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# Willa Cather

## Newsletter & Review

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*The creek made a winding violet chasm down through the pasture, and the trees followed it in a black thicket, curiously tufted with snow.*

~One of Ours

# Historic Site Benefits from Service-Learning Project

Susan N. Maher

University of Nebraska at Omaha

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is one of the nation's leaders in service-learning education. The purpose of service learning is to connect students in colleges and universities to the larger community around them. Often this connection is organized through a course that a student may be taking. At UNO, many students connect to non-profit agencies in Omaha through their course work in English, communication, social work, and many other disciplines. One can find a lucid description of service learning in the eastern Nebraska region on the Service-Learning Academy's web page: "The University of Nebraska at Omaha is a metropolitan university committed to building bridges



between the campus and the community. One such bridge is service learning, which brings the talents and energy of UNO students into the service of the Omaha community. Students not only address community needs but also enrich their own education by experiencing the real-world application of academic subjects and developing the habit of active citizenship."

***It felt great to be a part of a group that wanted to make a difference and have the opportunity to give back to the community and be a part of the positive change.***

***—Gilly Niyazova, Service Learning Participant***

In October, Dr. Susan Maher (UNO English), Dr. Dave Ogden (UNO Communication), Tim Kaldahl (UNO Media Relations), and Paul Sather (Director of the Service-Learning Academy) led a group of 25 UNO students to Red Cloud, Nebraska, in an effort to expand the reach of UNO Service-Learning into rural communities. These students represented many countries and many majors. What brought them together was the desire to serve. For the nine international students on the trip, this journey to Red Cloud was the first time many of them had visited small town America.

For a service-learning experience to be meaningful for students, the right set of projects must be organized well in advance of the actual work. In the spring, Susan and Paul journeyed with engineering professor, Stuart Bernstein, to survey Cather-related properties under the aegis of the Willa Cather Foundation and the Nebraska State Historical Society. Paul returned again to Red Cloud

to purchase necessary equipment and make final arrangements. With the help of Cindy Bruneteau, the UNO group decided that painting the Cather childhood home was a perfect service-learning assignment for the students. The dates set were October 19 and 20, UNO's fall break.

Service learning is meant to be educational. Painting the childhood home was important, but learning about Willa Cather and rural communities was also essential for making this trip a success. Everyone who signed up to ride the bus to Red Cloud read Cather's brilliant novella "Old Mrs. Harris." On arrival, students received a memorable tour of the childhood home, walking right into the space of Cather's story. After a hearty Sunday meal at Cutter's Café, the group gathered in the Opera House for a lecture and discussion session on the story, led by Susan Maher. Students then divided up and spent the night with Red Cloud citizens. They were able to enjoy small-town hospitality in family homes.



Monday was the big painting day, and students were up bright and early for an 8:30 a.m. start. It is amazing what 25 energetic, passionate young people can accomplish. By 2:30 that afternoon, the Cather childhood home was resplendent in new paint. Students worked so efficiently that Paul Sather sent a smaller group to paint the gallery space in the Opera House. Students lunched in the Opera House and enjoyed an informative lecture by Cindy Bruneteau on the

challenges facing small towns on the Great Plains. By 4 p.m., students boarded the bus back to Omaha and carried on lively conversations all the way home.

UNO thanks the Willa Cather Foundation for making this valuable opportunity available to students. The service-learning event in Red Cloud was such a smashing success that UNO hopes to make a Fall Break service-learning journey to Catherland an annual event.

*Cover photograph by Betty Kort. All photographs on this page courtesy of Tim Kaldahl, UNO Assistant Director of Media Relations.*

# After Merrill Skaggs

Joseph Urgo

for the Willa Cather Foundation

*That is what it means to write poetry; to be able to say the oldest thing in the world as though it had never been said before.*

— Willa Cather

*The World and the Parish* from *The Courier*, March 10, 1900

Collaborator, mentor, editor; dogged committee member and administrator; tireless organizer, petitioner, and advocate; our friend, a dedicated teacher and a creative scholar, Merrill Skaggs, has died.

The epigraph about poetry and old truths was among Merrill's favorite Cather quotations. She placed it above the opening chapter to her landmark study, *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (1990), and in her vocation as an educator, she embodied its principle. What the world needs is not more information, but greater intimacy with its precious truths. One of those truths is the miracle of creative renewal, particularly that of emulation, in the image, to which Merrill's soul seemed devoted.

Merrill loved craftsmanship. She on occasion would utter some version of, "well why would you want to do it if you were not going to do it well?" As Professor Skaggs explained,

Great love never protects against terror, or mutilation, or catastrophe. But it provides the fertile ground in which miracle can still sometimes flower. In her rendering of human life with all its complexity, horror, despair, and beauty, Willa Cather's fiction most perfectly illustrates her definition of *miracle*: it flowers out of her passionate desire to tell a story as perfectly as possible.

(*After the World*, 24-25)

Intensely spiritual, Merrill looked for not to the heavens for miracles, but into the hearts of her interlocutors. Her students adored her because she taught them the habit of looking consequentially within themselves and each other. Her friends she made feel exclusively hers. It was Merrill's way to make of whatever was contemplated, if it were worthy, a distinct possibility, if one would work at it. "It's not going to be easy," uttered in that deceptively musical voice, repeatedly, over the years; "but I think we—no, you—can do it."

In a world where the oldest things bear restatement, a second look is perpetually in order. Merrill was a painstakingly (sometimes obsessively painstaking) close reader. Of her studies of William Faulkner's mining of Willa Cather, and Cather's return volleys, we learn more than intertextual playfulness and intellectual indebtedness. We enter the mind of a woman who knew nothing better than to not let go. In *After the World Broke in Two*, Professor Skaggs foregrounds an assumption she shared with her lifelong object of study,

that Cather never entirely finished a subject. She returned repeatedly to the matters she considered essential or the problems that would not disappear. She attacked the same conundrums repeatedly, renewing her own interest by changing her angle of vision. (28)



Merrill Skaggs speaking at a recent Spring Conference in Red Cloud. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Among the conundrums that occupied Merrill, a thing she would discuss without a great deal of provocation, was the problem of evil. Why, in a world that exists by the gift of love, do we find ubiquitous such manifestations of its absence, from casual omission and mundane malfeasance to warfare for any purported cause—and to all the myriad intersections among such failures? The question nagged at her soul with more or less daily regularity. It was, for one, Willa Cather's interest in sustaining ourselves in such a world that Merrill returned repeatedly to those beloved texts. Consider Skaggs on Cather on St. Peter:

If overintellectual and disengaged,  
sometimes malicious and always critical,  
emotionally, physically, and professionally  
depleted Godfrey St. Peter can be saved and  
live on, so can she. Miracles fall on the just  
and unjust, the devout and the unbelievers  
alike. (83)

I suspect that last sentence appealed to Merrill, as Professor Skaggs wrote it, for its comforting audacity. "Audacious" was among Merrill's more frequent words of praise. Audacity is what keeps the world from eternally breaking in two, much less from fracturing once in one's lifetime. Chief among admirable human qualities, *audacity* deserves poetic rendering; it requires

## After Merrill Skaggs

(Continued)

keen aesthetic attention to keep it from slipping away beneath the proprieties. Merrill Skaggs found it at the core of Cather's intellect, expressed particularly in the life of Godfrey St. Peter. Quoting his lecture and then commenting on Cather's creation, Professor Skaggs wrote,

"Art and religion (they are the same thing, in the end, of course) have given man the only happiness he has ever had." . . .

St. Peter's statement stands out in Cather's fiction for its grammatical and rhythmic awkwardness; it's a declaration he and we nearly choke on. (112)



We are stunned by Merrill's passing because to few of us, if to any, did Merrill say how close to her death finally had nestled. It would not be Merrill to seek sympathetic indulgence from her friends. On

the other hand, months would pass without exchange, but upon contact the fire would burn as it had since the very first walking talk we took, in the Nebraska dusk, decades ago. All who knew her will recall those walking talks; perhaps we will recognize within ourselves the spirit to carry on, for Merrill, that faith in peripatetic exchange.

Merrill Skaggs' existence on earth reveals the potential life possesses to flower fully and magnificently before its inevitable passing. In this woman one would sense a ferocious will and feel a visceral capacity to live and to touch the lives of others, in the classroom, around the convivial table, or bellied up to the bar. As well, she had her demons. No one quite so blessed escapes them; few struggled so valiantly against the futility of victory. A productive truce led Merrill to the gentle grace of insight. One demon, this one personal, dwelled in the frosted darkness of *Lucy Gayheart*. Of Cather's creation in this novel, Professor Skaggs wrote:

The primary moral she conveys is the crucial importance of a woman's self-consciously and energetically choosing the direction of her own life and then willing to make her chosen life happen. (157)

After Merrill come monumental, sustaining memories of a woman who chose, who willed, and who happened to us in the fortunate moment of a lifetime.



Merrill thought the Cather Foundation should host an Elderhostel at the Red Cloud site. She helped design the event and served as the visiting Cather scholar for the Foundation's first Elderhostel in the summer of 2008. At left, she begins an Elderhostel session. Photograph by Stephany Thompson.

At the Drew Cather Colloquium in the fall of 2005, Merrill proudly introduced several newly acquired Cather Collections placed in the Drew Archives (left column). At right, Merrill comments following a presentation during the Colloquium. Photographs by Betty Kort.



Merrill, in a moment of levity, escorts David Porter off the stage following his piano performance at the culmination of the Drew Colloquium in 2005. Photograph by Betty Kort.

### Scholarly Contributors

**Kimberly Vanderlaan** is an Assistant Professor at Louisiana Tech University, where she teaches American Literature. She earned her undergraduate degree at Colgate University and her Ph.D. at University of Delaware. She resides in Ruston, LA with her husband and son.

**Sarah Stoeckl** is a PhD student at the University of Oregon and holds her Master of Arts degree from Utah State University. Her work focuses on gender, war, and performance in modern British and American prose. She has previously been published in *Watermark*.

**John Jacobs** is Professor of English and Director of the Willa Cather Institute at Shenandoah University in Winchester, VA. A regular participant at Cather International Seminars, John's Cather research focuses on her confluence with other American writers and artists. Currently, he is examining resonances of Henry Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams* in *The Professor's House*, while he continues studying affinities between Cather and Edward Hopper.



Eden's Blissful Bowre in  
"Coming, Aphrodite!"  
Kimberly Vanderlaan  
Louisiana Tech University

Recent Cather criticism has demonstrated a range of Classical influences on her fiction. In a notable essay recently published in this very newsletter, for instance, authors contend that Cather made use of a "systematic" set of "Classical allusions" (Levy and Lake 15) in *The Professor's House* to express a pervasive theme winding through her fiction: the incompatibility of art and economics. Over the past several decades, critics have established that Cather wrote much of her fiction to discriminate between the worlds of secular materialism and spiritual (or artistic) creativity. (See O'Brien, Murphy, Lindemann, and Stout, to name only a few.) "Coming, Aphrodite!" opens Cather's collection, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920), and was allegedly written "just for fun" during the Christmas season of 1919.<sup>1</sup> I will focus on the ways in which "Coming, Aphrodite!" reaches back to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to illustrate a theme closely related to that dealt with by Levy and Lake—material and carnal temptations in conflict with artistic integrity.

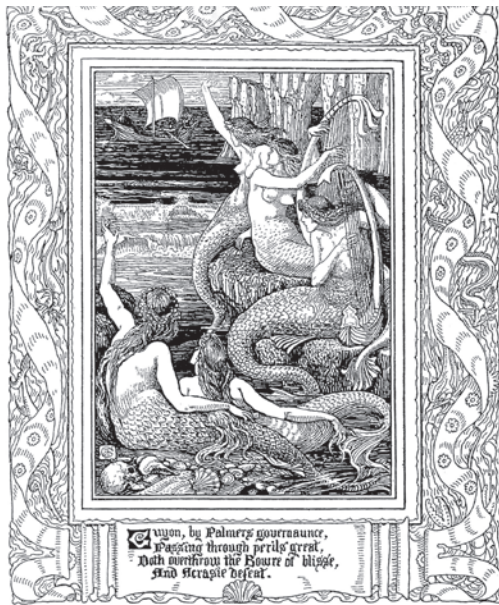
Cather's original choice for the title of the story collection, *The Troll Garden*, reinforces the motif of the artist in conflict with a world incapable of appreciating art's value. Critics have already explored at length the significance of the epigraphs at the beginning of this volume.<sup>2</sup> Buying the "fruits" of "Goblin men" (phrases from Christina Rossetti's poem, "Goblin Market") may also refer to buying into or selling out of the marketplace of fiction. We know Cather felt that sacrificing high art for vulgar material gain would be synonymous with sacrilege, as she claimed that the artist should be "able to lift himself into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not" (quoted in *Critical Assessments* 76). The title for this collection of stories, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, is also replete with Classical allusive possibilities. Medusa, one of the three Gorgons who could turn men to stone if they looked directly at her, was a mythological figure of Greek antiquity. In Cather's title, she symbolizes youth's high hopes for purposeful achievement—all the more seductive for the pitfalls associated with them. Perhaps Cather meant to suggest that to look one's highest ambition directly in the face, and to resist failure (petrification or paralysis) calls for an artist of epic proportions.

