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## Edith Lewis as Editor, *Every Week* Magazine, and the Contexts of Cather's Fiction

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## 19 Edith Lewis as Editor, *Every Week* Magazine, and the Contexts of Cather's Fiction

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MELISSA J. HOMESTEAD

On 26 August 1915 the *New York Times* reported the spectacle of two "Women Editors" who became "Lost in Colorado Cañon" as a "Result of Trip with Inexperienced Guide." "Miss Willa Sibert Cather, a former editor of McClure's Magazine, and Miss Edith Lewis, assistant editor at *Every Week*, had a nerve-racking experience in the Mesa Verde wilds," they reported, giving Lewis and Cather roughly equivalent status as magazine professionals and comic fodder ("Lost"). The war in Europe was still far away for most Americans that August, although the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May had inched the conflict closer. In July, Cather had been scheduled to travel to Europe with S. S. McClure to interview European leaders about the war; however, nearing the end of her long and gradual turn away from magazine editing and journalistic writing to full-time fiction writing, she regretfully surrendered the financial rewards and prospects of adventure the European trip presented (Woodress 262). Although her fiction continued to appear in magazines and she wrote occasional cultural commentary, the canceling of the European trip with McClure marked a definitive shift in Cather's career—with the exception of one article in the



Fig. 1. Edith Lewis's passport photograph, 1920. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

*Red Cross Magazine* in 1919, Cather engaged the war as subject matter only in fiction.

In 1915, however, when the *Times* could collectively label Cather and Lewis “women editors,” Lewis was just beginning a three-year stint as an editor at a new magazine, the circulation of which would eventually exceed half a million. As Cather was making the transition from magazine work to full-time fiction writing, Lewis’s editorship would keep magazine work a part of Cather’s wartime home front at their shared Greenwich Village apartment, Cather’s “scene of writing.”<sup>1</sup> Although Lewis has figured in Cather scholarship as the silent hostess looking after Cather’s guests at the Friday-afternoon teas at Bank Street, she was also looking after her own guests, *Every Week* staffers, and bringing the world of the magazine office into the domestic space and social milieu she shared with Cather. *Every Week* thus became one of the frames through which Cather contemplated the events in Europe and is, as this essay argues, an important context for reading the two novels that grew out of Cather’s experiences from 1915 to 1918, *My Ántonia* and *One of Ours*.

Lewis’s work at *Every Week* is also crucial to recovering and fully understanding her direct involvement in Cather’s creative process as Cather’s editor. Lewis brought her magazine colleagues home to tea at Bank Street, but she brought something else: editorial skills acquired through years of professional experience. The nature and scope of magazine editorial work is not easy to recover, because such work is collaborative and meant to be invisible—an identified editor in chief and the collective editorial “we” represent an entire office full of people working together.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, complete office archives of magazines are seldom preserved and made accessible to scholars (there is no such archive for *Every Week*, nor for *McClure’s*). Nevertheless, putting together the extant scattered pieces and reading against the collective anonymity of the magazine editorial enterprise, this essay makes Edith Lewis’s editorial work visible and locates the origin of her role in Cather’s creative process.



## EDITH LEWIS AT EVERY WEEK

After graduating from Smith College in Massachusetts in 1902, at the age of twenty, Edith Lewis returned to her hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, for a year to teach school (Homestead and Kaufman 61). However, in 1903, shortly after meeting Cather in Lincoln, she left for New York, where she worked as a copy editor at the Century Publishing Company ("Alumnae"). In 1906, Lewis followed Cather to *McClure's* for a position as an editorial proofreader (Lewis, *Willa Cather Living* xvii); she did not rest long on the lower rung of the magazine's professional ladder. As she wrote on her job application to the J. Walter Thompson Co. advertising agency in November 1918, she "was successively proofreader, make-up editor, art-editor, literary editor & acting managing editor" at *McClure's* (Personnel File). Cather effectively ended her editorial work at *McClure's* by the fall of 1911, when she went on leave—resigning in 1912 without returning to her duties. However, she continued to contribute freelance to *McClure's* through 1915 and beyond. No manuscripts or typescripts of Cather's fiction published before 1925 are known, but red-pen revisions in Lewis's hand appear on the typescript of Cather's poem "The Swedish Mother" from which copy was set for publication in *McClure's* in November 1911 (figs. 2 and 3). If typescripts of Cather's other *McClure's* contributions from 1911 through 1914 (such as *Alexander's Bridge* or "Three American Signers") survived, they would almost certainly show evidence of Lewis's red pen in her capacity as a *McClure's* editor.

Lewis resigned from *McClure's* in early 1915 because of "fundamental changes (for the worse) in the policy & organization" (Personnel File) and accepted a position as assistant editor of the Associated Sunday Magazines, a Sunday newspaper supplement just launching a Monday newsstand version, *Every Week*.<sup>3</sup> Under the leadership of editor-in-chief Bruce Barton, an ambitious young Amherst College graduate, *Every Week* as a three-cent

*McClure's*  
*room for*  
*page 219 (instead of 218)*  
 THE SWEDISH MOTHER  
 (Sebraska)  
 By Willa Sibert Cather  
 "You shall hear the tale again,  
 Hush, my red-haired daughter,"  
 Brightly burned the sunset gold  
 On the ~~blue~~ pond water. *Beach*  
 Red the pasture ridges gleamed  
 Where the sun was sinking,  
 Slow the windmill rasped and wheezed  
 Where the harts were drinking.  
 On the kitchen doorstep low  
 Sat a Swedish mother;  
 In her arms a baby slept,  
 By her sat another.  
 "All time, way back in old Yountree,  
 Your Granpa, he been good to me.  
 Your Granpa, he been young man, too,  
 And I been just lil' girl, like you.  
 All time in spring, when evening came,  
 We go bring sheep an' lil' lambs home.  
 We go big field, way up on hill,  
 Ten times high like our windmill.  
 One time your granpa leave me wait  
 While he go call sheep. By the gate  
 I wait until night come dark;  
 Rabbits run an' strange dogs bark,  
 Old owl hoot an' your mother cry, *modder*  
 She been so 'fraid big bear come by.  
 Last, 'far off, she hear the sheep,  
 Lil' bells ring an' lil' lambs bleat.  
 Then all sheep come over the hills,  
 Big white lust, an' old dog Nils.  
 Then come granpa, in his arm  
 Lil' sick lamb ~~was~~ something harm. *lat*  
 He so young then, big and strong,  
 Pick lil' girl up, take her 'long.  
 Poor lil' tired girl, just like you,  
 Lift her up an' take her too.  
 Hold her tight an' carry her far,  
 Aint no light but just one star.  
 Sheep go 'tigh-ty' an' road go steep;  
 Lil' girl she go fast asleep."  
 #

Fig. 2. The typescript setting copy for McClure's magazine of Willa Cather's poem "The Swedish Mother," copyedited by Edith Lewis. Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington IN.

