

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXVIII, No. 2

Editor, Mildred R. Bennett

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

29TH ANNUAL CATHER SPRING CONFERENCE May 5, 1984

Featured speaker for the 1984 Spring Conference is Dr. James L. Woodress, from the Department of English, University of California at Davis. Dr. Woodress published in 1970, *Willa Cather: Her Life and Art*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. He revised and updated the book, and it was republished by the University of Nebraska Press in 1982. Most recently he has written an in-

roduction and given various revisions of the short stories for an edition of *The Troll Garden*.



Although he has studied and taught abroad and written other books on literature, he has been a consistent supporter of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial. He did research in our archives prior to his 1970 book and returned to Nebraska for the 1973 International Cather Seminar. He also gave the keynote address for the first National Cather Seminar in 1981.

Cather scholars will want to hear his latest thoughts on Cather and the proliferation of studies and books about her.

has the right kind of memory — and the novelist's memory is quite as special a thing as the musician's — he will remember only the details of any event which contributed to the major impression that the event made upon him. The writer does not "efface" himself, as you say; he loses himself in the amplitude of his impressions, and in the exciting business of finding all his memories, long-forgotten scenes and faces, running off his pen, as if they were in the ink, and not in his brain at all. If he is an artist worth the name, what he remembers is RIGHT, what he has forgotten was superficial, accidental, and is better forgotten.

— WILLA CATHER

Jean Tsien, of the People's Republic of China, was the featured speaker at the 1983 Spring Conference. She is currently doing research toward a Ph.D. on Willa Cather's attitudes toward writing.

A 1922 PUBLISHED CATHER LETTER

A copy of this published letter was passed on to us by Jean Tsien, who found it mentioned on page 87 of James E. Miller's book, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and Technique* (New York University Press, 1964). This led to her discovery of the following from the *St. Paul Daily News*, March 5, 1922, p. 6, "The Literary Punchbowl:"

In your editorial "A Revaluation" all that you say is true, and yet I do not thing [sic] you make it clear why it is true.

Of course a writer of imaginative literature must not be literal; he must be ABLE to be literal; he must know everything he touches well enough for that. But if he is an artist he will not be literal, because

no artist can be. If he has the proper equipment to be a writer of fiction at all, he will never have to puzzle as to how far he should be literal; he has a selective machine in his brain that decides all that for him. If he has not such an instrument, he had better choose another profession.

An artist uses any particular scene or incident not to show how much he knows about it, or because it is in itself interesting. He uses it because of a certain effect of color or emotion that will contribute to his story as a whole, because it is in the mood of the story, or helps to make the mood. Therefore, in writing this scene, he will use as much detail as will convey his impression, no more. If he

THE TROLL GARDEN

The University of Nebraska Press has recently published a new issue of *The Troll Garden*.

To establish the definitive edition of the text, James Woodress has collated all editions of the stories and consulted other Catheriana. Following the strictest procedures of textual criticism, this edition contains a listing of all emendations, commentary on all debatable revisions, explanatory notes to the text, a table of revisions from which one can infer the reading of any edition, and tables of word divisions. The carefully

planned editorial apparatus does not intrude on the text of the stories.

A review of this book by Mildred R. Bennett will appear in the November, 1984 "Western American Literature" Quarterly. This book is available through our Book Shop at \$15.95, plus \$1.25 postage.

GUEST POET

Robert Schuler, poet and professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, will be in Red Cloud May 5 to read some of his especially prepared poetry to our guests at the banquet. Professor Schuler has been a long time devotee of Willa Cather's art.

NEW IN APRIL . . .

Willa Cather's Short Fiction by Marilyn Arnold

This study by Arnold provides complete accounts of the better known short stories, such as "Paul's Case" and "The Sculptor's Funeral," and offers useful introductions to the more obscure works. She also demonstrates that, in the short story, Cather's talents range more widely than in the novel. If the longer works are known for themes of the pioneer spirit and frontier life, the short fiction treats a greater variety of subjects (not excluding ghosts and princesses), and it experiments freely with technique — now borrowing from the drama, now from the detective story, now from the fairy tale.