While the "Aphrodite" of Cather's first story title recalls the Greek goddess of love, fertility, and beauty, other essential elements of "Coming, Aphrodite!" insist on a Renaissance reading, particularly as the story incisively alludes to several scenes in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>3</sup> The story may also be seen as a testament to, and enactment of, her early claim that "art itself is the highest moral purpose in the world" (*The Kingdom of Art* 378).

Don Hedger, the central protagonist of the story, represents an unusual brand of artist, likely the kind Cather admired, but for whom the majority of the rest of the world held deep ambivalence, if not scorn. He is also one of few fully realized artist figures Cather ever created in her novels or her short fiction.



With that the other likewise up arose,  
 And her faire lockes, which formerly were bound  
 Up in one knot, she low about her looke  
 Which flowing low and thick her cloth'd around,  
 First to yvorie in golden mantle quond.



Guyon, by Palmer's gourauner,  
 Passing through perils great,  
 Hath surmounted the Bowre of Blisse,  
 And escaped defeat.



Guyon is of innocet Werth  
 Led into loose Deste,  
 Fights with Gyanches, while his bow  
 Her hames in furious fire.

This story affords particular interest as a statement about how artists deal with the tension between worldly concerns and the inner artistic conscience. Eden Bower is the story's other main character—a dramatic artist the likes of which Wagner may have simultaneously loved and hated.<sup>4</sup> Their symbiotic relationship early in the story shows that they both possess elements Cather admired: Hedger, an unwavering commitment to his craft and disregard for material success and Eden, a natural grace and beauty to supplement her real musical and dramatic talent. Eden's name is a reference to the biblical garden, an innocent and sublime place, untouched by human failings. Hedger, too, is primitive and unsophisticated, a barbarian of sorts—"as strong as a gorilla" (20), and socially unrefined. He is an orphan, a "foundling" who had "grown up in a school for homeless boys" and remains "singularly unencumbered" (17) by social obligations. Eden's is a false name for a woman who was born as Edna, but for Hedger she represents worldly ambitions, egocentrism, and intemperate appetites, the temptations of the world which are most perilous to his artistic pursuits and productivity.

Eden's last name, Bower, is likely Cather's allusion to the Bowre of Blisse in the epic poem, a body of water surrounded by fatal geographical and metaphorical impediments. In Spenser's fictional landscape, there is the Rocke of Reproch, where fools end up after "hauing all their substance spent// In wanton ioyes and lustes intemperate" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 7); there is quicksand of the "Vnthriftihed" and a "whirlepoole of hidden ieopardy" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 18); there are the five mermaids who sing sweetly to allure the "weake traueller, whom gotten they did kill" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 31). The bower itself reinforces the myth that art can create outward perfection, for it is a place "pickt out by choice of best aliue, // That natures worke by art can imitate" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 42), a location at least superficially perfected by art's power of embellishment and suggestion.

Cather's Eden Bower incarnates the same external forms of aesthetic perfection. Hedger, positioned as one of Cather's many divided artist figures, is initially bewitched by her, though he eventually eludes Eden's poisonous enticements. As captivating as she may be, Eden conveys through her arts only a fraction of the person she is: "Miss Bower didn't usually tell the whole story—about anything" (35). Spenser similarly warns his readers about women's duplicitous nature: "Worse is the daunger hidden, then descride" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 35) just before Sir Guyon is sabotaged by false beauty. Just as the Bowre of Blisse contains all the enticements man's nature covets (It was "the most daintie Paradise . . . [i]n which all pleasures plenteously abound" [*TFQ*, II, xii, 58]), Eden represents for Hedger a kind of attraction outside the bounds of his imagination. Perhaps part of the reason he is incapable of painting once he meets her is that she has consumed his imaginative energies. He "sank into a stupor of idleness as deep and dark as the stupor of work" (30). Eden's nude dances leave Hedger mesmerized and out of touch with reality. Not knowing how much time has elapsed since he started his voyeuristic activity, he can but gaze at the "lake of gold sleeping on the faded Turkish carpet" (27). The scene becomes increasingly intense, especially as Cather describes Hedger in the act of 'possessing' Eden in art: "The charcoal seemed to explode in his hand at the point where the energy of each gesture was discharged into the whirling disc of light" (27). At least one critic views this scene as overtly sexual, pointing out that "the explosive and gesture imagery suggests masturbation" (Woodress 314). Like the enchanted Bowre of Bliss, Hedger's omniscient perch grants him his "fantasie aggrate" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 42), but this woman cannot appreciate the art he almost sacrifices for her.

Notably, Hedger fails to discern between beauty and artifice. Unlike Guyon, he has no guide to help differentiate between the two, perhaps because of his own faulty vision. Spenser makes light of "Art's" ability to outshine "Nature" because art's beauty comes from witches' fabrications and underlines the competition which ensues between the two forces. By allowing Guyon to destroy the Bowre and restore order, Spenser has indicated that unchecked artifice is opposed to life. Eden, beyond her perfect form, similarly represents "onely womanish fine forgery" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 28). Cather would articulate this theme of artificial beauty sabotaging spiritual and artistic integrity again in the construction of her female characters, Marian Forrester (*A Lost Lady* 1923), and Rosamond and Kathleen St. Peter (*The Professor's House* 1925).<sup>5</sup>

Both Eden Bower and Don Hedger are artists in point of fact, but Eden's talent as an artist is at least partially undermined by her predominant characteristics as a femme fatale. Hedger is "merely the first to fall under a fascination which was to be disastrous to a few men and pleasantly stimulating to many thousands" (42). Cather's veiled scorn for her behavior is evident enough. Eden was prepared to "permit herself" a significant "latitude of conduct," (43) and her haughty behavior leaves even Hedger's bristling Boston bull terrier, Ceasar III, cowering in his corner. Cather had already voiced her feeling that the most basic criteria for "the artist who succeeds in the true sense," was by "delivering himself completely to his art" (preface to *The Song of the Lark*, 417). Of course, Eden does eventually commit herself to a career of singing, but her attitude is that of an accountant; she comes back to New York to perform and "her thoughts were entirely on stocks" (74). She certainly delivers herself entirely to various activities, choosing to walk the balloon trapeze on Coney Island for a thrill. But her daredevilry has less to do with the physical excitement the original artist, Molly Welch, feels while descending than with pure egocentrism. Moreover, Eden's impetus for trying the stunt seems to have been inspired by Hedger's admiration of Molly's legs ("Not many girls would look well in that position" [48]). Eden wastes no time throwing off her skirt and continues the spectacle by running up the sand in her "black tights and silver slippers" (51).

In fact, Eden's desire to be "admired and adored" (53), betrays her real motive for pursuing a career as an artist. We eventually learn that Eden probably unplugged the knot hole that gave Hedger access to her erotic workouts. For Hedger, the pull of an aperture that gives full view to this dichotomous subject (he thinks of her alternatively as a sublime subject for one of his paintings and as a sexual object) blinds him to her artificial nature. It is Eden's spellbinding beauty which has the power to turn men to stone, at least symbolically, which allows her to be transformed in Hedger's mind from the type of woman who embroiders life with "ugly and meaningless trivialities" to "the immortal conception, the perennial theme" (32). If Eden's beauty participates in the eternal or the immortal, Cather expects the reader to understand that Eden's character, "in an aesthetic sense," is still "perverted" (31-2).

After their day on Coney Island, once they "had somehow taken hold of each other" (53) Hedger tells Eden a bizarre story about the nature of passion and the devastating consequences of succumbing to it. "The Forty Lovers of the Queen" is a blend of an oral tale passed on by a Mexican priest, the perhaps half-demented meanderings of a Spanish missionary holed away in a monastery, and an Aztec rain legend. The story also bears a certain resemblance, especially in moral implication, to various scenes from Spenser's poem. In Cather's story, when a Princess in ancient Mexico is eighteen, her father brings

home prisoners from a war party, among them a savage man with primitive tattoos all over his arms and breast. The Princess wants him to "practice his art upon her" (56), which involves wounding and staining her body with tattoos, but he also has

sex with her, an ambiguous act as it is told, somewhere between rape, seduction, and communally sanctioned sexual initiation. As punishment for "violating" the Princess, the savage's tongue is removed, he is castrated, and he must serve the Princess as a slave. Essentially, for his animal lust he is diminished to less than animal status. This trespass awakens in the Princess unknown regions of passion, and she takes to summoning attractive young men to her bed chambers—using her slave as the summoner. As long as the Princess (now a Queen) has her lovers put to death when she tires of them, the slave is quite content to serve her. When she becomes enamored of one, allowing him to live, the captive's jealousy erupts, and he sabotages the Queen, letting the King know of her infidelity. Both the Queen and her slave

are put to death by fire for their lack of "propriety," resulting in a scarcity of rain. The whole scenario leaves an entire community without necessary resources.

Spenser's poem, in a scene where Sir Guyon approaches the witch, Acrasia, similarly suggests that sexual duplicity and failure to live within the bounds of moderation have serious moral consequences. He and his Palmer "must surprise [her], // Else she will slip away, and all our drift despise" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 69). Like the Princess in Cather's story, Acrasia is found with a new lover, slumbering after enjoying "long wanton ioyes" and "light licentious toys" (*TFQ*, II, xii, 72), having through "horrible enchantment" (80) transformed men to "seeming beastes" and "figures hideous" (85). Spenser allows the savage, who had been transformed by Acrasia into a kind of brute beast, to resume his former self, though only after having "[r]epined greatly" of the "hoggish forme" which had debased the "excellence" (86) of his true nature. In a similar move, Cather's story within a story renders man a mute, impotent beast incapable of acting on the very impulse which defines his sexual nature. Cather ends her story, the actual framework about two artists, by restoring order to Hedger's creative world in the same way that Sir Guyon is allowed to restore moral order to his.

Hedger's intention in telling Eden the story is unclear. It may have been to indicate his attraction to her in the most lurid of analogies. Or it may have been a subversive subconscious attempt to sabotage their relationship so that he could return his energies to painting, his real calling. Hedger's youth would certainly have been blighted and his talent curtailed by the bright medusa of physical beauty, if he had not fortuitously fled from New York to Long Island at the time that Eden learned of her new opportunities for "success." We know that Eden's version of success (a Japanese servant, a wine cellar, and a riding horse) is very different from Cather's, and by extension Hedger's, idea of "spontaneous invention" which might lead to "a new work





All illustrations in this article are reproduced courtesy of Walter Crane's *Illustrations and Ornamentation from The Faerie Queene*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999.

artist; twice he defeats the temptation of “becoming a marketable product” (18), “work[ing] to please nobody but [him]self” (66). He eventually becomes a decided “influence in art” (77), choosing professional integrity over the probability of significant wealth.

“Coming, Aphrodite!” shows an artist coming to terms with the “vulgar and meretricious” (57) demands of the world, achieving balance of artistic production and personal integrity, something possible only once excesses of the material world have been moderated. Cather turns to Spenser’s epic poem to illustrate that restoration of order can come only once we return to a state of “intelligence”—the one attribute which sets man apart from “filth and foule” (*TFQ*, II, xii, 87) depravity. It is not likely accidental that the majority of allusions to Spenser’s poem are found in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene*, containing the Legend of Temperance. Cather’s story, even if written “just for fun,” may promote the same virtue.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> James Woodress uses the phrase “just for fun” in his *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (307), explaining that Cather was taking a break from working on her long novel, *One of Ours*, and that “Coming, Aphrodite!” gave her the idea for her next book—a collection of stories, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous critics have commented on the significance of the epigraphs, among them Brown, O’Brien, and Lee, who talk about the pervasive opposition of the two. Janis P. Stout points out that both epigraphs “show art as being dangerous” (Stout 93). The first one seems most pertinent to my reading of the story. It follows: “We must not look at Goblin men// We must not buy their fruits:// Who knows upon what soil they fed// Their hungry thirsty roots?”

