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## Leading Ladies In Willa Cather's The Professor's House

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LEADING LADIES IN WILLA CATHER'S  
*THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE*

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of Fort Hays State University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the women in Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's House* and demonstrates the ways in which the women are able to adapt to change better than the men in the novel, even though the women are degraded for their materialism and behaviors. By looking at previous scholarship, this thesis highlights how women in this novel have for some reason been excluded from the academic debate surrounding *The Professor's House*. This exclusion is often the result of scholars placing more emphasis on St. Peter and Tom as the main characters in the story. What this ignores, however, is the strength of the women and their ability to adapt to modern life. The women in the novel are remarkably strong, yet St. Peter does not see them this way. Since the narrative focuses mainly on the male perspectives, the reader can easily take on the view of the men and forget to look closer at the women in the text who demonstrate different characteristics than St. Peter detects in them. Finally, in placing this novel alongside *A Lost Lady*, which similarly views the woman in the story through the male's perspective, this paper proves that a new reading of *The Professor's House* must be considered to truly understand one of the ways Cather uses the women in this novel.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

What more can one add about a novel which has been written about extensively by an author who has also recently received much notice from academia? Looking at Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* may inspire such questions, yet the novel is uniquely open for much more scholarship and debate due to the broad world Cather created in it. As Susan Rosowski has noted in her book, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism*, "Ambiguity lies at the heart of *The Professor's House*, and therein lies its brilliance" (139). Rosowski's claim correctly identifies what makes *The Professor's House* worth studying and also how the novel provides scholars with ample opportunity for analysis. Cather once wrote, "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created" (*Not Under Forty* 50). Her idea of art and creation when it came to her literary works not only included the words she designed to put on the page but also the things not named that take shape in her work due to her brilliance. She later wrote,

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things: American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behavior. (*On Writing* 31-2)

In her own way, Cather presented readers with a view of life altogether inundated with the little inconveniences in life. As readers experience the novel, mostly from St. Peter's perspective, the logical prediction remains that most critical research would focus on him

and his relationship with Tom Outland. His dissatisfied point of view on life becomes why some say, "*The Professor's House* is a bleak novel in which no-one and no belief or value survives intact" (Bailey 321).

When discussing point of view, however, Cather's works become even more interesting. In many of her novels, especially when looking at gender, there are two points of view. As Ann Romines points out, "One is the male point of view (to be repeated in *My Antonia*, *One of Ours*, *A Lost Lady*, and *The Professor's House*), which takes advantage of a male character's relative mobility and his propensity to see domestic ritual from outside and thus to romanticize it, pro or con" (*The Home Plot* 139). In *The Professor's House*, the Professor begins to view domestic life with contempt, wishing he had never fallen into the trap of marriage. His negative view has sparked scholarly debate as to what his view can mean for the novel. As Joan Acocella mentions, "*The Professor's House* . . . is not a story about the professor's despair, it is a critique of the patriarchy" (41). This assertion might be a slight overstep because there are many more ways to approach Cather's novel, but it shows how women are not valued or viewed on equal footing as the other men in the novel, at least according to Professor St. Peter. In fact, women in general are left out of the close relationships found in many of Cather's novels, including *The Professor's House*; this exclusion of women remains quite apparent in *The Professor's House*, especially when it comes to the relationship between Tom Outland and Professor St. Peter. Not only do they bond based on a love for knowledge and exploration, but Tom's way of life almost guides the Professor to be dissatisfied with his own once Tom has died. Professor St. Peter, then, becomes unable to reconcile his present with his past and future.

To see how this male bond breaks the Professor and causes him to view his domestic life in a different light, gender in this novel must be analyzed. As Anne Baker notes, gender is an important theme in a significant amount of Cather's literary work. She asserts that, based on the Professor's perceptions, every character becomes either masculine or feminine in the narrative completely independent of the character's biological sex (253). The way the Professor begins to see masculine and feminine qualities, then, becomes of interest because the Professor is the lens through which readers experience and see the characters for the first time and throughout the novel.

The novel begins when Professor Godfrey St. Peter and his wife Lillian have moved into their new home, paid for by the proceeds for history books about the Spaniards the Professor published. Though the St. Peters have settled into the new home, the Professor still uses the study in the old house to write and continues to pay rent on the old home, and he is insistent that he must continue his work in that specific study because it is where he has always completed his work. Cather also introduces his two daughters and their husbands: Rosamond and Louie Marsellus and Kathleen and Scott McGreggor. Throughout the novel, Cather reveals that Rosamond used to be engaged to Tom Outland, one of the Professor's students, until he died in the war, leaving her a large inheritance with which she and Louie are using to build an extravagant home. Some tension exists between Scott and Louie because Scott was close to Tom and feels Louie is misrepresenting Tom's wishes. Additionally, Kathleen is extremely jealous of Rosamond and her fortune, especially at how acquiring wealth has changed Rosamond for the worse. One other character plays a significant role throughout the novel: Augusta, the woman hired to sew for the St. Peters. She used to share the study with St. Peter at the old home,



and they have a close relationship because of how they used to have to work around each other as artists. In the final scenes of the novel, St. Peter allows gas to leak into the room he is napping in, and Augusta is the one who fortunately saves him just in time before the gas leak kills him. This moment in the novel further emphasizes their close bond and affirms his belief in seeing her as the perfect model of what a woman should be.

The women in the novel, because of St. Peter's understanding of them, are cast as annoyances that he must put up with or solve problems for. As Rosowski notes, "His wife, Lillian, reminds him of what he owes to other people; his younger daughter, Kathleen, that his family will lose face if they don't make up Augusta's financial losses . . .; his older daughter, Rosamond, that it is not fitting for him to remain alone in the old house" (*The Voyage Perilous* 132). In this way, as well as others which will be mentioned later, the Professor's female family becomes a burden to him that he must bear. St. Peter looks at each of these women negatively, and he frequently casts them as materialistic, controlling, and even the cause of social obligations. Having the reader view the women from St. Peter's perspective, employs an interesting lens, and she uses a similar method in novels like *Lucy Gayheart* and *A Lost Lady*. Yet, the lens employed by the Professor remains much more cynical towards women and their actions than in the other novels mentioned. Surprisingly, the women in *The Professor's House* are each incredibly strong forces to be reckoned with, and in some cases they even dominate the men; yet, Professor St. Peter's view of them remains negative. This cast of strong women must not be overlooked in scholarship, but so far an extensive study on them has not been completed.

## **Literature Review**

Significant research has been completed on *The Professor's House*, yet most of it has focused on the bond between Tom Outland and Professor St. Peter. In fact, the other characters take a back seat to these two prominent men. One scholar even claims, "Every character in the book can be defined in terms of his or her relationship to the dead Tom Outland, but every character must also be defined in terms of his or her relationship to the Professor as well" (Middleton 108). This method of viewing the other characters based on their relation to St. Peter and Tom is justified; however, it is not the only way in which the other characters can be defined. Many of the other characters are in some way independent and, though connected to these two men, understanding their characters is not dependent on Tom and St. Peter alone. In fact, some scholars assert that Tom and St. Peter might not be the most reliable sources since they seem to be obsessed with past lives. As Guy Reynolds observes, "Tom Outland and Professor St. Peter are afflicted by parallel forms of regression: Outland's attachment to the Blue Mesa, where he spends an idyllic summer beyond societal responsibilities, is infantiely regressive; likewise, St. Peter's loyalty to his study is an evasion of adult, female responsibilities" (*Willa Cather in Context* 146). Since each of these men seem to fixate on an unrealistic life, they become somewhat unreliable, yet scholarship still focuses on them.

Part of this focus derives from the interest in the way this novel "realizes these two opposed modes of art (and worldviews) in its two narratives, juxtaposing Godfrey St. Peter's claustrophobically material world of mean people and things against Tom Outland's empty but redemptive Blue Mesa . . . where he 'found everything instead of having lost everything'" (Swift 176). Based on this understanding of the novel, it is no

wonder that the female characters are pushed aside in preference to the interesting male duo.

