

**INTERMEDIALITY AND THE INCOMMUNICABLE: MUSICAL MEMORY IN
WILLA CATHER'S *MY ÀNTONIA***

by

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Abstract

In *My Ántonia*'s final sentence, narrator Jim Burden describes the past as "precious" and "incommunicable," suggesting that the novel confronts the problem of communicating memory and its subjective value (*MÁ* 196). One critical paradigm simply asks, "How does one share what cannot be communicated?" (Tellefsen 232). This thesis refocuses *My Ántonia*'s paradox of "communicating the incommunicable" to the limitations of what literature can communicate as a medium. It considers music as an alternative mode of communication in Jim's memoir. The permanence of literature, combined with the temporality of music, enables him to capture his memories while conveying their transience. Therefore, analyzing *My Ántonia*'s intermedial form offers insight into how Jim addresses paradoxes of time, memory, and communication. I reconsider *My Ántonia* as a work of art or affect, giving special attention to Jim's artistic process. Building upon Jeffrey Swenson's assertion that Jim takes "memories of his immigrant friends and set[s] them into [...] classical modes," I demonstrate how Jim uses intertextuality and intermediality as artistic tools to aggrandize his memories (25). He maps Ántonia onto Vergil's Muse: a method to instill symbolic value. Through intertextuality, she becomes a timeless inspirational figure. Additionally, many of Jim's memories are described through musical metaphors or occur alongside dances, shows, or plays. Intermediality in the form of musicalized prose is a hyperbolic strategy to communicate incommunicable emotion. Levinasian and Deleuzoguattarian aesthetic theory provide the conceptual framework to explain how Jim makes his art objectively moving. His memoir, an image, is more impactful than reality because it is crafted with what I argue is "rhythm," an aesthetic force that occurs "in the in-between," permeates the reader's senses, and affects their emotions (Levinas 4, *ATP* 313). By combining multisensory imagery and intermediality, his memoir forces interaction between the five senses

and two media, thereby generating rhythm. Through a critical lens combining intermedial studies and aesthetic theory, I argue that *My Ántonia* is a musical-literary memoir that communicates Jim's axiological beliefs regarding ephemeral beauty and value. Ultimately, this thesis claims that Jim uses technical intermediality to convert subjective emotional significance into an objectively moving piece of art.

Lay Summary

This thesis argues that *My Àntonia*'s narrator, Jim Burden, merges literature with music to communicate the subjective value of memory, or what he describes as “the precious, the incommunicable past” (MÀ 196). I analyze Cather's 1918 novel with late-twentieth-century aesthetic theory and contemporary intermedial studies to better understand music's role as an alternative mode of communication in Jim's memoir. I posit that music is the ideal medium to supplement literature because it is temporal, fleeting, and auditory. By deploying these two media, Jim's memoir affects multiple senses and is more likely to move the reader. From this perspective, *My Àntonia* is a work of art that is optimally crafted to produce sensation and emotion that Jim once felt, thereby allowing him to transplant his individual experience. In sum, this thesis demonstrates how Jim uses intermediality to convert subjective emotional significance into an objectively moving piece of art.

Preface

This thesis is an original, independent intellectual product by the author, Christine Frim.

Mycelium Rhizome (2008) by Richard Giblett is copyright of the Estate of the late Richard Giblett.

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List of Abbreviations

ATP – *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (translated from French)

FBTL – *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (translated from French)

MÀ – *My Àntonia*

MP – *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*

SL – *Song of the Lark*

WM – “A Wagner Matinée”

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Introduction

In Willa Cather's most musical short story, "A Wagner Matinée" (1904), music exercises an inexplicable mnemonic power on the physical body; when attending a concert, the former pianist Aunt Georgianna's "fingers work mechanically upon her black dress, as though of themselves they were recalling the piano score they had once played" (WM 240). Eleven years later in the second novel of her Great Plains Trilogy, *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Cather suggests that music plays a significant role in phenomenology: it is "to music, more than to anything else, that [...] hidden things in people respond" (SL 273). These two examples adumbrate Cather's later exploration of the intimate tie between music and memory, which develops throughout the Great Plains Trilogy and flourishes in its third novel, *My Ántonia* (1918). Although *My Ántonia*'s thematic material is less overtly musical than its predecessor *The Song of the Lark*, the novel develops its musicality in a more sophisticated manner by interweaving music with its form. Its narrator, Jim Burden, often describes his memories through musical metaphors and many of his memories involve music, such as Ántonia's love for her father's fiddle, the play he sees with Lena, the Firemen's Hall Dances, and Blind d'Arneault's piano show. The frequency with which music appears as a figure or a formal technique, as well as a theme, suggests that it is the artistic analogue for memory in *My Ántonia*.

Literary modernism saw a rising interest in the intersection between literature and the other arts, especially music. In *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce*, Sebastian Knowles describes this fixation: "Words multiplied by music: modernism was fascinated with the possibility" (Knowles xxix). Works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* experiment by interweaving linguistic and musical rhythms. Such musicality in literature evokes Walter Pater's nineteenth-century assertion that "all art

aspires towards the condition of music” (Pater 140). Despite vivid debate about what place, if any, Cather occupies in the field of modernist literature, she certainly shared this fixation for literary-musical intermediality.¹ “Music can stand as a marker of what is unspoken in literature, a space to acknowledge moments of *inexpressibility*,” writes Katherine O’Callaghan in the introduction to *Musical Modernism* (O’Callaghan 2, my emphasis). In *My Ántonia*, music is the formal element which enhances word and aids in communicating what Jim calls “the precious, the *incommunicable* past” (*MÁ* 196, my emphasis). He intertwines his literary memoir with music, a medium that embodies the temporality, transience, and sentimentality of his memories. As such, this thesis seeks to understand how and why Jim uses intermediality – or the merging of literature and music – to represent elusive memory, or that which is “precious” yet “incommunicable.”

This intermedial approach complicates current scholarship surrounding music and memory in *My Ántonia*. In *Music in Willa Cather’s Fiction*, Richard Giannone argues that music “acts on Jim as a mnemonic evocation of Ántonia and life on the Divide” (Giannone 108) and that there is a “musical [...] impulse which reverberates throughout” the novel (120). According to Giannone’s analysis, both music and Ántonia inspire Jim and play a substantial role in his creative process. To expand upon this, I argue that Ántonia is like Vergil’s Muse; she is the mnemonic figure that recalls Jim’s past and inspires his art. Giannone also describes music’s thematic significance as a “metaphor for freedom and vitality, [which] elicits signs of their [Jim and Ántonia’s] emotional growth,” but does not explicitly connect Muse and music (116). Rather than discussing how music symbolizes their journey and accompanies them on it, I delve into *My*

¹ For example, see Jo Ann Middleton’s *Willa Cather’s Modernism: A Study of Style and Technique* (1990), or more recently, Janis P. Stout’s *Cather Among the Moderns* (2019).

Ántonia's musical form and how music and *Ántonia* inspire Jim to create art. Jeffrey Swenson contends that *Ántonia* is a Muse-like figure in his article "Art and the Immigrant: The Other as Muse in Cather's *My Ántonia* and Rølvaag's *Boat of Longing*." Swenson argues that Jim gathers artistic inspiration from the immigrants he encounters in his childhood, including Mr. Shimerda, Blind d'Arneault, Lena, and *Ántonia*. This thesis intervenes in Cather studies by suggesting that what all these Muse-like figures have in common is their strong connection with music. Because of this, in Cather's work, the role of Muse is necessarily musical.

My methodology expands upon Giannone's music paradigm by incorporating contemporary philosophy on how music functions as a medium. This includes recent developments in intermedial studies from thinkers such as Bernd Herzogenrath and Julia Meier, who posit that inter- or multi-medial art has the most potential to affect a subject from multiple sensory angles. Jim's artistic process consists of two parts: first, internalizing and processing the heady combination of memories, Muse, and music, and then conveying this through music and literature. An intermedial perspective that views media as the "machineries of sense production" (Herzogenrath 3) aids in understanding how and why Jim combines literature and music to communicate such great significance. This modern lens offers unique insight into Jim's artistic process and creates an unprecedented link between intermediality and Cather studies. From this novel perspective, I argue that Jim combines literature and music to more effectively move the viewer, thereby communicating the impact Muse, music, and memory have upon him.

This thesis contains two chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss how Jim's memories of *Ántonia* and Lena are described through musical metaphors or occur alongside events such as dances, shows, or plays. First, I draw upon scholarship from Karen Simons, Nathaniel C. Wagner, and Terence Martin, who insist that Jim uses allusions, ekphrasis, and intertextuality

with classical literature to aggrandize the figures of his childhood in Nebraska. I suggest that by comparing *Ántonia* and *Lena* to Vergil's figure of the Muse, Jim conveys the inspiration they bring to him. Driven by impelling memories of these women, Jim imitates Vergil and transforms his vision of them into art. Consequently, Jim's "individual talent" transforms the "tradition" of Vergil's Muse into a modernized figure in two ways: first, she is reincarnated in *Ántonia* and *Lena*, and second, she has not only a poetic influence but also a musical one. I then demonstrate how Jim's musical memories of *Ántonia* and *Lena* inspire him to write ornate, musicalized prose. However, his creative process presents an aesthetic query into the mimetic image vis-à-vis reality. Crafted to convey the emotional impact of his memories and his Muse, his memoir is a heavily aestheticized version of the reality. After studying the classics at university, Jim would certainly be aware of the perils of mimesis, namely Plato's image thrice removed from the truth.² Nevertheless, in *My Ántonia*, Jim privileges his image over reality, even concluding that "[s]ome memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again" (*MÁ* 173). *My Ántonia* is a text (an image) that cements and validates Jim's subjective vision of reality (his memory). This image is "better" than reality because it is crafted with what I argue is Emmanuel Levinas' concepts of the "musical image" and "rhythm," an aesthetic coupling that permeates the reader or subject's senses and deeply moves them. Jim uses the musical image and its powerful rhythm to convey the power Muse and memory have over the individual; the musical image best communicates this power because rhythm has a multisensory impact.

In the second chapter, I discuss how intermediality is especially effective for capturing the inexplicable experience of the moment. In order to explore the effect of the intermedial

² "[T]he imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small—he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth" (*Republic*, X, 605b).

image upon the artist (Jim) and the reader, I apply principles of aesthetic theory from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. First, I expand upon Levinas' concept of aesthetic "rhythm" by introducing Deleuze's definition of rhythm in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* and, with Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze argues that rhythm occurs in the "intermilieu," an unstable aesthetic plane where media blend and permeate the senses. Next, I demonstrate that the intermilieu and intermediality are linked since both suggest that the multisensory in-between has a unique power to destabilize the subject and give rise to profound thought.³ Given this unstable nature, I argue that music is the ideal artistic analogue for memory: it is temporal, fleeting, and is therefore less permanent than literature. Jim's memoir is his image of his Muse, so music simultaneously emblemizes her to song and dance as well as fleeting beauty. Finally, I link the temporality of music with that of the intermilieu. Because music exists within an instant (an intermilieu) then dissipates, as a medium it embodies Jim's belief that emotional significance and inspiration are short-lived. As Jim reads Vergil and reflects upon his memories of the Firemen's Hall Dances with Antonia and Lena, he clings to these memories in fear of their transience: "If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. [...] This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish" (*MÁ* 146). Jim's drive to create art (rhythm) comes between the moment of inspiration and its disappearance – which is itself an intermilieu. In sum, this chapter explains that intermediality is the appropriate form to communicate what memory, Muse, and music have in common: transient existence that generates inexplicable rhythm.

³ See *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 313 and Meier, p. 128.

Jim is an artist; his memoir is an artifact that produces specific affect or sensation in his reader. Through a detailed analysis of Jim's creative process, this thesis ultimately seeks to demonstrate how he uses intermediality to communicate that which is incommunicable. This modern philosophical paradigm expands upon Cather studies in an unprecedented way, since they remain hitherto disconnected from aesthetic theory. Although this contemporary approach using intermediality emerged decades after the publication of *My Ántonia*, it greatly aids in evaluating the novel's aesthetic framework.

