

# The Composing, Editing, and Publication of Willa Cather's *Obscure Destinies* Stories

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In 1998, Willa Cather's 1932 short story collection *Obscure Destinies* appeared as the fourth volume of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition (WCSE). As the editors would explain in an essay reflecting on the "The Issue of Authority in a Scholarly Edition," Cather "habitually sought to exert her authority over the full process governing the preparation and presentation of her novels: from drafting and revising the text to shaping the physical appearance of the published books."<sup>1</sup> In line with that sense of Cather's authority, the WCSE chose and continues to choose the first edition of each work as published in book form as copy text. *Obscure Destinies* was the first volume for which the WCSE had access to Cather's working typescripts, and they analyzed variants between the published texts and the typescripts and documented them in the textual apparatus. Hypothetically, one should be able to use the apparatus to reconstruct these typescripts analyzed by the editors, but as John Bryant argues in *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*, copy-text critical editions like the WCSE "inevitably marginalize[]" evidence of textual fluidity by placing the apparatus at the back of the book.<sup>2</sup> As Bryant further argues, the nature and placement of such apparatuses also mute the temporal and spatial aspects of revision, which "occupies space and reflects the passage of time . . . reveals options and choices . . . [and] has direction."<sup>3</sup>

Take, for example, the excerpt of the WCSE's "historical collation" for "Old Mrs. Harris," the second *Obscure Destinies* story, in Figure 1, which "records all substantive and quasi-substantive variants between the copy-text and the texts of other authorial editions . . . which have been rejected in establishing the text of

the present edition. The reading of the Cather Edition appears to the left of the bracket; to the right of the bracket appear the variant reading(s) and source(s).<sup>4</sup> The format of this apparatus privileges Cather's intention as realized in the first book edition of each story: every listed item begins with the emended copy text, while the "rejected" variant appears after the bracket ("OMHa" designates an early edited typescript of the story). Put another way, language from an early typescript appears after the language from the first edition book text. How would one use this list and the emended copy text to reconstruct a textual witness that preceded the first edition book text?

HISTORICAL COLLATION		
69.17	stood against] against	OMHa
69.18	children's caps] caps	OMHa
69.19	coats. There was a] coats, a	OMHa
69.20-21	A corner of the room] One corner	OMHa
69.25-70.1	splint-bottom] split-bottom	OMH

Figure 1: An excerpt from the "Historical Collation" of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *Obscure Destinies*. The excerpt documents rejected variants for the paragraph of "Old Mrs. Harris" that appears in Figure 4.

The WCSE aims to provide "information about [Cather's] revisions" in order to "invite[] textual analyses and interpretations that will bring us closer to understanding her creative process."<sup>5</sup> However, as Charles L. Ross argues in relation to the Cambridge Edition of D. H. Lawrence, print scholarly editions "fix" texts "in ways that reduce the variety of their voices" and "fail to liberate the multiple voices of textuality," including by masking collaborators' voices.<sup>6</sup> The WCSE historical collation does precisely this by failing to parse responsibility for variants between Cather and her editorial collaborator and domestic partner, Edith Lewis. I have previously argued that when Lewis marked revisions on

the extant typescripts of Cather's fiction, she was editing rather than serving as Cather's "amanuensis," as the WCSE has repeatedly claimed.<sup>7</sup> Here, my analysis of Lewis and Cather's collaborative editing of the *Obscure Destinies* stories is a case study in a kind of analysis of Cather's creative process the WCSE apparatus does not support. Furthermore, a wealth of additional material documenting the composition, editing, and publication of *Obscure Destinies* has emerged since 1998, namely additional working typescripts and many letters to and from Cather, including correspondence with her publishers.<sup>8</sup> These materials make the textual essay and textual apparatus of the WCSE *Obscure Destinies* obsolete even on its own terms.

Indeed, with at least two complete working typescripts now available for each story, the compositional archive for *Obscure Destinies* is one of the most extensive in Cather's oeuvre, enabling a detailed reconstruction of the range, timeline, and complexity of the collaborative effort involved in the editing and publication of the stories. A digital fluid text edition giving readers access to digital surrogates of these documents would best allow readers to trace the creative evolution of Cather's stories, including Lewis's crucial work as editorial collaborator. As Bryant argues, however, a fluid text edition does more than merely provide access—the editor must “manage and display the hydra of revision.” Unlike an eclectic edition, which “construct[s] a text to match an imagined temporalized intention,” a fluid text can “show the sequencing of shifting intentions by various agents.”<sup>9</sup> While I do not undertake that task here, I lay the groundwork for it and alert other scholars to available evidence. First, I describe the typescripts, place them in relation to the published states of each story, and provide examples of Cather and Lewis's editorial contributions. Both women made revisions that were substantive in both the technical and broader senses, so I pause to tease out changes in meanings produced by their revisions, especially Lewis's. Second, I narrate chronologically Cather's composing of the stories, her and Lewis's editing of them, and their movement through the publication process, including the appearance of each of the three stories in popular women's magazines.

Drawing on the typescripts and on letters, I greatly expand and often correct the narrative account provided in the “Textual Essay” of the WCSE *Obscure Destinies*. The subtitle on the first-edition dust jacket of *Obscure Destinies*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., identifies the contents as “three stories of the

American West." In them, Cather returned to childhood memories and Nebraska as a setting, making biographical analysis of their production particularly pressing. Crucially, using new evidence, I locate Cather's fullest creative engagement with "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Two Friends," both of which fictionalize childhood memories, firmly in July, August, and September of 1931, when she and Lewis were vacationing on isolated Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy and when Cather was grappling, at a distance, with her mother's final illness and death.

As James L. W. West III observes, scholarly editors who analyze textual variants "are practicing biography. They are constructing in their minds a conception of the author's creative personality that will undergird all they, as editor, wish to do to the texts."<sup>10</sup> By crediting Lewis's editorial collaboration, I also offer a different version of Cather's "creative personality" than does the WCSE, a version more suited to a fluid text approach. After more than a decade of research on Cather and Lewis's relationship, I am intimately familiar with the handwriting of both women, and as this essay's illustrations demonstrate, their hands are easily distinguishable: Cather's scrawl can frustrate even experienced readers while Lewis's elaborate hand is highly legible. Even though I distinguish between Cather and Lewis's markings, I also demonstrate how their editorial intentions were inextricably intertwined, presenting a fine-grained account of Cather and Lewis's extended and reciprocal process of editorial collaboration, which produced the polished and tightly constructed prose long recognized by readers as Cather's hallmark.

## The Typescripts

To understand why the WCSE had access to some working typescripts and not others, and to place their production in time and space, some background on their disposition is necessary. In her will, Edith Lewis, who survived Cather by twenty-five years, bequeathed "all letters, manuscripts and all other handwritten and typed papers, whether written by me or by any other person" in the 570 Park Avenue apartment in New York City she shared with Cather to Cather's niece Helen Cather Southwick and nephew Charles Cather.<sup>11</sup> An early typescript and the setting copy typescript of "Neighbour Rosicky" and setting copy typescripts of

“Old Mrs. Harris” and “Two Friends” were evidently in the apartment when Lewis died and came into Southwick’s possession. She provided a photocopy of the “Two Friends” setting copy to the WCSE, but she did not share the “Old Mrs. Harris” and “Neighbour Rosicky” typescripts with the editorial team. Now, however, all four typescripts are part of the Philip and Helen Cather Southwick Collection in the Archives and Special Collections of the University Libraries at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

An early typescript of “Old Mrs. Harris” and two early typescripts of “Two Friends” remained in Cather and Lewis’s Grand Manan cottage after their last visit there in 1940 but were removed some time before Edith Lewis transferred the title to the cottage to Helen Cather Southwick and her husband, Phillip, in 1966. The WCSE was provided with photocopies of the “Old Mrs. Harris” typescript and one of the “Two Friends” typescripts. At a 2009 Christie’s auction, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries acquired both “Two Friends” typescripts, which are now part of the synthetic collection of Willa Cather Collected Materials, and the purchaser of the “Old Mrs. Harris” typescript donated it to the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia.<sup>12</sup> I describe the typescripts in the order in which they appear in *Obscure Destinies*, which was also their compositional order.

### “Neighbour Rosicky”

Cather herself typed the earlier version of “Neighbour Rosicky,” a story about the death of a Czech immigrant farmer in 1920s Nebraska. She used a purple ribbon and low-quality nonbond paper and may have also produced one or more carbon copies, but none has surfaced. Cather numbered the pages and made verbal revisions in pen, while Edith Lewis edited in pencil. Cather evidently typed portions separately and merged them into one document, sometimes with the aid of scissors and glue: for example, pages 24 and 27 are made of pasted fragments of two different typed pages, and a sentence in Cather’s hand was spliced into another typed page. Furthermore, Cather inked in page numbers for section IV in a separate sequence but later renumbered them in pencil.

The time frame during which Cather began work on this story is well established. John Sadilek, husband of Cather's friend Anna Pavelka Sadilek, was the prototype for Anton Rosicky, but the death of Cather's father in March 1928 motivated her to write the story. The WCSE suggests Cather's composing "could have been begun in the Grosvenor Hotel [where Cather and Lewis shared quarters from 1927 to 1932] in the spring of [1928], begun at Cather's new cottage on Grand Manan during the summer and finished in New York, or written entirely during the fall at the Grosvenor."<sup>13</sup> Additionally she might have begun or continued composing during her spring 1929 visit to her invalid mother in Pasadena, California (of which more below)—the relatively clean state of the typescript suggests that Cather had already drafted and redrafted the story by hand, which she could have done anywhere. That year, 1929, also marked the second summer Cather and Lewis occupied their own cottage on Grand Manan rather than renting, allowing Cather to leave a typewriter there, and she produced her first typed letter from Grand Manan on July 23, 1929, asking Manley Aaron, secretary to her publisher, Alfred Knopf, to send her typing and carbon paper.<sup>14</sup> The typewriter font and purple ribbon of this letter match the early ribbon copy typescripts of the other two *Obscure Destinies* stories, which Cather definitely typed on Grand Manan, and she and Lewis remained on the island through October in 1929.<sup>15</sup> Thus Cather may have typed and she and Lewis may have revised "Rosicky" there between late July and October 1929.

