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thoughts and actions, while Emil Bergson and Marie Shabata spoil their warmth and impetuosity by illicit indulgence.

As a study of *My Antonia* and succeeding novels in the light of Willa Cather's "land-philosophy" reveals, *O Pioneers!* represents an important but obviously partial embodiment of her full artistic vision. Granted, in *O Pioneers!* the land actually figures as a character, contributing to the action of the novel. But while depending as much as ever on the land as a vehicle for conveying her vision in succeeding novels, Miss Cather progressively achieves a certain physical detachment from that land, along with a corresponding enlargement of her discernment. She explores and illumines the areas of the family, mechanization, art, learning and religion in the light of her inclusive "land-philosophy," at the same time that she stands, feet firmly planted, in the world of the five senses. In fine, she immerses her readers in visible, tangible reality, awakens them to the transcendent, reveals their inextricable inter-connection, and, in *The Professor's House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, advances through the subtleties and complexities of life's materials to a hard-won, convincing artistic vision.

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**THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE: AN ABODE OF LOVE AND DEATH**

*By Sister Peter Damian Charles, O.P.*

*The Professor's House*, published in 1925, is undoubtedly Willa Cather's most complex novel in theme, in structure, and in characterization. Thematically, she touches upon preoccupations that have long been present in her fiction: the interaction of the Past upon the Present; the encroachment of a materialistic world upon man's spirit; the opposition between the personal self and the idealistic, dedicated self; the "connection or opposition between youth and age, the way they mutually stir[red] one another."\(^1\) Structurally, *The Professor's House* is so complex that it baffled many critics until, in 1938,

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\(^1\) Willa Cather on the novel, as quoted in Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (Lincoln, 1963), 204.
Miss Cather herself explained its intricacies by elaborating upon the two experiments in form that she had undertaken in the work: 1) the insertion of the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*—the use of "Tom Outland’s Story" within the novel as a whole; 2) the arrangement of the parts of the novel by a sort of "free handling" of the academic sonata form—the a-b-a scheme whereby the three books of the work, "The Family," "Tom Outland’s Story," and "The Professor," interrelate as do sonata sections—a structure which in turn suggested to Miss Cather "old and modern Dutch paintings" containing a cluttered interior lightened and extended by a "square window open." Such complexity is further matched by the personality of the central character in the novel, Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter—sophisticated, successful, middle-aged scholar of history, whose eight-volume *Spanish Adventurers in North America* has won him international renown. Intensely psychological in its emphasis, the tightly-woven story records a critical year in the life of the fifty-two year old professor and traces his gradual relinquishing of a life of love for a life which accepts death and all that it implies. E. K. Brown’s perceptive study of *The Professor’s House* develops brilliantly the importance of death in the novel, and John P. Hinz presents an excellent analysis of the work as a whole in his essay, "A Lost Lady and *The Professor’s House*." I wish, however, to examine the novel in reference to the two great forces of man’s existence—love and death, Eros and Thanatos—and to elucidate still further profundities in the work by disclosing their pervasive interaction.