Chapter 1: The Muse, Music, and Memory

One of Jim Burden's most significant and detailed memories in *My Àntonia* is when Blind d'Arneault, the Black pianist, visits the town of Black Hawk to play a show for its residents. In his 1968 book *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*, Giannone argues that this episode is "the pulsating center of *My Àntonia*. Occurring as it does in the very middle of the novel, it gives off the emotional – the musical – impulse which reverberates throughout" (120). The literal and symbolic centrality of this memory suggests that music is significant in the novel as a whole. Nathaniel C. Wagner also points out that the Blind d'Arneault episode is the centre of *My Àntonia*, but for a different reason. He argues that this placement is intertextual, since the musical story of Orpheus is embedded in Vergil's⁴ *Georgics*. Through this intertextuality, Cather "highlight[s] the heroism of artistic expression at once profound by its virtue of its shared heritage with figures like Orpheus, Homer and Vergil but at the same time humble and imperfect" (Wagner 41). Although these two scholars do not reference each other's work, combining their observations reveals a mutual significance. In *My Àntonia*, music's inspirational impact engenders an "emotional impulse" to make new art (Giannone 120). For this reason, music embodies the transitory yet fervent desire to create and informs many of Jim's memories.

Both Giannone and Wagner identify d'Arneault as a primary musical figure in *My Àntonia*, but there is an important and overlooked second part to this scene. While playing, d'Arneault hears a curious noise from the dining room. The door is opened to reveal "Tiny and Lena, Àntonia and Mary Dusak, [...] waltzing in the middle of the floor" (*MÀ* 105). Although Blind d'Arneault's musical influence is considerable, Jim repeatedly associates music with the

⁴ This is the alternate English spelling which is closer to the Latin.

girls from his childhood who sing, dance, and play instruments. Music reverberates throughout his memories, and so too does the girls' presence – especially that of Àntonia. Giannone goes so far as to suggest that music *is* Jim's inspiration because it “acts on [him] as a mnemonic evocation of Àntonia and life on the Divide” (Giannone 108). This chapter demonstrates how Jim's memories of these girls are described through musical metaphors or occur alongside events such as dances, shows, or plays. This analysis will lead to a better understanding of why music is so intertwined with the novel's form and content, as well as its substantial role in Jim's creative process.

In order to explain the tie between music and the hired girls, I argue that Jim compares them to the Muse: a feminine, musical figure that he borrows from Vergil. Driven by impelling musical memories of these Muse-like girls, Jim imitates Vergil and transforms his vision of them into art. He believes that rewriting his memories in an aestheticized manner is the only way to preserve a memory and its emotional value. In doing so, he uses aesthetic rhythm to stimulate the reader's senses and induce emotion similar to what he felt in the moment. Jim achieves this effect by two means. First, he instils musical and Muse-like value into Àntonia, who he believes emblemizes his childhood. Second, he uses the aesthetic force of rhythm, or art that “carrie[s] away” the subject, to convey the emotional force of his memories (Levinas 4). He combines Muse and memory – musical images – with music to create the multi-sensory effect of rhythm. In view of this sensory impact, rhythm is the mutual quality in both the Muse and music: they are significant forces that dominate Jim's memory and drive him to create.

1.1 The Muse: Jim's Aesthetic Reinvigoration of Vergilian Tradition

In the afterword of *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Leo Marx acknowledges that his book overlooks some of the most “talented but hitherto insufficiently valued practitioners of the pastoral mode, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, and Jean Toomer” (Marx 493).⁵ In suggesting that Cather’s work could be a proper subject to the thesis of *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx refocuses the pastoral in *My Àntonia* to the pastoral scenery of Nebraska being interrupted by technology. This interruption is present in both the content Jim writes and his creative process. He writes about the agricultural evolution from plough to machine; meanwhile, his writing is itself an appropriation and modernization of classical literature. After reading and studying Vergil, he incorporates motifs and literary devices that connect his memoir to the Roman poet, such as imitation, ekphrasis, and the figure of the Muse. *My Àntonia*’s intertextuality with Vergil suggests that art is born from art, that intertextuality links artists across time, and that their feeling of artistic inspiration is the same.⁶ Wagner’s analysis reiterates that *My Àntonia* “uses classical allusion and ekphrastic moments⁷ – moments where art irrupts into art – to yoke characters and authors, past and present, in a shared enterprise” (Wagner 46). While allusion and imitation of the pastoral mode link *My Àntonia* to

⁵ The first edition of *The Machine in the Garden* was published in 1964. I reference the afterword included in the second edition of the book, published in 2000.

⁶ This idea was prevalent in the Modernist period, most evident in allusion-heavy literature such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) or T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), Eliot argues that a new artwork modifies those which came before it: “The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered” (Eliot 44). In her book *Cather Among the Moderns*, Janis P. Stout argues that Cather incorporates this idea into her own work: “Cather’s ‘individual talent’ needs to be assessed with reference to ‘tradition,’ what came before her. [...] Her own writing was always done with attention to tradition, as her use of the Virgilian *Optima dies . . . prima fugit* as an epigraph for *My Àntonia* signals” (Stout 182).

⁷ Whereas the modern definition of “ekphrasis” is “a literary device in which a painting, sculpture, or other work of visual art is described in detail,” Wagner’s use of the term is not tied exclusively to visual art, but rather medial translation or intertextuality (OED).

Vergil's *Georgics*, ekphrasis links aesthetic and stylistic elements of *My Antonia* to those of classical literature. Consequently, Jim's pastoral America reinvigorates Vergil's pastoral Italy just as the art of Jim's memoir reinvigorates the art of Vergil's poetry.

Instances of allusion, intertextuality, and rehashing tradition demonstrate the significance of aesthetic imitation in Jim's artistic process. When at Harvard, Jim writes a detailed account of *Georgics* that includes quotation, context, paraphrase, and annotations from his classics professor, Gaston Cleric. In this moment of aesthetic imitation, Vergil's art irrupts into Jim's: "Primus ego in patriam mecum... deducam Musas"; "for I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country" (*MÀ* 142). Here, Jim is the "individual talent" to Vergil's "tradition." During this intertextual interaction between their two artworks, Jim experiences the same inspiration that Vergil once did. In this way, the two artists are linked across time and space to suggest that art is born from art across temporal or spatial distance. However, Jim slightly alters his translation of Vergil by changing the plural "Musas" to "Muse" and including "if I live" in English but omitting it from the Latin quotation. In doing so, he alludes to and imitates Vergil while modifying the text to fit his own artwork. Moved greatly by Vergil's poetry, Jim imitates him and borrows motifs from classical literature in an attempt to make his own art as emotionally impactful.

The most prominent classical literary figure that Jim borrows from Vergil's work is the Muse, who appears in both *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. At university, Jim not only studies *Georgics* but also reads "the 'Aeneid' aloud and commit[s] long passages to memory" (*MÀ* 126). It follows that Jim's close study of these two texts would cause the Muse to linger in his mind and inspire him to incorporate her into his own art. In the period during which Vergil wrote, the artist evoked one or more Muses, then channeled her or their inspiration to create an artwork.

There were thought to be nine Muses representing nine different art forms: Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Euterpe (music and lyric poetry), Thalia (comedy and pastoral poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Terpsichore (dance), Erato (love poetry), Polyhymnia (sacred poetry), and Urania (astronomy). These sisters were born of Jupiter and Mnemosyne, the Titan goddess of Memory. Considering *My Antonia* is a memoir, it is fitting that Jim ties his Muse so closely to memory. Despite how Jim references the Muse in his own work, his memoir evades such rigid genre classification: it contains pastoral, tragic, romantic, and musical elements. Jim does borrow Vergil's figure of the Muse but reinvigorates her in his own art as a multifaceted inspirational figure not tied to a single genre or medium. As such, Jim's art modernizes the Greco-Roman classical philosophy that music, poetry, and literature are related – like the nine sister Muses.

While constructing his modernized version of the Muse, Jim also borrows concepts from Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, namely the idea that music and literature are closely related. Plato links the two as arts that should be taught together, as they “impart grace, and mak[e] the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful” (*Republic.*, III, 401d)⁸. Moreover, music that accentuates *logos* creates especially moving poetry, as it communicates complex emotions through sonic *mimesis*, such as “sound[ing] the note or accent which a brave man utters in the hour of danger and stern resolve” (*Rep.*, III, 399a). Plato reiterates this idea even more emphatically in *Laws*, stating that “when there are no words, it is very difficult to recognize the meaning of the harmony and rhythm, or to see that any worthy object is imitated by them” (*Laws*, II, 669a). In other words, music and literature interact to represent an idea or concept more completely. It follows that Jim, seeking a way to communicate “the incommunicable,” uses music and literature

⁸ Glaucon also asks, “And when you speak of music, do you include literature or not?” to which Socrates replies, “I do” (*Rep.*, II, 376e).

to better express his ideas (*MÀ* 196). According to Platonic philosophy, music embellishes literature, and together they would better depict Jim's memories. To better communicate in his art, Jim harnesses and revitalizes these classical conventions: Vergil's evocation of the Muse and Plato's mimetic music. He places his art among the classics in creating his own Muse who embodies the interplay between literature, poetry, music, and the other arts.

Because Vergil's writing moves Jim so deeply, he imagines that comparing his memories to classical literature will capture and communicate their emotional impact. Simons explains that Jim conveys subjective value in his art by mapping important figures from his own life onto the heroes of classical literature: "In the same way that the plough is magnified by the sun, the people and places in Jim's rural past assume heroic proportions against the light of classical literature" (Simons 534). Interestingly, Wagner's analysis also uses the metaphor of illumination to express this phenomenon: "Vergilian allusions and narrative devices open the present to the lamp of the classical past and illuminate the local figures of the Nebraskan plains" (Wagner 23). Jim uses Vergil's text as a backlight that amplifies his otherwise unremarkable memories. As an aesthetic parallel across time and space, classical literature both inspires Jim's art and aids in communicating "the precious, the incommunicable" (*MÀ* 196). He maps the figure of the Muse onto the cherished women of his childhood to aggrandize them, thereby communicating their value in his art.

In Vergil's poetry the Muse emblemizes artistic inspiration, so Jim associates her with the cherished women from his childhood. Curtis Dahl points out that in *My Àntonia* "[a]ll the greatest literary art [...] grows directly out of the beautiful fertility of the earth as symbolized in such women as Lena Lingard and Àntonia Schimerda [sic]. Lena, walking in Jim's vision through the harvest fields of Nebraska, is not only a pagan goddess of fertility but is also the true

Muse of poetry” (Dahl 45). Great literary art comes from the earth, but it also comes from these girls who, through Jim’s classical point of view, are like Vergil’s Muse reincarnated. After reading Vergil’s “Primus ego in patriam mecum... deducam Musas,” Jim reunites with Lena for the first time since his childhood. With these words in the back of his mind, Lena’s emotional impact on Jim makes him link her to the Muse: “Lena had brought them [memories] all back to me. It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil” (MA 146). Just as the Muse inspires Vergil’s poetry, Lena inspires Jim to write about his life and experiences. Magnified or illuminated by Jim’s comparison to Vergil’s Muse, Lena is transformed from dressmaker into “pagan goddess of fertility” or even “Muse of poetry” (Dahl 45).

Although the connection Jim draws between the Muse and Lena is more straightforward, he also draws Muse-like inspiration from Àntonia. In “Art and the Immigrant: The Other as Muse in Cather’s *My Àntonia* and Rølvaag’s *Boat of Longing*,” Jeffrey Swenson considers several immigrant figures to be Jim’s Muse. Swenson acknowledges that Lena is Muse-like to Jim, but ultimately concludes that Àntonia is Jim’s “central” inspirational figure and that through Jim’s artistic vision she is transformed into “a Bohemian earth mother” (Swenson 27). Both Dahl and Swenson argue that these two women inspire Jim’s art and that in this art they are transformed into more aestheticized, significant figures. Simons notes that Jim’s art transforms Àntonia into a great literary and agrarian image: “She is no longer one obscure, infinitesimal life but a figure who always has existed and always will exist. She made a place for herself on the land; now Jim has made a place for her in literature as well” (Simons 538). By connecting her to a classical tradition, the memory of Àntonia is preserved and she becomes a timeless literary figure, just like the Muse herself.