Bright with  
Every night the red-haired child  
Begs to hear the story,  
When the pasture ridges glow  
With the sunset glory.  
She can never understand,  
Since the tale ends sadly,  
Why her mother, telling it,  
Always ~~seems~~ as sadly.  
Wonderingly she looks away  
Where her mother's gazing;  
Only sees the drifting herd  
In the sunset grazing.

Fig. 3. The typescript setting copy for McClure's magazine of Willa Cather's poem, "The Swedish Mother," second page. Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington IN.



weekly rapidly achieved a high circulation. From its 3 May 1915 launch to its demise on 22 June 1918 its circulation grew to over six hundred thousand. Published in a large format with colorful pictures of pretty girls by top illustrators on its front cover, *Every Week* featured an evolving mix of fiction, advice, commentary, news items, and photographs with a human-interest focus. Barton's provocative editorials, which promoted Christian morals, capitalism, and individual self-improvement, became a prominent feature of each issue. Burton Hendrick, whom both Cather and Lewis knew from his years as one of *McClure's* primary investigative writers, contributed regular feature articles to *Every Week* on politics, world affairs, economics, and business. Notably, Cather herself contributed a nonfiction article to *Every Week* that appeared in August 1915, continuing the pattern earlier established at *McClure's* of Cather as contributor and Lewis as editor. In "Wireless Boys Who Went Down with Their Ships" (2 August 1915), Cather recounts the heroic deaths of twelve young American wireless operators who, as civilian merchant seaman, stayed at their posts on sinking ships, sending out messages to enable the rescue of others (including passengers) rather than abandoning ship to save themselves. Although Cather does not mention the war in Europe in this article, with the recent memory of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the bravery of these civilian "radio boys" would certainly have called up the looming war threat.

Fiction featured prominently in *Every Week*, with lavishly illustrated serial novels and short stories occupying a third of each issue. While most fiction leaned heavily toward popular genres—Western, mystery, romance—and most of the contributors have been forgotten by literary history, *Every Week* also published some fiction writers with names more familiar to literary historians, such as Susan Glaspell, Conrad Richter, Sinclair Lewis, Edna Ferber, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Zona Gale. At *Every Week*, Edith Lewis continued to practice the editorial craft she had developed at *McClure's*, having primary responsibility



for selecting and editing the fiction, much of which she bought from agent Paul Revere Reynolds, who became Cather's agent in 1916.<sup>4</sup> When called as a reference for Lewis's job application to Thompson, George Buckley, president of the Crowell Publishing Company (which purchased *Every Week* in 1916), said Lewis "had a very fine mind, really a brilliant mind: that she was one of the best judges of fiction they had ever known; that she had rewritten a great deal of the stuff that had come in to them" (Personnel File).

Lewis's tact and sensitivity with authors comes through in correspondence between *Every Week* and Conrad Richter, then a struggling author early in his career. Soon after the magazine's launch, when one of his stories had been selected as the best short story of 1914, Barton wrote him, asking him to submit a story for consideration (Johnson 62). Barton expressed admiration for the story Richter submitted, "The Laugh of Leen," but said that because the magazine published relatively few short stories in each issue, "we ought to have as much action as possible" (Barton to Richter, 26 May 1915). Reynolds suggested that Richter "give [him] a chance at something else," and Lewis was left with the chore of rejecting the second story he submitted. "Mr. Barton and I have both been interested in this story," she wrote, "but it seems to us a little too quiet and leisurely in tone to be just the sort of thing we are looking for." Two years later, with the Paget Literary Agency trying to place his stories, Richter's agent reported a conversation with "one of the editors of *Every Week*, who had read" yet another Richter story then in unsuccessful circulation. This unnamed editor (almost certainly Lewis) advised that half of the editorial staff "wanted to accept it [but] ultimately decid[ed] against it, because . . . the opinion in [the] office was that your writing and handling of material was not as good as the ideas in your stories warranted. This editor seemed to think that your work was inclined to be long winded and too indirect, in treatment, always taking, so to speak, a long round about way, instead of a straight direct path to the inci-

dent" (17 May 1917). When Paget finally placed a Richter story with *Every Week* (Paget to Richter, 17 October 1917), it was "The Pippin of Pike County," a briskly paced western tale set in a Montana silver-mining town (16 March 1918). When Richter responded to Bruce Barton's letter announcing the magazine's imminent demise (Richter to Barton, 24 May 1918), he asked Barton to "Please remind Miss Lewis of my appreciation of her kind interest in my humble scratchings."

Lewis also played a central role in the production of the third of each issue of *Every Week* devoted to captioned photographs and very brief articles. In her Thompson application she enumerates the writing of "captions, editorial notes & announcements, & short articles" as part of her duties at *Every Week*. She also claimed responsibility for "the organization of [the] gravure [picture] pages and *The Melting Pot*, two of the most successful departments of the magazine" (Personnel File). As Barton recalled, "We had to close so far in advance of publication that it would be impossible for us to use current news pictures. So I invented the picture-caption article in the form of double spread (center) of pictures and long, factual, informative, and (often) amusing captions. Miss Edith Lewis, who lived with Willa Cather . . . was my assistant. My other assistants were youngsters, some of whom became very successful later. The picture caption feature was a big success; as well as the great variety of short material" (Barton to Brower). While claiming to have "invented" the format, Barton also described the picture-caption section as "a joint-production—three or four of my bright young people wrote them, and Miss Edith Lewis, my Managing Editor, edited them, and then I finally ran them through my typewriter" (Barton to Balch). The text of "The Melting Pot," like the photo captions, appeared anonymously. A two-page illustrated feature that digested and excerpted content from current books and periodicals, "The Melting Pot" featured much of the "short material" to which Barton attributed the magazine's popularity.

