

# Willa Cather

## NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

Volume 57 • No. 1

Spring 2014

### Cather and Loti



*and*  
“the most beautiful  
things in the world”

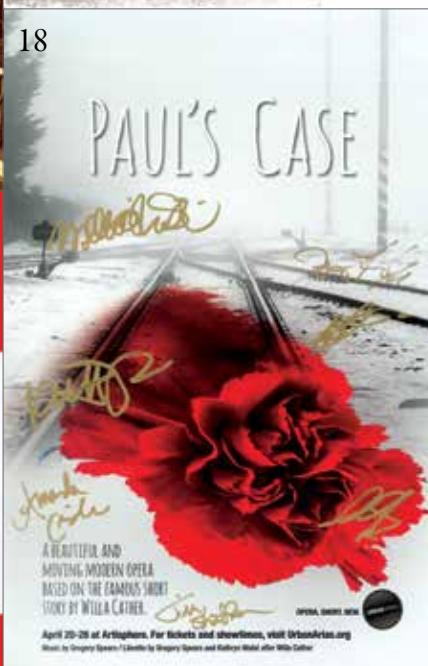
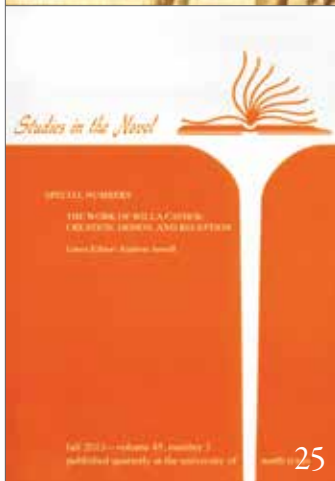
Eleonora Duse and “spiritual exultation”

“Paul’s Case” on the opera stage

# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW



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*On the cover: As Willa Cather wrote in a 1907 letter, Pierre Loti's works "are surely among the most beautiful things in the world. They stir one up like music and steal your senses away in the same fashion." Commemorative stamps honoring the two writers were issued in 1973—Cather's in the United States and Loti's in French Polynesia.*



## Letter from the President Thomas Reese Gallagher

Winter has given way to spring, the sandhill cranes have made their magical visit to central Nebraska, the school year enters its home stretch, and it is an extraordinarily busy time at the Willa Cather Foundation.

As I write this, final working drawings are being prepared by BVH Architects for our renovation of Red Cloud's Moon Block building into the National Willa Cather Center. We are deeply involved in the project planning that will permit the coming construction phase to proceed efficiently and economically. Our campaign to raise the funds for this ambitious project is proceeding on multiple fronts, including a new public phase. All in all, the forecast is good. We have not yet undertaken the nonprofit equivalent of turning over the sofa cushions; if we get there, we won't be hesitant or shy about it.

Springtime is also the season in which our regular education initiatives and programming schedule are augmented by a series of public events, for which preparations are well under way. May 14–18 brings the annual Prairie Writers' Conference, this year to be led by poet-editor Glenna Luschei and with guest artist Margaret Berry; June 5–7 brings the annual Spring Conference,

focusing on literature and the natural environment; and June 12–14 brings the special International Symposium, this year in Rome, exploring Cather the international traveler and the influence of European culture on her work. (Bonus points and public recognition for anyone who makes it to all three events.)

Our biggest news, however, is bittersweet: we are saying farewell to Leslie Levy, our Executive Director. Later this year Leslie will assume the directorship of the International Quilt Study Center and Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska, and her status at the Cather Foundation will change from director to esteemed friend. We are sad to lose her and wish her the best.

After a good deal of study and consultation, the Foundation concluded that a formal search for a new director was unnecessary—that, in fact, the solution to our problem was right in front of our eyes, in the person of our Associate Executive Director, Ashley Olson. Ashley has been with the Foundation since 2008 and assumed her current position in 2010. She is well known to the Foundation's community and extended family, many of whom expressed their pleasure upon hearing of this appointment. We're delighted that she will be assuming the role of Executive Director on April 21, 2014, just in time to guide us through a busy season and year. But, you know, no pressure.



*Ashley Olson*



## Letter from the Executive Director Leslie C. Levy

As my tenure with the Willa Cather Foundation comes to a close, I couldn't leave without sharing my deep regard and appreciation. It has been an honor to be a part of furthering Mildred Bennett's vision to preserve and celebrate Willa Cather's legacy. Helping to fulfill the Cather Foundation's varied mission has enhanced my life with dimension and diversity.

I have felt very fortunate to work in the beautifully restored 1885 Red Cloud Opera House, surrounded by the beautiful art exhibits in the gallery and the Foundation's extensive collection of Cather's works. Continuing the long tradition of excellent and diverse programming has been a pleasure and it has afforded me the opportunity to meet interesting and accomplished entertainers, scholars, and young performers. Consistent with the Foundation's

reputation for excellence, hard work, and determination, it has been a tremendous privilege to be a part of an amazing team that has worked to make the National Willa Cather Center a reality.

It has been an honor to work with the most knowledgeable and accomplished Cather scholars in the world, as well as those young scholars just starting on their journey. I have appreciated all that they have taught me. Their acceptance of me, even though I am not a scholar, and the friendship they have offered, are among my most cherished gifts from the Foundation.

As I have been challenged and rewarded, time and again these past few years, I am so very grateful to the Board of Governors and the Cather team for giving me the opportunities to grow professionally and personally. As a result, I have made some wonderful friends who have touched my life, and that of my family's, in very significant ways. I hold warm wishes for the Foundation's continued success.



# The South in Willa Cather's Early Stories: Waiting for Loti

Françoise Palteau-Papin | University Paris 13, Sorbonne Paris Cité

The “South” appears as a highly symbolic word in Cather’s early stories (those written before the ones most frequently anthologized in her lifetime). I am interested here in examining the word in all its occurrences, but not as the historic (and political) “Old South” of Cather’s Virginia birthplace, whose influence in shaping Cather’s imagination Joyce McDonald has studied in *The Stuff of Our Forebears*. Rather, the “South” I examine signifies an unorthodox mixture of Latinate, African, Ancient-Egyptian and pre-Columbian mythology, and also signifies a desire for freedom, which prepared her readiness for and her enthusiastic appreciation of the Southwest when she actually visited for the first time in 1912. The word brings to the fore ancient myths and cultures, together with a murky sense of evil and a dark mystery symbolized by the figure of the snake; the South keeps a sense of the ancient past, while erotically liberating her characters from bonding with the opposite, or “Northern” polarity, often associated with toil, duty, and lack of pleasure. In connection to the word (and geographic reference) “bluff” in the story “Lou, the Prophet” for example, the Southern bluff paves the way for her epiphanic encounter with “the South” of the Southwestern mesas and canyons, and what they came to represent for Thea Kronborg and other characters of her later fiction.

Cather elaborated her own mythology of the South early on in order to express a complex of emotions including a liberation from constraint, a source of creativity close to the unconscious and desire, combined with the thrill of danger, but also a shedding of superfluity, as best expressed in images of Southern deserts and greatly influenced by French writer Pierre Loti. One of Loti’s translators, Jay Paul Minn, explains that Loti’s 1895 travel narrative through the Sinai desert, entitled *The Desert*, probably served as a prime model for John C. Van Dyke’s *The Desert* (1901), the first book to praise the arid lands of the American Southwest. In turn Van Dyke’s volume became the grandfather of almost all American desert writing” (Minn ix).

For Cather, who was well-acquainted with the ancient classics and the Bible, the South is primarily a marker of Mediterranean culture, seen conservatively as the cradle of Western civilization from the Italian to the Middle Eastern shores. But that reference rarely comes unalloyed. As John Murphy analyzed the Count’s glass fruit in *Shadows on The Rock*, Cecile says that the fruit was “made by the Saracens.” He and David Stouck explain in a note about “the South” in the scholarly edition of that novel that

The term defines and generates Mediterranean and tropical associations in Cather, as in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, where it is used to describe the cathedral; in Quebec’s cold climate, such associations tend to the exotic and become life-supporting. The term “South” embraces subsequent items like the swallow and the parrot, shells and corals, and even the apothecary’s stuffed alligator. (439)

The exoticism of such mentions in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century Canada doubles with a sense of ancient history. The South harks back to the ages of ancient cultures, as far as Ancient Egypt and Greco-Roman history. The distance in time and space permits a Biblical brush with evil, as in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, when Father Latour balks at the rumor of pre-Columbian worship amongst the Tribe at Pecos (129), a rumor dismissed in the following paragraph, but allowed to appear to convey the rift between the American colonization of the New World and the dwellers of an ancient land. In a footnote to her novel, Cather then dismisses the historical explanation that the tribe’s extinction was due to the diseases brought by American settlers: “In actual fact, the dying pueblo of Pecos was abandoned some years before the American occupation of New Mexico” (130).

