes a step farther in emphasizing people than Cather's suggested text because it assigns names to the characters—the real names of two historical figures and the fictional name of Latour. Readers were likely familiar with Kit Carson (three Kit Carson biographies appear on Henderson's "Santa Fe Bookshelf") and some may have known about Chavez's clash with Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy. "The Story" is also a revision of Cather's suggestion: "Two priests leave their cultured France to become missionaries in the crude new America—a country savage and beautiful, 'where the water holes are poisonous,' and where man was 'made cruel by a cruel life.'" The juxtaposition of "cultured France" and "the crude new America" introduces the clash of culture in the book and the priests' efforts to understand the people in a changing world.

Notices continued to appear in *The Publishers' Weekly* leading up to the book's publication date. Free advertising in the July 9 "In the Book Market" section includes a

²⁸ This letter and suggested advertising text are from the Houghton Mifflin archives. Also available in *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, pages 385-386.

photo of Cather and a statement that September would offer “many new books” that “will be clamoring for attention. One of the winners we safely pick is Willa Cather’s new book which *Knopf* will publish” (149). The book is described as “the story of the young French priest, Jean Marie Latour, in the American Southwest in the days of Kit Carson.” A paid half-page advertisement on August 6 begins with the illustration of Latour and his horse. The text simply says, “On September 2 I shall publish WILLA CATHER’S *new novel* DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP” (377). This same style of advertisement is repeated on August 13—half-page, right-hand column, illustration at the top, price and publisher imprint on the bottom. The text advises booksellers to “RESERVE ample space on your counters *until* Friday, September 2nd *publication date* of DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP by WILLA CATHER” (451). These one-column advertisements share the page with three other Knopf titles. The advertisements are neither loud nor obtrusive, but simply keep the title, author and cover illustration in front of the bookseller to increase familiarity and enthusiasm.

On September 3, one day after publication, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* shares a full-page advertisement with two other titles. “Yesterday was the day that we published DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP,” says the advertisement at the top of the page. “NOW is the time for displays!” (647). The book debuted on the September 1927 list of best sellers in third place, dropped to fourth in October, and regained its spot at third in November. It sold well during the Christmas season, but dropped to tenth on the best seller list in February 1928. *Death Comes for the*

Archbishop was not a top-ten best seller for 1927 or 1928, but it was listed fourth in 1928 for public library demand.

Cather may have attributed the fall in sales to a lack of supply in bookstores. On February 10, 1928, she wrote to Alfred Knopf from Red Cloud that “demand for the *Archbishop* seems a mixed blessing, as even now there seems to be no very adequate method of satisfying it” (*Selected Letters* 404). She tells of the trouble “dealers here and in all the little towns” have encountered filling orders for “a few patient friends who were not able to get the book for Christmas.” She says the dealers tell her that “all their orders for ‘*Antonia*’ are filled quickly and without trouble,” a notable switch from January 10, 1922 when she wrote to Ferris Greenslet of Houghton Mifflin with “sad news from Omaha. The ‘*Bright Medusa*’ was on hand, but ‘*Antonia*’ was not to be had. Is it the booksellers’ fault?” The rest of Cather’s February 10, 1928 letter to Knopf also sounds familiar. “When you decided not to give the ‘*Archbishop*’ any individual advertising, then I understood that it was up to the book to sell itself if it could. But how can it sell itself if it is not printed, and if the jobbers don’t carry it?” In the next paragraph, she writes: “I’m your personal friend and admirer, now and always, but I don’t think you’ve given the *Archbishop* a flattering share of your interest and attention. With any personal enthusiasm behind it, I feel sure the book would have done much better.”

The September 4 *New York Times Book Review* includes a lengthy article about *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, complete with two illustrations, but Knopf did not place an advertisement in the issue. He waited until September 11, nine days after publication. The advertisement, slightly larger than a quarter-page, includes a truncated

drawing of Latour and his horse. The first column of advertising text focuses on the characters, beginning again with Kit Carson “with his anxious, far-seeing blue eyes of a scout and trail-breaker” (16). Padre Martinez is next, followed by Don Manuel Chavez, Jean Marie Latour and Eusabio the Navajo. The next column says “a host of figures, real and imaginary, [are] crowding the great canvas.” The word “crowd” has a negative connotation. It implies that Cather’s novel is too full of characters, crowding the canvas so there isn’t enough room for everybody. The last few sentences call the book “a marvellous [sic] piece of historical reconstruction, full of the sunset beauty of the old West. A great tapestry of color, flung across the page with the inimitable gesture of a supreme artist.” This statement praises *Death Comes for the Archbishop* for its historical background and beautiful landscape, but it comes close to the “ornamental writing” about landscape that Cather was trying to avoid.

Many reviewers had difficulty deciding whether *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was a novel or something else. In her September 1927 letter to Fanny Butcher, Cather says, “the morning World tells me that judged as a novel, it’s a very poor performance. Just what is a novel, I wonder? I’ve always wanted to try something in the style of legend, with a sort of New Testament calm, and I think I succeeded fairly well” (*Selected Letters* 396). Cather’s own suggested advertising text called it a “narrative.” Only three out of ten advertisements reviewed for this study call *Death Comes for the Archbishop* a “novel.” One calls it a “book” while six don’t refer to its genre at all. “This book is just one too many for the poor reviewers,” Cather wrote to Mary Austin on November 9.

“They complain about it, and say ‘it is almost impossible to classify this book’, as if I had

put over something unfair on them. They feel so bitterly because Knopf calls it a novel; I, myself, wanted merely to call it a narrative” (*Selected Letters* 399). Knopf responded to this conversation with a January 14, 1928 advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly*. “When I published this book in September, lots of good people were worried about whether it was a novel or not; and since many seemed to think it wasn’t, the question was debated whether it would sell as well as we expected” (139). Knopf doesn’t take sides in pinpointing the exact genre of the book, but he does take this opportunity to report sales.

The headline for the January 14 advertisement is “He Rides Supreme” and includes the usual illustration from the dust jacket. Knopf reports that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* “is now in its sixtieth thousand, and 14,687 copies were sold in December alone” (139). The Christmas season had gone well. He goes on to compare *Death Comes for the Archbishop* with *One of Ours*, *A Lost Lady* and *The Professor’s House*. “They vary enormously in length, in subject, and as examples of a great novelist’s technique. Yet each has enjoyed almost identically the same sale.” He says those four titles are “Miss Cather’s last four volumes,” forgetting *My Mortal Enemy* which did not sell as well. Although *One of Ours* won the Pulitzer Prize and *A Lost Lady* was receiving praise from Sinclair Lewis and others, Knopf believed that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* would have a longer sales life:

There is something about the book, difficult to put into words, that has made us here in the office believe from the time we first read the manuscript, nearly two years ago, that this book would continue for years

to sell at a rate remarkable even for Miss Cather. Here MY ÁNTONIA comes to mind; and as we enter the new year, I commend this analogy to the wise bookseller.

One month before Cather accused him of not having any personal enthusiasm for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, he announced to the book trade that he had so much faith in the book that he thought it would sell better in the long-run than any of the other books he had published for her.

A new advertising trend among publishers began in 1928, but Knopf didn't jump into it until the spring of 1929. Simon and Schuster was the first publishing firm in 1928 to offer an advertisement that looked like a gossip column. "From the Inner Sanctum" was written in first person and focused mainly on Simon and Schuster authors, although sometimes it commented on news from other firms. Dutton and Company began offering their own gossip-style advertisement, followed by Doubleday Doran who placed their trendy advertisement on the front page of *The Publishers' Weekly* so it wouldn't be missed. Knopf's new gossipy advertisement was called "Borzoiana." The March 23, 1929 "Borzoiana" mentioned Sigrid Undset, Joseph Hergesheimer, J. S. Fletcher, and Thomas Beer. Warwick Deeping, according to the last three lines of the advertisement, was departing "with Mrs. Deeping to Biarritz for a holiday" (1477). The "Borzoiana" also included this tidbit: "Willa Cather has left New York for California. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has outsold all her other books and is now nearing the hundred thousand mark. She is writing a novel but it will probably not be ready this year."

Cather was on her way to take care of her mother, who had suffered a stroke, and she likely did not want the world to know the personal business that was causing her grief.

Another form of publicity she tried to avoid snuck into print in early 1930. In a letter to Ferris Greenslet requesting a statement, she added a P.S. that she liked Oliver Lafarge's *Laughing Boy* "very much!" The book had been the Literary Guild's selection for November 1929 and was later awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1930. Greenslet wrote back to Cather on January 22, 1930, saying he was "delighted to hear that you like LAUGHING BOY, as I supposed you would. I think Oliver's next book is going to be even better." They both thought the conversation had ended there, but an enterprising publicity man saw the letter and decided it was perfect for an advertisement. On February 6, Cather saw the advertisement for *Laughing Boy* and fired off a letter to Greenslet:

You have emptied a pretty kettle of fish upon my head! Wasn't it faithless of you (and, incidentally, most illegal) to use my name, without my permission, in your ad for LAUGHING BOY? Two old and intimate friends of mine published new books this fall, and their respective publishers asked me to let them use my name in exactly the way you used it. I refused in both cases, because if one begins that sort of thing there is simply no end to it. Sometimes the best possible friends write the worst possible books, and if they come to you and say, 'you allowed your name to be used for this book or that book,' what is one going to say in reply?

The only way to keep out of embarrassing situations is consistently and in every case to keep one's name out of blurbs and advertisements.

Cather's reason for refusing to give endorsements was consistent with her reason for refusing most speaking engagements. If you agree to do it once, you'll be asked to do it again.

Authors as endorsers were a topic of conversation between Robert Gordon Anderson and Earnest Elmo Calkins in the fall of 1925 within the pages of *The Publishers' Weekly*. Anderson, in a September 26 article, advises authors to avoid public skepticism by being selective in the books they endorse. "Overdone, the practice will not attract any more readers than the usual publisher's blurb. Authors, like men in other callings, are, despite all libels to the contrary, really human, you know; and it is so easy to endorse the work of a friend at a publisher's or advertising man's request." He says endorsements are "a stunt that should not degenerate into a common practice" (1076). Earnest Elmo Calkins of the Calkins & Holden advertising firm replied on October 31 that endorsements "are really of the nature of a testimonial, whether genuine or not. In most cases the people who give their names for such purposes are in the public eye and consider the additional publicity valuable" (1536). Some authors—Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Edith Wharton and Sinclair Lewis—repeatedly wrote endorsements for other authors to help friends and colleagues while also keeping themselves in the public eye. Cather did not wish to do this.

On February 10, 1930, Greenslet explained to Cather that he knew she “had a principle against allowing yourself to be quoted in blurbs about books, but when one of our publicity young men, who had some way got hold of your letter, came down with shining eyes and asked whether he could list you among those who had liked the book, it didn’t occur to me that harm would be done thereby.” The issue was forgiven, or so Greenslet thought, but Cather had a long memory and a teasing friendship with her former editor. More than seven years later, on December 29, 1937, Cather wrote to him: “By the way, I think very well of a book you have recently published, but I would not dare tell you which, lest one of your enterprising young men should manage to work my name into an advertisement.”

CHAPTER SIX

THE RISE OF NEBRASKA WRITERS
DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The 1920s were “the years of loss” for the older generation of writers and “an age of miracles” for the new, but the Great Depression of the 1930s touched the sensibilities of them all with its despair, dissolution, and economic ruin. The collapse of the stock market in October 1929 began “a new decade of domestic jitters” where, as Maxwell Geismar explains, “the Aesthetic Individualist of the twenties gave way to the Economic Man of the thirties” (111). By the mid-1930s, novels were “beginning to reflect the pressures of the new age,” depicting a struggle with poverty and a fall from riches (123-124). Nebraska authors in the 1930s did not write directly about the Depression. Instead, their work showed the struggle of past pioneers and broken dreams.

Struggle was a common literary theme during the Depression, but the publishing industry did not expect much of a struggle with weathering the crash. In November 1929, *The Publishers' Weekly* interviewed George P. Brett, President of the Macmillan publishing firm, to get his view on how Wall Street would affect the book business. He predicted “that book publishing and bookselling will find themselves concluding a very successful year and a successful Christmas season and that both publishers and booksellers may look forward to 1930 with every confidence that it will be one of their best seasons.” People would continue to buy books, perhaps in larger quantities, because

“reading is the greatest resource of mankind, and people come back to it naturally after every deflection” (2595). Mr. Brett concluded by remembering “that in crises of the past when there was really more reason to be worried about the economic foundations of the country the book business suffered decidedly less than other industries” (2596). The message to publishers and booksellers was that their industry was not in jeopardy because people relied on books for information and escape during troubled times.

In the same issue, six pages later, one column tells of a directors’ meeting for the National Publishers’ Association. They were “discussing the problems of the trade and the possibilities of cooperative effort to increase business” (2602). Cooperative advertising campaigns flourished during the 1920s with “Buy a Book a Week” posters, monthly book-buying themes, and banners announcing the benefits of reading. During this meeting in late 1929, one director began writing in pencil, “tracing presumably an outline for a campaign.” His scribble became an idea for a poster:

BUY BOOKS

WHEN

BLUE

BROKE

BUSY or

BAFFLED

They meet any emergency

of the puzzled gift-maker.

Each “B” was enclosed in a pencil-drawn box, or perhaps a book, to show the message was purposefully crafted for its alliteration. The Great Depression had not yet hit full force, but this poster captured the feeling of the public as they responded to lost jobs, economic uncertainty and, in rural areas, crop-killing heat and drought.

“Buy books when blue.” The top-billing placement of “blue” in this poster fits the American advertising industry’s belief, soon after the stock market crash, that the negative mindset of the public caused the economic downturn. Roland Marchand explains, “since the damage inflicted by the crash was primarily psychological, the president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies noted in mid-November [that] advertising, with its power to sway the public, was best prepared to deal with such a ‘mere state of mind’” (286). Advertising agencies spread messages such as: “Now that the headache’s over, Let’s Go To Work!” and “Forward America! Business is good—keep it good” (quoted in Marchand 286). These inspirational advertisements were designed to lift spirits, encourage shopping, prod the unemployed to find another job, and change the direction of the sinking economy by turning people into positive thinkers.