With the novel entitled *My Àntonia*, and its third part entitled “Lena Lingard,” it is clear that both women have a Muse-like, poetic influence on Jim’s art. When he declares that “[i]f there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry,” Jim affirms that the girls of his childhood play a role in his poetic invention (*MÀ* 146). They have a Muse-like, poetic influence on Jim, but they also have a musical influence. Immediately after realizing the connection between these girls and poetry, Jim closes his eyes and reminisces about them. He first notices that he can “hear them all laughing,” which implies that the sound image lingers most prominently in his mind (146). Other prominent musical memories of these girls include them at Blind d’Arneault’s piano show, secretly “waltzing in the middle of the floor” before they are caught, then “fle[e] toward the kitchen, giggling” (105). He writes that dancing with the girls at the Firemen’s Hall Dances is “the one thing [he] looked forward to all the week [...] Tony and Lena and Tiny were always there” (121). He remembers Àntonia’s words about her father, that he “play horn and violin, and he read so many books that the priests in Bohemie come to talk to him” (53). Finally, he remembers the play he sees with Lena in Lincoln, “the ‘Traviata’ music,” the actress’s “heavy and deep” voice, which drives him and Lena to tears (148, 149). Many of these memories either involve or occur alongside music; this suggests that music as an additional sensory factor makes an experience more memorable than visual stimuli alone. The next section of this chapter demonstrates that upon remembering these girls, Jim is driven to describe his memories through musical metaphors and rhythmic syntax in order to accurately depict them. Àntonia and Lena are inspirational in both a poetic and a musical sense because they inspire Jim to create musicalized prose.

1.2 Jim's Musical Memories of his Muse

Jim's childhood memories repeatedly feature the "hired girls," the daughters of immigrants to Black Hawk that work to support their families. They are consistently the subject of the town's gossip, which Jim attributes to their "beauty [that] shone out too boldly against a conventional background" (MÀ 111). Their boldness stands out both in Jim's and others' memories – at least long enough to generate gossip. However, Jim's perspective accentuates their beauty and gives it a newfound significance. Like Vergil's Muse, these women are his aesthetic inspiration; they represent the inexplicable beauty in mundane experiences and drive him (the artist) to transform that beauty into art.⁹ Of the hired girls, Jim is most drawn to Àntonia and Lena, whom he describes as the most desirable.¹⁰ This singular attraction becomes apparent when he recounts his memory of dancing with them at the dance tent:

There were never girls enough to go round at those dances, but everyone wanted a turn with Tony and Lena.

Lena moved without exertion, rather indolently, and her hand often accented the rhythm softly on her partner's shoulder. She smiled if one spoke to her, but seldom answered. The music seemed to put her into a soft, waking dream, and her violet-coloured eyes looked sleepily and confidingly at one from under her long lashes. When she sighed she exhaled a heavy perfume of sachet powder. To dance 'Home, Sweet Home,' with Lena was like coming in with the tide. She danced every

⁹ Swenson argues that Jim represents the hired girls in a classical framework after reading Vergil: "With Lena's entrance, Jim begins to take his experiences with the immigrant 'hired girls' and to refine them, making them suitable to a classical tradition" (Swenson 25). During this artistic process, Jim also emphasizes their beauty so that they better resemble the classical art that he holds dear.

¹⁰ Lena and Àntonia receive most of Jim's attention; he specifically notes that "Àntonia, like Snow-White in the fairy tale, was still 'fairest of them all.'" (MÀ 118).

dance like a waltz, and it was always the same waltz—the waltz of coming home to something, of inevitable, fated return. After a while one got restless under it, as one does under the heat of a soft, sultry summer day.

When you spun out into the floor with Tony, you didn't return to anything. You set out every time upon a new adventure. I liked to schottische with her; she had so much spring and variety, and was always putting in new steps and slides. She taught me to dance against and around the hard-and-fast beat of the music. If, instead of going to the end of the railroad, old Mr. Shimerda had stayed in New York and picked up a living with his fiddle, how different Àntonia's life might have been!
(*MÀ* 121-22)

Jim's description of Àntonia and Lena links their personalities to their dancing styles. To dance with each girl is to drastically transform how one feels or experiences music. Their beauty may make them the most sought-after dance partners, but this inexplicable musical allure sets them apart from the rest. Consequently, this passage underscores the Muse-like inspiration they induce in Jim: when describing the two women, his prose becomes exceedingly romantic and detailed, even containing rhythmic elements that imitate music itself. Àntonia and Lena resemble the Muse inasmuch as they inspire Jim to create such ornate, musicalized prose.¹¹

Jim's description draws parallels between the girls and the songs that resemble them, suggesting that they enhance a musical or aesthetic experience. Lena's section is driven by predictability and soft rhythm, including repetition of the words "return" and "home." To

¹¹ Musicalized prose is an example of a form of intermediality called formal intermedial imitation. According to Werner Wolf, "the characteristic feature of formal imitation consists in the attempt to shape the material of the semiotic complex in question (its signifiers, in some cases also its signifieds) in such a manner that it acquires a formal resemblance to typical features or structures of another medium" (Wolf 255).

communicate the indolent, dream-like quality of Lena’s dancing, Jim incorporates euphonic sounds: “When she sighed she exhaled a heavy perfume of sachet powder.” Repeated fricatives combined with a lack of stops phonetically mimics a sigh, or the tide – both key images in the passage. Additionally, Lena’s soft tapping of the shoulder is also characteristic of her dancing style. This rhythmic emphasis is also discernable in Jim’s writing: “She danced every dance like a waltz, and it was always the same waltz—the waltz of coming home to something.” The waltz’s triple metre is audible in two ways: first, when the word “waltz” is repeated three times, and second, in the rhythmic emphasis of “*dance every dance like a waltz.*” Lena’s movements enhance the experience of a waltz, creating a multisensory aesthetic experience which inspires Jim to capture it in musical-literary form.

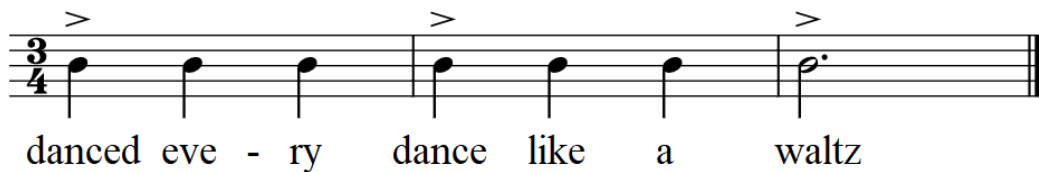


Figure 1.1: Musical notation representing the description of Lena’s waltz.

In contrast with Lena, Jim’s description of Antonia captures the excitement of a schottische. It becomes clear that this dance symbolizes her personality when they “sp[in] out into the floor,” demonstrating the blur between the excitement Antonia creates and the thrill of the dance. In this flurry of excitement, the two begin dancing before they even step foot on the floor. Whereas the steps of a waltz are predictable and rather constant, a schottische allows for improvisation, such as hopping steps and turns. In contrast with the soft, languid sounds that

characterize Lena's waltz, Jim uses excessive phonic stops to describe Antonia, who is "always putting in new steps and slides." Sounds quite absent in Lena's passage like "p," "t," and "d" are immediately followed by "s" to create quick, unpredictable phonetic rhythms. What advances this furor even further is the erratic rhythm of punctuation in Antonia's passage. Lena's passage contains many commas and a single em dash that signifies a brief pause; Antonia's has much more variety including commas, a semi-colon, and a triple-hyphenated adjective "hard-and-fast" – and concludes with an exclamation mark. Just as every dance with Antonia is "a new adventure," so is every sentence. Inspired by Lena's and Antonia's dancing styles, Jim mimics the dance tent music through prose and syntax. These girls' Muse-like quality enhances his experience of music and drives him to transform this memory into art, or musical prose.

As the novel progresses Jim experiences Muse-like inspiration from both Antonia and Lena, which poses a question: which one is the predominant Muse of his memoir? In the appropriately titled Part III, Jim's musical memories revolve around Lena Lingard. One of its most notable episodes is when the two attend the play *Camille* in Lincoln. This memory reveals that both Lena and music amplify Jim's emotions, leading to an artistic epiphany:

The orchestra kept sawing away at the 'Traviata' music, so joyous and sad, so thin and far-away, so clap-trap and yet so heart-breaking. After the second act I left Lena in tearful contemplation of the ceiling, and went out into the lobby to smoke. As I walked about there I congratulated myself that I had not brought some Lincoln girl who would talk during the waits about the junior dances, or whether the cadets would camp at Plattsmouth. Lena was at least a woman, and I was a man. (MA 148)

The contradictory nature of the orchestral music sets the tone for Jim's revelation. Just as the music is "joyous and sad" or "clap-trap and heartbreaking," Lena is a woman and Jim is a man. Here, music is the analogue for memory because it echoes what Jim expresses in prose.¹² Furthermore, it appears that the combination of music and Lena's presence plays a significant role in his memories. Jim stresses that she is the ideal person with whom to attend the play because she does not "talk during the waits." In other words, Lena does not detract from the art. Instead, she amplifies his musical experience because she is equally as moved by the music, "in tearful contemplation of the ceiling." In this moment, like at the Firemen's Hall dances in Part II, Lena adopts a Muse-like role and inspires Jim to channel music and emotion into his literary memoir. This inspiration crescendos during the play's final act, until Jim's emotions overflow: "I wept unrestrainedly" (149). Moved to tears by the music, Jim is carried away by emotions and reaches a peak of aesthetic enlightenment. When he congratulates himself on bringing Lena rather than another Lincoln girl, he insinuates that only she can make his musical experience so special. Lena and music are crucial to this moment; they both intensify his emotional response and give it importance in his memory.

Àntonia and Lena are the two most musical, Muse-like figures in Jim's memoir, but Lena's influence on Jim is brief. His meditation on the Muse begins during Part III of the novel while he studies classics at Harvard. During his time away from Black Hawk and Àntonia, Jim often visits Lena and initially likens her to Vergil's Muse. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jim declares that it is Lena who first "brings back" all his childhood memories (*MÀ* 146). After studying Vergil's *Georgics*, Jim has a recurring dream of Lena. The image of her walking across

¹² Jim's description of the play and its music is a form of intermediality called evocation. Werner Wolf explains that "novels can evoke a painting in the reader's mind through ekphrastic description (*see* ekphrasis), and they can evoke a specific musical composition in one's inner ear by describing its effect on certain characters" (Wolf 255).

the field in her short skirt “float[s] before [him] on the page like a picture, and underneath it st[ands] the mournful line: ‘Optima dies... prima fugit.’” (146). Jim subconsciously captions the image of Lena with the text of Vergil in a moment of ekphrasis. In other words, Jim’s artistic mind transforms Lena into a reincarnated Vergilian figure and she becomes Jim’s “Muse of poetry” (Dahl 45). Yet, it is Lena’s waltz-like, indolent nature that makes her detrimental to Jim’s memory. In “The Drama of Memory in *My Àntonia*,” Terence Martin compares the effect Lena and Àntonia have on Jim’s memory – and by extension, the creation of his memoir. Specifically, he notes that “Lena inspires a chronic forgetfulness. In an ultimate dramatic sense she would be fatal to memory. Consequently, she stands opposed to Àntonia, who will come to bear and to justify the burden of Jim’s memory” (Martin 310). Despite how Lena inspires images and generates emotions in Jim, Martin argues that she distracts him Jim from his studies, work, and other things that he values in life. In contrast, Àntonia inspires long-lasting, meaningful emotional revelations which Jim cherishes: her cultivation of the land, a family, and his memories. Because Àntonia better represents that which Jim values and encourages him to remember these things by capturing them in art, she is more conducive to his memory and memoir. Her pivotal role in Jim’s memory becomes increasingly apparent following Part III, as his attention shifts to and fixes upon Àntonia.