But before Cather grew older and wiser and felt the need to analyze historical facts more accurately, she reveled in non-historical, biased, fantastic associations about the South, as in the 1892 story “A Tale of the White Pyramid,” in which she compared the Nile “toward the south” to a mysterious serpent:

As I drew near the city the sun hung hot over the valley which wound like a green thread toward the south. On either side the river lay stretched away to where the low line of Libyan hills rose against the sky. The heat was very great, and the breeze scarce stirred the reeds which grew in the black mud down where the Nile, like a great tawny serpent, crept lazily away through the desert. (*Collected* 529)

The desert landscape of the Libyan hills, set against the mythical river Nile, seems to resonate with a sense of danger. The comparison of the river to “a great tawny serpent” seems to imply the progress of evil in its “lazy” movement “away through the desert.” The threat is not precise, unless it is the danger of delving into ancient, forgotten, and brutal cultures.



Likewise, the danger of exploring cultures remote in time, place and custom is also clear in *The Professor's House*. As Blake and Tom make their plans to explore the Blue Mesa, they decide that they “could manage to do the work ourselves if old Henry would stay with us.” Not wishing to make their “discovery any more public than necessary,” they “outlined their plan to Henry” in confidence. The Englishman assures them of his silence, saying “I’d ask nothing better than to share your fortunes. In me youth it was me ambition to go to Egypt and see the tombs of the Pharaohs” (203-204). He meets his death from snakebite on the Mesa, as if the “Tale of the White Pyramid” had finally deployed its metaphorical threat.

Such exoticism does not much reflect the distant culture of ancient Egypt, but reveals more about the budding writer’s desire for escape. In the poem “Are You Sleeping, Little Brother?” (first published in *Library*, in 1900), which Cather later claimed was about her younger brother and herself as children, she wondered if he had the same dreams of escape she had:

Are you dreaming, little brother,  
 Olden dreams that once were mine,  
 Glorious dreams of kingdom-sacking  
 where the tropic planets shine?  
 Do those dreams still dwell, I wonder,  
 In that little attic room,  
 Do they steal and take you captive  
 To far lands of Orient bloom? (*April* 54)

For Cather, the South bears a close connection to anything Latinate, as the English would define the Latinate countries in Old Europe, or as Americans would define South America. This is an all-encompassing definition, gathering all Latinate peoples under the words “blood” and “motherland”—notions that go back to Latinate conceptions of birth as defining one’s nationality, no matter how transplanted such notions were in Latin America. In Cather’s 1900 story “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” the narrator exclaims: “Ah that old hot, imperious blood of the Latins! It is never quite lost. These women had long since forgotten the wit of their motherland, they were dull of mind and slow of tongue; but in the eyes, on the lips, in the temperament was the old, ineffaceable stamp. The Latin blood was there” (*Collected* 551). Such “Latin blood” holds an essential component for the young Willa Cather because, in spite of emigration and cultural transfers, it allows her to lift the murky veils off erotic desire under the safety of the cultural displacement. In “The Dance at Chevalier’s” a Mexican character is addressed by the Italian nickname of “the Signor,” thus combining Southern Europe and South America, at least symbolically. He murders an Irish rival at a French dance in a dispute over the French girl Séverine Chevalier, and the poison which kills the Irishman combines a great mixture of Southern origins, from Africa to Mexico:

For it was no ordinary liquor. An old, withered Negro from the gold coast of Guinea had told how to make it, down in Mexico. He himself had gathered rank, noxious plants and poured their distilled juices into that whisky, and had killed the little lizards that sun themselves on the crumbling stones of the old ruined missions, and dried their bodies and boiled them in the contents of that flask. (*Collected* 553)

There’s a whiff of Hawthorne’s noxious, lizard-killing plant in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844) in Cather’s description of the lethal potion. The ingredients seem to have garnered the depths of Catholicism, as the lizards that are used in the potion are the ones “that sun themselves on the crumbling stones of the old ruined missions”—possibly echoing the Spanish Conquest and its bloody history in the casual mention. In ancient civilizations, the



Pierre Loti, 1892.





*Queen Pomaré IV of Tahiti (1813-1877): Loti's own drawing, from a photograph by Charles Burton Hoare, was included as an engraving in an 1898 version of his *Le Mariage de Loti*, the autobiographical novel in which Pomaré appears as a character. Originally published in 1880, *Le Mariage de Loti* was one of the early works marking the transformation of Louis Marie Julien Viaud into Pierre Loti. In an apocryphal account of the origin of his pen name, Queen Pomaré christened him Loti "after an oceanic flower." *Le Mariage de Loti* is one of the stories said to have provided a basis for *Lakmé*, the opera by Léo Delibes.*

dangers of passions, and the clear link between Eros and Thanatos, were duly acknowledged, bringing to the fore the repressed side of contemporary, more polished manners.

As she grew older, Cather's taste for exoticism in literature is clear in her correspondence as well, but she learns to keep the mystery of the danger muted, while paring down the gushing style associated with the South. The mention became more refined and less of a caricature, but retained its original power of suggestion. In a 1907 letter to Harrison G. Dwight, she praises Pierre Loti's fiction highly:

Tell me, why do you so scorn Loti? If anyone told me they saw a trace of Loti in anything I had done, I'd swoon with joy. And here you are indignant at such a suggestion. I don't know the new one you read but "Le Pêcheur d'Island[e]", "Le Désert", "Le Roman d'un Spahi" and a dozen more are surely among the most beautiful things in the world. They stir one up like music and steal your senses away in the same fashion. (January 12 [1907] *Selected* 101)

In a previous letter to Dwight, who was visiting Italy, she asks him to "find stories" for *McClure's Magazine*: "There is nobody here who would not like the 'outlandishness' and picturesqueness, provided that you can make the story run a little hotter and swifter through our atmosphere." (October 6, 1906 *Selected* 98). In 1906, she was keen on having such southern imports run a lively new spirit in *McClure's*. But Loti was the writer she had in mind as a model for fiction.

Cather read Loti in French, and she mentions his narrative *The Desert* in her letter. It recounts a one-month expedition Loti undertook across the Sinai desert in 1894, at the slow pace of a caravan on camel back, across the jurisdictions of several dangerous tribes of Bedouins. The novel was published in 1895, and went through many French editions, but was translated into English only in 1993 by Jay Paul Minn. Retracing the Biblical journey of the Hebrews led by Moses across the wilderness, Loti arrived in Gaza from the South on Easter, having failed to renew his faith, but having experienced the stark beauty of inhospitable deserts, which he describes in unornamented and beautiful poetic prose. It is his most pared down, least ornamental work, and considered by many (Bruno Vercier, for example, a prominent critic of Loti), his most poetic. The Cather-Loti parallelism bears many interesting points regarding our concerns about the South, and his works may have had a profound influence on her.

First, there is an odd biographical parallelism, which may have built a mirror image for her when she was looking for models to start her career as a writer. Like Cather, Loti long dreamed of Africa and foreign lands before he could visit them as his autobiographical novel *Le Roman d'un enfant* attests (1890; GF Flammarion, p. 118). The deserts of Africa and the Middle East helped him escape from the confines of Rochefort, his provincial hometown. But the parallelism runs deeper than life similarities and deals with their works as well. Loti incorporated foreign words into his novels to convey a sense of the exotic reality of things, beyond the scope of his native tongue, much the way Cather incorporated Mexican and Spanish words in her Southwestern novels (arroyo, adobe, and others). As early as in 1908 she sent her story "The Enchanted Bluff" to Sarah Orne Jewett, showing her regard for what she calls "a kind of Latin influence" and emphasizing her use of loan words: "In the West we had a kind of Latin influence, as you had an English one. We had so many Spanish words, just as you had words left over from Chaucer. Even the cow-boy saddle, you know, is an old Spanish model. There was something heady in the wind that blew up from Mexico." (October 24 [1908] *Selected* 116-17). In Loti's case, commentators speak of the "strange bilingual poetry" of his prose (Vercier, p. 35), when he uses words borrowed from African