This typescript documents language and characterization lost through revision before magazine publication, as well as some additions. Early in the story, when the narrator describes Rosicky's family during a visit by family physician Dr. Burleigh, Cather initially described the actions of Rosicky's sons and wife, Mary Rosicky, as follows: "The boys giggled, and so did Mary. She sat and watched the Doctor devour his biscuit and sausage, too much excited to eat anything herself." Cather lined out "giggled" and substituted "laughed" (perhaps giggling seemed inappropriate for an adult woman); in the second sentence she lined out "sat and," leaving Mary simply watching. Cather's economizing and reshaping of her characterization of Mary continued. "If Mary liked people at all," she typed, "she liked them with her heart and her hands and her blood, felt physical pleasure in the sight of them, personal exultation in any good fortune that came to them." Cather lined out all words between "she" and "felt physical pleasure" (5).<sup>16</sup> In section III

in an account of Rosicky's urban experiences before he became a Nebraska farmer, Cather had him reflect that his time living in London "had left a sore spot in his mind that wouldn't bear touching. He had got away from cage of dirt and poverty an accident that was almost a mire miracle." Cather lined out this nearly incoherent and mistake-filled sentence and moved Rosicky directly to his arrival at New York's Castle Garden (14).

Lewis made similar revisions. In section II, when Rosicky speaks to Pearl, the clerk at the farm-implements store, he says, "You know Polly. How much my bill, Miss Pearl?" Lewis inserted a clarification about Polly, later a key character: "that married my Rudolph" (8). When on his way home Rosicky comes to the graveyard on the edge of his property, Cather first had him reflect, "A man could lie down in the long grass and see the complete dome of the sky over him"—Lewis replaced "dome" with "arch" (9). In section IV, Rosicky takes the family car to the farm of his son Rudolph and Polly, his American-born wife. First, however, his young adult sons still living at home discuss their plans to drive into town "early that evening, so they would have an hour or so to look around the stores at Christmas things before the show." Carefully reshaping the final clause by lining out words and inserting new ones, Lewis produced "so that they would have an hour or so to see the Christmas things in the stores before the show began" (18).

When Cather depicts Rosicky speaking with his family and no "American" present, he is implicitly speaking Czech. Typing the opening section, Cather consistently presented Rosicky's speech as colloquial and used eye dialect to signal that he speaks accented English in Dr. Burleigh's presence. In the remainder of the unrevised typing Cather vacillated in styling Rosicky's dialogue, so Lewis restyled it for internal consistency. Cather initially had Rosicky explain why he gave Rudolph their family car to take Polly into town as follows: "Listen, boys; Polly isn't looking very well. I don't like to see anybody looking sad." Lewis carefully transformed Rosicky's speech into his recognizable vernacular established earlier in the story: "Polly ain't looking so good. I don't like to see nobody looking sad" (18).

Sometimes both Cather and Lewis worked over a sentence. Reproducing Rosicky's urban memories, Cather typed, "All those blank buildings, without the stream of life pouring through them, were somehow like empty jails. It struck Rosicky that that was the trouble with big cities; that they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground." Cather crossed

out the initial "All," indicated the capitalization of "those," and lined out "that" after the semicolon, while Lewis crossed out "somehow" and changed the second "that" to "this." Together they produced two sentences further refined later: "Those blank buildings, without the stream of life pouring through them, were like empty jails. It struck Rosicky that this was the trouble with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground" (16).

Sarah Bloom, Cather's secretary, evidently produced the second typescript of "Neighbour Rosicky," a carbon copy on a nonbond but heavier-weight paper than Cather's edited typescript. Bloom's unrevised typing matches precisely the revised state of Cather's typescript and closely matches the story as serialized in the *Woman's Home Companion*. Cather likely provided the magazine with the clean ribbon copy from Bloom's typing (which has not been located), and then she and Lewis revised the carbon copy. Ink density and color of markings, each made in pen, vary sharply from faded brown black to distinctly black, and both women also edited in pencil, suggesting that each edited in pen at least twice and in pencil at least once, for a total of six distinct rounds of editing (below I discuss additional markings identifying this document as setting copy for *Obscure Destinies*). Cather and Lewis's revisions on this previously unknown typescript account for most, but not all, of the variants between the magazine text and the book text—some additional changes took place at the proof stage (the proofs have not been located).

In section II of the unrevised state of Bloom's typing, Rosicky leaves the doctor's office in town: "Then he went into the general merchandise store next door and stood about until the pretty girl with the shaved eyebrows, who always waited on him, was free." In pencil Cather changed "store" to "place" while in pen Lewis revised "shaved" to "plucked" (9).<sup>17</sup> Cather and Lewis similarly coedited a later two-sentence sequence (Figure 2). In section III of the unrevised typing and magazine text, the narrator offers this detail of Rosicky's New York City life: "He was an habitual standee at the Opera on Saturday nights. He could get in for a dollar." In pencil Lewis revised the first sentence to "He often stood through an Opera on Saturday nights," while Cather, also in pencil, revised the second to "He could get standing room for a dollar" (17). It is not clear who revised first. Lewis revised another sentence in two stages but by herself. Describing the harmony between Mary and Anton Rosicky, the unrevised typing noted, "Without discussing it much they had been at one accord not to hurry though life and scrimp



and save.” In pen, Lewis lined out the initial clause and capitalized “They”—if Mary and Anton didn’t discuss it, why discuss the fact that they didn’t discuss it? In pencil, she substituted “not to be always scrimping and saving” for “and scrimp and save” (15).

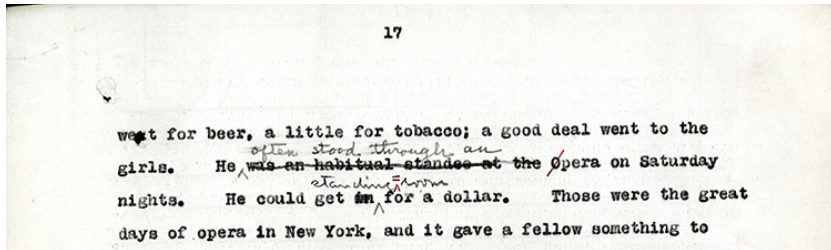


Figure 2: Willa Cather and Edith Lewis coediting two sentences from the setting copy typescript of “Neighbour Rosicky.” Both Lewis and Cather’s edits are in pencil; the red pen corrections are by the Knopf copyeditor. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Lewis made the most substantial changes. In the unrevised typing the narrator describes Mary Rosicky’s actions during her conversation with her husband about his medical appointment with Dr. Burleigh (Figure 3): “Mary took the twisted cake covered with poppy seeds out of the oven, lightly broke it up with her hands, and sat down opposite him.” Someone decisively penciled through the middle of the sentence from “the” through “hands,” and in dark black ink Lewis used a caret to insert the following: “out of the oven a pan of Kolaches stuffed with apricots, examined them anxiously to see whether they had got too dry, put them beside his plate” (12) (the Knopf copyeditor later added a line clarifying the long insertion, which spilled over into the margin). Lewis made many substantive changes, but this one stands out in an already thoroughly revised text needing relatively light editing. Her revision eliminates duplication between “Neighbour Rosicky” and “Old Mrs. Harris,” a story based very closely on Cather’s own family’s experiences in late nineteenth-century Nebraska, suggesting that Lewis made this revision as she and Cather were crafting the three stories into *Obscure Destinies* as a collection. In “Old Mrs. Harris,” Cather rechristened the Cather family the Templetons and transformed her Nebraska hometown into Skyline,

Colorado. In the story's opening, Mrs. Rosen, the Templeton family's cultured German Jewish neighbor, takes a "symmetrically plaited coffee-cake, beautifully browned, delicately peppered over with poppy seeds, with sugary margins about the twists" over to "Grandma Harris," Mrs. Templeton's mother.<sup>18</sup> Both Bohemian and German immigrants baked with poppy seeds, but the apricot filling and specification of Kolaches (later corrected to kolache) differentiates Mrs. Rosicky's cake from Mrs. Rosen's, and Mary's anxiety about her coffee cake subtly suggests her anxiety about her husband's health.