One of the most commonly asserted views of St. Peter is his ability as a scholar, or artist because of the books he has written. Not only does he have a prestigious position at his university, but he has also recently published a series of works on the Spanish civilizations that have brought him immense wealth and acclaim. This collision between art and materialism causes the Professor stress throughout the novel as he cannot reconcile being an artist, or writer, with possessing expensive things like his new home and furnishings. However, many scholars note that his accomplishment is somewhat responsible for the negative turn in his life seen in the novel. As Katherine Joslin mentions,

Once Godfrey has used his sewing-room—study to write his volumes of history and has thereby earned enough money to provide comfortably for his wife and himself, the family grows resentful of his right to such seclusion . . . Lillian, along with her newly wealthy daughter, Rosamond, and her upwardly mobile husband, [Louie Marsellus], discourages Godfrey's continued seclusion.

The article continues to claim that St. Peter must then face the challenge of figuring out how to leave his study and identity as a scholar behind (173-4). This task will not be easy for him, and it is one he struggles with frequently throughout the novel.

What appears to most upset Professor St. Peter about his situation is that it is not the ideal life he had initially anticipated. He wishes he could have been out on Tom Outland's Blue Mesa, and he sees this place as a most sacred and utopian paradise. The

Professor is so enthralled with the prospect of a perfect world that "Tom brings the professor 'a second kind of youth'" (Nealon 25). Not only this, but the ideal of the Blue Mesa begins to adjust St. Peter's ideas on American nationality. By being connected to Tom, St. Peter is able to experience an old tradition of people who he perceives to have found ways to make more of life than what he is able to do. St. Peter's fascination with Tom's project and the idea of getting back to a more perfect life slowly begins to disrupt his marriage as well as his satisfaction with his life. While Tom was still alive, St. Peter could hear stories, and this made him feel like life was worth living because he was able to move beyond the mundane things in life; however, once Tom is no longer alive to help the Professor, "St. Peter speaks of him as if he were the only person to give life any value" and that without Tom's presence he feels as though his years of teaching had been wasted (Nettels 142). St. Peter's obsession takes him so far as to find life not really worth living once he is no longer accompanied in his scholarship by Tom.

Many scholars also discuss St. Peter's near death, and much debate revolves around if it was a suicide attempt or if he did try to save himself by getting off of the couch. Judith Fetterley notes, "in *The Professor's House* Godfrey St. Peter loses the magic of desire and wants only to die" (222). This thought mostly revolves around the idea that St. Peter is not able to adjust to the modern life he has been propelled into—a life where everyone around him seems obsessed with materialism and consumerism—so he sees this as his only way to escape a life that is torture to him. Though Fetterley represents one popular view, others, including Stuart Burrows see it as a good thing for the Professor, demonstrating "what the Professor experiences at the end of the novel is a peculiar self-identification: he does not so much regress back to his original self as

experience his *own* life as if it belonged to someone else" (24). This idea allows for the idea that St. Peter has somehow experienced a life-and-death moment that has enabled him to almost watch his own life as a spectator, yet this new perspective on life somehow "yields only a muted determination to carry on" (Millington 61). St. Peter's attempted suicide then becomes a direct result of and a solution to his inability to adjust to modern life.

One of the main causes most scholars identify of St. Peter's inability to adjust to the conditions of his present life is his "desire to be Old World rather than New" though it may also seem like "stubbornness" (Nealon 24). This idea, however, ignores the fact that the Professor is in some kind of "intense anguish" that most readers do not see because they connect with him and want him to be happy, finding a solution to living in a modern world (Skaggs, *After the World Broke in Two* 75). In many ways, Godfrey's entire life has moved on in front of him at a fast pace he cannot keep up with, and Joslin argues "his very house has become the world outside; his wife has moved, along with their belongings, to the new house. By refusing the new life, Godfrey has been in a sense left outside his marriage and family" (172-3). His inability to keep up with modern times in the 1920s has made him an outsider in his own family, a place where he should feel the most welcome, but he holds on to the hope that Tom would have understood because of his similar obsession with the past. This situation suggests that "Godfrey St. Peter knows too much and yet not enough, for he is unable to envision a place for himself in the changing world that his new house represents" (Harvey 79). His life was dedicated to an ancient society when he worked on his books, and this dwelling in the past has stalled him from being able to move on in the future. His failure in reconciling the past to the

present and future leads St. Peter to "reject his adult identity in favor of the boy he used to be. St. Peter can find no connection between his original boy self and the man he has become, and he must either kill the man to get back to the boy or kill the boy to survive as the man" (Fetterley 223). He spends time reflecting on the perfection of his youth when he was free to explore the world and his surroundings without any familial obligations.

This view, though, is similar to a view held by Cather, which is that the world had broken in two. Rosowski even argues, "*The Professor's House* is about that historical moment when things broke apart: science from religion, thought from feeling, the present from the past. As a historian St. Peter can understand the tragedy of the time" (*The Voyage Perilous* 135). Rosowski's idea is furthered in other scholarship that states "In the structure of *The Professor's House*, then, we find a pivot or moment in which two worldviews or aesthetics self-consciously competed: worldliness and escapism, materialism and idealism, the overfurnished and the *demeuble*" (Swift 176). This thought has led Fetterley to argue that "in writing *The Professor's House* Cather registered the devastating effect of losing her primary object of desire" (222). This view leads readers to see St. Peter as autobiographical for Cather in that writing his story allowed her to find a way to reconcile herself to losing something she loved dearly, much like St. Peter does.

This perspective has guided a significant amount of scholarship about *The Professor's House*, yet one other subject has also been thoroughly explored: Tom Outland. Though Professor St. Peter is a man and despises aspects of the female, he is not the most masculine male in the novel. Tom Outland is not physically present for a majority of the novel, but he is still a very strong presence. In many ways, "Masculinity

in *The Professor's House* is associated most powerfully with St. Peter's dead protege, Tom Outland . . . a masculine antidote to the feminine world inhabited by his wife and daughters" (Baker 255). It is in this way that Tom and his masculinity become a sort of presence throughout the rest of the narrative. Tom provides the reader with an image of the ideal male in his nature, and one of the ways he does this is through his independence and adventurous spirit. Merrill Maguire Skaggs even points out that

Tom's whole life seems shaped by random luck and accident. What he does with his chances, of course, defines him as a plucky waif . . . who is a good deal of a southwestern adventurer himself. Tom's story includes strong male bonds, immense curiosity, an intense desire to know more, strong values, headstrong determination, pluck and luck, resilience, hard work, makeshift system, a respect for the future, and—as a final reward—an exhilaration as satisfying as religious emotion. (*After the World Broke in Two* 68)

Tom's relaxed attitude sharply contrasts with the other characters in the novel who live a much more ordered life. Even the Professor, who wants to live a life like Tom, finds solace in his schedule and the seclusion of his study. This image of masculinity becomes an interesting focus and contrast throughout the novel.

One of the most interesting ways in which Tom's masculinity is illustrated is through his life out on the Blue Mesa. His life on the Blue Mesa turns into something beautiful and majestic where Tom can be one with the environment and where "civilisation falls away and Outland becomes a creature interested only in light and warmth" (Reynolds, *Willa Cather in Context* 131). This open wilderness becomes the

place where Tom finds his peace and wants to remain forever. In other American novels, the idea of the pastoral and open space is quite common, and these spaces are mostly associated with masculinity "while female culture was locked within the home" (Reynolds, *Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction* 64). The relationship Tom shares with the land is something that has been seen throughout American literature that includes the pastoral. Annette Kolodny explores this idea in her book *The Lay of the Land*, published in 1975. In this book she explores the idea of land-as-woman, asserting that the land has been given the feminine traits of being a mother, womb, or safe resting place for the men who explore her. Kolodny explains how defining the land as feminine is unique to the American pastoral in literature, and she connects this with the original settlers of the continent seeing America as this beautiful land full of bounty to embrace them. In the twentieth century, she connects this view of the land with the concept that "the land could never be any one man's property, to be passed on from one owner to another; the man and the landscape are simultaneous, interdependent, neither one master of the other" (145). Tom's relationship to the land reflects Kolodny's view of the relationship between the land and man in that Tom sees the land as something he cannot control yet must be explored. His devastation when the pottery and artifacts are sold demonstrates his loyalty to the land as a naïve boy slowly maturing into manhood in the environment of the pastoral. Tom's life in the vast space on the Blue Mesa is something that defines him as particularly masculine as this type of space is usually reserved for the rugged adventurer. Guy Reynolds also notes elsewhere that "When Cather's hero travels to the mesa he enters a familiar manly environment" (*Willa Cather in Context* 143-4). Tom's story in this way conforms to the typical wilderness myth in which the male



wanders out into the wilderness to find peace and some sort of higher understanding. Reynolds also asserts that "It almost seems to be a pastiche of that myth . . . Outland and his friend Blake live, after all, beyond female company" (144). This beautiful place seems perfect, and it is as though Tom has found paradise, yet his boyhood dreams are dashed when the world comes back into the picture. For a time, Tom Outland lives "in an idyllic community, just as the Pueblo Indians had done in their own world; but greed and aggression destroy both communities" (141). Tom is concerned with his paradise, and he wants to learn more about it; yet his desire to reveal his treasure eventually leads to its destruction. While Tom is away at the Smithsonian failing to convince them to come excavate the town he found, Blake sells all of the relics they had found. This pillaging of Tom's Blue Mesa is not what Tom expected, and, in his disappointment, he severs his relationship with Blake. Tom's ideal masculine environment is spoiled when a consumer, a title often related to women, comes in and buys up all of Tom's treasures. Yet this is the life the Professor envies and wishes he could somehow return to because he sees Tom's life as the example of boyhood perfection.