Treating over 60 of Cather's short stories, published from the 1890s through the 1940s, Professor Arnold demonstrates that this work reflects the range and development of Cather's talents. Arnold establishes the importance of the short fiction to the body of Cather's work and argues that some of these stories, including "Neighbor Rosicky" and "Uncle

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE — SATURDAY, MAY 5

8:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

Registration, coffee and kolache, Cather Foundation Art Gallery and Book Shop, 326 North Webster.

8:30 a.m.

MASS — Grace Episcopal Church, 6th and Cedar, Father L. Brent Bohlke, officiating.

9:45 a.m.

MASS — St. Juliana Catholic Church, 3rd Avenue and South Walnut, Father Frank Leiblinger, officiating.

10:30 a.m.

A VISIT TO MOONSTONE — Tour departs from Cather Foundation Building, 326 North Webster.

12:30 p.m.

BOX LUNCH — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar.

2:00-3:00 p.m.

"THE PASSING SHOW" — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar; Panel: MEMORIES FROM WILLA CATHER'S NIECES AND NEPHEWS.

3:30-4:45 p.m.

AUTOGRAPHING SESSION — James L. Woodress, Foundation Building, 326 North Webster.

7:00 p.m.

BANQUET, Guest Speaker, James L. Woodress — High School Gymnasium, 7th and Webster.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. and 3:30-5:00 p.m.

CATHER FOUNDATION ART GALLERY AND BOOK SHOP, OPEN. 326 North Webster.

10:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. and 3:30-5:00 p.m.

OPEN HOUSE — All Cather Center Buildings. Exhibit at Burlington Depot, 1st Avenue and South Seward; Refreshments at Depot from 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Cather Center Buildings are opened courtesy of Cather Center, Nebraska State Historical Society, Ann E. Billesbach, Curator.

Valentine," rank among the very finest works of American short fiction.

Marilyn Arnold is professor of English at Brigham Young University.

This book will be for sale at our Book Shop by Spring Conference Day. It will be \$21.95, plus \$1.25 postage.

CATHER CENTER ARCHIVES

The Cather Historical Center has experienced a major increase

in archives patrons for 1983. The number of researchers using the collections has increased by more than 100 percent and mail requests increased by 50 percent. The archives itself has grown rapidly with the institution of an active collection program. More than 100 articles on Willa Cather and her writings have been added to the files this past year. The cataloging and indexing of the collections continues with the photographic files completed and the book, vertical file, and periodicals catalogs expected to be finished by this summer. The Cather Center

continues to solicit copies of articles or references to articles on Cather for the archives. Material can be addressed to Willa Cather Historical Center, 338 North Webster Street, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970.

ORDER . . .

your copy of *Song of the Lark* now!

Song of the Lark \$ 8.95

Postage and

Handling 1.25

Total Amount \$10.20

A FURTHER REPORT FROM JEAN TSIEN

Ms. Tsien also writes: "I managed to trace Willa Cather from her talk at the University of Chicago down to Cleveland, Ohio, where she went right after she left Chicago. It was hard finding any library not in Ohio that had any papers with a report of her talk, but I finally found an article in *The Cleveland Press* by Allene Sumner saying she [Cather] would lecture before the Women's City Club. She had an interview with Willa Cather apparently right after she checked in at the hotel. She says Cather was wearing 'a bright green and gray fur coat with gold and black velvet toque, and bright green bag to match.' "

Two Accounts of Willa Cather's Lecture at the University of Chicago in 1925

On November 17, 1925, Willa Cather gave a lecture at the University of Chicago. She had been invited to speak in Mandel Hall on "Tendencies of the Modern Novel" by Nathaniel Butler, the President's assistant, who was in charge of the William Vaughn Moody lectures. While in Chicago, she stayed at her favourite hotel, the Hotel Sisson, which faced Lake Michigan for, like Professor St. Peter in *The Professor's House*, she also enjoyed a view of the lake front from her window. As usual,

her childhood friend, Irene Miner Weisz who lived with her husband in Chicago, reserved the hotel room and made other travel arrangements for her. At Cather's request, Mrs. Weisz accompanied her to the lecture to help put her at ease as it was her first lecture and she was easily made nervous.

