

Life That Lasts after Death in a Literary Work

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If a person with a striking personality lives an intense and impressive life, he or she sometimes has a dominant influence, or even has control, over another person's life even if he or she dies physically in a very early stage. In *Lucy Gayheart*, the penultimate novel by Willa Cather, death dominates all the stories and episodes. But death does not end the stories; it rather initiates them.

This work of art has had a lower evaluation among her books, either on its plot and structure or on its protagonist. The novel consists of three parts, from BOOK I to BOOK III, but Lucy Gayheart, the titular heroine, dies a "completely accidental"¹ death in as early as BOOK II just after having experienced a brilliant awakening for spiritual rebirth. She never benefits from the awakening. Moreover, some reviewers criticize the episode of seemingly unnatural love between this twenty-year-old girl and a baritone singer approaching fifty in BOOK I, to which Lucy Gayheart spares half of the total pages. John H. Randall, one of the severest critics of Willa Cather, points out her "inability to portray a believable love relation,"² while Lionell Trilling says Willa Cather's women "are never truly lovers."³

Leon Edel remarks that the drowning of Clement Sebastian, the baritone, in the capsizing of a boat in Italy at the end of BOOK I and the drowning of Lucy in the icy river in her hometown at the end of BOOK II, are "as arbitrary as death can be."⁴ Indeed, the heroine's death caused by the breaking of ice while skating alone is "too obviously contrived."⁵ Her death, in terms of the plot, is never sufficiently or persuasively written.

However, it is clear that Willa Cather's intention is not to deal with the heroine's death as marking the climax. This viewpoint is vital to the interpretation of *Lucy Gayheart*. Lucy's death does not mean the end of the novel, nor even the end of her story. To try to find out some ethical or symbolic meaning in her drowning gives no great clue. To interpret her death only by associating it with fate, as some critics do, is also misleading. In fact, the heroine's death refers the readers to BOOK III, which, as this paper insists, is the crucial part where the author's main theme is found. In this part her description is centered upon "an occasion

1. John H. Randall III, *The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1973), p.355.

2. John H. Randall III, *op. cit.*, p.356

3. James Schroeter (ed.), *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p.155.

4. James Schroeter (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.266.

5. David Daiches, *Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), p.131

for remembering (214)”⁶ evoked by Harry Gordon, who is Lucy's boyfriend at the opening of the novel.

The main purport of this paper is to unravel how the author exerts her efforts in her description after the heroine's death. As a matter of fact heroine's entity in the novel augments its importance all the more after she ceases to exist on the ground. All things considered, the heroine's role lies not so much in her own path of life as in her controlling effect on Harry Gordon, who appears a shallow and snobbish person in the earlier stages.

As is well known, Cather herself wasn't content with the heroine she created. Lucy's characterization was not totally satisfactory. According to James Woodress, she wrote to Zoe Akins that her heroine was a “silly young girl” and she was “losing patience” with the heroine.”⁷ In reality, Lucy, who looks active, attractive and independent at the outset, becomes more and more static, dependent and precarious with the progress of the story, losing the will for autonomy and self-realization that had been the greatest traits of Cather's former heroines like Antonia Shimerda in *My Antonia* or Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!*.

In BOOK I, we become gradually disappointed at Lucy's infatuation with Clement Sebastian, despite the author's comment that she had intended to show “youth's tendency to ‘hero-worship’ which somehow seems a little ridiculous though it is a natural feeling in all ardent young people.”⁸ In BOOK II which, for the most part, describes Lucy's miserable predicament after Sebastian's drowning, we are rather fed up to see her childish behavior to contrive a chance to meet Harry, whom she had jilted only a few months before by telling him a disgraceful lie. In spite of all those episodes, she drowns in the river anyway, partly due to her recklessness, partly for fate, and partly for Harry's intolerance.

By giving the heroine an early death in BOOK II Cather centers her description, and intrigues our interest, on Harry Gordon, who never appears to have a crucial role in BOOK I and BOOK II. Cather once said she liked BOOK III in which Harry remembers the past on the night of the burial of Lucy's father who survived the longest among the Gayhearts. BOOK III accounts for only one-tenth of the whole pages of *Lucy Gayheart* and, on the surface, looks as if it were only an epilogue. But, as Cather herself says, “the novel doesn't pull together until one reads the last part.”⁹

As is already said, the theme lies not so much in Lucy Gayheart's short-lived life as in Harry Gordon's life with relation to Lucy not only before but *after* her death. The plot and the episodes are finally integrated into the story of his sin and redemption under the shadow of dead Lucy in BOOK III which compensates all the other parts. This is where *Lucy Gayheart* can maintain its artistic values. By taking the view that the author's point is in Harry

6. Willa Cather, *Lucy Gayheart* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962). Page references in the parentheses throughout are to this edition.