While most criticism written about *The Professor's House* deals exclusively with St. Peter and Tom, a few scholars have completed articles briefly analyzing the four main women in St. Peter's life: his wife, Lillian; his daughters, Rosamond and Kathleen; and his seamstress and fellow artist, Augusta. Of these four women, Augusta is the only one who is exempt from the Professor's critical eye; she is not seen as a materialistic consumer. Lillian, Rosamond, and Kathleen are not free from St. Peter's judgment, though. While St. Peter's bias requires analysis, the articles written that mention the women in the novel ignore the strengths of the women, focusing only on their

consumerism and materialism, essentially only highlighting their weaknesses as seen by Professor St. Peter.

Judith Fetterley's article "Willa Cather and the Fiction of Female Development" surprisingly focuses on how St. Peter develops and how the women in his life affect his development in a negative way by being too materialistic. Fetterley sees the novel as autobiographical and connects Cather to St. Peter, essentially pushing the women in the novel out of her analysis; St. Peter's daughters and wife are briefly acknowledged as Fetterley continues to closely analyze the Professor's development. Sharon O'Brien's article "Mothers, Daughters and the 'Art Necessity': Willa Cather and the Creative Process" takes a similar approach to Fetterley in that O'Brien asserts that Cather is placing her own views of women in the novel through St. Peter's perspective; her mention of this stops with her simply acknowledging how these views might upset feminists. O'Brien spends much of her article focusing on some of Cather's other novels, and she misses the connection between how the Professor's bias when viewing the women in his life prevents him and the reader from being able to understand and identify the women's strengths.

The focus on the weaknesses of the women in *The Professor's House* is not limited to those scholars who focus on St. Peter alone. Honor McKittrick Wallace in the article "'An Orgy of Acquisition' The Female Consumer, Infidelity, and Commodity Culture in *A Lost Lady* and *The Professor's House*" does provide analysis regarding how Rosamond is materialistic and how this relates to modernism and the 1920s, but the article does not connect that this view of Rosamond is exacerbated by St. Peter's bias and inability to adapt to the changing culture. Margaret Doane is one scholar who entirely

focuses on Lillian in her article “In Defense of Lillian St. Peter: Men’s Perceptions of Women in *The Professor’s House*,” but she does not move beyond discussing Lillian’s faults to recognize and argue how Lillian is a strong female who is materialistic but also a loving wife. Doane defends Lillian, but she does not attempt to view Lillian without considering St. Peter’s bias. By ignoring how Lillian, Rosamond, Kathleen, and Augusta are strong as a result of their character and ability to adapt to modern culture, scholars have missed the opportunity to analyze several interesting characters in *The Professor’s House*.

## Chapter 2: Rosamond Marsellus

Rosamond is one of the female characters of interest in the novel because of the way she is frequently described based on her physical features, her use of money, and her reliance on her husband. Rosamond stands in the novel as the perfect example of how materialism corrupts those who become obsessed with improving their lives with possessions that was so common during modernism and the 1920s, and she is the most materialistic of all the women in the novel. Cast as a flighty woman who cannot behave properly, Rosamond turns into the one person in the novel who no one really likes anymore. To begin with, she is mostly described and valued for her looks. She is described in *The Professor's House*:

Rosamond, the elder daughter, resembled her mother in feature, though her face was heavier. Her colouring was altogether different; dusky black hair, deep dark eyes, a soft white skin with rich brunette red in her cheeks and lips. Nearly everyone considered Rosamond brilliantly beautiful. Her father, though he was very proud of her demurred from the general opinion. He thought her too tall, with a rather awkward carriage . . . But St. Peter was very critical. Most people saw only Rosamond's smooth black head and white throat, and the red of her curved lips. (38)

This image of Rosamond directs the reader simply to her beauty, though her father recognizes her flaws. Sadly, Rosamond becomes a figure of beauty instead of a woman who is allowed many different facets and emotions. The way everyone dwells on her physical appearance traps her into the role of the beautiful sister that she may have never wanted.

In addition to the way everyone else sees her, it appears as though Tom Outland, her once fiancé, was also unable to see past her beauty: "Usually . . . people were aware only of her rich complexion, her curving, unresisting mouth and mysterious eyes. Tom Outland had seen nothing else, and he was a young man who saw a great deal" (59). Rosamond then is placed in a position where she is simply defined by the men in her life. Tom and St. Peter only saw her beauty, as was the case with many other people, but they are the two who in the novel receive the opportunity to define her based on what they see instead of basing their perception of her on who she is as an individual who can be valued for more than her beauty.

Additionally, Rosamond even struggles to define herself in her marriage to Louis. After coming into significant money due to Tom's invention and Louis' business skills, Rosamond becomes the materialistic, doting wife of Louie, and she does nothing else. She even allows Louie to design her life for her and make her decisions for her as well. Instead of being the independent woman she was growing up, Rosamond has become entirely dependent on her husband to find her identity. As Katharine and St. Peter both observe, she has become someone entirely different from when she was a child. In this way, her personality changes most based on the men in her life. With her father she behaves one way, with Tom another, and with Louie one that is completely unrecognizable.

One of the ways Rosamond's change most displays itself is through her materialistic tendencies throughout the novel. The relationship Tom shares with the land is something that has been seen throughout American literature that includes the pastoral. Annette Kolodny explores this idea in her book *The Lay of the Land*, published in 1975.

In this book she explores the idea of land-as-woman, asserting that the land has been given the feminine traits of being a mother, womb, or safe resting place for the men who explore her. Kolodny explains how defining the land as feminine is unique to the American pastoral in literature, and she connects this with the original settlers of the continent seeing America as this beautiful land full of bounty to embrace them. In the twentieth century, she connects this view of the land with the concept that “the land could never be any one man’s property, to be passed on from one owner to another; the man and the landscape are simultaneous, interdependent, neither one master of the other” (145). Tom’s relationship to the land reflects Kolodny’s view of the relationship between the land and man in that Tom sees the land as something he cannot control yet must be explored. His devastation when the pottery and artifacts are sold demonstrates his loyalty to the land as a naïve boy slowly maturing into manhood in the environment of the pastoral. Honor McKittrick Wallace notes, “Rosamond fail[s] . . . to restrain [her desire] according to the nineteenth-century model” of materialism (154). Instead of behaving like an economic wife, who watches the money spent and tries to economize and use money efficiently, which would be the ideal woman before consumerism became as prominent as it was in modernist society, Rosamond spends money as though she will never see the end of what she has. Initially, her family is not even concerned about the change in her spending habits as Bailey points out, “St Peter refuses to become entangled in such materialistic conflict and passes no judgment on his daughter [Rosamond] and her husband Louie, who built 'Outland' as a vulgarized monument to his achievements” (322). Though he refuses to reap the benefits from Rosamond's new wealth, St. Peter initially does not oppose her spending the money . . . he only opposes this change once it

begins to affect him directly. The apathy towards Rosamond's behavior, though, functions like silent approval since no one outwardly scolds her until she has so far encumbered by her materialism that there is no way to resolve or come back from.