Cather left Chicago on November 19 for Cleveland, Ohio, where she spoke at the Women's City Club on the 20th. The lecture went smoothly because she found the beauty and soft lighting of the hall relaxing as well as the faces of the stylish young people who came to hear her.¹

To my knowledge, her lecture notes no longer exist, but recently a friend, Kathleen Farley, unearthed two accounts of her lecture in local newspapers from the University of Chicago archives and kindly placed them at my disposal. It is evident from these that some of the points made at the lecture were reiterations of beliefs she had held for some time. Among the tendencies she deplored in the modern novel, for instance, was the prevalence of the "machine-made novel." By this she meant "the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand — a business as safe and commendable as making soap or breakfast foods."² She believed that "the novel manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people must be considered exactly like a cheap soap or cheap perfume or cheap furniture"³ — hence the terms "machine-made novel" and "commuter's convenience." She had explained the latter term in an interview the previous year. "We have a great prosperous middle class," she had said, ". . . [who] want a book which will fill up commuting boredom every morning and evening . . . they want . . . something to take off the edge of boredom and empty leisure."⁴

She likewise deplored the writer's concern with plot, or as she called it, "event pattern," which she regarded as a menace to writ-

ing as an art. She believed that while the writer of little talent regarded plot as something of prime importance since it would enable him to turn out an interesting story, the real artist put emotion first and wrote only from his emotion and personal experience. She cited an example from her own experience: she had told an interviewer from the *New York World* in April, 1925 that *My Ántonia* was "just the other side of the rug, the pattern that is not supposed to count in a story." There was "no love affair, no courtship, no marriage, no broken heart, no struggle for success."⁵ This was because she had known she would spoil the emotional intensity if she put it in the conventional fictional pattern. Earlier in 1923 she had told the Paris correspondent of the same paper, "The new American novel is better than the old-fashioned conventional one, with its plot always the same, its accent always on the same incidents. With its unvarying, carefully dosed ingredients, the old-fashioned American novel was like a chemist's prescription."⁶

However, in her lecture at the University of Chicago she did not stop there but went one step further — predicting that the novel of the future would be more concerned with the emotional pattern, or what we might call psychology of the characters, than with the event pattern, or plot. Since the lecture was given in 1925, she must have had such writers in mind as Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence when she was making her prediction, as well as the older writers she admired who were more interested in character than in plot. She often mentioned Conrad's works in her letters as examples of how one should write; she admired Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, believed *Ulysses* to be a great work and regarded Lawrence as the most talented writer of his generation, though she felt he let his emotions run away with him.

Other statements in the lecture about the modern novel included remarks on changes in form and technique. For example, Cather found that the novel, as an art form, was changing in a number of ways and becoming more flexible. She saw more freedom of subject matter, of language, and of technique and welcomed these changes as an indication that the novel was at last catching up with other forms of art, no longer adhering to rigid principles as in the past, but bound now only by the rule of art.

The accounts of Cather's lecture are interesting not only because they provide rare insight into her views of the novel of her own day but also because they recall her as surprisingly modern in these views and in her application of them in her works. She is often regarded as a traditionalist, looking back into the past, but so far as theme, form and technique are concerned, she was undoubtedly a writer of the twenties. She shows her affinity with the decade in her vision of the sterility of postwar times in the novels written between 1922 and 1926, as well as in her choice of the theme of immigrant participation in the settlement of the West. In her experiments with form and technique and preoccupation with character rather than plot, she was also forward looking. As Bernice Sote pointed out in her essay, "An Appointment with the Future: Willa Cather," Cather in the twenties was "actually writing for, and of the future."⁷

Below are the accounts in the Chicago papers. I have retained the original misprints.

" 'Machine-Made' Novel
Deplored"

Chicago Daily *Maroon*
November 18, 1925

Prevalence of the "machine-made" novel, was deplored by Willa Cather, noted writer, last night in a lecture on "The Tendencies of the Novel Today," before a capacity audience in Mandel Hall.