To encourage and bolster the spirit of the publishing industry in January 1932, the National Publishers’ Association placed an inspirational advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly* telling the story of two moments in history when “America Came Through!” The first moment was in 1893 when “stark ruin stalked through the land. 467 banks failed in a few months. Mills, furnaces and factories shut down everywhere. Bankruptcy was on every hand. America had twice as many unemployed per thousand population as she has today. But she put them all back to work” (254). The second moment was in 1907 when

“panic broke loose. The production of pig iron dropped 50% in less than a year. All but the strongest men lost heart—‘We are ruined,’ they declared, ‘recovery cannot come in our time.’ Yet in two years prosperity had returned.” The advertisement concludes: “History tells how America has fought and won 19 major depressions. Good times always follow hard times, as surely as day follows night. Prosperity always comes back. It is coming back this time, too.” At a time when publishers were cutting back on the number of books published and booksellers were watching the decline of their sales figures, this dramatic advertisement was designed to increase their optimism and to remind them that times had been harder and that conditions would improve.

Times were hard for Willa Cather, too, as she wrote *Shadows on the Rock* in 1929 and 1930. Her struggle was not with finances, but with a world changed by her father’s sudden death and her mother’s illness. In the spring of 1929, she wrote to Dorothy Canfield Fisher about her mother’s stroke and how difficult it was to care for the strong yet partially paralyzed woman in California. “I’ve lost my bearings and can’t write except as bitterly and desperately as I feel,” Cather wrote. “Father’s death was swift and gay—he was laughing two hours before he died. Goodbye, God bless you, and don’t remember this letter after you read it. There are enough people crushed under this poor sick woman who defied time so long” (*Selected Letters* 415). Visiting Quebec and writing *Shadows on the Rock* were Cather’s escape from this crushing sadness. She wanted her new book to be a quiet story about the endurance of French colonists in Quebec, focusing on an apothecary and his daughter during the year 1697. “It’s no world-beater,” Cather wrote to Blanche Knopf in October 1929, “but I want it to be good

of its kind—very quaint and dry, as I told you; mostly Quebec weather and Quebec legends” (*Selected Letters* 418). It was not a complete escape. In the last pages of *Shadows on the Rock*, her thoughts on life’s approach toward death filter into Bishop Saint-Vallier’s conversation with Euclide Auclair. The Bishop tells of his meeting with the King of France and how “a wind arose, stripping the trees that were already half-bare. The King invited me to go indoors to his cabinet, remarking that it distressed him now to hear the autumn winds and to see the leaves fall” (277). Like the King, Cather, too, was distressed by the autumn winds of old age and the falling leaves of friends and family who had lost their color.

When it was time to announce the publication of *Shadows on the Rock*, Alfred Knopfs’ first advertisement matched Cather’s description of her novel—quaint and dry. The lightning bolt had disappeared, replaced by straightforward text in blocks. The May 2, 1931 advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly* announces:

COMING AUGUST 7th

WILLA CATHER’S

NEW NOVEL

Below that is the title, *Shadows on the Rock*, in a large outlined font that looks Celtic.

The title is the only element in the advertisement that hints at the novel’s subject or

theme. There is neither blurb nor accompanying picture. The text explains to the trade

that the first edition “will consist of twenty-five thousand copies. I expect an advance of

publication sale considerably in excess of this, but twenty-five thousand seems enough to print of any first edition of an important novel by an author who is collected” (2175). Through this advertisement, Knopf is selling *Shadows on the Rock* to booksellers based on the strength of Cather’s reputation rather than the strength of the book. Her work has become a collector’s item. To encourage book collectors to buy early, Knopf limits the number of copies printed so the supply will be less than demand. He also issues “a limited large paper signed edition—copies on Japan vellum at twenty-five dollars, and copies on rag paper at ten dollars.” Twenty-five seems to be a popular number for Knopf because he lists May 25th as the deadline to order the special editions. To further highlight the importance of buying a copy of the book, Knopf adds: “None of this novel has appeared serially.” Readers cannot find this story in a periodical. They must find it in the bookstore.

On July 25, one week before the book’s release date, Knopf placed a new *Shadows on the Rock* advertisement on the back cover of *The Publisher’s Weekly* where it would get a lot of notice. Cather’s name and the novel’s title are again printed at the top of the page in a large Celtic font. Instead of August 7, the publication date is now August 1. The earlier advertisement ended with a typical “By the Author of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*,” but this new advertisement begins its text by stating, “This is Miss Cather’s first novel since *Death Comes for the Archbishop* which was published September, 1927, and of which 96,756 of the original edition have so far been sold” (364). Now Knopf is using the strength of Cather’s previous novel to sell her new one without giving any more details about the story than what the title suggests. “The first

trade printing” is still 25,000, but the selection of *Shadows on the Rock* by both the Book-of-the-Month Club and The Catholic Book Club adds another 51,800 copies to the total. The advertisement goes on to reassure booksellers that “a second trade printing of 38,200 will be ready this month.” Regarding special editions, Knopf reports that “619 copies of the signed edition on all rag paper at \$10.00 have been made and 199 copies on Japan Vellum at \$25.00. These have all been subscribed for by the booksellers who will, I confidently predict, take in over *a quarter million dollars* on *Shadows on the Rock* alone this year.” In one month, Alfred Knopf expects to distribute 115,818 copies of Cather’s new novel, a number exceeding the four-year total of her successful *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. “I think this novel may outsell even *Sorrell and Son*,” the advertisement says in reference to Warwick Deeping’s novel that ranked third and fourth, respectively, on the best seller lists for 1925 and 1926. “I seriously doubt if a more salable or a better novel will be published this year.” This advertisement is not “dry.” It radiates enthusiasm for the book, predicting superior sales in a tough economic year.

Cather was delighted by Knopf’s distribution numbers for August, which she said were “a great surprise.” She told him in a July 31 letter that she still saw the book as “only a story to please the quiet and meditative few. As it has got beyond that circle, I can only conclude that you and Blanche, and your office, and the ‘Archbishop’ of four years ago, all had a good deal to do with bringing this bashful volume out before the curtain” (*Selected Letters* 449). Weekly advertisements placed in the *New York Times Book Review* do not share the reticence of the *Publishers’ Weekly* advertisements toward describing the subject or theme of Cather’s novel. The August 2 announcement in the

New York Times says the setting is new for Cather. She is exploring “Quebec, in the last year of Frontenac’s life—and she recaptures the very tone and feeling of the seventeenth century in this old French city, built on a rock on the great St. Lawrence” (10). This sentence provides a quick summary of the book’s placement in time and space while partially explaining the title. “Shadows on the Rock” appears in a large outlined font at the top of the advertisement, but a closer look reveals that the font has changed. It no longer looks Celtic. Below the title, author’s name, and reference to *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Knopf’s text continues: “For me to praise this novel would smack of impertinence. It is enough to say that it is every bit as good as we have come to expect from one whose title to first and foremost of living, if not of all, American novelists few would challenge.” In this, Knopf reveals that he will not offer the usual superlatives because he does not want to rudely or condescendingly assume that the reader does not know that books written by Willa Cather are always good. The advertisement ends by stating that *Shadows on the Rock*, which “has not been serialized,” is the August selection for the Catholic Book Club and the Book-of-the-Month Club. For anyone who doesn’t receive a copy from a club, the book is available for \$2.50 in all bookstores.

The text in this advertisement reprints, word for word, the blurb on the back panel of the dust cover for the novel’s first edition. The cover’s front panel is also heavy with text. The title and author’s name are followed by this praise: “Seldom has any novel been as widely bought and as dearly loved as *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. I assure Miss Cather’s readers that *Shadows on the Rock* is of the same superb vintage.” This praise ends like a typical Knopf advertisement with his signature underneath. Elsie

Parrett, writing “In Defense of Blurbs” in August 1923, describes two different styles of book jacket design. She says the jacket has outgrown its original purpose “to protect the book covers from soil and stain” and now “supports” the same work it “surrounds.” The book jacket “has become a prognosticator for the curious, a reassurance for the literarily uncertain, and entertainment for the sophisticated” (601). The first style is subtle. In this, “all printed matter is removed from the outside cover, which is, instead, devoted to a beautiful lady, or a moonlight scene, or a pictorial representation of some lurid emotional crisis. The colors are rich and harmonious; the conceptions vigorous and rich in human interest.” Upon opening the front cover, “there it is, unobtrusive in its chaste narrow column on the inside fold of the jacket, the inevitable blurb” (601). The first edition of *Shadows on the Rock* provides an example of the second style of design. This style spreads text throughout the front and back panels of the jacket. For a buyer “whom type fascinates, they present an overwhelming temptation, especially when the bookseller displays the book broadside; he can no more get past them without reading the blurb than a hungry man can refuse food” (601-602). Jacket text often includes the plot synopsis, critical essay, quoted opinions and reviews, and “the eulogy of the author, with the inevitable statement that this is his best work to date” (602). True to this second style of design, the inside flaps of Cather’s first edition contain review excerpts for all of Cather’s previous books published by Knopf.

The fifth edition of *Shadows on the Rock* moved away from this design in favor of the first style. Cather had written to Alfred Knopf on September 3, 1931, suggesting that the jacket for the fourth edition should have more open space than the “small type and

close set” third edition. She ended by saying, “I wish you would send me a proof of that drawing of a black rock you said you might sometime use on a jacket. It rather struck me at the time, and I’d like to see it again” (*Selected Letters* 454). This black rock she mentions appears on the front panel of the jacket for the fifth edition. The rock engulfs the cover, spilling over onto the spine, and is framed by buildings above the rock and buildings below. This bold rock may not be subtle, but it does take away all text from the page except for the novel’s title, author and publisher names engraved within the rock.

The August 2 advertisement that reprinted the blurb from the first edition’s jacket was followed by an August 9 advertisement in the *New York Times* that reprinted an article from the July 15 *Retail Bookseller*. The reprinted article has two columns, but the second column (with its information about a non-Cather book) is covered by what appears to be white scrap paper with words printed in black crayon: “SHADOWS ON THE ROCK by Willa Cather On Sale Everywhere \$2.50.” The bottom of the scrap paper notes that this is “a Borzoi Book published by Alfred A. Knopf” and that 110,000 copies of the novel have been printed (58). The article’s headline announces that “Willa Cather’s ‘Shadows on the Rock’ means good times for booksellers.” This point is more important to the bookseller who has seen a decrease in sales than it is to an everyday reader of the *New York Times*, but the article’s second paragraph becomes a persuasive piece about why potential book buyers such as this everyday reader should spend money to buy a copy of this new novel:

It concerns chiefly a French apothecary, his daughter, and their immediate friends, but it includes news of France, glimpses of frontier life, and pictures of the city itself. The story is almost incidental, as in ‘Death Comes for the Archbishop.’ The book is a quiet, beautiful, gentle picture of a city and a time. It is remarkably well written (has, indeed, been called the finest prose ever produced in America). Without any question, it is one of the best novels every [sic] produced in America, very nearly perfect of its kind (58).

This glowing, nearly perfect review joined many others in encouraging readers to escape from the noise and worry of a persistent economic depression by entering a quiet and “gentle picture” of colonial life in old Quebec, but the book also had its vocal detractors.

The August 9 advertisement was perfectly placed to counteract the largely negative review by John Chamberlain, printed a week earlier on the first page of the *New York Times Book Review*. Chamberlain praises the novel’s prose as “inordinately beautiful” with its “softly flashing northern color,” but he criticizes its lack of plot. He disagrees that *Shadows on the Rock* is “incidental” because “there is not a really memorable incident in the book” (1). For Chamberlain, the novel needs more drama, more “vital eye-witnesses and participants,” stronger stories from history, and a demonstration of experience. He wonders, “perhaps her experience, the ‘feel of the rock’ that the novelist must have, has run out.” The book is difficult to finish, he says, because “the lack of conflict in the method is almost fatal to continued enjoyment of ‘Shadows on

the Rock’; once one has got the flavor—and it is the flavor of wine of a good vintage year—there is little excuse for going on.” Cather was speaking of reviews like this when she wrote to her mother on August 10 that if she mourned “about the things jealous, disappointed newspaper men write about me, I could just mourn my life away—which I don’t intend to do” (*Selected Letters* 450). For some reviewers, the flavor of *Shadows on the Rock* did not sit well. For others, they finished their glass and asked for seconds.

Positive reviews, consistent advertising, book club sponsorship, and the strength of reputation helped *Shadows on the Rock* become Willa Cather’s first number-one best seller. On September 19, 1931, *The Publishers’ Weekly* reported that August’s list of best sellers “gained new leaders and many new titles. First, by an overwhelming majority is Willa Cather’s new book, ‘Shadows on the Rock.’ The next best seller is ‘A White Bird Flying’ by Bess Streeter Aldrich, whose ‘A Lantern in Her Hand’ has nearly two years’ popularity to its credit” (1255). For three consecutive months, two Nebraska authors claimed the top two spots for best-selling novels in the nation. *Shadows on the Rock* and *A White Bird Flying* “easily” retained first and second place in September and held on through October.

Knopf slowed down his *Publishers’ Weekly* advertising during this time, but weekly announcements in the “Customer’s Choice” section gave them free publicity. On August 29, “Customer’s Choice” announced: “It is safe to say that during the month of August Willa Cather’s ‘Shadows on the Rock’ was the best-selling book in Boston” (767). Another note on the same page shared that Cather’s novel “has been a best-seller in Philadelphia since publication. It was in the Doubleday shop here that one woman

refused to buy the book on the ground that she ‘didn’t like to read books about nuns’” (maybe the store clerk should have asked if she liked to read about pharmacists). The September 26 “Customer’s Choice” tells a story about a “standing joke” in Scranton, Pennsylvania, “which has been almost in danger of being overworked lately, when customers ask for ‘Shadows on the Rock’ under so many names that are something like the real title” (1488). By October 31, *Shadows on the Rock* was the only book of fiction Washington, D.C. readers “seem to be frantically interested” in. Meanwhile, in Des Moines, Younker Brothers “originally ordered 50 copies of ‘A White Bird Flying.’ Net order was 100, and a week ago 100 more copies were ordered. ‘Shadows on the Rock’ has sold here to the extent of 100 copies” (2032).