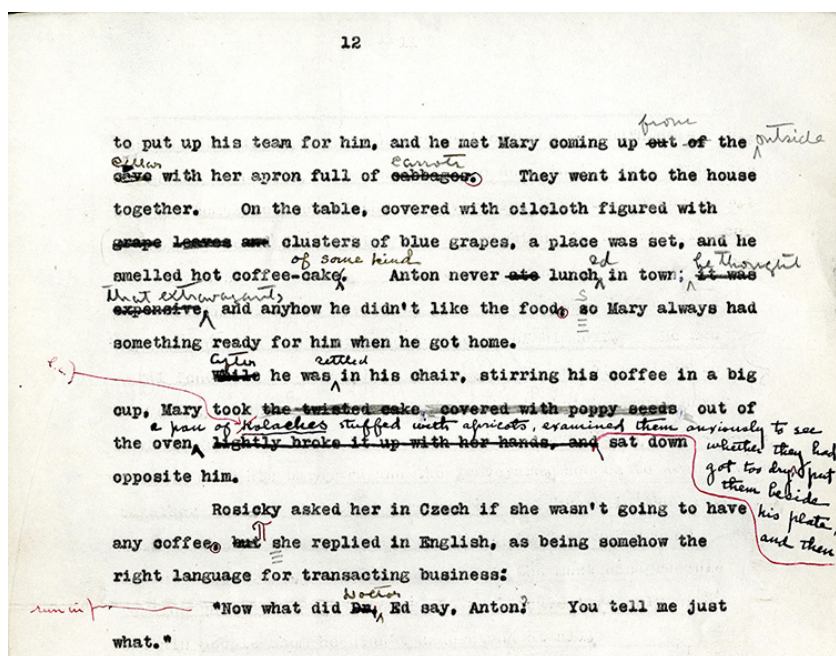


Figure 3: A significant change to "Neighbour Rosicky" made by Edith Lewis in black pen. Also visible are smaller changes in black pen by Willa Cather and corrections and formatting instructions in red pen by the Knopf copyeditor. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

## “Old Mrs. Harris”

Cather typed all elements of the early “Old Mrs. Harris” typescript on bond paper featuring “Whiting’s Pure Linen” and “Citadel Bond” watermarks. The WCSE textual analysis establishes that this document incorporates “two different sets of pages to produce the typescript in its present form.” The different watermarks—visible on the original but not on the WCSE’s photocopy—support this conclusion; the purple typewriter ribbon Cather used to produce both sets of pages, similarly undetectable in photocopy, locates her typing on Grand Manan. The WCSE describes the complete document in detail, and the historical collation parses its difference from later published versions. However, even though a page of the typescript appears as an illustration with a caption acknowledging markings by both Lewis and Cather, the textual essay states flatly that “substantive variants are in [Cather’s] hand.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, both Lewis and Cather marked corrections and revisions from minor to substantial throughout, Lewis in pencil and Cather in both pencil and pen.

Everything about this typescript—the number of pages consisting of fragments of two typings pasted together, the quantity of corrections and revisions—suggests that it memorializes the story at an earlier, less finished stage than the early “Neighbor Rosicky” typescript. It resembles the “Rosicky” typescript, however, in that Cather and Lewis both made many changes to single words or short phrases. Describing Mrs. Harris as she readies for the day by tidying up her makeshift bedroom, Cather typed “She folded the heavy quilts” but later changed the verb to “smoothed” (14).<sup>20</sup> As the narrator describes the conditions under which Mrs. Rosen let Vickie Templeton, a teenaged girl and the character for whom Willa Cather herself served as prototype, spend the afternoon reading in her parlor, Cather changed “with the blind up only a tiny way” to “a little way” (18). Lewis muted the dialect speech of Mrs. Rosen throughout. Rather than putting “de tray” on a little chair between herself and Grandma Harris, Lewis substituted “my tray” (2). On the other hand, when Mandy, a live-in servant who moved to Colorado with the Templeton family from the South, addresses the title character, Cather had inconsistently styled the honorific “Misses” by which Mandy addresses

her. Lewis carefully restyled Mandy's speech so she consistently addresses her as "Miz' Harris."

Both Cather and Lewis also made more substantial changes, but Lewis made some of the most striking. When Mrs. Rosen buys a new cloak, Vickie finds it captivating and wordlessly expresses her pleasure by following it with her eyes. When Mrs. Rosen shows the cloak to her husband, he says, "But it's not a cloak, it's an air from *Rigoletto*!" From Mrs. Rosen's point of view the narrator adds, "So it was,—but why should Vickie be so delighted by it?" Lewis penciled out Mr. Rosen's words and presented them afresh: "Where did you get that?—out of *Rigoletto*?" She took two turns at Mrs. Rosen's reflections, first crossing out "delighted" and substituting "charmed," and then returning to and crossing out both her own inserted word and the entire typed sentence, writing above the line, "It looked like that—but how could Vickie know?" (21). Lewis also substituted shorter and subtler sentences or phrases for long ones reflecting characters' internal thoughts, or she deleted them entirely. As discussed below, Cather wrote and both Cather and Lewis were editing this story when Virginia Cather, the prototype for Victoria Templeton, was still alive, so it was important to mute and soften internal family conflicts based on conflicts in Willa Cather's own family. When Mrs. Harris realizes she is dying, she is grateful that her son-in-law (based on Cather's father) is absent:

Appearance had to be kept up when there was a man in the house; and he might have taken it into his head to send for the doctor. No words could tell the dread she had of lying helpless on this lounge and being beholden to a family where she always paid her way. And that was not to be. The Lord would take her, and she need ask nothing of anybody. The Lord is my shepherd, she whispered gratefully. (69)

If there are no words, why would she think them? Lewis drew a pencil line through the three sentences beginning "No words" and ending before the quotation from the Twenty-Third Psalm, added a clause to the first sentence about what would have happened if Mr. Templeton had called the doctor ("and stir everybody up"), and finally crafted a brief, less judgmental thought for Grandmother Harris before she murmurs the Bible passage: "Now everything would be so peaceful."

Determining which woman drew a pencil line through typed words is difficult, even impossible, although in the example above, the context of Lewis's verbal revisions makes the case for her pencil clear. The edited typescript suggests, however, that Cather and Lewis felt responsible to the story, the polish and precision of its language and the integrity of its characters, rather than feeling individually possessive about words. In particular, sentences they both revised in several stages suggest they valued the results produced when they both grappled with the subtleties of language. When Mrs. Rosen wonders why the twin Templeton boys attend her yard well but don't maintain their own, Cather had Mrs. Rosen wonder why they did not "extermin-te the messy 'flower bed'" that really wasn't one. Cather penciled out the mistyped "exterminate" and substituted "obliterate," but Lewis then obliterated "obliterate" and inserted the more precise "dig up" (26). Lewis even restored Cather to her own original word choices, such as when the narrator explains that "Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, because they belonged to no church, contributed to the support of all" and Cather penciled out "church" and substituted "denomination," but Lewis then crossed out "denomination" and reinserted "church" (27).

They took particular care revising passages describing Mrs. Harris's actions and circumstances. Describing "Grandma's" room next to the kitchen where Mrs. Rosen brings her coffee cake, Cather initially supplied Mrs. Rosen's visual survey in a rambling series of clauses after a colon (Figure 4):

a hideous, cluttered room, furnished with a rocking horse, a sewing machine, an empty baby-buggy, a walnut table against a blind window piled high with old magazines and tattered books and caps and coats, a washstand (two washstands, if you counted the oilcloth covered box as one). One corner was curtained off with some black and red striped cotton goods for a clothes closet. (4)

The verbal jumble reflects the state of the room but not the order and precision of Grandmother Harris's nearly invisible life lived in it. Either Cather or Lewis first decided to create a sentence incorporating the words after the colon and ending at "baby buggy," capitalizing "A" before walnut table. Cather then supplied the necessary verb (it "stood against" the window). Next Lewis inserted commas in the succeeding list of items piled high and the modifier "children's" before "caps and

coats." Cather then gave the washstands their own sentence by inserting "There was" and supplying the missing closing parenthesis. With the elements of the scene broken up, Lewis tweaked the final sentence so that "A corner *of the room* was curtained off" (emphasis added). The historical collation in Figure 1 encompasses these revisions but does not parse responsibility for variants between Lewis and Cather. One would be hard pressed to use the collation to sequence these changes because the sequence emerges out of the back-and-forth between two editors.

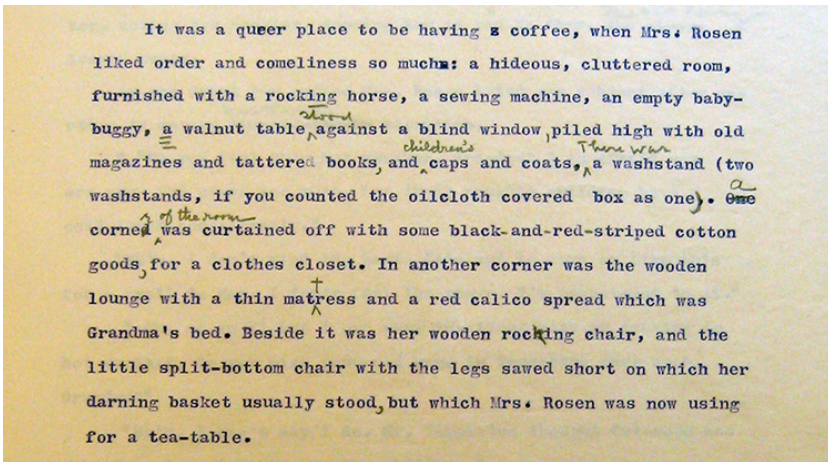


Figure 4: Willa Cather and Edith Lewis coediting a paragraph from the opening section of the early typescript of "Old Mrs. Harris." Both women used pencil. Papers of Willa Cather, 1899–1949, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

Cather typed no title on the first page but inked and underlined three times at the top "Old Mrs. Harris." Having typed no page numbers, she added them at the top of each page. Page numbers from a different sequence are penciled sporadically in the margins. The previously unknown setting copy typescript (described next) proves correct a WCSE hypothesis about these numbers—when Bloom produced a fresh typing based on the revised text of Cather's typing, she marked the corresponding page numbers from her fresh typing to keep her place when her work was interrupted.<sup>21</sup>

Only the carbon of Bloom's typing—on paper watermarked "Eton Bond"—is extant; like the carbon of Bloom's typing of "Neighbour Rosicky" it served

as setting copy for *Obscure Destinies*. Lewis's black ink revisions predominate over Cather's black ink and pencil changes. Again, both women made small, precise changes. Lewis changed Mrs. Harris's dress in the opening of the story form "black calico" to "brown," the "comfortable chairs" in the Templeton parlor to "easy chairs," and the back of Mrs. Harris's hand Mrs. Rosen kisses from "purple-spotted" to "purple-veined" (2/47, 27/71, 62/106).<sup>22</sup> Cather changed the "unuttered rule that Grandmother was not to receive visitors alone" to an "understood rule" and fine-tuned some verbs. While the women of Skyline originally "wouldn't let their children play with" the town laundress's children, Cather softened it to "didn't like" them "to play" with the children of a woman of questionable sexual morality (10/54, 31/75).

