

Willa Cather

Newsletter & Review



Winter 2007

Volume I, No. 3

Return to the Prairie



Less than a year has passed since the Cather Foundation acquired the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie and already noticeable changes are taking place.

“We’re in the process of restoring the prairie to its native state” said Jim Fitzgibbon, member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors who lives in Red Cloud and leads the project to return the prairie to its pre-1900 conditions.

In Cather’s day, the mixed-grass prairie of southern Nebraska consisted of plants and grasses like purple prairie clover, purple coneflower, big bluestem, and side-oats gramma. Insects and animals like grasshopper sparrows and prairie chicken wandered the plains. Trees were nearly absent. Today, overgrazing, farming, and the encroachment of foreign species of vegetation (not to mention humans) have made this natural setting hard to come by.

Laboring almost entirely without assistance, Fitzgibbon removed approximately one thousand non-native trees from the east side of the prairie. Non-native trees, like Chinese Elm and Eastern Red Cedar, can inhibit the growth of indigenous plants such as the enormous cottonwood trees that Cather adored so much and described in her fiction.

Of the prairie’s many springs, the largest is now fenced off and has been flowing since fall—its stream reaches almost half a mile. Running east and west across the prairie is a new cross-fence that will make restoration easier. At least one additional cross-fence will be installed later. The committee that manages the prairie—members Merle Illian, Duane Lienneman, David Smith, Joe Springer, Betty Kort, and Fitzgibbon—have decided to reduce grazing time for the upcoming season from seven to six months in order to restrict the areas cattle access. (At roughly 608 acres, the Cather Memorial Prairie is too small

to support bison, the original grazers of the region, but it can easily support cattle.)

With the abundant improvements made thus far, it might seem volunteer opportunities have vanished—however, the contrary is true. While the Opera House can boast over a hundred volunteers, the number of people currently willing or able to assist with prairie restoration is minimal. More volunteers are needed to clear out the thousands of remaining alien plants. Also, as funds become available, more fences need to be installed to protect further springs from compaction of the ground by cows.

Helping to restore the Cather Memorial Prairie can be an exhilarating way to study the positive impact of native prairies in America’s art, history, and culture and to ensure that at least some of that influence is conserved for future generations.

In June, the Cather Foundation, with the support of the Nebraska Arts Council, will welcome writers and aspiring writers to the weeklong Willa Cather Memorial Prairie Writers’ Workshop. The workshop, led by Lorraine Duggin of Omaha, will culminate with a public reading and reception celebrating the participants’ works. Duggin, who earned a Ph.D. in English/Creative Writing from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has been writing poetry, fiction, and non-fiction for most of her life. She has won numerous awards, including an Individual Artist’s Fellowship from the Nebraska Arts Council, a Prairie Schooner First Prize for short story, and an Academy of American Poets’ First Prize for Poetry, among others.

In This Issue...

Essays by Nichole Bennett, Jeevan Gurung, Dennis P. Coyle, Kathleen Schairer Svendsen, pictures of Willa Cather in hats, and more!



Cather Foundation Calendar

The 11th International Willa Cather Seminar

*Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds
Paris & Provence, France
24 June — 1 July 2007*

*Sponsored by:
The Willa Cather Foundation*

The 2007 meeting will be the first International Willa Cather Seminar held in France. Its title, "A Writer's Worlds," celebrates aspects of modernism, interest in history and religion, gender roles, social criticism, politics, aesthetics, and other considerations.

Keynote speakers will be Marc Chénétier and A. S. Byatt.

Willa Cather Newsletter & Review

The Willa Cather Society
Winter 2007

Volume L, No. 3
ISSN 0197-663X

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Red Cloud Opera House Winter 2007

*"Where there is great love, there are
always miracles"*

"Godspell" — Community Theatre at the Red Cloud Opera House Mar. 22, 23, and 24 at 7:30 pm. and Mar. 25 at 2:30 pm.

Free Beer & Chicken "Unplugged" — A new acoustic style concert featuring danceable songs through the decades. May 25 at 7:30 pm.

"The Jungle Book" — Missoula Children's Theatre presents "The Jungle Book." Aug. 10 at 7:30 pm. and Aug. 11 at 3:00 pm.



Programs made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Nebraska Humanities Council, and the Nebraska Arts Council

Willa Cather Spring Conference April 27-28, 2007 Red Cloud, Nebraska

Willa Cather and Material Culture

The 2007 Willa Cather Spring Conference theme, "Willa Cather and Material Culture," is inspired by the book (with the same name) edited by Janis Stout. The Conference will feature artifacts from the Cather Foundation Archive. Stout will present the keynote address.

A Note from the Issue Editor

In June of 2004 I returned from a glorious trip to Turkey quite sure that I had something I wanted to write about Willa Cather. I had just completed a year of chemotherapy and wished to waste no time before committing my ideas to paper. Knowing in advance that I'd better write fast and furiously—not stopping before September to prepare fall classes—I arranged to teach a graduate course in what I was actually drafting: the Cather-Faulkner connection. The ensuing Autumn course was the most difficult one I had ever imposed on trusting students. It required them to learn from scratch how to read two demanding and different writers, then locate and analyze their interleaving "dialogues" in sophisticated ways. It wasn't fair, but then neither was my life; I did it anyway.

Our graduate seminar consisted of ten students, and not all of them flourished. The ones who survived the challenge, however—and that seemed to me at least six of them—not only startled but even stunned me as they showed they could do what they had to do. In taking their desperate measures, they came up with work that awed and made me proud. I drew a moral: if graduate professors like me would assign original possibilities and then point students in new directions, the students could certainly devise original essays.

I offer in this edition of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* four examples of original work that American graduate students can do when they must—a proof of their grace under pressure. Their interpretations are their own; what I gave them was a framework for comparing Cather and Faulkner. Where they took their papers involved their own choices and judgments. I merely assured them that they could attack me if they wished, and after that a few missiles whizzed by. My newest book, to be entitled *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner*, is scheduled for publication in fall of 2007 by University of Nebraska Press. All essays in this *Newsletter* issue will be duly footnoted there. Merrill Skaggs

Return to Sender: Miscommunication in *Alexander's Bridge* and *Soldiers' Pay*

Nichole Bennett, Drew University

In the third volume of *Cather Studies*, Merrill Skaggs threw down a gauntlet. Her essay, "Thefts and Conversations: Cather and Faulkner," opens with a broad claim that has yet to be fully met or challenged: "A surprising fact in this century of criticism is that nobody has yet explored carefully the relationship between Willa Cather and William Faulkner. The two seem to me the century's chief fiction-writing rivals" (115). While much has been written on these two authors individually, so few have yet to accept or embrace Skaggs's challenge that she has attempted to bring this connection to light again in "Cather's War and Faulkner's Peace: A Comparison of Two Novels, and More." And yet, the connection between Cather and Faulkner goes much deeper than a mere lifting, sharing, or exchanging of what Skaggs calls "passage[s] that looked to [her] like Faulkner, signature Faulkner" in Cather's works or vice versa ("Cather's War" 40). Indeed, the connection goes so far as to include the literary method through which Cather and Faulkner achieve a specific trope or theme. For example, both Cather and Faulkner play with communication, or to be more precise, miscommunication. Both authors enjoy creating texts that force the reader to work with both information and misinformation which their characters reveal to themselves, to each other, and to the reader.

The significance of mis/communication for both authors becomes apparent when one examines their use of a similar literary trope: the undelivered letter. Neither invented this literary movement.¹ For both, however, the undelivered letter reveals the inner thoughts of their characters and deepens the reader's understanding of either the writer or the sender. It is not that Cather or Faulkner re-invent the epistolary novel in their works. Indeed, it is the limited use and almost passing reference to the undelivered letters in both Cather's *Alexander's Bridge* and Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* that calls a careful reader's attention to this similarity. In both works, the revelation of undelivered letters allows the reader to explore the characters more fully through their inability to communicate. By reading or imagining what these letters contain, the reader learns that both Bartley Alexander and Margaret Powers cannot communicate clearly or with candor to any of the characters in the novel, including themselves.

In *Alexander's Bridge* there are three undelivered communiqués: a telegram of urgent importance and two Dear John, or in this case Dear Joanna, letters. All three directly reflect the character of Bartley Alexander, our lead in this play of characters set within a love triangle from which Alexander cannot disentangle himself. In addition, the telegram addressed to Alexander directly impacts the end of the novel. The first undelivered letter is written by Alexander and addressed to his lover, Hilda Burgoyne. Alexander writes the second undelivered letter to his wife, Winifred. Both letters directly impact the reader's understanding of a character who begins the novel as a crystal clear type because "he looked as the tamer of rivers ought to look," and then evolved unto a murky enigma who only "left an echo . . . [though the] ripples go on in all of us" (283, 351). Essentially, the undelivered telegram and letters reveal why

Bartley Alexander has moved away from a character who appears to be simplistically clear to a character who is unfathomably deep. Both the telegram and the letters address Alexander's greatest flaw: he is constantly plagued by miscommunication between his image, how others perceive him and his self, and how he perceives himself.

At first glance, the undelivered telegram is of drastic importance to the plot only. As his assistant Phil Horton explains, his "first telegram missed [Alexander] somehow. I had sent one Sunday evening to the same address, but it was returned to me" (342). If Alexander had received the telegram Sunday evening as Mr. Horton hoped, then he would have arrived at the Moorlock Bridge in time to prevent the tragedy that cost him his life and the lives of many of his workers. Which leaves the reader to ask, as Phil Horton seems to be asking, where was Bartley Alexander on a Sunday evening in April? He was in fact on business in New York City, at his apartment, at the very address he had given Phil Horton in case of emergencies. He did not receive Horton's telegram because he was not alone. He was rekindling his love of Hilda Burgoyne for a third time. Although Cather does not include any lurid details, it does not take a great imagination to realize that Bartley Alexander never received or replied to the original telegram because he did not hear the knock at the door. He was literally caught within the perplexing love triangle of the novel once again.

The importance of Alexander's and Hilda's rekindled romance, however, is more than a mere plot device. For Cather and her close readers, it becomes apparent that Alexander's relationship with Hilda is what clouds his character to such a degree that even he cannot tell who he is or what he wants in any given moment. Before Hilda enters his New York apartment, he had composed a letter to her and planned that it would reach her on the steamer as she left New York City and returned to Europe (335). Although it is unclear what the letter contains, it is most likely similar to his previous missive addressed to Hilda, which is included in the novel. In that letter, Alexander agonizes over the double life he has led for nearly a year since their affair was first rekindled:

It seems that a man is meant to live only one life. . . . When he tries to live a second, he develops another nature. At first he seemed only a pleasure-loving simpleton, of whose company I was rather ashamed. . . . But now he is strong and sullen, and he is fighting for his own life at the cost of mine. . . . Believe me, you will hate me then. . . . If anyone I loved suffered like this, I'd want to know it. Help me, Hilda! (332)

Such a letter reveals Alexander's growing crack.² In the first chapter, the promise of his physical image as "strong enough . . . to support a span of any one of his ten great bridges that cut the air above as many rivers" is juxtaposed with his character as his and Professor Wilson's banter reveals that "It's not [Alexander] you feel sure of; it's Winifred. People often make that mistake" (283, 284). The truth of such a statement is not fully understood

until we read Alexander's first letter to Hilda and imagine the content of the second, undelivered letter addressed to Hilda. Bartley Alexander is not simply living a double life; he is doubled. The image he presents to the world and his true self seems to be of two entirely different people. His exterior physical being is a façade that deceives the world and prevents him from seeing his true self—a shallow indecisive man. He is caught between his dreams of the sensual life he might lead if he stays with Hilda and the successful stability of his life with Winifred. Rather than choose between his wife and his lover, Alexander essentially asks Hilda to choose for him, thus compounding his weakness.