The reign of the Nebraska authors ended in November when John Galsworthy’s *Maid in Waiting* took the top spot. *Shadows on the Rock* landed second on the best sellers list for November and December while *A White Bird Flying* fell to fourth behind Edna Ferber’s *American Beauty*. Willa Cather’s and Bess Streeter Aldrich’s novels stayed on the best sellers list until the early spring of 1932. When the list of top best-selling books for the year of 1931 was released, *Shadows on the Rock* was listed second and *A White Bird Flying* was third. They were behind *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, the Pulitzer Prize winner for that year.

As sales began to wind down for *Shadows on the Rock*, Knopf placed advertisements in *The Publishers’ Weekly* focusing on distribution numbers. His advertisement in the August 9 *New York Times Book Review* proposed that Cather’s new novel meant “good times for booksellers” and now he had numbers to prove it. In Willa

Cather's October 14 letter to Fanny Butcher, she mentions that *Shadows on the Rock* "keeps on selling like anything, 92,000 actual shipments from the office, besides the two Book Clubs. I think that's because he [Alfred Knopf] himself liked it, and he and all his staff have worked awfully hard for it" (*Selected Letters* 455). A Knopf advertisement on the back cover of the November 14, 1931 *Publishers' Weekly* itemizes the number of copies shipped. Numbers included 51,800 copies to book club members, 47,290 copies shipped to booksellers before publication, 21,521 additional copies shipped in August, 23,990 in September and October, 3,350 to Canada, and 1,714 copies sold during the first week of November. "Thus 97,865 copies were sold to the trade and 149,665 copies to the public before November 8th" (2276). This was an outstanding four-month sales record for being two years into the Depression. Thirteen months later, Herbert Jenkins, Vice-President of Little, Brown and Company, would declare that "the first year's sale of 100,000 copies of any new book is a rarity in this country to-day, even with a book club adoption" (1056). Knopf's November 14 advertisement ends by naming *Shadows on the Rock* as "the year's most important single source of income for the book trade" and predicts "it will be more in demand as a holiday gift than any other novel" (2276). He was right about the holiday demand. More than 10,000 copies of *Shadows on the Rock* sold in December.

At a time when Willa Cather was straying from Nebraska settings to write novels about historical moments in places that captured her imagination, Bess Streeter Aldrich was achieving popularity for her novels set on the Nebraska prairie. In 1912, when Cather wrote *O Pioneers!*, Nebraska was considered "déclassé as a literary

background.”²⁹ By the 1930s, a “national readership” had grown for “fictional depictions of Midwestern pioneering” (Homestead 77). Depression-era readers in New York City and other urban areas escaped their financial crisis, for a moment, by imagining the Great Plains as depicted in novels or “standing in the doorway with Abbie Deal watching the sunset” (fan letter to Aldrich quoted in Homestead 85). Willa Cather and Bess Streeter Aldrich did not communicate as friends, although they shared a similar interest in their adopted home state. Melissa Homestead suggests that “Cather probably would have disavowed any connection to Aldrich,” but a study of their work, linked in literary history, “recovers with more precision the terms on which Cather engaged the literary market and a popular readership” (77). Their prairie novels were similar in setting and subject, but Aldrich more openly embraced the middlebrow market despite her claim (like Cather’s) that she wrote only to please herself.

Aldrich was originally from Iowa, but she moved to Nebraska in 1909 when her family purchased a bank in Elmwood. She wrote while raising four children in the small, eastern Nebraska town, but her pastime of writing became the way she supported her family after her husband’s death in 1925. When asked to write “The Story Behind *A Lantern in Her Hand*,” she ended the essay with advice similar to Sarah Orne Jewett’s. Aldrich wrote: “Regardless of the popular literary trend of the times, write the thing which lies close to your heart” (ix). She had not grown up on a farm, but her “many relatives were always coming and going, uncles and aunts who had been sturdy pioneers”

²⁹ See Willa Cather’s “My First Novels (There Were Two)” in *Willa Cather on Writing*, page 94. New York: Knopf, 1949.

and she grew up listening to their stories (v). She wanted to write a story that would capture the pioneer spirit—not browbeaten defeat, but the courage and humor she saw in her mother. She explains that *A Lantern in Her Hand* “was written to please no one but my own consciousness of the character of many of those pioneer mothers. It was written in the so-called ‘mad twenties’ when most of the best-selling books were about sophistication, flaming youth, or far-flung countries” (ix). Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* entered the literary scene, Edna Ferber’s *Show Boat* gained best-selling status, and Sinclair Lewis’ *Elmer Gantry* engaged pastors in a noisy row while Aldrich was diligently researching pioneer life.

Bess Streeter Aldrich and Edith Wharton, two Appleton authors, shared an October 6, 1928 advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly*. Wharton’s *The Children* is featured in a small box in the lower right-hand corner of the advertisement. The box announces that Wharton’s book is “breaking records” after “unprecedented” sales just one month after publication. The majority of the advertisement focuses on Bess Streeter Aldrich and *A Lantern in Her Hand*. At the top is a framed photograph of Aldrich sitting at a table, looking down at the pages of an open book. Her name is printed below the photo, followed by a description of the story, “acclaimed as the richest and most memorable novel Mrs. Aldrich has ever written. Reviewers and booksellers alike are saying that here is the sunny wholesome type of fiction, the fiction of real people close to reality, the fiction of pioneer courage and steadfastness that warms the heart of the reader” (1397). The novel is not always “sunny,” of course. Abbie Deal struggles with poverty, isolation, harsh prairie weather, depression, and unfulfilled dreams, but she also

gains a life full of love and memories. When Abbie's granddaughter Laura suggests that her memories are sad, Abbie says, "My memories are not sad. They're pleasant" (282). The advertisement advises booksellers to feature *A Lantern in Her Hand* in their stores "because people love it and talk about it" (1397). Eleven months later, the book was still selling well. It was included in a September 1929 advertisement as one of three best-selling books "that are universally popular" and "international hits" (925). Advertisements praising this "truly American novel" continued through the time of the economic collapse.

Her next novel, *A White Bird Flying*, was scheduled for publication on August 3, 1931, just two days after the release date for Willa Cather's *Shadows on the Rock*. A three-quarter page advertisement in the August 2 *New York Times Book Review* devotes more space to the reproduction of book covers than to narrative text. The new book, *A White Bird Flying*, reclines against a copy of *A Lantern in Her Hand*. The dust cover of the new novel is stunning with its picture of steps leading up to a three-story house with white columns. Manicured hedges line the steps, leaves from a dark tree drape over the scene, and a white bird flies in from the top right-hand corner. Publicity for *A White Bird Flying* leans heavily on the reputation of Aldrich's previous novel. The headline announces, "Good News for the hundreds of thousands who love 'A LANTERN IN HER HAND'" followed by "Bess Streeter Aldrich writes another great story of American life" (13). The first paragraph of the text begins with a quotation from Abbie Deal and states that *A Lantern in Her Hand* "has become an American saga, beloved literally by

millions.” The next paragraph reveals another layer of this new book’s reliance on the previous one—*A White Bird Flying* is the sequel.

A Lantern in Her Hand ends with Abbie Deal’s death and her family’s reaction. As her children express sadness and worry that she was alone when it happened, one little girl in the room understands her grandmother and explains to the adults that maybe Abbie “didn’t miss you *at all*. One time grandma told me she was the very happiest when she was living over all her memories” (307). This little girl is the main character of *A White Bird Flying*. The second paragraph of the August 2 advertisement contains this blurb for the continuing saga:

Laura Deal, granddaughter of Abbie Deal, is an attractive, lovable girl, typical of present-day American womanhood. Reared in the best Deal tradition, educated at one of the great co-educational universities of the Middle West, Laura Deal suddenly finds herself at the cross roads of life, forced to make the most important decision that can confront a young woman (13).

We are not told what choices Laura faces, of course, because readers must get their “copy now and be among the first to read this fine story which all America soon will be discussing.” If readers had not yet read *A Lantern in Her Hand*, the advertisement advises them to “ask your bookseller to send it, too, with your copy of ‘A White Bird Flying.’”

Two weeks later, an Appleton advertisement in the August 16 *New York Times Book Review* lists *A White Bird Flying* at the top of its list of recommended books. The advertisement claims that the novel, already in its second printing, is “the talk of the book world” with its “new story of the Middle West of today” (14). By representing life in modern-day Nebraska, Aldrich answers her own character’s complaint that “nobody writes anything about Nebraska as it is now” (89). Laura Deal, a senior at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in the late 1920s, is talking with her sorority sisters about the “odd ideas” people have about the Midwest. “What does it mean to people who’ve never been here?” one girl asks. “They’ve the craziest notions” (88). Through this conversation, Bess Streeter Aldrich advertises the virtues and products of Nebraska. Another girl tells the story of a Nebraska “newspaper woman” who visited relatives in New York and decided that she would not give them the pleasure of thrilling “the poor little Main Street child.” Instead, everywhere she went, she pointed out something created by a Nebraskan. “She goes past a book store and there are Willa Cather’s books stacked up in a pyramid, and she gets snooty about her being a Nebraskan” (90). The displayed Cather books may have been *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, published in 1927, or perhaps *A Lost Lady* in 1923. Although no date is given for Laura’s senior year at the University, a hint is supplied when one of her stories is “accepted by *The Prairie Schooner*, Nebraska’s own literary magazine of highest type,” a national journal that debuted in 1926 (87). Just as Sinclair Lewis advertises certain books in *Babbitt*, the best-selling novel of Bess Streeter Aldrich, a charter member and 1927-1928 president of the Nebraska Writers Guild, lifts up examples of Nebraska’s literary talent.

Photographs of the visually interesting dust cover for *A White Bird Flying* appeared on multiple advertisements as sales continued to increase. Dorothea Lawrance Mann, in her July 1931 essay in *The Publishers' Weekly*, said that reproducing book jackets on print advertising conveys “a suggestion of familiarity” that helps readers recognize it in the bookstore. Since recognition leads to sales, “we have the emphatic assertion of a bookseller that no cut is so helpful in selling books as the cut either of the jacket or of some picture from the jacket which helps the eye to pick out that book from the many on the book counter” (235). To help the book trade recognize *A White Bird Flying*, Appleton’s full-page advertisement placed in the September 5 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* is one-quarter text and three-quarters dust cover. The text claims:

When a novel is selling as this is selling right now—

When the public, the reviewers and the booksellers praise as they are now praising—

When a best-seller by an author is succeeded by another best-seller by the same author—

Then there is no finer advertisement of a book than the book itself! (895)

The same dust cover pictured on the August 2 *New York Times* advertisement graces the rest of the page on September 5. The bookseller and book buyer may forget a novel’s title or an author’s name, but it is more difficult to forget a visual of the cover.

Book displays in a window or on a counter are another way to familiarize potential readers with a book. The March 12, 1932 “Customer’s Choice” in *The Publishers’ Weekly* prints a photo of Bess Streeter Aldrich sitting at a square table among a large display of her books. Copies of *A White Bird Flying* are stacked in pyramids, similar to how Aldrich described the display of Cather’s books. A large sign from floor to ceiling stands in between the table and a bookshelf. The sign is simply designed with book title at the top, author’s name at the bottom, and a cut-out of a large white bird flying in the space between. Aldrich has a book open in front of her and a pen in her right hand, waiting to sign. She looks elegant in her blouse, jacket and hat, but frowns as if she’s bored. The accompanying text explains that:

Mrs. Aldrich was invited to speak and autograph books on Washington’s birthday in the book department of the J. W. Robinson Company in Los Angeles. At two o’clock when Mrs. Aldrich reached the store there were already about forty people waiting for her and in the course of the afternoon literally hundreds of admirers asked her to autograph books for them (1221).

Due to this high interest, she may have been anxious to begin or tired after autographing when the photograph printed in *The Publishers’ Weekly* was taken. This photo illustrates the difference in how Aldrich and Cather embraced their public. Aldrich met readers face-to-face in the store while autographing copies of her book. Cather preferred not to

wear out her hand at a public signing, but chose instead to autograph special editions in the privacy of her home.

A decade earlier, *The Publishers' Weekly* printed several articles on how to design window displays effectively. In April 1921, Frederick Hartman of Chapman's Bookshop in Montreal advised fellow booksellers to “put as much care into ‘editing’ his window as the newspaper editor in his review page” (1178). Books, arranged simply or in “startling configurations,” should be complemented by notices on cards. Display cards could offer:

1. Pictures of authors.
2. Biographical notes of authors, illustrators, etc.
3. Reports of large editions.
4. Changes in paper market.
5. “Best sellers” in big book centers.
6. Titles of books reviewed in various books and journals (1178).

Michael Gross, widely known among early 20th century publishers for his innovation in designing posters and other display material, directed his window display advice toward publishers. “It is only too true that dealers consistently refuse to put up certain types of window displays,” he wrote for the December 24, 1921 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*. “The only way to remedy this condition is for the publisher to avoid ordering and sending out material that falls into the tabooed class” (2005). He lists four taboos for publishers to avoid. First, a display should not be too complicated. If there are too many pieces to

put together, hands will be raised in disgust and the display will be sent to the trash. Second, “window displays should be sent along with the books they advertise” so immediate enthusiasm can lead to displays in show windows (2006). The third taboo is sending display materials that are not requested. Instead, publishers should send notices to booksellers advising them that display materials are available upon request. The fourth problem is an unattractive display that lacks “human interest and attention-getting value.” Successful window displays, Gross says, should “convey to the passerby an immediate idea of the kind of story being featured, the setting, the locale” (2007). The visual should show a scene or atmosphere that’s interesting and important to the story.