<sup>3</sup> We can also interpret the secondary meaning of the word, “rebirth,” to apply to Hedger’s artistic reawakening, which occurs after Eden leaves for Europe.

<sup>4</sup> Cather’s fondness for Wagner is well known. She mentions Wagner’s “value of scenic literalness” in “The Novel D meuble” as an example of an “attitude of mind” on the part of the artist by which he handles his theme” (*WCW* 37-8)—a part of her reconstruction of “realism” in art. Wilhelm Richard Wagner (b. 1813), famous for his music dramas, liked large scale, dramatic art, but he would not have had any patience for Eden’s suggestion to Hedger that he paint

of genius” (“Escapism, *WCW*, 26).

Eden is depicted as a serious obstacle to creating great art, and the reader is left to “hedge” her bets on Hedger’s artistic talent and integrity. In refusing to sell out to the masses, in spite of his influence and his talent, Hedger epitomizes Cather’s notion of what it is to be a great

what others could understand, even if he himself could not abide the product. Wagner’s life reveals many instances wherein he chose material privation over artistic compromise. Cather, in sympathy with Wagner, at least in terms of artistic inclination, likely created Eden Bower as an early prototype of the glamorous operatic diva.

<sup>5</sup> Cather’s narrator, Neil Herbert, believes in his youth (along with much of Sweet Water), that Marian Forrester is magnificently beautiful, cultivated, gracious, elegant, and good. It is only once the Captain’s physical decline reveals her true, or transformed, nature and her total dependence on her husband that Niel sees that her charms were comprised of the “most finished artifice” (*A Lost Lady* 93) and she becomes “flighty and perverse” like a “ship without ballast, driven hither and thither by every wind” (131). Similarly, Godfrey St. Peter observes the “painful transformation” (*The Professor’s House* 71) in his beautiful daughters once they are introduced to material possessions. Kathleen turns “green with envy” (*PH* 71) and Rosamond engages in an “orgy of acquisition” the likes of which makes St. Peter want to “omit the verb to buy” (134-5) from the language.

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# An Authenticating Hand: Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and the Right to Write About War

Sarah Stoeckl  
University of Oregon

“However near a war is it is always not very near. Even when it was here. It is very funny that but it is true. Perhaps if one were a boy it would be different but I do not think so. I think even when men are in a war actually in a war it is not very near, it is here but it is not very near.”

—Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945)



Backs to the Wall: Rogers, W. A. “Their backs to the wall: they need you, Uncle Sam!” Pen and ink, 1918? Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* (1922), a commercially successful novel whose good reviews outnumbered bad two to one, won the Pulitzer Prize. Yet critics consistently heap Cather’s primary World War I novel with scorn and ridicule, a trend only eased recently by an upswing in defenders.<sup>1</sup> Cather’s biographer, James Woodress, sums up the problem by defining what critics required of a “true” modernist war novel: “It seems clear that the hostile reviewers wanted a protagonist who experienced boredom and disillusionment in his military service and lived to criticize the society that had sent him to war” (334). However, with the pre- and post-World War I shifts in traditional ways of thinking, it is no surprise that a committed artist like Cather would write a novel responding to such an earth-shattering event in an unexpected way. Likewise, Gertrude Stein, an equally committed artist, wrote of World War I in her unorthodox autobiography, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). Stein depicts the war from the “homey” perspective of herself and partner Alice Toklas, generally showing the banal, domestic, or even festive aspects of the war—rather than scenes of horror—thereby legitimizing

civilian war experiences due to the story’s basis in “reality.” *One of Ours* is equally tricky with its depiction of Claude Wheeler’s self-fulfillment (instead of disillusionment) in war, but also its complex irony that privileges the traumatic war experiences of civilians, particularly women, on the “home front.” Thus, eleven years after the publication of *One of Ours*, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* supported and authenticated Cather’s conflicted re-imagining of the war, paving the way for reclamations of her complicated novel.

The works and lives of Cather and Stein are rarely linked, an omission I find strange. They did not know each other personally, but it is inconceivable that two such savvy, well-read, and culturally aware women were unaware of each other. As writers, both faced similar challenges in regards to sexuality, gender, and class, and both sought to establish themselves as *artists*, beyond demographic classifications. Both authors also marched boldly into territory previously closed to women artists. As Jennifer Haytock claims, “women’s participation in the sexual battle—whether in the political, social, or literary arena—partly assumed the shape of asserting the right to talk about war,” and Cather and Stein joined the figurative trenches by writing about the Great War. Likewise, as with other women who braved the battle, Cather’s and Stein’s “writing about war was often closely related, even integral, to their writing about the home” (Haytock xxvi). Haytock claims that World War I propaganda was designed to make martyrs of the ladies sacrificing at home, a distinction that mingled with the period’s climactic emphasis on divided spheres for men and women, an emphasis she finds integral to war itself.

Cather, however, extends war experience beyond these confining realms. *One of Ours* focuses attention on Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey, as well as on the unexpected aspects of Claude’s soldierly life. This differentiation from most male authors can certainly be attributed to Cather’s personal reactions to the war. As Janis Stout writes,

Cather’s response to the First World War was an intensely emotional one. She referred to the war at various times as ‘terrible’ and ‘unjust’ and repeatedly asserted that it had unleashed a general misery infecting every aspect of life so that no one could have any true happiness as long as it went on. In part, these feelings sprang from her reading about the sufferings of civilians in the war zone. (73)

The war experiences of non-combatants made up part of Cather’s inspiration to explore World War I in her writing, a foray that Stein mirrors in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Both the works of Cather and Stein demonstrate how artists began to question the designations between soldiers and non-combatants, front lines and home front, in ways that did not always meet with the approval of their male peers.

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(Continued)

The post-war sense of vertigo allowed artists and intellectuals of all types to re-arrange formerly unbendable rules. In Cather's essay "The Novel Démoublé" (1936), she describes the need for modern writers to "break away from mere verisimilitude," an attribute she sees beginning to appear in some of the "younger writers":

Following the development of modern painting, to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters; . . . the novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it; just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns when utterly to disregard his accomplishment, when to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect. (48–49)

In *The Autobiography*, Stein utilizes the persona of Toklas to write her own autobiography, a complete innovation of perspective allowing Stein to be avant-garde and, for the first time, accessible to a wide audience. In her treatment of "real events," she continually complicates and subverts traditional expectations, particularly the "truth" of World War I. Likewise, in *One of Ours*, "Cather demonstrates that the 'truth' about war is more elusive than we think, its motivations and satisfactions more deeply rooted in the American psyche than we would care to admit" (Trout, *Memorial Fictions* 7). Cather's novel follows a traditional format while Stein's *Autobiography* subverts one. Stein takes on the role of "younger writer" and supports Cather's varied and untraditional conclusions about the war, a project both authors were invested in as women braving the battlefields of modernist art.

Stein's unique autobiographical form adds an important tension to the already problematic assumptions of reality within the genre. Throughout *The Autobiography*, she gives clues that call into question the veracity of her text, but she does not do so merely to relieve the burden of truth-telling but to highlight the relativity of narrative and memory. From stories told differently at different times to the unique conflation that often occurs between the speaking persona of Toklas and the authorial voice of Stein, the book proves Paul de Man's contention that "empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm" (68). Thus, when the war begins to go badly for France and Toklas/Stein states, "I had been so confident and now I had an awful feeling that the war had gotten out of my hands," the reader realizes how inherently slippery narrative is through the narrator's inability to hold down events and the reader's own difficulty in separating the speaking personae (166). Stein claims experiential truth while also emphasizing how mutable such realism can be.

In "Autobiography as Defacement," de Man deconstructs the notion of autobiography as a literary genre and instead argues for it as a relation between the author and the audience. The defining trait of "autobiography" is that its titling as such engenders the reader to presume a text largely based on true events, in opposition to fiction. De Man argues, autobiography does not reveal any real self and story but, rather, the perpetual creation of self and story through language. He says,

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (69)

Without language, without self narrative, we do not have self, and Stein's multi-layered versions draw attention to this complicated truth. In a unique relation between Stein and Cather, one that also highlights de Man's notions of autobiography, Cather ghost-

wrote S. S. McClure's, *My Autobiography*, first published serially in *McClure's* (1913–14). She used his persona, but neither denied that Cather actually wrote the book. During publication, McClure expressed his gratitude for Cather's help, and in her personal copy of the book he inscribed, "With affectionate regard for the real author" (The Willa Cather Archive). With works such as Stein's *Three Lives* (1904) and her *Autobiography* and the Cather/McClure autobiography and *One of Ours*, both authors push against the notion that

experiential truth somehow attains an irreproachable version of reality, a move that allows them to alter the boundaries for women writing about subjects such as war.

*One of Ours* is often condemned for its depiction of war as a fun, fulfilling lark. In the modernist novel, World War I is expected to be nothing but dreariness, violence, and misery, but Cather subverts this expectation by allowing the fun times to highlight the quintessential "aliveness" Claude feels at war, especially compared to the banality of home with his emotionally cold wife Enid. Frederick Griffith claims, "At the moment when Dos Passos and his followers in the cult of experience were making the Great American Novel something that a woman as noncombatant could never write, Cather reasserted the great tradition of war narrative as the province of artists more than of warriors" (263). Cather's depiction of fun in war was not unfounded, but based largely on the life and death of her cousin, Grosvenor P. Cather, and other lengthy research into the war. Her design is also backed by the large amounts of fan mail she received from European residents, soldiers, and mothers, who praised her accuracy and realism, one such claiming, "the last part of 'One of Ours' is the most perfect picture of the war that



Farm woman poster: Chavannas, B. "Emprunt National 1918. Société Générale, pour nous rendre entière la douce terre de France." Color lithograph, 1918. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

I have read” (qtd. in Trout, *Memorial Fictions* 110). Woodress reports that “despite the bruises her ego suffered at the hands of the critics, she could take comfort in the size of her deposit slips. The book became a best seller . . . and for the rest of her life [she] had no money problems” (334). Cather’s portrayal of the self-fulfillment, even fun, in war was not unrealistic, was not even a stretch, yet prominent critics scorned the work for its lack of verisimilitude. Such an ongoing critique speaks as much to the mythologizing narrative that followed World War I as it does to the inherent gender bias that suggests Cather had no idea what she was talking about.

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein highlights the fun times of the war more than she hints at darkness. After going to Spain to “forget the war a little,” Stein and Toklas return “to an entirely different Paris. It was no longer gloomy. It was no longer empty. . . . [W]e decided to get into the war” (161, 168). They promptly join the American Fund for French Wounded and order a Ford truck from America to drive the soldiers in. They dub the vehicle, “Auntie after Gertrude Stein’s aunt Pauline who always behaved admirably in emergencies and behaved fairly well most times if she was properly flattered” (172). With the “authenticity” the book’s status of autobiography conveys, Stein is allowed to joke, to make light of her and Toklas’s experiences, tapping into a human truth; even in dark times, people are able—even required—to laugh.

Cather realized this truth too, and has her jolly soldiers declare, “they were going to come back [to Beaufort] after the war, and marry the girls, and put in water-works!” (576). Her not-so-subtle hint at wartime promiscuity aligns with Stein’s portrayal of the hitchhiking soldiers she picked up as “pretty hard characters. . . . Gertrude Stein said to [one] soldier, but you are tellement gentil, very nice and kind. Madame, said he quite sharply, all soldiers are nice and kind” (174). Cather and Stein allow their soldiers to be morally ambiguous figures without denigrating their war efforts. By dually romanticizing and humanizing the American soldiers in France, both authors engage in a complex re-creation of military experience that complicates assumptions that Stein only focused on herself or that Cather merely sentimentalized war experience. Steven Trout argues that by “modulating back and forth between two antithetical discourses of military experience,” Cather creates “a tension that prevents us from interpreting Claude exclusively as a dupe whose idealism blindly denies the horrors that surround him or exclusively as a hero whose grand exit truly represents an admirable sacrifice. . . . Once again, *One of Ours* seems more concerned with conveying the ambiguities

of war and the idealism that it satisfies than with constructing a cogent celebration or parody of military valor” (118). Thus, Cather tapped into an accurate reality by letting Claude and his compatriots experience fun in war, camaraderie, even “sin,” and Stein, who had many “god sons” among the soldiers, authenticates Cather’s ambiguity by also allowing her soldiers to experience fun in the midst of war, despite their real world imperfections.