The choice Hilda makes for Alexander is apparent. Their last night together, that very fateful night when Alexander missed Horton's first telegram, establishes their love affair once again and implies that Alexander will choose Hilda over Winifred. If there is any doubt, Alexander's undelivered letter to Winifred provides a glance at Alexander's choice. Although we are not privileged with the direct content, the information that is included in the novel reveals a great deal:

On Monday night he had written a long letter to his wife, but when morning came, he was afraid to send it, and the letter was still in his pocket. Winifred was not a woman who could bear disappointment. She demanded a great deal of herself and of the people she loved; she never failed herself. If he told her now, he knew, it would be irretrievable. There would be no going back. He would lose the one thing he valued most in the world; he would be destroying his own happiness. There would be nothing for him afterwards. (Cather 337)

Such a descriptive passage is more informative than Alexander's letter would most likely have been. Finally, here is an explanation of Winifred's sure character. Alexander depends upon her not because she is dependable and supportive, but because she holds him to his highest standards of perfection. And, therefore, she supports his unattainable dream, his ever-elusive idea that he is the image of perfection that he presents to the rest of the world. Alexander can depend upon her because she does not change. Perhaps she does not need to change, of course, because she has the moral luxury of focusing on his projected image of the perfect builder of bridges—solid, stable, the connector of land, the spanner of time. To change would be to acknowledge Alexander's humanness and to flirt with disappointment and fallibility. Since, according to Alexander, Winifred can bear neither, she cannot challenge herself through change. Wilson's and Alexander's positive image of a woman who supports her husband and acts as a moral compass which guides his career is subverted. Her stability is now a hindrance, a sign of her inflexibility. Rigid like the steel beams of the bridges her husband builds, Winifred would buckle and collapse under the strain of an unexpected change.

In addition, we once again see the unsure character of Bartley Alexander. His rekindled romance with Hilda led him to write this letter to Winifred, but even now, when he appears to have made a decision to leave Winifred for Hilda, he cannot end his marriage. Instead, he looks for excuses to keep himself from telling Winifred about his year-long affair. He even claims that such an evasion of the truth is needed to protect Winifred from facing his failure. But most telling is his need to have a place to go back to. He cannot destroy his happiness. Bartley Alexander's indecisiveness has evolved. He is no longer a man who cannot choose between his wife and his lover. He is now

a man who wants the security of a wife and, simultaneously, the adventure of a lover. His unsent letters aptly portray his inability to communicate with the characters that surround him and highlight his increasing ability to communicate his most intimate thoughts with the novel's readers.

In Faulkner's work, there are also two undelivered letters: both are Dear John letters written by Margaret Powers, a central figure in this cast of characters who are all connected through a relationship with the silent, wounded soldier, Donald Mahon, who is the "loot" of the novel. For the other characters in *Soldiers' Pay*, Mrs. Powers' character begins as a type; she is the loose woman with loose morals who instantly charges every scene with sexual energy from the moment she enters that fateful train car and introduces herself to Donald Mahon:

She was dark. Had Gilligan and Lowe ever seen an Aubrey Beardsley, they would have known that Beardsley would have sickened for her: he had drawn her so often dressed in peacock hues, white and slim and *depraved* among meretricious trees and impossible marble fountains. (27)³

As the novel progresses, Mrs. Powers becomes less and less real within the cast of characters:

He [Gilligan] stopped at last, actually weeping with anger and despair, watching her figure, in its dark straight dress and white collar and cuffs become smaller and smaller with the diminishing train that left behind a derisive whistle blast and a trailing, fading vapor like an insult, moving along twin threads of steel out of his sight and his life. (305)

Essentially, then, Mrs. Powers' undelivered letters represent her increasing inability to communicate with the other characters of the novel.

For the reader as well, Mrs. Powers enters the novel as an amorphous entity who participates in the implausibility of the opening chapter. She just happens upon three soldiers on a train and agrees to help Gilligan and Lowe assist Mahon in his travels home. However, it is through her actions of self-

Willa Cather in Hats

Willa Cather, like all complex and busy people, could be said to have worn many hats; the pictures in this issue prove and illustrate that basic fact. All are taken from the Cather Collection at Drew.

Captions: right: *New York Herald Tribune* (Sept. 10, 1953); page 59: *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* (Sept. 12, 1948); page 66: *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* (Feb. 25, 1957). (All Photographs reproduced by Masato Okinaka.)



sacrifice for and self-revelations to these three men that Margaret Powers develops into a nuanced character and not a type for the reader. For *Soldiers' Pay's* cast of characters, she enters as a type and leaves as an enigma; but for the readers, who are allowed a privileged glimpse into Mrs. Powers' thoughts and emotions through the two letters, she becomes more real the further she travels within the novel.

The first revelation of one of Margaret Powers' undelivered letters is shared with Gilligan. Mrs. Powers reveals much about herself in the conversation that includes the reference to this letter. As Gilligan and Mrs. Powers discuss her intentions with the loot, she reveals her history. She was a woman of the canteen who "had other men friends" when she met her husband, Dick Powers (159). But neither her husband, who "expected to know women in France and . . . didn't expect [Mrs. Powers] to be a hermit while he was gone," nor Gilligan seems to be perturbed by the realization that she is the type of woman conjured by her entrance: they realize that she is so much more (159). She is transformed from a simple to a complex type of woman who is "doing something without some obvious material end in view . . . something you thought only a man would do" (157). In essence, her pure intentions with the loot and her ability to both forgive and accept an unfaithful husband while he forgives and accepts her for being an unfaithful wife encapsulate her character. Faulkner's reference to the decadent artist in his first reference to Margaret Powers is finally illuminated for the reader (remember Gilligan is not privileged with the knowledge of this allusion). She is not merely a caricature of woman as whore; she is the prototype of the New Woman of the turn of the century pictured so fancifully in Aubrey Beardsley's work.

This is not all that we learn of Mrs. Powers, however, because we have yet to explore the significance of the letter to her husband. While the letter Mrs. Powers sends to Dick is not revealed, her intentions are:

And one day I got a letter saying that he didn't know when he'd be able to write again. . . . That was when he was going up to the front I guess. I thought about it for a day or two and then I made up my mind that the best thing for both of us was just to call the whole thing off. So I sat down and wrote him, wishing him luck and asking him to wish me the same. And then, before my letter reached him, I received an official notice that he had been killed in action. He never got my letter at all. He died believing that everything was the same between us. (160)

This Dear John letter, unlike Bartley Alexander's letters, was sent. Mrs. Powers is not only a New Woman, she is a strong New Woman who is willing to end her marriage when she realizes that it was merely a sham, part of the excited hysteria of the circus of war (Faulkner 158). She is willing to allow her husband, if not herself, a chance at true happiness.

As Mrs. Powers reveals, her attention and attraction to Donald Mahon is her penance. Because her husband never received her letter, Mrs. Powers feels that "some way . . . I wasn't square with him. And so I guess I am trying to make it up to him in some way" (160). It is her guilt over the letter's failure to reach her husband that haunts her. If he had only known that nothing was the same between them, then perhaps she would never have stopped and entered the train car. She would never have felt obliged to bring the loot home. She would never have

married a dying man just to fulfill that thing that she believed he was waiting for. Because Cecily was never square with Donald Mahon, Margaret Powers assumes her role in his life in order to complete Cecily and Donald Mahon's fantasy of their wartime engagement.⁴

It is Margaret Powers' second Dear John letter which completes the cycle of wartime love affairs for her. Addressed to Julian Lowe, whose "love" letters to Margaret are interspersed throughout the novel, this letter is intended once again to reveal that a wartime engagement is merely a sham.⁵ Believing Lowe to be at his mother's address, Margaret Powers sends him a letter that reveals all she has done for the loot: "On the rector's desk was a letter addressed to Mr. Julian Lowe, ----- St., San Francisco, Cal., telling him of her marriage and of her husband's death. It had been returned by the post office department stamped, 'Removed. Present address unknown'" (311).

This letter is Margaret Powers' attempt to be square with Julian Lowe. Before Julian left for San Francisco, Mrs. Powers had tentatively conceded to their engagement by promising to kiss him once again "when we are married" (51). If this parting conversation is read as a tongue-in-cheek spoof on relationships, then it is apparent that her acceptance of Julian's demand that she love him is merely an attempt to send him on his way. If their parting conversation is read as a serious exchange, then it is possible that Margaret Powers' acceptance of Lowe's demand that she love him is very similar to her acceptance of Dick Powers' proposal. In either case, Mrs. Powers has promised something that she does not intend to deliver. Julian Lowe is not the man for Margaret Powers, but she leaves Mahon's house believing she has been square with him. She believes Julian knows that nothing is the same with them. Not knowing the letter was returned, she can get on another train without any haunting guilt.

In fact, as Mrs. Powers steps onto the train platform, she realizes that "freedom comes with the decision: it does not wait for the act. She felt freer, more at peace with herself than she had for months" (297). Margaret Powers' freedom comes with the decision to leave, but it stems from her penitential marriage to Donald Mahon and her letters to both her husband and Julian Lowe. Both acts allow her to move beyond her guilt-ridden connection to her husband. By marrying Donald Mahon, she has completed her obligation as a dutiful wife. While she knows that both her marriage to Dick Powers and Donald Mahon are false, her marriages give Dick Powers, Joe Gilligan, the rector, and perhaps even Donald Mahon justification for believing that there was something in this world that was not turned upside down (37). Moreover, the marriages to first Dick Powers and then Donald Mahon provide Mrs. Powers with one complete nuptial. With Dick Powers she was a physical lover, like Hilda Burgoyne, and with Donald Mahon she was the stable spouse, like Winifred Alexander. Unlike Bartley Alexander, Margaret Powers is strong enough not only to decide her future but to send the letter that seals her future not once, but twice.

Without the privilege of these letters, the reader of both *Alexander's Bridge* and *Soldiers' Pay* would not realize the depth to which Faulkner and Cather use the same literary device in almost exactly opposite ways. While Cather uses the undelivered letters to emphasize the character flaw of Bartley Alexander, Faulkner uses his letters to emphasize the character strength of Margaret Powers. Both authors utilize these letters to reveal the

inner core of their characters to the reader only. By doing so, both authors entomb these wonderful characters within the types that they represent within the novel. Ironically, it is Cather's flawed hero who maintains the image of his strength and moral virility even in death, and it is Faulkner's flawed heroine who has the strength and moral virility of Alexander's façade but vanishes from sight.

Notes

¹The convention develops clearly in the epistolary novel, an early genre of the Anglo-American canon. See, for example, Ian Watt's discussion of Samuel Richardson's use of the epistle to connect the reader and the audience in Chapter VI "Private Experience and the Novel" of his literary history *The Rise of the Novel*. Cather and Faulkner most likely learned the power of the undelivered letter from Henry James who has two undelivered letters in the final books of *The Wings of the Dove*. Although both letters are delivered, they are never read by Merton Densher, and the reader never knows exactly what is disclosed in the letters.

²It is Professor Wilson who alludes to Bartley Alexander's flawless façade which prevents his weak person from being seen by the world: "I always used to feel that there was a weak spot where some day strain would tell. . . . The more dazzling the front you presented, the higher your façade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom" (284).

³Aubrey Beardsley, a nineteenth century British symbolist and decadent, is noted for his work with Oscar Wilde as illustrator of the British edition of Wilde's *Salome* (1894). Addison C. Bross' essay "Soldiers' Pay and the Art of Aubrey Beardsley" connects the British symbolist to Faulkner's early

work as an artist and traces the use of direct references to and images reminiscent of Beardsley in Faulkner's work.

⁴In an earlier scene, Gilligan reveals the content of a letter Cecily sent to Donald Mahon by describing it as "all the old bunk about knights of the air and the romance of battle, that even the fat crying ones outgrow soon as the excitement is over and the uniforms and being wounded ain't only not stylish no more, but it is troublesome" (37).