7. James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) p.450

8: James Woodress, *op. cit.*, p.461

9: Deborah Carlin, *Cather, Cannon, and the Politics of Reading* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p.143.

Gordon's redemption by evoking and "spiritualizing" Lucy, we realize that the whole structure of the novel is never really inappropriate.

Before discussing Lucy Gayheart who controls Harry Gordon's life even after her death, we need to glance at "Lucy Gray" by William Wordsworth. Some critics have pointed out the striking similarities of the name and the cause of death of these two girls. Though Cather articulates nothing about their relations, there is no doubt that she acquired the idea of *Lucy Gayheart* from this universally known poem. As it is, she gets the concept not only from the poem itself but from its prosaic preamble, in which Wordsworth explains how he got the idea. In that preamble, the poet tells of a girl who is "bewildered" in a snow-storm and found dead in the canal. He says his intention was for "spiritualizing the character."

This phrase, it is possible to say, is the key to the interpretation of both Lucy Gayheart as a heroine and *Lucy Gayheart* as a work of art. The memory of Lucy, for whose death Harry is partly responsible, becomes no longer painful for him at the final stage of the book. It even becomes nostalgic and sweet. Painful memories being filtered, Dead Lucy is purified and finally spiritualized in Harry's memory. For many years he avoids recollecting her, but finally, just as Wordsworth's Lucy Gray revives as "a living child," Harry's Lucy Gayheart comes back as "the best thing he had to remember." The two greatest motifs of the novel are, no doubt, the spiritualization of Lucy Gayheart and the atonement of Harry Gordon who had been tortured by the "sense of guilt."

BOOK I starts in "modern times," namely, in 1927, but it soon dates back to Christmas holidays in 1901 and ends in the autumn of 1902 when Clement Sebastian drowns in Lake Como in Italy. BOOK II starts on Christmas holidays in 1902 and ends a month later in January in 1903, when Harry Gordon encounters a train of people carrying the body of Lucy Gayheart who, having been refused by him a ride on his sleigh, goes skating totally alone and drowns when the ice in the river cracked. BOOK III comes back again to the "modern times" when Lucy's father, Jacob, dies. On that night Harry Gordon recollects the past and faces the memory of Lucy Gayheart. Thus, BOOK I and II ends with death, while BOOK III begins with it.

We discuss the heroine's role from the perspective of what she meant to Harry Gordon, especially after her death and how he finds salvation from the "life sentence" he has suffered. But, first, by way of comparison we glance at what her life meant to Clement Sebastian, a celebrated baritone who is, as he says, "quite old enough to be [her] father." A music school student in Chicago, she auditions successfully for the role as a fill-in accompanist playing the piano for Sebastian's practice hours and they fall in love. Despite the fact that Lucy knows he is "not going to make love to [her]," she is content with her position of joining in his private, upper-class way of life: "Her life was exactly as she wanted it" (96). To devote her whole self to him, she believes, is "the most extravagant of all hopes." Thus the greatest trait of Lucy's

unrequited love for Sebastian is, as Tom Quirk points out, “Lucy attaches her hopes and desires to another’s fulfillment.”¹⁰

Actually, this kind of altruistic devotion constitutes a fatal obstacle to an artistic career, but their relationship reveals a unique feature on the part of the author. What is depicted here is the love between an artist approaching to his senescence and a girl young enough to be his daughter. Lucy worships her lover but never feels sexual desire to him and also, while Sebastian says he loves Lucy, he does not treat her as a woman, as a sexual object. The relationship is entirely platonic and never likely to be the one accompanied by sex which the author dislikes and even fears. It is imaginable how an appropriate material their love was for the author in creating the sort of love that does not involve sexuality.