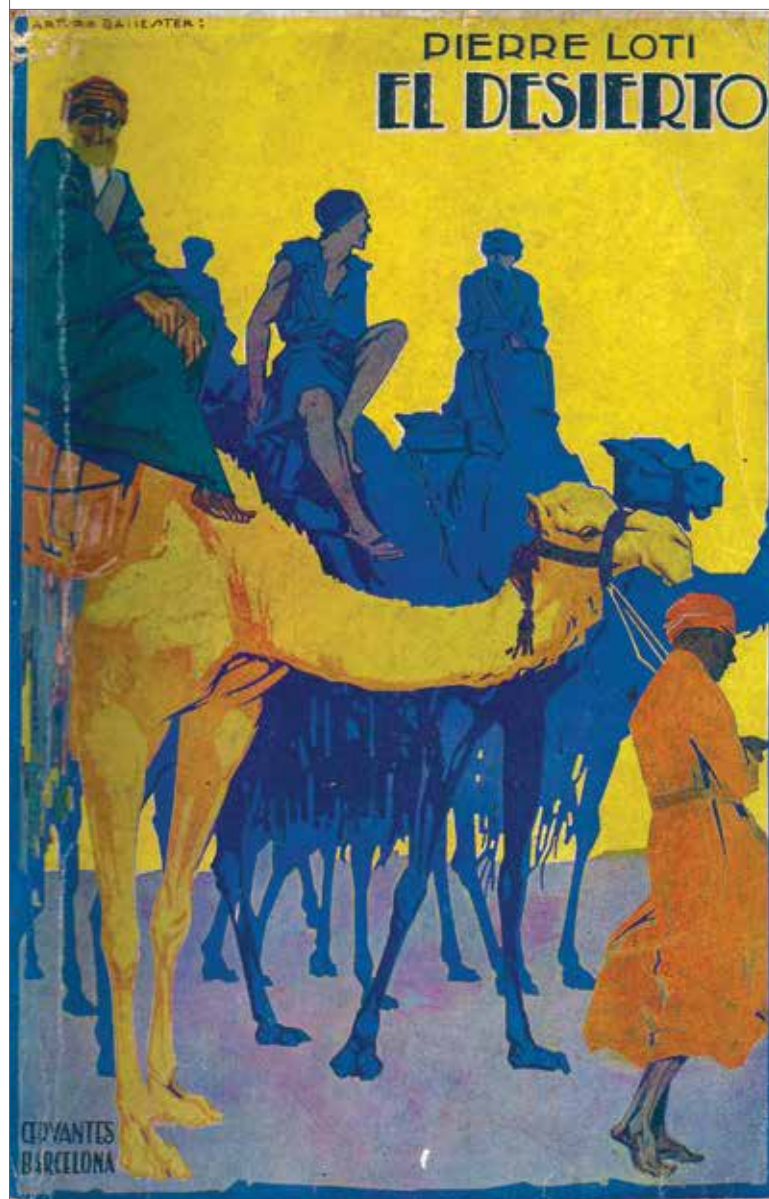
languages to “deterritorialize” his French expression, to borrow a word coined by Gilles Deleuze about Melville’s prose (93). Most importantly, both writers share a similar treatment of the South when they assert a southern polarity for their characters and for their plots. Doing so, they manage to give a new form to the contingent meanings they shape. Their writing changes remarkably, shedding superfluity and coming closer to a sharp sense of the present, to an authenticity that stands out on the page. Or, to phrase it differently, they find a new literary form to express immanence. Loti could be a decorative writer in his novels, in which he had not thrown the so-called fictional furniture of the nineteenth century out of its windows. His novels were not “démouillés,” to use Cather’s French term. But in his travel writing, he did get rid of superfluity. The exotic sense of the “South” one feels in Loti’s fiction comes across in his fascination for silence and for empty spaces, full of the danger of losing one’s life and one’s soul, but ripe with the possibility of finding something essential about oneself. Loti found something dating back to the creation of the world in such places, as in the following passage from *The Desert*, strangely presaging *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, in the bishops’ robe color as well as in the geological formations of the landscape; thus he writes with precision of

that chaos of granite that is Arabia has not yet finished its evening magic: between a green sea and a green sky rise mountains, the bases of which are of a violet found in bishops’ robes and whose peaks are of an orange-pink—but an unusual, indescribable pink that persists after the sun has gone down, as if there were fire burning inside, as if everything were going to be melted together soon, as if the great furnace of cosmic creation had reignited into cataclysms and destructions of worlds . . . (73-74).

In the deserts of Loti, one comes close to cosmic understandings which may not be named, and are best approached through music and sound, much as Cather’s South fosters the musical genius of Thea in *The Song of the Lark*, thus enabling the character to produce true art. Father Latour likewise delights in the bell made for his cathedral, exclaiming: “And even now, in winter, when the acacia trees before the door were bare, how it was of the South, that church, how it sounded the note of the South!” (283). A musician himself, Loti had an ear for music, much like Cather. He was very sensitive to the sounds of Arab tambourines, or of Asian and African instruments and their different scales. But his fine ear is also attuned to the complexities of silence in the wilderness he passes through. He is highly conscious of the limits of description when he says tentatively: “I would like to

try describing this nameless desert intersection” (76). To give a sense of the otherworldly South, his prose uses rhythm in a masterly way, much like Cather’s. He juxtaposes elements in succession, building up a landscape from parataxis, step by step, in the slow rhythm of his sentences, which sounds almost static, as when he describes rare trees in the desert (not unlike the cruciform tree in *Death*):

Two or three thin date palms and weird doom palms with multiple trunks wave long erratic branches; and each holds aloft a bouquet of yellowed fans. These are plants of antedeluvian appearance, motionless in the sun, against the ashlike and misty background of the pink granite rock. . . . A solitary stork that was perched there asleep spreads its wings to follow us. And my wagtail from yesterday flutters in my shadow and is still keeping me company . . . (77).



A 1937 Spanish edition of *Le Desert* from Editorial Cervantes, Barcelona.



Loti is a master at enhancing the silence through the barely perceptible noises of nature, as in this desolate description, the “flutter” of two isolated birds is the only indication of life. When the eye has diminished perceptions at nightfall, the lack sharpens the observer’s awareness, after a long day of sunlight, as it later does for Tom Outland on his mesa: “Beyond the water that is beginning to rustle in the night wind, Arabia is just a grayish band, and it suddenly seems farther away” (74).

In a way similar to Loti’s, the rustles of the vegetation and the elements in the “hot south breeze” are expressed as escaping the scales of music, as a murmur coming from nature itself, in pre-cratylic fashion, in Cather’s 1893 story “The Elopement of Allen Poole”:

He turned aside into a road that ran between the fields. The red harvest moon was just rising; on one side of the road the tall, green corn stood whispering and rustling in the moonrise, sighing fretfully now and then when the hot south breeze swept over it. On the other side lay the long fields of wheat where the poppies drooped among the stubble and the sheaves gave out that odor of indescribable richness and ripeness which newly cut grain always has. From the wavering line of locust trees the song of the whip-poor-will throbbed through the summer night. (576)

The fullness of the summer night is here pictured in the cultivated soil of Virginia, where Cather placed this early story, but she later conveys a similar sense of fullness in the deserted landscapes of the Southwest she visited for the first time in 1912. It is a well-documented epiphany to feel a sense of otherworldly plenitude in wild nature, as Cather’s 1892 Nebraska story “Lou, The Prophet” expresses:

Then he thought a strange light shone from the south, just over the river bluffs, and the clouds parted, and Christ and all his angels were descending. They were coming, coming, myriads of them, in a great blaze of glory. (536)

Cather learned to omit such explanatory passages in her later stories and novels. She learned the art of suggestion, the value of “the thing not named” and of picturing the full from a void, much in the way Loti does in his novels and his travel narrative *The Desert*. Yet the escape to the Southwest of her hermitic character Tom Outland retains the power of Lou’s mad vision, in a manner

that may be restrained but is not subdued, echoing Lou’s epiphany which takes him south:

He prayed more than usual that day, and when they sat eating their dinner in the sunshine, he suddenly sprang to his feet and stared wildly south, crying, “See, see, it is the great light! the end comes!! and they do not know it; they will keep on sinning, I must tell them, I must!” . . . He kissed them all tenderly and blessed them, and started south. (539)

Transposed in less gushing style, this could be read as Tom Outland’s leitmotif when, in an era he perceives as crassly materialistic and limited, he cannot get the Smithsonian Institution interested in the archeological relics of a tribe that he deems more worthy of respect than his contemporaries, or Professor Godfrey St. Peter when he contemplates the lake from his den’s window to escape the bitterness of his similar disgust in his family’s consumption habits and short-termed historical memory. Both echo Cather’s own mistrust in the 1920s, an era she seems to have considered too materialistic and not enough concerned with culture and art, or the essential art of life nurturing. In the 23rd section of Loti’s travel narrative, two paragraphs encompass a contrast that may have provided a model for Cather’s effect of pitting the ruins of the Ancient People that delight Tom



Pierre Loti, 1900.

Outland and the blue lake Michigan of St. Peter’s childhood against the corruption of the surrounding materialistic world. Loti first mentions the Gulf of Arabia, before his next paragraph describes the ruins of an abandoned citadel:

The sea alone, the extraordinarily blue sea with its extraordinarily sharp edges, seems something real and tangible. But one could say the sea is suspended in a vacuum, in a kind of great pink haze—and this is the terrifying and hard granite chaos of the desert. . . .