⁵Lowe's letters are indeed an important addition to any discussion of epistles in Faulkner's works; however, as the focus of this essay is undelivered letters, Julian Lowe's letters do not fit with the topic under discussion because they are received by Margaret Powers.

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A Message from the President

Hello to all the members and readers,

One of the networks has been running a little series on the Seven Wonders of the World, promising its viewers that they get to vote for what they consider the eighth wonder.

The series prompted a good friend to send me another set of wonders, complete with folksy pictures of each: sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell, laughter, and love.

From time to time, the natural scientist in each of us likes to think of the great natural wonders: the Grand Canyon, majestic mountains and waterfalls, great rivers, the deserts, the forests, and these paradoxical plains on which Cather lived for a short time.

My grandfather subscribed to *National Geographic*, so I grew up intrigued by those people and places so different from anything I knew or saw on the streets of Greeley, Colorado, that monument to the vision of Horace Greeley, one of our most interesting historic figures. He was something of a wonder himself. The man who apparently suffered no one gladly (he showed Mark Twain to the door) gave us the phrase that characterized our own national dynamic: Go West, Young Man.

But more than any of the other wonders of the world, it was the wonder of reading that both showed me the larger worlds out there somewhere and eventually showed me my own world more clearly. Our high school recently mounted a tremendous production of *Seussical*, the musical based on the Dr. Seuss books; Dr. Seuss's Horton appeared in the first book I read to myself, and Horton was my first experience of reading a character into my world and of reading myself into his world. My good friend Charles Fort's daughter, Shelley, gave a performance that brought me to tears, tears of recognition, making again immediate the power of an experience that first touched me 60 years ago. I'll take that as an "eighth wonder" any day.

Books still take me beyond and still enlighten my own interior world; and if you are reading this, they probably do that for you, too. We've been fortunate in these last years to have current writers such as Megham Daum and Terese Svoboda, Kent Haruf and Ted Kooser, who have shown us something of the place and people that evolved from places and people Cather knew and characterized.

As ages and centuries pass, however, some writers take their place as the colossi of their times. We think of Dickens in England, Dostoyevsky in Russia, Mann in Germany, Balzac in France. People speak of the Age of Dryden, the Age of Wordsworth, the Age of Eliot. Cather now seems to be looming forward as that kind of writer, a writer for the ages.

It's likely that, 100 years from now, as readers and critics look back on American literature in the Twentieth Century, they will see two figures bestriding the literary landscape: Cather and Faulkner. Possibly more than any others, they explored more deeply the myths by which we wrest meaning from our experience. Or, as Fredrick Manfred once said to me, they wrote out of the deepest swamps.

As this issue attests, our Cather studies will increasingly turn to Cather's place among the giants, the immortals, sometimes learning from them, sometimes one of them, sometimes teaching them out of one of her favorite themes, the meaning of being an artist. And it is such issues we will be examining in Paris and Avignon at the upcoming seminar.

As we say out here on the plains, "High Time!" Or perhaps, "No wonder."

Sincerely,
Chuck Peek

The Mother within the Fictional Dialogue between Faulkner and Cather

Jeevan Gurung, Drew University

William Faulkner, in an interview published by the *Paris Review* in 1956, answered a question about how much personal experience is needed for writing: "A writer needs three things, experience, observation, and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others" (Stein 76). That he was a good observer not just of the world around him but also of Willa Cather's works can be discerned from several of Merrill M. Skaggs's essays.¹ Skaggs has shown that Faulkner lifted heavily from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* to write *The Sound and the Fury*. Skaggs missed, however, the uncanny similarity in the two writers' treatment of the mother goddess imagery which, growing out of Christian myth, pervades both the texts. Though the treatment of the mother, and Christian imagery in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, have been explored by other scholars, no critical discussion exists that connects the two.² I will, therefore, argue that Faulkner during his apprenticeship of "imitating and lifting" (Skaggs, "Thefts" 115) observes and imaginatively incorporates Cather's complex use of the mother goddess symbolism in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* into his masterpiece *The Sound and the Fury*.

Skaggs, in "Thefts and Conversation: Cather and Faulkner," provides some arresting textual and biographical evidence that Faulkner imitated Cather's works. In fact, she provides anecdotes, correspondences, and textual evidence for assuming a definitive conversation between the two fiction writers. As a self-disciplining apprentice, Faulkner started gleaning from Cather's works from the first novel that he wrote. The most readily identifiable pickup is from *One of Ours*, which was published in 1922 by Alfred A. Knopf. Perhaps Faulkner was offended by Cather's characterization of Victor Morse, who in *One of Ours* is depicted as an American uncannily reminiscent of Faulkner.³ To that Faulkner had to retort, and he does so in *Soldiers' Pay*, making it obvious to Cather that he was willing to take on her challenge.

As a response to Cather, Faulkner picks up the narrative of "the maimed American amnesiac soldier" (Skaggs, "Cather's War" 41) from *One of Ours* and develops his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*. The story of Donald Mahon, the young aviator critically wounded in the war, revolves around three women: Mrs. Margaret Powers, his fiancée Cecily Saunders, and Emmy. Thus, *Soldiers' Pay* indicates Faulkner's earliest inclination to include in narrative the power of women. Picking up on *One of Ours*, where women are the controlling force in Claude's life until he escapes them through death, Faulkner too tries to develop his narrative around a male figure surrounded by women. But unlike *One of Ours*, Faulkner's women here do not control Donald. His story is not a story of the struggle to break free from their clutches. Mrs. Margaret Powers and Cecily Saunders, though "the most active agents in Donald Mahon's lingering death-in-life" (Williams 37), can hardly make any difference to his life. Another woman in Donald's life, Emmy, the servant girl, though linked to Mother Nature by allusion to earth, water, grass and trees, cannot

restore life in him. Mrs. Powers, a mother figure in her own right, associates herself "inexplicably . . . with death" (Williams 35) as when Gilligan asks her to marry him and she says, "If I married you you'd be dead in a year, Joe. All the men that marry me die, you know" (Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* 295). Cecily Saunders is too fickle to support Donald or even herself. Faulkner realizes the potentialities of women in this text, but they "exist as a sort of unfocused feeling, an incipient mythos, in the author's mind [and] they fail to be vitally integrated with the action which the story relates" (Williams 38).

If Faulkner leaves the potentialities of the feminine imagery that he developed in *Soldiers' Pay* unresolved, then Cather in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* brings such possibilities to resolution. Her multi-layered narrative can be read as one of achievement, order wrought out of chaos; a mythic journey of fulfillment; a reconciliation of the different peoples, cultures, and religions through the worship of the mother goddess. Superficially seen, Father Latour's conflict seems to be his struggle against nature, corrupt priests, or his struggle to build a cathedral, to establish an institution. Yet the real struggle seems to lie within him. For the first time he is in a new world where his religious faith conflicts with the primitive traditions of the natives. For a man of order, he finds the ancient traditions of the Indians and the Mexicans highly disturbing until he can, like Vaillant, find solace in the serene image of the mother goddess, Virgin Mary.

In spite of this novel's being the story of two men, the feminine presence is embedded throughout the narrative. Through minor characters, allusions, descriptions, narratives within the texts, as well as the thoughts of the priests, the Holy Mother pervades the texture of the text. The scene where Latour is lost in the eerie landscape alludes to the feminine image, which Latour inadvertently fails to recognize although he is described as being "sensitive to the shape of things" (17). Lost in the labyrinthine landscape dotted with red conical hills, Latour looks for a safe passage out. Cather describes the conical hills as "spotted with smaller cones of juniper, a uniform yellowish green, as the hills were uniform red" (17), suggesting that these hills are shaped like breasts with nipples. The "omnipresence of the triangle" (17) is an obvious reference to the female pubic area. Latour's lack of vision becomes apparent when he sees the cruciform tree, which is described as having a "little crest of green in the center, just above the cleavage" (18, emphasis mine). He sees the Cross in the tree, and he kneels in devotion to "the God" (18), but he fails to see the feminine in the landscape and the tree. This opening scene sets the tone for Latour's subsequent spiritual struggle in this new land.

Though Latour delights in "the Moorish" heritage of the golden bell (Ryder 255), though he sees the mesa as an Oriental city, though he asserts that "veneration for old customs was a quality he liked, and that it played a great part in his own religion" (DCA 143), his sense of order is threatened when Jacinto, the young Indian guide, takes him into the stone lip cave

to seek shelter from a blizzard. Inside he hears a “dizzy noise” and when he puts his ear to the crack in the wall, he feels he ‘was listening to one of the oldest voices of the earth’” (137). Janis P. Stout, in *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*, describes the cave as “the uterine cave with its vaginal passages” and explains “the opening between thrusting lips” of the cave as “blatantly resembling genital labia” (242). Furthermore, she says, “The offensive smell in the cave is perhaps an allusion to an old canard against women” (242). Naturally, Latour finds everything inside the cave (the womb of the earth) terrible and prays before he goes off to sleep. He awakens halfway through the night to see Jacinto with his arms outstretched against the wall in the shape of the crucifixion, only seen from behind. The image of crucifix in the primitive setting disturbs him deeply. He is unable to reconcile his faith with that of the primitive image since he is not yet ready to accept the power of the earth, the mother.

In spite of Latour’s inability to perceive the feminine presence, every time he is in danger a woman saves him. He is discovered by a young girl and led to an idyllic settlement, *Agua Secreta*, not unlike the Garden of Eden. In another instance when he and Vaillant are at the mercy of Buck Scales, it is Magdalena, Buck’s wife, who signals them to escape. Magdalena’s portrayal brings in the association of the myth of Mary Magdalen, “the very incarnation of the age-old equation between feminine beauty, sexuality and sin” (Haskins 3). Mary Magdalen has traditionally been conceived of as “the prostitute who hearing the teachings of Jesus Christ repented of her sinful past and henceforth devoted her life and love to him” (3). She was the first witness of Christ’s resurrection. Though there is scant reference about her in the New Testament, yet her myth has persisted. Her mysteriousness has inspired numerous legends that seem to conflate her persona with the Virgin Mary⁴ and Black Madonna.⁵

Paralleling the story of Mary Magdalen, Latour takes Magdalena under his care. She becomes his housekeeper and the manager of the Sisters’ kitchen. During her dark period under domination of Buck Scales, she looked half-witted, but once redeemed from her fallen position she “bloom[s] again in the house of God” (DCA 83). Now whenever Latour visited the school, he would visit and “see her serene and handsome face” (83). Even at Latour’s deathbed Magdalena waits upon him just as Mary Magdalen “stood . . . , beholding (Christ’s crucifixion)” (Haskins 7). The image of Magdalena waiting upon Latour blends the Mary Magdalen legend of the repentant prostitute, Virgin Mother (Madonna and Pieta combined) and the devoted bride.

The reverence for the mother goddess in the people of this new world becomes manifest in the various stories of the Lady of Guadalupe, the various figurines of Mary with Mexican faces, the Indians’ reverence for the earth, etc. Although Father Latour recognizes their reverence for the mother goddess, he does not participate in it until he experiences spiritual oneness with the prayers of the Mexican woman called Sada, bonded to a torturous Protestant family. Prior to that encounter, Latour was “unable to sleep, with the sense of failure clutching his heart. His prayers were empty words and brought him no refreshment. His soul had become a barren field. His work seemed superficial, a house built upon the sands. His great diocese was still a heathen country” (DCA 221). At this time of spiritual depression, he alongside Sada kneels before the image of the Virgin and “experience[s] . . . holy mysteries . . . [as] the beautiful concept of Mary pierced the priest’s heart like a sword” (228). The Virgin in the form of Sada provides

Latour with the strength to fulfill his mission. Mary, as the goddess coming in between the revelation and the pre-Christian religion, connects the two like a bridge. Finally, Latour can find peace. The earlier doubts in his mind have been cleared, and he can now fulfill his mission of building the cathedral, which is symbolic of his establishing an institution, or integrating the past with the present. It is also symbolic of the connection with the mother earth, the assimilating of the earthy primitive tradition into Christian consciousness.