Sebastian is the man who has marked the zenith in the world of arts to which the author attaches the highest value. He has, as Lucy says, “everything other people are struggling for.” With all this resounding success, the past he looks back to is, as he reflects, “Emptiness, that was the feeling.” Having harbored the haunting fear of aging and dying, he has desperately been aspiring youth, both physical and spiritual, which twenty-year-old Lucy symbolizes and radiates. Through the interaction with this girl he struggles to recover his “youth, love, hope—all the things that pass,” while initiating this crude young girl into the world of art and sophistication. Cather’s delineation shows that Lucy is a talented girl as a music school student but is not talented enough to be a professional artist. Only in that sense their relationship is reciprocal.

Tangibly, Cather presents one type of ideal situation where lovers experience supreme happiness without a sexual or marital relationship about which, to say the least, she has no concern as her literary material. This is perhaps what Maxwell Geismer, one of the few critics who highly evaluated *Lucy Gayheart*, meant when he said this novel involves “the most complete love relationship”¹¹ among Cather’s works. Bewilderingly, however, BOOK I abruptly comes to an end with the news that Clement Sebastian drowned in Italy with his regular accompanist for whom Lucy filled in.

To decipher Willa Cather’s manipulation of sexuality, we should take notice of one symbolic scene in BOOK I. She confides to Harry Gordon, who visits Lucy in Chicago, that she loves “another man.” Harry is perplexed, but the greatest concern he expresses here is “How far?” Hearing this, Lucy tells a lie with anger and “a flash of scorn,” insinuating that she has sexual relations with Sebastian. Harry leaves her in resentment. What is important in this scene is not whether Lucy and Sebastian actually have the physical contact, nor “how far” their relationship has progressed. The importance lies in the very fact that the sexual elements, even on a verbal basis, come to be involved in her purely platonic sphere of love with an artist to whom she gives her absolute devotion. In Lucy’s mentality, her relationship with Sebastian is so sacred and chaste that even a slightest thought about sex is profane. Harry Gordon has

10. Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture* (Chapel Hill & London: The University Nebraska Press, 1990), p.177.

11. James Schroeter (ed.), *op. cit.*, Willa Cather and Her Critics p.196.

broken into that sacred sphere: "It was as if he [Harry] had brought all his physical force, big well-kept body, to ridicule something that had no body, that was a faith, an ardor." In a general concept it is quite natural that Harry Gordon, young and energetic, should conceive of her relations with Sebastian in terms of sexuality when he hears Lucy's confession. The disaster for Lucy is that, against his intrusion into her undefiled world, she responds on the same plane. Lucy is finally forced to get involved, albeit only verbally, in the forbidden area she has banned herself from entering. It is at this stage that she makes a break with Harry Gordon and, at the same time, experiences an enormous shame because of her own lie. Though her drowning is totally accidental in itself, the anger Harry harbors at the lie leads to her death in a roundabout way.

In BOOK I, Harry's role is only secondary as compared to Sebastian, the artist. Even in BOOK II where the artist, drowned, never enters the story, Harry's appearance on the scene is not so frequent except in Lucy's mind. In BOOK III where Lucy is dead for twenty-five years, the narrative is centralized in the introspection of fifty-five-year-old Harry Gordon. The author's motif is embedded in that introspection in which dead Lucy is the central figure. In short, while Harry is the character that appears on the scene, the central character is Lucy Gayheart, the dead heroine who controls his whole life. This view offers justification to Lucy's too early, too accidental, and too "arbitrary" death.

Harry Gordon, a man of "good physical presence", lives all through his life in Lucy's hometown, Haverford. The author's character delineation in BOOK I emphasizes Harry's snobbery and their apparent incompatibility. The scene of their argument about a picture in Chicago museum reveals their irreconcilability in a symbolical manner. Pointing out figures of French impressionists that are "not correctly drawn," he criticizes them, saying "anatomy is a fact" and "facts are at the bottom of everything." Lucy answers with restraint that "some pictures are meant to express a kind of feeling merely and then accuracy doesn't matter"(101). In this slightly far-fetched scene Lucy's perfectly sound logic is incomprehensible to Harry. He appears such a stereotyped, self-confident and almost caricaturized businessman that we are somewhat perplexed at the seemingly unbecoming scene of his meditation in BOOK III. Nevertheless, it is after Lucy's death that Harry realizes she was right.