Toward three o’clock, on a small island not too far from shore, our astonished eyes, which have not been used to seeing human constructions, perceive the ruins of a citadel and its black battlements in the Saracen style. It seems this used to be a convent of solitary monks in the style of the Sinai Convent. But this retreat had been abandoned for a hundred years. (76-77)



In her early readings of Loti as well as in her early stories, Willa Cather had “started south” long before she ever went there, in her desire for freedom, on the outlook for new forms of novels that might manage such southern openings: *O Pioneers!* inserts a Latin blood story of passion and murder in its stable agricultural frame plot, *The Professor’s House* inserts “Tom Outland’s Story” as an opening vista in an otherwise stifling life, and even shy Cécile Auclair encounters the uncouthness of peasant life on the Île d’Orléans in *Shadows on the Rock*,



*Pierre Loti in the pagoda room of his home in Rochefort, France, 1892. From an album of photographs entitled Galerie nos contemporains chez eux by Dornac (pseudonym Paul Cardon) in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.*

although she experiences it as a failure and her sense of escape remains limited to the Count’s glass fruit from the Saracens and to the shells from southern seas. Escaping the here and now as well as stepping outside the frame of narration, the South is the myth that bridges dichotomies for Cather, that brings closer what cannot be united, much as “Tom Outland’s Story” brings two pictures together, the page from Virgil’s *Aeneid* and the vision of the Mesa, one forever eluding the other, much as the real and art never quite meet, the better to enhance each other. Like Loti’s travel narrative, which I contend had a great influence on Cather, the South empowered her to shed superfluity. Tapping the depths of history, the citadels of the past, and the bareness of the southern deserts, she could express the immanence of the present from her southern polarity, in new forms.

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# Willa Cather's Intertextualization of Pierre Loti's *Iceland Fisherman* in *O Pioneers!*

Richard M. Berrong | Kent State University

*Cather confessed that she would swoon with joy if anyone saw traces of Loti in her work.*

—James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (1987)

*We have handicapped ourselves by fashionable judgments; by critical assumptions made, held, and never reexamined; by our own ignorance of the nineteenth-century milieu in which Cather developed (who now reads Alphonse Daudet, Alexandre Dumas, Pierre Loti, or George Sand?); and by the neglect of clues and allusions within the work that in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (to give only one example) would have drawn forth tomes of analysis.*

—Bernice Slote, "An Exploration of Cather's Early Writing" (1982)

Since Julia Kristeva's article, "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman" (1967), on the Mikhail Bakhtin book subsequently published in English as *Rabelais and His World*, literary scholars have taken to examining how various authors have made what Kristeva christened "intertextual" use of the works of their contemporaries and predecessors. Of course, different scholars have used "intertextuality" to mean different things, and so to review all that would take an article in itself and not tell us anything much about Cather's use of Pierre Loti's *Iceland Fisherman*. As I use it here, intertextuality is allusion in one text to a previous text with the purpose of making at least certain readers of the new text recall the previous one and consider how an awareness of the older work might shape their understanding of the new one. Thus Cather's use of Loti's *Iceland Fisherman* (1886) in her real "first" novel, *O Pioneers!* (1913).

Despite the fruitful results of such examinations, however, some continue to ignore authors read and even admired by those whom they study. Bernice Slote's admonishment suggests the danger of such ignorance when dealing with Cather's work. During her time, an ignorance of the work of Pierre Loti would have seemed strange. He had been elected to the French Academy in 1891 at the unusually early age of forty-one, and had been hailed by American intellectuals such as Cather's admired

Henry James even before then. In 1888, in an article published in the *Fortnightly Review*, James declared Loti to be a "remarkable genius" and singled out the author's masterpiece, *Pêcheur d'Islande/Iceland Fisherman*, as "to my sense perfect" (James 482, 500). As the epigram that begins this essay demonstrates, Cather shared James' enthusiastic admiration for the French author. A letter she wrote to her Pittsburgh friends George and Helen Seibel in August 1897 indicates that she read it—in French—by then. Cather knew that some dismissed Loti because of the sentimentality in certain of his works (Cather to Harrison G. Dwight, January 12 [1907], *Selected Letters* 101-02), but that didn't deter her from assigning *Iceland Fisherman* to her students in Pittsburgh when she taught there from 1901–1906 (*Willa Cather Remembered* 45).

Despite such indications of Cather's interest in Loti in general and *Iceland Fisherman* in particular, there has evidently been little or no serious examination of her work by a scholar equipped to catch evocations of it. In his *Willa Cather and France* (1988), Robert J. Nelson made no mention of Loti. In an article published seven years later, John P. Anders lamented that "Cather's connections with the once popular Loti have suffered the same neglect he and his work have since his death in 1923" (Anders 16), yet the online MLA Bibliography reveals no further studies of Loti and Cather since Anders's article.



*The illustrations in this essay are from an 1893 French edition of *Pêcheur d'Islande* published by Calmann Lévy. They are the work of the artist Edmond Rudaux, engraved by Jules Huyot.*



That this lack of attention to an author we know Cather admired has in fact handicapped our appreciation of her work, to use Sloté's verb, is apparent in one of her most popular novels, *O Pioneers!*. From its very first sentence, Cather presents the small Nebraska town of Hanover as a fleet on an ocean beset by a storm:

One January day, thirty years ago, the little town of Hanover, *anchored* on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away. A *mist* of fine snowflakes was curling and *eddying* about the cluster of low drab buildings . . . some of them looked . . . as if they were *straying off* by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence. (11-12; emphasis mine)



This evokes ships caught in a storm at sea, but as Robert Thacker has demonstrated, the Great Plains of North America had been evoking comparisons to the sea since the time of the first Spanish explorers, so Cather is following in that tradition (14). It is not until Cather takes us inside one of the Hanover stores that we realize she is specifically intertextualizing the opening scene of *Iceland Fisherman*, which takes place on a fishing boat in the North Atlantic off the coast of Iceland. “The overheated store . . . reeked of pipe smoke, damp woolens, and kerosene” (20), she tells us, a sentence that recalls Loti's opening observation that, in the cabin of the *Marie*, “there was a fire in a stove; [the fishermen's] damp clothing was drying, giving off steam that mixed with the smoke from their clay pipes” (1: 1).<sup>1</sup>

By the time *O Pioneers!* was published in 1913, *Iceland Fisherman* had appeared in the United States in five different English translations, some going through multiple editions; this fact, as well, indicates Loti's popularity during the late-nineteenth

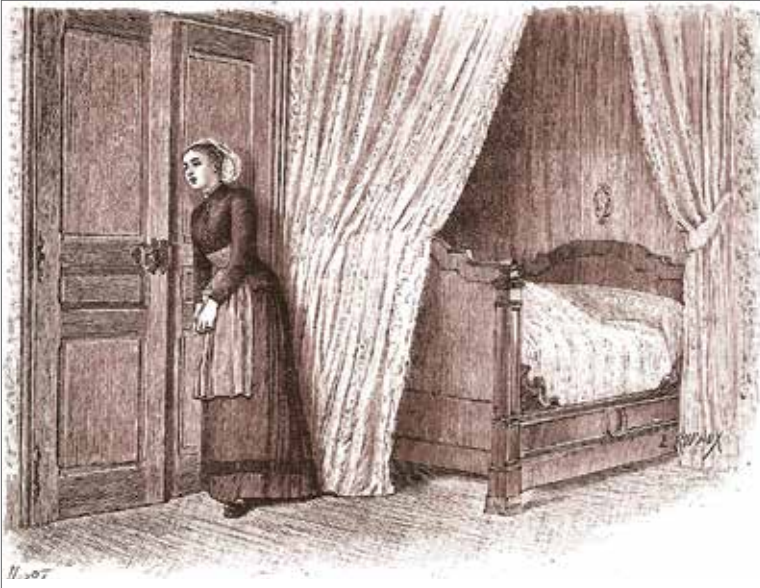
and early-twentieth centuries. Among them, there were Clara Cadiot's (Gallsberger: 1888, 1891; G. G. Peck: 1894); Anna Farwell de Koven's (McClurg: 1889, 1893, 1896, 1889, 1903, 1908, 1909); Helen B. Dole's (T. Y. Crowell: 1896); and H. A. Melcon's (A. L. Burt 1901). Also, an unnamed translator's was first published in New York in 1902 by Werner, P. F. Collier, and D. Appleton with an introduction by the French ambassador to the U.S., Jules Cambon.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Cather could have counted on at least part of her audience recalling the storm scenes in *Iceland Fisherman* while reading the opening of *O Pioneers!*, and perhaps even being struck by the similarity of the descriptions of the inside of the Hanover store and Marie's cabin that occur in the first chapter of each novel. The question then arises: why would she have wanted at least part of her audience to think of Loti's novel while reading hers?

Susan J. Rosowski has shown that Cather was aware of the development of painting in France during her era and saw parallels between some of it and what she hoped to accomplish in her work. Mark Facknitz has recently demonstrated the influence of the Nabis' use of strong colors on some of that work, and more generally Cather's great interest in the French painters of her era. Similarly, Joseph C. Murphy has illustrated the influence on Cather of American tonalist painters, whose work sometimes resembled some of Monet's earlier canvases; he has compared one passage from *O Pioneers!* to an 1891 painting by George Inness, *The Clouded Sun* (102-103). John J. Murphy has pointed out that when Carl observes Alexandra and Marie together in the latter's orchard in *O Pioneers!* it is “like an impressionist painter's study” (120). In other words, Cather was interested in incorporating aspects of innovative contemporary painting into her work, and saw much of that innovation as coming from France.