Not only has Rosamond turned to spending money without concern, but she has also developed a jaded response to money. This behavior separates her from her closest family to the extreme where they begin to notice her dislike. Scott even knows, "Rosamond detested his editorials and his jingles . . . She also, now that she was Tom Outland's heir, detested to hear sums of money mentioned, especially small sums" (46). After coming into money, Rosamond becomes a different person and a type of person who can no longer stand her family. She no longer shows the level of control she once had in expressing her thoughts or knowing when it is appropriate to share exactly what is on her mind. Rosamond's outspoken behavior is especially obvious when Louie brings up giving Scott and Kathleen some of their old furniture. The conversation is quite tense, as Rosamond behaves poorly,

Rosamond looked at him in astonishment. It was very evident they had not discussed anything of this sort before. "Don't be foolish, Louie," she said quietly. "They wouldn't want our things."

"But why not?" he persisted playfully. "They are very nice things. Not right for Outland, but perfectly right for a little house. We chose them with care, and we don't want them going into some dirty second-hand shop."

"They won't have to. We can store them in the attic at Outland, Heaven knows it's big enough!" (164-5)

The conversation continues with Rosamond flatly refusing to give up any of her things. In the end, the couple settles the issue with Rosamond's last words, "'You can do as you like with your own things, Louie. But I don't want any of mine at the McGreggor's bungalow'" (166). Not only is Rosamond materialistic in the consumption of goods, but she also demonstrates her materialism when she asserts that the objects that she no longer needs or desires are still too good to be placed in her poorer sister's home.

Rosamond's materialism becomes something even her father begins to see as a change for the worse in her. Although Rosamond is not as flashy with her possessions as she might be, her focus on money and having all the right items and never giving anything away begins to corrupt her from the innocent child she was when St. Peter had fond memories of her. St. Peter and Rosamond discuss her change during the novel, since the increase in her fortune is mostly due to Tom leaving everything to her, including his invention, which has made the money Rosamond and Louie used to build their grand estate. In this conversation, the novel describes the scene as such: "His daughter looked perplexed and a little resentful. 'Sometimes,' she murmured, 'I think you feel I oughtn't to have taken it, either'" (63). This moment in the novel reveals Rosamond's nature when it comes to her money. She wants to consume things and make it seem like she is better with having her possessions surround her, but she actually feels some amount of guilt over having the money. Her response to her father demonstrates her attitude toward the money because she speaks softly and expresses a thought of her own by saying it is something her father felt.

The change in Rosamond is closely tied also with her marriage to Louie. Cather writes in the novel,



Since Rosamond's marriage to Marsellus, both she and her mother had changed bewilderingly in some respects—changed and hardened. But Louie, who had done the damage, had not damaged himself. It was to him that one appealed,—for Augusta, for Professor Crane, for the bruised feelings of people less fortunate. It was less because of Louie than for any other reason that he would refuse this princely invitation. (159).

St. Peter does not want anything to do with this alteration in his family, and it is clear whom he blames; however, he only marks the change in Rosamond and Lillian—Louie remains untouched. The reason this so disturbs Professor St. Peter is because he is disgusted with the change this new money has brought on his wife and daughter. Though Rosamond and Louie try to shower the Professor with gifts and benefits only money can buy, he rejects them because he despises the way materialism poisons his family.

Rosamond tries several tactics throughout the novel to try and convince her father to take some money from her in order to make his life more pleasant. She offers trips, but one of the most interesting attempts made by Rosamond is her wanting to place an income on the Professor. She tells him,

“Louie and I have often talked this over. We feel strongly about it. He's often been on the point of blurting out with it, but I've curbed him. You don't always approve of Louie and me. Of course it was only Louie's energy and technical knowledge that ever made Tom's discovery succeed commercially, but we don't feel that we ought to have all the returns from it. We think you ought to let us settle an income on you, so that you could

give up your university work and devote all your time to writing and research. That is what Tom would have wanted” (60-1).

This approach seemed as though it might work to Rosamond, but this is the last method that could convince the Professor to take money. Tom was St. Peter’s favorite, and he wishes he could have had him as a son-in-law—he accepts Louie as a sort of necessary second. Rosamond, though, tries to validate Louie, claiming the success of Tom’s invention came from skills Louie brought to the project. This comment makes Rosamond sound self-important, almost as though she ignores Tom entirely until the end when she tries to convince her father that she knows what Tom would want the Professor to do. Since St. Peter feels like he is the only one left who remembers Tom, this attempt falls flat, and he refuses to accept her offer because he sees it as sinking into the world of materialism that Tom did not like.

Although the Professor does his best to avoid being sucked into Rosamond’s materialism, he goes to Chicago with her to help her find pieces for her new home that are authentic. Professor St. Peter goes with her although “He had very much wanted to stay at home and rest—the university work seemed to take it out of him that winter more than ever before; but Rosamond had set her mind on going, and Mrs. St. Peter told him he couldn’t refuse” (149). He goes with Rosamond to Chicago, but he comes back worn out from the material acquisition. He tells his wife, “I should say she had a faultless purchasing manner. Wonder where a girl who grew up in that old house of ours ever got it. She was like Napoleon looting the Italian palaces” (153). He is amazed with Rosamond’s materialism and cannot figure out where she obtained this need to buy everything from, since she came from a relatively poor family. He struggles to imagine

how the little girl he remembers has transformed into this woman whose main goal is to spend money and acquire possessions—this change occurs mainly as a result of her new fortune and adoption of consumerist habits.

The reason for Rosamond's change is not entirely uncertain, though, because Kathleen identifies it quite easily. She says, ““But she's entirely changed. She's become Louie. Indeed, she's worse than Louie. He and all this money have ruined her”” (85). Kathleen's observation is quite astute since Rosamond behaves more and more like Louie every time they see her because of her dealing with money. Louie has somehow managed to place himself in charge of Rosamond and treats her as such. This idea is somewhat explored by Laura Mulvey in her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” published in 1975, when she explores the idea of the woman as a passive form in cinema. The same idea can be applied to Rosamond in the context of *The Professor's House*. Mulvey's identification of the woman as being the passive female whose behavior is determined by the active male gaze evinces itself in the relationship between Louis and Rosamond. He literally decides which dresses and jewelry she should wear to fit the form he desires, and she passively submits to his control and gaze. Louis is therefore in charge of Rosamond and has stripped her of her independence, making her a passive observer to her own life, left to consume goods and spend money thoughtlessly.

One of the ways Louie demonstrates his influence over Rosamond is through picking out all her clothes and jewelry. Louie's influence becomes obvious to the family as well:

He observed also something he had not seen before—a coat of soft, purple-grey fur, that quite disguised the wide, slightly stooping shoulders

he regretted in his truly beautiful daughter. He called to her, very much interested. “Wait a minute, Rosie. I’ve not seen that before. It’s extraordinarily becoming.” He stroked his daughter’s sleeve with evident pleasure. “You know, these things with a kind of lurking purple and lavender in them are splendid for you. They make your colour prettier than ever. It’s only lately you’ve begun to wear them. Louie’s taste, I suppose?”

“Of course. He selects all my things for me,” said Rosamond proudly.

“Well, he does a good job. He knows what’s right for you.” St. Peter continued to look her up and down with satisfaction. (81-2)

This exchange between father and daughter shows how Louie has become the most influential factor in deciding things for his wife. She is almost like a doll that he dresses up and makes more appealing. Shockingly, though, St. Peter does not have a problem with this—in fact, he applauds Louie for his sense of style and for picking out the appropriate items for Rosamond. Even though the Professor is appalled when Rosamond buys fancy furniture in a frenzy because of her complete submission to materialism, when Louie is the one spending the money and selecting the clothes this behavior is praised and seen as acceptable.

Additionally, Louie has altered Rosamond’s taste in jewelry from what it had been when she was engaged to Tom. When arriving at dinner at the Professor’s house, Kathleen notices a new bracelet Rosamond has on. Kathleen looks at it intently, and eventually Louie discusses it saying, ““It’s very old, you see, the gold. What a work I had finding it! She doesn’t like anything showy, you know, I like her in simple things, too . . .

I always remember a little bracelet she wore the night I first met her. A turquoise set in dull silver”” (106). The bracelet he refers to is the one given to Rosamond by Tom, and its mention assists in noticing the change in Rosamond and her materialism since she was engaged to Tom. Louie attempts to bridge the gap by finding her older jewelry, but the difference still remains. Rosamond has submitted to Louie’s materialism, but it has altered her from the innocent who took pride in the jewelry found for her by Tom. Now Rosamond is seen as simply materialistic because of her new collection of jewels purchased by Louie; even though he is the one responsible for her most recent acquisitions.