Latour’s spiritual awakening is much more than a religious experience. There is more of the perennial realization of Eastern thought in his spiritual transformation. Cather describes Latour’s experience by saying:

More and more life seemed to him an experience of the Ego, in no sense the Ego itself. This conviction, he believed, was something apart from his religious life; it was an enlightenment that came to him as a man, a human creature. And he noticed that he judged conduct differently now; his own and that of others. The mistakes of his life seemed unimportant; accidents that had occurred *en route*. (304)

This means that he has moved beyond the confines of religious parochialism. He is able to let go of his ego; he has grown in spiritual stature through his shared experience with Sada. Latour’s growing a garden over a Mexican one (277), his ability to domesticate and develop native flowers (279), his ability to take pride in the Indians in spite of their indifference “to missionaries and the white man’s religion” (307), his watching over the completed cathedral wrapped in his Indian blanket (283) reflect that he has reconciled with the primitive tradition.

As an astute observer, Faulkner must have noticed the link between Mary Magdalen and the myth of the Black Madonna as Cather’s reply to his characterization of Mrs. Powers, who is described as a dark and beautiful mother figure. More importantly, Mary Magdalen’s significance is her association with Easter. She “stands out . . . in the gospel texts for her role at Easter” (Haskins 29), which definitely was not lost on Faulkner. His masterpiece *The Sound and the Fury* depends for its structural unity on the Easter imagery.

Cather’s mother imagery gets crystallized in Faulkner’s works, but with some fresh qualifications. *The Sound and the Fury* is replete with the earth imagery. Benjy’s perception of Caddy is like a mother. She smells to him like trees, which makes her identical with the tree goddess, embodiment of the earth and fertility and nourishment.⁶ The tree that Caddy climbs to watch Damuddy’s funeral is highly symbolic. David Williams, in *Faulkner’s Women: The Myth and the Muse*, sees it as “the forbidden tree,” climbing which Caddy “becomes for Benjy the mother of death as well as of life” (78). This tree later on becomes a means of escape for Quentin, Caddy’s daughter. The tree imagery brings into focus the cruciform tree before which Latour bows down to pray. Analogous to the tree in *The Sound and the Fury*, the cruciform tree not only manifests death but also the mother goddess by its reference to the feminized landscape and the cleaved branches.

As another wink to Cather, Faulkner modeled his Compson family on the Shimerdas of *My Ántonia*. More importantly, Caddy is built on Ántonia, who like her symbolically represents the mythic earth mother.⁷ Caddy’s portrayal reflects her role as the mother earth to perfection,

especially when it comes to Benjy. Williams mentions that Caddy with “Her over-spreading love is very much the positive elementary character of the great mother, nourishing, containing, and protecting” (Faulkner, *Sound* 77). She effects change in the people around her just as the reverence for the Virgin Mother effects change in the people in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. However, unlike Latour’s movement toward the acceptance of the matriarchal power, the tragedy of the Compson brothers is their denial of changes effected by Caddy. Though they react to “the primordial feminine in Caddy” (Williams 79), they fail to change along with her. Quentin’s hatred and desire to conquer time is his attempt to fix Caddy in time. Contrary to Latour, he refuses to develop spiritually and the result is madness, dissolution, and death.

Quentin’s obsession with Caddy’s mother image is reinforced when, talking of women, he says, “Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced. Moons he said full and yellow as harvest moons her hips thighs” (*Sound* 160). This description evokes the image of the confrontation of the setting sun and the rising moon in *My Ántonia* (MA 910), a natural source for Faulkner to pinch from. The image in *My Ántonia* reflects the pull between the mother (moon) and the son (sun); it is also an indication that the union will not come to fruition. Jim’s desire to be one with the mother gets across clearly when he says, “I felt the old pull of the earth” (910). Similar to Jim’s is Quentin’s wish. But as Williams points out, Quentin in identifying “Caddy’s thighs with yellow moons stress[es] his incipient awareness of the great mother in his sister’s sexual being. She is that goddess of moons and menstruation who determines the flow of time that he would reject. She is also the creation of the filthy world of flesh that he hates” (82). As “the ‘son lover’ of his sister” (Williams 85), Quentin is fixated on maintaining Caddy’s virgin mother image. When he cannot stop either time or Caddy, he wants to swap places with Caddy. He says, “Why couldn’t it have been me and not her who is unvirgin” (Faulkner, *Sound* 96). He takes on himself Caddy’s supposed crime and so as punishment he kills himself. The loss of Caddy’s virginity overwhelmingly bears on his self, stifling him and driving him to his death. Caddy, or “mother of life is transformed into the mother of death” (Williams 86). Where Latour and Vaillant accept Magdalena into their fold and even see her as a deity, Quentin cannot and that is his tragedy.⁸

Like Quentin, Jason too fails to grow; and contrary to Latour he fights to overcome the feminine force. His mean and calculating personality drives him to try and subjugate it. But the feminine force constantly thwarts his efforts. First Caddy causes him to lose his promised job in Herbert Head’s bank, and then Quentin, Caddy’s daughter, runs off with his savings. He cannot even force the police to catch the culprit. His attempt to rob Caddy, the mother figure, boomerangs on him when Quentin, his niece, turns the tables. Quentin, as noted by Williams, is “symbolically linked to Caddy by ‘a soiled under-garment of cheap silk a little too pink’” (89). In the epic struggle of the patriarch (driven by money and calculation) versus the matriarch (driven by instinct and impulse) the latter wins, for Jason remains a childless bachelor; Quentin, on the other hand, though lost is still living (Williams 89). Despite the fact that Faulkner borrows the mother imagery from Cather, he provides it his own twist.

In the final section of *The Sound and the Fury*, the

movement is away from the narrow “male consciousness” to the “wider objective view” of the female or matriarchal consciousness represented by the “enduring being of the Negress Dilsey” (Williams 90). Finally, Faulkner successfully harmonizes the ritual experience of the mother’s encompassing humanity. To evoke this harmonious feeling, he once again looks to Cather. Notwithstanding the similarity between Mahailey, the housekeeper of the Wheeler household in *One of Ours*, and Dilsey of the Compson household, where both represent the keeper of sanity, protection and nourishment in their respective households, the imagery that underscores the last section of *The Sound and the Fury* is the icon of Pieta, a definitive pick up from Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *One of Ours*.

In *One of Ours*, Claude is wandering through a town in France when he inadvertently follows two young lovers to the moonlit doorway of the church. There they cling together, the girl sitting down on the stone bench, while the soldier rests his head on her knee, his one arm lying across her Pieta-like lap (1198). In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Father Latour recalls the incredible story of Father Junipero. While crossing a great stretch of desert, Junipero comes across a Mexican family in the middle of the desert. As the priest sat reading the evening prayers, he saw that “the child [of the house] sat upon the floor against his mother’s knee, with the lamb in his lap” (295). Furthermore, the image of Magdalena attending to the sick Bishop Latour during his dying moment is another strong image. To Faulkner’s perceptive and fertile mind the moving icons surely stirred a great deal of interest.

Faulkner by now was not merely picking up Cather’s icons for use in his work. As sharp as his eyes were, he was able to spot the thematic connection in the images that Cather used. Andrew M. Greeley, in *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God*, says that “in the Pieta icon, Mary held the dead body of Jesus in her arms (against her breasts in Christian plastic art; just as did ancient death goddess of old)” (189). Mary the Pieta thereby resembles “a ‘goddess’ of death. . . . The Pieta is the loving mother who presides over the destruction of old life and its renewal” (189). The images described above, in both *One of Ours* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, anticipate Claude’s and Latour’s death respectively. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Latour recalls the image after he has “arranged an order for his last days” (288) and Magdalena attends on the dying Latour, while Claude’s experience takes place after he has left the safe shores of America and is headed for his inevitable death in the war in France. Interestingly, both Latour and Claude are resurrected in their own way. Latour has a spiritual resurrection after the inner conflict that he faces, while Claude is resurrected as a war hero.

Correspondingly, in Dilsey’s tears and Benjy’s rapt attention in the final section of *The Sound and the Fury*, the icon that Faulkner attempts to create is clearly that of the Pieta, which references Cather’s icons in *One of Ours* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Following Cather’s example, the Pieta icon in *The Sound and the Fury* thematically heralds the death of the Compson family, which is symbolized by the “paintless house with its rotten portico” (372). Dilsey, therefore, becomes “like Caddy, the sorrowful mother of death” (Williams 92). Implicit, however, in this presentation is the idea of resurrection. Dilsey’s tears are proof that she is spiritually moved by the occasion. The fact that she “gives up her long and fruitless effort to ‘save’ the

Compsons from themselves" (Castille 428), the fact that she leaves Mississippi to resume her matriarchal role in the Gibson family, the fact that she renews her lapsed family ties and puts the barren past behind her (492) initiates the resurrection of relationship and connection not unlike Latour's in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Faulkner not only conceives Dilsey in the moving Pieta icon in the final section but also integrates in her experience Latour's spiritual epiphany. As Dilsey sat raptly listening to Reverend Shegog's sermon about the dying son, she "sat bolt upright . . . , crying" while Benjy "sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze" (Faulkner, *Sound* 370). Paralleling it in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is the Latour and Sada episode. Cather describes Latour's spiritual experience by laying bare his thoughts as the two sat kneeling together in front of the altar. Latour realizes for the first time that "Only a Woman, divine, could know all that a woman can suffer" (228). Cather goes on to describe that Latour "received the miracle in her heart into his own eyes, knew that his poverty was as bleak as hers" (228-29, emphasis mine). Incidentally Faulkner does not directly describe Dilsey's spiritual awakening, but from her streaming tears and her saying that "I've seed de first en de last" (*Sound* 371, emphasis mine) he indicates that she has received the miracle in her own eyes. The connection here is clear. On further examining the parallels in the two incidents, we see that both the episodes take place in the Church; both have the presence of two prominent figures, a man and a woman; both effect change in the beholder. If in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* it is the man who is moved, in *The Sound and the Fury* it is the woman who is spiritually rejuvenated.

Structurally, too, Faulkner integrates the Easter connection that he picked up from *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.⁹ In this regard Williams notes that "the icon of the Madonna [Caddy in Benjy section] and the icon of Pieta [Dilsey and Benjy in the final section] contain the whole narrative between them; they give it 'time' but they also surround time" providing *The Sound and the Fury* the "quality of timeless femininity" (94). Furthermore, he explains that Faulkner's use of "the dates suggest the lost soul (the unredeemed Benjy) in hell on Saturday, the crucifixion of the god of love (through Jason's hatred) on Friday, and the resurrection with its implied hope of Sunday" (Williams 92-93). Cather's influence in Faulkner's use of the image of the Passion of Jesus through the Easter connection cannot be ignored, the most likely source being Cather's Pieta image and the myth of Mary Magdalen.

Cather in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* integrated the primitive with Christian symbolism through characters, mini-narratives, and Latour's spiritual awakening. Faulkner, too, achieves this feat by fragmenting and distorting the Christ myth (Williams 95), through Caddy's characterization and Dilsey's spiritual rejuvenation. Incidentally, Reverend Shegog's sermon shifts focus from the son to the mother of God. Philip Castille in "Dilsey's Easter Conversion in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*" notes that Faulkner rearranges the Passion narrative by placing the "destruction of the world by water after the crucifixion of Christ" (425, my emphasis). He reworks the pre-Christian story of the Noah-flood taken from the Hebrew scripture to effect destruction of the sinners and follows it up with the story of resurrection (425). Faulkner uses the idea of death and renewal, destruction by water (symbolizing feminine and mother), and resurrection at the same time. The emphasis in the last scene is more on the mother of God, water (flood), and Dilsey. Caddy

too encompasses in her the idea of death and rebirth, which is a reflection of the fertility ritual manifested in the primitive great mother goddess. Like Cather in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Faulkner explores the embedded primitive ritual of the mother figure within Christian tradition to tell his story.¹⁰

In the same interview given to the *Paris Review* in 1956, Faulkner, when asked if he would add inspiration to experience, observation, and imagination, replied that he didn't know anything about inspiration. He said, "I've heard about it, but I never saw it" (qtd. in Stein 76). Yet inspiration, as we know, is the source of all creation, the mother that gives life to new works of art. Faulkner had a source of it at hand when he picked up Cather's latest works. In the interview he suppressed the idea of inspiration because to admit the existence of inspiration would have shed light on his source. But now that the mother (source of his inspiration) within his art has been discovered, it opens his text up to another level of interpretation; it provides a different shade not just to his text but also to deconstructing the conversation between the mother and the son.