That *The Professor’s House* is a novel about death is indisputable. From the very first line—"The moving was over and done,"—which sets the elegiac tone, to the last chapters in which St. Peter faces the reality of near physical death by asphyxiation and survives a psychic death to "face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future" (p. 283), the macabre image of Thanatos haunts the story. But the novel is also about love—the death of love. Willa Cather herself wrote on the flyleaf of Robert Frost’s copy of the book: "This is really a story of 'let-
ting go with the heart,'" and the Professor remarks apropos of his own situation, "Surely the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love—if once one has ever fallen in." The narrator continues, verifying St. Peter's musings, "Falling out, for him, seemed to mean falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed" (p. 275). This novel, then, recounts a crucial year in the life of Professor Godfrey St. Peter—the year in which the elemental self, aware of both love and death—within him as a child but crowded out in his youth by the active Eros-creature who ruled him—comes to full fruition. The Professor recognizes this pattern, for the narrator has him recall that "the design of his life had been the work of this secondary social man, the lover" (p. 265). He likewise realizes that "the man he was now, the personality his friends knew, had begun to grow during adolescence, during the years he was always consciously or unconsciously conjugating the verb 'to love'—in society and solitude, with people, with books, with the sky and open country, in the lonesomeness of crowded city streets" (p. 264). Now, however, as the novel opens, this life of love seems dead; all that the Professor had intensely cared for seems bereft of interest for him. His life had been happy mainly because of his two romances: "one of the heart, which had filled his life for many years, and a second of the mind—of the imagination" (p. 258), but both are now over. His wife Lillian, with whom he had been keenly in love when they were married, had become gradually alienated by his "romance of the mind"—his joy in his scholarly work and his friendship with the young man who made that work so "simple and inevitable," Tom Outland. Now Lillian is preoccupied with her sons-in-law with whom "she had begun the game of being a woman all over again" (p. 79), and spends her time planning and furnishing the new home into which St. Peter is so reluctant to move. As for his romance of the mind, that too is over: The Spanish Adventurers is at last completed. Furthermore, Tom Outland is dead, and though his memory makes a ray of light in the Professor's growing darkness, the vulgar use to which the young man's fortune is being put is a daily torment to the sensitive scholar.

6 Sergeant, 215. Miss Cather refers, of course, to Frost's poem, "Wild Grapes," in which the speaker asserts, "nothing tells me/That I need learn to let go with the heart."
The basic problem of St. Peter's struggle between Eros and Thanatos, love and death, is symbolized by his conflict between the houses; and thus, the house imagery in this novel is extremely complex. The old house through whose "empty, echoing rooms" the Professor walks alone in the opening lines of Book I, "The Family," denotes the past—vigorous youth, happy home memories, the life of love—of the heart and of the mind. The new house, on the other hand, signifies the future, and, at the same time, death, for it is a symbol only of the vulgar success of his imaginative romance, the great histories; it images death too to his romance of the heart, when "dignity" grants the "convenience" of separate rooms for husband and wife. That St. Peter has acquiesced to this move only partially is also significant, for his refusal to part with his dark den of a study situated over the "dead, empty house" reveals his determination to grasp as long as possible the shreds of his romance of the imagination.

In order to see this conflict the more clearly, the reader enters the house of the Professor's mind, by far "the best thing about him" (p. 13) his daughter Kitty had once commented, endeavoring to describe her father's distinguished appearance. The divisive nature of St. Peter's love has already been indicated by the very categorizing of his romances into heart and head, but Miss Cather underscores this by further symbolic use of place. Through detailed description of the Professor's study and by insistence upon its import in the novel, the author makes clear that the attic room is a symbol within a symbol. St. Peter's house of love has two parts: the "human house" where the romance of the heart, his wife and daughters dwelt; and the attic room, where his romance of the imagination, his books, his "Spanish sons," his Tom Outland memories resided. The Professor found this inconveniently-appointed room to be "the one place in the house where he could get isolation, insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life" (p. 26). He admitted too that he would endure the discomfort of poor lighting and faulty ventilation and heating rather than risk the "perilous journey down through the human house [where] he might lose his mood, his enthusiasm, even his temper" (p. 27). The love of the imagination became to him a luxury that he could not live without. And when this love resulted in achievement of international
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stature—his prize-winning books—he found his success infected by the death-touch of money which transformed the "great pleasure" of his writing experience into a well-appointed house alien to his imaginative spirit. This separation of St. Peter's faculties of loving also accounts for the narrator's avowal that "St. Peter had managed for years to live two lives, both of them very intense" (p. 28). The Professor himself acknowledges this situation as a contributing factor to his 

Weltschmerz when he tells Lillian, "Perhaps, for a home-staying man, I've lived pretty hard. I wasn't willing to slight anything—you, or my desk, or my students... A man has got only just so much in him; when it is gone he slumps!" (p. 163).