Throughout the novel, Rosamond is the most materialistic of any of the women—she is not in charge of her own decisions, she buys everything in sight, refuses to release any of her possessions even if they just sit in the attic, and she has changed significantly from when she was engaged to Tom. Her materialism is not entirely her fault, though, according to St. Peter because it is only since her marriage that she has become this way. Ironically, though, Louie is not blamed for his role in making her this way, and Rosamond is still the one treated differently by her family.

### Chapter 3: Lillian St. Peter

Lillian, St. Peter's wife, is described in the novel as being "very fair, pink, and gold,—a pale gold, now that she was becoming a little grey. The tints of her face and hair and lashes were so soft that one did not realize, on first meeting her, how very definitely and decidedly her features were cut, under the smiling infusion of colour. When she was annoyed or tired, the lines became severe" (37-8). This focus on her features and attractiveness, also seen with the description of Rosamond, places an importance on her beauty with one exception: when she is either tired or annoyed. Sadly, this is the description the reader has of Lillian, and it continues to shape how the reader understands her actions—with this description, she seems much less like a person and much more like a physical object. Yet, at other times in the novel, the reader does get brief glimpses at her humanity through connection with St. Peter. The reader learns that the Professor and his wife share "an old joke—the Professor's darkest secret. At the font he had been christened Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter. There had always been a Napoleon in the family . . . Godfrey had abbreviated his name in Kansas, and even his daughters didn't know what it had been originally" (161). Through this description the reader sees how Lillian and St. Peter connected during their marriage, but this is a brief demonstration that is forgotten in the midst of the conflict between them. Lillian and Rosamond share several traits the Professor finds disruptive to the women he wishes they were. Like Rosamond, Lillian obsesses over jewelry, nice houses, expensive trips, and other material objects the Professor sees as frivolous. Although she does not devolve into as intense a consumerism as Rosamond does, this may in part be due to the difference in their wealth—Rosamond is significantly more wealthy than Lillian resulting from her inheritance from Tom.

As the Professor sees this materialistic shift in Lillian, conflicts between the once happily married couple arise. One such tension is their weekly Sunday breakfast. St. Peter attends somewhat reluctantly, and he reflects, “There was no way out; they would meet at compt. When he reached the dining-room Lillian was already at the table, behind the percolator” (46-7). What should be an enjoyable moment alone between husband and wife at the breakfast table becomes a requirement Godfrey must endure in order to move on to other things he wishes he could do instead. From this, it appears as though Godfrey is simply doing as his wife says because it is easier than arguing with her. He knows that “when his wife said a thing it must be done” and he does this from “long-established habit” (149). St. Peter is aware that Lillian knows best when it comes to social interactions and what he must do to be proper, but he still resents having to comply with these requirements.

In fact, St. Peter believes this new level of requirement as a negative change in Lillian because she closely aligns herself with someone the Professor criticizes for materialism. St. Peter reflects,

That worldliness, that willingness to get the most out of occasions and people, which had developed so strongly in Lillian in the last few years, seemed to Louie as natural and proper as it seemed unnatural to Godfrey. It was an element that had always been in Lillian, and as long as it resulted in mere fastidiousness, was not a means to an end, St. Peter had liked it, too. (158)

Lillian’s focus on possessions and having just the right things used to appeal to St. Peter because it did not interfere with the rest of his academic life, but now that he must

participate in these regulations he resents this behavior in Lillian. Essentially, the Professor now thinks that Lillian is not the same woman he married years ago. The Professor thinks back to when their marriage first began to become difficult:

As he left the house, he was reflecting that people who are intensely in love when they marry, and who go on being in love, always meet with something which suddenly or gradually makes a difference. Sometimes it is the children, or the grubbiness of being poor, sometimes a second infatuation. In their own case it had been, curiously enough, his pupil, Tom Outland. (50)

The Professor is fully aware that his marriage has changed since the beginning, and he correctly identifies the cause, yet he misses the person who most influenced this change in their marriage; he attributes the change to Lillian's jealousy of Tom, but the change is more likely a result of Godfrey's obsession with Tom and his desire to explore like Tom had. He remembers that after having met Lillian he no longer could relate to the young boy he used to be who wanted to explore. In fact, he reflects, "After he met Lillian Ornslet, St. Peter forgot that boy had ever lived" (264) until he met Tom and remembered his desire to explore.

His desire to explore and escape his marriage stands in the way of his having a happy marriage because he envies Tom for not having to be married and deal with a wife. He actually sees Tom's death and not getting married to Rosamond as a good thing because he "would have had to 'manage' a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that" (261). After understanding the Professor's view of marriage, is it any wonder that he is no longer



satisfied in his own? He believes that Lillian has become something more materialistic than she was when they first fell in love, and he is glad Tom was saved from the same experience with Rosamond. Even though Tom “escaped,” St. Peter still has to live with the materialistic woman he married.

Lillian has changed significantly since their marriage, according to St. Peter, and he attributes this partially to her handling of money. When they were married, Lillian was given a small allowance from her father which she used to help buy the nice things she could not have afforded on St. Peter’s salary. The Professor realizes that, “they could not have been happy if Lillian had not inherited a small income from her father” because “Lillian couldn’t pinch and be shabby and do housework, as the wives of some of his colleagues did” (257). Though this is likely true, the Professor sees his happiness in being married simply as a result of an income that he was not responsible for; he wonders if, without this extra money, they would still be happily married—he concludes they would not.

In addition to the extra money fueling their happiness, St. Peter also notes how her sons-in-law have assisted Lillian in finding happiness in her marriage. By getting involved in her daughter’s new marriages, Lillian can relive the initial blissful years during which she and Godfrey were happy. When it came to Louie, “nobody could please her more . . . Best of all, he admired her extravagantly, her distinction was priceless to him. Many people admired her, but Louie more than most” (158). Even though Lillian has become less tolerant of St. Peter, he believes that she will tolerate anything when it comes to her sons-in-law, and he must “school himself to bear it” (36). He does not

believe that he can alter this behavior in his wife, so he decides to simply continue to bear it, ignoring all the unpleasant traits he sees in his wife.

Eventually, St. Peter feels entirely pushed out of her consideration when he notices her dressing herself in order to please her sons-in-law instead of him:

Mrs. St. Peter was wearing the white silk crepe that had been the most successful of her summer dresses, and an orchid velvet ribbon about her shining hair. She wouldn't have made herself look quite so well if Louie hadn't been coming, he reflected. Or was it that he wouldn't have noticed it if Louie hadn't been there? A man long accustomed to admire his wife in general, seldom pauses to admire her in a particular gown or attitude, unless his attention is directed to her by the appreciative gaze of another man.

Lillian's coquetry with her sons-in-law amused him. (77)

Though he questions why he realizes how pretty Lillian has made herself, he is still somewhat affected by her desire to appeal to her sons-in-law because "he hadn't foreseen it" (77). This notable change in Lillian, for Professor St. Peter, simply marks how she has changed into the woman he never expected her to become.

Throughout her marriage, Lillian's traits that St. Peter does not like have become more pronounced, and he sees these changes as a worsening of her person. She is more materialistic, more desirous of attention from her sons-in-law, and more focused on regulating the Professor's behavior. St. Peter does not seem to have any need to separate from his wife, yet he desires solitude, demonstrated by his keeping of the old house after all of his things but his studies have been moved to the new house. Experiencing the

changes in Lillian as he has, the Professor longs to return to the happy, blissful days of his marriage. In one of their most honest conversations with each other, they discuss the future and the past:

“My dear,” he sighed . . . “it’s been a mistake, our having a family and writing histories and getting middle-aged. We should have been picturesquely shipwrecked together when we were young.”

“How often I’ve thought that!” she replied with a faint, melancholy smile.

“You? But you’re so occupied with the future, you adapt yourself so readily,” he murmured in astonishment.

“One must go on living, Godfrey. But it wasn’t the children who came between us.” (92)

In this moment, St. Peter realizes that the changes in his marriages and in Lillian are something she noticed as well; he is not alone in thinking about the past and the perfect relationship they once had. Instead, the difference between Lillian and St. Peter is her ability to move forward with her life and adapt to the future in front of her, while St. Peter cannot.