Even though *One of Ours* contains many light moments, Cather does not shy away from graphically portraying violence and horror. Lisa Garvelink sees in this duality a dialectic between modernism and romanticism, noting that “by presenting both the idealism and the horrors, Cather portrays not only the war and a close-up of one of its soldiers but also the war’s conflicted world” (908). Before Company B can enjoy their lovely week in Beaufort, they must liberate it from a handful of German soldiers who shoot at Americans and civilians alike: “the little girl who stood beside Hicks, eating chocolate, threw out her hands, ran a few steps, and fell, blood and brains oozing out in her yellow hair” (565–66). This scene belies the soldiers’ dreams of easy liberation with its graphically violent depiction of a child’s death. The physical horror experienced by the soldiers punctuates the ensuing moments of lightness with a kind of desperation, a shadow overhanging their determination to have fun despite the circumstances. Such examples of physical horror are offset in the work by an intellectual horror that privileges the reader with a secondhand perspective. Ultimately, the audience comprehends the details of Claude’s intellectually graphic death in ways lost to Claude and his fellow soldiers. Claude, so afraid of being duped while alive, dies duped, pointlessly killed, blissfully believing his best friend is alive

instead of having “been blown to pieces . . . when [he] dashed back through the enemy barrage” (598). His fellow soldiers are only glad he died unaware. Likewise, the line, “the look that was Claude had faded,” speaks to the fact that Claude was a look, not substantive, an ideal rather than a reality (598). The mingling of the soldier’s graphic horrors with the reader’s horror that Claude has died a fool creates a unique tension whereby the civilian reader’s experiences are made as profound and legitimate as the fictional soldiers. As an author, Cather portrays another reality; wars only end for those who die in them.

Stein, as a civilian, pays a lot of attention to the experiences of non-combatants in World War I, thereby altering the hierarchy that privileges soldier’s experiences above all others. In so doing, she legitimizes Cather’s similar disordering of hierarchies. Stein mentions big, historical moments, such as



“The Marne”: Neumont, Maurice. “On ne passe pas. 1914 . . . 1918. Par deux fois j’ai tenu et vaincu sur la Marne.” Color lithograph.

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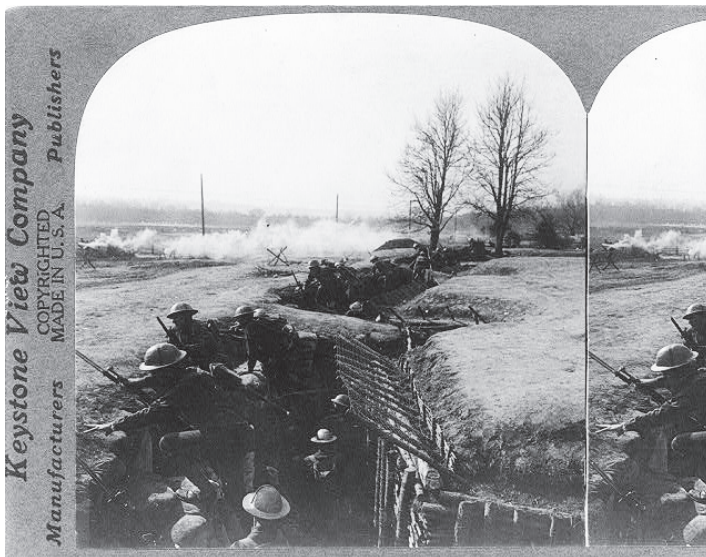
the Battle of the Marne, from the perspective of those far from the fighting. A friend, Nellie Jacot, tells Toklas how she tried to get a taxi out of the city and after several failed attempts, a cabby tells her, “no taxi can leave the city limits to-day. Why, [she] asked. He winked in answer and drove off. [She] had to go back to Bourgogne in a street car. . . . and that was the battle of the Marne” (180). Another friend claims, “I was sitting there and then I noticed lots of horses pulling lots of big trucks going slowly by and there were some soldiers with them and on the boxes was written Banque de France. That was the gold going away just like that . . . before the battle of the Marne” (151). By portraying this battle from afar, Stein authenticates the war as something that affected the lives of everyone in ways big and small, irritating and profound, including civilians like herself. The stories’ second-hand telling, told as memories of friends, emphasizes the way most people experience “real” war—second-hand—and the humor sweetens her claim that wars and battle are not only the provenance of soldiers. Cather, writing fiction, feels free to delve into soldierly experiences of violence and is taken to task for her presumption by critics, almost entirely male, who believe that war writing belongs to those who were there. Stein’s “real” writing again authenticates Cather’s ability to explore an issue “second-hand.” In so profound an event as World War I, nobody experiences it second-hand, and perhaps the greatest trauma is reserved for those who don’t achieve a glorious death. As women writing about war, such alterations to the patriarchal expectations by Cather and Stein are necessary to legitimize their right to write about war. Ultimately, Stein’s comic narration of her inability to back up her car becomes a metaphor for soldiers, civilians, governments, and presumptuous “lady” authors alike: “Wrong or right, said Gertrude Stein, we are going on” (173).

Ultimately, Cather doesn’t betray her contemporary’s disillusionment with the war. Instead she moves that crisis to the women’s sphere, the home front, placing the agony onto Claude’s mother, Mrs. Wheeler, instead of onto Claude (to whom, supposedly, it should belong). When she learned of Claude’s death, “Mrs. Wheeler said, ‘Thank you,’ and hung up

the receiver. She felt her way softly to her chair. She had an hour alone, when there was nothing but him in the room,—but him and the map there, which was the end of his road. Somewhere among those perplexing names, he had found his place” (603). While Claude has “found his place” in the glory of battle and comrades and death, Mrs. Wheeler is left alone with her understanding that “the flood of meanness and greed had been held back just long enough for the boys to go over” and that her son, “who was so afraid of being fooled,” had “died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with” (604). Mrs. Wheeler’s despair reflects the agony depicted in more accepted war novels of the time, and yet detractors ignore Cather’s discernment, presumably because they cannot see her contemporary critique through their own expectation of Mrs. Wheeler’s grief. In her depiction of Mrs. Wheeler, Cather balances respect for the sacrifices of soldiers and mothers and, ultimately, society itself with the painful truth that war is not a great good. This balance between honor and critique may be the novel’s greatest achievement.

Stein, on the other hand, does not deal with grief in a big way but, as with previous examples, uses understatement and banality to legitimize the experiences of everyday people forever changed by World War I. In regards to Cather, her depictions again authenticate Cather’s privileging of experiences outside the hierarchical expectations, particularly of those who didn’t fight, those who remained at home. Seeing the trenches, Stein remarks, “To any one who did not see it as it was then it is impossible to imagine it. It was not terrifying it was strange. We were used to ruined houses and even ruined towns but this was different. It was a landscape. And it belonged to no country” (187). Stein’s understated yet chilling description reinforces the fact that war, in the end, is beyond all notions of civilization. Stein can cope with the “ruined houses and even ruined towns” but the magnitude of the war machine, represented by the trenches, is unique to this new kind of war and incomprehensibly inhuman. After the war Stein emphasizes how everything has changed, writing, “Paris was crowded. Clive Bell remarked, they say that an awful lot of people were killed in the war but it seems to me that an extraordinary large number of grown men and women have suddenly been born” (190). Stein’s quoting of a famous person such as Bell is common to the *Autobiography*, but her quoting of a friend indicates the shared aspect of such a traumatizing event, one which leaves no more children, only just-born adults, presumably foundering in the changed landscape the war has created.

Cather, too, focuses on strange landscapes as a means to describe the war and its effects on the civilian population. Her focus on the realistic and the domestic proves Trout’s contention that “an author does not have to be a ‘war writer’ in order to produce work that registers the cultural and personal impact of mass violence, particularly during the first half of an especially war-torn century” (Introduction xii). In *One of Ours*, as hostilities begin, Mrs. Wheeler digs a map of Europe out of the attic so that she might have a physical connection to the strange places discussed in the newspapers. The text emphasizes the American domestic connection to far away Europe through the map, “a thing for which Nebraska had never had much need. But that night, on many prairie homesteads, the women, American and foreign-born, were hunting for a map” (219). Through maps and



“Over the Top”—American soldiers answering the bugle call to ‘charge.’”  
Photographic print on stereo card, 1918. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

encyclopedias, Cather's women access the war, and her depiction of them honors the importance of non-combatants' emotional and psychological attachments to global traumas and events. Cather herself believed that something profound in the world of art and thought changed after the war, an alteration that she depicts spatially in her essay "148 Charles Street" (1936): "Just how did this change come about, one wonders. . . . Was it at the Marne? At Versaille, when a new geography was being made on paper?" (74). Her linking of physical space to imaginative geography subtly highlights the connection that non-combatants, even as far removed physically as the United States, had to World War I. Cather thus sets up Mrs. Wheeler, an iconic figure of the home front, to bear the brunt of post-war, modern disillusionment and nihilistic despair in a particularly poignant and maternal way.

In *One of Ours*, Claude's death is a mercy killing on the part of Cather, saving him from the fate of those men unfortunate enough to return home in this disjointed world, and a mercy to Mrs. Wheeler who doesn't have to see her sensitive son awoken to the new reality as others, inevitably, do:

One by one they quietly die by their own hand. Some do it in obscure lodging houses, some in their office, where they seemed to be carrying on their business like other men. Some slip over a vessel's side and disappear into the sea. When Claude's mother hears of these things, she shudders and presses her hands tight over her breast, as if she had him there. . . . [S]he thinks those slayers of themselves were all so like him; they were the ones who had hoped extravagantly, . . . And they found they had hoped and believed too much. But one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion . . . safe, safe. (605; final ellipses in original)

As opposed to Stein's suddenly born "grown men and women," Cather's soldiers "leave prematurely the world they have come back to," like babies unable to cope with the hostile environment outside of the womb (370). Haytock claims that in *One of Ours*, Cather "establishes a contradiction: that we need ideals in order to effect change in the world and that idealism can be a cover for corruption and therefore must be questioned" (30). Likewise Stein, looking back on the war with more than a decade's perspective, uses her undramatic reality to upset notions of glorious war while concurrently claiming her right to speak about this war as a person who did experience it. Both Cather and Stein held a strong affection for France and a belief in the importance of US involvement on the Allies' side. However, in differing and unique ways, *One of Ours* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* also question the very ideals they uphold.

Stein's insistence, as a non-combatant, to claims of authentic war experience in her *Autobiography*, legitimizes Cather's preceding and much-maligned *One of Ours*. Throughout this discussion, I have claimed that Stein's device of the "autobiography," and prevailing assumptions about the genre's "realism," allowed her to write her civilian experiences with a freedom that Cather didn't have and, thus, authenticates Cather's preceding work. Elizabeth Gregory claims that "Stein took what means she found available to accomplish that end. In so doing she displayed a double-mindedness common to women writers of her period, who both questioned the hierarchical terms on which authority circulated in their world, and sought some of that authority for themselves" (264-65). At the same time, Cather extended a hand to Stein and all civilians who choose to write

about war, paving the way for their right to write. *One of Ours* is a flawed book; however, a lesser author's book would have disappeared entirely and, if lucky, been reclaimed in the 1970s as a shining example of what a marginalized woman could almost achieve. Since the book is Willa Cather's, there's not enough recognition of what an outrageous and important experiment she undertook in writing about a war that permanently altered the artistic and cultural worlds of America and Europe as a civilian, a woman. Stein's "real" insistence on her civilian experiences may, retroactively, authenticate Cather's work, but without Cather's example, even a contemporary like Stein might not have had a page to write on.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>Volume six of *Cather Studies, History, Memory, and War* (2006) features fewer than six essays that deal with *One of Ours*, all of them seeking to enhance, complicate, or apologize for the novel and its historical reception. Likewise, Merrill Maguire Skaggs' *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (1990) and Steven Trout's *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War* (2002) offer defenses for Cather's much maligned depiction of WWI.

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## President's Message

Greetings from New York! I'm Jay Yost, the new president of the Willa Cather Foundation's Board of Governors. As a native of Red Cloud, but having spent most of the last 25 years in New York, I am honored, humbled, and frankly a bit shocked to have assumed this office. During my first seven years as a Board member, I thought I had been vocal enough in expressing my opinions that I was safely to remain a backbencher . . . and then I miss one meeting and look what happens!