Window displays for Willa Cather’s *Shadows on the Rock* were simple and uncluttered. An August display at the Post Box Bookshop in New York “consisted of a few copies of the book grouped around a copy of the August 3rd issue of *Time* magazine which, as you have probably noticed, has a large picture of Miss Cather on the front cover” (“Sales Notes” 517).³⁰ The cover of *Time* helps the bookseller follow two of Hartman’s suggestions: it provides a photo of the author and shows that the book has been reviewed in a popular magazine. A second New York bookstore had “a handsome poster of the Chateau Frontenac on view in the window with copies of ‘Shadows on the Rock.’ Knopf will furnish it for the asking” (517). The immense Chateau Frontenac was built in 1893 as a luxury hotel. Although it did not exist when the novel takes place, its

³⁰ This is the photo Cather mentions in her August 10, 1931 letter to her mother: “I’m sorry that horrible picture of me got onto the front page of the magazine called “Time”, but I couldn’t help it. One just has to grin and bear such things” (*Selected Letters* 450).

picture could interest potential readers who knew the hotel's reputation and wanted to know how it fit with Cather's new novel. Another window linked *Shadows on the Rock* with travel to modern-day Quebec, but this display wasn't at a bookstore. Canadian Pacific railway displayed copies of *Shadows on the Rock* to increase travelers' interest in Quebec. The September 12 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* suggests that booksellers "could undoubtedly get from the Canadian Pacific brochures with colored cover, posters, etc. which would give background to a display" (1051). Meanwhile, a Seattle bookstore made a symmetrical display with rock, evergreens, five sets of books and two cards on easels. *Publishers' Weekly* printed a photo of the display with this description:

The background of the window was green. Compo board was cut out and painted to look like rock with black letters applied on the surface with the shadow effects also lettered on. The base was green grass. The cards on the easels were also green to match the cover of the book. These cards were lettered in the same color as the lettering on the book cover. The books, with five different colored jackets, were each displayed against a background of colored sand a few shades darker than the paper jacket cover (1051).

This well-planned display is not busy or cluttered. Its unique design and colors invite people strolling by to stop, look, and perhaps read. One stroll past this window may not inspire someone to enter the store and purchase a copy, but the repetition of passing

window displays, reading reviews, and seeing advertisements for the same novel helps cultivate the familiarity necessary to make sales.

Booksellers and publishers had hoped the Depression would not have a heavy impact on sales, but the January 2, 1932 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* reports that “the Christmas book season in New York was not exactly brilliant. People bought economically and with a deliberate kind of restraint.” One bookstore, “which caters to a very wealthy group, found customers cutting down more than ever before” (45). People were still turning to books, as George P. Brett of Macmillan had predicted, but they weren't going into the stores. They were instead visiting the public libraries.

Helen Haines, former managing editor of the *Library Journal*, addressed this trend in her January 1932 article, “Reading to Find a Way Out.” She writes:

All over this country men and women are turning to books to find a way out of their difficulties, or to understand the causes that have brought those difficulties, or to build up new resources of courage or adaptability with which to meet them, or simply to enjoy temporary forgetfulness of them. Perhaps this may not be so evident in the commercial book world, for many of these readers have no money to spend and many others have never frequented bookstores (173).

Libraries offered safety, companionship and encouragement. Those discouraged by the economy “are likely nowadays to go to books rather than to a friend; at the library they

feel assured of anonymity, they talk frankly to the librarian, tell their life stories and usually respond with gratitude to counsel or suggestion” (174). Herbert Jenkins, Vice-President of Little, Brown, agreed that libraries were hurting book sales. He lists two reasons: “First, the book buying public, in economizing, patronizes the commercial lending library which may now be found in every large office building and residential quarter, or the public library. Secondly, the falling off in library appropriations for the purchase of books” (1056). Jenkins claims that the Chicago Public Library purchased \$336,813 worth of books in 1928, but “now practically nothing.” According to a report from the National Association of Book Publishers, printed in the March 25, 1933 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, the Chicago Public Library’s book budget fell from \$6,000 in 1932 to \$0 in 1933. In New York City, the public library’s \$261,050 book budget in 1932 was reduced to \$60,432 in 1933, a 77% decrease in spending. Boston’s library book budget went from \$160,000 to \$75,000 (a 53% reduction) and Baltimore’s fell from \$50,000 to \$16,500 (67%). Los Angeles’ book budget decreased by 24%, but San Francisco increased their budget from \$12,000 in 1932 to \$19,000 in 1933.

Despite decreases in spending by libraries and bookstore customers, one book department manager in Cleveland had an optimistic outlook for the fall of 1932. Charles Jackson, in his September 3, 1932 article for *The Publishers’ Weekly*, reports “a change in the attitude of our customers. People who come in ready to buy one book may be sold two or three” (765). He attributes this change, in part, to his store’s careful selection of “books worth owning” and reduction in the number of low-quality or slow-selling books. His store “eliminated books we considered doubtful; and we have bought only small

quantities of many other books. Even the books which we think show the greatest promise we have bought relatively lightly.” Jackson believes another factor in improving book sales “during this so-called depression” is customer service based on personalized recommendations (766). He says 1932 “will be a recommendation year. Already our suggestive selling of ‘The Fountain,’ ‘Obscure Destinies,’ ‘The Good Earth,’ and some others has made a noticeable difference in our daily sales total” (765). Sales clerk recommendations in favor of Cather’s *Obscure Destinies*, a collection of three long stories published in August 1932, helped the Cleveland store obtain more than one hundred advance orders for the book.

Charles Jackson’s optimism toward book-buying trends was steadier than Alfred Knopf’s. In a May 7, 1932 *Publishers’ Weekly* advertisement for *Obscure Destinies*, the firm says, “it is possible that even in times like these a book of stories by Miss Cather will have an advance of publication sale considerably in excess” of 25,000 copies (1927). The word choice in this sentence indicates the unsteady nature of Knopf’s optimism. Short story collections rarely sold as well as full-length novels, but the financial crisis of the 1930s made it even more difficult to predict sales. In this front-page advertisement, a large advance sale is not “certain” or “likely,” but “possible.” It lists each of the three stories by title and announces a cutting-back in special editions. In the past, Knopf had offered two special editions made of different materials. This time:

There will also be, as usual, a limited, large paper, signed edition—but, in accordance with the times, this will appear in only one form, to retail at

\$15.00. It will not be as handsome as we have been able in the past to produce at \$25.00 but it will be definitely superior to our former \$10.00 editions.

In 1931, less than 200 copies of the \$25 edition of *Shadows on the Rock* were purchased while 619 copies were sold of the \$10 edition. Since then, the depression had cut even further into personal budgets. Instead of spending time and money on producing the more expensive edition, Knopf chose to focus on and improve the collector's edition that produced the most demand.

The three stories in *Obscure Destinies* ("Neighbour Rosicky," "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Two Friends") were a return to Cather's childhood in Nebraska. The collection made its debut on *The Publishers' Weekly* list of best books on May 14, 1932, but the familiar "Books of the Month" list of best sellers had been replaced by a two-page spread with a racing horse theme. The "P. W. Form-Sheet" listed books under different categories: Neck and Neck, Betting Favorites, At the Starting Post, Dark Horses. Horse-racing had fallen out of favor in the first decade of the twentieth century as fraud and scandal led states to ban it, but racing made a comeback as a popular sport after World War One (Longrigg 230). In the early 1930s, several state governments passed laws to legalize pari-mutuel betting on horses in an effort to raise additional revenue by collecting state taxes on winnings (Longrigg 282). On the "P. W. Form-Sheet" for May 14, *Obscure Destinies* was listed under "Dark Horses." On July 30, a week before the book's publication date, it moved up to "At the Post" (track conditions: "dusty").

By August 6, *Obscure Destinies* had fallen off the racing sheet, but a new title by another Nebraska author appeared under “Betting Favorites.” It was Mignon Eberhart's crime novel, *Murder by an Aristocrat*. *Obscure Destinies* reappeared on the Form-Sheet on August 20, going “neck and neck” with Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* for third and fourth place as best sellers. A two-line statement about *Obscure Destinies* indicates it had “sold over 26,000 copies in two weeks of publication” (576). A week later, *Obscure Destinies* had moved to second, leading fiction sales in Chicago and “breaking all records for short stories” (870). It was second on the August list of best-selling fiction, fifth on the September list, but had dropped off by October. Meanwhile, Mignon Eberhart was making another appearance on the P. W. Form-Sheet with her new “dark horse,” *The White Cockatoo*.

Mignon Good Eberhart was a prolific writer for Doubleday’s series of “Crime Club” fiction. She was born in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1899, attended Nebraska Wesleyan University, and spent most of her adult life in Chicago and New York. It is unclear whether she ever met or communicated with Willa Cather, but Eberhart listed Cather as one of her favorite authors and Eberhart’s closest friend was Fanny Butcher of Chicago, who was also a good friend and supporter of Cather. Eberhart debuted as a published novelist in 1929 and went on to write 59 books of fiction. According to a eulogy printed in the October 9, 1996 issue of *The New York Times*, Mignon Eberhart “was one of the most popular mystery writers and one of the most highly paid.” Her “penchant for plucky heroines in distress” led her to be “considered a disciple of Mary Roberts Rinehart, but eventually she became known as a writer of romance mysteries with a touch

of the gothic” (Gussow D19). A book reviewer for the *Miami News* “coined the moniker *America’s Agatha Christie*,” which Eberhart’s paperback publishers quoted “on each Eberhart cover” (Cypert 19). Rick Cypert, Eberhart’s biographer, says she “preferred the title ‘First Lady of Mystery’” because she “did not wish to be seen as part of a *group* of female mystery writers.” Instead, she “recognized the power” of being set apart in publicity as “*the* female mystery writer” (19-20). That was the public image she wanted for herself.

Eberhart’s national prestige as a writer is evident in the placement of her praise for a Francis Iles crime thriller in a November 5, 1932 advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly*. Although her quoted statement is rather dull—“certainly the most unusual story of crime detection I have read”—its placement in the upper right-hand corner of a large block of review quotes, just to the right of Christopher Morley’s,³¹ indicates her name recognition with booksellers (1756). Her national and international reputation is trumpeted in a December 10 *Publishers’ Weekly* advertisement for *The White Cockatoo*:

You know the Eberhart record—average sales in excess of 10,000 copies of all her titles—the famous THE PATIENT IN ROOM 18—the Scotland Yard Prize Mystery, WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT—FROM THIS

³¹ Christopher Morley was a popular journalist, a judge for the Book-of-the-Month Club, and a best-selling novelist. Morley’s *The Haunted Bookshop*, published in 1919, became “sponsor for the very latest style in bookstore nomenclature.” According to a brief note in the October 16, 1920 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, “Roger Mifflin’s place in Brooklyn is to be visualized in Lincoln, Nebraska, where R. B. Campbell is about to launch ‘The Haunted Book Shop’ at 1414 O Street” (1128).

DARK STAIRWAY and others—a uniform record of success here and abroad (her books have appeared in 9 different languages)—and now comes her eeriest, most terrifying story (2162).

Eberhart did not gain her popularity by writing about Nebraska, like Willa Cather and Bess Streeter Aldrich, but she was another Nebraska author with a large following during the Great Depression.

Despite the limited optimism for the potential of 1932, and good advance sales for some authors, the depression had not improved by 1933. During his January 1933 talk at the Massachusetts Library, Herbert Jenkins from Little, Brown reported that “general business throughout the United States” was “at least 48% off from the peak of 1929. It is generally conceded that trade publishers’ sales have been reduced 50% or more in the last three years. This is a serious matter for both publisher and booksellers, who have found it necessary not only to cut salaries and wages but also to reduce personnel” (1055). In their struggle for survival, publishing firms were combining resources through mergers and acquisitions. They relied heavily on textbook and non-fiction sales while numbers for their line of fiction decreased.

Firms focused on non-fiction because, as Roland Marchand explains, advertisers “needed to make the messages about their products ‘newsworthy.’ To do so often meant to show how the product—in price, function, or symbolic value—was particularly necessary or attractive ‘in these times.’” Advertisers needed to relate their product to the “concerns and anxieties of a depression-shaken public” (288). Publishers designed their

non-fiction advertisements around a theme developed by the National Association of Book Publishers, “Books for a Thinking America,” and listed new titles about the economy, politics, and foreign relations. Houghton Mifflin’s January 9, 1932 advertisement in *The Publishers’ Weekly* “offers below a list of recommended books for the thinking American” (149). The top book is *America Faces the Future*, a collection of essays by “the best minds” (including Franklin D. Roosevelt) on how American industry can be harnessed “by National Planning and the country can be pulled from the morass of depression.” A photo of the book’s jacket appears in the upper right-hand corner. On the jacket’s front cover, a large silhouette of a man stands confidently, legs apart, one hand on hip, parchment in the other hand, and gazes ahead at the rural town’s grain elevators to the left and the big city on the right. The bottom half of the advertisement lists Hermann Arendtz’s *The Way Out of Depression*, Stuart Chase’s *Economic Behavior*, New Russia’s Primer, and a reprint of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* “now available with an Introduction by Heywood Broun.”

This confident silhouette of a man was typical of Depression-era advertising. A “mood of besieged, teeth-gritting determination increasingly characterized the ads in the trade and business press in 1932 and 1933,” Marchand explains (326). Popular culture reproduces the image of the hard-working, courageous man “on occasions when good Americans are forced back on their inner resources by threats or obstacles. We all know the appropriate gestures for such occasions: the undaunted worker rolls up his sleeves; the unconquerable defender of the right doubles his fists” (324). Depression-era advertising differed from previous hard-time iconology because the courageous man or

boy pictured in the 1930s “did not simply bare his arm and double his fist in proud confidence. Rather, he clenched his fist, squeezing the fingers and thumb together, almost in desperation.” This was often accompanied by a grimace. Despite obstacles and frustrations, this raised, clenched fist showed determination instead of resignation. This figure was rarely female. “In conformance with the mystique of sweaty, hardboiled virility with which the advertising trade responded to the depression, the image of the clenched fist was a thoroughly masculine icon” (Marchand 328). The rolled-up sleeve and clenched fist of Rosie the Riveter wouldn’t be revealed until 1942.