Jim’s vacillation between Àntonia and Lena as his Muse reveals his initial struggle to reinvent tradition. Faced with this problem, he skewers multiple characters in search of one that maps onto the figure of the Muse. Jeffrey Swenson argues that Jim draws inspiration from immigrants he encounters throughout his life. Swenson points out that this perspective is problematic as Jim “seeks to take the memories of his immigrant friends and set them in appropriate classical modes, fitting them into an agrarian, pastoral tradition” (Swenson 25). Jim’s

artistic process becomes hegemonic when he “appropriate[s] the[ir] experiences” (25) and erases immigrant identity to force them into tradition rather than using “the lamp of the classical past” to “illuminate” (Wagner 23) and aggrandize their experiences. Jim does claim their memories as his own, reducing these immigrants to mere inspiration for his great, pastoral, American art. As he searches for someone to fit the role of Muse, he ponders and draws inspiration from multiple immigrant figures: the hired girls, Lena, Àntonia, d’Arneault, and Mr. Shimerda. However, I argue that by learning lessons and culture from these figures, Jim eventually constructs his own definition of Muse. What all these characters have in common besides their immigrant status is their deep connection with music. The fact that Jim draws inspiration from all of them – and Swenson acknowledges these figures as Muses – demonstrates how pivotal music is in Jim’s creative process. Therefore, we may regard the role of “Muse” as one that is necessarily musical and inspirational but shifting from one character to the next as Jim encounters different forms of aesthetic inspiration.

Although Jim gathers inspiration from many people he encounters, this does not change the fact that Àntonia is the most successful Muse of his memoir (which is fittingly titled *My Àntonia*.) This success is derived from the breadth and longevity of her influence on others. First, she is Muse-like not only for Jim but for others as well. Second, the memory of her endures and has the same Muse-like effect, even when she is not present. In the novel’s introduction, the unnamed narrator¹³ reveals that to “speak her [Àntonia’s] name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one’s brain” (*MA* 2). This discussion of Àntonia’s name in the introduction resembles the evocation of the Muse, which often occurs at the beginning of

¹³ Although some scholars posit that this narrator is Cather herself, this fact remains uncertain (see Martin p. 304, Schwind p. 51, Tellefsen p. 242).

an artwork. Like the Muse, Àntonia is a concept that inspires or conjures up artistic images. The mere thought or memory of her creates “pictures” and “drama,” both forms of art, in the mind. Jim reiterates this idea at the end of the novel: “Àntonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time” (186). Unlike Lena, who Martin labels as “fatal to memory,” images of Àntonia endure and even grow stronger as time passes (Martin 310). Both the unnamed narrator and Jim acknowledge that the image of Àntonia remains in “one’s brain” or “the mind.” These generic determinants suggest that she has this Muse-like effect on everyone, not just the two of them. The extent of this effect becomes clear in Part IV of the novel, “The Pioneer Woman’s Story,” when Widow Steavens fondly recalls Àntonia’s attachment to music: “She used to sit there at that machine by the window, pedalling the life out of it—she was so strong—and always singing them queer Bohemian songs” (164). Widow Steavens’ memory embodies the unnamed narrator’s and Jim’s descriptions of Àntonia’s Muse-like effect. Àntonia evokes detailed artistic images, pictures, drama, or music, in the minds of multiple characters. For this reason, she is more like the figure of the Muse than Lena.

In addition to the memoir’s title, Àntonia’s constant presence throughout it suggests that she is its central inspiration. From Part I when she reminisces about her father’s violin playing to Part V when we learn that her son has learned to play Mr. Shimerda’s violin, she is the underlying (musical) rhythm in Jim’s memoir. One of Jim’s earliest memories of Àntonia is her speaking about her father’s fiddle playing in Bohemia. Central to her memories is the happiness and sense of purpose his music provided: “My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for play, he shake his head no. Some days he take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings, like this, but never he make the music” (MÀ

56). Àntonia's words imply that music is an analogue for memory. The way that Mr. Shimerda places his fingers on the strings symbolizes a rift between physical and cultural memory. Both body and mind remember, but the instrument is silenced in a country that does not value his "calm" and "skilled" hands, instead preferring working ones (20). What augments Àntonia and Mr. Shimerda's pain is the unique connection between music and memory: even when the violin is silent its sound image resonates in the mind. For Àntonia and her father, this sound image emblemizes weddings, dances, and happiness in Bohemia. Whereas to her the music and happy memories are within reach, *in his hands*, for her father the violin is a reminder that to reproduce the sound is to taint the happy memories associated with it. Playing the violin in this new locale, which symbolizes alienation and loss for Mr. Shimerda, is a bitter reminder that he can play the music but not relive the happy memories associated with it. Ultimately, Àntonia laments her father's hostility toward music, but throughout the narrative takes it upon herself to integrate music with her new life in Nebraska.

After her father's death Àntonia endeavours to impart her familial ties to music and the hope it brings. As a result, she becomes the memoir's most musical figure. In contrast with Mr. Shimerda, who is unable to cope with the unforgiving pressures of a new working life in Nebraska, Àntonia integrates her happy, musical memories of her homeland and her unforgiving work in her new locale. This is yet another Muse-like quality: she reminds Jim how music engenders positive memories, instils hope, and brings out the beauty in mundane experiences. When the dance tent comes to town, she carries the music from each evening into the next workday. Jim remarks that song and dance consume her thoughts: "Àntonia talked and thought of nothing but the tent. She hummed the dance tunes all day" (112). In his eyes, she becomes a symbol of music, bringing the dance tent with her wherever she goes. However, it is not only

Àntonia who integrates work and music. At the Harlings' household where she works, "there was usually somebody at the piano" (88) and on Saturday nights "Mrs. Harling used to play the old operas" (97). Music and musical figures surround her, but Àntonia enhances Jim's experience of music through her singing and dancing. Therefore, it is she who inspires him to incorporate music into his own art. Àntonia's central role in all these musical memories, alongside her ardent love for music, leads Jim to see her as an emblem for music and the happiness and beauty it brings.

Much like her father played music for her in Bohemia, so too does Àntonia's musicality resonate and flourish in others. Jim witnesses this firsthand in Book V when he meets Àntonia's children and remarks that her eldest son has learned to play violin: "It was old Mr. Shimerda's instrument, which Àntonia had always kept, and it was too big for him. But he played very well for a self-taught boy" (183). Àntonia does not teach her son to play, but she encourages him by preserving the violin – the emblem of memory and musicality – and passing it on to him. As Leo plays, Àntonia's daughter dances along, reminding Jim of her mother's love for song and dance. Not only does Àntonia keep music alive throughout the novel, but it is because of her that "in her own household at the end of the novel there is music as there was at the Harlings' place and in her Prague¹⁴ home" (Giannone 122). Àntonia fosters a musical environment for her children which is a tribute to her father and her homeland, but also creates new musical memories for her children and Jim alike. For this reason, she is an emblem of music and memory for Jim, as well as the Muse of his memoir. Because of Àntonia's close affinity with it, music is central to many memories in the novel and it is impossible to discuss her without it.

¹⁴ Although Giannone implies that Àntonia lived in Prague, the novel does not substantiate this claim. Her husband Cuzak is from Prague, and Jim sends Àntonia "some photographs of her native village" (*MÀ* 173) when he is in Prague, but it is not clear that she had a home there.

1.3 Rhythm and the Musical Image

Àntonia's presence in Jim's memories is rhythmic. It is both *consistent* as an even, predictable influence upon Jim's emotional development, and *musical*. This descriptor is particularly fitting as it unites the ideas discussed in this chapter. First, Jim uses the backdrop of classical literature to communicate the emotional impact of his memories, comparing the hired girls (and especially Àntonia) to Vergil's Muse. Second, Jim interweaves his prose with musical elements to convey moving moments, making them more complex and multisensory. Third, Àntonia and her musical presence have a constant, rhythmic influence upon Jim's and others' memories, since to "speak her name [i]s to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain" (*MÀ* 2). Moreover, her ties to music through her family (her father and her children) lends to her musical presence. For these reasons, Àntonia's Muse-like, rhythmic nature conjures up images and art, aesthetically affecting those around her.

The impact Àntonia has upon others closely resembles Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the musical image and its aesthetic rhythm. In "Reality and its Shadow," Levinas insists that the aesthetic image is musical because "[p]ossessed, inspired, an artist, we say, harkens to a muse. An image is musical. Its passivity is directly visible in magic, song, music, and poetry" (Levinas 3). An image affects the subject in a musical manner: it renders one "passive" then permeates the other senses.¹⁵ The effect of the musical image closely resembles that of the Muse: she inspires pictures or drama in one's mind, seemingly without their consent or awareness. The inevitable reaction to aesthetic stimuli is called rhythm, which Levinas defines as "a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up

¹⁵ Additionally, Levinas argues that the act of listening induces sensation but does not require conception. For this reason, the person perceiving the image remains detached from the object represented.

and carried away by it” (4).¹⁶ Accordingly, rhythm perfectly describes the dramatic emotional impact Jim’s memories have upon him. Delivered by mediation on the Muse, Jim’s memories overwhelm him, which then drives him to capture them in rhythmic art: art so oversaturated with emotion that it in turn overwhelms the reader. When he describes himself “weep[ing] unrestrainedly” (*MÀ* 149) at the play *Camille*, he is “caught up” in the musical, emotional force of rhythm. With this in mind, it becomes clear why music is so central to *My Àntonia*. Jim venerates his memories and his Muse, so it follows that he harnesses the force of the musical image to communicate the “incommunicable” (196) emotional impact of his memories.

To assert that Jim uses Levinas’ musical image in his memoir is to suggest that Àntonia is more like an image than a real figure.¹⁷ Yet, this is not farfetched; Cather scholars frequently point out that the reader only sees Àntonia through Jim’s first-person, subjective memoir. Most notably, Blanche Gelfant encourages us to “reexamine Jim’s testimony, to discover him a more disingenuous and self-deluded narrator than we supposed” (Gelfant 60). Likewise, Jean Schwind suggests that we may question Jim’s testimony by noting how Àntonia is represented both in word and image. In the introduction, the unnamed narrator suggests that the goal of the memoir is to better *see* Àntonia: “I would set down on paper all that I remembered of Àntonia if he would do the same. We might, in this way, get a picture of her” (*MÀ* 3).¹⁸ Schwind interprets this sentence as a reference to the novel’s paratextual illustrations: “Agreeing only to ‘set down on paper’ all her memories of Àntonia, Cather leaves the matter of her artistic medium open in a way that invites us to take the pictures of *My Àntonia* as fulfilling her promise to provide a

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, from this point forward I use the term “rhythm” in its aesthetic sense, as defined by Levinas and Deleuze.

¹⁷ I place the seemingly similar terms “image” and “figure” in reference to terminology from Swenson’s article. He argues that Jim “gathers inspiration from the image and not the actual figure” (Swenson 20).

¹⁸ This quotation is significant in the 1918 preface to *My Àntonia*, but Cather removed it from the 1926 preface.

separate account of Jim's heroine" (Schwind 52).¹⁹ Although the Benda illustrations do provide an alternate image of Àntonia, and Cather wished for them to be included in editions of *My Àntonia*, they are often omitted.²⁰ While the 1918 preface suggests that Jim's memoir is co-authored, the 1926 preface shifts the narrator (which Schwind posits is Cather) into an editorial role, suggesting that "Jim's narrative is inadequate" (54). Even without the illustrations *and* with Cather's "editorial" revisions to make Jim's image less "inadequate," *My Àntonia* is nevertheless an image of Àntonia, regardless of that image's accuracy.

Because the memoir is an image of Àntonia, she is Muse-like in that she inspires the creation of this artwork. However, it is also because of the memoir that this image of Àntonia is "fixed forever by a text that is (ostensibly) male-authored" (Tellefsen 230). *My Àntonia* substitutes image for reality and the reader may only "see" her through the artistic image as it appears in Jim's memoir. The real Àntonia is lost, having only existed to those who encountered her, and replaced with a mimetic image. What complicates this even further is how Jim converts memory into art (image) but colours it with his own emotions, leading to a romanticized and aestheticized version. Jim even admits in the preface that his account of Àntonia is distorted, since it is "through [him]self that [he] knew and felt her" (*MÀ* 7). He sees in others what he wishes to see; he is blinded by the emotional effect Àntonia has upon him. Through Jim's eyes, then through his memoir which sets his vision in stone, Àntonia becomes mere image: an

¹⁹ Schwind refers to the illustrations Cather commissioned from W. T. Benda.