Having Cather read to me as a child in Red Cloud gave me the unique experience of feeling as if I were growing up inside a novel. Cather was all around me. As *The New York Times* put it several years ago, Red Cloud is a "ville musée"—a town as museum—and one of the best-preserved literary sites in the world. In fact, Red Cloud has the largest number of National Register sites devoted to a single author, making it truly a place of national significance.

I can tell you that the Willa Cather Foundation ten years ago—when I joined its Board—is in some ways unrecognizable from the organization we're lucky enough to be associated with today. It's remarkable when you stop and think about all of the things we do as the Cather Foundation, and the magnitude of the whole strikes you when you view our accomplishments as a group. So I'd like to mention a few of those wonderful successes that your ongoing support allows us to continue. Together, we must ensure that Nebraska's greatest literary light remains known as one of America's greatest authors.

I'm going to use four of the six functional areas outlined in our Strategic Plan as a way to organize a run-through of our successes and our strengths:

1. **Sites & Collections:** our wonderful **Cather Archives** located in Red Cloud; the **Moon Block Building**, our current restoration project which will give a proper home to our Archives, expand our bookstore, create four residential apartments for income, give us backstage and wing space for the Opera House Auditorium, and renovate five business bays on Red Cloud's historic main street; the **historic properties** we manage and own including the Childhood Home, the Garber Bank Building, the Burlington Depot, the old Episcopal, Catholic, and Baptist Churches, the Harling House, and the *My Antonia* farmstead; and, of course, our unique, 608-acre, never-been-plowed **Willa Cather Memorial Prairie**.
2. **Education & Programming:** our annual **Spring Conference** in Red Cloud; **Elderhostel**; **Prairie Writers' Workshop**; our biennial **International Seminar** (this year in Chicago, June 24-28); Cather Prairie-based **eco- and heritage-tourism**; our **Opera House and Art Gallery** programming including music, dance, art, literature, theater workshops for kids and the commissioning of new works of art, all of which enhance our reputation as a regional arts center.
3. **Marketing, Promotion and Audience Outreach:** our newly redesigned **website** at [www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org) that offers Catherland, the Foundation, and our comprehensive bookstore to you via the web; this **Newsletter & Review**, now in its 52nd year; our second **Annual Report** due out in April describing our achievements, our donors, and our stewardship.
4. **Development:** our **ongoing development efforts** via our dedicated Board members and staff; your generous response to our annual **year-end campaign**; **support** from the Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Humanities Council, Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Travel & Tourism, and others, as well as state and national economic development funds. The last of these helps us in our vital role as an engine of **economic development** to ensure the long-term viability of Cather's hometown.

While these financial times are trying for all non-profits, our strong base of operations and our committed supporters (such as you) will help us weather this economic storm—and will continue to make the Willa Cather Foundation the national model for how an all-encompassing, 360-degree, placed-based literary foundation should function. I'm excited to play a role in helping us along that journey during these next two years, and with your support and guidance, we can be wonderfully successful.

## The Archive

Jim and Angela Southwick have recently provided the Willa Cather Archive with yet another treasure. Mystery surrounds the relationship of Willa Cather and Isabella McClung to this day. The same is true of the diminutive turquoise and gold pin Jim brought to the Foundation in January. Isabella's name is gracefully engraved on the back of the pin. Willa Cather gave the pin, along with many other precious items, to Jim's mother, Helen Cather Southwick, now deceased. Whatever story might be connected to this lovely piece is lost in time. But thanks to the Southwicks, this precious item is in safekeeping in the Archive.



# *Sapphira and the Slave Girl:* Willa Cather Rewrites *Huckleberry Finn*

John Jacobs  
Shenandoah University

*Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) is Willa Cather's culminating work, not her swan song. Once again, in defiance of her growing infirmities and the expectations of critics and readers, she writes her own book her own way. She produces a carnivalesque narrative that reconciles her to her biographic/historic past, while she subverts popular and literary narratives of the ante-bellum South.<sup>1</sup> Cather's ante-bellum South is populated by grotesques, exaggerated transitional figures who complement her narrative. Cather's guide into the dynamic dark world of the ante-bellum South is Mark Twain in his *Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

*Huckleberry Finn* and *Sapphira and the Slave* are both frontier narratives of the ante-bellum South. Both writers, as befits their frontier subjects, present carnivalesque pictures of a tumultuous society struggling to nurture democratic ideals in a hierarchical, though primitive, ignorant, and often violent world.<sup>2</sup> Twain's work, from its first publication, has been recognized as subversive; Cather's, politely reviewed by her contemporary critics, has only lately been recognized as a subversive text. I would like to push the boundaries even further: *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* subverts *Huckleberry Finn* to expose the powerful sexual corruption of slave society to which Twain turns a blind eye, while at the same time paying homage to Twain's otherwise masterful dismantling of frontier slave society.

While Twain's ironic narratives and characterizations are sardonic and humorous in presentation, Cather's are more often direct and dark. For example, while *Huckleberry Finn* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* are both escape narratives, *Huckleberry Finn* concentrates on the journey to freedom, while *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* concentrates on the abuses of slavery that lead to escape. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the older slave, Jim, is aided in his escape by the young white boy, Huck; in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the young slave, Nancy, is aided by the older white woman, Rachel. While both works take place in frontier societies containing both primitive and civilized aspects, each ends in a different sphere. At the end of his story, Huck plans to abandon civilization to seek happiness in the wilderness. At the end of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the resolution of the tension of the story occurs back home, at Willow Shade, but the most striking way that Cather subverts *Huckleberry Finn* is by infusing her escape narrative with sex.

Cather comments to Alexander Wolcott that, in *Sapphira*, her end is her beginning (Woodress 481); she may be dropping a hint to us of *Huckleberry Finn*'s influence on

*Sapphira*. Broadly, this comment clearly refers to Cather's autobiographic narrative in the epilogue, where she reveals the genesis of her story. Also suggested, of course, is the importance of Cather's Southern heritage to her life and work. If we take "end" in the most literal sense, Cather can refer to her final comment in *Sapphira* in direct authorial voice. At the very end, Cather attests to—and then subverts—the factual accuracy of her book: "In this story I have called several of the characters by Frederick County surnames, but in no case have I used the name of a person whom I ever knew or saw." At the end of the text, she admits that the sound of "Mr. Pertleball"'s name delighted her, but she does not "know how to spell it" (295). At first glance, this note seems superfluous, perhaps a testimony to the verisimilitude of the book; or a kind of complimentary close followed by Willa Cather's signature. But in this end of *Sapphira*, we find an echo from Twain's authorial Explanatory at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, vouching for its verisimilitude: "In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the



Willow Shade. Photograph by Joe Kelley.

ordinary 'Pike-County' dialect; and four modified varieties of the last." Twain ends his note in much the same way as Cather, admitting he may not be able to represent accurately the sound of those dialects through his orthography.<sup>3</sup> If this were the only similarity and reversal shared by Twain and Cather, it might be dismissed as mere accident, but Cather, we know, greatly admired Twain and especially *Huckleberry Finn*. More importantly, throughout *Sapphira*, carnivalesque depictions of frontier life echo those of *Huckleberry Finn*. Both writers discover carnivalesque episodes and grotesque

characters that epitomize the distortions and flux of frontier life. As Cather complements *Huckleberry Finn*, she also subverts its narrative, characters, and themes.

A recurring criticism of *Huckleberry Finn* is that the book lacks narrative unity and focus, obvious consequences of Twain's having composed it over a lengthy period of time. For example, the confusion of the river journey at Cairo is often a focal point of criticism. Even casual readers note the frequent disappearances of Jim and his escape to freedom as a major concern of the text. *Huckleberry Finn* is clearly not only an escape narrative, but Twain's indictment of an entire society predicated on slavery. Twain similarly mixes genres and modes in *Huckleberry Finn*, which is a "boy's book," a Mississippi River travel book, an escape narrative, and a spiritual autobiography. Along the way, Twain parodies frontier theater productions of

## Willa Cather Rewrites *Huckleberry Finn*

(Continued)

Shakespeare, popular eulogies, and camp meeting sermons. *Huckleberry Finn* is a rich pattern for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

*Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is also often criticized for its lack of narrative unity. The most obvious fracture comes between the narrative of Nancy's escape and the epilogue which occurs twenty-five years later. In the epilogue, Cather steps directly into the text. She uses her own voice as author, not the fictional voice of the narrative proper. And she inserts her five-year-old self into the text. There are other dissonances in the book as well: at times, it is a novel of manners, and it focuses on the day-to-day rituals of Back Creek life. At other times, it is pastoral, and it celebrates the closeness of man to nature. Then again, it is also a narrative of escape, and it is a Gothic Romance, with all of the mystery and gimmicks of that genre. Taken together, these modes of narration form a carnival-like whole; each different mode, with its own characteristic trappings, challenges the other for reader attention. Cather, too, recognizes in her narrative that the escape motif, while a central tension, is only a steadying narrative thread of the book. Nancy's escape from slavery to freedom is often a slim line upon which Cather stretches many other commentaries and contemplations; all of them demonstrate the distortions of individuals and intimate relationships caught up in a hierarchical slave society arbitrarily redefining the human condition, often through physical violence.

Disharmony is structural and thematic in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, as it is in *Huckleberry Finn*, and in both books it is expressed in related terms of the carnivalesque and grotesque. The carnivalesque and grotesque both point to the metamorphoses of society, of dynamic change, and of death and rebirth. Similarly, there is a carnival of characters, a mixture of "high" and "low," each in her own voice and language vying for our attention and sympathy. To add to the carnival-like atmosphere, many characters are drawn grotesquely, as distortions of the conflict of which they are a part. This seeming pandemonium, however, is purposeful, not chaotic. Through her story-telling method, Cather wishes to reflect the pandemonium of Frederick County, in conflict with itself over slavery. In the "particularly conflicted history, geography, and economy" among country gentry, white trash, and black slaves in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (Romines, "Admiring and Remembering" 275), Cather finds a pattern for the social turmoil of the Old South. These carnivalesque elements of narration, then, provide a uniform critique of the disarray in the Old South. They also portend a rebirth of the social order that will follow.

The carnival atmosphere in *Huckleberry Finn* is most evident in the shenanigans of the Duke and Dauphin. The con men's usurping of aristocratic titles to impress Huck and Jim is ludicrously undercut by their dress, language, manners, and sensibilities. For a while, however, the fools fool the greater fools on shore with their Royal Nonesuch, camp-meeting fraud, bastardized Shakespearean productions, and imitation of the grieving Wilkes brothers. The Duke's and the Dauphin's masquerades emphasize the lack of clear identity and self-confidence characteristic of frontier slave society and the lack of a social and moral center. Carnival in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is more subtle, but equally powerful, in dismantling

hierarchical pretenses. Rituals of celebration and mourning become carnivalesque in *Sapphira*. First, the celebration of Christmas finds the slaves in easy familiarity with the mistress of the house as they share a Christmas toast, briefly creating the illusion that mistress and slaves are equal. Funeral rituals for Jezebel are also carnival-like; Sapphira enjoins her slaves to spare no expense in putting on a showy funeral, as though the slaves were kin, not property. Cather undercuts that mock democracy by having Jezebel buried in a childhood nightgown, discarded by Sapphira years before. Carnival is also evoked in the hay mowing section. Once again, hierarchy of slave and master disappear as Henry shares the labor and leisure of mowing with his slaves, but that pastoral scene is ruptured by the pathetic appearance of Tansy Dave, a slave who has become a beggar.

Tansy Dave's story is framed in the midst of a summer pastoral. Working as an equal with his slaves, Henry Colbert leads them in mowing the summer hay. Their joint effort is a celebration of the earth's fruitfulness and the beauty of Back Creek valley. This interlude allows Cather briefly to find a haven from slavery—like Huck's and Jim's raft—that returns men to the peaceful and soothing rhythms of nature. But as the men pause for their midday meal, their idyll is interrupted by Tansy Dave, who hides out in the mountains, in the neighborhood of the "white trash," when the weather is nice. He only returns to the plantation, where he does no work, when the weather is cold or he needs to beg food. Dave was once a carefree and happy young man, a lady's man, and a pastoral lover, known for his dancing and his music. Thwarted by slavery in his love for a Baltimore maiden, Tansy Dave becomes a grotesque, "'jst a pore mock of a man,'" to borrow Lawndis Ringer's self-assessment (129).