The Great Depression had changed the look of advertisements in other ways, too. “Depression advertising was distinctively ‘loud,’ cluttered, undignified, and direct,” says Marchand (300). In the early 1930s, advertisers condemned the self-indulgent, beautiful, artistic advertisements of the prosperous 1920s and returned to their old role as persistent, hard-working salesmen. “Images of working-class exertion and vitality seemed to provide catharsis for the hard-pressed, white-collar professionals of the advertising trade, struggling to regain a sense of potency” (300). The new advertising trend of the 1930s “brought a proliferation of ‘ugly,’ attention-grabbing, picture dominated copy in the style of the tabloid” (303). White space became rare in advertisements. Large photographs were preferred over artistic character portraits.

Advertisements for Mignon Eberhart between 1933 and 1935 were bold and cluttered, but they continued using the personal “we.” The September 16, 1933 advertisement for *The Dark Garden* is dominated by a half-page photo of Eberhart. She’s wearing a high-collared white coat and string of pearls. Her wide eyes look directly

at the camera and her mouth is drawn into a mischievous smirk as if she's hidden something and it's the reader's job to find it. The headline printed in white over the photo reads, "WHAT'S HER SECRET?" This tabloidesque headline is followed by two columns of text:

Why have her sales in this country reached the quarter million mark?
 Why are her books translated into almost every civilised language? Why has she become the greatest name in her own field—the novel of fear and mystery? You'll find the answer in the rich magnificence of this new book, a drama of grim death, ruthless detection, young romance as fresh as spring sunlight, sweeping to a final tumultuous climax in a fog-shrouded mansion by the Chicago lake-front (798).

Read aloud, this sounds like a movie preview. It is loud, direct, and written to grab attention; designed so readers will say, "ooh, I want to read that!" Additional text is squeezed into the space to the left of the photo. Its small type is barely readable at a glance, but it's written in the style of a hard-hitting sales talk. "You remember 'The White Cockatoo,' the sensational Scotland Yard prize-winner!" This assumes the reader knows the book well and, if not, might shame the reader into purchasing a copy. The text continues by saying Eberhart's "reputation is growing now to such proportions that her name is a talisman for every mystery reader—and for readers who ordinarily never touch mysteries. We predict an extraordinary success for this new book." This advertisement

makes no effort to avoid superlatives. *The Dark Garden* is “possibly the great American mystery” and nobody should miss reading it.

Two years later, Doubleday, Doran denies regret for using superlatives to advertise Eberhart’s work. In their April 6, 1935 advertisement for *The House on the Roof*, they claim, “we’re not resorting to superlatives without deep consideration when we say that this, the ninth book by Mignon G. Eberhart, is easily the best thing she has written” (1397). Her books “have sold over a quarter of a million copies” and “this magnificent story of love, terror and mystery in a Chicago penthouse is very likely to top all her previous successes.” Like the 1933 advertisement, a photo of Eberhart dominates the top half of this advertisement, but now a reproduction of the book jacket overlies her portrait with the spine of the book a few centimeters from her cool, determined face. The jacket shows two female characters. One, standing in a long fancy dress, looks shocked or scared while the other woman, leaning forward on a desk, seems slightly troubled.

Doubleday, Doran’s advertisements for Sinclair Lewis’ 1932 novel, *Ann Vickers*, also fit the model of Depression-era advertising.³² The December 24 and December 31 advertisements look similar to news pages. They both begin with a top banner, “News About ‘Ann Vickers.’” Following the banner are two columns of text. Neither

³² Sinclair Lewis switched from Harcourt, Brace to Doubleday, Doran in January 1931 for reasons similar to Cather’s switch from Houghton Mifflin to Knopf. After Harcourt, Brace’s splendid advertising for Lewis’ refusal of the Pulitzer Prize, he was disappointed in their slack advertising of his Nobel Prize acceptance. He wrote to Alfred Harcourt: “I have the impression, and the impression is backed up by too many facts to be merely fanciful, that the firm of Harcourt, Brace and Co., and you personally, feel that they have just about done their duty by Sinclair Lewis” (*From Main Street* 299).

advertisement says what the story is about. Instead, they focus on advertising plans and selling helps such as advance order cards, dummies, postcards, “small packages of lipstick tissues bearing ANN VICKERS advertising,” canvas streamers for display windows, posters, three-color bookmarks, and cut-outs of a Sinclair Lewis photograph.³³

The advertisements show a roll-up-the-sleeves, get-to-work attitude by describing how Doubleday, Doran will push the book, but they avoid offering details about the book’s content. The December 31 advertisement asks, “isn’t it more vital to you what Sinclair Lewis has written?” This teaser is followed by review excerpts (2371). According to one reviewer, “I never thought Sinclair Lewis deserved the Nobel Prize at all until I met this tremendous Ann. Now I think he deserves the Nobel Prize twice over!” Carl Van Doren offers this “pre-view” of the book: “Once more Sinclair Lewis has chosen a large theme and done large justice to it! Where before he had five major novels, now he has six.” A “Last-Minute News Flash” fills the bottom of the December 31 advertisement with an advisory to “watch *The Saturday Evening Post*” for February 4. “We had to have the biggest medium we could find for ANN VICKERS. So we’re announcing this book to the two-and-a-half million readers of this great national magazine. Clip this ad. Post it in your window” (2371). Doubleday, Doran promises to work hard at selling the book, and they expect the booksellers to work hard at it, too.

³³ Description of lipstick tissues taken from the December 24, 1932 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, page 2303.

In a February 11, 1933 advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly*, Doubleday, Doran claims that *Ann Vickers* may have single-handedly improved the economic condition of the book industry:

You hear this on all sides—has Sinclair Lewis turned the tide in the book business? There is competent testimony from booksellers that something important happened with the publication of ANN VICKERS. The advance was a record for January. Re-orders are the best since 1926. The book is bringing back old customers into bookstores—new ones too. It is interesting to note how other publishers are welcoming this book as a leader in a common cause: Revival (596).

The possibility of economic revival was evident through the Christmas season of 1933. “Business Looks Up!” shouted a headline in the December 30 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly*, followed by three pages of testimony from booksellers across the nation. A bookseller in Chicago said, “confidence and hope seem to have replaced the distrust and despair of the depression—and 1934 should become the year of recovery” (2218). In that bookseller’s store, Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *Miss Bishop* was one of six best sellers. In New York, Doubleday Doran’s general manager for their multi-branch bookstore “reports a satisfactory increase in business everywhere except in New York City” (2219). New York City’s Brentano’s store, however, had “a marvelous finish which puts them about 20% ahead of last year.” Henry Smith of Duttons, Inc. also saw an increase in

Christmas sales. He said it was “a mistake to urge that people do their Christmas shopping early” because “people are much more eager to buy generously” when “the Christmas spirit gets in the air and the decorations are up” (2219). A bookseller in Buffalo advised publishers to “keep their heads and cut their lists” because “people nowadays pick only the winners” (2219). Even though booksellers were approaching 1934 with more hope, they were still cautious about the stock they purchased.

Declining prices from the deflation ended in 1933, but the economic depression continued for another several years. James Woodress, in his biography of Willa Cather, says “the deepening Depression troubled her, though she was getting rich from her royalties” (437). She worried about her friends and family in Webster County, Nebraska who lost crops due to heat and were in danger of losing their farms due to the economic crisis. In her January 11, 1933 letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather expresses her relief that “for three of them, thank God, I have been able to save their farms by paying their interest. About nothing ever gave me such pleasure as being able to help them keep their land—the land they’ve worked on since I was ten years old!” (*Selected Letters* 481). Woodress says she helped more than three families: “When Mary Austin asked her to donate to a favorite charity, she declined on grounds that she already was helping keep half a dozen families and had loaned money to others who were in such dire straits she was sure they never could repay her” (437). By August 1936, her pleasure at being able to help turned into weariness. In a letter to her friend, Zoë Akins, she explained that “so many sad and bitter things are happening to my old friends in Nebraska that I can’t feel very happy” (*Selected Letters* 518).

Cather's 1935 novel, *Lucy Gayheart*, is a return to her childhood in Nebraska, but it is drenched with a bitter sense of loss. The story begins at the turn of the century and ends in 1927, effectively avoiding mention of the ongoing economic depression. "Miss Cather gave an excellent exhibition of her technical prowess," Harry Hansen writes in his January 1936 review of the past year's books, but "she was blamed because her story was remote from the present world" (199). Just as Cather avoids setting her story during the Depression, Knopf avoids Depression-era trends in his single-title announcements for the novel. Advertisements placed in the April 27 and May 4 issues of *The Publishers' Weekly* are simple, uncluttered and respectful with a single column of text and no photographs or illustrations. The first three lines of the April 27 advertisement provide a low-key headline: "Willa Cather's new novel LUCY GAYHEART." The personal "I" is sprinkled throughout the advertisement. Knopf says Cather's novel "needs no introduction: I will comment only as to place and time. It is Romantic—Western—Modern—a story of the passionate enthusiasms of youth, which triumph even when they seem to fail" (1651). This same description is used in a July 6, 1935 two-page advertisement that fits the Depression-era trend of bold and loud. Five books are advertised in the spread with *Lucy Gayheart* at the top of the left-hand page and Clarence Day's *Life With Father*, a Book-of-the-Month Club choice, at the top of the right-hand page. The pages are busy with white boxes in dark frames, large type, and photographs of Cather, Day, and the jacket of Warwick Deeping's newest novel. At the top of the advertisement, printed across both pages in script, Knopf writes, "I think these books may do very well indeed; give them a break" (4-5).

The advertisements' claim that *Lucy Gayheart* is "a story of the passionate enthusiasms of youth, which triumph even when they seem to fail" attempts to put a positive spin on a book about broken dreams, missed opportunities and "youthful hero worship" (*Selected Letters* 510). The main character, Lucy, moves to Chicago when she is 18 to study music, but she does not have any "passionate enthusiasm" for music or art. She is "talented, but too careless and light-hearted to take herself very seriously. She never dreamed of a 'career'" (5). When she is hired to play for Sebastian Clement, she does not see it as her break into a musical career, but as a way to spend time with the singer who infatuates her. When Sebastian sends her a check, she thinks it's "much too large, and made her feel as if she were being paid off" (63). Her "passionate enthusiasm" for Sebastian blinds her to the reality that he is an employer paying his employee for the work she was hired to do. Sebastian drowns while on tour and Lucy returns, depressed, to her father's house in Nebraska. When Lucy is remembered twenty-five years later at her father's funeral, she is remembered as unhappy and tragic "like a bird being shot down when it rises in its morning flight toward the sun" (207). There is no triumph here.

Knopf's May 4 advertisement for *Lucy Gayheart* does not give further insight into the story. Instead, it focuses on numbers for the first edition and a list of selling helps. Knopf anticipates "an advance sale of at least 50,000 copies," but "in fairness to collectors the first printing will be limited to 25,000 copies" (1725). He advises booksellers to "please estimate your probable sale very carefully and place now an advance order sufficiently large to secure you the first edition copies you require." Copies from the first printing will "be prorated among booksellers according to the total

of their individual advance orders.” In this, Knopf promises to favor the largest advance orders instead of the quickest. To remind booksellers that Cather’s novels sell well, even during depression years, the top of the advertisement mentions that *Lucy Gayheart* is Cather’s “first novel since ‘Shadows on the Rock’ (now in its 190th thousand at \$2.50).” Selling helps include “imprinted postcards, counter cards, and dummies to help booksellers gather orders from their customers in advance of publication,” but these helps won’t be sent unless requested by the bookseller.

Upon publication on August 1, *Lucy Gayheart* “jumped immediately into the lead” and became the best-selling novel in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and St. Louis.³⁴ The novel, a Book-of-the-Month Club substitute selection, continued as the number one best seller throughout the month of August with 63,000 copies sold. By September, *Lucy Gayheart* lost its top spot to Ellen Glasgow’s *Vein of Iron*, but still enjoyed good sales and a top-two spot. In October, *Lucy Gayheart* fell to fifth on the best seller list, but was joined by another Nebraska novel. Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *Spring Came on Forever* ranked seventh and Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here* was listed eighth. *Lucy Gayheart* was not included on the list of November best sellers, but *Spring Came on Forever* had risen to fifth. In non-fiction, Mari Sandoz’s *Old Jules* ranked sixth, outselling “everything else at Woodward & Lothrop, Washington; Loeser’s, Brooklyn, and Miller & Payne, Lincoln (special Nebraska interest).”³⁵ In December 1935, *Spring Came on Forever* stepped up to fourth on the list, but *Old Jules* had already

³⁴ See the August 17, 1935 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, page 440.

³⁵ See the December 14, 1935 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly*, page 2177.

fallen off. *Spring Came On Forever* didn't disappear from the best-selling list until February 1936.

In July 1935, Little, Brown introduced Mari Sandoz to the publishing industry with her Atlantic Non-Fiction prize-winning biography, *Old Jules*. The firm's July 27 advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* is a two-page spread with the first page devoted to a photo of Jules Sandoz, a Nebraska sandhills pioneer, with his cap pulled low over his forehead and his white beard rough, but trimmed. This photo became the cover art for the first edition's jacket. The advertisement's second page uses six paragraphs to introduce Old Jules and his daughter. The introduction begins with an anecdote demonstrating Jules' personality and Mari Sandoz's strong determination to write: "Writers I have always considered as the maggots of society," wrote Old Jules to his daughter when he found out that she intended to be an author. But on his death-bed he gave her permission to write the story of his amazing life" (205). The story of Old Jules not only won the \$5,000 Atlantic prize for Mari Sandoz, but became the Book-of-the-Month Club selection for November and helped launch her writing career.