When it came to doing in literature what painters were doing on canvas, Loti was a standard for Cather. In an article for *The Library* in 1900, she wrote that a painting by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), a Black American artist who had been studying and working in France since 1891, “reminds me of Pierre Loti's faculty of infusing absolute personality into environment, if one may compare two such dissimilar mediums as prose and paint” (*World* 762). She repeated this line verbatim a year later when referring to other works by Tanner (845). Painting and prose may have struck her as naturally dissimilar, but when it came to writing in a way that could in fact suggest painting, Loti was, for Cather, a memorable example.

It is therefore not surprising that when she undertook to do just that, Cather should have remembered Loti, and in particular *Iceland Fisherman*, his most painterly novel.<sup>3</sup> Rosowski specified one way in which Cather incorporated French Impressionism into





*O Pioneers!*: “like the Impressionists, [Cather sought] to present the mind in the act of perceiving” (57). There are several examples of this in the novel. When we first meet Alexandra Bergson’s adult older brothers, Oscar and Lou, for example, we start, before we ever see them, by hearing unexplained heavy tread: “There was a sound of heavy feet in the kitchen. Alexandra went to the door and beckoned to her brothers, two strapping boys of seventeen and nineteen” (31). Cather lets us follow Alexandra’s perception of the sound of the heavy feet, and then, when she moves to the door and can see the individuals who made that sound, her realization that the cause was her brothers.

This narrative technique was an extrapolation from Impressionist painting of which Loti made considerable use in *Iceland Fisherman*. In fact, he used the same “off-stage” sound, heavy footsteps, repeatedly to give us a chance to observe the mental processes of his female protagonist, Gaud Mével, as she dealt with her sensory impressions and derived information about the world around her from them. When she walks out to Pors Even in search of the man she loves, Yann Gaos, for instance, she is unable to find him when she arrives, so visits the home of his parents. At one moment while she is touring the second floor she hears heavy footsteps on the stairs:

A somewhat heavy footstep on the stairs made her tremble.

No, it wasn’t Yann, but a man who resembled him notwithstanding his already white hair, who was almost as tall and who stood as straight. Yann’s father returning from fishing. (2: 3)

Here the mental processes are more detailed. “No, it wasn’t Yann,” an example of free indirect discourse, makes it evident that Gaud had assumed the heavy steps to be Yann’s, but then revised her analysis when the footsteps’ producer appeared and the visual

impression contradicted her initial assumption based on the oral impression. Gaud then analyzes the visual impression, discerns the man’s resemblance to Yann, and assumes that he must be in the same family. He also has white hair, and so is older. Gaud therefore concludes that this man must be a Gaos of the previous generation. Since he entered without announcing himself, he is most probably the head of the household, Yann’s father, she concludes. For several lines Loti has us watch as Gaud works with the information available to her through her senses to arrive at an understanding of those impressions and the world around her.

Loti employed this particular extrapolation from Impressionism again late in *Iceland Fisherman*, which may explain why Cather chose to use it as well, and why she could have imagined that her use of it would recall Loti’s novel to some of her readers. Near the end of the French narrative, when Gaud has been waiting for months without word for Yann to return from the sea, she again hears footsteps coming from outside her range of vision.

Suddenly a man’s footsteps, hurried footsteps on the path! Who could be passing by at such an hour? She sat up, shaken to the depth of her soul, her heart stopped beating. . .

Someone was at the front door, they were climbing the little stone steps. . . .

Him! . . . Oh! Thank heaven, him! They knocked. Could it be anyone else! . . . [. . .] The Leopoldine had probably arrived during the night and dropped anchor across from the house in the bay off Pors-Even,—and he was running [to greet her]. She arranged all that in her mind with the speed of lightning. [. . .]

“Ah! . . .” And then she drew back slowly, sinking down, her head dropping on her chest. Her beautiful madwoman’s dream was over. It was only Fantec, their neighbor. (5: 10)



Again Loti starts with an aural impression, all Gaud could have experienced from inside the hut—“suddenly a man’s footsteps, hurried footsteps on the path!”—and proceeds to follow her consciousness’s analysis of it and the subsequent visual impressions.

Whereas in *Iceland Fisherman* the text usually has us follow the analysis of sensory impressions in the consciousness of one of the characters, as in these examples with Gaud Mével, Cather often used this technique to get her readers to notice that process in their own minds. In Part 2, Chapter 1 of *O Pioneers!*, for example, Cather gives us two paragraphs of ever-more suggestive description before she finally informs us that the young woman with “dancing yellow-brown eyes” she presents is Marie (76-77). If we have any memory of Marie’s appearance as a child at the beginning of the novel, when the narrative made a point of singling out her yellow-brown eyes (17), we will have figured that out by then, and perhaps noticed how we worked with the clues Cather presents.

Cather does the same thing with Ivar’s first appearance after the sixteen-year break between the first two parts of the novel. We get several lines of description that should recall the elderly Norwegian to the attentive reader before the text finally reveals his name:

At Alexandra’s left sat a very old man, barefoot and wearing a long blue blouse, open at the neck. His shaggy head is scarcely whiter than it was sixteen years ago, but his little blue eyes have become pale and watery, and his ruddy face is withered, like an apple that has clung all winter to the tree. When Ivar lost his land through mismanagement a dozen years ago, Alexandra took him in, and he has been a member of her household ever since. (83)

It was not just because she wanted to alert her readers to a distinguished precedent for the employment of Impressionist narrative technique that Cather would have evoked Loti’s masterpiece in the minds of the readers of *O Pioneers!*, however. After all, other novelists of Loti’s generation such as Henry James were doing similar things. There were also issues of content, metaphorical and real, for which Cather seemed to desire the example of France’s then highly admired Impressionist novelist. Cather may have chosen to evoke Loti’s novel to gain support, even to provide a distinguished literary predecessor, for her strong female protagonist, Alexandra Bergson. In a work that derives narrative technique from modern French art, Cather presents Alexandra as a painter of sorts. Her friend Carl, who painted as a boy but then abandoned creative art to engrave the paintings of others, contrasts his work with what the young woman has done



with her farm: “I’ve been away engraving other men’s pictures, and you’ve stayed at home and made your own.’ He pointed with his cigar toward the sleeping landscape. ‘How in the world have you done it?’” (108). It is not just that Carl finds the fields of the Bergson farm make pretty pictures. He admires Alexandra’s ability to imagine what could be done with the previously unbroken plains, to create in her mind a composition, a layout, that could not yet be seen with the human eye. That, for Carl—and it appears Cather—was an artistic, painterly gift: “What a wonderful place you have made of this, Alexandra,” he tells her. “He turned and looked back at the wide, map-like prospect of field and hedge and pasture. ‘I would never have believed it could be done. *I’m disappointed in my own eye, in my [lack of] imagination*’” (101; emphasis mine). Carl acknowledges that Alexandra is a painter, and more of one than he is himself, someone who can visualize how to lay out a composition in her imagination. It is worth remembering that the protagonist of Cather’s next novel, *The Song of the Lark* (1915), was very clearly an artist, a musician, and that the name of that novel was taken from a French painting by Jules Breton.

This subtle presentation of Alexandra Bergson as an artist is one reason Cather might have wanted her readers to recall Loti’s presentation of *Iceland Fisherman*’s female protagonist, Gaud Mével, whom Cather, in her August 1897 letter to the Seibels, described as “fascinating.” When her father dies leaving her impoverished, as Alexandra’s does in *O Pioneers!*, Gaud develops a successful business as a *couturière*, using what she had learned about the latest French fashion during her adolescence in Paris to establish a career for herself in small-town Brittany. Loti was not content with giving her just those artistic skills, however. Throughout the novel, he shows that she has the eye of a painter, indeed an Impressionist painter, when it comes to looking at the world around her (Berrong, *Putting Monet* 74-83).



Like Alexandra, she has the imagination, the “eye” to see how the world could be transformed into works of art.

Exercising such unconventional artistry was not easy for either woman. At first the small-town mentality of Paimpol had looked askance at the young woman who, rather than washing others’ clothes for a living as her great aunt Yvonne Moan had done, took to creating them (5: 4). In the same respect, Alexandra confides to Carl that her brothers “think me too independent” with her introduction of new farming techniques that they avoid (109), farming techniques that, in the context of Carl’s previously quoted comments, suggest artistic imagination as well. “But I have had to think for myself a good many years,” Alexandra explains to Carl; her circumstances recall those given to Gaud by Loti: left a poor orphan, she also had to make a life for herself, creating innovative fashions that had not at first pleased the provincial Paimpolaises. Cather certainly would have wanted the Loti readers who caught her evocations of *Iceland Fisherman* to see them as an invitation to view Alexandra as another independent woman artist who creates a new kind of art, as well as a new kind of life for a woman artist in a small town, largely on her own.