Cather, like Twain, also creates an ironic moral center for her book. At the moral center of *Huckleberry Finn* is the unself-consciously ironic Huck, a naïve and powerless young white boy. At the moral center of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is the self-consciously ironic Jezebel, an experienced old black woman, even less powerful than Huck. Huck is the central consciousness in Twain's work and always in the narrative; Jezebel, except for her inset tale, is a peripheral character, yet her deathbed moral witness against slavery and the savagery of slave holders reverberates throughout the book. Huck Finn's "conversion" experience, in which he accepts damnation for helping to free Jim, by now is famous (268-71). After his long journey with Jim, he begins to feel stirrings of his conventional conscience and ponders whether to turn in Jim as a runaway slave or to suffer damnation for continuing to remain silent about his escape. Huck composes a letter to Miss Watson alerting her to Jim's escape, but then tears it up and with it the possibility of salvation. Cather locates the moral center of *Sapphira* with more biting irony. With characteristic economy, Cather uses Sapphira's visit to Jezebel's death-bed to expose the savagery of slave holders and, at the same time, develop a continuity of spirit between Jezebel and her great-granddaughter, Nancy.

Born free in Africa, Jezebel could never be truly enslaved. Though bound to the Dodderidges/Colberts for decades, she remains fiercely independent, even when she is supine from old age and ill-health. In tone, Jezebel's story resembles Jonathan Swift's superficially dispassionate "A Modest Proposal." Additionally, Cather incorporates three motifs from that essay: cannibalism, humans as livestock, and an ironically





The Millhouse. Photograph by John Jacobs.

presented voice of reason—the captain of the *Albert Horn*, “a model slaver” (92). Jezebel is brought to the Captain’s attention after she bites the thumb of a mate who is intent on thrashing her. The mate would throw “the female gorilla overboard,” but the captain was not anxious to throw overboard any of the cargo, in which he had a one-third interest. Instead, he orders “a bridle on her” and has Jezebel kept above decks, out of the middle passage, to preserve her monetary worth (92-94). Over sixty years later, as she lies dying, Jezebel ironically recalls that early scene. When Sapphira tries to coax Jezebel to eat, Jezebel with “a sly chuckle” responds that she relishes nothing, “lessen maybe it was a li’l pickaninny’s hand.” Aghast, Nancy crouches in a corner and cries out that Jezebel is “out of her haid!” Sapphira responds, “She is no more out of her head than I am” (89). In that response, Sapphira unwittingly reveals the moral truth of slavery: It is not the slaves who are the savages and cannibals, but the slaveholders, who, like Swift’s absentee landholders, consume all but the literal lives of their slaves. Ironically, it is the supine Jezebel who stands straightest in this scene. Mistress Sapphira is bloated and crippled by her desire for dominance. Nancy, young and healthy, cowers under the burden of lifelong slavery, unlike Jim who often acts heroically despite his status. At the same time, the upright stature of Jezebel foreshadows the triumphant return of a liberated Nancy twenty-five years later. The Reverend Mr. Fairhead, in a naïve irony reminiscent of Huckleberry Finn’s during his “conversion,” reflects at Jezebel’s funeral that “[p]erhaps her long old age had been granted her that she might fill out in years the full measure of a Christian life” (102).

Cather’s foremost subversion of *Huckleberry Finn* is to reveal the sexual exploitation and dissonance caused by slavery

that Twain ignores. Twain has obvious depth of feeling in his rejection of slavery and the crass order that supported it, but he does not disclose the most devastating and corrupt power of slave master over slave. Paradoxically, the white master’s exploitation of sex becomes the white master’s and mistress’s obsessive fear about the sexual prowess of black slaves. Since the slave master routinely exploited his slaves for sex, his wife could never be confident of her husband’s fidelity. Since the master needed to find reasons to keep his male slaves subjugated, he demonized them as sexual predators. As slavery corrupts intimate human relations, it destabilizes the entire society. That is why, in Cather’s ante-bellum world, there are so many broken families and so many grotesques. It is also why Nancy’s youthful innocence offers her no protection from the corrupt forces surrounding her.

Cather provides numerous examples of sexual abuse of slaves. For example, Nancy’s mother Till was impregnated by an itinerant Cuban painter. Since Till was Sapphira’s favorite housemaid, she did not want her pregnant again, and so Sapphira marries Till to old Jefferson, referred to by the other slaves as a “capon man.” As a child, Nancy assumed that Jefferson was from Cacapon village, just a few miles to the north. We’re never told why Jefferson was castrated, but it is a safe assumption that it was punishment for a slave owner’s fears of the sexual threat that Jefferson, like any black man, supposedly presented to white women.

Like the vulnerable Huck Finn—a poor, white-trash fourteen-year-old boy—Nancy is powerless in her world. Similarly, because neither has power, each must suffer patiently the abuses of adults: Huck withstands the abuses of the

Duke and Dauphin, while Nancy bears the abuses of Sapphira, Martin Colbert, and the cook, Fat Lizzie. Though he was often physically abused by Pap and exploited by the Duke and Dauphin, Huck never faces sexual abuse. Indeed, his world seems almost sexless; and Huck, androgynous. For example, Huck unhesitatingly disguises himself as a girl when it suits his needs, and beyond showing affection for the swindled Wilkes sisters, he demonstrates no romantic interests—highly unlikely for a fourteen-year-old boy. Though as innocent as Huck in most ways, Nancy is knowledgeable about sex. More importantly, she chooses a chaste life, making her victimization by Martin Colbert and Sapphira a powerful metaphor for the corruption of the human spirit caused by slavery. Throughout his journey down the Mississippi, Huck considers the wickedness of slavery, but he is insulated from the worst aspects of slavery; he does not witness its horrors first-hand, and his comments against slavery lack emotional conviction. Unlike Twain, Cather focuses on the circumstances of slavery, rather than an escape from it. Readers of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* are provided a firsthand view of the degradation and fear Nancy experiences.

These grotesque mockeries of love, sex, and marriage among the slaves are reflected in the broken families of the white people. As Ann Romines notes, “the presence of evils grounded in slavery blights, at least partially, almost every relationship in the book” (“Willa Cather’s Civil War” 14-15). In the case of Sapphira and Henry Colbert, their strained and distant marriage is a metaphor for the wrongs of slavery. Sapphira suffers from dropsy (severe edema) which makes her unable to walk, or even stand, without great pain. Her condition also makes her increasingly reliant on her slaves who must carry her from place

## Willa Cather Rewrites *Huckleberry Finn*

(Continued)

to place on the plantation and otherwise minister to her diseased and weakened body. They do so not out of love, but servile obligation. Her physical infirmity only magnifies the growing divide between her and Henry. No longer able to be intimate with him, Sapphira's sexual isolation turns into suspicion and fear that Henry is having an affair with Nancy. Her suspicion is fired by jealous gossip among the other slaves. They resent Henry's fatherly affection for Nancy, who keeps his room at the Mill. Perversely, Sapphira invites Henry's nephew Martin Colbert to Back Creek in order to ruin Nancy for Henry. When Henry finally learns Martin's purpose from his slave Sampson, Henry questions whether there is some truth to his wife's suspicions that his interest in Nancy is sexual. This uncomfortable self-awareness upsets his once innocent and benevolent relationship with Nancy. Not only slave families, but also slave-holding families are corrupted by slavery and its distortions of sexuality.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, on the other hand, white and black lives, although they unfold on the same property, seem never to interact, except superficially. The slave-holding Grangerford family is portrayed as noble; their members are devoted to one another, and their home life is warm and happy. Similarly, the Phelps, with whom Huck spends the last part of the narrative, are portrayed with affection and respect as good Christians, loving spouses, and devoted parents. At the same time, they deal in runaway slaves and wait in ambush for supposed abolitionists attempting to free Jim. Cather's vision of slavery and its ills is broader and more penetrating. In Twain's book, the primitive forces of frontier life tend to triumph, while in Cather's civilized, domestic forces triumph. This distinction is brought home in the closing episodes of the two works. In both, social, racial, and moral distinctions continue to be eroded in the closing sections. Misrule reigns. The expectations of how people should act are upset, and the reversals that are part of the carnivalesque demonstrate the arbitrariness of false hierarchies of class and race.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, these reversals are at first rendered comically. At the end of his river journey, Huck must adopt one more false identity to help save Jim, imprisoned at the Phelps farm. As luck would have it, when Huck goes to the farm looking for Jim, he is mistaken by Mrs. Phelps for her nephew on his way to visit Tom Sawyer. Huck smoothly adopts the identity of his best friend. Huck considers Tom the paragon of civilized virtue and intelligence, his frequent touchstone of values during his long river journey. In the buffoonery that follows, Huck and Tom "free" an already freed Jim, at the expense of a bullet wound for Tom. When all of the action ends, Huck, fed-up with civilization and its deceptions, declares: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (362).

In the closing episode of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, characters are self-conscious about the seriousness of helping Nancy escape. The consequences would not be light for anyone knowingly involved. Nevertheless, characters abandon their social roles and legal obligations for a higher good. Henry Colbert, though philosophically an abolitionist, respects the property rights of his wife, marriage to whom made him the

legal owner of her slaves. While he will not directly help Nancy escape, he makes it easier for her to do so by allowing Rachel to steal money from him to aid Nancy. Rachel risks permanently alienating her mother by helping Nancy. Ironically, Nancy's mother, Till, cannot be told of the escape because Rachel fears that Till's allegiance to her mistress, Sapphira, will outweigh her allegiance to her own daughter. The postmistress, Pastor Fairhead, and the local carpenter assist the escape at great social and legal risk. In a scene reminiscent of Twain's depictions of drunken frontier ruffians, comic relief occurs at Haymarket, when the carpenter's wagon is stopped by ruffians outside a tavern, but their drunken bravado is squelched when they are told the cargo is a dead body. Jim was befuddled but patient at the elaborate escape plans made by Huck and Tom, and he ultimately proved himself compassionate and heroic. Nancy is so fearful of the journey away from the only home she has known that she is ready to return, like Tansy Dave, no matter the consequences. But Rachel encourages her, and Nancy escapes to Canada. The consequences for Rachel are serious, though not legal. Sapphira shuns her daughter and orders her to stay away from the mill house. When diphtheria soon takes Rachel's daughter Molly, Sapphira's favorite granddaughter, they are reconciled, although never close again. The last episode of the narrative is not the close of the book. That takes place in the autobiographical narrative. In *Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature*, Susan J. Rosowski contends that *Huckleberry Finn* lacks renewal, the rebirth of *Huckleberry Finn*—or America—as a consequence of his adventures (9-11). *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, on the other hand, envisions that rebirth in Nancy and Willa Cather's young self.<sup>4</sup>

The book opens inside the mill house on a dreary spring day with an ill, isolated, and aging Sapphira contemplating her loss of health and power. It closes in Willow Shade on a refreshing spring day, just after a rain. The once fearful slave girl is to return to Back Creek after twenty-five years in Canada and many years after the end of the War between the States. Nancy is in the prime of her life and totally self-possessed. Though in service to a Canadian family, she is sophisticated in speech and fashion far beyond the expectations of Back Creek gentry. Indeed, the young Willa Cather who witnesses her return is slightly put off by her speech and manners, though otherwise taken with her story of escape and transformation. In the civilized atmosphere of Willow Shade, a new order is suggested. Unlike in *Huckleberry Finn*, domestic life is validated. In the epilogue to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the center of attention is neither white nor black, but a foreshadowing of a new order: Nancy is a half-black, half white American married to a half-white, half-Indian Canadian. Together, they are parents of two children. Clearly, Nancy's success, her self-possession and sophistication mock and put an end to the old order, the chaos that would have robbed her of all dignity and humanity.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Ann Romines, "Admiring and Remembering," discusses Cather's coming to terms with the South of her memory and the romanticized South of literature, history, and popular culture.

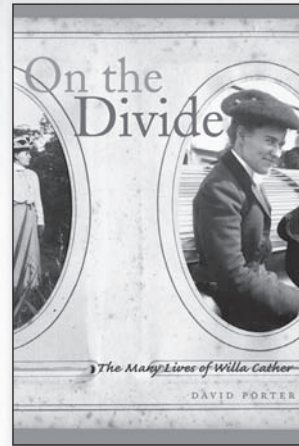
<sup>2</sup>The broad framework of this essay is suggested by David S. Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* and by Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill Skaggs points out Cather's similar uses of Back Creek and Loudoun County dialects in *When the World Broke in Two*. Skaggs also discusses at length the subversive nature of *Sapphira*, 165-181.