Yet again, Lewis made many of the most substantial changes, softening characterization and muting characters' internal thoughts. Cather had characterized Mr. Rosen as "a reflective, unambitious Jew, who was not particular as to how he made his living if he had a great deal of time to read philosophy"—Lewis substituted the softer and more precise "didn't mind keeping a clothing-store in a little Western town, so long as" in the dependent clause (19/63) (the change from "a Jew" to "a man" happened at the proof stage). When Mr. Rosen is considering whether to lend Vickie the money she needs to go the University of Michigan, "He put his hand on her hair and felt her head enquiringly with his finger tips. 'I wonder?' He shrugged and asked her playfully, 'Why do you want to go to college, Vickie?'" Lewis crossed out everything before his question spoken aloud and inserted after his question "he asked playfully" (54/98). Later, as the narrator discloses the family's backstory in Tennessee, Lewis muted Mrs. Harris's emotional response to her status change when her daughter married. "She accepted this estate unprotestingly, gratefully, as the tired apple orchards accept winter," Cather had typed in the earlier typescript and Bloom had reproduced in this later one; Lewis inserted "almost" before "gratefully" and lined out the metaphor (38/82).

## "Two Friends"

Of the three *Obscure Destinies* stories, only "Two Friends," in which Cather fictionalized a late nineteenth-century political conflict between two Red Cloud

businessmen and placed it in an unnamed Kansas town, survives in both ribbon and carbon copies Cather produced from a single typing. Using purple ribbon as she also had when typing both other stories, she added standard black carbon paper and used paper watermarked "Howard Bond" for both copies. Cather and Lewis edited the ribbon copy, Lewis using pencil throughout while Cather began revising the first page with a pen but shifted to pencil when her pen produced an ink blot large enough to soak through to the second page. At a later stage Cather used a different pen to make some additional small changes. Both women worked the ribbon copy over multiple times, handing it back and forth, making—and sometimes erasing—penciled changes rather than crossing them out as they had on the "Old Mrs. Harris" typescript.

The revisions each woman made range again from corrections of errors, to small single word substitutions, to more substantial changes. The adult first-person narrator—unnamed and ungendered—recalls the childhood pleasure of listening to the conversations of the title characters, businessmen R. E. Dillon and J. H. Trueman. Lewis changed Trueman's "big cattle ranch in the green timbered valley of the Caw" to a "fine ranch" (the previous phrase describes his "farms up in the grass country," making "cattle" an unnecessary modifier) (2).<sup>23</sup> She also changed Dillon's voice from "very gay and droll" to "very humorous" (9). Cather changed Dillon's eyebrows from "curly thick" to "curly black" and made a substantial change to the characterization of both men and the narrator's attitude toward them by substituting "one could look up to them" for they "had more experience and more money" than other men in the town (2, 3).

Together, Cather and Lewis revised in several stages the opening paragraph of the story, a broadly philosophical reflection making no reference to the story's characters and events. Cather relied on a strategy she had used occasionally in her other early typescripts: typing alternate word choices above the main line of text, leaving for later the choice between them. She opened the story as follows (alternate words appear in brackets) (Figure 5):

Even in early youth, when the mind is so eager for the new and strange [untried], while it is still a stranger to faltering and fear, we yet like to feel that there are certain unalterable facts [feelings], somewhere at the bottom of things, a sure foundation. Sometimes these anchors are ideas;



but more often they are merely pictures, vivid memories which are in themselves ideas or ideals. They may be very homely; the only thing we can say of them is that in some curious [unaccountable] and very personal way, they satisfy [fortify] us. The sea gulls that seem so much creatures of the free wind and waves, that are as homeless as the sea, able to rest upon the waves and ride the storm, needing nothing but water and sky, at certain seasons they go back to something they have known before; to islands that are their breeding grounds, to lonely ledges where they creep into well-known holes and caves, into mere fissures and cracks in the rock. The restlessness of youth has such retreats, even though it may be ashamed of them. (1)

In pen, Cather changed “feel” to “think” and chose “feelings” over “fact” in the first sentence, eliminated “Sometimes” at the beginning of the second, and chose “unaccountable” over “curious” and “fortify” over “satisfy” in the third. In the fourth sentence, she put “even” before “they” (“even they go back”) and put an “or” before “into mere fissures.” Next, in pencil Lewis chose “untried” over “strange” (Cather had not chosen between them), substituted “realities” for “feelings,” and lined out the final clause (“a sure foundation”). In the third sentence Lewis made the gulls rest on “tides” rather than “waves,” eliminated “well known holes and caves” so that “mere fissures and cracks” became the object of “into,” and crossed out Cather’s superfluous coordinating preposition.

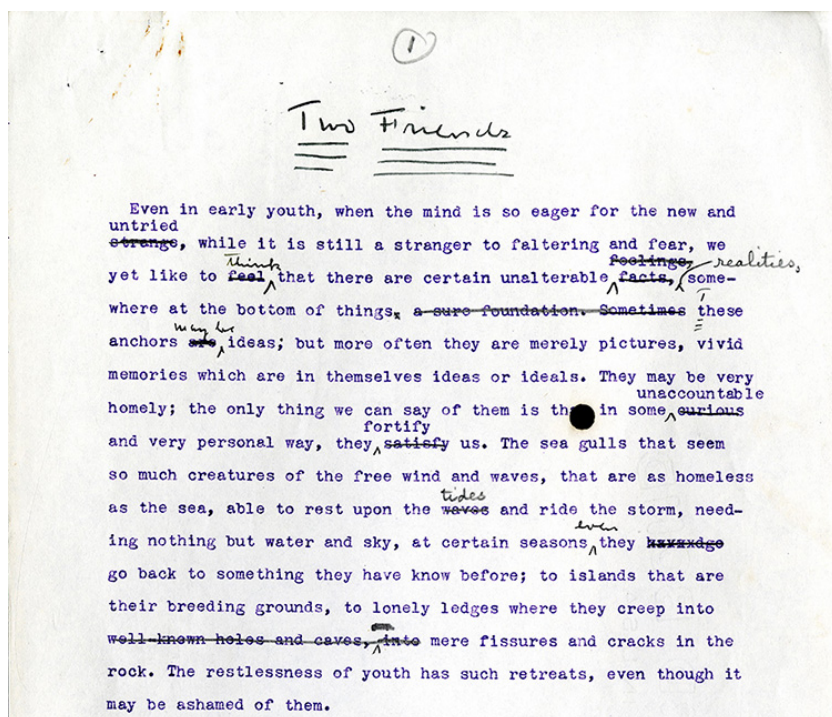


Figure 5: Willa Cather and Edith Lewis coediting the opening paragraph of the early ribbon copy typescript of "Two Friends," Cather in black pen and Lewis in pencil. Willa Cather, Collected Materials, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

In pencil Cather copied both her own and Lewis's editorial markings onto the carbon copy.<sup>24</sup> However, she and Lewis then worked over the ribbon copy again, sometimes erasing previous crossouts. For example, consider the multistage revisions to sentences about a convent in St. Joseph, Missouri, of which Dillon's sister is the mother superior (Figure 6). "He knew all the sisters," Cather typed, "and his visits were great events at the convent. The nuns made much of him, and he enjoyed their admiration and good food and all the ceremony which attended their dinners." Lewis first capitalized "sisters" and changed his visits to "a great event" singular. Then, either Cather or Lewis crossed out both sentences in pencil. Next, one of them erased parts of the lining out of the second sentence, and Lewis

revised the second sentence to read “The nuns made much of him, and he enjoyed their admiration and all the ceremony with which they entertained him” (15). At the end of this revision, what Cather had copied onto the carbon no longer preserved the most advance state of the edited text, so she again copied changes, including reversions. The purple ink on the ribbon copy allowed clean erasures, but the lower-quality ink on the carbon copy did not, so Cather resorted to “stet” markings.