Notes

⁹See Skaggs's "Thefts and Conversation: Cather and Faulkner," "Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," "Willa Cather," and "Cather's War and Faulkner's Peace: A Comparison of Two Novels, and More."

¹⁰David Williams, in *Faulkner's Women: The Myth and the Muse*, associates the tree in *The Sound and the Fury* as maternal (77) and Caddy as representing "the great tree goddess" and Benjy's "true mother" (77). Besides, he also associates Dilsey as a mother figure for Benjy. At the same time, Williams likens Benjy to a Christ figure and even makes special reference to the Easter dates and the structure of the Christian myth in the novel. Likewise, Philip Dubuisson Castille, in "Dilsey's Easter Conversion in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," argues that "the Passion Week serves as the book's main organizing principle" (423). He also calls Dilsey the "matriarch" (429), the binder who in failing to save the Compsons "gains a new perspective of her own family and moves toward reunion with them" (429). The mother figure and the Christian symbols dominate in Williams and Castille's reading of *The Sound and the Fury*. Correspondingly, the reference of Holy Mother and hence of Christianity is obvious in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Joyce McDonald, in *The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather's Southern Heritage*, explains the novel as Cather's "quest for order and civilizing forces" that she tries to achieve by merging "two seemingly opposing forces: the doctrine of Catholic Church and the ancient spiritual tradition of the indigenous peoples" (74). Janis P. Stout, in *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*, extensively discusses the confrontation of Christianity and pagan religion in the cave scene. Moreover, he likens the opening of the cave as "resembling genital labia" (62). In the

Murphy Lectures at Santa Fe Cathedral

Recently, Cather scholar and member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors John J. Murphy (Professor Emeritus, Brigham Young University), delivered a lecture titled "Revisioning Lamy's Church: Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*" for Santa Fe Cathedral's Adult Enrichment program in Santa Fe on Thursday, November 9.

More than sixty participants attended the lecture, thus accounting for one of the largest crowds ever in the series. A lively discussion followed the highly successful lecture.

scene we can associate the feminine image to pagan temptation while masculine control to Father Latour. An even more direct allusion to the mother is Marilyn Callander's claim that the two helpers of the protagonist in most fairy tales are "a tree with miraculous powers, and a loving deceased mother who intervenes with magic or miracle" (53). For more information see Marilyn Berg Callander's *Willa Cather and the Fairy Tale*.

³See Skaggs, "Cather's War."

⁴Baring and Cashford suggest that Mary Magdalen is the split image of Virgin Mary, both representing two extremes of women's sexuality. For reference see Baring and Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*.

⁵The Cult of Magdalen, forced underground, as noted by Luna Blanca in *Mary as Goddess: Mary Magdalen*, is linked to the Cult of the Black Madonna. Though there is much speculation as to the origin of the Black Madonna, some link her to "Sarah 'The Black Queen,' believed to be the child of Mary Magdalen, brought out of Egypt"; some link her to Isis; some suggest that "black represent[s] the face of the universal Goddess that Christianity does not positively acknowledge." See *Mary as Goddess: Mary Magdalen* at <http://www.northernway.org/twm/mary/magdalen.html> for more information and references. Baring and Cashford link the Cult of Mary Magdalen to the Cult of Black Madonna when they mention, "Statues of Black Virgins are often found on the sites of the ancient goddess . . . or where there was a cult of Mary Magdalene, with whom she was significantly associated" (587-88).

⁶See Williams 77-78 for more detail.

⁷Skaggs in *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* provides a detailed account of how Faulkner modeled his Compson family on the Shimerdas. She especially points out that the "beloved woman" in both the novels is "equated with trees" (64).

⁸See Cather's description of Magdalena's entry as Latour and Vaillant sit talking in Book VII Chapter I, which is ideally named "The Month of Mary": "The two friends were roused from their reflections by a frantic beating of the wings . . . She advanced in a whirlwind of gleaming wings, and Tranquilino dropped his spade and stood watching her" (219). The wings bring association of angels hovering around a deity, and the idea that they are all mesmerized by her sight can be seen in Tranquilino's reaction. There is also, however, some eroticism involved in the description. The word "roused" is a clear indication. The blending of the divine and the erotic exhibits that the two are reconciled in the figure of Magdalena while in the case of Caddy the same is definitely not evident.

⁹Besides Williams, see Castille's explanation, in "Dilsey's Easter Conversion in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," where he states that the "Passion Week serves as [*The Sound and the Fury*]'s main organizing device" (423).

¹⁰Castille describes the sermon by Reverend Shegog, in the fourth chapter, as the "pre-Christian parabola of death and resurrection" and also explains that it evokes a sense of "pre-Christian religious ritual and belief" (425). In fact, one can argue that Faulkner borrowed this notion of the assimilation of the primitive and the Christian into his narrative from *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

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A Farewell: Faulkner and Allusions to Shakespeare in Willa Cather's "Before Breakfast"

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Over the last forty years, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to investigating Willa Cather's use of allusion, examples of which can be found in each of her carefully crafted works. Yet, a brief survey of the scholarship on this matter leaves one with the sense that, while much has been done, there is still much left to be explored. One of the more intriguing avenues of such investigations, though still largely uncharted, is Cather's use of allusion to maintain a relationship with another figure of American literature, William Faulkner.

The personal interaction between Cather and Faulkner is not a relationship that is well documented, but the probability that the two met on more than a single occasion is quite high. Joseph Blotner recounts in his extensive *Faulkner: A Biography* a dinner party where both writers were present, though the potential for stirring conversation would have been small due to the alcohol Faulkner consumed prior to arriving (742). Merrill Maguire Skaggs, whose scholarship composes most of the investigation into this relationship, believes that Cather would have taken notice of the young Faulkner because of this evening ("Thefts" 125). Skaggs also establishes a second period during which the two had the opportunity to interact. In her 2004 article "Cather's War and Faulkner's Peace: A Comparison of Two Novels, and More," she notes that both Cather and Faulkner frequented the area of Washington Square Park in New York City during the late summer and early fall of 1921, providing ample time for the two to form a bond that would be played out through their literary creations (49).

This is scanty evidence on which to claim the existence of a relationship, yet Skaggs' conclusion to "Cather's War and Faulkner's Peace" is a stirring defense, and also an intriguing call to delve into this dialogue:

I'd like to suggest that in considering this pair of geniuses—the Faulkner and Cather Joseph Uργο has called “the horizontal and vertical axes in American literature”—we trust the evidence their work provides. They knew all is fair in love, war, and fiction. They recognized the finest literary and imaginative quality in each other's work. They had the shrewd judgment and ample self-confidence to trust their instincts on this one. They hailed each other with admiration and respect—as the master snakes they were: oleh, chief, grandmother. (51)

While the scales are light on tangible evidence of a face-to-face relationship, mutual respect is undeniable. There are a number of instances where “[Faulkner] publicly admitted admiring Cather at intervals throughout his career—early, middle, and late” (Skaggs, “Thefts” 116). And Cather seems to have returned the compliment at least one time in an aside about Faulkner. This occurs in her essay “148 Charles Street” and represents one of the few times that Cather allowed herself to comment on a living contemporary author (125).

Cather, however, did not need to limit herself to dropping names in order to demonstrate respect for her literary correspondent. She makes this quite evident in her story “Before

Breakfast” by conveying one last message to Faulkner.¹ This story is the concluding piece of Cather's final, posthumous publication *The Old Beauty and Other Stories*; she wrote it in 1944, almost three years before her death. The writing of this story must have held a particular significance for Cather as her hand was hampered by a brace and the act of writing necessitated the removal of this brace and would have incurred for her no small amount of pain. The story's personal significance is further underscored because Cather only undertook such an endeavor on one other occasion, to write “The Best Years,” which she intended as a gift for her brother Roscoe. To send her farewell message to Faulkner, however, Cather would have had to make sure he paid attention to this story. Cather does this by including details gathered from his novels, some of which she uses subtly while others, blatantly. Alongside these allusions, Cather incorporates a second web of references which allude to the works of another William: William Shakespeare, particularly his *Henriad*. Many of the allusions reference both authors simultaneously or suggest one through an allusion to the other, in no small part because Faulkner also often draws upon Shakespeare in his works.

When examining “Before Breakfast” in terms of these two webs of allusion, Cather's intent can easily be interpreted as a farewell message to Faulkner that prompts him to continue in their common pursuit while being careful in his craft. What is perceivable of the relationship between these two prominent authors suggests that it was not always a cheerful exchange, and in some cases may have even been a dynamic battle waged over the right to narrate and to own what is properly narrated. Yet the final tone of “Before Breakfast” suggests that such is not how Cather wished to end their repartee. While the first two sections of the story bode for a tense and unhappy conclusion, the final scenes of this story in many ways suggest acceptance of others, even taking pride in the endeavors of others, and the legacy inherent in allowing the younger generation to attempt their own feats.

A rather obvious reference to Faulkner occurs when the main character, Henry Grenfell, makes his journey to the coastline of his island. While describing a brook, Cather includes the title of one of Faulkner's most famous novels: “for the water was rushing down the deep-cut channel with *sound and fury*” (Cather, 767, emphasis mine; Skaggs, “Thefts” 126). Cather's choice here involves Faulkner's use of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for his novel while also representing a transformation of the phrase's connotation. The brook that Cather describes rushes headlong toward a waterfall to go crashing into the sea, which Grenfell believes bodes for an icy death. This image of a brook, however, has a power and strength that is highly divergent from the muddy puddle of a waterway that runs so prominently through *The Sound and Fury*. While Grenfell's brook suggests the plunging fate of the Compson family which Faulkner chronicles, the unnamed daughter of Cather's Doctor Fairweather—a name with particularly cheerful connotations—implies that such will not occur in the world of “Before

Breakfast.” The young Fairweather dives into the frigid waters and swims confidently, with spunk. Thus, Cather indicates that Faulkner’s sterile dissipation and disconnection does not replicate the intended end of her own characters. Nor need it end this authorial relationship.

Further, the names in Cather’s story often evoke characters in Faulkner’s fiction. As Cather reveals in this tale’s second section, Grenfell’s wife is named Margaret and is described as “being faultlessly polite.” Both the name and description call to mind Faulkner’s Margaret Powers of *Soldiers’ Pay* who continually and courteously manipulates scenes to preserve the pretense that death does not loom so closely for another character. Nor is this the only name taken from *Soldiers’ Pay*. In the initial sentence of the story, the name of Grenfell’s firm is “Grenfell & Saunders” (758). This incorporates the last name of the other pivotal female character of *Soldier’s Pay*, Cecily Saunders (Skaggs, “War” 50).

While Cather carefully imbeds this system of allusion to the works of Faulkner, she is also creating, often simultaneously, a network of connections to a myriad of plays by Shakespeare, which includes *The Tempest*, *King John*,² *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and the three parts of *Henry VI*, as well as each of the installments of the *Henriad*—*Richard II*, both *Henry IV*’s, and *Henry V*. While Cather overtly draws attention to this second system rather than the allusions to her contemporary, the number of Shakespeare’s works that she suggests as potential schema for examining the story number far more than a quick scan would suggest. Taken together, these allusions embed in the story connotations of succession and acceptance, as well as transformation, on a level that few except Faulkner could achieve.