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Wolff discusses the Demeter-Persephone myth in *Sapphira* in "Time and Memory in *Sapphira* and the Slave Girl."

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## Robert E. Knoll: A Remembrance

Betty Kort

for the Willa Cather Foundation

My acquaintance with Robert Knoll began at Willa Cather Foundation Board meetings. As a new member of the Board of Governors nearly twenty years ago, I was in awe of this man—his grace, his wit, his intellect, his opinionated stance. He was easily one of the most respected members at the table and I listened and learned. It did not take long to realize that he had shepherded the Foundation through some very difficult times during his tenure as a Governor. When he decided to leave the Active Board a couple years later, I thought maybe the Foundation would not survive without his guidance. He paid me a compliment at his last Board meeting, saying that I was to "replace" him on the Board. I knew better—Robert could never be replaced or emulated, but his compliment inspired me to work hard for the Foundation, and I have found myself thinking many a time about what Robert would do in this or that situation. I have not been above calling him a few times. Knowing that he was a gifted and award-winning teacher at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for many years, I wonder how many young people, colleagues, friends, and associates were motivated by this man of many talents—a staggering number, I am sure.

Robert E. Knoll died peacefully at home on Thursday, January 8, 2009. He was a longtime member of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and remained a member of the Advisory Board until his death at the age of 86.

In 1950, he joined the Department of English at the University of Nebraska equipped with a PhD from the University of Minnesota. He had already served in the Army during WWII from 1943 to 1946. His honors included a Woods Fellow at the Warburg Institute in London in 1959-1960; a Fulbright Professor in Graz, Austria in 1966-1967; a Fellow at the National Humanities Institute at Yale in 1977-1978; and Semester-at-Sea Lecturer in 1982. He retired in 1990 as the D. B. and Paula Varner Professor of English. Robert published books on Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe and Midwestern regional writers Robert McAlmon, Weldon Kees, and Wright Morris.

I know that one of his proudest accomplishments was his *Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska* (1995). We talked about the book the day he served on a panel at the Willa Cather Spring Conference 50th Anniversary celebration in 2005 in Red Cloud. He said that it was an "opinionated" text—how could it have been otherwise? Robert was opinionated and rightly so—he had earned the right to his opinions and they were respected. He will be missed by so many—so many who continue to be inspired by this sage man of letters.

Condolences or personal reflections may be sent online at [www.roperandsons.com](http://www.roperandsons.com). As is our tradition, a memorial fund has been established for Robert E. Knoll in honor of his service to the Willa Cather Foundation.

## Letters to the Editor

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Dear Editor,

In the late sixties when I was a teenager, I read Willa Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris" for the first time. Recently someone told me that she never read a book more than once. Not me. If I truly enjoy a book the first time, I may read it several times. In the re-reads I glean things that were missed in previous readings. There are several books and short stories that I have read more than once, but "Old Mrs. Harris" is by far my favorite. For years I would check it out of the Auld Public Library, but now I have my own copy of *Collected Stories* that I can read whenever I wish.

Until I read the recent fall edition of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*, I had never tried to analyze what there is about "Gram'ma Harris" that attracts me so much. Unlike Betty Kort, I can't seem to identify with any of the characters. I now understand that I should have been able to identify with Vickie when I first read it; because all teenagers suffer, to some degree or another, from "intense self-absorption." It was Cather's art of descriptive writing that first captured me. When I closed my eyes I could see the inside of the Templeton house as if I was there, especially the kitchen. At the time I didn't realize that later it would be what she was describing that would be most important to me.

As a mother with young children, I read the story again. From the very first, I thought Victoria's behavior was simply horrible, and I certainly couldn't identify with her. Even her treatment of the death of Blue Boy the cat seemed cold and cruel. The world I was living in seemed very distant from theirs. Women had been liberated and we didn't have to feel resigned "to the chances of life." Therefore, I couldn't begin to understand why Mrs. Harris simply accepted her life and the way Victoria treated her.

Now I am the mother of grown children. I still read "Old Mrs. Harris" from time to time. And what I thought at one time was in another time and place actually isn't. The world still has children that treat their parents and grandparents like Vickie and Victoria did. And there are still parents and grandparents accepting that behavior. Age has made me more resigned "to the chances of life" myself. Cather had the ability and wisdom to write an ageless story. It brings tears to my eyes every time I re-read it. That alone makes it a wonder that it has remained my favorite. But it has! I find myself spending more time reading and concentrating on the descriptions now. They hold the key to why this is my favorite Cather story. The descriptions remind me of my own grandmother and take me back to my childhood stays in her old farmhouse. Her calico dresses and aprons. The way she combed her hair. The hand water pump in the yard. The treadle sewing machine. The wood burning stove in her kitchen. Her lack of material possessions. Her physical weariness in later years. Without much effort I can even smell her spice cake.

"They will think a great deal about her, and remember things they never noticed . . ."

—Mary Brumbaugh  
Red Cloud, Nebraska

## Correction

The *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* Staff and Publications Committee wishes to apologize to Richard T. Groos of Hastings, Michigan. In the Fall 2008 issue of the *Newsletter*, we published "'The Swedish Mother': A Recently Discovered Song Manuscript with Music by Ethel Herr Litchfield and Lyrics by Willa Cather" in which we inadvertently misspelled the name of Mr. Groos. Mr. Groos wrote a letter to the Willa Cather Foundation in February of 2001. His letter served as a primary source for the above named article and provided the impetus for the piece. We regret this error and appreciate that Mr. Groos brought it to our attention.

—Betty Kort  
Managing Editor  
*Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*

Dear Managing Editor,

Your article in the latest *Newsletter* on "Old Mrs. Harris" was absolutely right on. Over the years I've felt as you did about the many aspects of that novella. In 1956, I was worried I might not be able to return to college because of our family financial situation, and I behaved toward my mother just as Vicky did . . . and my mother and grandmother with their own concerns. And now that I'm a grandmother, I relate to so much of old Mrs. Harris' feelings. I think it has to be Cather's best work—a real jewel.

—Susan Parry  
Washington DC

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed your thoughts on "Old Mrs. Harris" as your life has changed over the years. Literature has that remarkable ability to reach us in different ways at the different stages of our lives. . . .

—Rob Kerr  
Hastings, Nebraska

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## Editor's Note:

The Publications Committee of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors is pleased to hear from *Newsletter and Review* readers. We encourage your responses and will print them as space allows.

The Fall *Newsletter and Review* article on "Old Mrs. Harris" elicited numerous reader responses. In addition, several readers sent "Favorite Novel/Short Story" submissions for future issues. We continue to encourage readers to submit their comments about Cather favorite short stories and novels. I would like to remind those of you who wish to submit entries to choose only one Cather writing and focus exclusively on that Cather text. Your entry should not exceed 500 to 700 words.

Send your favorite novel or short story entries and/or your general comments to

Betty Kort, *Newsletter & Review* Managing Editor  
WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION  
413 North Webster Street  
Red Cloud, NE 68970

# My Favorite Willa Cather Short Story

## “Neighbour Rosicky”

James R. Messenger

Oddly enough, when it comes to Willa Cather’s short stories, I have found that one—and only one—story stands like a true giant, and if I had to make a “final” choice for just one story, I would instantly choose “Neighbour Rosicky,” because I simply cannot imagine never being able to read it again.

From the first time I read this exquisite story—and I use those two words carefully, for “Neighbour Rosicky” is crafted as finely as a masterfully cut diamond—I was captured and have never been able to escape its spell. Across the years, I have found I return to it for periodic restoration of my soul, which works for me in the same manner that sitting on a beach, seeing and hearing the waves, and experiencing the largeness of the universe provides for most of us.

How can this be? What could Cather—what could any author—say that would provide this sort of comfort that, at least for me, puts one in touch with life itself?

As familiar as “Neighbour Rosicky” is to me, each time I read the story, it seems as if it is for the first time, and, each

time, the reading concludes—and this is hard for a man to admit—with my being reduced to tears in having known such a living, breathing, decent human being as Anton Rosicky. I have never been able to understand or to describe why this story achieves such an impact upon me, and why I blanch at the idea of never being able to read “Neighbour Rosicky” again. But what I have come to know is that I would be willing to let every other Cather short story go—as good as they are—except for this one.

Having just read “Neighbour Rosicky” again—tempered by the milestones of having turned 60 years of age this past fall and just having gone through major surgery at the Mayo Clinic—the answer to my question has suddenly become clear. Why it never occurred to me before, I don’t know, because there are passages in the story that articulate what I have always felt, which have passed before my eyes many times.

“Neighbour Rosicky,” the light finally dawning, is nothing more, nor nothing less, than Willa Cather’s contemplation of the meaning of life. And her conclusion? Though never stated in so many words, Willa Cather asserts that the purpose of life is happiness. But why say something in a manner so patently obvious and clichéd and banal, when one can express it like this:

Well, it was a nice snowstorm; a fine sight to see the snow falling so quietly and graciously over so much open country. On his cap and shoulders, on the horses’ backs and manes, light, delicate, mysterious it fell; and with it a dry cool fragrance was released into the air. It meant rest for vegetation and men and beasts, for the ground itself; a season of long nights

for sleep, leisurely breakfasts, peace by the fire. This and much more went through Rosicky’s mind, but he merely told himself that winter was coming, clucked to his horses, and drove on.

Or like this:

He stopped by the windmill to look up at the frosty winter stars and draw a long breath before he went inside. That kitchen with the shining windows was dear to him; but the sleeping fields and bright stars and the noble darkness were dearer still.

I’ve lived those experiences. Those words are the rolling sounds of waves, of the awareness that—vain as humans are—we are still part of something larger than ourselves, and appreciating and folding into that immensity and mystery and flowing with it to achieve personal happiness is what being alive is really about. Indeed, the brilliant title of the collection of short stories of

which “Neighbour Rosicky” is a part, *Obscure Destinies*, elevates Rosicky—and others like him—to a dignity and purpose held in our time only by the famous or wealthy.

There is an art to living, to goodness, to loving, that goes beyond our worldly definition of success. Anton Rosicky stands as a role model, as a philosophical statement that there are men and women who can see to the very heart of life, can see truth, can understand what brings real happiness, real success in living.

Rosicky stands counter to all that is now depicted for us as “happiness” by today’s popular culture—lives of excess, with only

money and fame, bought at any price in terms of loss of dignity or honor, being the sole measures of respect. But Rosicky faced that, too: “The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human,—depraved and poisonous specimens of man.” And Anton Rosicky stood them down.

We now live in a time when such “specimens” have flourished and consumed business and public life and who assert through popular culture that only people like themselves have “validity” and “reality” and that all of us should believe as they do.

I won’t. I can’t. From the day I first read “Neighbour Rosicky,” I have stood with Anton Rosicky and Willa Cather and what they believe. And I will continue to do so until my final breath. And when I find myself hurting, I will read “Neighbour Rosicky” again, for it is not “fiction,” it is a true understanding of the fundamental nature of life and of what life can be.

**James R. Messenger** currently works as a technical writer and has launched his own publishing house, The Alexander Press LLC. He has won an Emmy and been nominated for two Academy Awards, among other honors.



The Pavelka House, owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society, is one of the settings for “Neighbour Rosicky.”  
Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

## Willa Cather Foundation 2008 Donors

The following is a listing of those contributing to the Foundation from January 1 to December 31, 2008. The listing does not reflect pledges—only monies received to date (excluding sales). Some donations may include payment on a pledge or grant for 2008. Those gifts including such a payment are denoted by an \*. Although space does not permit us to list donations under \$50.00, we are extremely grateful for these contributions as every gift is important to us.

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(See Honoraria List on Page 76)

## Honoraria

A number of donors gave contributions in 2008 in honor, in recognition, or in memory of individuals. These amounts are already credited to specific donors on the Willa Cather Foundation 2008 Donors list, pages 74-75. They are repeated here to pay tribute to the individuals honored.

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In Recognition of Incoming  
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In Honor of Betty Kort

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## The Executive Director's Report



Each day, as I drive away from my apartment—on the second floor of the historic train depot in Red Cloud, NE—I follow the path of the horse-drawn street car Cather would have taken to watch the theatrical companies, opera singers, and immigrants loading and unloading from passenger railcars. Entering work, I walk into Cather's Opera House, where the first floor now houses the Willa Cather Foundation offices. And it's beautiful. And still, as I walk into my office, I'm surrounded by her books, her art, and, most importantly, her legacy. All of this, blended with the picture of Mildred Bennett on my wall and knowing that her mission is in progress, makes true what Pat Phillips (a previous executive director) told me of this job: "It is truly unduplicable." It has been the rarest of opportunities and the privilege of my life to call these last two years "work."