Despite Barton's role as the spokesman of mainstream Ameri-

can values and as the public face of *Every Week*, the “youngsters” who toiled anonymously to produce these pages of photographs and brief articles were an interconnected and ever-changing cast of bohemians in their twenties. One of these, Anne Herendeen, fondly recalled the conventional Barton’s attitude toward the unconventional female members of his staff: “I remember what you [Barton] said about ‘those short-haired girls’ on your *Every Week* staff. You said ‘But they’re smart’” (Herendeen to Barton, 14 October 1959). Herendeen cheerfully characterized two of the young men on the predominantly female staff, John Colton and John Chapin Mosher, as “delightful deviants, god bless them” (Herendeen to Barton, 5 May 1960). While his bohemian junior staff regarded Barton with a mixture of bemused affection and self-righteous scorn, they clearly respected and loved Lewis, their quieter managing editor. Barton joked with the staff and dreamed up ideas for promoting the magazine, but Lewis was, as staff member Brenda Ueland recalled, “our real boss on *Every Week*” (*Me* 156).

Although Lewis began as assistant editor, her role as the hands-on editor and manager of the magazine’s daily operations was clear from the start, and she soon officially acquired the title of managing editor (“Lincoln Girls”). In letters to her mother, Lella Faye Secor simply identified Lewis as “the editor,” the person who judged her freelance submissions and decided whether she would be asked to do more work (Florence 41–51), and she called Barton the “chief mogul” (51). Secor at first found Lewis to be “one of those stoical sort of women who let you know very little of what she really thinks” (41), but later, when she joined the magazine’s staff, she relished Lewis’s praise of her work. Early in Ueland’s time at the magazine, she wrote her mother that she and “Miss Lewis . . . have a secret liking of each other. She is pretty and shy and we both have the same trouble of jerky talking. I have been working in the same room with her for the past month, and strange to say (for me), I love her” (qtd. in *Me* 160). In her memoir, Ueland praises Lewis as “the best boss I ever had,



the most intelligent, the most just, the kindest and the bluntest. Her warm hazel eyes looked at you and she would say right out: 'These captions are no good; they are all over the place!' and at the same time, because of bashfulness, she would be almost lisping and blushing deeply. From anybody else, it would be an unbearable wound (unfeeling, mean editors weazen all one's ability, just as mean employers do) but not from her. And I respected her so much. Yes, it was true, I saw at once: the captions were frightful. I went and did them again. I was grateful for all her guidance" (158-59).

#### EVERY WEEK, THE WAR, AND ONE OF OURS

When *Every Week* launched in 1915, the war was a regular, although minor, presence in the magazine, as it was in the lives of most Americans. Through 1915 the war remained largely somebody else's problem, a subject for detached contemplation, speculation, and analysis, much of that analysis carried out in regular contributions by Burton Hendrick. For instance, he devoted articles to explaining how European nations were financing their war efforts by printing new money (20 September 1915) and to speculating on "How Long England [Could] Hold Out" financially (6 December 1915)—his answer was indefinitely. But in 1916, commentary on the war in *Every Week* began taking a more anxious and introspective turn, as U.S. National Guard troops were called up for the so-called Punitive Expedition into Mexico, led by Cather's old friend from her school days in Lincoln, General John J. Pershing. On 6 August 1916, Barton (who had been advocating military preparedness in previous editorials) devoted his editorial "On Seeing My Brother Ride Away to Mexico" to a tirade against the long-standing American policy of *not* preparing for war, of marching troops off to Mexico without uniforms, typhoid inoculation, or modern weapons. The Mexican action also personally affected *Every Week* when staff member John Colton's National Guard cavalry regiment,



Squadron A, was called up and spent nine months on the border under the command of Pershing ("Author of 'Rain'"). And, as Lewis would have been well aware, Cather's cousin G. P. Cather, the prototype for Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours*, was serving on the Mexican border under Pershing (Harris 636).

In late 1916, the war "over there" in Europe became increasingly prominent in *Every Week*, with the magazine actively seeking contributions from those who had seen the conditions in Europe firsthand. For instance, Lewis tried to enlist her and Cather's former boss S. S. McClure as a contributor because of his war-related editorials in the *Evening Mail*. "Mr. Barton wants me to see you about doing an article for us," she wrote in November 1916. "We wish very much that we could have you do something for *Every Week*. I have been following your editorials with the greatest interest. I hear a great many people speak of them." Based on McClure's controversial 1916 trip to Europe, these articles became the basis of both a lecture tour and a book, *Obstacles to Peace* (1917).<sup>5</sup> Although Lewis's attempt to recruit McClure as a contributor failed, *Every Week* succeeded in acquiring accounts from others who had recent experience of Europe. In December, journalist William Gunn Shepherd contributed an article on "The Bravest Man I Met in Five Armies," and an editorial note boasted, "As the correspondent of the United Press, Mr. Shepherd has seen the Great War on every front except the Russian . . . we are going to have quite a number of articles from him—all bully" (3 December 1916). The next week, Barton contributed his own full-length article praising the nine thousand Americans who were part of the Canadian forces fighting in Belgium, including at Ypres.