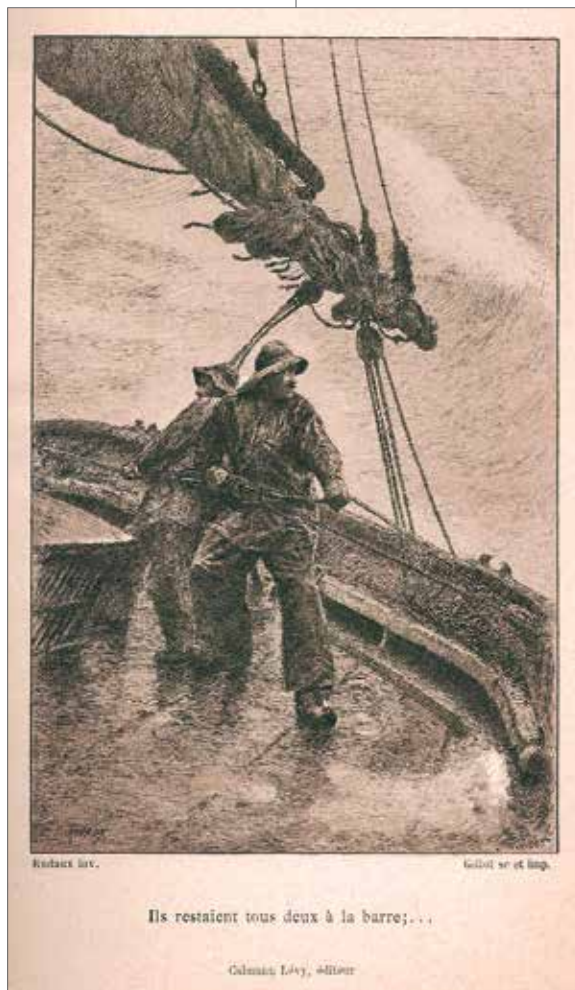
In *Iceland Fisherman*, Loti had used intertextuality himself to evoke his own previous novel, *My Brother Yves*, so that at least some of his readers would see the parallels between Gaud’s love for the fisherman Yann Gaos and the male narrator’s interest in the sailor Yves Kermadec in the previous narrative and consider to what extent they should read each through the other (Berrong, *In Love*, Ch. Five). Anders has argued generally that Willa Cather’s great interest in Loti had its roots in her appreciation of “the erotic subtleties of Loti’s male romances,” and that they “provided Cather with a stylistic and thematic model for writing about men in love” (Anders 17). In this instance, however, a Loti text seems to have provided Cather with a way to write about a woman who was not in love, at least with the various men who courted her. Alexandra repeatedly dreams of someone who will hold and protect her. On the last page of the novel, however, once she has married Carl, she decides that her dream “will never come true, now, in the way I thought it might” (273).

When Cather recounts this dream at length in the first chapter of the last part of the novel, she does eventually use masculine pronouns. But she begins the passage with the sexually ambiguous sentence: “As [Alexandra] lay with her eyes closed, she had again, more vividly than for many years, the old illusion of her girlhood, of being lifted and carried lightly by *some one* very strong” (OP 251; emphasis mine). Did Cather repeatedly invoke *Iceland Fisherman* in *O Pioneers!* because, among other reasons, she also wanted some of her readers, those who have seen what

Loti was up to in his novel and might be sympathetic, to suspect that one of the reasons Alexandra’s marriage to Carl is “one of the most spectacularly unromantic love stories ever told” (Kraus xv) was that her dream concerned a strong woman and not Carl or another man? Marcel Proust, who published the first volume of his massive *In Search of Lost Time* the same year as *O Pioneers!*, made repeated intertextual use of *My Brother Yves* to hint that Albertine, the person his male narrator loves, could be read as a man as well as a woman (Berrong, “Significant”). Did Cather choose to intertextualize *Iceland Fisherman* in *O Pioneers!* because it allowed her to suggest, among other things, that there were same-sex dimensions to her protagonist’s romantic fantasy?

Near the end of a recent article on Proust’s evocations of the boulevard theater of his day in *In Search of Lost Time*, Danièle Gasiglia-Laster concluded that they “prove . . . that Proust made honey from all these

literary works and that any of the theatrical performances he attended, even if they were of minor works, were potentially able to provide seeds that would flower in his novel” (137). Gasiglia-Laster declares that discovery to be “disturbing” (137). As Professor Slote asserted in 1982, however, we only handicap ourselves and those whose enjoyment of the literature we teach and write about is the supposed reason for our profession, when we react in such a way. Loti was not Flaubert or Proust, granted, but neither was he a negligible author. And who knows? We might, in reading him with Cather in mind, make her ghost swoon repeatedly. That I may have just done so is for me a pleasant thought, because I believe it means that we can now have a richer experience when we read *O Pioneers!*



1. Since the chapters in *Iceland Fisherman* are very short and since there are many different editions of the novel but no standard ones, I follow the practice traditional in Loti scholarship of referencing quotations by part and chapter number rather than with pages in a specific edition that readers may not be able to find. Although there are seven English translations of the novel, they are all old and rather fustian, so all translations of the text in this essay are my own. In any case, Cather read the novel in the original French with the Seibels during the winter of 1896–97 and not in English.

2. Three of those five translators were clearly women. All I could find out about M. A. Melcon was that she (or he) also translated *Heidi* for A. L. Burt. Granted, literary translation often fell to women at the time, but still, these publishers evidently felt that a woman's sensibility would not be out of place here. It is true that, in France, Loti was seen as an author who particularly appealed to women.

3. In *Iceland Fisherman*, Loti, himself a painter, set about developing a whole range of techniques for achieving in words what Monet and some of his colleagues were accomplishing in oils. See Berrong, *Putting Monet* Ch. One. Loti's contemporaries perceived that. Upon his and Monet's death, one of the founders of the *Nouvelle revue française*, André Suarès, went so far as to proclaim: "Far more than Sisley, Claude Monet or the Goncourt brothers, Loti was the great Impressionist" (Suarès 212).

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# Willa Cather and Eleonora Duse in the Kingdom of Art

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Willa Cather's deep and ongoing interest in performing artists is an evident aspect of her early biography. Beginning with her 1890s journalism, Cather was able to explore this interest with regularity and in great detail as a reviewer for the Lincoln *Courier* and the *Nebraska State Journal*. The massive extent of this writing is made clear by William M. Curtin's two-volume *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902* (1970). Also well known is that in these reviews Cather focused especially on the presentations and abilities of individual actors—indeed, her discussions center on voice, dramatic technique, and contrasting styles of female performers in particular. Cather reviewed male performers, of course, but as her early fiction leading especially toward *The Song of the Lark* subsequently made clear, she can be seen in these theatrical reviews searching for some guideposts for herself, guideposts she could scrutinize in her own search for the meaning of art, the role of the artist, and her own place in the artistic firmament. Janis Stout has recently pointed out that “in the figure of the female performer,” Cather “confronted the nature and potential rewards of the woman artist” (61) while well before her Bernice Slope, writing of actors in general terms, noted that Cather was drawn to them because “the artist” may be perceived “in the very act of performing the miracle of creation” (115).

The names of many of these performers, primarily actresses, may be found throughout her fiction: notable among them are Sarah Bernhardt, Rachel Felix (of an earlier generation than Bernhardt), Clara Morris, Pauline Hall, and Helena Modjeska, whom Cather met in person and reviewed in performance. Years later, Modjeska would make a cameo appearance in *My Mortal Enemy* as a guest of the Henshawes at their New Year's Eve party, where she performs. In the same novel, Nellie Birdseye and Oswald Henshawe go together to hear Bernhardt and Aïné Coquelin perform (37-41). That said, nowhere in Cather's fiction does the name of the Italian actress Eleonora Duse appear, despite the fact that Cather the reviewer lavished great praise upon her—without ever actually seeing Duse perform. Acknowledging Cather's awareness of and mentionings of these other actresses in her fiction, my purpose in this essay is to analyze Cather's awareness and appreciation of Duse.

As Michael Schueth and Evelyn Funda have shown in their work on the more widely known Bernhardt, Cather evinced a clear interest in her work; thus I will not discuss her at great length. Even so, Cather's seeming preference for Duse's acting techniques and lifestyle—over Bernhardt's—and what they signified to her cannot be fully appreciated without briefly comparing the two. While it may be possible to write about Bernhardt with only

a passing reference to Duse, the reverse is not the case. Duse is almost without exception compared to Bernhardt in all the materials I have examined. Bernhardt, who was fifteen years older than Duse, was a great inspiration to the younger woman who saw Bernhardt perform in Turin in 1882. William Weaver reports that viewing Bernhardt in performance was a great liberation to Duse as a woman and as a performer, quoting her as saying that “I felt I had the right to do what I wanted,” and not just what “was imposed on me. . . . I went every evening to hear her and to weep!” (35). In later years, Bernhardt and Duse became archrivals, often performing the same roles in different venues; they became the two great titanic figures of the theatre in their time. Bernhardt performed only in French and Duse only in Italian; yet they both held audiences in their thrall in their home countries and on their numerous international tours.