²⁰ "When Houghton Mifflin dropped the Benda illustrations in a cheap 1930 reprint of *My Àntonia* (forgetting, however, to delete 'with illustrations by W. T. Benda' from the novel's title page), Cather considered the book an unauthorized edition" (Schwind 52). Schwind paraphrases from Cather's personal letters, which remain unpublished and inaccessible due to Cather's wishes.

affective symbol whose purpose is to inspire creation in others.²¹ Whereas the real Àntonia may have intrinsic goals and thoughts, Jim’s image only shows her extrinsic purpose as a propellant in his personal and emotional development. She is an accessory that inspires and furthers his art, since his memories “revolve not, as he says, about the image of Àntonia, but about himself as a child. When he finds love, it seems to him the safest kind - the narcissistic love of the man for himself as a boy” (Gelfant 64). From Jim’s perspective, Àntonia is an all-encompassing symbol of his memories: the land, the hired girls, music, and childhood relationships. The image of her is an aesthetic tool to embody his memories and “acquires symbolic significance for Jim; embodying and justifying his memories, it validates nostalgia by giving his feeling for the past a meaning in the present” (Martin 308). Consequently, Àntonia is Muse-like in that she drives Jim to create art, yet in doing so he transforms her into a mere aesthetic catalyst.

In *My Àntonia*, Jim repeatedly avoids or refuses to acknowledge reality and instead privileges the image he has created. In Part V, he delays visiting Àntonia in fear of finding her “aged and broken” (*MÀ* 173). Though the image of Àntonia – the inspiration of Jim’s memoir – has immortal beauty, the real Àntonia must age. The way that Jim “put[s] off” (173) seeing her for twenty years indicates his consciousness of the fact that the real Àntonia differs from the romanticized image in his mind and memoir. When image and reality are at odds, Jim chooses to substitute image for reality and “maintain[s] a kind of inner life; the image of Àntonia, suggesting youth and early happiness, has hardened into a reality which he fears to see shattered” (Martin 311). This brief insight into Jim’s psychology reaffirms that he privileges image over reality. In privileging the Muse-like image of Àntonia over Àntonia herself, Jim uses an image as

²¹ Tellefsen also highlights Àntonia’s role as a sort of inspirational catalyst: “Àntonia is not the real subject of the text but serves as the catalyst of others imaginative powers, which produce the construction and commemoration of America’s past, present, and future” (Tellefsen 230).

inspiration rather than the actual figure. In general, Jim's artistic process consists of converting reality into image through the guise of "memory," a term that validates his subjective perspective. When Jim admits that "[s]ome memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again," he juxtaposes "memory" with "reality" rather than "image" and "reality," which suggests that memory is closer to image than reality (*MÀ* 173).

Additionally, Jim implies that a memory's value is based in its emotional significance. In other words, because his old memory of Àntonia was more aesthetically and emotionally moving to him, it is "better" than anything that could ever be.

Constructing an impactful emotional image in *My Àntonia* is Jim's solution to the difficulty of capturing the intangible, or communicating "the precious, the incommunicable past" (*MÀ* 196). Jim admits his fear of losing the inexplicable worth of his childhood when he connects the poetry of Vergil to the hired girls: "This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish" (146). Jim suggests that memories – especially the most precious ones – are unstable or fleeting, an idea borrowed directly from Vergil's "optima dies [...] prima fugit" (146). Presented with this problem, Jim believes that the solution is to transform his memories into art. He rewrites his memories in an aestheticized manner, amplifying, aggrandizing, and beautifying all sensory stimuli. His art stimulates the reader's senses, "carries them away," and induces similar feelings to what he felt in the moment (Levinas 4). This effect is rhythm, and Jim's art generates it in two ways. First, he converts his memories into artistic images, communicating their emotional value by aestheticizing them. For example, he instils aesthetic, musical, and Muse-like value into Àntonia, who he believes emblemizes his childhood. Recreating her in art and turning her into a symbol of the Muse or "earth mother" is a means to instil importance in her (Swenson 27). Second, Jim combines Muse

and memory – musical images – with music to create the multi-sensory effect of rhythm. He in turn overwhelms the reader’s senses to convey the emotional force of his memories. In view of this sensory impact, rhythm is the mutual quality in both the Muse and music: they are forces that dominate Jim’s memory and drive him to create. Gilles Deleuze argues that when perceiving a piece of art, rhythm “make[s] visible a kind of original unity of the senses” (Deleuze 42). Because it unites the senses, the musical image evokes the same sensory-emotional reaction in Jim’s reader that he experiences himself. This is what makes rhythm so significant in communicating the incommunicable. By impacting multiple senses, Jim’s memoir overwhelms the reader as he himself is overwhelmed by memory, thereby circumventing communication and instead transmitting firsthand experience.

By emphasizing the musical portion of his memories, Jim’s memoir affects the reader from multiple sensory and aesthetic angles. This is why, in his art, Jim merges music and literature to create an intermedial memoir. As aforementioned, his most significant memories of Àntonia are tied to music. However, music is also woven into the novel’s form, since Jim uses musical metaphors to demonstrate the influence music has upon many of his memories and experiences. For this reason, music itself has a constant, rhythmic presence throughout the novel just like Àntonia (the Muse).²² From the “delicious sound” (26) of a ripe watermelon splitting to the “basic harmony between Àntonia and her mistress” (100), music is a synesthetic metaphor for experiences pleasing to other senses. A fruit may sound as delicious as it tastes, or interpersonal warmth may adopt a musical quality. These musical images are rhythmic in a Levinasian and Deleuzian sense: they “carry away” Jim in their beauty because they aesthetically

²² Here, I use the term “rhythmic” in both the conventional and Levinasian definitions. Àntonia’s presence is constant and musical, and also multisensory, pervading the senses.

please multiple senses. Intermediality, or the merging of literature and music, better communicates the inexplicable experience of the moment. If the fruit's deliciousness is beyond words, exaggerating this quality through music *and* literature is a hyperbolic strategy to communicate the incommunicable beauty of the moment. Such a vivid description impacts multiple senses, giving the reader the feeling of being in this memory, and thereby allowing them to understand Jim's momentous experiences.

Jim's emphasis on the "precious" yet "incommunicable" nature of the past suggests that the emotional significance of experience surpasses description. A literary memoir may be unable to communicate the depth of his memories, but merging literature and music allows Jim to capture more sensory stimuli of the moment. This is because form and content are indistinguishable in the instant of perception. In his influential essay "The School of Giorgione," Walter Pater argues that music stands apart from all other media because "while in all other works of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it" (Pater 140). Whereas reproducing memory in literature separates it into form and content, music preserves them as one. Jim emphasizes the beauty of a memory by creating an exaggerated, multisensory image; this allows the reader to experience Jim's particular image of reality, or his memory. In other words, by describing Àntonia's significance through music, dance, and description, the reader receives an intermedial – and thus more complex – image of her crafted to reproduce the same "incommunicable" effect that Jim once experienced. This method of overwhelming, or the way that art impacts multiple senses and "carries away" the subject, is what Levinas describes as rhythm. Therefore, Jim uses the musical image and its powerful rhythm to communicate the "precious" and "incommunicable," and ultimately capture the emotional impact of his memories.

This chapter has discussed how Jim uses the Muse, the musical image, and rhythm to depict meaningful moments in his emotional, physical, and mental development. One of Giannone's key arguments is that for Jim and Antonia, "[m]usic, the metaphor for freedom and vitality, elicits signs of their emotional growth" (Giannone 116). While Giannone's analysis is insightful and often accurate, its theoretical framework does not include aesthetic theory from thinkers such as Levinas, Deleuze, and Guattari, whose works offer considerable insight into how music functions as a medium.²³ Similarly, recent developments in intermedial studies help to understand the aesthetic implications of Jim's literary-musical memoir.²⁴ Rhythm will be central to this discussion of intermediality in *My Antonia*, since Levinas, Deleuze, and Guattari define it as an aesthetic force occurring in the in-between: between senses, media, and states of being. Many of Jim's most significant realizations occur in a moment of fervor and he expresses fear of their disappearance. This chapter has acknowledged how music symbolizes the transitory yet fervent desire to create; the next chapter will analyze how music's temporal nature makes it the appropriate art form to convey the ephemeral inspiration. Further discussion of the in-between, which in intermedial studies is where the most genuine and profound thought takes place, will aid in understanding why Jim uses intermediality to capture and convey the significant yet fleeting instant of artistic inspiration.

²³ I primarily refer to Levinas' "Reality and its Shadow" (1948), Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), and Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981).

²⁴ Some of these works include Bernd Herzogenrath's *Travels in Intermedia[lity]* (2012), Julia Meier's "Genuine Thought is Intermedial" (2012), and Caroline Bem's "Intermediality is the Map as Much as the Territory" (2017).

Chapter 2: “I Suppose Intermediality Hasn’t Any Form”

In *My Àntonia*, music often occurs alongside Jim’s Muse, but he also uses music to describe the inexplicable beauty in mundane experiences. On the haunting winter night after Mr. Shimerda’s death, Jim creeps through the kitchen, hoping not to disturb him in his grave. As he sits behind the woodstove and ruminates on Mr. Shimerda’s life and love for music, outside he hears “the wind singing over hundreds of miles of snow [...] as if [he] had let the old man in out of the tormenting winter, and [was] sitting there with him” (MÀ 59). Mr. Shimerda “speaks” to Jim across the void of death through nature and music. The wind, nature’s song, is the metonymic representation of the old Bohemian’s soul. This spiritual experience does not arise from a single sensation, but rather a combination of visual, emotional, and musical stimuli; the magic of the moment surpasses description. As such, Jim recounts it through multisensory imagery and communicates by merging literature and music. Yet, this is not the only time that Jim hears the wind sing. When the relentless winter plagues Black Hawk residents, Jim recalls that “the wind sprang up afresh, with a kind of bitter song as if it said: ‘This is reality, whether you like it or not’” (96). Here, music is the medium that speaks the truth. When combined with literature it paints a fuller image of reality. The description of the wind, a musical image, better communicates the inexplicable magic of the moment. Together, music and literature capture and convey multisensory stimuli, such as the fresh coolness of the wind, its bitter taste, and its indifferent song.

My Àntonia’s introduction contains an often-quoted assertion that Jim supposes his memoir “hasn’t any form” (MÀ 7). This chapter rethinks his statement to argue that Jim’s intermedial memoir “has no form” in that it is a representation of experience. Form and content are indistinguishable in the instant of perception. Whereas reproducing memory in literature

divides it into these two subcategories, music preserves their indistinguishability. Therefore, intermediality and rhythm aid in communicating affect across multiple senses, reproducing the inexplicable sentiment of the moment in Jim's reader. This chapter will analyze literary-musical intermediality in Jim's memoir and explain why it is appropriate to communicate his experience.

In Chapter 1, I argued that Jim sees music as appropriate to analogue memory because it is the sole medium that unites form and content (Pater 140) and because the musical image's rhythm unites the senses (*FBTL* 42). In this chapter, I expand on previous discussion surrounding rhythm by introducing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "intermilieu," an unstable, transient aesthetic plane where rhythm penetrates the senses (*ATP* 314). The intermilieu and intermediality are linked: both suggest that the multisensory in-between has a unique power to destabilize the subject and give rise to new thought.²⁵ With reference to scholarship in intermedial studies, I argue that intermediality possesses unique potential to generate rhythm and inspiration in Jim's reader. The second half of this chapter explains why music is the ideal medium to merge with literature in *My Antonia*. I demonstrate how medium-specific aspects of music, such as its temporality, emblemize the instability and transience of memory. Ultimately, music is less permanent than literature; in combination, these two media communicate the ephemerality of beauty, memory, and Jim's Muse. Through intermediality he resolves a temporal paradox: he simultaneously preserves beauty and conveys the fleeting nature of experience, or what he describes as "the precious, the incommunicable past" (*MÀ* 196).