The July 27 advertisement differentiates between Sandoz's biography of a Nebraska pioneer and novels exploring pioneer life. "No *novel* of American pioneers has ever had as its central figure so picturesque or so powerful a character as Old Jules. It is doubtful whether any novelist could imagine the incidents which made up his crowded life" (205). The next paragraph provides a list of incidents covered by the book. Some are familiar to readers of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Bess Streeter Aldrich's *A Lantern in Her Hand*, but some are distinctly unique to Jules Sandoz. "In the Nebraska

sandhills where he held off the cattlemen at the point of his rifle to establish his dream of a prosperous farming community,” Old Jules “persuaded the settlers to come in; nursed the sick and delivered the babies (for in Switzerland he had studied to be a doctor); experimented with wheat from Russia; traded fruit trees with Burbank; married four wives; battled with blizzards, drought and persecution.” Adversity did not make him grow faint or weary. He met it head-on with “a temper so fierce it swept everything before it.” Little, Brown expects record-breaking sales because *Old Jules* “has a more general appeal than any other Atlantic Non-fiction Prize winner.” By October 19, the firm announced in its front-page *Publishers’ Weekly* advertisement that 63,500 copies were printed before publication due to the Book-of-the-Month Club and advance orders. Nebraska may have been “déclassé” in 1912, but by 1935 it had become the setting for several best sellers by Nebraska authors.

On September 21, 1935, *The Publishers’ Weekly* announced “The Worst Is Well Over.” Travelers for publishing firms were reporting optimism and improved economic conditions. One traveler with a territory from New York to St. Louis said, “Bigger crops and the potential income from them are affecting business generally in the Middle West. Increased rentings of business properties are pointed to as a sure sign of better things to come in the larger cities” (983). Houghton Mifflin’s traveler for the territory from New York to Nebraska reported “that the two spots in which the book business seems to have responded most rapidly to outside influences are Washington, D. C., and the Middle Western states into which the AAA [the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act] has sent money for farm assistance” (984). A Kansas City to West Coast traveler for Harper’s

shared some “infallible signs” that business was improving. In the publishing industry, “many buyers who last year weren’t allowed to go across the street to see a ‘trunk man’ are now being sent to New York. It is no longer like pulling teeth to get a buyer into a sample room.” Meanwhile, in the travel industry, “quite a few hotel ‘front offices’ are getting snooty; sample room rates are being raised; restaurant prices are going up; no longer may one be sure of getting a lower in a Pullman at the last minute, and hotel reservations in advance are in order again” (984). Macmillan’s traveler reported that “motor traffic is heavier, trains, street cars and busses are carrying larger crowds. There are fewer vacant stores.” For public libraries, “tax collections have improved to such an extent that many libraries are again able to purchase a book and, in phenomenal cases, two books” (984). While the travelers expressed optimism, booksellers remained cautious. They examined book lists, determined salability of each title, and ordered a limited stock for their store.

Willa Cather’s next novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, was published in December 1940 at the end of the Great Depression and the beginning of World War Two. It’s “a story of Virginia before and just after the Civil War,” a two-page advertisement explains in the September 14 issue of *The Publishers’ Weekly* (908). By now, sales figures for *Lucy Gayheart* and *Shadows on the Rock* were 56,000 and 195,000 copies, respectively. Knopf expected a first printing of 25,000 copies for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, but increased that number when the novel was chosen as the Book-of-the-Month Club’s selection for January 1941. He explains in an October 26 advertisement that he has “received so many booksellers’ orders for first edition copies that I have decided to

increase the first printing to 50,000” (1642). The book “will not only be this year’s outstanding Christmas item, but will also be the first big novel of the new year.” With a release date less than three weeks before Christmas, *Sapphira* immediately entered the top-three best seller list for December 1940 and January 1941. It slipped to fourth in February and was off the list by March. Knopf’s March 15, 1941 advertisement boasts that “the trade has so far bought 65,194 copies” in addition to the Book-of-the-Month Club offering, for a total of 285,000 copies printed (1178). The advertisement ends with advice for booksellers: “Check Your Stock + Freshen Your Display = SELL.”

The last four novels of Willa Cather’s writing career had each debuted in one of three top spots on the monthly best seller lists, but it was Cather’s novel with the original \$300 advertising budget that proved to be the most resilient in the literary marketplace. In the 1920s, *My Ántonia* was mentioned in advertisements to indicate that a new book by another author was comparable in literary value. Alfred Knopf’s February 3, 1923 advertisement for John Frederick’s *Druida*, for instance, says the book “courts and bears comparison with Miss Cather’s ‘My Antonia’” (301). Five years later, a February 4, 1928 advertisement for Cornelia James Cannon’s novel *Red Rust* had as its headline a quotation by bookseller Adolph Kroch: “Not since ‘My Antonia’ was there a Finer Book than ‘Red Rust’” (414-415). In the 1930s, as Cather continued to grow in popularity, *My Ántonia* was the first of her novels to become known, listed and widely advertised as an enduring American classic.

EPILOGUE

Through essays, advertisements, speaking engagements, and her own fiction, Willa Cather carefully crafted a public image of herself as an artist writing outside the literary market. In public comments, she repeated the words she had written for Don Hedger: “I work to please nobody but myself” (“Coming, Aphrodite!” 66). Like Hedger, Cather painted a portrait of herself as an artist who wanted to try something new, capturing what people thought and felt, regardless of what the public wanted. Advertisements associated her work with prestige, quality, significance and brilliance. She was heralded as “one of the few writers of today who refuses to be hurried,” affirming her desire to prioritize artistic literary quality over quick profits.

“Economics and art are strangers,” she wrote in a 1936 letter to *The Commonweal*, but behind the scenes she was a busy business woman creating and re-creating a market for her work. She wrote letters to book reviewers, hoping to elicit positive reviews that would send readers to her newest novel. She provided text for advertisements and dust cover blurbs. She watched the literary and advertising trends closely, even if she did not always follow them. *Shadows on the Rock* was proclaimed as 1931’s “most important single source of income for the book trade” and advertisements to the trade boasted the growing demand for additional copies and editions. While critical reviews of her work soured toward the end of her career, her popularity with the reading public soared.

When Willa Cather looked back at her career, she was most proud of *My Ántonia*. “Perhaps I have always been a little sentimental about the book, for the distressful stroke its youth had suffered,” she wrote on February 16, 1942, to Ferris Greenslet, her friend and editor at Houghton Mifflin. “Never a book that seems to have had ‘go’ in it had so bad a start.” After 25 years, the regular edition of *My Ántonia* was still accumulating sales of more than 2,500 copies per year. “From the beginning Antonia has been advertised only by her loving friends,” Cather wrote to Greenslet on February 16, but that was “not a complaint. It is better to have a book make its own way, if it can!” With its combination of artistic literary quality and a long history of slow but steady publicity, *My Ántonia* had become a literary classic in its own time.

EXHIBITS

Figure 1.1

J. S. REDFIELD, 110 AND 112 NASSAU STREET,
WILL PUBLISH ON WEDNESDAY, 8th,
Part I, Imperial Bro.

OR

THE WORKS OF SHAKSPEARE,
REPRINTED FROM THE NEWLY DISCOVERED COPY OF THE FOLIO OF 1623, IN POSSESSION OF A PATSE COLLIER,
CONTAINING SEVERAL
TWENTY THOUSAND MANUSCRIPT CORRECTIONS.
WITH
A HISTORY OF THE STAGE TO THE TIME,
AN INTRODUCTION TO EACH PLAY, A LIFE OF THE POET, ETC.
BY J. PAYNE COLLIER, F.R.S.

TO WHICH ARE JOINED
GLOSSARIAL AND OTHER NOTES, THE READINGS OF FORMER EDITIONS.

A Practical Catalogue, by Charles Probst, & Vignette Title, on Steel, and a full title of the old Folio, with the Manuscript Corrections. To be completed in Sixteen weekly Parts. Price 25 cents each.

WILL SHORTLY BE PUBLISHED,
ROLLIN'S ANCIENT HISTORY.
LIBRARY EDITION.
LIPPINCOTT, GRAMBO & CO.,
PHILADELPHIA.

Have in Press a new Stereotype Edition of ROLLIN'S ANCIENT HISTORY, in two volumes octavo. Large Type. Bound in the best London style, with additional corrections and revisions.

FANNY FERN'S BOOK.
6,000 Copies Ordered in Advance of Publication!

Was Published, on Wednesday, June 1st,
FERN LEAVES FROM FANNY'S PORTFOLIO.
With eight Original Illustrations from designs by FRANCESCA M. CORRIE, engraved by N. OAK.

One Elegant 12mo. Volume, 400 pages, Gilt Top.
Price, \$1.25.

Published by
DERBY & MILLER, Authors, N.Y.
DERBY, ORFON & MULLIGAN, *Booksellers*.

* For sale by Booksellers throughout the United States. 142

Clegg on Coal Gas.
JUST REPRINTED
BY
D. APPLETON & CO.,
599 BROADWAY.
A Practical Treatise on the Manufacture and Distribution of Coal Gas.
BY HENRY CLEGG.
Second Edition, enlarged and improved,
1 vol. 4to. 40c.

Froststone's Fractional Treatise on Gas Lighting.
Third Edition, 1 vol. 8vo., 25c.

The Journal of Gas Lighting.
EDITED BY G. T. SARGENT.
Vol. 2 for the years 1851 and 1852—60c. 45.
The next for 1853—published monthly. Annual subscription 45c.

NEW TALE BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE INDIAN."
This Day Published by
D. APPLETON & CO., 599 BROADWAY,
GYRILLA. A Tale.
By the Hon. Mrs. F. M. F. GYRILLA,
Autrice of "The Indian."
Complete in ONE VOLUME. 12mo. paper binding, 25 cents.
The BARNES TABLETS, 12mo. paper binding, 10 cents.

Derby & Miller advertisement for Fanny Fern's *Fern Leaves From Fanny's Portfolio* in *The Literary World*, June 4, 1853, page 465. The same advertisement was printed in *The Literary World* on June 11, 1853, page 488.

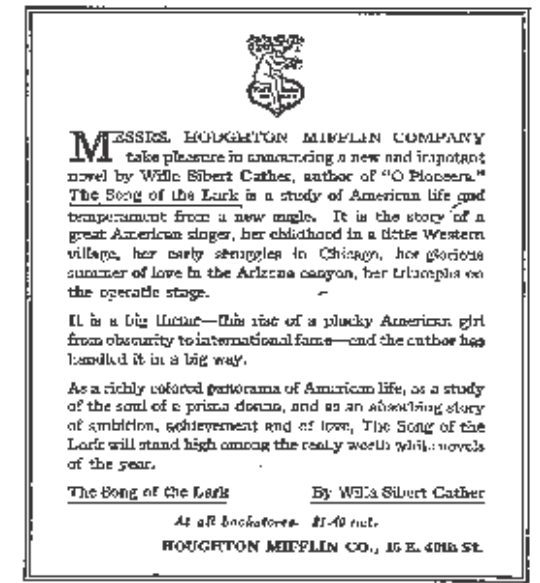
Figure 1.2

<p>AT DAYLIGHT, THIS (Thursday) MORNING, THE NEW-YORK LEDGER will be for sale at all the news offices in the United States, New-Jersey and the Sandwich Islands.</p>	<p>LO! THE POOR INDIAN.—Read Emerson Bennett's Great Indian Tale, entitled BLANCHÉ BERTRAND; Or, Perils of the Border, in the New-York Ledger. Now ready this (Thursday) morning.</p>	<p>FANNY FERN writes only for the NEW YORK LEDGER.</p>
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Robert Bonner advertisement for the *New York Ledger* in *The New York Times*, May 13,

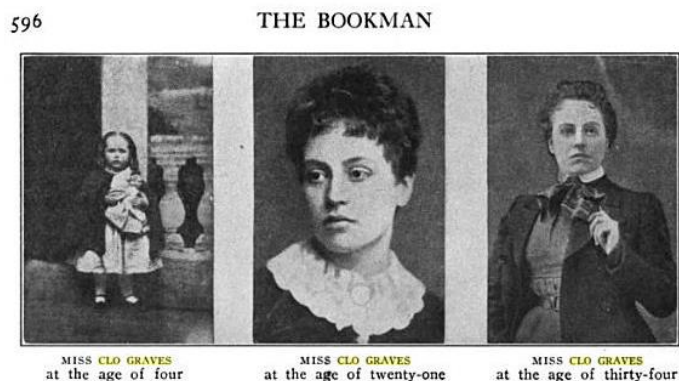
1858, page 6.

Figure 2.1



Houghton Mifflin advertisement for *The Song of the Lark* in the *New York Times Book Review*, October 3, 1915.

Figure 2.2




Photos of Clotilde Graves (who wrote as Richard Dehan) published in "Chronicle and Comment" in the February 1913 issue of *The Bookman*.

Figure 2.3

Ready about

February 19th



The MAN of IRON

By RICHARD DEHAN

The author's critical illness delayed this great novel. A cablegram brings the good news we may now publish February 19! Many booksellers who had many heavy demands for the book in November are now doubling the orders then given us.

Special War-Flag Poster on request

\$1.35
net

The MAN of IRON

\$1.35
net

PUBLISHERS FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY NEW YORK

Frederick Stokes advertisement for Richard Dehan's *The Man of Iron* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, January 30, 1915.

Figure 2.4

The Publishers' Weekly.

1226 October 17, 1914

Important Notice

The MAN of IRON


By RICHARD DEHAN

Author of "Between Two Thieves," "One Braver Thing," etc.

Will not be published until late in November

Though the author has been working on this novel of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 for two years, she will not consent to have it go out until every detail is done to suit her. This is not a hasty war publication, but a solid, dramatic novel of immense timely interest.

*Send
orders
now
for
shipment
on
publication*



Richard Dehan
Author of 'The Dop Doctor'

*Special
war
poster
for display.
Picture
wrapper
\$1.35 net*

PUBLISHERS FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY NEW YORK

Frederick Stokes advertisement for Richard Dehan's *The Man of Iron* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, October 17, 1914.

Figure 2.5

MY ANTONIA

By Willa S. Cather

Author of
"The Song of the Lark,"
"O Pioneers!" etc., etc.