And here is why.

The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is alive and healthier than ever. Our prairie management committee is more dedicated to its preservation every day, working to propagate species, outline desirable conditions, and solidify the burn plan. (We've asked the weather to make this happen during your visit for Spring Conference, April 24-25.)

The Opera House is hosting impressive programming and gallery exhibits in 2009, employing the theme "The end is nothing, the road is all." Some of these include a Smithsonian traveling display and documentary about Roberto Clemente; free movies about aging and dying, supplemented by scholar-led discussions; unmatched community theatre productions; a fourth Missoula Children's Theatre Week; and so much more. If you're not on the Opera House email/ mailing list, please contact the Foundation. You must see why a town of so few draws culture from so far.

Education initiatives are flourishing. 2009 will see our second Elderhostel, another Prairie Writers' Workshop, continued collaboration with UNO's Service-Learning Academy, increased

contributions to the website for teachers and students, and programs such as Minds On Learning Academy.

It seems as if our archives are growing every day. A new item to the Foundation archives is the sheet music for "Spanish Johnny." Our linear storage space is growing short, which is yet another reason a new, state-of-the-art archival space is a vital part of the Moon Block restoration project. As most of you know, this is a truly monumental undertaking, but it will bless the Foundation with additional income and resources and give Red Cloud a much-improved Main Street.

The Harling House is undergoing another restoration phase. Soon, the upstairs apartment will be ready for visiting scholars and artists in residency. We're anxious for this work to be complete so that guests may once again see the interior of one of the most beloved buildings on our town tour.

Community relations between the Willa Cather Foundation and Red Cloud are strong. My role as president of the Chamber of Commerce has, in part, facilitated a positive partnership. This—combined with my volunteer efforts, such as securing funds for a new town website and three-pronged marketing campaign, and by way of working to bring the Nebraska Community Foundation's HomeTown Competitiveness initiative to Red Cloud—has heightened awareness about the Foundation's important role in rural development.

Well, friends, you can see that much is happening in our Cather circle. There isn't enough room to tell you everything, and some of what I need not tell you is bleak. This economic climate is creating real challenges for our Foundation and causing roadblocks to our mission. Even still, the staff in Red Cloud and the Board of Governors across the nation are working harder than ever to ensure that our mission is secured for posterity. For me, as I look around even as I'm writing this and see Cather and Bennett in everything, I have confidence that we'll go on.

Tonight, when I make the drive back along the ghosted street car path, I'll think of some of our dearest comrades lost in 2008, and know that we're doing what they'd have wanted most: charging full ahead on the road that is, as Cather tells us, all.

—Cynthia Bruneteau, Executive Director

## New WillaCather.org Website Introduced

Our new website proves what we've been saying all along—our presence is indeed global, having attracted thousands of visitors from over 80 countries and territories since we went live on December 8, 2008. While there is still much to do (podcasts, board member blogs, added virtual tours), the site is helping people find and learn about us. A flurry of inquiries comes to us weekly about Cather and her life, times, and work. Here is a sampling of what we have to offer at [www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org):

- Access to the entire collection of the Newsletter and Review—163 issues and many more to come
- Valuable education materials for teachers and students
- Secure, easy-to-use, virtual bookstore
- Spring Conference registration
- Virtual tour of Cather's childhood home
- Image galleries for the WCM Prairie, Opera House, archives, tour sites, and more
- Exciting members-only features

**Pay a visit to WillaCather.org soon.**





## Calendar of Events

### Willa Cather Annual Spring Conference

Red Cloud—April 24-25, 2009

The Later Nebraska Fiction:

Wisdom in *Obscure Destinies*, *Lucy Gayheart*, and “The Best Years”

The 2009 Willa Cather Spring Conference will focus on religious, moral, and spiritual themes in selections from Cather’s prairie fiction. Special speakers will include Bishop Frank Griswold (former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and long-time Cather fan), Ann Moseley, and other noted Cather scholars. There will be a Gallery show and lecture as well as a feature on *Lucy Gayheart* and Chicago (leading up to the June 2009 International Seminar). We’ll mark the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Mildred Bennett’s birth with a gala party, and there will be a special series of activities focused on the Depression Era Great Plains and Woody Guthrie. Several people familiar with its liturgies are planning a Taizé meditation for the conference, among them a newcomer to our conference, the Rev. Ruth Eller. We will also welcome participants from Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI).

You can find more information and register online at [www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org).

*The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Willa Cather Foundation present*

### The International Cather Seminar 2009 Cather, Chicago and Modernism

June 25-28, 2009

University Center, Chicago, IL

Guy Reynolds, Cather Seminar Director

The 12<sup>th</sup> International Seminar will focus on Willa Cather’s relationship to broader formations of cultural and literary modernism. The Seminar will take place in the downtown “University Center,” Chicago, IL, and will include events focused on specific literary and cultural sites within that area that counterpoint Cather and Chicago within turn of the century culture. The broader question of how Chicago has figured within the national literary imagination will naturally serve as another focus for the program.

*The Willa Cather Foundation presents*

### Elderhostel 2009

Willa Cather Foundation and

Nebraska State Historical Society Historic Site

Red Cloud, Nebraska

June 15-19, 2009

Steven Shively, Visiting Scholar

Hosting the nation’s largest living memorial to an American author, the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, Nebraska, opens a rare window into Willa Cather’s life, times, history, and writings. Analyze the literature of this significant American author as you explore the small Western town that influenced her work. Discuss Cather’s short stories and novels with a university professor and premier Cather scholar and discover destinations related to the pieces you examine. Enjoy visits to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie and nearly 20 museums and historic sites around Red Cloud and gain exclusive access to Cather artifacts and nationally designated historical buildings. Readings: *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *A Lost Lady*, *My Ántonia*, “Neighbour Rosicky,” and “A Wagner Matinee.”

“When people ask me if it has been a hard or easy road, I always answer with the quotation, “The end is nothing, the road is all.” —Willa Cather

## Beyond Baseball.

The Life of Roberto Clemente  
A Smithsonian Institute Exhibit



Also featuring . . .

**Roberto Clemente PBS Documentary**  
Presented by director Bernardo Ruiz  
2008 ALMA Award Winner

“From Middle School to the Major Leagues”  
Dave Ogden, Ph.D.  
University of Nebraska Omaha



Coming this fall to the Red Cloud Opera House

**WILLA CATHER  
NEWSLETTER & REVIEW**



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The *Newsletter & Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 3000 words; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment and should follow MLA guidelines.

**Send essays and inquiries to one of the  
Issue Editors listed below:**

Ann Romines Department of English George Washington University (annrom3@verizon.net)	Steven Trout Department of English Fort Hays State University (strout@fhsu.edu)
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**Send letters and news items to**  
Betty Kort, *Newsletter* Managing Editor  
Willa Cather Foundation  
413 N. Webster  
Red Cloud, NE 68970  
betty.kort@gmail.com

Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography*.

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Telephone (402)746-2653/Toll Free (866)731-7304/Facsimile (402)746-2652  
<www.willacather.org> OR <wcpm@gpcpm.net>

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413 North Webster Street, Red Cloud, Nebraska, 68970

**WILLA CATHER  
PIONEER MEMORIAL  
& EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION  
(The Willa Cather Society)**  
Founded 1955 by Mildred Bennett

Mrs. Bennett and seven other founding members of the Board of Governors defined the Foundation's mission, which has evolved into these

**AIMS OF THE WCPM**

To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.

To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.

To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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## News and Events



Joanne and Bob Berkshire accept the gift of a framed print of "The Calling Card Holder" from the Willa Cather Foundation. Betty Kort is standing at left; Jay Yost, President of the Foundation, is at right.



Lyn Wallin Ziegenbein talks with Jay Yost and Ardis Yost.



Pat and Jeanne Salerno, Hani Kenefick, and Ruth Keene share a moment.



Karen Baker and Pat Tschetter find a convenient place to talk.



Special guest Bill Bennett converses with Judy and George Haecker.

## Nebraska – New York Connection Event Held

The Willa Cather Foundation, Wade Leak, and Laurie Smith Camp hosted an event at Laurie's home in Omaha on January 17<sup>th</sup>, celebrating Jay Yost as the new president of the Willa Cather Foundation. The event offered an opportunity for members and friends of the Foundation to enjoy the company of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors. Board members were in Omaha for the winter meeting of the Board of Governors. (Photographs of the event are courtesy of Betty Kort.)

## Rural Immersion Group Visits Cather Historic Site

Four seminary students from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, along with one of their instructors visited Nebraska in January. Their purpose was to learn more about the culture of rural America. In the process they visited many sites in the Hastings area and the Willa Cather Historic Site in Red Cloud. After a tour of historic sites in Red Cloud led by Betty Kort, Dee McCurdy treated the group to lunch at Cather's Retreat. The group ended their time in Red Cloud with a visit to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie.

The group was hosted in Nebraska by the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Hastings, Pastor Steven Peeler, and church member Jerri Haussler, all of Hastings.



Rory Phillips, Instructor Peter Vethanayagamon, Mary Climer, Shelisa Jones, Kelli Wilder, and Good Shepherd Pastor Steven Peeler. Photograph by Jerri Haussler.

## Cather Day and Quebec's 400<sup>th</sup>

John Murphy, Emeritus  
Brigham Young University

Saturday, September 27, 2008, was Cather Day at the Morrin Cultural Center in Quebec City. *Shadows on the Rock* was featured as part of the year-long celebration of the founding of Quebec City in 1608. Four papers on the novel were presented by Cather scholars John J. Murphy, Guy Reynolds, Ann Romines, and Robert Thacker, all members of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors.

Murphy's paper provided the religious and historical context of the novel. Thacker examined Cather's take on the emergence of Quebecois culture, while Reynolds treated cultural components of permanence and transmission. Ann Romines examined Cather's Quebec from the perspective of Cécile. The four papers were framed by fine readings from Cather's text—three in English and two from the French translation by Marc Chénétier.

There were lively discussions after the two morning papers and after the two in the afternoon. Some participants had recently read the novel for the first time; others had long treasured it as a paean to their city. The reasons for Cather's fascination with Quebec's unique French culture were considered, as well as the broader ramifications of that culture in North America.

After a lunch break, John Murphy led a tour of sites in the old section of the city highlighted in the book. About twenty-five participants attended the complete program.

# The Willa Cather Foundation

*Preserving the Past . . . Informing the Future*



## Harling House Restoration Underway

Because of dedicated and generous donors, restoration of historic buildings related to the life and works of Willa Cather is ongoing at the Willa Cather Foundation. Presently the second story of the Harling House is receiving special attention.

The construction phase of the second-story restoration will be completed late this winter, after which the upstairs will be ready for final painting, wallpaper, and flooring. The Foundation is seeking late 19<sup>th</sup> century-style bathroom fixtures, kitchen cabinets, kitchen appliances, light fixtures, electrical wall plates, etc.

Plans call for the second story to be ready for occupancy by late summer, and the first level of the house will again be part of the Cather Town Tour. As a

result of the restoration, the upstairs will contain a living room, kitchen, bedroom, bath, and computer area. The Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors intends to make the upstairs available for visiting scholars, artists, and other special guests coming to work and study at the Foundation.

Only one block west of the Cather Childhood Home, the house was built for James L. Miner and his family in 1878. The Miner House was home to Cather's lifelong friends Carrie and Irene Miner. It appears in Cather's novel *My Ántonia* as the home of the Harling family who employed Ántonia as hired help throughout much of the novel, just as the Miner family employed Annie Sadilek Pavelka, Ántonia's prototype. Cather dedicated the novel to Carrie and Irene Miner: "In memory of affections old and true."

This beautiful historic home is an excellent example of Italianate Victorian architecture, with its seamed-metal pyramidal roof, bracketed and dentilled cornice, and tall windows. The house was donated to the Willa Cather Foundation in 2001 by Advisory Board member Nancy Picchi and her husband Bernard of New York City. Before turning over the property, Nancy and Bernard completed the restoration of the exterior of the home, provided both the upstairs and the main level with furnishings original to the home or of the period, and established a maintenance fund. Bernard, Nancy, and Faye Glass, mother-in-law of Advisory Board member James Fitzgibbon, are providing the funds for the present restoration efforts. Their generosity is preserving a historic treasure for us now and for future generations to come.



**WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION**  
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