#### Chapter 4: Kathleen McGregor

Kathleen functions in an interesting way throughout the novel as one of the more independent women. Though she still shares an attachment to Professor St. Peter, Kathleen is unafraid to speak her mind and stand up for what is right. Being a strong woman, however, does not stop her from being observed by her father as a sort of object. Kathleen is described as,

the younger daughter, [who] looked even younger than she was—had the slender, underdeveloped figure then very much in vogue. She was pale, with light hazel eyes, and her hair was hazel-coloured with distinctly green glints in it. To her father there was something very charming in the curious shadows her wide cheekbones cast over her cheeks, and in the spirited tilt of her head. Her figure in profile, he used to tell her, looked just like an interrogation point. (38)

Regardless of the fact that Kathleen is later slightly recognized for her intelligence, this entirely physical description comes far before any other; in addition, most of the descriptions of her intellect classify it as a more feminine intelligence or response than anything else. By merely looking at Kathleen's physical features, the reader sees her as more something to look at and appreciate rather than consider for her sharp wit and care for other people. St. Peter has spent time with his daughter, and Kathleen is even sort of viewed as his favorite; yet he still cannot see the ways in which he could have a relationship with her anything like his relationship with Tom. Even though Kathleen remembers and takes pleasure in the old stories Tom would tell, the Professor cannot see

that she is someone he could confide in and rely upon. To him, Kathleen can be seen through this light only and any other behavior is seen as an aberration.

Throughout the novel, Kathleen is most frequently compared to her sister, Rosamond. The surprising part about this, though, is that the two sisters no longer seem similar enough to warrant comparison. As Middleton points out, "we never fully accept money as the reason for the sisters' estrangement" (107). Their relationship is strained, though it was not in the past. Cather includes in her narrative this explanation:

When they were little girls, Kathleen adored her older sister and liked to wait on her, was always more excited about Rosie's new dresses and winter coat than about her own. This attachment had lasted even after they were grown. St. Peter had never seen any change in it until Rosamond announced her engagement to Louie Marsellus. Then, all at once, Kathleen seemed to be done with her sister. Her father believed she couldn't forgive Rosie's forgetting Tom so quickly. (88)

Of course, this is all speculation from the Professor's perspective, and he correctly identifies the time in which the two sisters grew apart. The contrast between the way the sisters used to act and the way they interact in the novel indicates that Rosamond's moving on from her engagement as quickly as she did greatly hurt her sister mostly because Kathleen has fond memories of Tom as well.

While visiting the Professor in his study one day, Kathleen talks to him briefly about Tom. As she prepares to leave the Professor says, "Can't you stay awhile, Kitty? I almost never see anyone who remembers that side of Tom." To which Kathleen responds, "Yes, and now he's all turned out chemicals and dollars and cents, hasn't he? But not for

you and me! Our Tom is much nicer than theirs" (130). The Professor is aware that Kathleen is perhaps the only one in the family who still keeps the pure idea of Tom with her. Rosamond and Lillian never speak of him willingly, and Louie, the one person who never met him, speaks inaccurately, upsetting the rest of the family. These moments show the connection Kathleen must have had with Tom, as well, because she seems to remember the moments with him when she was a little girl. When Tom first arrived at the Professor's house, he would tell stories to the girls, but "the stories Tom told the children [had] no shadows. Kathleen and Rosamond regarded his free-lance childhood as a gay adventure they would gladly have shared" (122). Tom became a companion for Kathleen and Rosamond, yet only one of them had the opportunity to keep him for life: Rosamond. This was difficult for Kathleen, but knowing that Tom would stay in the family allowed her to still have a friendship with Tom. However, when Tom dies and Rosamond quickly moves on, Kathleen is left wondering why she and the Professor are the only ones who remember him.

Even though the Professor and Kathleen share this special bond of remembering Tom for who he was, the Professor still sees Kathleen as quite helpless when compared to her sister. He finds himself assured that he understands his youngest daughter but not his oldest, and he believes that "[Kathleen] had always seemed to need his protection more than Rosamond" (64). His feeling that Kathleen needed to be taken care of demonstrates his misunderstanding when it comes to his daughters. Kathleen is not a weak person. In fact, she is strong and confident in almost all that she does. St. Peter finds her "I can-go-it-alone" step and posture as a reason for her needing his protection, when in actuality it

is a sign of her strength (64). Kathleen is able to form her own opinions and take care of herself.

Though Kathleen is one of the strongest characters in the novel, it does not mean that she is not sensitive or at least susceptible to difficult emotions. At one point in the novel, Kathleen calls the Professor over to her house to help her pick out some new furs. When he arrives, however, he meets Rosamond on her way out wearing a new, and very nice, fur. Upon going inside Kathleen's house, the Professor notices that "she was very pale; even her lips, which were without color" (82). The Professor knows the reason for this reaction, yet he does not mention Rosamond to Kathleen; instead he tries to move on to discuss her new furs. After putting on the first fur, Kathleen breaks down and takes off the fur saying, "I'm so sorry, Daddy, but it's no use to-day. I don't want any furs, really. She spoils everything for me" (14). What challenges Kathleen so much about this situation is the difference in wealth between the two sisters. The Professor urges her to not be jealous, but she simply responds, "I can't help it, Father. I *am* envious. I don't think I would be if she let me alone, but she comes here with her magnificence and takes the life out of all our poor little things. Everybody knows she's rich, why does she have to keep rubbing it it?" (83-4). This shows a change in Kathleen since girlhood, when she used to rejoice in Rosamond's new things. Now that they are no longer on equal footing, she feels envious of what Rosamond has that she will never have the chance to. While St. Peter sees this as a weakness, it is simply her feeling emotion, especially when being compared to Rosamond.

Rosamond's boastful behavior is not the only issue Kathleen takes with her new wealth. At one point in the novel, Kathleen tells the Professor that Augusta had lost five

hundred dollars in a stock market investment that Louie had recommended she not invest in, even though many people in her church were investing. Unfortunately, she lost the money, and Kathleen is determined to make it up to her. The Professor wholeheartedly agrees with her and resolves to speak to Rosamond to help make up the money. Kathleen tells him that Rosamond refuses saying, "She says that Louie took the trouble to speak to his banker and to several copper men before he advised Augusta; and that if she doesn't learn her lesson this time, she will do the same thing over again" (127). For Kathleen, this refusal from Rosamond shows her the most disgraceful side of her newly gained wealth—she is not even willing to help Augusta, who has been their sewing woman since they were little girls. This lack of compassion shocks both Kathleen and the Professor, and it draws a stark contrast between the two sisters, since Kathleen is willing to give one hundred dollars and Rosamond, the more wealthy, is not willing to give anything. Though the two sisters grew up together and seemed to have a similar outlook on life, they now have next to nothing in common and stand in stark contrast against one another.

Though Kathleen stands in stark contrast to her sister, she seems to be the Professor's favorite and the one he has fond memories with. The Professor reflects, "For Kathleen he had a special kind of affection." He attributes this attachment to the summer during which Kathleen stayed at home with him instead of going to Colorado because she had whooping cough. Together they had "worked out a satisfactory plan of life together. She was to play in the garden all morning, and was not on any account to disturb him in his study." He even reflects on how Kathleen "took pride in keeping her part of the contract." One of these days in the summer, though, something happened that sticks out to the Professor more than any of the other moments. He remembers, "One day when he



came out of his study at noon, he found her sitting on the third floor stairs, just outside his door, with the arnica bottle in one hand and the fingers of the other puffed up like wee pink sausages. A bee had stung her in the garden, and she had waited half the morning for sympathy." He takes this instance to comment, "she was very independent" (87-8). The reader never hears such fond memories shared about his other daughter, Rosamond, which makes it clear that Kathleen is his favorite; the reason of this preference seems to be Kathleen's respect for his work along with her independence. Though Kathleen could never fill Tom's role as student, she is the person in the family who the Professor feels respects the importance of his research. These fond memories he has for Kathleen highlight her independence, which is seen throughout the novel.

One of the most remarkable ways in which Kathleen's independence is demonstrated throughout the novel is in her relationship with Scott McGreggor, her husband. She is a strong woman in their marriage, yet she still remains a devoted wife with no desire to control or restrict her husband. From the discussions they have, it seems as though their marriage is one built on trust and mutual respect unlike the other relationships in the novel. After a family dinner, Kathleen and Scott drive home and share this conversation:

"Kitty," said Scott as they were driving home that night, Kathleen in the driver's seat beside him, "that silver bracelet Louie spoke of was one of Tom's trinkets, wasn't it? Do you suppose she has some feeling for him still under all this pomposity?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. But, oh, Scott, I do love you very much!" she cried vehemently.