Anticipating the language and images that would soon dominate American war propaganda (which echo in *One of Ours*), Barton praises these American volunteers as "Knights errant—Clean and fine and red-blooded," and quotes one of them as telling him, "I got to reading in the papers about them Germans tearin' up Belgium and smashin' churches and beatin' up wom-

en and raisin' the devil generally, and darned if it didn't get me sore" (11 December 1916). Other war-related items published before U.S. entry into the conflict also suggestively prefigure scenes and images in the Nebraska section of *One of Ours*, in which Claude and his family and neighbors contemplate events far away in Europe. For instance, in January 1917, *Every Week* published a reproduction of a painting by Ralph Coleman, captioned "Somewhere in France," of a young French peasant woman sitting pensively in a church, her Bible in her lap, while soldiers march by. The anonymous extended caption (written by someone on the *Every Week* staff, perhaps Lewis) begins with an unattributed quote from Thomas Jefferson: "Every man has two countries—his own and France." Reflecting on the burdens borne by French civilians in the war and on their continuing unity in purpose despite differences within the nation, the caption opines, "Napoleon and Joan of Arc are two of the three miracles of French history. The third is the temper with which the French people received this war, and drove back the German army from within eight miles of Paris in the battle of the Marne" (29 January 1917).

These items, dated before the U.S. involvement into the war, evidence the growing interest of Americans in the war in Europe, and when the United States finally entered the war in April 1917, the war virtually took over *Every Week*. Considering that war information was managed by the federal government and the circulation of dissenting opinion effectively suppressed through the Espionage Act of 1917 (Peterson and Fite 95), it should come as no surprise that the content of *Every Week* was consistently pro-war and patriotic (even though some of its young staff members were engaged in pacifist agitation in their free time). With a few minor exceptions, all departments of the magazine supported the government's war program, asking readers to save food, subscribe to the Liberty Loan, engage in war relief work through the Red Cross, and gladly surrender their young men to the armed services, writing them cheerful letters to maintain good morale.

The young staff writers under Lewis's supervision and Lewis herself were thus deeply immersed in war publications. Half of Barton's editorials addressed war issues, and a significant portion of "The Melting Pot" was turned over to digests of war items from books and other magazines. Brief digests were not enough, and during the year it took to train, equip, and transport American troops to Europe, *Every Week* relied on men who had already fought for other nations to contribute longer original articles about the battlefields of Europe. In the summer of 1917, *Every Week* introduced Irishman Captain A. P. Corcoran as a regular contributor. A motorcycle "despatch" rider or "buzzer" in the British army from August 1914 to July 1915 (discharged as a result of injuries sustained in the collapse of a communications tunnel at the Battle of Somme), Corcoran became a source of authoritative information about "trench life" for *Every Week* readers, who were invited to suggest topics on which he should write (16 July 1917, 27 August 1917, 18 May 1918).

Because the war affected the lives of *Every Week* staff members as much as it did the magazine's readers, Lewis was left juggling an ever-changing roster of junior staff members. Ueland recalled the effect the war had on John Mosher, who "made jokes and burst into his spasmodic, agonized laugh. 'I have a friend,' he said, 'whose mother is very anxious for him to go to the Front, to see the stuff that is in him'" (*Me* 166-67). In November 1917, Mosher enlisted as a private in the Medical Corps at the U.S. Base Hospital in Albany. He sailed to Liverpool on 1 May 1918 and served until February 1919 at the U.S. Base Hospital at Portsmouth, England, where working on the shell shock ward kept him away from the front lines but gave him a front-row seat for observing the *mental* disintegration of those who had seen action ("John. C. Mosher").<sup>6</sup> Ueland followed her husband, who had been transferred by his employer to the Philadelphia area to support war-related production, and Lewis, with her staff rapidly shrinking, strongly urged her to contribute news digest items as a freelancer (*Me* 174).



By the end of 1917, the war had completed its spread into every corner of the magazine, finally making its way into its fiction. Back from Mexico, John Colton contributed his first works of fiction to *Every Week*, including "Lusitania Night" (18 May 1918), a story set in Germany on 7 May 1915 and depicting the country celebrating the sinking of the *Lusitania* (poor eyesight kept him from enlisting or being drafted for European service ["Author of 'Rain'"]). Because the popularity of the digests in "The Melting Pot," the magazine added a two-page digest section devoted exclusively to the war and anchored by Captain Corcoran's continuing original contributions. The magazine also commissioned original war-related artwork, both for its cover and as full-page inside images (like the Ralph Coleman image described above). And, anxious to prepare readers for the imminent entry of their sons, husbands, and brothers into battle, *Every Week* increased its effort to seek out accounts from those who had already seen action, publishing the letters home of a slain member of the Lafayette Escadrille of the French Air Service, American Kiffin Rockwell (3 December 1917), and an interview by new staff member Freda Kirchwey with Lieutenant Pat O'Brien (30 March 1918), an American who enlisted in the Canadian Royal Flying Corps early in the war and gained fame by escaping German custody after being captured behind enemy lines.

Richard Harris has recovered Cather's extensive reading and research as preparation for writing *One of Ours*, but *Every Week* should also be included as a crucial resource for Cather as she re-created the war years from the perspective of Claude Wheeler. The magazine required Lewis to be unusually well versed in war books and periodical content, and that base of knowledge would have entered her everyday conversations with Cather. The magazine itself also doubtlessly crossed their threshold, being available for Cather to read during and after the war. It is striking how many works identified by scholars as Cather's probable sources were excerpted or noted in *Every Week*.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the magazine published an article-length excerpt from Arthur



Guy Empey's memoir *Over the Top* (6 August 1917) and included in its war digest pages a snippet from Henri Barbusse's novel *Under Fire* (16 March 1918). Other war items published in *Every Week* may represent previously unidentified Cather sources. The published letters of Lafayette Escadrille pilot Victor Chapman have been identified as contributing to Cather's creation of fictional pilot Victor Morse (Harris 651–52), but Kiffin Rockwell's letters and Kirchwey's interview with Pat O'Brien may also have affected this composite character. Indeed, the photograph accompanying Rockwell's letters in *Every Week* shows him in the company of Chapman, and one of his letters gives an account of the air battle that led to Chapman's death. A. P. Corcoran's reminiscences also find echoes in *One of Ours*. In "Women and Children behind the Fighting Lines" (9 February 1918), for instance, Corcoran recalls an incident strikingly similar to one in *One of Ours*. Claude comes upon a "pitiful group of humanity" consisting of a French woman with a sick baby in her lap and three older children, and one of the older children tells him that the baby "is a Boche." Although Claude finds the child (implicitly a product of rape) repulsive, he carries it while his fellow soldiers carry the mother (473, 476–78). Similarly, Captain Corcoran reports entering a house in the French countryside in which terrified women and children cower, and later conversing with the group, he discovers that an infant had been fathered by a German soldier who occupied the house. *Every Week* illustrated this reminiscence with a picture of a soldier holding a baby (fig. 4).