OF all the remarkable women that Miss Cather has created, no other is so glowing with vitality as Antonia, all impulsive youth and earnest courage. Miss Cather has the rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of an untameable youth.

MY ANTONIA is a love story of profound human appeal. And it is also one of the really notable American novels of recent years. We unreservedly recommend it to every lover of good fiction.

(Hills, by Bamber) 35.00 net
At all bookstores.

Houghton Mifflin Company

A Good Love Story

is especially welcome now. That's just what **THE STAR IN THE WINDOW** is. *Oliver Higgins* (young version of "Bobbie, General Manager") has in this fine romance of an American girl and her odd sailor lover given us something unusual but real. It is just the absorbing sort of novel to give a mother with a son at the front or to send the boy who wants a truly interesting story of the folks back home.

One of the most heartrending books resulting from the War is **THE CHILDREN OF FRANCE and the Red Cross**. In it *Jane Richardson Lewis* tells in simple, poignant words pictures what the American Red Cross means in the devastated lives of the brave women and children of France.


At all bookshops. Send for full descriptive circular, gratis.

Publishers **FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY** New York

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Houghton Mifflin advertisement for *My Antonia* in the *New York Times Book Review*,
September 29, 1918.

Figure 2.6

ALFRED A. KNOFF  220 W. 42. St., New York

A new Book by the author of "My Antonia", etc.

Willa Cather **Youth and the Bright Medusa**

THERE are not many living writers from whom a new book commands the attention with which each successive volume of Miss Cather's is now awaited. There seems to be no disputing the fact that she is our foremost living woman novelist. In the stories in the present volume she deals with youth's adventures with the many-colored Medusa of art. Each tale is marked by the amazing ardor and restless energy of imagination which is peculiarly Miss Cather's; by a quick, bold cutting into the tissues of human experience and emotion that makes each of them a new discovery about character and life. "She has given us three novels of the west that stand alone in American literature."—*Chicago Daily News*. "Her art is to me as amazing as it is simple; through the commonplaces of farm and village life she shows the very soul of America."—*Idun* (Sweden). \$2.25.

George Kibbe Turner **Hagar's Hoard**

THE scene of this tale of an old man's greed and a young man's love, is Memphis during the yellow fever epidemic of 1878. Mr. Turner excels in vivid characterization and sureness of touch, and he has, in this novel, created a really distinguished piece of work. \$2.25.

Kahlil Gibran **The Forerunner**

MR. GIBRAN has won in the past two years the recognition in this country that is due the national poet and prophet of the Arabic-speaking peoples. The present volume continues the vein of ironic symbolism of "The Madman" and is illustrated with five original drawings by the author. \$1.50.

Alfred Knopf advertisement for *Youth and the Bright Medusa* on the back cover of the *New Republic*, September 29, 1920.

Figure 2.7

Mr. Knopf's List

Eight distinguished stories!
Youth and the Bright Medusa
 By *F. Scott Fitzgerald*
 Author of "My Auntie"
 "Littellton of a whole row of the great as well as, in a rarer and rarer sense, one of the most perfect interpretations of American life that we possess." *Nation*. \$2.50

Hager's Hoard
 By *George Kibbe Turner*
 The best of the study writer ten novel in 1919 in Memphis during the Yellow Fever epidemic—the story of an old woman's greed and a young man's love. \$2.50

The Romantic Woman
 By *Mary Gordon*
 An impressive novel of the Middle West and English society, of which *The Nation* says: "Her picture of that city [Chicago] and the people is one of the very brilliant things in recent literature. She conveys the richness, the distinction, and the vigor of an appealing character and mind." \$2.50

Alfred Knopf advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review*, October 10, 1920.

Figure 2.8

New Books Too Good to Miss

<p>Penelope's Postscripts By <i>Kate Douglas Wiggin</i> "Just as vigorous and readable as the former books and just as full of Penelope's unique production of word and deed." N. Y. Times. Pictorial. \$1.50 net.</p>	<p>Little Miss Grouch By <i>Maxwell Anderson</i> "As bright a bit of fun as we have come across in a long time." N. Y. Times. Illustrated by <i>R. K. Crosby</i>. Pictorial. \$1.00 net.</p>
<p>The Song of the Lark By <i>Willa Sibert Cather</i> The story of a young woman who, from childhood on a Western ranch to international fame—a story of ambition, of loyalty and of love. Pictorial. \$1.50 net.</p>	<p>Letters on an Elk Hunt By <i>Elmore Frank Stewart</i> Just as fascinating as "The Letters of a Woman Hunter" by the same author. Pictorial. \$1.00 net.</p>

At all bookstores **HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY** 25 N. 4th St. NEW YORK

Houghton Mifflin advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review*, October 10, 1915.


Figure 2.9

ALFRED A. KNOFF 220 W. 42 St., New York

THE BORZOI ALFRED A. KNOFF THE BORZOI ALFRED A. KNOFF

Now on sale at all book shops

WILLA CATHER'S New Novel "ONE OF OURS"



WILLA CATHER is one of the few novelists who cannot be hurried. "ONE OF OURS" is her first novel since "My Antonia" (1918). It is significant that Miss Cather was the only woman in the list of five leading American writers who have emerged in this decade, in the recent Literary Digest poll. As Burton Rascoe said in *The New York Tribune*: "Miss Cather is the one woman of indubitable genius that we have."

In "ONE OF OURS" she has created an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age.

INTO the story of Claude Wheeler's stormy youth, his enigmatic marriage, and the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of his nature, Miss Cather has poured all the passion of her daring, impatient mind, her subtle and flexible style. She presents a single figure—against the haunting background of the prairie—a sort of American Hamlet; but behind the personal drama there is an ever deepening sense of national drama, of national character, working itself out through individuals and their destiny.

The first edition of *ONE OF OURS* consists only of three hundred and fifty-five copies, as follows—thirty-five on Imperial Japan Vellum (of which five are not for sale) numbered 1 to 35 (\$25.00), and three hundred and five copies on Persian hand-made Indian paper (of which fifteen are not for sale) numbered 36 to 245 (\$10.00). Each copy is signed by the author.

Second and subsequent editions . . . \$2.50 net

In Canada Get The Dominion Company of Canada, Ltd., 81, Market Street, Toronto

THE BORZOI ALFRED A. KNOFF THE BORZOI ALFRED A. KNOFF THE BORZOI ALFRED A. KNOFF

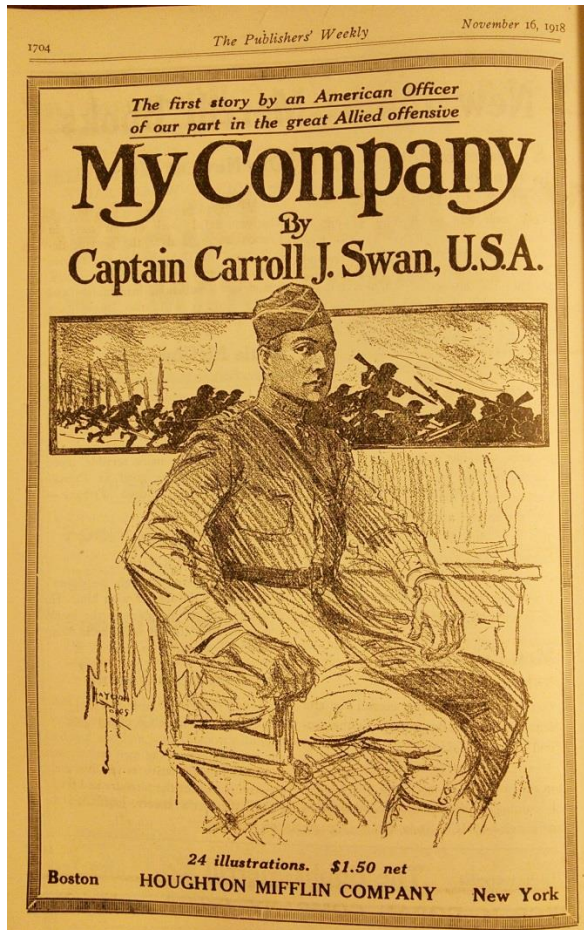
Alfred Knopf advertisement for *One of Ours* in the *New York Times Book Review*,
September 10, 1922.

Figure 3.1

<p>THE GREATEST WAR NOVEL</p> <h2>THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE</h2> <p>By VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ</p> <p>Authorized Translation by Charlotte Brewster Jordan</p> <p>First and only... THE GREATEST WAR NOVEL... of the war. It is the most vivid in style, because it is the only one... Price \$1.50 Net. Postage Extra. At All Bookstores. E. P. DUTTON & CO., 681 Fifth Ave., New York.</p>		<p>A. J. SACK, Director of the Russian Information Bureau in the U. S., has written a most valuable work covering the entire history of the Russian Revolution up to and including the Bolshevik regime, entitled "The Birth of the Russian Democracy." George Kennan, distinguished author on Russia, says: "The fuller or better you read probably it is to be found in the English language of the... the men and the events that finally brought about the overthrow of the Czar Government." 327 pages—100 illustrations. \$3.75 net. AT ALL BOOKSTORES.</p>
<p>If you should discover your chauffeur to be a lord, your dress-maker a princess, your governess an English lady, how amazed you'd be. Yet it's all perfectly possible according to</p> <p>GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON whose</p> <p>"The City of Masks"</p> <p>is a delightfully humorous tale of the unknown foreign aristocrats who are living great romances in the obscure places of a vast city like New York.</p> <p>In all Bookstores \$1.50. Dodd, Mead and Company</p>	<p>"The Epic of the Air, Romance that gives the story of all the Airc."—Chicago News</p> <h3>HIGH ADVENTURE</h3> <p>By Capt. James Norman Hall</p> <p>"The most and most graphic account of how American boys face the trials and plagues of aviation."—Pittsburgh Courier</p> <p>50 illustrations. \$1.50 net at all bookstores DUTTON-MYHLEN CO.</p>	<h3>Dutton's Modern Language Series</h3> <p>French—Spanish—Russian, etc. To enable you to learn the language in a shorter and more practical manner, the materials are arranged in attractive, convenient, unprinted copy, translated by native speakers. Soldiers' Spoken French By ANTHONY TRIGBY, an expert. Compiled from a series of lectures courses of actual lessons. French in a Nutshell By JESSE KILBURN, also an expert. Compiled for all language schools. Sent for a complete list of the titles. E. P. DUTTON & CO., 681 Fifth Ave., N. Y.</p>
	<p>CASH PAID FOR BOOKS</p> <p>Highest prices paid for large or small collections of BOOKS, AUTOGRAPHS or other literary property. Cash down and prompt removal.</p> <h3>Malkin's</h3> <p>NEW YORK'S LARGEST BOOKSTORE 42 Broadway, N. Y. Phone 2004 Broadway</p>	<p>THE GREATEST WAR NOVEL</p> <h2>THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE</h2> <p>By Vicente Blasco Ibanez</p> <p>"The description of the war, known to all nations, is here set forth in a unique place in the world of fiction... a work of the highest class of great..." —Published in New York in 1917 \$1.50 net. 327 pages. 100 illustrations. E. P. DUTTON & CO., 681 Fifth Ave., N. Y.</p>
		<h3>BRITAIN AFTER THE PEACE</h3> <p>By Brougham Villiers</p> <p>Houston Post says: "He clearly put ahead about demobilization, industrial control, taxation, land holding and foreign policies of Britain will be stimulating to all readers who foresee great changes impending." 128 pages. 100 illustrations. E. P. DUTTON & CO., 681 Fifth Ave., N. Y.</p>

E. P. Dutton & Company advertisements for Vicente Blasco Ibañez's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in the *New York Times Book Review*, September 22, 1918.

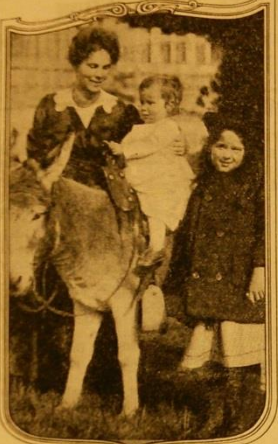
Figure 3.2



Houghton Mifflin advertisement for Captain Carroll Swan's *My Company* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, November 16, 1918.

Figure 3.3

616 *The Publishers' Weekly* August 24, 1918



**DOROTHY
CANFIELD'S
HOME
FIRES
IN
FRANCE**

PUBLICATION
DATE
September 26th

*Dorothy Canfield Fisher
and Her Children*

*"Not a war book but the story of those who have kept
the home fires burning."*

The Pictorial Review says:
"Of all the stories that have come to us from war-stricken France,
we have not read any to compare with this. . . . Beyond all doubt the
most touching and inspiring human documents you could ever read.
Each one is a masterpiece and each one is based on actual facts that
have come under the author's personal notice. Only the names and
locations have been altered."

320 pages, \$1.35 net.

HENRY HOLT & COMPANY
19 WEST 44th STREET NEW YORK

Henry Holt & Company advertisement for Dorothy Canfield's *Home Fires in France* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, August 24, 1918.

Figure 3.4


The Publishers' Weekly *November 2, 1918*

USEFUL AND INEXPENSIVE GIFTS

To keep nerves steady and brain fit take an occasional plunge into a good novel; an hour or two of relaxation before bed to break the chain of daily preoccupations. Nothing else unkinks tired minds like good FICTION. It's a war-time prophylactic you can't afford to omit from your Christmas list.

MY ANTONIA
By
Willa S. Cather

Of all the remarkable women the author of "The Song of the Lark" has created, no other is so vital as Antonia, all aglow with the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth. Her story is a romance of profound appeals. Illustrated by Benda. \$1.60 net.



HEART'S HAVEN
By
Clara Louise Burnham

This is the story of May Ca'line, a village beauty; of her romance with two lovers and of the later years when both men played a vital part in her life and happiness. Illustrated. \$1.50 net.

THE CARAVAN MAN
By Ernest Goodwin

A lighthearted tale of an artist who fled to the country to avoid women, and of Rose, the vicar's granddaughter, all stiff and prim without, all a-tingle with youth and life within. A delightful novel. Illustrated. \$1.50 net.