The name Margaret suggests characters not limited to Faulkner as it, as well as the names of the two central men of “Before Breakfast,” are Shakespearean references. “Margaret” is the name of Henry VI’s wife who appears in all three of the plays bearing his name, as well as in *Richard III*. She “develops from an ingenuous young woman thrust into prominence, through a career as a scheming plotter and a courageous and persistent military leader”; and this characterization covers both her and Grenfell’s wife (Boyce 399). Further, Cather names the central character Henry and his son Harrison, replicating the patronymic name constructions of both Faulkner and Shakespeare while also referencing characters throughout Shakespeare’s histories, particularly the father and son roles of *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, not to mention Henry Sutpen in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*.

While these names subtly suggest Shakespeare, Cather alludes most obviously to him when one of his plays pops up physically within the story, in one of the two matching volumes that Grenfell’s son Harrison locates in his father’s valise. After entering his father’s room, Harrison sees his father’s personal case and notices that “[o]n top of his pyjamas [sic] and razor case lay two little books bound in red leather. Harrison picked up one and glanced at the lettering on the back. *King Henry IV, Part I*” (Cather 763). Grenfell immediately views this as an invasion of his privacy and rebuffs Harrison before Harrison notes the title of the second volume.

This intense, resentful reaction attaches a high level of importance to these volumes for Grenfell and marks them as significant to the story as a whole and as a reference for Faulkner. Cather’s description of Grenfell’s books is particularly

specific and appears to allude to a series of Shakespeare’s plays produced by JM Dent and Sons in England that is entitled *The Temple Shakespeare*. The volumes in this series measure thirteen centimeters in height and are bound in red leather with gold lettering along the spine. Thus, Cather’s description observes every detail of the series, and in Cather’s hands, the two volumes become an additional, oblique allusion to Faulkner; this time referencing the central character of *Sanctuary*, Temple Drake.³

Further emphasizing the importance of these volumes of Shakespeare, the incident between Grenfell and his son occurs in the second section of a three-part story, and the reference itself neatly falls at the center point of the story’s text. Thus, Shakespeare’s second part of the *Henriad* lies at the center of this story structurally, textually, and thematically. The play itself is considered by many to be Shakespeare’s mastery of the History Play (Evans 886). It is a play of binaries—Henry IV and Falstaff, as well as Prince Hal and the traitorous Henry Percy. Alternating scenes heighten tension between the scenes themselves, the characters depicted in them, and in the play as a whole. Shakespeare creates two paralleling stories that depict separately both the moral strength, yet misguided praise, of the father Henry IV as he continually lauds Henry Percy—also known as Hotspur—until Hotspur turns traitor. Additionally, it features the moral lapses of Falstaff who entices Hal to debauch himself as a thief, a waiter, and even as a mock king (Boyce 252-253). Most briefly, however, *Henry IV, Part 1* is the story of a son who begins to prove he deserves the right to be his father’s successor.

The relationships that Shakespeare constructs between parent and child are also evident in Cather’s story and have bearing on her literary conversations with Faulkner. The relationships between these father-son, or predecessor-successor, pairs are strained. Just as Henry IV does, Grenfell disapproves of the choice of lifestyle in which two of his sons, one of them Harrison, have chosen to engage; Cather does not seem to have accepted easily the modeling and thefts for which Faulkner seems to have turned to her work. This significance, moreover, is also woven into the story.

Grenfell perceives Harrison’s comment on the books in his valise as a violation of his privacy, and he resents “any intrusion on his private, personal, non-family life” (763). This, too, parallels a conflict between Henry IV and his son Hal that is at its most dramatic representation in the closing scenes of *Henry IV, Part II*. During this scene Hal believes his father to be dead, and the aggrieved son picks up and bears off stage the symbol of his father’s position, the crown. Henry IV, however, soon regains consciousness and denounces his son for having taken the crown, viewing it as an attempt to erase him and all that he has done as king. Cather herself may feel Faulkner’s crown-snatching premature.

The plays and the story provide, however, types of rectification or reconciliation for these intricately related individuals. Prior to the conclusion of Grenfell’s walk, he sees Fairweather’s daughter daringly take a swim in the ocean. He is shocked that she survives it, noting “the distance wasn’t much, but Lord! The cold,—in the early morning! . . . ‘Silly creature! Why couldn’t she wait till afternoon.’” But the moment is transformative for him. He cannot fail to respect the girl for having done it, especially since it was only for herself. Though he is not even aware of it, this alters his entire perspective so that “everything since he left the cabin felt reassuring, delightful”

(769). This revelation stands in stark contrast to his emotions while still in his cabin, which are the product of a sleepless night; a night spent contemplating the perceived violation of his son. Similarly, Prince Hal alters his father's perceptions of his character during the battle at the end of *Henry IV, Part 1*. In the final scenes, Hal slays Hotspur, a traitor to his father's reign, and fulfills the oath he makes to his father in the second scene of Act Three:

I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood
And stain my favors in a bloody mask,
Which wash'd away shall scour my shame with it. (*Henry IV, Part 1, 3.2.132-137*)

By fulfilling these words, Hal is able to prove to his father that he is worthy of succeeding as king, and King Henry accords Hal a place of authority in the maneuvers to quash the rebellion that Hotspur had attempted. Though it is not Harrison who is the performer of the analogous deed, the younger generation—through Fairweather's daughter and Hal—proves itself of both sufficient mettle in their acts and sufficient character in their demeanor in handling the aftermath of these acts that the elder generation must reassess their negative judgments. The conclusion to *Henry IV, Part 2* similarly provides an instance of reconciliation. While the ailing king misapprehends the actions of his heir, he refuses to allow Hal the opportunity to succeed him; Shakespeare crafts for his characters an emotional reconciliation that establishes a continuity for the Lancastrian line of kings, whose rise to power under Henry IV mirrors the construction of self and success that marks the life of Cather's central character.

Thus, in her story, Cather compresses two points of conflict and reunion into the story by alluding to both parts of *Henry IV*. Such a construction also has a bit of light-hearted nature to it. With it, Cather is taking the opportunity to have a little fun at her contemporary's expense. By specifically noting the name of Shakespeare's play *Henry IV, Part 1*, Cather calls attention to the fact that there are two plays named *Henry IV*. In so doing, she corrects an oversight in Faulkner's *Light in August* wherein he sends the character of Gail Hightower, a character bearing no small similarity to Cather's choice of central figure, to his library. There, Hightower bypasses his normal reading material because "this time . . . he chooses food for a man. It is *Henry IV* and he goes out into his back yard" where he promptly falls asleep (Faulkner 383).

Apparently, such fare was too heavy for the rut-bound Hightower. Faulkner's reference is unintentionally ambiguous: Is Hightower reading of the hearty Falstaff's engagement in life's comedies or the tragic story of the death of kings? In contrast, Cather neatly and knowingly plays on the ambiguity by asserting a matching, yet unnamed volume beside the *Henry IV, Part 1*. With the two volumes, Cather constructs this story around a reference that reveals far less than it conceals. By naming *Henry IV, Part 1*, she provides one scheme through which to analyze the story, yet she denies a list of all that she has compressed into the tale. There are far too many allusions to Shakespeare's plays to make any simple answer concerning what is the title of her unnamed matching volume. Every potential answer adds new implications to her comments or implied themes, and still she crafts her story to send a jovial jab at Faulkner while simultaneously preventing such limitations from restricting herself. Whereas Faulkner creates ambiguity in a misrepresentation, Cather accurately references

Shakespeare while reveling in the ambiguity. In this, she models another lesson to her literary friend before "breaking her pencil."

Cather's ability to interweave two such prolific and imaginative authors into a single, brief story suggests just one of the reasons that Marilyn Arnold marks Cather's writing as "being at once accessible and deeply complex—unequivocal on the surface and ironic or ambiguous underneath" (138). Cather can mention a single element and at the same time suggest a multitude of others. With such irony and ambiguity, as well as—I believe—affection, Cather crafts this story, her final message to Faulkner.

Notes

¹ A catalogue of other connections between this story and the works of William Faulkner as well as a more thorough examination of the history of the relationship can be found in Skaggs' "Thefts and Conversations: Cather and Faulkner," *Cather Studies*, 1996 Vol. 3: 115-136.

² Marvin Friedman investigates the connections that this story has to Cather's novel *My Mortal Enemy* while briefly addressing those to Shakespeare's *King John* in "Lifting the Death Chill: 'Before Breakfast' As Sequel to *My Mortal Enemy*," *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*, 45.3 (2002): 61-67.

³ The popularity of this series, which sold a quarter of a million volumes in its first year alone (Myers), demonstrates that such a reference by Cather would not have been lost on Faulkner. A more personal connection, however, is apparent due to volumes from *The Temple Shakespeare* being present in the libraries of both these authors. Joseph Blotner documents in his catalogue of Faulkner's library that it contained thirty-seven volumes drawn from the 1934 and 1935 editions (71) while a letter from Channel Bookstore to Cather in the Cather Collection of Drew University's Special Collections confirms Cather's order of *Measure for Measure* from the series in January of 1934. Additionally, her handwritten notes on the letter denote possible future title purchases from the series (Channel Bookshop).

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Faulkner's "Anse"-wer to Cather's Sick Rose: Anse Bundren as a Caricature of Anton Rosicky

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In her 1990 essay on Cather's "Neighbour Rosicky," Merrill M. Skaggs points out that the title character's name, "*Rose-sick-y* suggests the famous Blake poem "The Sick Rose" ("Cather's Complex Tale" 79). Skaggs explains that the "poem, in turn, supplies the given conditions of the story by summarizing Rosicky's physical predicament and his reasons for resistance to Doctor Burleigh" (79). While Rosicky's illness is the catalyst for much of the action in the story, where "he sets out to prepare all who are important to him for the lives they will live without him" ("Cather's Complex Tale" 79), the reference also indicates that Rosicky is a rose, a flower that is both beautiful and many-layered. Perhaps it is this analogy that allows "Cather [to create] in her character study of a simple man a story that is *itself* complex and multifaceted in form, without once undercutting the reader's admiration for Rosicky" (80). However, William Faulkner's reading of Rosicky is obviously less admiring of the character than most.

In 1996, Skaggs established the fact that, "at the end of her life, Cather engaged Faulkner in a significant literary conversation" ("Thefts" 115). Subsequent essays outlining this conversation reveal that it began in the 1920s, after the publication of Cather's novel *One of Ours*, and continued through the end of Cather's career.¹ Further study of the Cather-Faulkner relationship reveals a competition to publish responses to each other's work as quickly as possible, as well as a growing antagonism that sets the stage for Faulkner's transformation of Anton Rosicky into Anse Bundren.²

Although Faulkner claimed that "a story will choose its own style" (Skaggs, "Willa Cather's *Death*" 89), his creation of Anse Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* from the skeletal remains of Anton Rosicky shows that the author's style determines both the character's and the story's form. Like the "invisible worm" from Blake's poem, Faulkner attempts to destroy the "crimson joy" of Rosicky's character by focusing on the "dark secret[s]" that Cather has charmed readers into ignoring (poem qtd. in "Cather's Complex Tale" 79). Bundren is thus a disturbing distortion of Cather's "ideal man of the soil" (Vardamis 35). Like Rosicky, whose heart is failing him, Bundren "just can't seem to get no heart into anything" (Faulkner 26). Neither character, however, has a problem with his appetite: Rosicky deals with the loss of his crops by having his wife put together a picnic, and Bundren responds to the loss of his wife by ordering Dewey Dell to "[g]it up, now, and put supper on" (34). Faulkner makes his purpose clear by describing Anse Bundren as "a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist" (110). By grossly exaggerating Rosicky-type flaws in his depiction of Bundren, Faulkner uses Anse to undermine Rosicky's contention that "ow[ing] nobody, . . . plenty to eat an' keep warm, an' plenty water to keep clean" (Cather 606) are the only criteria for a simple man's happiness.