"A commuter's convenience" was one of the many terms which Miss Cather applied to the type of novel which she declared predominates today.

The beauty creating surge is not menaced so much by commercialism as by a "low form of itself," the authoress warned, condemning the importance attached to "plot" in the modern novel.

An optimistic outlook for the future of the novel, was, however, expressed by Miss Cather.

"Art Now Only Rule for Writing
Novels, Willa Cather Says"

Chicago Daily *Tribune*
November 21, 1925

Willa Cather lectured this week at the University of Chicago on "The Tendency of the Modern Novel," and she said so many pertinent and important things that it seems only fair to share them with you who did not hear her. The novel — as an art form, as opposed to the machine-made novel — has changed, she said.

It has changed, for one thing, in the matter of length. It is as long now as the author believes it should be to express what he wishes to say, and it is, therefore, either shorter than the old novel or longer, as the case demands. The rules of novel construction are not adhered to as they used to be.

She mentioned as an example "The Death of Ivan Ilytch," by Tolstoi, which begins with a funeral, proceeds to a vivid tale of Ivan's life, and ends with his death. According to all rules, such a technique is wrong. As art, it is right, she said. To have done that novel in any other way would have been as tragic and as silly as to have cut up a child and rearranged its members differently.

The novel is behind the other arts in that very matter, she said. A painter can see a pretty little clump of trees, and behind it the great cathedral and, if the clump of trees allures him he will paint his trees, sketch in the cathedral in its proper

perspective and go home pleased with himself. The novelist will see the clump of trees, but he is pressed to realize that behind them there is that great cathedral, and he is a rare artist who contents himself with his trees. The novel is like democracy, she said, with all of its virtues, but likewise all of its faults.

She spoke at length about the new freedom of subject matter. She voiced the belief that periods of the greatest freedom have never been periods of the greatest beauty in literary creation. The very fact that there are restrictions, things that one must not talk about, tends to make the art a richer one. That is also true of language, she said. There now are being used words which formerly were to be found only in patent medicine almanacs, and she bade her auditors beware of a language which had no bad words in it — and any word, by being generally used, ceases to be bad.

She said that the power to stir the reader erotically was the charge of dynamite which every great author had, but that, used to excess or even used without distinction, the charge lost every whit of its power.

"There is such a thing in life as nobility," she said, "and novels which celebrate it will always be the novels which are finally loved."

The novel of the future will be more experimental, she ventured. It will be more concerned with the emotional pattern of the characters than with the event pattern. Many happenings may be, as events, startlingly important in a life, but they may leave a person almost cold emotionally. It is the true emotional pattern of his characters which the author will chart in the future. He will write about whatever makes an impact on his mind.

— Jean Tsien
University of Chicago

NOTES

¹See letters from Willa Cather to Irene Miner Weisz, November 4, 10 and 21, 1925. See also note from Nathaniel Butler to Willa Cather concerning arrangements and title of lecture, October 29, 1925. (At Newberry Library)

²"On the Art of Fiction" (1920) in *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1949), p. 103.

³"The Novel Demeuble" (1922), *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴"Restlessness Such as Ours Does Not Make for Beauty" by Rose C. Feld, *The New York Times Book Review*, December 21, 1924, p. 11.

⁵"Willa Cather Discusses Writing and Short Story Courses," *Lincoln State Journal*, April 25, 1925, p. 11. Reprint of Flora Merrill's interview in the *New York World*, April 19, 1925.

⁶Interview in the *New York World*, May 20, 1923. Quoted by Bernice Slote in "An Appointment with the Future: Willa Cather."

⁷In *The Twenties*, ed. Warren French (Deland, Fl.: Everett/Edwards, 1975), pp. 39-49.

1984

PRAIRIE WORKSHOP

The Prairie Workshop will be held May 29 to June 2 in Red Cloud. Participants may earn three hours credit from Kearney State College, either in biology or literature. Books that should be read in preparation for the week are *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather, *Old Jules* and *The Horse-catcher* by Mari Sandoz and *Prairie World* by David Costello.