COMMON CAUSE
By Samuel Hopkins Adams

How a man and a girl stemmed the tide of pro-Germanism in an American city. Illustrated. \$1.60 net.

PHILO GUBB
By Ellis Parker Butler

Stories of mystery and mirth by the author of "Pigs is Pigs." Illustrated. \$1.50 net.

TANG OF LIFE
By Henry Herbert Knibbs

An intense and virile story of the West, by the author of "Overland Red." Illustrated. \$1.50 net.

THE CROSS OF FIRE
By Robert Gordon Anderson

A dramatic and intensely exciting romance of love and war to-day by an author well known to the Trade. Illustrated. \$1.50 net.

MANY MANSIONS
By Sarah W. MacConnell

The story of a girl who fled from the stagnant atmosphere of home to the warmth and romance of New York, of her business career there, and of her tempestuous love affair. \$1.50 net.

OH, MONEY! MONEY!
By Eleanor H. Porter

"Mrs. Porter has never written a more enjoyable story."—*Christian Endeavor World*. Illustrated. \$1.50.

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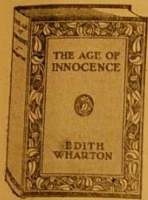
Houghton Mifflin advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly*, November 2, 1918.

Figure 4.1

October 9, 1920 THE BOOK REVIEW 1045

On Publisher's Fall Lists


THE AGE OF INNOCENCE *By Edith Wharton*



A novel that in strength and broad appeal rivals Mrs. Wharton's "The House Of Mirth." It is a picture of the highest New York society in its days of innocence, about 1880, and its leading character is a hero who hesitates between two loves, of whom one is rebellious against prudish conventions, and the other his fiancee. It is a novel that in powers of entertainment is the literary treat of the year, and represents Mrs. Wharton's powers at their very finest.

Published by D. APPLETON AND COMPANY. \$2.00 net.

THE BLUE ROOM *Cy Cosmo Hamilton*



In this powerful plea for the single standard of morality Cosmo Hamilton has done his best work, which is saying a great deal. For this distinguished writer of the ultra-modernist school is the author of "SCANDAL," the outstanding success of the present New York theatrical season. Could any one write a more powerful plea for this single standard of morality than Cosmo Hamilton, who is perhaps the most acute observer of the more sophisticated classes of our complex modern life? While "THE BLUE ROOM" has a moral purpose back of it, and on this account will be widely discussed, it is above all else, a novel with interesting characters and an unusual plot, and is sure of a large sale for its charm as a story alone. Frontispiece 12mo. Cloth.


Published by LITTLE, BROWN & CO. \$1.90 net.

MAIN STREET *By Sinclair Lewis*

Most of us have known Main Street, and most of us have left it—gladly. We have praised the dear old swimming hole, and gone back for visits—and returned to the city with speed. But in "Main Street" an eager girl goes from a city, where she has been happily inconspicuous, to live the fish-bowl existence of a doctor's wife in a small town where her every movement is commented upon, and every lightly spoken word remembered, and only in the end does she learn the great secret of life in being content with a real world in which it is never possible to create an ideal setting. It is "The Old Wives Tale" of the American Main Street.

Published by HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE. October 14th. \$2.00

THE PURPLE HEIGHTS *By Marie Conway Oemler*



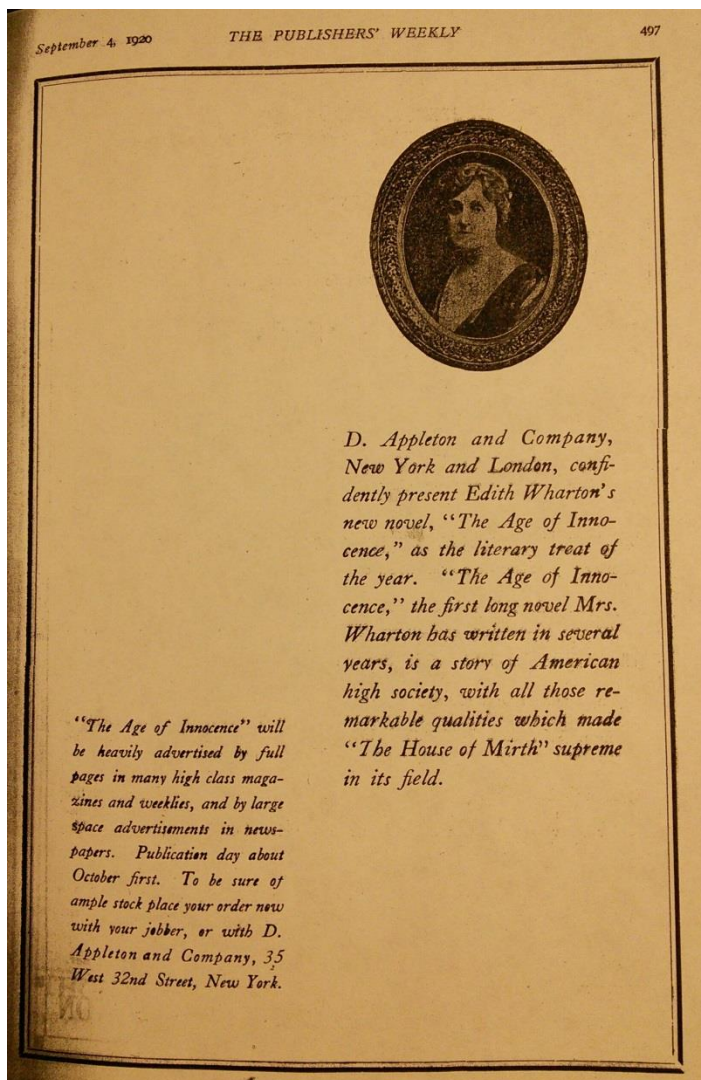
The woman who wrote "Slippy McGee" wrote this novel. "The Purple Heights" has everything a popular novel should have. It has a love story that is refreshingly new and that ends happily. It has two or three of those quaint characters that readers easily remember and like to talk about to their friends. There are tense moments of poignant pathos; and there is a running fire of humor throughout the whole book. It is a clean book, a gentle book, a book rich in philosophy as well as in plot that should please any reader from sixteen to—well, to the limit.

Published by THE CENTURY CO. \$2.00 net.

"The Selling Talks Manual for Prominent Fall Books" in *The Publishers' Weekly*,

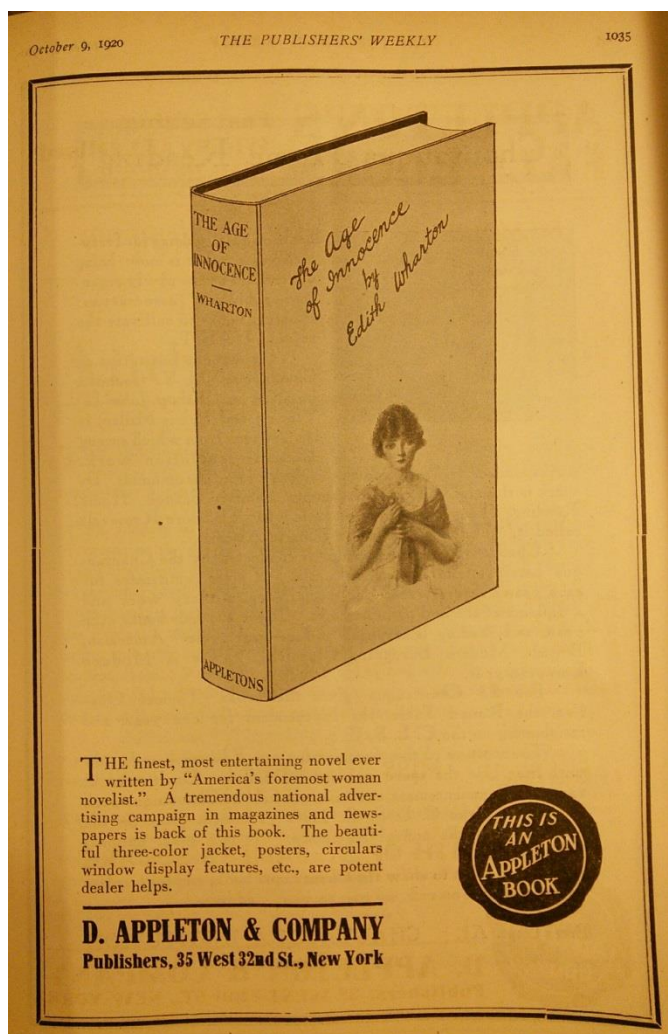
October 9, 1920, page 1045.

Figure 4.2



D. Appleton & Company's advertisement for Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, September 4, 1920.

Figure 4.3




Appleton's advertisement for Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, October 9, 1920.

Figure 4.4

THE PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY 1171

Was She Justified In Seeking a Divorce?

Why was this American girl forced to leave her brutal Polish husband? Why did Ellen, Countess Olenka return to New York, seeking to forget? Whispers came all too soon that she had been compromised in the artistic continental society from which she had fled. But in the narrow New York Society of the 1870's she was welcomed back, and the whispers of far-off Europe ignored, until she and Newland Archer are swept together by mutual attraction, and the old, old question is renewed, shall she create a scandal just because she is unhappy?



All the glamor of the society life of the original Four Hundred is the background for this story—the nights at the opera, the balls, the intimate amusements of the society leaders of the day. Newland Archer's life is spent among them, and Ellen, with her charm of other lands, comes to him as a breath of a new day. But he is engaged to lovely May Welland, a girl of his own circle, and his whole living is firm-rooted in cramped New York. Graphically and with a sure understanding of the moral values of the situation, is presented the call of the new things that lure them, these children of New York's Age of Innocence, in

The Age of Innocence

By EDITH WHARTON

**America's
Greatest Woman
Novelist**

"Our foremost American novelist,"
Boston Transcript.

"Paul Bourget calls her the greatest American novelist."
New York Sun.

"A book from our leading novelist's pen is an event."
Philadelphia Public Ledger.

"Mrs. Wharton's touch is the deftest, the surest, of all our American manipulators in the novel form,"
The New Republic.


"Each of Mrs. Wharton's later books has represented a new difficulty mastered."
Quarterly Review.

This is a full length novel by the foremost American woman novelist which in strength and breadth of appeal rivals "The House of Mirth." It is entertaining from the opening scene at the Opera in New York to the last pages laid in Paris. The leading characters appear as living human beings against the keen pictures of society, and the book, as a whole, will take its place beside "The House of Mirth" as the outstanding depiction of New York Society.

"The Age of Innocence" represents Mrs. Wharton's art at its pinnacle. All her splendid abilities find their choicest material in this her greatest novel, and in it she has given the world of readers a book that is unsurpassed for entertaining qualities.

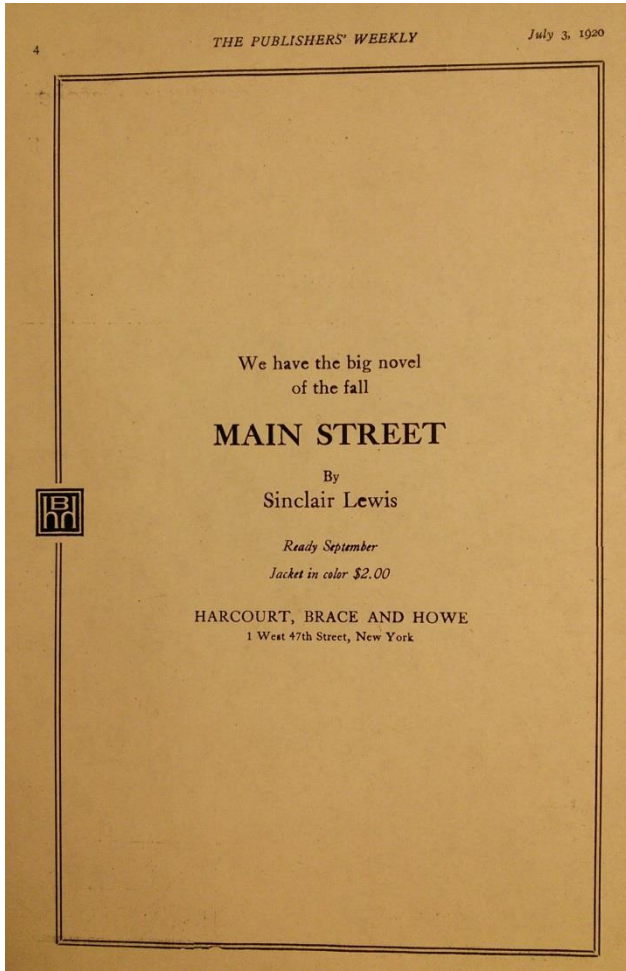
\$2.00 net.

D. Appleton and Company
Publishers New York



Appleton's advertisement for Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, October 16, 1920.


Figure 4.5



Harcourt, Brace and Howe advertisement for Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, July 3, 1920.

Figure 4.6

48 *The Publishers' Weekly*



PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY ADVERTISEMENT July 3, 1920

We have the big novel
of the fall

MAIN STREET

By
Sinclair Lewis

Jacket in color \$2.00

HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE
1 West 47th Street, New York

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT, December 20, 1920

William Allen White says:

MAIN STREET
By Sinclair Lewis

"ranks with
"The Scarlet Letter:"

Published	Oct. 23rd
Second printing	Oct. 27th
Third printing	Oct. 30th
Fourth printing	Nov. 11th
Fifth Printing	Nov. 18th
Sixth printing	Nov. 26th
Seventh printing	Dec. 6th
Eighth printing	Dec. 11th
Ninth printing	Dec. 17th

(Each 5,000-10,000 copies)

100,000 in 1921—Watch Our Ads.

Harcourt, Brace and Howe advertisement for Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* in *The Publishers' Weekly*, January 1, 1921.

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Appleton and Company for Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A Lantern in Her Hand*.

Advertisement. *The Publishers’ Weekly* 6 October 1928: 1397.

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Advertisement. *The Publishers’ Weekly* 7 September 1929: 925.

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