Faulkner envelops his character in Rosicky's mantra: Bundren repeatedly refuses help in order to avoid "owing" or being " beholden" to anyone; his trip to Jefferson is plagued by

"plenty water" in the form of a flood; and finally, once he reaches his destination, he purchases a new set of teeth to assist him in getting "plenty to eat," and trades in his cold, dead wife for a new one who can help him "keep warm." In fact, similarities between Rosicky and Bundren are evident throughout the two texts. Both characters are struggling farmers who are forced to deal with the issue of mortality: Rosicky must prepare for his own death, while Bundren must handle the death of his wife. Both men have grown children who are trying to balance their parents' expectations of them with their own ambitions. But perhaps most importantly, as Rosicky is the first to know and Bundren will likely be the last, both men are about to become grandfathers—a key symbol in the Cather-Faulkner connection.³

Despite these similarities, while readers have generally responded positively to Rosicky, the opposite is true for the character he metamorphoses into as Faulkner writes. Critics have consistently found fault with Anse Bundren, and with good reason. According to Rita Ripplette, Bundren has been called a "tyrannically inept schlemiel" as well as "one of Faulkner's most accomplished villains," and he has been accused of "laziness . . . hypocrisy, egotism, avarice and callousness" (313). In fact, Ripplette herself, while arguing that Bundren has been unfairly judged by most critics, admits that "Anse is not a man one would wish for as a husband, father or neighbor" (325)—exactly the roles in which Rosicky appears admirable. Given his status as a recognizably unappealing character, then, it may be difficult to establish his connection to Rosicky. However, the text holds enough clues to draw the attention of a forewarned or careful reader.

With the title of Cather's story in mind, Faulkner begins his critique of Rosicky from the perspective of the neighborhood. Taking his cue from the speculation of Rosicky's neighbors, Faulkner draws his most humorous distortion of the character in his representation of the simple man's failure to achieve financial success. Evidently noticing that "the gossipers in the drugstore [who wonder] why Rosicky didn't get on faster" actually provide the reason, Faulkner fastens on that reason: he and his sons "were rather free and easy, weren't pushers, and they didn't always show good judgment" (Cather 594). Then Faulkner uses these characteristics to pillory the Bundrens. To say that the Bundrens "didn't get much ahead" (594) on their trip to Jefferson would be a gross understatement, and there are plenty of neighbors and onlookers who are ready to supply evidence that the family doesn't "show good judgment."

Bundren's entire trip to Jefferson to bury his wife is filled with unheeded advice from neighbors and strangers alike, and each time he chooses to ignore these people he places his family in some sort of jeopardy. The threat begins before the family even leaves home, when neighbors discuss their concerns that the rain has caused the river to swell and the bridges to shake. Like Rosicky's neighbors, Anse's friends Armstid, Tull, and Quick gossip about Bundren's lack of good sense. Through their conversation we learn that Bundren has ignored their advice

to bury his wife in New Hope or to hurry his departure, and that he refuses Tull's offer of the use of his team. Of course, the Bundrens wait too long: the bridge is out, and in the fiasco that evolves as they try to cross the river, Anse loses his mules. As if they need more problems, Bundren also ignores Cash's warning that the coffin is not balanced; Addie's body goes floating down the river and Cash becomes seriously injured in the rescue process. As the trip continues, we learn from another outsider that the Bundrens have chosen to take the long way to Jefferson, rather than going "around up by Mount Vernon" (76), which would have gotten them there sooner and reduced the growing health risk of carting around a dead and decaying body. Finally, when the end of their trip is in sight, Bundren still shows poor judgment in ignoring the advice of "Armstid and Gillespie" to "sen[d] word to town and [have the grave] dug and ready," explaining that he "just never wanted to be beholden to none except her flesh and blood" (154).

Although the extent of Bundren's stubbornness proves comical on the road to Jefferson, his inability (or perhaps refusal) to make appropriate decisions is evident in the speech of other characters from the beginning of the novel. Tull gives us our first clue that Bundren generally does too little, too late, when he reminds Anse that he has corn that needs to be harvested. We know that the two have discussed the subject before, apparently to no avail, because Tull says, "I tell him *again* I will help him out if he gets into a tight" (22, italics mine). Bundren's response—"I aimed to get to it today. . . . Seems like I can't get my mind on nothing" (22)—obviously does not surprise his neighbor, for Tull, although still trying to convince Bundren to get to work, remains stoic about his chances.

This brief conversation serves several purposes for Faulkner. It not only reflects the complacency that will permeate Bundren's character throughout the narrative, but when combined with Anse's inability to sweat (mentioned in the opening pages of the novel), it also helps to establish a medical condition that Rita Ripplettoe views as a possible reason for the character's failure to act responsibly. Ripplettoe bases her argument on Darl's claim that his father "was sick once from working in the sun" (Faulkner 12), and suggests that Bundren suffered from heat stroke. According to Ripplettoe, a severe case of heat stroke can lead both to an inability to sweat and also a "condition of reduced mental abilities" (321). Thus, Faulkner not only establishes Bundren as an inactive character—which would explain his failure to "get ahead"—but gives him an excuse as well, albeit one less obvious for readers who prefer to view Anse's laziness as comic.

While Faulkner uses humor to depict Bundren's many flaws, he also critiques the romantic view of poverty in "Neighbour Rosicky." One of the techniques Faulkner uses is to infuse Bundren's dialogue with phrases from Rosicky. For example, borrowing words from Rosicky, Bundren tells his boys that they cannot understand the love that he feels for his dead wife. His claim, "You all don't know" (154) echoes Rosicky's admonishment, "You boys don't know what hard times is" (Cather 606). Recognizing the irony in Bundren's accusation that his children's love for their mother was never as strong or "pure" as his, the reader must then ask whether or not Rosicky's words should be taken at face value either.

Upon close examination, we find that Rosicky really does not know what hard times are, not because he has not experienced them, but because he refuses to acknowledge them. Our first clue that Rosicky's happiness is based at least partly on his own

strenuous denial comes when he reminisces about "*what he called* a happy home life" (598, italics mine) when he lived in New York. His description of that life includes his regular mental escape from everyday restlessness through both opera attendance and alcohol. By Rosicky's own account, these activities kept him occupied "[s]o he never had time to figure out what ailed him, though he knew something did" (599). Although Rosicky goes on to convince readers that "what ailed him" was a need to be connected with the earth, we find other forms of escape on and from the farm, as well. As Mary explains to their sons, "Your father wouldn't never take nothing very hard, not even hard times. . . . [Like when] that terrible hot wind . . . burned everything up on the Fourth of July" (606). Mary then tells the boys how their father took this opportunity to spend the afternoon soaking and picnicking with his children, explaining that since they had lost their entire crop, they "might as well enjoy what we got" (608). Although this scene demonstrates how "[u]nder the most adverse circumstances, 'everything amused [Rosicky]'" (Skaggs, "Cather's Complex Tale" 83), it also suggests that he chooses to redefine situations that make him feel powerless.

Rosicky's reluctance to face hardship head-on is similarly demonstrated in the story of his Christmas in London. Having previously responded to Polly's request to tell her about his days in London by lying—"I ain't no talker, Polly" (603)—Rosicky finally decides to share his most shameful memory with the entire family. After admitting to stealing the Christmas goose from a hungry family, however, Rosicky depicts his own role as that of Santa Claus, replacing the inadequate goose with a veritable feast. Thus, he preserves his own image as that of a happy man, despite the fact that the story is about starvation, desperation, and powerlessness. Moreover, the story shows how Rosicky is only able to escape his shame and destitution by his reliance on the kindness of strangers, another detail that Faulkner chooses to exaggerate in his depiction of Anse Bundren. Bundren continually insists that he "never wanted to be beholden to none" (154), but it is clear that the family would survive neither the trip to Jefferson nor their everyday lives if it were not for the kindness of both their neighbors and the "Christians" they expect to meet wherever they go.

While the Bundrens' reliance on the charity of others permeates Faulkner's ironic narrative, a striking perversion of Rosicky's character comes in the form of Anse's relationship to women. Just as "Rosicky seems to love women generally, and his wife Mary specifically" (Skaggs, "Cather's Complex Tale" 80), Bundren's devotion to his wife is proven by his determination to transport her body to Jefferson for burial—despite both hell and high water—and his general interest in women is proven by his introduction of the second Mrs. Bundren. Bundren's insistence upon carrying out his wife's dying wish, however, suggests more about their relationship than mere (twisted) devotion; it reveals a power structure that is surprising for a novel of its time. As Diana York Blaine explains, in *As I Lay Dying* "[n]othing is what it seems, the traditional narratives of patriarchal power have been usurped, and in their place a problemitized figure of the maternal holds brief and uneasy sway" (85). Blaine further argues that although Addie dies early in the novel, "[n]ot mere representation of object nor semiotic irruption, Addie symbolizes and speaks.

In this way she cannot be interpreted simply as another instance of our culture's documented obsession with silencing death and women, but as a postmodern permutation of it" (87).

Through Addie's words we come to understand the nature of her relationship with Anse. In considering this relationship, Addie "think[s]: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse" (Faulkner 116). By drawing attention to the name in this manner, Faulkner suggests a reason for calling his character Anse: he acts as an *answer* to Cather's character Rosicky. More importantly, Addie's internal speech suggests that she is actually in control of her marriage. According to Marc Hewson, Addie's consideration of her husband's name suggests that "Anse's fealty to linguistic determinism, the equation of idea and word, means precisely that he cannot be anything other than Anse" (556). Hewson explains that Anse "will always be 'the shape and echo of his word' [while Addie], on the other hand, determines that 'I [will] be I'—not a name to be spoken or a shape to be filled but an identity comprised of being rather than saying" (556). Thus, Addie reduces Anse to mere words, while establishing her own identity as more substantive.

Ironically, while this speech seems to discount words by establishing the word "Anse" as hollow, it simultaneously calls readers to reexamine speech in "Neighbour Rosicky," particularly the dialogue of Rosicky and his wife. Their interactions reveal that, like Addie, who maintains power over her husband and their children even after her death "by instilling her values in them and forcing them to undertake the journey" (Hewson 558) to Jefferson, Mary is actually the one in control of her household. This dynamic is evident from Mary's first conversation with her husband after his doctor's visit. When Rosicky attempts to avoid the subject of his heart by making small talk in Czech, Mary ruins his plans by demanding a report: "She replied in English, as being somehow the right language for conducting business: 'Now what did Doctor Ed say, Anton? You tell me just what'" (595). Not only does she dismiss her husband's attempt at avoidance, but by switching to English Mary shows that she has control over the very nature of their discourse. Moreover, when Rosicky tries to further distract her with flattery, Mary refuses to be swayed, flexing her linguistic muscles again by warning, "'don't try to put me off'" (595). Rosicky's continued attempts to avoid the subject, and his eventual sugar-coating of the reality—emphasized by the actual candy that he has brought home for her—are reminiscent of a child who is afraid to inform his mother about a transgression. At the same time, Mary's ability to see through his antics suggests that she is used to his avoidance tactics.

If Rosicky reveals a compliant nature in his relationship with his wife, the couple's dealings with their children show even more emphatically that Mary is the one in charge. When Rosicky tells his younger sons that he intends to lend Rudolph his car to take Polly into town, they initially protest. Rosicky responds by explaining his concerns for his oldest son's marriage. During his speech, the boys slowly begin to accept their fate, but not before voicing their resentment by asking, "'Oh, is Rudolph going to have the car every Saturday night?'" (601). This comment prompts more apologetic explanation from Rosicky, before Mary ends the discussion with, "'Sure it's all right, Papa'" (601). Although she addresses her husband as "Papa," suggesting that she is his subordinate, the fact that the boys end their protest at this point shows that they recognize who actually holds the position of power.