BOOK I also contains some passages that foreshadows his dual personality. At the very early stage, the author says he is determined to marry Lucy because he means "to commit the supreme extravagance and marry for beauty" and "to have a wife other men would envy him." Importantly these passages imply young Gordon's twofold mind in which "imagination" and "conceit" are intermingled. Deep underneath his conceit and snobbery, "so deep that he held no communication with it," he conceals "imagination" of which only Lucy knows the existence. She is the only person that sees through to the "depth" of his mind of which he himself is not totally aware. It is because of this hidden trait that his whole life is dominated by Lucy even after she died. And more importantly, it is because of this trait that he finally obtains salvation.

In BOOK II where most of the narrative is focused on Lucy's behavior and her consciousness, he shows very little of his imaginative side. But Lucy believes he has "more depth than the people around him" and has "some imagination," and that he keeps "that side of himself well hidden." She looks upon this posture as his "strength." It is obvious to the reader, however, that this is the manifestation of his "conceit." The word "conceit" appears five times in this novel and all of them are used in Lucy's reflections upon Harry Gordon. His inherent "conceit" outstrips, and hides, his imaginative side in this stage. It is his conceit that destines him for the life of contrition, and it is his imagination that brings redemption at the end.

BOOK II features Lucy's returning home from Chicago after Sebastian's death and her making a desperate, almost ridiculous attempt to approach Harry Gordon who is already married to another woman. Cather does not articulate "exactly what" Lucy wishes for.

And why, she wondered ... would it mean so much? She didn't know. ... Perhaps it was because he was big and strong and a little hard.... Conceited and canny he was most days of the month; but on occasion something flashed out of him. ... There was a man underneath all those layers of caution; he wasn't tame at the core. (175)

Unmistakably, what Lucy wants is Harry Gordon as a man, as a physical entity. In her dire predicament caused by the death of Sebastian with whom she believed she had a purely platonic relationship, she is, understandably, now looking for help in Harry's manhood though it is doubtful whether she is aware of the nature of what she is seeking for.

It is no wonder that in "the desperateness of [her] distress" she tries to heal her psychic wound by seeking virility in a strong man. As a matter of course, however, Willa Cather never allows her protagonist to be saved or even consoled by that. Lucy fails to touch "a man underneath all those layers of caution" and recover association with Harry, whose conceit induces him to think he must "punish" her. As it turns out, his intolerance at this stage results in Lucy's death by a satirical coincidence and determines his later life in torment. His conceit, reinforced by resentment, is so overwhelming that it overpowers his latent love for Lucy which, as is revealed in his introspection in BOOK III, has been kept in the deepest part of his mind as strongly as ever. Lucy's death and the "life sentence" he experiences could have been avoided if he could have held back his conceit.

Susan Rosowski says Harry is "capable of showing generosity and cruelty."¹² In BOOK I and II, however, the author gives us very limited passages that suggest his ambivalence or his inner virtues, either in his behavior or in his attitude. Only when we read BOOK III we are aware of his imaginative, reflective side and realize that Lucy was true. BOOK III is, to put in Doborah Carlin's words, "the filling in of BOOK II's absent story, the answer to why

12. Susan J. Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p.227.

13. Deborah Carlin, *op. cit.*, p.146.

Gordon behaves as he does to Lucy.”¹³ Indeed, in reading BOOK III we are informed that the deep, introspective nature was smoldering behind his indifferent or even spiteful manner toward Lucy. He was harboring, the author says, “a contrary conviction” that “he and Lucy Gayheart would be together again” (217). Before this conviction becomes true, he is destined to see Lucy's death.

It should be kept in mind that Lucy had known his inner virtue and distinguished him from other townspeople, thinking “he [knows] the world better than anyone else here.” Willa Cather's intention in BOOK II is clear. The greatest tragedy and the greatest irony for Harry Gordon is that he could not awaken his own dormant imagination when he had the chance to do it; Lucy's repeated pleas for help were in fact the call to arouse the imaginative part of his mind that might have led him to a full-fledged, self-realized man.

This viewpoint accounts for the desparate attitude she shows at the moment when Harry spitefully refuses to give her a lift onto his sleigh. This episode, which is followed by Lucy's reckless skating and death, has been criticized by many critics partly because their encounter on the deserted, snowy road is too coincidental. Willa Cather ought to have been well aware of the criticism she would draw by creating the scene which, at first sight, appears too contrived. When Harry drives on, deserting her in the snow and saying in a malicious tone “Wish I weren't in such a hurry,(197)” Lucy, the author says, “sent just one cry, angry and imperious, after him, 'Harry!' as if she had the right to call him back”(197).