As Lewis's work life made its way into the Bank Street apartment, *Every Week*'s significance for Cather during the war years went beyond simple source hunting, however. Ueland places herself, Herendeen, and Mosher at Cather and Lewis's Friday-afternoon teas in 1916 (*Me* 160), and as a good managing editor, Lewis certainly could not have excluded other junior staff from the honor of afternoon tea in their "real boss's" home. Ueland describes herself and Mosher as "young and nobodies, listen[ing] in silence" as Cather debated with music critics Louis

# Women and Children Behind the Fighting Line.

By CAPTAIN A. P. CORCORAN

A MAIDFOWMAN wandering through a shattered street, mourning and carrying her hands, a baby girl hung by the middle, her mouth open from crying, great in old man crouching round the ruins of his home, trying to explain that it is no longer affordable shelter—these night are the scenes of war.

Perhaps you think you know it better, because you have sent a husband to the front, or because you are striving with cold, or because you have lost your money and are forced to work. But let me tell you that my American and my Englishman, or German, for the matter of that, unless he has seen it as the old woman of Senneuse saw it, I will tell you her story, which I heard from her own lips. I happened to be billeted in her house for some time. It was just back of the line, a couple of miles from the trenches. She lived there with her husband—they were both over seventy—and their four weak children of one year and a pig.



This baby with a wail, is a French soldier in one of the present-day trenches. Little French wife of others, if had lost her pig.

One day, her son had led her to go to the front. She had had some. Now they were all dead. But she was very quiet, and, strictly, yet she did her day's work, and she looked after me well.

One morning, however, I went to another house some distance away. I was gone until evening. When I returned, I was to find her sitting in the ruins of her home, gnawing and crying, as well as from some neighbors were with her to inform the poor woman. Her, seeing me, she wept up, and before I could step her she had thrown herself on the ground at my feet.

For God's sake, go and kill them! Kill those cursed Boches! They came down to a kind of strike, and she could her arms round my neck. "Look at what they've done to me! For God's sake, kill them!"

The woman was distressed with grief. We did what we could to calm her, and by and by she recovered her peace. Then she had gone to turn to do some mending, leaving her husband in charge. When she came back, he was dead, but his house was still in ruins and her small boy groaning in his arms. Two days had struck them. And here she was, at seventy, with no kin, no cattle, and no money.

What did she do? Why, just what the words were in my mind. The Tommies in the town brought down sheets and pieces of tarpaulin, and made the old ruin as weatherproof as possible, and we ventured to live in it, giving her as much work and pay as we could.

It seems almost of course to many that these people should continue to live in places where they face death daily, yet what alternative have they? They might have joined, or be sent, these long trains of refugees, homeless, penniless human beings, who are now depending on charity. But France for that substance England is full of them, so is Scotland. France, but there were many who were unable or unwilling to join that throng of death in the homes of their fathers, rather than live in those of strangers or Gauchins.

All along the line you will see the plucky women folk that may at any moment be killed by a stray shell, or farmers plowing fields that will soon be ravaged if indeed they are not captured by the enemy. And, even should they escape such fate, there is still the soldier to be reckoned with. He, of course, is master of the country.

Does he need the civilian's house? He takes it without ceremony. Does he need the civilian's food? He eats and lives on it. The civilian's food? He eats. The civilian's stock? He kills it. To be sure, he pays his way, but what he pays is not always for sale. Yet, if they demand? Well, there's the story from the East.

## German Efficiency

NOT a single detail was omitted in Germany's preparations for the great war. Even the attention was not left to chance; they were foreseen, and the ability prepared in advance.

Eight years before the outbreak of the war, the German government paid a military insurance for the use of the French's Country. In it, written in French, were provisions all prepared for the use of an invading army, with nothing lacking but the money and staff. Some of them follow. Remember, it was eight years before the great war was forced on Germany by her people's enemies that these provisions were prepared for use in occupied France.

A force of 400,000 men, in possession of an extensive road system to maintain a German soldier, is imposed on the use of O—, by order of —.

Edicts have been made, without much delay, the withdrawal of the staff. The town fund for payment system, on Sunday, December 17, at noon.

There is to be no more of the kind of thing that the 7th of this month, in which going to the scene the great difficulty which was to be met in the morning. I can see now the explanation which I have thought proper to give me the severity the order in question, which emanates from my government, is in clear and precise, and the instructions which I have conveyed in the matter are as categorical, that if the men due by the town of R— is not paid for the town will be burned down without pity.

On account of the destruction of the bridge of F—, I refer the duties shall be a small number of 180,000 men by way of means. This is brought to the notice of the public, who are informed that the work of equipment will be continued. The last and that the German of the kind will be informed with the utmost severity. The village of F— will be destroyed immediately by fire, with the exception of certain buildings reserved for the use of the troops.

though not by French or British, we saw the traces as we passed. Which had me in the story of the most uncomfortable five minutes I have ever passed in my life.

We had just taken a small village which had been long occupied by the Boches. The light order, we were looking for bullets and I accompanied the officer on his rounds.

As we went, about the last in standing in the place, we could get no answer to our repeated knocking. Finally we pushed the door open. As we did so, the light met our eyes.

Concluding in a corner of the kitchen—always the last room in the French farmhouse—were an old woman and two girls, one holding a baby. In all my life I have never seen such ghastly scenes as was women in the face of these women.

The stock of French being low, it took some time to make mutton clear. When finally we succeeded, the look of terror gave way, and all three fell into fits of hysterical weeping.