William M. Curtin, in a note in *The World and the Parish*, reports that Cather actually saw Bernhardt perform in Omaha in 1892 in *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou (38-39), but she did not review the performance. However, she did review Bernhardt in *Izeyl* by Armand Sylvestre and Eugene Morand without having actually seen it. Curtin writes that when Cather was unable to see



*Eleonora Duse* by John Singer Sargent, 1893.



a particular performer in person, she “relied on her reading” (39), and that was also the case with her assessment of Duse. He also maintains that Cather was “fascinated” that “‘suppression’ was a part of the tragedienne’s life as well as her art . . .” and she wrote of Duse “in religious terms: a nun, a votary of the ancient gods” (56). This was in stark contrast to Bernhardt, whose private life was always in the public eye and as tempestuous as her style of acting. Curtin also writes that when the two performed in different roles in London in 1895, a kind of “duel” ensued (206). Viewing this competition, Cather reduced the essence of their artistry in a commentary that turned out to be prescient as well as amazingly insightful in such a youthful reviewer:

Signora Duse has always played with the highest, noblest qualities of her soul . . . and that wears an artist quickly. . . Upon the stainless heights of art she has dreamed and created. . . Bernhardt’s acting is a matter of physical excitement, Duse’s of spiritual exultation. . . Bernhardt enjoys Camille, but Duse pities her with all her infinite compassion and all her divine womanhood. . . Art is Bernhardt’s dissipation, a sort of Bacchic orgy. It is Duse’s consecration, her religion, her martyrdom. (207)

Cather’s vivid comparison of the two artists holds the key not only to what was likely her greater esteem for Duse but also the key to understanding Duse’s place in the history of theatre. I will explore this question at greater length, but some biographical detail about Duse herself must be considered. As noted, Bernhardt is still known far and wide, but that is certainly not true of Duse except for those interested in the history of theatre—there, scholars refer to her as the first modern actor. Yet, when people today use the common expression, “what a doozy!” they may be referring to the great Eleonora Duse. Scholars have speculated that the expression is dated to sometime after her second New York City tour in 1896 when she became “the idol of the hour” (137) as William Weaver writes. Bernhardt was also performing there then, so a second “duel” ensued. Although critics were divided, Weaver writes that they tended to favor Duse more and more; a contemporary publication, the *Dramatic Mirror*, reported that “Duse’s power is greater than Bernhardt’s, for Duse’s is the power of truth, while Bernhardt’s is the power of theatricalism” (137).

Eleonora Duse was born in 1858 in a town near Venice, Vigevano, Italy, into a family of poor itinerate performers. It was expected that she would also become a performer, and she dutifully began her stage career at the age of four. Weaver comments that

she was beaten with “a switch to her bare legs and pushed onto the stage as a small child” (281). At the age of fourteen when performing the role of Juliet, Duse experienced an epiphany which forever transformed her acting career. Thereafter, she aimed to attain that same inner “state of profound grace and ecstatic abandonment” in every performance as Helen Sheehy writes (5). The key to understanding Duse’s lifelong attitude toward her work and Cather’s great admiration lies in exploring the ramifications of Duse’s own phrase, the attainment of a “state of profound grace” in her work, in considering why she was deemed the first modern actor, and in comparing Cather’s concept of art to hers.

Cather’s estimation of Duse as a “nun” was based no doubt on Duse’s singular dedication and religious fervor toward her theatre work where she sought to communicate in her performances a pure and distilled sense of art. It was an estimation shared by Eva



*Duse by Mario Nunes Vais, 1905, from the Alinari National Museum of Photography in Florence, Italy.*

Le Gallienne, then also a young and rising star in New York theatre, who saw Duse in performance and met her several times during Duse’s last and tragic tour of the U.S. in 1924. This tour was tragic because Duse would soon die of pneumonia in Pittsburgh. Le Gallienne wrote that Duse viewed the art of the theatre “ideally as a synthesis of all the arts,” aimed at awakening in theatregoers “a sense of the sublime,” adding that to Duse, the theatre was closely “allied to religion.” As Le Gallienne continues, her thoughts seem to bear a surprising similarity to Cather’s, as when she writes that Duse’s work “was sacrificial; it was as though each time she played she immolated herself upon an altar” (18). Le Gallienne’s words leave no doubt that when Duse used the term “a state of profound grace,” she meant it in a

deeply religious sense. According to Le Gallienne, Duse “sought,” “served,” and “worshipped” God “in and through and by her work” (15).

It is easy to see from Le Gallienne’s observations why Cather would be so captivated by Duse in that she represented in her acting the living embodiment of Cather’s concept of art in her youth. Le Gallienne perhaps went even one step further than Cather in comparing Duse to Teresa of Avila in terms of their personalities and mystical outlook (19), and she entitled her book on Duse *The Mystic in the Theatre*. She inevitably compared Duse to Bernhardt stating that the latter’s “art was overstressed, overdecorated, overactive,” while with Duse, one thought of Rimbaud’s saying: ‘Action is a way of spoiling everything’ (146). Le Gallienne also wrote that “Duse’s art was simple, economical, stripped”; she “seemed not to be ‘doing’ anything” (146), adding that “an ‘extraordinary emanation’ ‘flowed from her whole being, like a visible ray of light’ (147).



Cather's use of the term "nun" might also refer to the fact that on stage and off Duse shunned artifice, using no make up or flashy jewelry. Yet, in good times Duse often ordered her wardrobe from the house of Worth in Paris, and she was hardly a nun in her private life. She was married and later separated from her husband, had a daughter Enrichetta who in childhood was boarded out far away from Duse's theatrical life, and conducted a number of love affairs with great discretion, the two major ones with members of the Italian intelligentsia, Arrigo Boito and Gabriele D'Annunzio. On this matter, Weaver quotes Duse as saying "apart from the foolish mistake I made in marrying my husband, I have loved only twice" (283). We can only assume that here she was referring to Boito and D'Annunzio.

Boito was a poet, writer, composer, and perhaps most famously a librettist. He was much older than Duse and remained a lifelong friend. She referred to him as *il Santo*—the Saint. Weaver reports that Duse believed that "the sense of eternal poetry and the noblest revelations that you seek in philosophies, I received from Boito" (320). D'Annunzio, for his part, was five years younger than Duse, also a writer and poet, a playwright of a new poetic theatre, a politician, and a womanizer who betrayed her both professionally and personally on more than one occasion. He and Duse shared the dream of living only for art as well as the dream of establishing a national theatre in Italy. The first lasted for the years of their relationship, but the second was never fulfilled. During their liaison, Duse often performed in his plays even though many were considered too obscure for the general public. Nonetheless, a few remained in her repertory of over 200 plays, many of which she directed herself. Weaver writes that Duse's friends considered D'Annunzio to be a burden on her private life and had a "calamitous effect on her art," in addition to distracting "her from a more suitable repertory" (226).

Much to the admiration of Cather but to the dismay of impresarios, Duse shunned publicity of any kind throughout her career even though she was frequently plagued by financial difficulties. From a young age, Duse had few reserves of physical strength and was plagued with health issues, most seriously of a respiratory nature, often causing her to cut back on her performance schedule. Yet, she continued to tour throughout Italy, Europe, the United States, parts of South America, and even Cairo, Egypt. The tours both depleted her energies and restored them in that she often met a wide range of artists in different fields of endeavor nurturing her wide intellectual interests. When she

toured in Norway, she hoped to pay homage to Ibsen, whom she idolized, but he was too ill to receive her. Duse always sought out more modern material and introduced Ibsen's plays to Italy beginning with *A Doll's House*. In this respect, she differed greatly from Bernhardt who tended to play in the same potboilers over and over again. Ruth Brandon remarks that Bernhardt "did not dream of adapting her style to the demands of a new playwright" (390); this was in contrast to Duse whose introspective technique was open to newer writers such as Ibsen and Chekhov (383). Although it pained Duse greatly to replay the older roles in her repertory, they were often included in her schedule out of financial necessity and because of their familiarity to the public.

In 1909, Duse began a long absence from the stage perhaps out of sheer emotional and physical exhaustion. Duse herself declared: "I've spent my life trying to perfect my art. . . . It's time I tried to perfect myself." (Sheehy 263). Duse spent the years of her retirement often seeking the solitude that she craved and always with her books. During the World War years, she volunteered her efforts but preferred doing so on a small scale. Duse became interested in film as a new art form but turned down an offer from D. W. Griffith. In a review of a film adaptation of a play in her repertory, she reveals both her contempt for the film as well as her concept of art and what the ideal performance should encompass.