²⁵ For example, see scholarship in the field of intermedial studies that uses Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* as a theoretical foundation, such as Herzogenrath p. 3, Meier, p. 134, and Turetsky, p. 140.

2.1 Rhythm, the Intermilieu, and Intermediality

In “Reality and its Shadow,” Emmanuel Levinas argues that art forces the subject into passivity. Rhythm occurs when one perceives an artwork and it imposes itself on the senses: “Rhythm designates not so much an inner law of the poetic order as the way the poetic order affects us, closed wholes whose elements call for one another like the syllables of a verse, but do so only insofar as they impose themselves on us, disengaging themselves from reality” (Levinas 4). When the musical image “affects” or “imposes itself” upon the subject, they cannot block rhythm and it carries them away. This passivity when perceiving an artwork renders the subject’s senses vulnerable to rhythm. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze argues that, rather than stimulating a single sense, rhythm occurs in “the brain” or “the nervous system” (FBTL 43) after perceiving a piece of art.²⁶ There, it unites multiple senses and affects them in tandem. To suggest that rhythm is more profound than the senses of vision and hearing is to broaden the definition of “rhythm” beyond a mere element of music or sound and renders it a force vital to aesthetic sensation. Deleuze then uses Francis Bacon’s triptychs as an example to illustrate that, in seeing, rhythm takes over the body and engages other senses so that we may “touch,” “smell,” “eat,” and “weigh” the mere image of meat (42). The artwork, a visual stimulus, enters the nervous system where it then triggers other senses. Like Levinas’ concept of “closed wholes whose elements call for one another” then impose themselves upon the subject,

²⁶ Levinas and Deleuze are not in direct conversation with each other regarding rhythm. However, scholars frequently connect the two thinkers due to their similar definitions of aesthetic rhythm. In *Rhythm and Refrain: In Between Philosophy and Arts* (2016), Jūratė Baranova writes: “Levinas, the same as Deleuze, concludes that rhythm transcends the sphere of music and has something to do with ontology [...] The difference is that there is not such cosmic scope in Levinas’ ontological approach towards the concept of rhythm as in Deleuze’s” (Baranova 57). Similarly, in *Levinas Unhinged* (2013), Tom Sparrow notes: “Not unlike Deleuze’s interpretation of the painting of Francis Bacon, Levinas understands aesthetic experience in general, not just music or poetry or dance, as the locus of rhythm. It is the rhythm of the work of art that exerts a force on the spectator; or, rather, what forces the spectator to participate in the work of art. Understanding the nature of this force and this participation is essential to conceptualizing Levinas’s aesthetics” (Sparrow n.p.).

an artwork causes the senses to call to each other, uniting regardless of the subject's will. These two philosophers believe that rhythm triggers a synesthetic sensory response which overwhelms the subject, makes them passive, and carries them away.

Jim is repeatedly overwhelmed by and rendered passive to his emotional experiences in *My Àntonia*. To communicate this phenomenon, he optimally crafts his memoir to permeate the reader's senses and overwhelm their emotions. First, Jim describes a large quantity of sensory stimuli in his memoir, including visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile imagery. Second, he presents these stimuli by describing them through two media: literature and music. Combining multisensory stimuli and intermediality increases the likelihood that rhythm penetrates one sense, induce passivity, then permeates the other senses. For instance, Jim feels overwhelmed by his senses upon seeing Àntonia walking through the fields and he describes it thus in his memoir: "Whenever I saw her come up the furrow, shouting to her beasts, sunburned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda, who could say so little, yet managed to say so much when he exclaimed, 'My Àn-tonia!'" (*MÀ* 72). Jim's sense of sight, or the visual image of Àntonia, generates rhythm, which triggers other senses. He first registers the sight of her, followed by the sound of her shouting, then the texture of her sunburnt, sweaty, dust-covered skin. This multisensory image generates rhythm in Jim's nervous system: the sight of Àntonia and all its sensory details causes him to *hear* Mr. Shimerda's words and "tone" of voice. Capturing a high quantity of sensory stimuli is Jim's first step in transmitting his experience to the reader.

In addition to the quantity of sensory stimuli in the passage, Jim also writes in musicalized prose. Combining literature and music allows him to affect the reader through two sensory pathways. Specifically, he structures the passage to be a literary-musical crescendo. In

prose, dependent clauses describing Àntonia accumulate sensory stimuli and gradually overwhelm the senses. In music, the quantity of syllables in each dependent clause increases as sensory descriptors accumulate: “sunburned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered.” The entire passage is a single sentence which builds with each dependent clause, leading up to its exclamatory conclusion: “My Àn-tonia!” The intermedial crescendo accentuates the symbolic significance of the phrase “My Àntonia.” In a musical sense, it is the loudest and most emphatic moment; the two-word phrase is brimming with emotion. In a literary sense, the accumulation of previous dependent clauses makes the reader *feel* weight – the weight of all the sensory imagery her name recalls. To communicate the feeling of being overwhelmed, Jim crafts a multisensory, musical-literary crescendo. Àntonia coming through the fields is a visual image. However, the rhythmic result of seeing her is musical: hearing Mr. Shimerda’s voice saying the most emotionally weighted phrase in the novel.²⁷ To convey the emotional value of both images, intermediality affects the reader’s senses through the visual and auditory pathways. In combination with the quantity of sensory stimuli Jim describes, intermediality increases the likelihood that his art enters the nervous system, where rhythm may then take over the reader’s senses.

Levinas defines rhythm as an aesthetic force that induces passivity and takes over the senses; Deleuze argues that rhythm unites the senses. We may expand upon these definitions by considering Deleuze and Guattari’s argument that rhythm is a force of change that occurs in every heterogeneous space. “There is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one

²⁷ I argue that this is the most emotionally weighted phrase first and foremost due to its being the title of the memoir, but also the rumination Jim goes through upon giving the memoir its title: “He went into the next room, sat down at my desk and wrote on the pinkish face of the portfolio the word, ‘Àntonia.’ He frowned at this a moment, then prefixed another word, making it ‘My Àntonia.’ That seemed to satisfy him.” (MÀ 7). As the title, the phrase is representative of all the memories within.

milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times. Drying up, death, intrusion have rhythm,” they write in *A Thousand Plateaus* (ATP 313). The vagueness of the word “milieu” is significant. In English, “milieu” can denote environment, context, sphere, territory, or element. In French, the original language in which Deleuze and Guattari wrote, the word also means “middle.” Like the concept of the “rhizome,” a milieu is complex and may be broken into many different parts.²⁸ The rhizomatic connection between milieus becomes clear when they explain that rhythm is “located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus, on the fence, between night and day, at dusk, twilight” (313-14). The milieu may be divided into intermilieus, meaning that an infinite number of heterogeneous spaces exist and each one generates rhythm.²⁹ This would mean that during an exchange or interaction between sensory stimuli or media, rhythm emerges. It follows, then, that multisensory stimuli in combination with intermediality would generate more rhythm, as Jim seeks to do in his art.

²⁸ In the first plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “[a] rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be,’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and... and... and...’ This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be’” (ATP 25). They write that “rhizome” (and its adjectival form “rhizomatic”) can describe a variety of entities, their primary characteristic being their participation in a greater, ever-evolving structure.

²⁹ The rhizomatic space between milieus and intermilieus generates rhythm or energy: “The *middle* is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed” (ATP 25, my emphasis). In French: « C’est que *le milieu* n’est pas du tout une moyenne, c’est au contraire l’endroit où les choses prennent de la vitesse » (MP 37, my emphasis). “Middle” is translated from the French “milieu.” These two translations have similar meanings, but they are not the same. In French, the connotation is that the milieu or intermilieu are where things “pick up speed.” In English, the meaning is restricted to “middle” rather than “in-between.”

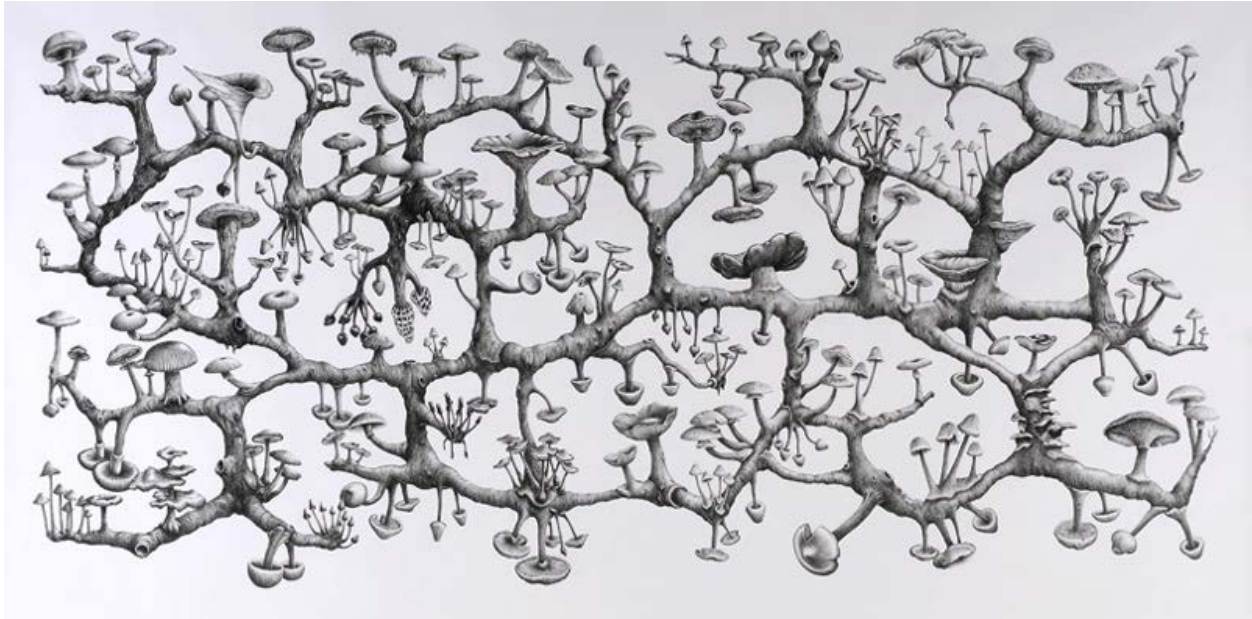


Figure 2.1: *Mycelium Rhizome* (2008) by Richard Giblett. Copyright: The Estate of the late Richard Giblett.

A visual representation of Deleuze's rhizome: a complicated web with an infinite number of milieus and intermilieus, constantly growing, changing, and interconnected.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the in-between, or the intermilieu, is where sensation, change, and rhythm occur. Because the word "milieu" has so many definitions, it may be applied to any entity – including medium. Linking intermilieu with intermediality suggests that media are constantly in conversation or mutual transformation, rather than existing as disparate, fixed entities. It is no surprise that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the intermilieu has been used to construct theories of intermediality. Caroline Bem points out that the two philosophers' definition of the rhizome "is profoundly intermedial: taken as a material object first and foremost ("connectable in all of its dimensions, detachable"), the map is always already falling prey to its own destruction ("torn, reversed"), but it is also able to make visible and further strengthening existing ties" (Bem n.p.) Bem argues that the rhizomatic map is an "operator of mediation,"

suggesting that it has the potential to disrupt or undo itself. The growing, changing nature of the arboreal rhizome and its milieu disrupts the notion of disparate media. Likewise, in “Genuine Thought is Intermedial,” Julia Meier argues that art emerges in “the clash in-between things, the process of becoming other. All thought, then, begins in sense experience, in the becoming-other of the senses, and is therefore reshaping our own senses. This is where genuine thought has the potential to come into being” (Meier 134). Because rhythm is a multisensory phenomenon, it reshapes our conceptualization of how the senses are related, engendering potential for more profound thought. Meier’s broader argument is that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “space in-between” creates “genuine thought as an *event* within the concentrated form of the intermedial artwork” (Meier 125, original emphasis). Deleuze and Guattari underline that the in-between, or a sense of becoming, forces lateral, comparative, or what Meier describes as “genuine” thought. If Levinas argues that rhythm forces the subject into passivity, then combining that with Deleuze, Guattari, Bem, and Meier reveals that this passivity impels them to generate profound thought or art.