They had not known the results of the attack on it. They thought, perhaps, that the Boches had returned, and the sight of us had entirely failed to relieve their fears, for they had never seen the British men before.

They told me afterward that the last they gave me had been occupied by a German colonel. The baby, I discovered later, was his son.

But still that and soldiers are not the only burdens that the civilians are called on to bear. They have to be as well as positive enemies. Try to imagine yourself in a town that has been robbed of every mechanic—no carpenters, cobblers, plumbers, professional men. Lawyers, no doubt, you could dispense with, and who bother with plumbers when you're in no without a rat? But doctors!

A woman I met in Albert told me how her mother had lain four days in a damp cellar in Rheims, suffering from acute pneumonia. She had gone there to hide from shell fire. Her family were all away.

The neighbors at first fought her. When they finally found her, she was very dead. They buried her for a day, but the only one left, aged eighty, was much too sick to come. Still, she recovered—such is the power of things. It was the medical man who died.

Yet, despite and continually threatening as is the life in front-line towns, it still has its light, even happiness, side. For one thing, it would be difficult to condemn the equanimity of the French housewife who stands largely unalarmed under fire. I've seen her often in her kitchen, calmly making her confection, ten minutes after a shell had removed a window. And there never yet was such a barrage as could make her forget to collect her cash! A thirty soul is this woman of France. Her equanimity sometimes takes humorous forms.

Cheer, as you know, are precious these days in France. Consequently it is no common sight to see Jean, Madame's oldest, decked out in the following manner: On his head is a Tommy cap, recovered from a rubbish pile. Round his body is a Tommy's groundsheet, in which these holes have been made to allow passage for hand and arm. On his feet are some questionable metal shoes too large for him, kept in place by some dirty cord pattern. And round his neck is a kind of head, one of those horsehair affairs that they make in France.

John is coming home from market—he does all the shopping these days. Madame is busy with her beloved soldiers. Is he such, as one article? Not he! He is after the fashion of his kind—the French. Well, France be blessed! Look at him on his mother's chair at home, how ever her cook-stove in her kitchen. Will she give in? Not she! Do you think her husband too courageous? You can't beat a nation with such spirit.



One of the American women who have gone to France to help comfort the devastated districts, talking with a French housewife. "No, she and soldiers are not the same, because the soldiers are called on to bear," writes Captain Corcoran. "Try to imagine yourself in a town that has been robbed of every mechanic—no carpenters, plumbers, or cobblers, and no doctors."

Fig. 4. A page of World War I material from Every Week magazine, 9 February 1918.

Sherwin and Pitts Sanborn. She describes Cather as "affirmative and masculinely intellectual" and "her talk . . . very definite," while "*our* darling, Miss Lewis, was always shy and quiet, gently blushing if you said something that made her laugh, and she just quietly saw to it that we had a nice time and that there was hot water for tea" (160).

#### W. T. BENDA AND *EVERY WEEK*

The case of illustrator W. T. Benda's work for *Every Week* also provides evidence of the mixing and merging of Lewis's magazine work with Cather's work as a novelist. Benda's *Every Week* work supports Janis Stout's suggestion that *My Ántonia*, a novel depicting events in the late nineteenth century, bears marks of its composition during World War I (155, 164-5). Although Benda's illustrations appeared regularly in *McClure's* during Cather's tenure as managing editor, Lewis continued her working relationship with Benda into the war years, with his first illustration for *Every Week* being a headpiece for an essay by University of Nebraska sociologist George Elliott Howard's essay "Will Women Do the Marrying after the War?" (17 January 1916). Later that year he illustrated James Oliver Curwood's serial Western *The Girl beyond the Trail* (24 July to 24 September 1916), and in 1917 he created a headpiece for another Howard essay about war and marriage (3 September 1917) as well as a full-color cover of a young woman in eastern European folk costume (9 November 1917). Most notably that year, *Every Week* commissioned a full-page drawing by Benda to illustrate a vignette from Laura de Gozdawa Turczynowicz's *When the Prussians Came to Poland* (1916), a memoir by an American woman married to a Polish man about her experiences in occupied Poland. In Benda's drawing, a woman and her children cower in the foreground while dark figures in German helmets loom threateningly in the background (17 September 1917) (fig. 5). The memoir had been noted in "The Melting Pot" in May





Given for Kelly Clark by W.T. Benda, L. 1917

### WHEN THE PRUSSIAN CAME TO POLAND

THE great lands have quivered, and we must pay for it with our blood, our wives, and our children.

He was a Pole, a handsome twenty-five year old, and this, one of the men caught in that first few incursions of Poland, and so he felt for the first time the Prussians on their march to Paris, as Poland stretched between them and Russia. The many peasants, moved with terror, and aided by the Prussians on the west bank of the Vistula, had well held back an invasion from the front, but through East Prussia these strongholds can be shattered from the rear.

The first day of August, 1914, masses of our soldiers were marched through to East Prussia. Only a few days later the Prussian legions in stream into the hospitals of Central Poland.

Marianne Thurmeyer, an American girl who married a Pole, describes the arrival of the first train of

wounded men in her land. "When the Prussians Came to Poland".

"We heard the news when the Prussians had taken full of ground, conquering humanity. They had been transported a long distance, and were in the corps of soldiers. The next day we had seen five hundred in our hospital."

The Poland of the days before the war was covered with great forests of oak and beech and lime. Even when the Prussians moved over to Poland in the greatest numbers it was famous for its grain. The population of 1914 meant the first step of modernization. In the next ten years the area of cultivated land increased by 1,500,000 acres. By and by the wheat and potatoes would have made that country rich in a few more

years. Its mines and factories were growing. The "country of grain" had the great cornfields for the country which had so long been the seat of the struggle of Russia and western Europe. But "grain" had another destiny for this one of the small nations.

A month of war and Poland was so about that Prussians returning to their homes were crushed, and thought they must have lost their way. Prussians well known, suddenly lost, disappeared. "Where were they?" "Where, my dear, my dear, my dear?"