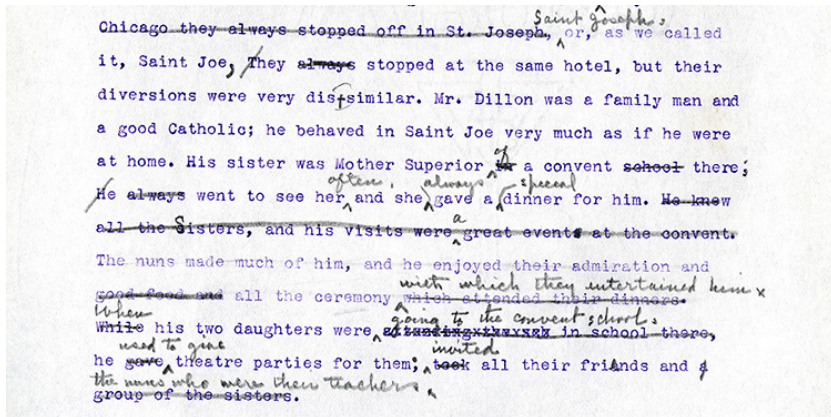


Figure 6: Edith Lewis editing in pencil a passage from the early ribbon copy typescript of “Two Friends.” Note the erasures, indicating more than one round of editing. Willa Cather, Collected Materials, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

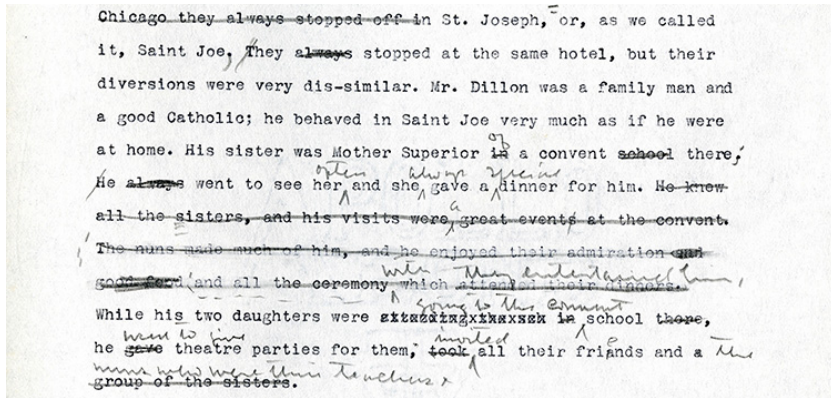


Figure 7: Willa Cather copying Edith Lewis's edits from the early ribbon copy typescript of "Two Friends" (see Figure 6) onto the carbon copy from the same typing. Note the stet markings because she was unable to reproduce Lewis's erasures. Willa Cather, Collected Materials, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Cather was thorough in creating this archival copy but was imprecise or negligent in recording a few revisions. Because the WCSE had access to this carbon only in photocopy, they erroneously identified it as a ribbon copy Cather edited in ink.<sup>25</sup> Bloom's typing of "Two Friends" replicates precisely the revised state of the earlier ribbon copy as edited by Cather and Lewis. Bloom's typing, on the same watermarked "Eton Bond" paper she used for "Old Mrs. Harris," survives only in a single carbon copy—the ribbon copy (with the exception of page 20, swapped for its carbon) and an additional carbon Cather instructed her to make (see below) are not extant. Lewis and Cather edited Bloom's typing lightly, although Lewis's pen predominates over Cather's pencil and pen, and Lewis again made key cuts and changes. Cather had been explicit about Trueman's sexual morality on his trips to St. Joe. "He had rather questionable women friends there too," Cather had written, "as he had been a widower for many years." Lewis made the characterization suppositious and eliminated reference to his unmarried state: "He was supposed to have rather questionable women friends there, too" (15/135).<sup>26</sup> Cather had originally prefaced her telling of the conflict that fractured Dillon and Trueman's friendship as follows:

When families quarrel about politics or religion, when two brothers turn bitterly against each other, it is usually the expression of some indefinable personal antagonism, an old grudge or jealousy, ashamed to show its face, which seizes the mask of a righteous cause. But with Dillon and Trueman I know this was not so. (22/142)

Why explain what was not so? Lewis lined through the two sentences to cut right to the next sentence, “I don’t believe self-interest would ever have made a breach between them,” and substituted “Dillon and Trueman” for “them” because she had removed its referent. Lewis even reverted a change she herself had made on Cather’s earlier typing. In the midst of the political argument about the 1896 presidential election that ends their friendship, the Republican Trueman says, “The Democrats will have a long time to be sorry they ever turned Pops.” Lewis had revised to “ever went over to the Pops,” and Bloom had typed her revision, but on Bloom’s carbon Lewis reverted to Cather’s original (19, 19/139).

Lewis let stand the first sentence of the introductory paragraph as she and Cather had revised it but worked over and condensed the ensuing meditation on how certain memories anchor personal identity (Figure 8). Cather had vacillated between labeling memories “ideas,” “ideals,” or “pictures.” Lewis first tried to break Cather’s meandering through these contradictions but then lined out the end of the first and the beginning of the second sentence and took a different approach:

These anchors may be ideas; but more often they are merely pictures, vivid memories, ~~which are in themselves ideas or ideal. They may be very homely; the only thing we can say of them is that~~ ^which^ in some unaccountable and very personal way ^gives us courage^ ~~they fortify us.~~

Lewis had previously revised Cather’s metaphor for how our minds return to certain childhood memories, which she now substantially compressed:

at certain seasons even they go back to something they have known before; to ^remote^ islands ~~that are their breeding grounds, to~~ ^and^ lonely ledges ^that are their breeding-grounds^ ~~they creep into mere fissures and cracks in the rock.~~ (1/121)

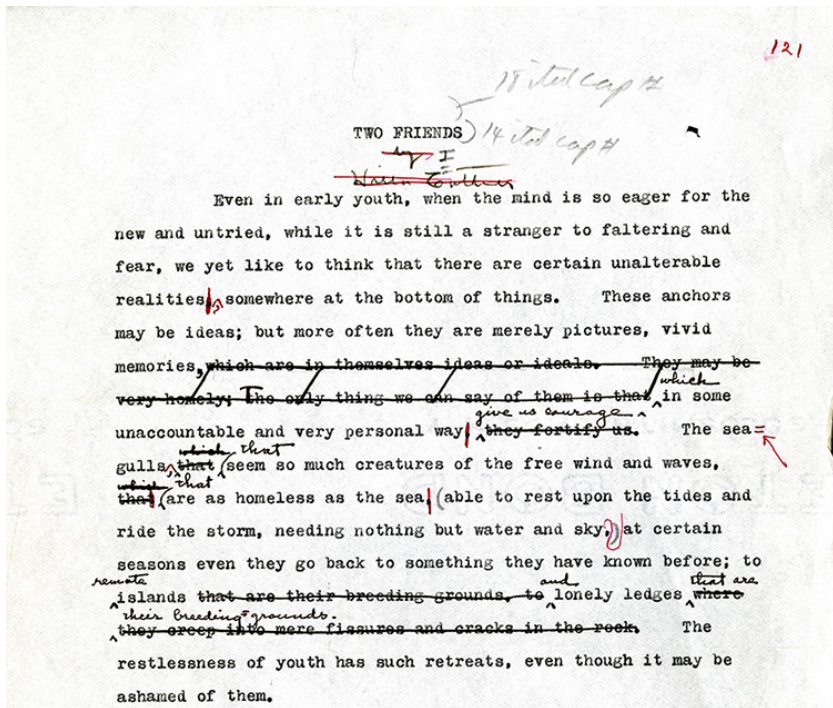


Figure 8: Edith Lewis editing the opening paragraph of the setting copy typescript of "Two Friends" in black pen. Red pen corrections are by the Knopf copyeditor. Note also penciled typesetting instructions at the top of the page. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Bloom's typings of all three stories as edited by Cather and Lewis also feature three categories of markings identifying them as setting copy for *Obscure Destinies*. A Knopf copyeditor used a fine red pen to clarify markings made by Cather or Lewis, make a few corrections to punctuation and style, and change American English spellings to British English, including converting the title "Neighbor Rosicky" to "Neighbour Rosicky." None of the extant typescripts bear out the WCSE's contention that Cather personally preferred British spellings<sup>27</sup>—if she did, wouldn't she have typed them consistently, or wouldn't she and Lewis have marked American spellings for conversion to British? The copyeditor also renumbered in sequence the pages of "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Two Friends"—as

“Neighbour Rosicky” was the first story, its pages didn’t need renumbering. Cather had inked “by Willa Cather” below the typed titles of “Old Mrs. Harris” and “Two Friends” so they could circulate separately, but the copyeditor crossed out these bylines as unnecessary in *Obscure Destinies*. All three typescripts also include penciled typesetting instructions and marking into galleys. At the end of the next section, I consider a few additional details of the setting copy typescripts and what they reveal about late-stage developments (including magazine publication of “Old Mrs. Harris” and “Two Friends”) and the chronology of work on *Obscure Destinies* as a volume.