The intermilieu and intermediality are linked in that both suggest that the multisensory in-between has a unique power to destabilize the subject and give rise to new thought. As *My Antonia*’s epigraph “Optima dies [...] prima fugit” suggests, aesthetic and emotional value are born and disappear in a fleeting moment (*MÁ* 1). That fleeting moment, or the metaphorical “dies,” could be understood as an intermilieu. A memory or experience is multisensory (in that it may be seen, heard, tasted, felt, smelled, etc.) and exists for a short time before disappearing. Moreover, a memory or experience generates inspiration, deprives the subject of power and forces them into participation, which drives Jim to create profound thought and art. The birth of art occurs *after* an experience, *after* the moment of inspiration, but *before* the moment

disappears. In this way, fleeting memory and fleeting inspiration exist in intermilieus that generate rhythm. From this perspective, we may better understand the epigraph of *My Antonia* as both Jim's personal inspiration and a broader insight into subjective emotional value. After reading Vergil at university and reflecting upon his memories of the hired girls, Jim concludes that "[i]f there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. [...] This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish" (146). In Chapter 1, I posited that Jim mitigates this fear of transience by transforming memories into art. This holds true, but the intermilieu explains why these fleeting memories are so precious and why Jim is driven to create art because of them. Since they occur in the in-between, they are rhythmic, carrying Jim away by emotions and driving him to create art. Meier argues that moments like these are where "genuine thought has the potential to come into being" (Meier 134). Jim recognizes his revelation as "precious," or genuine, thought and because of that, creates new art.

"Precious" or "incommunicable" experiences are unstable entities that exist for an instant before vanishing, meaning that they occur in an intermilieu. Accordingly, the moment between an experience's occurrence and its disappearance generates rhythm. Rhythm is an aesthetic force which "carries the subject away" (Levinas 4), "pick[s] up speed" (*ATP* 25), then gives rise to "genuine thought" (Meier 134) or the drive to create new art. Jim is driven by the rhythm that occurs between milieus or in intermilieus, but he also crafts his art in an attempt to communicate the sensory stimuli he once experienced. He does so by using intermediality to affect multiple senses. In "Travels in Intermedia[lity]," Bernd Herzogenrath argues that "media are nothing but these machineries of sense production, and the rhizomatic interconnections among the various media are what constitute the field of intermedia[lity]" (Herzogenrath 3). In evoking Deleuze's

concept of the “rhizome,” Herzogenrath implies that relations between media are constantly changing and that they may be combined in a multitude of ways to produce different sensations. His broader argument is that media are mere intermediary “machineries” whose purpose is creating sensation. They are artistic tools that an artist like Jim uses to generate sensation in the reader. The toolbox is the “field of intermedia[lity] [...] a quasi-ontological plane underlying all media” (3). Different media are connected and, when merged through intermediality, produce more profound and complex sensation.

In *My Àntonia*, Jim uses media as machineries to transplant his own experience, thereby communicating the incommunicable experience of the moment. An excellent example of this is when Jim describes the dance tent’s arrival in Black Hawk:

That silence seemed to ooze out of the ground, to hang under the foliage of the black maple trees with the bats and shadows. Now it was broken by lighthearted sounds. First the deep purring of Mr. Vanni’s harp came in silvery ripples through the blackness of the dusty-smelling night; then the violins fell in—one of them was almost like a flute. They called so archly, so seductively, that our feet hurried toward the tent of themselves. (*MÀ* 108)

The goal of Jim’s description is to illustrate the mysterious allure of the dance tent. Accordingly, he uses intermediality as a mode of sense production to make the reader feel as though they are themselves in the moment, experiencing this “arch, seductive” call. First, Jim texturizes silence, making it “ooze” out of the ground. This verb communicates the disgusting, haunting emptiness of silence in both an auditory and tactile way. In the next sentence, he transforms the texture of silence through the verb “broken.” Such word choice signifies that the music is so transcendent

that it can do the impossible: break an oozing entity. Next, Jim gives the music visual qualities such as colour and shape in “silvery ripples,” and the reader’s sense of smell comes into play with “dusty-smelling night.” In Jim’s description, music and sound adopt non-auditory properties, including texture, colour, shape, and smell. Meanwhile, all these sensory qualities are communicated through literary description of a musical image. Jim uses multisensory imagery and intermediality to convey the magic of an experience. It is the interaction between the senses (intermilieus) and two media (an intermilieu) that creates rhythm. Rhythm “carries the reader away,” just as the call of the dance tent music is enough to make one’s “feet hurr[y] toward the tent of themselves.” Through media as a means of sense production, Jim communicates his experience of the tent to the reader.

Media are the tools of sense production, intermediality is the combination of these tools, and Jim incorporates multisensory stimuli to reproduce his experience in the reader.

Consequently, Jim’s memoir is (an attempted) representation of experience. It captures the sensory stimuli of the moment and triggers those senses in the reader. In *My Àntonia*’s introduction, Jim reflects upon his memoir before giving it its title: “I didn’t arrange or rearrange. I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people Àntonia’s name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn’t any form. It hasn’t any title, either” (7). Jim’s statement is misleading, since his memoir is indeed crafted to induce emotion in the reader. In the scholarly introduction to the Oxford version of *My Àntonia*, Janet Sharistianian disputes the validity of Jim’s claim:

Given his uninterrupted presence and “authorship” of the manuscript that constitutes the book, isn’t he the character with control over the text and thus the

reader? If so, then Jim's reluctance to claim any literary authority, by insisting in the Introduction that he was without artistic intentions, had produced not a novel or even a book but simply "the thing about *Àntonia*" which hasn't "any form" because he did not "arrange or rearrange" it (p. 7), is at least naïve, if not misleading. (*MÀ* xix).

Jim's statement that the memoir "hasn't any form" is inaccurate as a justification for a supposed lack of literary authority and artistic intention. However, if we rethink his words as an implication that he is reproducing his experience in art, they hold ground. In stating that he did not "arrange or rearrange" and that he "simply wrote down what [...] *Àntonia*'s name recalls," he implies that his memoir is as close to his experience of past moments as possible. By reproducing the sensory details that he recalls from the moment, the reader experiences those same details, which would theoretically generate an experience similar to what Jim remembers. In this way, intermediality combined with multisensory stimuli is Jim's deliberate attempt to rhythmically affect the reader in order to communicate the incommunicable feeling of memory.

When applied to *My Àntonia*, concepts from aesthetic theorists such as Levinas, Deleuze, and Guattari help to examine Jim's artistic process. Through aesthetic analysis, we may better understand how he constructs his memoir to maximize its emotional impact on the reader. The concept of the intermilieu and its transience – which generates rhythm – informs Jim's belief that the most precious experiences exist for an instant before disappearing. Inspiration is unstable and occurs within an intermilieu. To reproduce the experience during which form and content are indistinguishable, Jim combines multisensory stimuli with intermediality. By affecting a variety of sensory pathways through literature *and* music, he is more likely to induce rhythm, which

Deleuze argues “unites the senses” and affects them in tandem (*FBTL* 42). Moreover, Jim’s memoir conforms to the intermedial concept that media are the “machineries of sense production” by manipulating media to induce feelings in the reader akin to those which he himself felt (Herzogenrath 3). Intermediality thereby makes it possible to communicate the subjective emotional impact that Muse, music, and memory have upon him.

2.2 Music: The Temporal Medium

To convey the idea of the ephemeral moment, or the *intermilieu*, Jim uses intermediality and media as machineries of sense production. I have already argued that he merges literature and music but have not yet explained why music is the appropriate medium to merge with literature in *My Antonia*. In Chapter 1, I argued that Antonia could be understood as an example of Levinas’ musical image because she is a symbol of Jim’s childhood who, captured in his art, aids in communicating the incommunicable. However, it is precisely the idea of artistic image that complicates Jim’s memoir. While recognizing that the most precious moments are ephemeral, he attempts to capture that moment in art so that it may endure. As a medium, literature (memoir) achieves this goal, but contradicts the ephemerality of memory itself. Jim simultaneously recognizes that what makes beauty and memory so precious is their transience and expresses fear of their disappearance. By combining literature and music, he simultaneously preserves beauty and captures the fleeting nature of memory. Music is a temporal medium, existing within an instant (an *intermilieu*) before dissipating. Therefore, music is the ideal artistic analogue for memory because it is temporal, fleeting, and is less permanent than literature. Jim’s memoir is his image of his Muse, so music simultaneously emblemizes her to inspiration, song and dance, as well as short-lived beauty.

In “What Is a Temporal Art?” Jerrold Levinson and Philip Alperson offer new criteria for determining which media are temporal. They acknowledge that many theorists (such as Arthur Schopenhauer, G.W.F. Hegel, and Susanne Langer) believe music best represents temporality and consciousness due to the Kantian assertion that time and consciousness are inherently linked. Levinson and Alperson declare themselves “far from personally recommending th[is] argument,” but acknowledge its significance in the history of aesthetics (Levinson and Alperson 169). The significance is clear as this paradigm resembles that of thinkers referenced in this thesis, such as Pater and Giannone. For instance, Giannone argues that music symbolizes the instability of memory in *My Ántonia* because “music exists in time, and the inevitable end of its beauty, its insupportable pleasure, gives music a nostalgic quality which is congenial to Jim’s mind” (Giannone 108). In arguing that music’s temporality is congenial for Jim, Giannone suggests that music is well suited to express consciousness, or at least that it inspires Jim to do so. But unlike Pater who believes that music is the purest or highest form of art, Giannone merely emphasizes the temporal and therefore inspirational qualities of music.

In proposing alternative criteria for determining which media are temporal, Levinson and Alperson’s article ultimately dethrones music as the “most temporal medium.” Although I argue that music is temporal and thus embodies the transience of memory in *My Ántonia*, this is not to say that music is the best art form to express consciousness, nor that music is the purest art form. Instead, I aim to evaluate the qualities of literature and music as individual media, then explain why their union in intermediality represents the temporal paradox Jim faces in *My Ántonia*. In “Discourses and Models of Intermediality,” Jens Schröter suggests that “whatever seems to be specific in a given medium depends on ‘what the others are not’ (Saussure 117), i.e., on the

(implicit) definitions of other media that have to be used as contrasts” (Schröter n.p.).³⁰ In other words, comparative analysis allows for a holistic view of the ontological field of intermediality. From there, we may produce definitions of media unique to the situation at hand. On a similar note, Clement Greenberg argues that “Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art” (Greenberg 305). This case-by-case approach to intermediality means that music may not be *the* most temporal art, but its temporality is distinct when joined across the intermedial field with literature, its less temporal counterpart. Jim’s use of intermediality reveals to us his recognition that literature is limited in its ability to express ephemerality and that combining it with music may be a solution to circumvent this problem.

In this discussion of why music is the ideal medium to merge with literature in *My Antonia*, it is important to address how the artistic image endures according to aesthetic theory. A central argument in Levinas’ “Reality and its Shadow” is that when an artist creates an image of a represented object, that object is forever fixed in time. He writes: “[a] statue realizes the paradox of an instant that endures without a future. Its duration is not really an instant. It does not give itself out here as an infinitesimal element of duration, the instant of a flash; it has in its own way a quasi-eternal duration” (Levinas 10). A statue, paused in action, lives eternally in that instant. This aesthetic phenomenon is the temporal paradox of an artwork. The image, or what Levinas calls the “shadow,” is fixed forever while the represented being lives on: “Art brings about just this duration in the interval, in that sphere which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilized” (11). Levinas believes that what separates object and image is

³⁰ Schröter cites Saussure’s *A Course in General Linguistics*.

the ability to “traverse” the interval and move freely. In other words, an artwork is permanent while an object is impermanent. This solves the dilemma Jim faces in *My Antonia*: communicating ephemerality through the artistic image – or communicating the incommunicable.