And now the Prussians, our friends, children, "wounded, left alone, their answers before us. East Prussia, our child of our mother, a babe of six months. They had taken death in the proximity of their hunger. Every bit was buried down. Many more we saw dead men. Being through the woods as night we heard a child cry, but could not locate the sound."

So Keller was carried to Poland.

Fig. 5. W. T. Benda's illustration of a vignette from *When the Prussians Came to Poland* from *Every Week* magazine, 17 September 1917.



1917, suggesting that Benda's vignette of the war in his homeland had been commissioned in the spring.

Cather first suggested Benda to Houghton Mifflin as a potential illustrator for *My Ántonia* in April 1917 (Cather to R. L. Scaife, 4 April 1917), but she took no further action until she had returned in October from Jaffrey, New Hampshire. She wrote to Scaife that she wanted head- and tailpiece illustrations by Benda that closely followed her own ideas, or else no illustrations at all, and she anticipated inviting Benda to dinner to discuss illustrations (Cather to Scaife, 18 October 1917). Such a dinner certainly would have included Lewis, with whom Benda had an ongoing professional relationship. When Cather's discussions with Houghton Mifflin about the cost of Benda's services became heated, she defensively explained that she chose Benda because he knew both Bohemia and the American West (Cather to Ferris Greenslet, 24 November 1917)—a fact probably brought to her attention because Benda had made scenes and figures from both the American West and eastern Europe the subject of illustrations for *Every Week*. Neither Cather nor Scaife and Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin ever mention Lewis's name in this extended epistolary argument, but Lewis's active professional relationship with Benda and other magazine illustrators exerts a strong (if unnamed) pressure throughout.

Cather insists that Benda will complete the illustrations she envisions more cheaply for her than he would for anyone else, basing her claim on her experience with reselling serial illustrations to book publishers during her years at *McClure's* (Cather to Greenslet, 24 November 1917). Scaife counters with an explanation—and complaint—about the difference between rates of compensation for book and magazine illustration. "In fact," he writes, "in a good many cases, [magazines] have completely spoiled the artists, and have made it practically impossible for book publishers to use their work" (Scaife to Cather, 26 November 1917). Scaife's complaint against magazines partially

responds to Cather's anecdote about *McClure's* but also seems silently aimed at Lewis as an editor at *Every Week*. And perhaps Benda was willing to complete the illustrations for Cather's novel cheaply because Lewis continued to send more lucrative magazine illustration work his way? Indeed, the October 1917 Bank Street dinner at which the novelist and the magazine editor entertained the illustrator to discuss illustrations for *My Ántonia* also likely led to Benda being further "spoiled" by *Every Week* with a new commission. In November, an editorial note—likely Lewis veiled by the editorial "we"—told readers how Benda came to contribute a drawing of Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski to its ongoing series, "The Most Interesting Man I Know." "'Who is the most interesting man you know?' we asked Mr. Benda, and a few days later he appeared with this portrait, done from life. Mr. Benda is himself a Pole; and those who recall his picture, 'When the Prussians Came to Poland,' which appeared on this page some weeks ago, will find it easy to understand his intense feeling for his native land, and his admiration for the man who, more than any other, has contributed to its relief" (19 November 1917).

#### AFTER EVERY WEEK

The Crowell Publishing Co. voted *Every Week* out of existence in May 1918, citing war paper shortages as a determining cause (22 June 1918). *Every Week* thus did not survive to chronicle the armistice, the peace treaty, and the war's aftermath—indeed, American troops were barely engaged in Europe when the staff produced its last issue. After twelve years of full-time magazine work, Lewis took a month's vacation in Canada. In June 1918, Cather learned of the death of her cousin G. P. Cather on a French battlefield in May, and she spent part of the summer in Webster County, where she read G.P.'s letters to his mother and felt moved to write a novel about an American soldier like him. In November, as Cather was wrapping up *My Ántonia*,

Lewis was applying for jobs, and in January 1919 she began her long career as an advertising copywriter at J. Walter Thompson.

*Every Week* continued to have significance in Lewis's life long after its demise, as she continued to be a friend and mentor to the women and men who had worked under her. As Brenda Ueland wrote to Bruce Barton in 1930, "I like Edith Lewis so much and [she] has done so much for me by advice, money, and affection" (30 May 1930). After a few years of postwar wandering, John Mosher returned to New York in 1926 to join the staff of a new magazine, *The New Yorker*, and the warmth of his sustained relationship with his fellow Manhattanite Lewis comes through in Ueland's report to Barton of a 1935 lunch. "I saw darling Edith Lewis," she writes. "She took me and John Mosher to lunch at Voisin, and we drank too much and I can remember that through the fog John Mosher rebuked me saying that NO one any more talked the way I did about 'truth' and 'love.' But Edith Lewis stuck up for me. She looked so elegant, so charming, like Countess Mend[e]l" (24 November 1935). Mosher died in 1942 at the age of fifty, and when an elderly Lewis wrote to Ueland in 1961, she recalled, "You were always my favorite of the *Every Week* staff—you and John Mosher, whom I was truly fond of, and whose early death I so regret."

It is clear that, as Cather and Lewis moved forward together into the war years and beyond, Lewis provided many forms of support (financial, editorial, emotional) crucial to Cather's emergence as a major creative artist. Since there are no known Cather typescripts extant between "The Swedish Mother" and *The Professor's House* (1925), there is an archival gap in the record of Lewis as Cather's behind-the-scenes editor. However, the surviving working typescript of *The Professor's House* shows substantive revisions in Lewis's hand, the quality and extent of which suggest that it was not the first time she had done this sort of work on Cather's fiction (fig. 6). How should scholars interpret this evidence? Before most of the known typescripts surfaced, Susan J. Rosowski argued that Cather's move from Houghton