### *Obscure Destinies*

Drawing on correspondence, I begin again here to date more precisely the composing and editing of the three stories and add new details to the circumstances and timing of their periodical and book publication. Obviously, Cather had finished composing a complete and refined version of “Neighbour Rosicky” by the time it appeared in the April and May 1930 *Woman’s Home Companion*. If, as I hypothesize, she typed it on Grand Manan, the periodical text existed by fall 1929. She likely had at least begun composing the two other stories then, but she did not yet imagine “Rosicky” as part of a collection. She routinely told correspondents to wait for book publication of her fiction rather than read it in magazines, but she sent both installments of “Neighbour Rosicky” to Margaret and Elizabeth Cather, her twin nieces in Wyoming, on March 19, 1930, just as the first installment was appearing in the April *Woman’s Home Companion*. “Your daddy will read it aloud very well, as he knows the characters,” she wrote from Pasadena, where she was visiting her mother. In the wake of her husband’s 1928 death, Virginia Cather traveled to California to visit her son Douglass and suffered a stroke that left her unable to speak or return to Nebraska. Willa Cather also wrote her nieces that “[y]our grandmother” was “about the same, comfortable, and most of the time cheerful.”<sup>28</sup> Cather next mentions “Rosicky” by name in a March 25, 1930, letter to literary agent Paul Revere Reynolds, who had placed Cather’s short stories and novels in magazines in the 1920s. Evidently surprised to see the story prominently placed in the *Companion* without his serving as intermediary,

Reynolds wrote Cather about British serial rights, and she replied that she would gladly let him sell the rights, but he would have to query the Crowell corporation, the magazine's publisher, about their availability. "I sent this story over to Miss [Gertrude Battles] Lane [editor of the *Woman's Home Companion*] as the result of a telephone conversation. There was no correspondence about it," she offered as explanation.<sup>29</sup>

Cather made no further mention of the story or a planned short story collection until summer 1931, when she and Lewis were on Grand Manan. Before they left New York City for the island Cather likely telephoned or visited the Knopf offices, leaving no epistolary trace.<sup>30</sup> Thus Cather and Lewis's editing of Bloom's typing of "Rosicky" cannot be dated precisely. Her correspondence with Knopf staff and the typescripts of "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Two Friends" make clear, however, that the typing, editing, retyping, and mailing back and forth of those stories occurred rapidly in July, August, and September 1931. The WCSE discounted such a scenario in relation to "Old Mrs. Harris," suggesting the time was too short, but evidence now proves what once seemed impossible.<sup>31</sup>

Cather and Lewis arrived on Grand Manan before July 10.<sup>32</sup> Three weeks later, Cather wrote to Alfred Knopf, "I have just finished the longest of the three stories I mean for the next volume and have sent it down to my secretary to be typed. It will run about 23,000 words. We had spoken of 'Obscure Destinies' as a title for that volume of three stories. Would you like 'Out West' better? They are all western stories; one in Colorado, one in Kansas, one in Nebraska."<sup>33</sup> "Old Mrs. Harris" is the "longest of the three," set in Colorado, while "Neighbor Rosicky" is set in Nebraska and "Two Friends" in Kansas. Cather was thus very busy during her first three weeks on Grand Manan, typing a complete version of "Old Mrs. Harris," then typing a revised version of parts of it, and then melding the two documents into the seventy-one-page typed text she and Lewis edited before she mailed it to Bloom around July 31. Although Cather's instructions to her secretary do not survive, events establish that Cather had received Bloom's retyping by late August. After sending "Old Mrs. Harris" to Bloom, Cather quickly typed "Two Friends," the edited ribbon copy of which she mailed to Bloom on August 18 with a penciled note: "Please copy the chapter as soon as you can, make ~~three~~ two carbons, send one carbon, first copy and my rugged version and one carbon [*sic*]



back to me registered mail.”<sup>34</sup> As described earlier, Cather had copied all revisions she and Lewis had made onto the carbon from her own typing, and this remained with her in case the edited ribbon copy miscarried.

Bloom noted an August 22 receipt date on Cather’s scrawled note, and since it was a Saturday and she was not working at her regular office job, she retyped “Two Friends” immediately.<sup>35</sup> A large manila envelope Bloom addressed to Cather on Grand Manan and postmarked August 23, 1931, at the Grand Central Station Post Office has recently come to light. Cather later scrawled Two Friends in blue pencil on the envelope.<sup>36</sup> Bloom may have used this envelope for another purpose (i.e., forwarding correspondence), with Cather only later stowing “Two Friends” in it, but if Bloom mailed “Two Friends” to Cather in it, her turnaround was remarkably speedy. Even if Bloom worked less expeditiously, Cather had her fresh typing in hand by the end of August. Considering the sparse schedule and complexities of mail service to and from Grand Manan, one would have expected Cather to instruct Bloom to deliver the retyped “Two Friends” directly to the Knopf offices. However, Cather instead instructed her to return it to her on Grand Manan, which only makes sense if she and Lewis intended to edit the story again before Cather shared it with Alfred and Blanche Knopf. Bloom also returned Cather’s note, which Cather stowed away on Grand Manan, probably in the manila envelope with the early ribbon and carbon copies of the story.

Simultaneously with Cather and Lewis’s editing of “Two Friends,” Cather and the Knopfs were corresponding about their publication of *Obscure Destinies* and magazine placement of the two unpublished stories, a task Alfred Knopf delegated to his secretary, Manley Aaron. Carbons of Aaron’s outgoing letters were preserved in Alfred Knopf’s files, and although Cather’s incoming letters are missing, the outgoing carbons provide key, previously missing details. Aaron wrote Cather on August 24 that she was “anxiously awaiting the manuscript of the long story, and I wonder when I am to have it.” On August 26 she reported that Graeme Lorimer of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* “was asking again about the manuscript of the story but I expect that I will be hearing from you when the manuscript will reach me before you get this letter.” On August 30, Cather wrote Alfred Knopf that he would “hear from me later in the week about two new stories which I want you to read as a favor to me.”<sup>37</sup> On September 3 Cather addressed Alfred and Blanche Knopf and Aaron jointly, writing “With this letter I am sending Miss Aaron two short stories

for the volume of which 'Neighbor Rosicky' will make a third. I hope that you [Alfred] and Blanche will read them before Miss Aaron starts out to sell them." She described "Old Mrs. Harris" as "more interesting" but praised "Two Friends" as "the best short story I have ever done."<sup>38</sup>

Aaron responded quickly, writing September 9 that she had given the typescripts to Alfred Knopf "before I had time to read more than 'The Two Friends.' May I say that I think this is one of the finest pieces of short story writing I have ever read, and I can hardly wait until I read the other." Aaron promised to return "Old Mrs. Harris" to Cather "as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Knopf have read it."<sup>39</sup> Alfred Knopf wrote the next day, reporting that he had just finished both stories and judged "Old Mrs. Harris" "one of the great short stories of all time. I have never before read anything that got right inside of me as that did. I shall never cease to wonder at your style of writing and depicting both atmosphere and people in such a way that they become a good deal more real than the landscape outside the window or the person sitting across the table from one." He also praised the "amazing compactness and brilliancy" of "Two Friends" and its "completely new vein" but found it "less stirring."<sup>40</sup>

Knopf imagined that Cather was "having a heavenly time on Grand Manan," but a poignant comedy of errors was playing out beneath the smooth surface. Ironically, Knopf wrote praising a story about the death of an old woman Cather modeled on her grandmother on the same day Cather wrote him about the death of her mother, prototype for Victoria Templeton. "My mother died in Pasadena the night of August 30th," she wrote, and the telegram reached her Monday August 31st "several hours after the boat left for St. Andrews." The next boat out on Wednesday, September 2, would not have gotten her to the mainland soon enough for a timely train journey to her mother's funeral in Nebraska. "I decided to stay on here and try to follow my usual course," she continued, but instead she "muddled everything [she] touched," including sending "Miss Aaron the unrevised copy of 'Mrs. Harris' instead of the corrected copy."<sup>41</sup> As Alfred Knopf wrote back on September 14, his office "had a clipping just a few days ago regarding your mother's funeral and wanted to wire you but then realizing that you had made no mention of her death in your letters to us, we thought, fantastically enough, that you had perhaps not even heard of it and so did not write. It was a pity that after all the time you did spend with her you had to be inaccessible when the end came."<sup>42</sup>

The “Two Friends” and “Old Mrs. Harris” typescripts Bloom produced in August 1931 eventually became setting copy for *Obscure Destinies*. Although they were later stored in the Park Avenue apartment Cather and Lewis moved into in late 1932, all evidence points to Cather and Lewis editing them at least once before returning to New York City in October 1931. Indeed, Cather’s report that she had sent the “unrevised copy rather than the corrected copy” of “Old Mrs. Harris” to the Knopfs and Aaron in early September only makes sense if she mistakenly sent the clean, unrevised ribbon copy of Bloom’s recent retyping rather than sending what she had intended to send, the carbon copy she and Lewis had edited.

Manley Aaron next wrote Cather on September 17, apologizing for a delay produced by “[being] in bed freezing out an appendix” and reporting both that she had returned the “Old Mrs. Harris” typescript to Cather by registered mail and that she had successfully placed both stories. Graeme Lorimer had visited the Knopf office twice and “settled on a price of fifteen thousand dollars for the story with the first installment not to appear before May of next year. Everything will be formally put in writing as soon as you send me the corrected manuscript for them.” Aaron was gratified that she had negotiated up from Lorimer’s original bid of \$9,000 (\$3,000 per part). She also reported that Gertrude Battles Lane had “Two Friends” and “as soon as I am out of the house in a day or two I will talk to her about that. She likes it very much and wants to buy it.”<sup>43</sup> On September 28, Aaron thanked Cather for her “charming letter” of September 20 (unfortunately missing). “I am proud that you are pleased with what I did with ‘Mrs. Harris.’ And I hope you will be pleased with the results of ‘Two Friends’ which I am not yet ready to tell you.” She also had received the “corrected manuscript of ‘Mrs. Harris’” that morning “and you will in a few days be getting the formal agreement for the Ladies’ Home Journal.”<sup>44</sup>

Arrangements with both magazines were soon in place. On October 2, Aaron sent Cather Lorimer’s letter of agreement (not extant) “regarding the time of publication and so forth.” After careful consideration, Aaron had also just accepted Lane’s “offer of \$3500 for ‘Two Friends.’” She believed she might have gotten \$4,000 from a different magazine but knew Cather preferred Lane, who had “pointed out . . . [that] prices are not what they used to be” and “Two Friends” was a “short piece” (as “Two Friends” was one third the length of “Old Mrs. Harris,”

\$3,500 was proportionally reasonable). Relishing the negotiations, Aaron closed with her wish that Cather was "getting started on the next batch of stories."<sup>45</sup>