This temporal divide between being and shadow may be applied to the “real” Antonia versus the image of her in Jim’s memoir. The previous chapter discussed how Jim communicates Antonia’s value by comparing her to Vergil’s Muse. He transforms her from a regular Bohemian woman into an enduring figure with literary significance. Mapping Antonia onto the figure of the Muse bridges the gap between Vergil’s and Jim’s art and effectively makes Antonia timeless. Similar discussion takes place in Blythe Tellefsen’s “‘Blood in the Wheat’: Willa Cather’s *My Antonia*.” Rather than highlighting Antonia’s connection to the Muse, Tellefsen notes that “America [...] is embodied in the figure of a woman, the Bohemian immigrant Antonia Shimerda” (229). Tellefsen argues that through writing, Jim fixes his memories and depicts them as a microcosm of America’s development. Antonia is a symbolic image representing a snapshot in time – both for Jim and for America.³¹ It is for this reason that Tellefsen concludes Antonia is “fixed forever by a text that is (ostensibly) male-authored: the text preserves a particular past by transforming personal memory into written, national history” (230). Whether she is aggrandized through the backlight of the Muse as I argue, or of America as Tellefsen does, “image” Antonia is immobilized (unlike “object” Antonia). Transformed into an artwork, she acquires aesthetic value and becomes timeless. Like Levinas’ “shadow immobilized,” the image of Antonia is fixed forever in literature and exists eternally in that interval.

³¹ Antonia grows up with Jim, making her a reminder of *his* childhood. However, she also represents the birth and development of modern America: “As Antonia Shimerda develops from a rough, poor foreigner into a farm-owning American citizen, so does Nebraska develop from a prairie wilderness into a civilized state” (Tellefsen 230).

To combat this timelessness created through literature, Jim grounds Àntonia in ephemerality by closely associating her with music. Jim wants her to endure, but also wants to convey her ephemeral beauty. Intermediality brings him closer to resolving this temporal paradox. We see the interplay between the temporality of music and literature when Jim describes his memories of Àntonia: “‘Oh, better I like to work out-of-doors than in a house!’ she used to sing joyfully. ‘I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man.’ She would toss her head and ask me to feel the muscles swell in her brown arm” (MÀ 79). In this passage, Jim combines fixed and temporary elements to capture the memory while preserving its transitory nature. For example, his language connotes repetition and regularity, such as “used to” as a marginal modal verb and “would” as a modal verb indicating a habitual action in the past.^{32 33} Àntonia’s actions, or that which Jim and the reader *see*, are described in habitual manner. Conversely, the auditory elements of the passage ground this memory in instability. Jim directly quotes Àntonia but the reader has no way of knowing her real words because they occurred in an ephemeral moment. He paraphrases her speech from memory, which is unreliable. The passage conveys the idea that words are ephemeral but literature is not: Àntonia’s words and singing ground Jim’s memory in temporality, combine visual and auditory stimuli, and tie her to music and fleeting beauty. Jim’s memoir, an intermedial image of reality, is therefore transient and enduring, making Levinas’ shadow immobilized ever so slightly mobile.

³² “In uses referring to the past. Usually with the sense that the action described was formerly habitual but has been discontinued” (“Use,” OED).

³³ “Expressing natural disposition to do something, and hence habitual action: Has the habit, or ‘a way’, of —ing; is addicted or accustomed to —ing; habitually does; sometimes connoting ‘may be expected to’” (“Will,” OED).

Whereas literature captures a stable image of an object, music is never the same when played twice. As a temporal medium, music presents a reminder that Jim's memoir, and memory itself, are unstable. Jim ends *My Àntonia* with a broad commentary on the elusiveness of the past: "Whatever we [Àntonia and I] had missed, we possessed together through the precious, the incommunicable past" (MA 196). Jim's final statement is a retrospective reflection that the memoir is an attempt to communicate the "incommunicable" past.³⁴ Yet, his conclusion suggests that his memoir will never sufficiently communicate his memories because he and Àntonia alone "possess" them. I argue that, although the memoir is an attempt, it cannot entirely capture nor communicate the past for two reasons. First, the magic of the moment is a result of the cumulative experience of sensation combined with the unique feelings of the subject. Jim himself acknowledges this narrative barrier in the introduction to *My Àntonia*. Because he insists it is through himself that he "knew and felt" Àntonia, in writing his memoir, he admits that it is necessary to "say a great deal about [him]self" (7). Jim is conscious that the reader may see through his eyes, but never experience his memories directly. In other words, by capturing and representing the stimuli he experienced in the moment, he may craft the reader's experience, but not guarantee that he reproduce his experience in them. Second, the past is fleeting and memory is subjective. Because an experience lasts for but a moment (an intermilieu) and memory itself is malleable, the past evades representation. Furthermore, psychological processes such as memory reconsolidation and hindsight bias make it impossible to communicate memory, rendering it

³⁴ Tellefsen very briefly ponders Jim's statement: "[W]hy is that past finally described as 'incommunicable'? How does one share what cannot be communicated?" (232).

incommunicable.³⁵ Like the rhizome which is constantly growing and changing, creating new milieus and intermilieus, so too is a memory.

My Àntonia is an artwork born from inspiration. Moved by his Muse and music, Jim is carried away by sentiment, and driven to transform his memories into art. To communicate the weight of emotion he once felt, it follows that Jim would make his artwork as rhythmic – and therefore as moving – as possible. In this way, his inspirational impact on the reader would be parallel to Vergil’s inspirational impact on Jim. Intermediality plays a significant role in this inspirational potential because it makes the memoir more likely to induce rhythm in the reader. Intermediality merging literature and music is the appropriate form to communicate what memory, Muse, and music have in common: transient existence that generates inexplicable rhythm. Jim is rendered passive to his emotions, which are incited by memory, Muse, and music. The way rhythm eclipses “initiative or freedom” allows it to “carry away” the subject because, according to Deleuze, rhythm penetrates multiple senses once it is in the nervous system (Levinas 4). Rhythm enters without consent and permeates the senses. Translating this phenomenon into art using music is logical since sound is pervasive: it “invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us. It takes leave of the earth, as much in order to drop us into a black hole as to open us up to a cosmos” (*ATP* 348). If sound and music are uniquely powerful in permeating the senses, it follows that Jim merges literature with music to generate rhythm. In

³⁵ In a psychological process called “memory reconsolidation,” a seemingly solidified (or consolidated) memory may be altered when revisited. Karim Nader et al. explain that “overwhelming evidence suggests that consolidated memories can be transferred again into a labile state, from which they are restabilized by a reconsolidation process. Retrieval appears to be the key process that transfers memory from the stable to the unstable state. This idea is not new to cognitive psychology, in which memory malleability phenomena such as the misinformation effect and hindsight bias have been prominently studied for quite some time” (Nader et al. 3).

doing so, he increases the likelihood that his reader experience rhythm directly, effectively converting subjective emotional value into an objectively moving artwork.

Alone, literature has the qualities I have discussed in this chapter: solidifying memories, communicating stimuli, and aggrandizing the figures of Jim's past through the lamp of intertextuality and allusion. Coupled with music – which embodies temporality, the instability of memory, and affects the reader through the auditory sensory pathway – literature is better able to represent the essence of Jim's memories, which he describes as the “precious, the incommunicable past” (MÀ 196). In sum, intermediality allows Jim to manipulate the sensory stimuli which the reader perceives, thereby communicating his experience. For this reason, analyzing the literary-musical form of *My Àntonia* offers insight into the ways in which Jim addresses paradoxes of time, memory, and communication in his memoir. The disparate media of music and literature are two distinct machineries of sense production, occupying very different locations on an ontological plane of media. In combination, they open new possibilities of genuine thought and novel artistic expression.

Conclusion

My Àntonia, a novel centred on memory and the ephemeral beauty of the past, presents a paradox: how does one communicate the incommunicable nature of a memory? This thesis reconsiders *My Àntonia* as a work of art or affect, with special attention to Jim Burden's artistic process. It first considers how Jim processes the heady impact Muse, music, and memory have upon him, then explains how he communicates this emotional significance through his art. I have suggested that the frequency with which music appears as a figure or a formal technique suggests that it is the artistic analogue for memory in *My Àntonia*. The temporality of music, combined with the permanence of literature, enables Jim to capture his memories while communicating their transient allure. In his memoir, music emblemizes the instability of memory, the inexplicable impact of rhythm, and affects the reader from an additional (auditory) sensory pathway.

Despite how this thesis retrospectively applies the contemporary framework of intermedial studies to *My Àntonia*, Jim indisputably demonstrates exceptional knowledge of media and how they affect the subject. His aesthetic sensitivity not only to literature but also to music surfaces in his work and transforms his memoir into a hybrid literary-musical performance. Additionally, modern conceptualizations of how literature and music function as disparate media inform a musical analysis of *My Àntonia*. For these reasons, scholarship in intermedial studies helps explain how Jim converts subjective emotional significance into an objectively moving piece of art. Understanding the paradox of communicating the “precious, the incommunicable” (*MÀ* 196) seems at first a lofty goal, but the lens of intermedial studies in combination with detailed aesthetic analysis renders it digestible. This thesis may be novel in its

attempt to bridge the gap between intermedial studies, aesthetic theory, and Cather studies; however, additional research in this field does merit consideration.

The first chapter of this thesis gives newfound attention to music in *My Àntonia* by exploring its connection to memory. To communicate the value of the hired girls in his childhood, Jim maps Àntonia and Lena onto the figure of the Muse. Because these two girls often appear alongside music, Jim links them to it; as a result, both they and music inspire his art. Ultimately, Àntonia is the most musical and central figure of his memoir and its primary inspiration. Driven by the inspirational influence of Muse, music, and memory, Jim transforms her into an artistic image that encapsulates his childhood and emotions. This transformation is an example of Levinas' musical image and its aesthetic rhythm: a tool to communicate the subjective value of Muse, music, and memory. By making his image musical and rhythmic, Jim's art carries the reader away, just as he is carried away by this triad. This chapter's analysis reveals that Jim's memoir is optimally crafted to induce sensation in the reader by means of aesthetic rhythm.

The second chapter concentrates on intermediality and media as the means of sensory production. Furthermore, it explains why intermediality is the ideal method to express the emotional impact Muse, music, and memory have upon Jim. I first connect the concept of the intermilieu, an unstable moment which generates rhythm, with intermediality, an aesthetic technique that has the potential to generate more genuine, profound thought. Jim's drive to create art (rhythm) comes between the moment of inspiration and its disappearance (an intermilieu). In order to reproduce this feeling in his reader, he uses intermediality which affects multiple senses and is therefore more likely to produce rhythm. Media are the tools that produce sensation in different senses, and Jim uses multisensory, multimedial art to manipulate what the reader

experiences. As a result, he may manipulate the reader's sensory experience to better communicate the incommunicable, subjective value of memory. This chapter concludes by explaining why music is the ideal artistic analogue for memory: its temporality and instability represent the everchanging nature of memory itself. Ultimately, Jim's memoir is his image of his Muse, so the medium of music makes her a symbol of song and dance as well as fleeting beauty. By merging literature and music, Jim may simultaneously capture his transient experiences while preserving their ephemeral quality.

The two chapters of this thesis expand current discussion regarding the role of music in Willa Cather's oeuvre and allow for further considerations into this topic. More broadly, this project demonstrates the merits of applying contemporary critical lenses to older artworks in order to re-evaluate them as cumulative knowledge expands. For instance, contemporary developments in intermediality and aesthetic theory believe music (as a medium) functions in a very different way than what was thought in Cather's time. Then, how does Cather's musical-aesthetic philosophy align or contrast with recent thought, and could her use of music in literature be considered proto-intermedial?³⁶ Finally, this project analyzes the musical aspects of *My Àntonia*, but Cather's other works have yet to be revisited with this modern philosophical framework. With the help of aesthetic theory and intermedial studies, how could we conceptualize the development of music as a theme in the form and content of the Great Plains Trilogy? Cather's fascination with the tie between music and memory in *My Àntonia* is but a brief insight into her love for music and the representation of such in her literary works could be considered proto-intermediality.

³⁶ For example, I have discussed how contemporary intermedial techniques cited by Wolf, such as formal intermedial imitation and evocation, appear in *My Àntonia*. But does this make her work a precursor to more contemporary, overtly intermedial artworks, or could her work be considered as a part of that intermediality?

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