For additional information write or call Dr. Helen Stauffer, Department of English, Kearney State College, Kearney, Nebraska 68847. Telephone: (308) 234-8297.

PRAIRIE BURNING

Dr. Hal Nagel, Biology Department of Kearney State College and steward of the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, has announced that the east half of the prairie will be burned the weekend of April 28 and 29 or if weather prevents, the burning will be done May 5 and 6.

"WESTERN AMERICAN LITERATURE"

Order your copy of the special Cather issue of *Western American Literature*, available here for \$5.00, plus \$1.25 for postage and handling. Cather scholars will want to add this collector's item to their libraries.

FAMILY HEIRLOOM DONATED

Virginia Cather Brockway has given Grandmother Ruhamah Seibert's sewing table to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation. Grandmother Seibert was Willa Cather's great-grandmother and the prototype for Sapphira in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. First Mrs. Charles Cather, Willa Cather's mother, kept the table. Then Elsie Cather kept it and at her death it went to Mrs. Brockway.

The official description of the table reads: "One American Mahogany Sewing Stand, 28" high, 20" wide, 17½" deep; weight approximately 45 pounds. Rectangular lid, interior compartment over single wide apron drawer all on angular vasisform pedestal with incurvate base on scrolled feet. The entire case in 'Flame' grain mahogany with the upper case displaying an ogee moulded form. Secondary woods of walnut and tulip poplar. C. 1830."

RED CLOUD OPERA SINGER

We had hoped to have Sarah Jane Arneson with us to sing at the Spring Conference. "Sally," born in Webster County, is a modern counterpart of Thea Kronberg of *The Song of the Lark*.

She writes from Germany: "I was so pleased that you wanted to invite me to the Spring Conference on May 5. I have to be in Munich, though, on May 2 for a 'Violetta' (*La Traviata*) and a 'Martha' (Flotow) on May 4. Theoretically, I could attend your conference, but I would be flying on the morning of the 5th from Munich. I doubt if I could reach Red Cloud before the evening of the 5th.

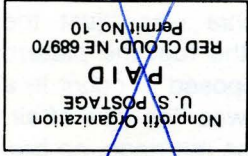
"*The Song of the Lark* is naturally a very special book for me, both personally and professionally. Some of the parallels seem uncanny. I was invited to sing in the Dresden Opera in January. Since very few American (Westerners at all) are now invited to East Germany, much less Dresden, this was a great honor for me. What a beautiful Opera House! It is now fully restored and I could only think of the great singers who had sung there, and of course, Thea Kronberg."

"Sally" is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Aleck Arneson of Red Cloud.

COMING EVENTS TO REMEMBER

- May 5 Spring Conference
Red Cloud, Nebraska
- May 29-June 2 Prairie Workshop
Red Cloud, Nebraska
- June 17-23 WILLA CATHER
The Northeast Perspective
Merrimack College
North Andover, Massachusetts

326 North Webster
Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970
Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial



YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

AIMS OF THE WCPM

- By being a Cather Memorial Member and financial contributor:
BENEFACTOR \$1,000.00 and over

- 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.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Patron	\$100.00
Sustaining	25.00
Family	15.00
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For Newsletter Donation Only	\$5.00
Foreign Mailing	6.00

WCPM members receive:

- Newsletter subscription
- Free guided tour to restored buildings

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

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ALL MEMBERSHIPS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND BEQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1965

Special group memberships (such as clubs or businesses) are available. Write to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for details.

WILLA CATHER THE NORTHEAST PERSPECTIVE

Lectures, Discussions and Talks by

- Elizabeth Ammons, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.
- Marilyn Arnold, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
- Bruce P. Baker, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska.

Mildred R. Bennett, Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, Red Cloud, Nebraska.

John J. Murphy, Merrimack College, North Andover, Massachusetts.

Sharon O'Brien, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Susan Rosowski, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Don't Forget to Register Early for the 1984 Spring Conference on May 5!!!