Perhaps the most startling instance of Mary's control over her husband occurs when she takes the reins in a business decision, and he casually concedes. An opportunity to "get ahead" presents itself when a creamery agent approaches the couple and offers to buy their milk. Pointing out how successful their neighbors have been in selling their milk, the agent goads Mary, not her husband, into an emphatic refusal of his offer: "'and look at them Fassler children! Pale, pinched little things, they look like skimmed milk. I'd rather put some colour into my children's faces than put money into the bank'" (597). When the agent tries to dismiss Mary's response by turning to her husband for the final answer, Rosicky says simply, "'I guess we'll do like she says'" (597). While this conversation certainly supports the narrative premise that "[s]he was rough, and he was gentle," it simultaneously calls into question the idea that "at bottom, they had the same ideas about life" (596). The fact that Mary voices her opinion first suggests that their tendency to agree "without discussion" has more to do with her inclination toward dominance and his toward concession than it does with their having "the same thought together" (596).

Faulkner makes it clear that he recognizes this discrepancy when he echoes the notion of single-mindedness in one of Tull's sections in *As I Lay Dying*. Upon the suggestion that he should accept the apparent impossibility of taking his wife's body to Jefferson, Bundren argues, "'[h]er mind was set on it,'" to which Quick responds "'[a]nd Anse is set on it too'" (57). While Quick's response implies that the Bundrens are of one mind, it also undermines that implication by establishing Addie as the person who had the thought and Anse as the one who adopted it. This dynamic replicates that of the Rosickys, where Anton accepts his wife's determination that the milk from their cows will serve to nourish their children's bodies, rather than their bank account.

The Rosickys' choice to keep all of the milk that their cows produce also provides another opportunity for Faulkner to critique the admirable simplicity that Cather ostensibly offers in her portrait of a simple farmer; it calls into question the premise that Rosicky knows what is best for his children. Cather suggests that father knows best when Rosicky tries to save Rudolph's marriage through Saturday night trips to town. Rosicky's conviction that Polly and Rudolph simply need to go and watch a movie provides further evidence that his strategy for dealing with difficult situations is one of escapism. In addition, the scheme provides a means for examining the town versus country dichotomy that is present in both "Neighbour Rosicky" and *As I Lay Dying*.

Not only does Rudolph's characterization as a "persuasive fellow" (Cather 602) suggest that perhaps he would be better off in business, but the young man's speech throughout the text also reveals his disappointment with his life as a farmer. Rudolph's response to his father's claim that all a man needs is land, food, and water is to assure him: "'I've got to have a good deal more than that, Father, or I'll quit this farming gamble. I can always make good wages railroading, or at the packing house, and be sure of my money'" (606). This response not only implies that Rudolph has felt the pinch of poverty more than his father would like to believe; it also suggests that his decision to pursue farming might not be appropriate for him—a sentiment echoed in Vardaman Bundren's question, "'Why aint I a town boy, pa?'" (Faulkner 43). While Rudolph's parents worry that Polly will turn him away from the farm, Cather provides evidence that it is

Anton and Mary who have allowed their worldview to improperly influence their son. We learn that Rudolph worked in a factory in Omaha in order “to get money to marry on. He had done very well, and they would always take him back at the stockyards. But to Rosicky that meant the end of everything for his son. To be a landless man was . . . to be nothing” (604). However, unlike his father, Rudolph appreciates the value of money in the bank. He believes that “there must be something wrong about his father’s way of doing things” (608), and he wants more for himself and Polly.

Like any good caricaturist, Faulkner picks up the detail of Rudolph’s discontentment and runs with it. In his portrayal of Cash Bundren, Faulkner shows how a father’s impractical insistence on a certain lifestyle can literally cripple his son. Although Cash is obviously a skilled carpenter, he is forced to restrict carpentry to a side job while giving priority to his father’s farm, and then to the trip to Jefferson. When Cash is injured during his father’s scheme to cross the river, Anse not only fails to seek medical attention right away, but he also exacerbates the injury first by jostling Cash’s body around in the back of the wagon, then by attempting to alleviate the pain through the use of a home-made cement cast. Bundren’s poor judgment finally causes such severe damage that Cash will “limp around on one short leg for the balance of [his] life—if [he walks] at all again” (162). Certainly, Cash’s leg is just one among many examples of the damage caused by Anse’s lack of responsible concern regarding his children. As Harriet Hustis points out, the Bundren children have all “been scarred,” for “the near-drowning of Cash, Darl, and Jewel, Cash’s broken and cemented leg, the near-loss of Jewel’s hard-earned horse, the theft of Dewey Dell’s money, and Darl’s ultimate incarceration in an asylum . . . [are all] more or less directly caused by their father Anse” (111). However, while the damage to the other children—and particularly to Dewey Dell, who is identified with a cow on more than one occasion—can be seen as Faulkner’s distortion of the damage caused by the Rosickys’ refusal to earn money from their milk, it is Cash’s victimization that is directly linked to Rudolph’s debilitation. Through the unfulfilled potential of these sons, the limited visions of their fathers prove to be endlessly restrictive. Readers can infer that if the two sons continue to bend to their fathers’ will—and for Cash there now seems to be little choice—then the next generation of Bundrens and Rosickys will be similarly limited. In this light, Cash’s predicament appears even worse than his brother Darl’s, because Faulkner, like Cather, has given readers a glimpse of what one young man in the family is capable of, and then shown how a father can destroy that potential.

Although Faulkner’s caricature invites readers to take a second look at “Neighbour Rosicky,” his critique does not undermine Cather’s story. Rosicky remains a rose even when we acknowledge his thorns. In fact, by exaggerating Rosicky’s flaws, Faulkner makes Cather’s ability to charm her readers into admiring her character that much more impressive. While *As I Lay Dying* provides a satiric examination of the struggles of a poverty-stricken family, “Neighbour Rosicky” remains as a “consistently upbeat tale [that] continues to hold an admiring public” (Skaggs, “Cather’s Complex Tale” 80). Although a comparison of the two reveals interesting dialogue between the two authors, neither story destroys the integrity of the other.

Notes

¹Skaggs has written several essays on the literary connection between Willa Cather and William Faulkner, including “Thefts and Conversation: Cather and Faulkner,” “Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and William

Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*,” and “Cather’s War and Faulkner’s Peace: A Comparison of Two Novels, and More.”

²“Neighbour Rosicky was serialized in *Women’s Home Journal* in 1930; *As I Lay Dying* was published in October of the same year.

³See Skaggs, “Thefts.”

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[The following is a listing of those donating items or making in-kind **with documented valued** donations to the Foundation **August 20, 2005, to December 31, 2006**. We are also grateful to these donations as every gift is important to the work of the Foundation. Thank you.]

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**WILLA CATHER
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The *Newsletter and Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 2500-3000 words; they should be submitted on disk in Microsoft Word and should follow *The MLA Style Manual*.

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

**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 From Red Cloud and Cather Foundation Updates

Moon Block Update

Plans are proceeding for the renovation of the Moon Block in Red Cloud. Completion of an environmental study, now underway, will pave the way for the Foundation to receive \$300,000 in HUD funds. These funds will support preliminary construction to structurally reinforce the building and allow work to begin in the basement area.

HUD requires the approval of the City of Red Cloud before any construction can begin. In January, Betty Kort and Eric Reed met with the Red Cloud City Council to discuss the Foundation's plans for the five-bay structure. Council representatives were excited to see the blueprints completed by the Foundation's architectural firm, Bahr, Vermeer, and Haecker and unanimously consented to approve moving forward with the project. The initial phase of construction is scheduled for completion within the next two years.

"The Road Less Traveled"

When NTV out of Kearney, Nebraska, visited the community of Red Cloud, the Cather Foundation was an important stop.

NTV uses the theme "The Road Less Traveled" to celebrate the features and activities that make small communities in Nebraska special. On January 16th the "road" led to Red Cloud. That day the Cather Foundation was hosting a regional medical meeting in the auditorium, which was covered by NTV. The mayor of Red Cloud, Gary Ratzlaff, came by to present NTV personnel with a key to the city. Stephany Thompson and Betty Kort were profuse in their description of the activities of the Cather Center. The Cather Foundation found this to be a good opportunity to promote the Cather Foundation and the city of Red Cloud itself.

The Executive Director's Report



With spring just around the corner, here at the Cather Foundation we are preparing for yet another spectacular Spring Conference. Our theme, as you may have read on the back cover of this issue, is "Willa Cather and Material Culture," inspired by Janis Stout's book by the same name. Our goal is to display artifacts and exhibit photographs of many of the artifacts located here at the Cather Historic Site in Red Cloud. In addition, we will show a videotape which will give audience participants an opportunity to discuss objects in the video itself. The artifacts are part of either the Cather Foundation collections or the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

As usual we will have a stellar list of resident experts and Cather scholars here to discuss the history and importance of those objects chosen for display. Janis Stout, the keynote speaker for the Passing Show Panel on Saturday, will underscore the conference focus on "material culture" as it influenced Cather and her writing.

Because many new items have been donated to the Cather Foundation in recent years, this seems to be an appropriate time to focus on the collections. Cather's clothing, newly donated from the Helen Cather Southwick Collection by the Jim Southwick family, will be one of many highlights of the weekend. With hundred of artifacts available, one of the difficulties of a conference of this sort is choosing the specific artifacts to highlight.

I feel more responsibility than usual for this particular conference. The Cather Foundation Spring Conference committee of the Board of Governors has commissioned me to photograph a number of the artifacts to be exhibited in the Gallery during the conference. Artifacts are everywhere within the Cather historic properties. The fact that they fit so neatly within turn-of-the-century spaces in the historic properties often obscures their value and importance. In her writing, Cather is known for her ability to stop action, focus on a specific object, and, in the process, magnify the importance of a material object. Photography has this same capability to hold the viewer's attention on an object and magnify its importance. I have the advantage of a marvelous camera and a state-of-the-art computer. At the touch of a few buttons, I can stop action, enhance and magnify an image, and give the viewer an opportunity to study a specific object. How impressive it is that Cather can accomplish this and much more with merely pen and paper and forever draw the world's attention to her artistry.

We hope our readers will want to take part in this particular conference. Again the dates are April 27-28, 2007. Mark your calendars.

Spring Conference Text Available!

Free shipping in time for Spring Conference



Willa Cather and Material Culture: Real World Writing, Writing the Real World
A compilation of essays on the consequence of material culture to Cather's work and scholarship

240 pages - illustrations - jacketed

The book that inspired the Spring Conference theme!

Hear editor Janis P. Stout's keynote address at the 52nd Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference in Red Cloud!

Orders received by March 31, 2007, will be shipped free of charge!



The photograph depicts the Turkish doll music box, circa 1860-70, from the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, described in Willa Cather's 1913 novel, *O Pioneers!*. The artifact is on display at the historic Garber Bank Building in Red Cloud.

Learn more about this particular artifact and hundreds of others when you attend the 2007 Willa Cather Spring Conference. (Photograph by Betty Kort.)

CATHER FOUNDATION
52nd ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE

Red Cloud, Nebraska

APRIL 27-28, 2007

Presenting
Willa Cather and Material Culture

Exhibiting and Interpreting Artifacts
From the Life and Works of Willa Cather

Keynote Speaker: Janis Stout, Editor of
Willa Cather and Material Culture

The theme of the 52nd Annual Spring Conference is Willa Cather and Material Culture, a topic inspired by Janis Stout's recent book by the same name. Stout's book contains a representative collection of scholarly essays which focus on material culture as it influenced Cather as a writer. Stout will be the keynote speaker for the Passing Show panel discussion.

Throughout the two-day conference, participants focus on a number of artifacts carefully chosen from among the hundreds available at the Cather Foundation Historic Site. Artifacts will be individually explored by scholars and experts with emphasis placed on the importance of these objects to the life and writings of Cather.



**Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial
and Educational Foundation**
413 North Webster Street
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