Why does she have “the right” to call him back? What is important in this scene is neither the strength of her anger nor the lack of his morality. The essential point for readers is to find out what she is really angry at and why. The “just one cry, 'Harry!'” is not merely the cry to call him back but it is the cry appealed directly to the deepest part of his mind, which, as is repeatedly said, confines his imagination and of which only Lucy knows the existence. That is the call to liberate him from the confinement of his own. This is the very reason that Lucy “had the right to call him back.” To be short, her exasperation is the reaction to his degeneration to an average, snobbish, unimaginative man. It is the expression of her crushing despair toward Harry Gordon rather than toward her own hopeless situation in the snow. He does not answer her appeal and expectation and, by doing so, discards the chance of his own liberation. His virtue never reveals itself even at the very last moment of their encounter. This is, this paper insists, exactly what Willa Cather intended in creating the scene of their apparently implausible encounter.

One thing that should not be ignored is that their ill-fated encounter takes place after the impressionable, seemingly climactic scene of Lucy's epiphany in the Opera House in her hometown. She goes to a concert of an old opera singer, who “has lost everything; youth, good looks, position, the high note of her voice” and yet sings “so well”. Lucy is so deeply inspired by the singer's stage that she almost regains the courage to return to Chicago and reenter the world of art and sophistication into which Sebastian gave the initiation. By listening to the songs, by coming in contact with art again, she recovers the will and the morale for living:

“What if … what if Life were the sweetheart? … like a lover waiting for her in distant cities” (184). This scene of Lucy's awakening is written with such strength and, along with Lucy's drowning, marks the climax of BOOK II.

To say the least, she is not in need of a man at this moment. She does not need any of Harry's fine physique nor his entity itself for her recovery. What she ought to do at this stage is, after all, to pursue the world of art and sophistication. Harry has far greater need of Lucy than Lucy needs him. By not answering Lucy's call for help he loses the chance of self-realization, and with her death for which he is responsible, he is destined to live a life in misery. Indeed, here is the greatest irony of *Lucy Gayheart* as a novel. The crucial thing is that Lucy, like Wordsworth's Lucy Gray, remains “living” even after she dies a physical death. She controls Harry's life. For him, paradoxically enough, the memory about her turns out to be “the best thing” that enriches his inner life.

Now, we should turn our eyes to how he does attain salvation in BOOK III twenty-five years after Lucy dies. Jacob Gayheart's death initiates the story in BOOK III. On the night of his funeral, Harry awakens his memory of the distant past that has been a lifelong, sheer misery. His past after Lucy's death has been “life sentence” as we see him muttering to himself. Since Lucy's death “he used to fight against reflection” but “Tonight was an occasion for remembering; he felt it coming on!” (214)

What he is actually doing here is to release his imagination that has been confined at the depth of his heart and, by doing so, to free himself from his own prison. His imaginative side manifests itself at last.

He had just buried the last close personal friend he had in the world. He was not … likely to make new ones at fifty-five. How differently life had turned out from the life young Harry Gordon planned. (209)

The word “friend” is one of the key-words in Willa Cather's literature. For Cather, who did not believe in a marital relationship, friendship is prior. Harry's marriage with a rich but homely woman does not cure but augments his loneliness. The couple have no children, suggesting they didn't have a sexual relation.

Harry's friendship with Jacob Gayheart, on the other hand, has grown “closer and warmer—like a son's regard.” Thus, their “friendship” is vital for Harry's salvation because it “was somewhat like an act of retribution” (222). Virtually Harry becomes Jacob's surrogate son in this old man's closing years. While playing chess at Jacob's watch-repairing shop they “never talked of Lucy, but the piano on which she used to practice still stood there (222)”, the author says.

Actually this passage, seemingly casual, is extremely important. Lucy as a physical existence is not here, but no doubt Harry is feeling an entity of Lucy Gayheart. Harry has been tormented. But now he feels a spiritual repose when he is near the piano that evidently

symbolizes Lucy Gayheart. We see Harry Gordon being in the process of redemption through the friendship, or rather, through the filial relationship with Lucy's father. To put in Joseph Urgo' word, Lucy's "apotheosis"¹⁴ is proceeding.