And indeed, he slumps all the more quickly as Thanatos casts its shadow over all he loves. Lillian he had loved passionately, but he had early recognized that he could not depend upon her alone for mental companionship. When he began to make a friend of young Tom Outland, whose "mind had the super-abundance of heat which is always present where there is rich germination" (p. 258), Lillian grew fiercely jealous and withdrew her favor from the boy. The lad's prudent recognition of this fact and St. Peter's understanding of his wife had eased the situation somewhat, but the touch of death had left its mark on both husband and wife. Now, as he watches Lillian's relations with her sons-in-law, the Professor reflects, "Beaux-fils, apparently, were meant by Providence to take the husband's place when husbands had ceased to be lovers" (p. 160), and he ponders over his wife's "worldliness, that willingness to get the most out of occasions and people" which he had liked in her only so long as it was a means to an end. Louie Marsellus had precipitated this change in Lillian, the Professor feels; yet his Jewish son-in-law is not alone to blame. Watching Mignon in a Chicago theater, St. Peter attempts to tell his wife how much he mourns this "death" of their love when he comments, "My dear, it's been a mistake, our having a family and writing histories and getting middle-aged. We should have been picturesquely shipwrecked together when we were young" (p. 94). Her agreement astonishes him, yet he senses in her voice the inevitability of this entry of Thanatos into their romance, a certainty re-echoed in the Professor's day-dream of the scene of shipwreck without his wife.
The source and inspiration of St. Peter's other great romance—the young Tom Outland—is another cause of the invasion of Thanatos into the Professor's life. It is not so much Tom's physical death that brings Godfrey St. Peter pain—not once in the course of the novel is Tom's actual death mentioned with regret—but it is the vulgar use to which Tom's "princely gifts" are put that moves the mind and heart of the Professor to wish for death. Tom's generous legacy of all returns from his invention, the Outland vacuum, to his fiancée, St. Peter's beautiful daughter Rosamond, is ultimately the "alchemy" that works death upon all who touch it. Louie Marsellus, now Rosamond's husband, is the "extravagant and wheeling stranger" whose business acumen aids the legacy to yield large monetary returns. Yet to the young Jewish boy, Tom is simply "an adored and gifted brother" (p. 166) who "got nothing out of it but death and glory" (p. 41). The death that the Professor sees working, however, is far more insidious, for he watches this fantastic fortune change and harden his whole world. Mrs. St. Peter, as has already been seen, develops into a determined and scheming woman to whom money and position mean more than happiness. Rosamond and Kitty, his two beloved daughters, grow estranged from each other through envy and jealousy over the money. Kitty acknowledges to her father that when Rosamond approaches, she feels "hate coming toward her, like a snake's hate"; "she's become Louie," Kitty continues. "He and all this money have ruined her" (pp. 85–86). With an agony like that of death, the Professor recalls the faces of his two children on that fateful day when he discovered the extent to which money colored their relationship. At the thought a cry of sorrow rings from his heart: "Was it for this the light in Outland's laboratory used to burn so far into the night!" (p. 90). The conversion of Tom's "very bones into a personal asset" by the naming of her new home "Outland" is further aggravated by the deep hurt Rosamond gives her father when she asks him to accompany her to Chicago in order to purchase furnishings for the new house. "An orgy of acquisition," St. Peter calls the shopping tour, and he wonders "where a girl who grew up in that old house of ours" (p. 154) had acquired such a manner.

But it is not only his immediate family which has been so adversely affected by Tom's gifts. Professor St. Peter's colleague,
Dr. Robert Crane, who had worked with the young Outland as adviser, now haggles over a share of the profits. Always a staunch supporter of the Professor's scholarly ideals, Crane shows himself as crassly utilitarian as the rest. Such disillusionment eats deeply into the Professor's Eros-spirit, and Thanatos is close to victory in the scene which depicts St. Peter's departure from Crane's laboratory-study:

The world was sad to St. Peter as he looked around him; the lake-shore country flat and heavy, Hamilton small and tight and airless. The university, his new house, his old house, everything around him, seemed insupportable (p. 150).

Shadowed by this bleak vision, St. Peter finds it imperative to refuse Louie's offer of a European holiday. Using his desk as the "shelter one could hide behind" (p. 161), he pleads work as an excuse but begs the others to enjoy their trip.