There is a strange exception to the absence of Cather's letters to Aaron—a *carbon* of an October 27 letter. Evidently typed for Cather at the Knopf office for the purpose of forwarding it to Lorimer, in the letter she corrected and added an addendum to Lorimer's "very cordial letter," in which he "speaks of the story they have just bought for the Journal as 'Old Miz Harris.' Please call his attention to the fact that this is a very small variation from my text but is an important one." She did not want to give the impression that it was "a Southern dialect story," nor did she want anyone familiar with southern speech to misapprehend the title character's social status. "Poor mountain people would certainly call her 'Miz' but her neighbors and people of her own station would always call her 'Mrs,'" she explains, "and that is the designation of her respectable middle class status." Cather concluded by cautioning, "I hope of course, that the editors will be careful to see that there is no change in the text anywhere without my consent."<sup>46</sup>

Only two letters mentioning publication details fit into the gap between October 27, 1931, and the 1932 magazine appearances of "Two Friends" and "Old Mrs. Harris" and book publication of *Obscure Destinies*. Cather's further involvement in or consent to aspects of magazine publication is thus unrecoverable. During this period, Cather made a several-month visit to Red Cloud encompassing Christmas and featuring a family reunion and her handling of affairs related to her mother's estate. Back in New York City by February 1932, she could handle arrangements for *Obscure Destinies*, including attention to proofs, in person or by telephone. In late May, she wrote Walter Newman Flower of Cassell's, her new British publisher, asking him to "give a little more attention" to the "physical appearance" and dust jacket of her "forthcoming book" than he had to *Shadows on the Rock* (1931).<sup>47</sup> This letter establishes that *Obscure Destinies* had reached the page proof stage. "If you re-set *Obscure Destinies* in England, might I suggest that you examine the make-up we are using in the American edition?" she queried. "It is somewhat unusual, but I think it is quite successful for a short book. It makes an attractive page, and makes the book longer than it is without giving the effect of padding." Cather and Lewis started their 1932 Grand Manan stay in June. On June 13, George M. Stimson, production manager at Knopf, sent Cather twelve proofs of the *Obscure Destinies* dust jacket, and on June 17 Cather wrote

stating her top four preferences for color values but also asked Stimson to send “some done like the original sample” designer Rudolph Ruzicka had produced.<sup>48</sup>

“Two Friends” appeared in the July 1932 *Woman’s Home Companion*, *Obscure Destinies* was issued in early August, and the first installment of “Old Mrs. Harris,” retitled “Three Women,” appeared in the September *Ladies’ Home Journal*. As the example of “Neighbour Rosicky” suggests, magazine issues typically began circulating the month before the cover date, so the first installment of “Three Women” appeared simultaneously with *Obscure Destinies*. All the while Cather remained on Grand Manan. The second and third installments appeared in the October and November *Journal*, after Cather returned to New York and began settling into the Park Avenue apartment she and Lewis had leased.

Gaps in key archives make the precise circumstances of the 1932 magazine publication of “Old Mrs. Harris” and “Two Friends” opaque. The extant editorial correspondence files for the *Woman’s Home Companion* begin in 1933, and the various extant pieces of the Curtis Publishing Company archive do not encompass 1931–32 editorial correspondence for the *Journal*. Furthermore, the bulk of the Alfred Knopf, Inc., archive does not extend back into the 1930s.<sup>49</sup> Cather had expressed a “hope” that the *Journal* would make “no change in the text anywhere without my consent,” and although the story did not appear as “Old Miz Harris,” it was retitled “Three Women.” Before Cather’s typescripts surfaced, some believed this was Cather’s “original” title,<sup>50</sup> but the title “Three Women” appears on neither typescript and is mentioned in no extant letter.

The late magazine publication of “Three Women” remains particularly puzzling. Recall that on September 28, 1931, Aaron reported she had received Cather’s letter of September 20 enclosing a “corrected copy” of “Old Mrs. Harris” for the *Journal*: the magazine thus had access to an edited version of the story a year in advance of publication, but which typescript did they have? As the WCSE notes, “Three Women” omits a number of “primarily narrative and descriptive” passages present in both the early typescript and the book version “of the sort an editor pressed for space would tend to cut.”<sup>51</sup> Most of Cather and Lewis’s revisions to Bloom’s typing, with the exception of sentences omitted altogether, do appear in the *Journal*, but a few do not. For example, two of Cather’s revisions to the setting copy typescript described above do not appear in the serial: the women of Skyline still “would not let their children play” with the town laundress’s children

and Victoria's "rule that Grandmother was not to receive visitors alone" remains "unuttered." Perhaps before September 20, when Cather sent a corrected "Old Mrs. Harris" typescript to Aaron, either she or Lewis copied their revisions onto Bloom's ribbon copy or another carbon and then continued editing the carbon that became the *Obscure Destinies* setting copy.

Conversely, a number of substantive variants between the revised setting copy typescript and the book text presumably reflect revisions made on the proofs. Most interesting is the final paragraph of the story—and it is here that we find the payoff of this detailed reconstruction locating the editing of this deeply personal story in time and space. "Thus Mrs. Harris slipped out of the Templeton story," the narrator notes at the close of the story, "but Victoria and Vickie had still to go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable." The narrator closes with some proleptic editorializing:

When they are old, they will come closer to Grandma Harris. They will think a great deal about her, and remember things they never noticed; and their lot will be more or less like hers. They will regret that they heeded her so little; but they, too, will look into the eager, unseeing eyes of young people, and feel themselves alone. They will say to themselves: "I was heartless, because I was young and strong and wanted things so much. But now I know."<sup>52</sup>

The final sentence ("But now I know") is absent from the setting copy typescript. Cather added it, then, while she and Lewis were reading proofs in their temporary quarters at the Grosvenor Hotel in late winter or early spring 1932. Their normal practice entailed Lewis reading aloud from one set of proofs while Cather marked changes on the other.<sup>53</sup> "I was heartless, because I was young and strong and wanted so much," the fifty-nine-year-old Cather, whose mother had died the year before, would have heard Lewis read aloud. "But now I know," she added to the last page of the proofs. Strikingly, this notable final sentence *does* appear in the final installment in the November *Journal*.<sup>54</sup> It did appear well after *Obscure Destinies'* August publication, so Cather *might* have asked the *Journal* to add the final sentence, but it seems unlikely she would have asked for a single late-stage revision while not asking for others. Perhaps the *Journal* editors saw the book and decided on their own to add the sentence—we may never know.

Another aspect of the setting copy typescript of “Old Mrs. Harris” reveals how strongly Cather came to associate the story with the 1931 death of her mother, fictionalized as Victoria Templeton, a middle-aged woman who fails to pay proper attention to her dying mother, Mrs. Harris, because she is preoccupied with her own life. Cather added to the end of the setting copy typescript of each story a line of text that seemingly locates her composing of it in time and space. These lines appear after the concluding sentence of each story in *Obscure Destinies*: “New York, 1928” for “Neighbour Rosicky,” “New Brunswick, 1931” for “Old Mrs. Harris,” and “Pasadena, 1931” for “Two Friends.” However, at the end of “Old Mrs. Harris” setting copy typescript, Cather first inked in “Aix-les-Bains, 1930.” Later, however, she crossed out the name of the French resort where she had spent several weeks in August 1930 with multiple pencil strokes and inked in “New Brunswick, 1931.” In the summer and early fall of 1931 on Grand Manan Island, in the Canadian province of New Brunswick, Cather indeed typed—and she and Lewis revised—“Old Mrs. Harris,” but Cather also received there and then the telegram informing her that mother had died. Now, she knew.

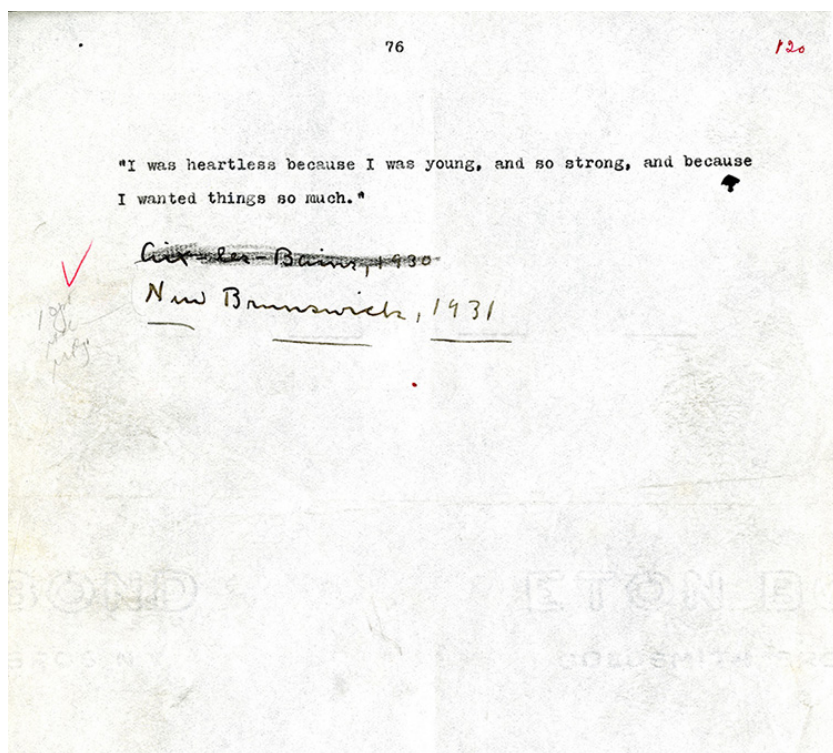


Figure 9: The last page of the setting copy typescript of "Old Mrs. Harris." Note the absence of the final sentence, Cather's changes to the date and place lines, and the red pen of the Knopf copyeditor and penciled typesetting instructions. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

## Notes

1. Susan J. Rosowski, Charles W. Mignon, Frederick M. Link, and Kari A. Ronning, "The Issue of Authority in a Scholarly Edition: Editing Cather," in *Textual Studies and the Common Reader: Essays on Editing Novels and Novelists*, ed. Alexander Pettit (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 31.