By releasing all the memory about Lucy and exerting all the imaginative part of his mind, he finally attains redemption for his past that had been of contrition and torture. In spite of all the misery he had been through on her account, Harry now understands that "Lucy was the best thing he had to remember"(223). Thus Lucy, apotheosized, comes back to him.

Before Willa Cather made her name as a writer, she wrote in an essay on literary criticism that there are people who see "facts" but cannot see "truths," adding that "the ultimate truths are never seen through the reason but through the imagination."¹⁵ His imagination being activated, Harry faces the past and gropes after his memory. Following the scene of his contemplation the passages suddenly become present tense: "He is not a man haunted by remorse. ... Lucy Gayheart is no longer a despairing little creature standing in the icy wind and lifting beseeching eyes to him"(224). Now that his own ending of life is not so far ahead, he learns to "enjoy his prosperity and his good health." In fact more important are the passages that follow: "she has receded to the far horizon line, along with all the fine things of youth, which do not change." To put in Wordsworth's word in "Lucy Gray," Lucy Gayheart's "spiritualization" is complete.

One notable thing is that while he is morally to blame for Lucy's death, Harry finds his own justification for it, which appears, in a sense, expedient to readers but authentic to the author. He says to himself that "perhaps it was no great loss to have missed two-thirds of her life if she had the best third, and had been young—so heedlessly young"(222). This is the notion Harry comes to harbor and accept at the final stage. Harry's notion of trying to justify Lucy's death has much in common with the author's own idea about one's youth, one's past and one's whole life.

Significantly, Lucy Gayheart, the heroine, is dead for twenty-five years when the story of *Lucy Gayheart* begins. An anonymous townsman in Haverford, using the pronoun "we", tells of her in the present tense: "... life goes on and we live in the present."¹⁶ ... They still see her as a slight figure always in motion: dancing and skating and walking swiftly with intense direction, like a bird flying home"(1). These passages remind us of Wordsworth's lines in *Lucy Gray*: "Some maintain that to this day/ She is a living child." When Lucy Gayheart's story becomes a myth, a new life is conferred to her. Lucy Gayheart has revived and is living in the memory of Harry Gordon and the townspeople. She is sublimated and apotheosized. Harry is finally redeemed from the life of repentance when he envisages the figure that "has receded to

14. Joseph R. Urgo, *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p.121.

15. Willa Cather, *The Kingdom of Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p.143.

16. "The present" in the opening scene in BOOK I in which the anonymous "we" are living is around the late-1920s, and soon the story goes back to the days when Lucy Gayheart was alive. In BOOK III the story returns to "the present", that is, to the day of Jacob Gayheart's funeral. On that night Harry Gordon reminisces about the past.

the far horizon line.” He is freed from his own prison by evoking her to resurrection.

The story appears as if it ends here. But the author attaches one last episode which, though some critics regard it as sentimental and superfluous, gives a clue to grasp the author's idea. Harry goes with his cashier, Milton Chase, to see the three footprints which Lucy left on the cement sidewalk in front of her house when she was thirteen. Harry promises Milton to rent the house, now Harry's possession, without charge and, after his death, to bequeath it to him. Pointing the footsteps printed more than thirty years ago, Harry asks Milton “to see that nothing happens” to the footprints while Harry is alive. Hearing the words Milton reacts as follows:

... he was cold; a little chilled and uncomfortable in his mind too. ... That moment of conversation by the sidewalk had been more depressing, though he could not say just why. It had made him feel older, made life seem terribly short and not very important. (230)

Milton, who is alienated from the world other than business, cannot comprehend and is even afraid of “something not quite regular ... something fantastic” about his chief. But these passages are relevant more to Harry than to Milton. Harry is now a person of imagination and depth. Watching “with some amusement” [Milton's] mournful back leaving, Harry Gordon proves to the readers that he is now an enlightened, better-fulfilled person who has gained his redemption. The spiritual and imaginative world Harry has entered is, for Milton, the “depressing” one he would never, and could never, approach without flinching.

Thus the author's intention about this last episode is clear: Harry Gordon's salvation and Lucy Gayheart's resurrection. When Willa Cather wrote *Lucy Gayheart* she was over sixty years old, living in her closing years like Harry. Life is too short to cut out the present itself from the eternality of time. Through Harry's reflection Cather says: “The future had suddenly telescoped out of the past, so that there was actually no present” (220). The end of one's biological life in the present does not mean the end of one's whole entity. And the heroine, dead but resurrected, walks and runs with the footsteps.