It is with relief, then, that St. Peter bids Lillian and the Marselluses farewell and "smuggles his bed and clothing back to the old house and settles down to a leisurely bachelor life" (p. 171). Once more established in this "house of love," the Professor allows himself to return partially to his "romance of the imagination" by attempting to edit and annotate Tom's diary for publication. The labor involved in capturing this boy's spirit for the written page enables St. Peter to recall memories of a summer that he had spent in Tom's company. It was during that time the young man had told the Professor his "story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about—until he grows older" (p. 176).

This tale, which forms Book II of the novel, does indeed, as Miss Cather intended, "open the square window [on the stifled room of 'The Family'] and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine regard for trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour." Yet because it is identified as a "story of youthful defeat," one expects to find within it life's essential elements—love and death. Love there is, undeniably: the brotherly love of Tom Outland for Roddy Blake, ten years his senior, who, Tom confesses, "surely got to think a lot of me, as I did of him" (p. 185); and imaginative love for the tantalizing neighbor, the glorious Blue Mesa, admirably

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inaccessible in its mystery. But penetration into the Mesa’s secret—and into the secret of human relations—brought Tom face-to-face with death, too,—not only in the dead Cliff City, but also in the evidence of that powerful force in the “personal tragedy” of “Mother Eve.” By far the deepest probing into the mystery of love and death in “Tom Outland’s Story,” however, centers in the conflict of Tom’s two loves. Like Professor St. Peter, Tom found himself torn between a love of the heart—Roddy and his devoted work in Tom’s behalf—and a love of the imagination—the delight of his investigative mind in the discovery of the Blue Mesa and all that it implied. Though his decision in favor of the love of the imagination brings Tom the comprehension of the wholeness of life during that summer of great joy, later, as he retells his story to the Professor, he prophesies death as the only outcome for such an abuse of Roddy’s love:

But the older I grow, the more I understand what it was I did that night on the mesa. Anyone who requites faith and friendship as I did, will have to pay for it. I’m not very sanguine about good fortune for myself. I’ll be called to account when I least expect it (p. 253).

This glimpse into the past, through the person of Tom Outland, and deeper yet, through his discovery of the Cliff City, into the ancient past of an admirable civilization, does indeed create a perspective which contrasts vividly with the airless college town, the setting of St. Peter’s two “houses.” In addition, the narration of the “very curious experience” which brought “training and insight” (p. 259) to the lad who “idealized the people he loved and paid his devoir to the ideal rather than the individual” (p. 172) allows for a clearer understanding of Tom himself, whose ghostly presence permeates the novel and inspires such esteem in Professor St. Peter. When then, in Book III, “The Professor,” the novel’s focus is trained on St. Peter alone—physically and psychically—the reader finds that the man whose life “had been shaped by all the penalties and responsibilities of being and having been a lover” (p. 265) is not content in his “summer of great misfortune” to rest in a vicarious reliving of the happy times with the young Tom. Outland’s life too, despite its simplicity in the bracing air of the Blue Mesa, was beset by the dangers of that “secondary social
man, the lover” (p. 265). No, it is not to Tom who had “brought St. Peter a kind of second youth” (p. 258) that the Professor now turns for companionship in his loneliness. It is to another boy, “the boy the Professor had long ago left behind him in Kansas, in the Solomon Valley—the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter” (p. 263). With this youth St. Peter reverts to an almost primitive existence; goes back, it seems, to pick up threads of reality—in contradistinction to the romantic life he had indulged in with Lillian and Tom: “the Professor felt that life with this little Kansas boy, little as there had been of it, was the realest of his lives, and that all the years between had been accidental, ordered from the outside” (p. 264). This child deals with essences, and his acceptance of life is total. He seems, like Freud’s death instinct, bent upon bringing life “back to its primaeval, inorganic state,” while at the same time he makes one aware of life’s strong, positive powers. For Godfrey St. Peter, whose life had been so intensely dedicated to Eros’ vital affirmation, the youthful spirit’s recognition of the “declining sun,” the restraining root, the dying leaves—life’s negative functions—is truly striking. St. Peter discovers that under this boy’s tutelage he is brought, much like his grandfather before him, to realize that “there are only a few years, at the last, in which a man can consider his estate, and he thought he might be quite as near the end of his road as his grandfather had been” (p. 266). In the company of this lad the Professor spends long hours at the lake. Yet despite this “novel mental dissipation” St. Peter becomes aware that he is growing indifferent to his own life, quite as if it were the life of another person. Alarmed at length by the persistence of the conviction “that he was nearing the end of his life” (p. 267), St. Peter takes the precaution of checking with his doctor, though he fails to acquaint him with the real reason for the examination—“one doesn’t mention such things” (p. 269).