He pinched off his driving-glove between his knees and snuggled his hand over hers, inside her muff. "Sure?" he muttered.

"Yes, I *do!*" she said fiercely, squeezing his knuckles together with all her might.

"Awful nice of you to have told me all about it at the start, Kitty. Most girls wouldn't have thought it necessary. I'm the only one who knows, ain't I?"

"The only one who has ever known."

"And I'm just the one another girl wouldn't have told. Why did you, Kit?"

"I don't know. I suppose even then I must have had a feeling that you were the real one." Her head dropped on his shoulder. "You know you *are* the real one, don't you?"

"I guess!" (108-9).

This moment provides readers with a snapshot of the relationship between Kathleen and Scott and demonstrates the trust they have in one another. As they discuss Rosamond and Louie briefly, they move into their own relationship, alluding to a secret that has been kept between them. This secret is never revealed, but it is implied that it has to do with Tom somehow; readers are also aware that Kathleen was taken with Tom and the fanciful stories he would tell of his adventures. Their discussion remains positive and loving, though, because Scott does not feel superior to his wife or feel as though it is his responsibility to control her. Due to this representation of Kathleen, the reader can begin to understand the vital, strong role the women in the novel play even though they are not

valued by St. Peter. Scott and Kathleen are in a seemingly successful marriage, and their conversations demonstrate this mutual respect.

In addition to their mutual respect for one another, Kathleen is shown as being supportive and encouraging in Scott's career. Scott and Kathleen's relationship blossomed quickly when they first fell in love, and this worried the Professor. He refrained from speaking against it, though, because he knew Scott did not have a job that would allow him to support a wife. This barrier was soon destroyed when Scott secured a position at a newspaper writing humorous editorials. Scott grows to hate this position, but he is stuck writing because he is married. Even though this might be seen as a burden on their relationship, Scott does not resent Kathleen, as the Professor resents his wife, for the toll she has taken on his career. In fact, Scott even allows Kathleen to participate in his work, as she is often reminding him of his need to work. One evening, after a dinner with the family, Kathleen reminds Scott, "Remember, we are leaving early, Scott," said Kathleen. "You have to finish your editorial to-night." (45). This moment demonstrates the ways in which Scott relies on Kathleen to help him with his career, and this is necessary because she is the cause for his taking the job. Kathleen sees the benefits that Scott's job have brought them, and she tries her best to help him feel supported in his career. As a result, much of the tension that exists between the other couples is eliminated.

This is how Kathleen stands out above the rest of the characters. She is confident and strong in her position as a wife, and her husband respects her. By not being limited by social bounds and obligations, Kathleen presents the idea of a woman who is valued and seen as equal, if not more valued than her husband. Though Kathleen is occasionally brought down by her jealousy of her sister, it is only through comparison and the

boastfulness of Rosamond that these feelings are brought about. On the whole, Kathleen represents a strong woman who takes center stage in her relationships and in the novel as an exemplary woman.

## Chapter 5: Augusta

Even though the Professor mostly exhibits contempt for the women in his life, Augusta stands as the one woman he sees as strong, independent, and capable. Augusta saves the Professor when he is alone and resigned to ending his life, and she possesses the ability to somehow relate to the Professor even though she is female. All of the other women the Professor deals with exasperate him, yet Augusta is somehow exempt from this judgment. St. Peter even permits her to share his sacred study with him when no one else is allowed to disturb him.

Augusta's nature somewhat separates her from the other women in the novel, yet she is still not entirely respected by St. Peter. Even though he allows her some liberty not given to his wife and daughters, his beliefs about Augusta and her desires show a prejudice towards her which is demeaning. This inability to understand a woman whom he does not despise, and, in fact, seems to vaguely love, shows his general bias against women as a whole.

Each of the women in *The Professor's House* are given a physical description which categorizes them. Augusta is said to have "large slow hands" and she is "tall, large-boned, flat and stiff, with a plain, solid face, and brown eyes not destitute of fun" (24). Her large hands are also described as clumsy as the Professor tries to imagine how Augusta could sew so well with them. This description of her has led scholars to believe that Augusta is a character who somehow crosses gender barriers, becoming androgynous. This androgyny allows Augusta to work in a unique role in the novel: "as a covert example of the potentially transformative power of female artistry" (Baker 254). As the female artist in the novel, contrasted with St. Peter as the artist, Augusta is

allowed to cross some of the barriers the other females are kept from encroaching on. Her position in the house allows her access to St. Peter's sacred attic study, and as a result, she becomes the one woman he truly allows a connection with.

This connection, however, is not only related to Augusta's requiring the use of his study for her sewing room because the house lacks the necessary space for an office and sewing room, but they are connected through something deeper because their relationship continues after she has moved her materials into the new house. A large part of the relationship between the two is that Augusta does not behave in the same way the other female characters do. For example, "the other female women in the novel . . . are all openly obsessed with money in various ways, [but] Augusta is both ignorant about it and too proud to discuss it" (Baker 264). Augusta's lack of materialism is refreshing to St. Peter, so she is allowed certain liberties the other females in the Professor's life do not. Cather frequently included women in her novels who seemed to have some masculine aspects, and she also "frequently equates femininity with capitalist consumption" (Nealon 31-2). As a result of her lack of materialism, Augusta is able to "fuse the masculine and feminine" because of her material ignorance (Baker 266).

Augusta's feminine and masculine traits allow her one particular liberty that the other women in the novel rarely take advantage of: being able to frequently, and without permission, go up to the Professor's study. In fact, Anne Baker even asserts that Augusta is the only one who comfortably ascends and descends the stairs because the Professor himself sees leaving his study as a dangerous journey into the feminine and domestic household (264). This ability of Augusta's allows her to have a closer relationship with St. Peter in which they share aspects of their lives with one another.

Augusta, though not directly part of St. Peter's family, has a unique relationship with the Professor in which they can converse lightly and enjoy their conversations. At one point, St. Peter reflects after talking to Augusta and coming up to his study that it was "as though Augusta had been there and brightened it up for him" (99). Her ability to bring enjoyment into the Professor's life does not end in minor instances like this. After Augusta saves the Professor from asphyxiation, he reflects that all the other women in his life have gone, but Augusta alone remains; he even thinks about "a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (281). Other scholars note that the Professor even reflects, "he would rather have Augusta with him than anyone he could think of" (Wallace 154). This opinion of his demonstrates the close relationship between the Professor and the sewing woman.

This mutual relationship of equality is demonstrated in a few different ways during the novel. In several of their conversations, Augusta "gently rebukes his easy assumption of democratic camaraderie, reminding him specifically of her class difference and the social role of 'people in your station'" (Swift 185). This awareness of hers as to the difference between St. Peter and herself resides only with Augusta as the Professor frequently seems to assume they are equal, though this is not the case. St. Peter ignores the social inequality of their relationship and focuses instead on how their manuscripts and sewing patterns have been mixed together throughout the years. As Augusta begins to retrieve her patterns to move to the new house, a description of the mingling work is given:

At one end of the upholstered box were piles of note-books and bundles of manuscript tied up in square packages with mason's cord. At the other end

were many little rolls of patterns, cut out of newspapers and tied with bits of ribbon, gingham, silk, georgette; notched charts which followed the changing stature and figures of the Misses St. Peter from early childhood to womanhood. In the middle of the box, patterns and manuscripts interpenetrated. (23)

This mixing of their work shows the closeness of their relationship, and according to Michael Leddy it is the only way in which "Cather can present the possibility of genuine union" (192). Their mutual respect for one another, demonstrated when the Professor leaves the window open when he smokes and when Augusta picks up her sewing scraps, is clearly one of the only pure unions remaining at the end of the novel. This is why Augusta remains of interest because she is the one woman who is able to even get the Professor to relate to another human being. Without her character and relationship with St. Peter, the Professor would likely have disappeared into the oblivion into which he was sinking.