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he went to Washington on his fruitless errand. Their hardships  
~~over, they went for a few weeks to the Grand Canyon, - not now in~~  
~~the company of their priest, sworn to poverty. They took a suite~~  
~~in that sumptuous hotel in the pine woods and lived like princes~~  
~~instead of like the poor scholars.~~  
 The next summer Tom ~~and the Professor~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~went to~~  
~~They went, the next summer, to Old Mexico, and~~ They had planned  
 a third summer together, in Paris, But it never came off. Tom was  
~~delayed~~  
~~held up~~ by the formalities of getting his patent, and then came  
 August, 1914. <sup>He had written</sup> ~~He had written~~ <sup>stopped</sup> ~~stopped~~ --  
 The next spring Father Deschene ~~came to Hamilton to see his~~  
~~old pupil. He was on his way back to Belgium, to serve in any~~  
~~capacity he might. The priest stayed in Hamilton only four days,~~  
 but in that time Outland made up his mind, had a will drawn,  
 packed, and said goodbye. He sailed with Father Deschene on the  
 Rochambeau. ~~Eventually he is enlisted in the Foreign Legion, and~~  
~~was killed on the same, about a year after he left Hamilton.~~  
 To this day St. Peter ~~regretted~~ <sup>had</sup> ~~that he never got that vacation~~  
 in Paris with Tom Outland. He <sup>had</sup> ~~wanted~~ to re-visit certain spots  
 with him; ~~to stand~~ <sup>to go</sup> with him some autumn morning ~~in~~ <sup>to</sup> the Luxembourg  
 Gardens, when the yellow horsechestnuts ~~were~~ were bright and  
 bitter after rain; to stand with him before the monument to Dela-  
 croix, and watch the sun gleam upon the bronze figures, - Time,  
 bearing away the youth who was struggling to snatch his palm - --  
 or was it to lay a palm? Not that it mattered. It might have  
 mattered to Tom, ~~if~~ <sup>had not</sup> ~~Chance~~ in one great catastrophe, swept away  
 all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself.  
 (white line)

Fig. 6. A typescript page from *The Professor's House*, edited by Edith Lewis. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

Mifflin to Knopf in the 1920s signified that Cather, the former magazine editor, was “resum[ing] broad editorial responsibilities” in relation to her own fiction (19). Quoting from her interview with Knopf himself about the treatment of Cather’s works by his publishing house (“we didn’t do that kind of editing at all for Miss Cather” [18]), Rosowski titles her essay “Willa Cather Editing Willa Cather.” Even in light of the evidence of the typescripts, textual essays for the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition have interpreted Lewis’s hand on the typescripts in secretarial terms (Lewis was “serving as her *amanuensis*” and “*transcri[bing]* . . . revisions Cather wished to make” (Link, *Obscure Destinies* 338–39, emphasis added)).<sup>8</sup>

But Cather was not the only experienced magazine editor living at Five Bank Street—she shared a home with *another* editor who possessed considerable experience, skill, and judgment, and who inspired loyalty and admiration in those whose writing she supervised and edited. And, of particular consequence for *One of Ours*, Lewis’s years at *Every Week* gave her a deep knowledge of war news and literature, including war-related content that she edited for publication. When she picked up her pen at Five Bank Street, Lewis brought both an intimate knowledge of Cather’s fiction and the proper editorial distance from it. I do not propose to challenge the premise that Cather exercised final control over the end product (her published fiction), but the typescripts suggest that Knopf never needed to edit Cather’s fiction because Lewis had already subjected it to a thorough editing.<sup>9</sup> Although Cather maintained final authority over her texts, she welcomed Lewis’s involvement in her creative process, not as her secretary, but as her editor.

#### NOTES

1. I adopt this phrase from Brodhead.

2. For an excellent discussion of the challenges of recovery, including the way these questions are often gendered, see Garvey. See also Ahearn’s discussion of Cather’s “invisible hand” at McClure’s.

3. The complex interrelationship between the Sunday and Monday versions of the magazine is beyond the scope of this essay, and for the remainder of this essay I focus exclusively on the *Every Week* version. For brief accounts, see Haney (169) and Barton to Brower.

4. On *Every Week* and Lewis's dealings with Reynolds, see Reynolds to Lewis, Lewis to Reynolds, and Reynolds, Sales Records. Both Lewis and Cather likely had dealings with Reynolds at *McClure's* as well.

5. On McClure's 1916-17 European sojourn, undertaken to escape what he had realized was an untenable position as named editor of the *Mail*, see Lyon 375-82.

6. Sergeant reports that Cather pumped her for information about shell shock (155-56), and Harris credits her as a source for the "lost American" episode in *One of Ours* (650); however, considering Lewis's relationship with Mosher (see below), he likely provided Cather with even more information than Sergeant.

7. On Cather's sources see Harris 651-54 and Trout, *Memorial Fictions* 76-7, 119-20.

8. In the textual essay for *The Professor's House*, Link devotes less space to the extensive evidence of Lewis's involvement, simply noting her hand and concluding, "Lewis would not have made significant changes on her own, and Cather would in any case have reviewed the proposed changes as she prepared the next draft" (398-99). Nevertheless, the extent to which the textual essay on *The Professor's House* obliterates Lewis's agency in relation to her own hand is demonstrated by Trout's "Rebuilding the Outland Engine." Reproducing a page from the typescript, Trout does not even mention that the revisions on the page are in Lewis's hand, not Cather's, as he analyzes "Cather's" struggle with language and details on the page reproduced. See also Link's textual essay for *Shadows on the Rock*, in which he interprets Lewis's hand on a carbon typescript of *Shadows* as Lewis "transferr[ing] most of Cather's changes" on the face copy of the typescript (560), even though he also notes that Lewis "alter[ed] or omit[ted]" many of "Cather's" changes. Recent work by Charles W. Mignon (another textual editor for the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition) suggests that forthcoming volumes will recognize Lewis's role as editor rather than "amanuensis."

9. Nevertheless, if one were to follow Stillinger's influential argument about "multiple authorship," Lewis deserves recognition as one of the multiple authors of "Cather's" fiction. See also Laird on "coauthorship," which would take in Lewis's everyday conversations with Cather



as a coauthorial contributions ("coauthorship depends as much on the conversations that precede and surround writing as on the writing itself" [8]).

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