With Chapter IV of Book III the Professor’s vacation time is at an end and the “elegy season” is once more upon him. The child Godfrey has departed, but his elemental spirit—aware of both love and death—remains with St. Peter. Despite Dr. Dudley’s positive assurance that all is well, the Professor finds that

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his attitude toward his students is strangely negative: he does not attempt to learn their names for he feels that “his relations with them [will] be of short duration” (p. 271). Furthermore, the “family” is now crowding about him again. First to arrive are Scott and Kitty, and the Professor’s first encounter with Scott results in a wearying discussion of the “matter of domicile,” indeed a knotty problem for St. Peter. Pondering the issue, he is reminded of Longfellow’s lines:

For thee a house was built  
Ere thou was born;  
For thee a mould was made  
Ere thou of woman camest. 9

This thought of man’s last house is no longer “insupportable” to the Professor; just the opposite is true: human houses are now “insupportable.” After his summer’s association with the primitive Godfrey, he finds that “now he thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was Truth” (p. 272). Days later a letter brings the news that Lillian and the Marselluses will soon be arriving; they are already on the high seas in a fast vessel, the Berengaria. This word weighs heavily upon St. Peter’s shoulders and he retires to his old study, determined to discover “some way in which a man who had always tried to live up to his responsibilities could, when the hour of desperation came, avoid meeting his own family” (p. 274). The air grows oppressive; a storm gathers; St. Peter struggles in vain with his problem and eventually lies down on his old couch, falling into a deep and “death-like” sleep.

The awareness of danger is a vaguely-remembered dream when St. Peter awakens from his thinly-disguised “death-wish” of a sleep; Death has come, the Professor realizes—not the death of the body, but a kind of psychic death from which new life is born. New life—different from the old, exuberant, romantic life of the past—but a more real life. Austere, but beautiful in a somber, quiet way, this new life is symbolized by Augusta—a technical stroke prepared for naturally in the course of the story. From the novel’s opening pages Augusta, the staid, middle-aged German Catholic seamstress, has played a small

9 E. K. Brown, in the analysis cited above, corrects Willa Cather’s memory on the Longfellow poem, p. 244.
but persistent part in the Professor’s life. His beloved study, in which he is now recovering under her care, was their mutual workshop for many years. Their realms of activity were very different, yet they were mindful of one another. When the problem of moving to the new house came up, Augusta remarked to St. Peter cheerfully, “I guess we will have to do our moving together,” and his refusal to allow her to take his beloved “dress forms” aroused her vexation and disapproval of his “foolishness.” Her patterns she was permitted to take though, and as the two bent over the box-couch to claim their respective belongings, they found that “in the middle . . . patterns and manuscripts interpenetrated.” St. Peter commented meaningfully, “I see we shall have some difficulty in separating our life work. Augusta. We’ve kept our papers together a long while now” (pp. 22–23). The symbolic intention of this “interpenetration” between the two is verified by their mutual understanding at a very deep level. Augusta highly respected the Professor’s basic honesty and integrity. Even over the matter of the dress forms about which St. Peter became at times—in Augusta’s opinion,—“risque,” the little seamstress trusted him, for “she was sure of his ultimate delicacy” (p. 18). Concerning religion too she had an implicit faith in his good will, despite the fact that he joked with her about the propriety of a priest visiting a lady in her bed-room. Furthermore, he teased her about working for his reconversion:

“You’ll never convert me back to the religion of my fathers now, if you’re going to sew in the new house and I’m going to work on here. Who is ever to remind me when it is All Souls’ Day, or Ember Day, or Maundy Thursday, or anything?” (pp. 24–25).