Though Augusta and St. Peter do share a close bond with each other, St. Peter is relatively ignorant of any desire that Augusta has for her life. Believing that she is simply another woman in his life, St. Peter does not see that Augusta might entertain ambitions just as he does. Stuart Burrows, in his article "Losing the Whole in the Parts: Identity in *The Professor's House*," argues that St. Peter's surprise regarding Augusta's initial plans for her life shows his inability to relate to the other people around him. Burrows focuses on the moment when St. Peter discovers that Augusta never intended to spend her life as a sewing woman for the St. Peters to claim, "St. Peter cannot conceive that Augusta might have a life of her own" (27). St. Peter's response to Augusta in this moment shows



his inability to recognize other people, in this case a woman, as having something greater in life she would have liked to do. Even Augusta, who is almost regarded as an equal to St. Peter is not spared from his self-absorption. If he is not capable of seeing the woman he most regards as equal as having ambitions which he cannot understand, then how is he expected to handle the dreams of his wife and daughters. At the end of the novel, St. Peter is still unable to reconcile himself to being happy with the lot he has in life because he is unable to understand the desires of those closest to him. Augusta's ambitions are so shocking to him, yet they reveal for the reader one of the true reasons why Professor St. Peter finds himself dissatisfied: he can think of no one having equal claims to their ambitions as he does to his own.

The end of the novel presents an interesting scene where St. Peter lies in his study, which is slowly filling with gas, and he finds himself struggling to find a desire to continue with his life. At this moment in the novel, Augusta's strength becomes something she is to be praised and valued for. Elsa Nettels analyzes this scene and concludes:

In *The Professor's House* a woman is literally the salvation of the male protagonist. When St. Peter, feeling himself mortally oppressed by a life from which all joy has gone, allows himself to lie in his gas-filled attic study until he is unable to open the window blown shut in a storm, he is found by the sewing woman Augusta, who revives him and restores him to acceptance of a diminished life. (145)

Nettels finds that Augusta's role in this moment is to save the Professor and also help him reconcile the life he so desires and the life he has. When he has been fully helped by

Augusta, he realizes that he will no longer have the same strong ambitions about life anymore, but he does take comfort in the fact that "At least, he felt the ground under his feet" (283). Though Augusta is unable to entirely rehabilitate the Professor, she is able to help him prepare for the rest of his life. This is something that he is not capable of doing himself, and his musings of the life he missed out on certainly harmed his resolution on life. In this way, the end of the novel demonstrates the strength of the sewing woman in comparison to the apathy of the scholar and writer. The final words of the novel leave the reader admiring Augusta and doubting St. Peter and his ability to face the life ahead of him regardless of his own professions of certainty because the readers have seen his weakness.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Professor, though, is an entirely different story than his wife, daughters, and seamstress. While the women in his life charge ahead and grow, all St. Peter wants is the quiet solitude Tom had when he lived on the mesa. In the novel, the narrator describes that St. Peter “used to feel that if his wife could but lie in the same coffin with him, his body would not be so insensible that the nearness of hers would not give it comfort. But now he thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation from every form of effort. It was the Truth” (272). His search for solitude, for the opportunity to be entirely alone is realized when Lillian, Rosamond, and Louie travel to Europe without him; he intentionally remained at home where he could be by himself. When they are on their way home, though, he tells himself over and over, “there must be some way in which a man who had always tried to live up to his responsibilities could, when the hour of desperation came, avoid meeting his own family” (274). He wants to avoid his family and not have to interact with them anymore, and this choice demonstrates his immaturity regarding his responsibilities. Unlike the women in his life, the Professor cannot move beyond the dreams of independence of his boyhood.

He reflects, realizing his family will be coming home from Europe soon, “He could not live with his family again—not even with Lillian. Especially not with Lillian!” (274). St. Peter, in his months alone, has decided that he can no longer fulfill the role of husband and father—he must live a solitary life away from everyone, even the wife he once loved so dearly. He thinks, “Surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love—if once one has ever fallen in. Falling out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family” (275). His love for

his wife has vanished, fallen away, and this results in his removing himself from society as a whole. Writing a memoir on Tom Outland has forced the Professor to reconcile his present with the future he had once hoped for himself. Seeing this discord, he recollects all the moments in his life, viewing them in a different light.

This new view on his present life is depressing, though, because he now views his family as a tragic series of events which have prevented him from succeeding in the areas he wishes he could have discovered success in. Feeling as though no one needs him anymore, St. Peter regresses into the immature boy he once was who wanted to explore and leave civilization behind. When he is done thinking, he realizes that “He didn’t, on being quite honest with himself, feel any obligations toward his family. Lillian had had the best years of his life, nearly thirty, and joyful years they had been, nothing could ever change that. But they were gone” (281). He sees the happy years of his life slipping away, and he gives up. A midlife crisis of empty nesting has struck St. Peter, and he does not fight for his family; instead, he spends time wishing his life had been different.

He thinks back on his life, remembering only what he gave up for his marriage and family. All of his life has been merely “catching at handholds” where “because there was Lillian, there must be a marriage and a salary. Because there was marriage, there were children. Because there were children, and fervour in the blood and brain, books were born as well as daughters” (264-5). Every choice, every moment in his life has revolved around his marrying Lillian, something he now almost seems to regret. His life choices resulted in a life he is dissatisfied with, yet he does not take ownership for his decisions. Instead, the Professor blames life as a whole—the responsibilities that led to the result he is so unhappy with, yet he should take responsibility for his choices and

make the changes he needs to if he believes that is the right thing to do. Godfrey St. Peter, though, is unable to do anything but to continue existing.

In the end of the novel, when he has all these moments of doubt and disillusionment, St. Peter becomes a character who readers may struggle to connect with. Though he admires Tom for his adventurous spirit and his manly, independent nature, St. Peter falls short of this ideal. He dreams of being able to be on the mesa with Tom, thinking his life would have been perfect had he never met Lillian and had been free to explore uncharted land, yet this is not the case. What he misses is Tom's end. Tom explored the mesa, and he learned a great deal from his adventures, yet Tom still lost everything when Roddy sold the artifacts to someone who was just shipping them off to be sold illegally overseas. The ideal St. Peter reaches for is unattainable, and he mocks all those who do not resist growing as their lives change. The Professor sees the changes in Lillian, Rosamond, and Kathleen as regressions, but in reality that have progressed at a rate with society that he is unable to follow. Their progression has left him behind, and the divide that now separates him from his family prevents him from being able to relate to his family, resulting in his inability to be with them anymore.

The Professor's final thought in the novel reveals the change he has gone through and the difference this will mean for his family. He realizes,

His temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial. He had let something go—and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably. He doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to; they would be too happily preoccupied with their own

affairs. If his apathy hurt them, they could not possibly be so much hurt as he had been already. At least he felt the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future. (282-3).

In these final moments of the novel, the Professor adapts to his future and reconciles himself to being the family man; however, he remains apathetic to his life. Instead of finding happiness and joy in his future life with his family, he decides to live his life as he has been living it and be with his family, regardless of his true thoughts about them. He also demonstrates his disdain for his family in that he believes them incapable of recognizing this alteration in his person; he believes them ignorant and unobservant. His new outlook on life demonstrates his weakness in comparison to Rosamond, Lillian, Kathleen, and Augusta since each of these women whom he despises to different degrees can accept the future. Though the Professor sees the women as weak and materialistic, they are strong women who achieve their dreams in life—something he cannot do.

Throughout much of Cather's fiction, readers have the opportunity to read about the differences between men and women in a consumerist culture. *The Professor's House* is a brilliant example of this because of how it demonstrates St. Peter's inability to grow and change with society and with his family. Unable to evolve, the Professor sees his family as the issue and resents them for causing the life he has. This relationship between men and women is also seen in some of Cather's other novels including *A Lost Lady*, which explores the ways in which a dependent relationship between men and women, married and not, can cause discord and strife. When St. Peter and Niel blame the women in their lives for their dissatisfaction in life, they become tied to a childhood past to which

they can never return. This blame then results in a cynical view of women that is not representative of the women themselves. Lillian, Rosamond, and Kathleen are not the terrible women the Professor sees them as, but he has lost his perspective and can see them in no other light. Augusta differs slightly in that she remains unchanged to the Professor, but this likely has much to do with her strength and masculine features—the Professor is able to see her as a companion more than as a woman. Regardless of Augusta's unique position, St. Peter still sees women as materialistic, needy, changeable people who he no longer can see spending time with. In the end, however, he somehow reconciles himself to his dissatisfaction and reality of his future with his family. Though he can face his future “with fortitude” (283), he remains apathetic in the face of all change.

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