2. John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 9.
3. Bryant, *Fluid Text*, 12.
4. Willa Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, ed. Kari A. Ronning, Frederick M. Link, and Mark Kamrath (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 377.
5. Rosowski, "Issue of Authority," 31.
6. Charles L. Ross, "A Future for Editing: Lawrence in Hypertext," in Pettit, *Textual Studies*, 142.
7. Melissa J. Homestead, "Willa Cather, Edith Lewis, and Collaboration: The Southwestern Novels of the 1920s and Beyond," *Studies in the Novel* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 408–41.
8. On the correspondence, now part of the Dobkin Foundation Collection of Feminism, maintained by Glenn Horowitz, Bookseller, New York, NY (hereinafter DFCE), see Richard C. Harris, "'Dear Alfred'/'Dear Miss Cather': Willa Cather and Alfred Knopf, 1920–1947," *Studies in the Novel* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 387–407. Before this correspondence surfaced, the WCSE and others relied on Knopf's unpublished "memoir" of his relationship with Cather, which relied on these then-unavailable correspondence files with Cather. On the scope of Blanche Knopf's correspondence with Cather at the Harry Ransom Center and more recently located correspondence, including some related to book production of *Obscure Destinies*, see Melissa J. Homestead, "Yet More Cather-Knopf Correspondence," *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* 59, no. 2 (Fall 2017): forthcoming.
9. Bryant, *Fluid Text*, 94, 152.
10. James L. W. West III, *Making the Archives Talk: New and Selected Essays in Bibliography, Editing, and Book History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 6.
11. Edith Lewis, Last Will and Testament, July 31, 1968, p. 2, Surrogate's Court, County of New York.
12. Thanks to Mary Ellen Ducey and Katherine Walter for information about accession of these materials by UNL Special Collections, and to Kari Ronning for explaining the WCSE use of photocopies. For the fullest account of Cather's composing process across her career, see Charles W. Mignon, "Willa Cather's Process of Composing," *Resources for American Literary Study* 29 (2003–4): 165–84.
13. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 325.

14. Willa Cather to Manley Aaron, July 30, 1929, DFCE.
15. Edith Lewis to Mabel Dodge Luhan, [1929], Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.
16. Willa Cather, "Neighbour Rosicky" ts., Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS 007), Box 1, Folder 19, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln (hereinafter Southwick-UNL). Page numbers from typescripts are provided parenthetically.
17. Willa Cather, "Neighbour Rosicky" ts., Southwick-UNL, Box 1, Folder 18.
18. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 66.
19. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, [260], 330.
20. Willa Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris" ts., Papers of Willa Cather, 1899–1949, Accession #6494, Box 4, Folder 6, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (hereinafter PWC-UVA).
21. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 331.
22. Willa Cather, "Old Mrs. Harris" ts., Southwick-UNL, Box 1, Folder 16. As explained below, each page bears two page numbers.
23. Willa Cather, "Two Friends" ts., Willa Cather, Collected Materials (MS 008), Box 1, Folder 4, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln (hereinafter WCCM-UNL).
24. Willa Cather, "Two Friends" ts., WCCM-UNL, Box 1, Folder 3.
25. For more on this error by the WCSE, see Homestead, "Willa Cather," 424–27. The WCSE's reliance on this carbon in its historical collation accounts for the differences found between it and the unrevised state of the setting copy typescript.
26. Willa Cather, "Two Friends" ts., Southwick-UNL, Box 1, Folder 17. Typescript numbers cited parenthetically reflect the fact that each page has two page numbers.
27. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 343–44.
28. Willa Cather to Margaret and Elizabeth Cather, March 19, [1930], in *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, ed. Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout (New York: Vintage, 2013), 427.
29. Willa Cather to Paul R. Reynolds, March, 25, [1930], Paul Reynolds Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University. The letter itself strongly implies that Cather and Reynolds had no previous correspondence about the story, and even absent outgoing

- carbons, internal memoranda suggest the Reynolds-Cather relationship dropped off in the late 1920s. Merrill Skaggs's theory that William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) responded to "Neighbour Rosicky" is thus untenable. *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 85–86.
30. An interview with Cather published June 2, 1931, in the *Kearney Hub* also references a collection of three stories encompassing "Rosicky." Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 326.
  31. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 337. The WCSE implicitly relies on Lewis's memoir of Cather, but Lewis misremembered the number of mail boats. *Willa Cather Living* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953), 128. Cather's letters written from the island routinely refer to thrice-weekly mail, making the rapid turnaround more plausible.
  32. Willa Cather to Blanche Knopf, July 10, [1931], Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Archive, Box 689, Folder 4, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
  33. Willa Cather to Alfred Knopf, July 31, [1931], *Selected Letters*, 449.
  34. Willa Cather to Sarah Bloom, August 18, [1931], housed with Willa Cather, "Two Friends" ts., WCCM-UNL, Box 1, Folder 3.
  35. As she did with "Old Mrs. Harris," Bloom occasionally penciled page numbers from her fresh typing onto Cather's "rugged" version. These page numbers establish definitively that Bloom worked from the ribbon copy rather than the carbon.
  36. DFCF seems to have acquired this envelope privately as part of an assorted lot of materials (other than the typescripts) removed from the Grand Manan cottage.
  37. Manley Aaron to Willa Cather, August 24 and 26, 1931, and Willa Cather to Alfred Knopf, August 30, [1931], DFCF.
  38. Willa Cather to Alfred Knopf, September 3, 1931, *Selected Letters*, 454.
  39. Manley Aaron to Willa Cather, September 9, 1931, DFCF. Aaron also offered a historical correction to the key scene in which Dillon and Trueman argue about the 1896 presidential contest, "so you [Cather] do not have to make any changes in the manuscript." Cather's typescript and the story as published are both confused. Trueman says, "I guess Grover Cleveland must be a sick man; must feel like he'd taken a lot of trouble for nothing" (183). Aaron offered that "Grover Cleveland finished his second term in 1897 [*sic*] and did not die until 1908." Cather did not heed this correction, which is itself confused. The WCSE points out that Cleveland "was not running for re-election in 1896" and his second term as president was 1892–96, and suggests that the reference has something to do with his action as president to prevent the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act (315).
  40. Alfred Knopf to Willa Cather, September 10, 1931, DFCF.

41. Willa Cather to Alfred Knopf, September 10, [1931], DFCF. Introducing Cather's letters from 1932 to 1936, Jewell and Stout suggest that "Old Mrs. Harris" "could only be published after the death of Cather's mother, for the character inspired by Virginia Boak Cather, Victoria Templeton, is complex and not altogether attractive" (*Selected Letters*, 465). However, as this sequence of events demonstrates, Cather was pushing ahead with plans to publish the story, both in magazine and book form, while her mother was still living.
42. Alfred Knopf to Willa Cather, September 14, 1931, DFCF.
43. Manley Aaron to Willa Cather, September 17, 1931, DFCF.
44. Manley Aaron to Willa Cather, September 28, 1931, DFCF.
45. Manley Aaron to Willa Cather, October 2, 1931, DFCF.
46. Willa Cather to Manley Aaron, October 27, 1931, *Selected Letters*, 458–59. Jewell and Stout misidentify the editor of the *Journal* as George Horace Lorimer (Graeme Lorimer's father) and hypothesize that the letter was a "transcription made by the Knopf office staff." However, the document is a carbon rather than a ribbon copy, and the letter "r" appears near the signature line. Aaron's outgoing letters to Cather feature "mma r" in this location—her full name was M. Manley Aaron, so the office code "mma" documented that she signed the letter and "r" that she typed it. Cather's typed letters, whether self-typed or dictated to Sarah Bloom, bear no such codes.
47. Willa Cather to Walter Newman Flower, May 25, 1932, PWC-UVA, Box 2, Folder 75.
48. Willa Cather to George Stimson, June 17, [1932], DFCF.
49. The extant Crowell-Collier materials are at the New York Public Library (MssCol 703). The Curtis Publishing Company Records are split between the University of Pennsylvania Library (Ms. Coll. 51) and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Collection 3115). See the finding aid for the Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Archive at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, which explains that a culling process took place in 1945 due to an office move, and only "some of the more important author files from Knopf's 'golden age' of publishing in the 1920s and 1930s were saved for their literary significance."
50. Deborah Carlin, *Cather, Canon, and the Politics of Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 90.
51. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 351.
52. Cather, *Obscure Destinies*, 156–57.
53. Homestead, "Willa Cather," 434–35.

54. In the absence of the setting copy of “Old Mrs. Harris,” the WCSE hypothesized that “at least two copies of a professionally typed version were made from” the earlier typescript “and that Cather then went over one copy and made the changes that subsequently appeared in [*Ladies’ Home Journal*], presumably including the last sentence of the story” (336–37). There is another late-stage revision to the final paragraph that the *Journal* may have picked up from the book publication: in the unrevised typing and the serial, Mandy finds Mrs. Rosen “unconscious in the morning, and she never regained consciousness”—on the setting copy a pencil line marks the second clause for deletion, and the clause does not appear in the serial (alternately the *Journal* may have independently cut this clause to save space).