His admiration for her simplicity and hers for his honesty brought joy to both of them, and the narrator comments concerning one of their casual meetings: “Their ways parted, and both went on more cheerful than when they met. The Professor climbed to his study feeling quite as though Augusta had been there and brightened it up for him” (p. 100).

Thus it is not surprising to find the Professor, after his near-fatal accident, opening his eyes to this new life as the clock in Augusta’s church tower strikes midnight, and beholding this calm little woman peacefully reading her prayer book by the kerosene lamp at his desk. With the same lack of sentimentality
that characterizes her approach to death, hard winters, or "any of the sadesses of nature" (p. 281), the seamstress tells the scholar of his near-asphyxiation and her fortunate arrival in time to save him. Meekly, St. Peter asks her to remain with him: "I seem to feel rather lonely—for the first time in months" (p. 279). He feels, too, that in regarding Augusta, he faces "humankind, as if after a definite absence from the world of men and women" (p. 279). Just before this fatal accident, St. Peter had dreaded the possible intrusion of the German Catholic seamstress; now, however, he realizes that "if he had thought of Augusta sooner, he would have got up from the couch sooner. Her image would have at once suggested the proper action" (pp. 279–280). He reflects how, all during his life at Hamilton, she had served as a "corrective, a remedial influence." Often at breakfast with him—before the rest of the family were up—she had spoken wisely and seriously:

She wasn't at all afraid to say things that were heavily, drearily true, and though he used to wince under them, he hurried off with the feeling that they were good for him, that he didn't have to hear such sayings half often enough (p. 280).

Perhaps she is "like the taste of bitter herbs," like "the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from" (p. 280), but she is also "seasoned and sound and on the solid earth . . . and, for all her matter-of-factness and hard-headedness, kind and loyal. He even felt a sense of obligation toward her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real. And when you admitted that a thing was real, that was enough—now" (p. 281). The reality that the young St. Peter had made so understandable this summer, the reality of life itself—that is what Augusta is to him. But more than that. She is a constant reminder that death—deaths of all kinds—are a part of life. St. Peter admits that "he had never learned to live without delight . . . without joy, without passionate griefs" (p. 282). This psychic death—this "temporary release from consciousness," as he calls it—had indeed been beneficial to Godfrey St. Peter. The "something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished" (p. 282) was his own romantic notion of life created by a divorce between love and death. Now, when "at least, he felt the ground
under his feet” (p. 283), he can realistically assess life as compounded of two great forces—love and death—and “face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future” (p. 283).

A WILLA CATHER COLLECTION

By Richard Cary

As the end of the past decade approached, the Division of Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Colby College Library did not harbor any appreciable amount of Willa Cather memorabilia among its more than fifty special author collections. Apart from her basal value as possibly the best of America’s female novelists, there were at least two reasons why her works might have been included: 1) she is buried in nearby Jaffrey, New Hampshire, thus providing us a regional claim; 2) she was a protégée and avowed disciple of Sarah Orne Jewett, without peer Maine’s most perceptive delineatrist. This consociation inspired Miss Cather to dedicate O Pioneers! “To the memory of Sarah Orne Jewett, in whose beautiful and delicate work there is the perfection that endures”; and to compile The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1925), in the preface of which she declared: “If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life, I would say at once, The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn, and The Country of the Pointed Firs.” Despite these compelling motivations, only a few fugitive items of secondary bearing and several letters, desultorily donated, marked the extent of our Cather holdings—until 1959.

In the waning months of that year Mr. Patrick J. Ferry of Valhalla, New York, casually mentioned in one of his letters to the Curator that he had a “rather good” accumulation of Cather books which he was thinking of contributing to Colby. Over the years Mr. Ferry had demonstrated incisive interest in our collections, frequently sending choice and scarce editions of, principally, Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Jewett, and other Maine authors. By December 1959 Mr. Ferry came to his de-