Duse found in the film "nothing that stimulates the soul," that "frees the imagination," "nothing of what is *not* seen and weaves life; nothing of the inevitabilities that form it, that grip it in a vise" (Weaver 305). Duse later accepted a role in an Italian film, *Cenere* (Ashes).<sup>1</sup>

When Duse returned to the stage in 1921 largely due to financial difficulties, she chose to open in a play by Ibsen. Charlie Chaplin saw her perform in Los Angeles on her previously noted final tour and wrote a laudatory critique stating that she was obviously old (Duse's hair was white and she did not wear a wig), "yet there is something about her that suggests a pitiful child. I suppose this is the simplicity of her art." Chaplin added that Duse is "the perfect artist: the simple, direct, child soul; the experienced craftsman in technique; the heart that has been taught the lesson of human sympathy, and the incisive analytical brain of the psychologist. Bernhardt was always studied and more or less artificial. Duse is direct and terrible" (Weaver 356). Chaplin then went to describe how in a single gesture Duse conveyed the emotional truth and anguish of the character.



Cabinet photo of Duse by Bary of Paris, ca. 1900.

In further distilling critics' comments comparing acting techniques of Duse and Bernhardt, it becomes even more evident as to why Duse was considered the first modern actor. In a sense, she was the un-Bernhardt as the words of George Bernard Shaw, as quoted by Helen Sheehy, make clear: Bernhardt "does not enter into the leading character; she substitutes herself for it" which "is precisely what does not happen with Duse, whose every part is a separate creation" (144). Similarly, Susan Bassnett explains Duse's more modern technique in greater detail: Her style "depended on nuance" and "her acting process" passed "through a series of stages—firstly, a stage of internalization, of relating to her part and experiencing it psychologically, then a stage of expressing her reactions through subtle signs rather than grand gestures" (136). Bassnett continues: "The effect of this technique was to draw attention through down-playing rather over-playing" (136). Bassnett also quotes Luigi Pirandello on Duse: "Her technique is the quintessence of a pure, lived truth, a technique that moves from the internal outwards" (125).

But what of Cather's appreciation of Eleonora Duse? Evelyn Funda has made a similar point with regard to Cather's characterization of Eden Bower in "Coming, Aphrodite!," surmising that Cather paid homage to Bernhardt when, in that story, Eden ascends in a hot air balloon in Coney Island because Bernhardt once did so in Paris, probably as a publicity stunt. Equally, I surmise that Cather may very well have had Duse in mind in characterizing Thea Kronborg's steadfast and unwavering dedication to the expression of her art in *The Song of the Lark*. In her performances, Thea weds her innate passion to reason, or in other words emotion to idea, much as Duse and Olive Fremstad did. In Cather's 1913 *McClure's Magazine* article that focused in part on Fremstad, "Three American Singers," there is a caption under a photograph of Fremstad that could very well refer to Duse. It reads: "A great tragic actress, her portrayal of a character is always austere, marked by a very parsimony of elaboration or gesture" (43).

Bernice Slote writes that in the years 1893–1895, Cather "was caught in that ancient pull of the gods, torn between the Dionysian and Apollonian forces of rapture and repose, release and containment. That conflict was at the very center of her creative will" (81). In essence, the distinctive performing artistry of Bernhardt and Duse represent those opposing poles of the Dionysian and Apollonian. I believe that Cather resolved that conflict in favor of the Apollonian—that is, the approach personified in the art of Eleonora Duse. In her fiction, it is manifested particularly in the character of Thea Kronborg, a fusion of her youthful self in the throes of fulfilling her "original desire," and Fremstad in performance and artistic maturity.

Ultimately, Cather's great admiration for Duse was not only a question of acting range, stage presence, and fearless attitude in considering new forms in the art of theatre but also of lifestyle. Duse, like Cather, valued her privacy, went out of her

way to avoid publicity for herself and her family, and professed only the very highest ideals in her work. For Duse, the theatre was not merely a commercial venture or entertainment but her sacred mission as previously indicated and as Sheehy's quote of Duse's words demonstrates: "The theatre sprang from religion. It is my great wish that, somehow, through me—in some small way—they might be reunited" (309). In Duse's ideal of theatre, we have paired Cather's very own equation of religion and art, the trajectory she followed in her own art.

#### NOTE

1. A brief clip of Duse's performance in *Cenere* is available for viewing on YouTube. The film script of *Cenere* was adapted from the novel of 1904 by Grazia Deledda, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1926.

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# Paul's Case, the Opera: A Study in Temperament Comes to the Stage

Marvin Friedman

In 1895 Willa Cather traveled to Chicago and attended the fourth American presentation of Verdi's opera *Falstaff*. In reviewing the performance for the *Nebraska State Journal* she stated:

There is something especially wonderful and sacred about any great masterpiece in its first youth . . . while it is played by the first cast, and the ink of the score is scarcely dry. Something of the very personality of the composer seems to cling to it. Its bloom, its freshness, the wonderful charm of its novelty, even the slight uncertainty with which some of the principals carry their parts, all emphasize that one is witnessing an absolutely new creation, a new work that did not exist yesterday, that has been called up out of nothingness and that henceforth will be a part of the art of the world. (*The World and the Parish*, 178-179)

In Arlington, Virginia in April 2013, my wife Margaret and I had a similar opportunity to attend one of the first performances of a new opera, one based on Cather's own story "Paul's Case." In addition to favorable critical reviews from the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, the headline of the *New York Observer's* review of the opera's most recent production this January stated: "In *Paul's Case*, a Young Opera Festival Yields Its First Masterpiece."

Virginia was an appropriate venue for the opera's premiere given the fact that Gregory Spears, the composer, is a Virginia native who grew up in Virginia Beach, near Norfolk, the home for the Virginia Opera since three years before Spears was born in 1977. Although he began his training as a pianist, Spears's interest turned to composing at a very early stage in his musical development. Encouraged to do so by a nurturing high school music teacher, Spears composed and performed his own piano concerto at the age of 16. After obtaining his bachelor's degree in composition

from the Eastman School of Music, Spears received a Fulbright scholarship to study at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. Subsequently, he received a master's degree in composition from the Yale School of Music and a PhD from Princeton University, where he has taught a freshman writing seminar called "Music

and Madness," exploring the popularized link between creativity and madness. He has also been an artist in residence at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, where Cather herself was in residence for several weeks in the summer of 1926.

While *Paul's Case* is Spears's first opera, it was not his first major musical composition. In 1999 he was awarded a commission from the New York Youth Symphony under its annual First Music competition for young composers; his winning *Midnight Pictures* was performed at Carnegie Hall in May 2000. He recently collaborated with choreographer Christopher Williams on a dance opera entitled *Wolf-in-Skins*. His completion of the Mozart *Requiem*, commissioned by the Seraphic Fire vocal ensemble, premiered in Miami in November 2013 by Seraphic Fire and the

Firebird Chamber Orchestra. With librettist Greg Pierce and director Kevin Newbury (who also directed *Paul's Case*), Spears is currently working on a new full-length opera based on *Fellow Travelers*, the 2007 novel by Thomas Mallon.

I recently had an opportunity to interview the composer on a cold, snowy January morning at a coffee shop in Brooklyn, New York. Here are some of the highlights of that interview.

**Marvin:** What was your first exposure to Willa Cather's writing?

**Gregory:** I remember reading *My Antonia* as part of a high school assignment. Then I read "Paul's Case" for the first time in college.

**Marvin:** What about the story intrigued you? Why do you find it relevant after more than a century?



Gregory Spears



**Gregory:** While researching, I read that Paul's suicide was inspired by *Anna Karenina*. That connection didn't occur to me originally. I do see some connection to the current interest in bullying and the stories in the news of teenage suicide. Tyler Clementi comes to mind. But the story is universal. Being a teenager, or the parent of a teenager, is tough in any era. It's a delicate time.

**Marvin:** Why did you decide to turn the story into an opera rather than some other musical form?

**Gregory:** The way the story is being told, as opera, is another projection of Paul's aesthetic obsession with music and theater. The strangeness, even the decadence of the medium enhances his fish-out-of-water situation. I should say, however, that Paul in the story doesn't really want to be an artist. Rather than make art, he wants to be enveloped by it. He wants to become a character in a novel, or painting, or performance. Our opera grants this wish. Paul is the star, with lights, an orchestra, and a cast of singers orbiting him. This desire to live inside art is part of what makes Paul fascinating, but it's also his tragic flaw. My hope is that, by telling his tale as opera, the medium itself becomes part of the story.

**Marvin:** How did you select your librettist Kathryn Walat?

**Gregory:** Kathryn and I met at Yale. She was studying playwriting at the drama school, and I was at the music school. I saw her plays and fell in love with her short staccato style of dialogue. I thought it would be perfect for the piece.

**Marvin:** What research did you do into the background of the story?

**Gregory:** The Cather Archives has some interesting letters concerning the story, and Hermione Lee has some fascinating things to say about the story. I also e-mailed with Tim Bintrim, who told me a lot about the locations, circumstances and people

PAUL'S CASE

*Handwritten signatures in gold ink: "m. shapiro", "K. Walat", "Gregory", "Amelia", "Jim Shapiro", "Kathryn Walat"*

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*The poster for the Arlington, Virginia production, signed by members of the cast. Courtesy Marvin Friedman.*

used as inspiration. I became transfixed with the models for Paul and Cather's real-life role as a high school teacher in Pittsburgh. I became intrigued with the notion that Cather might have lived aspects of this story, both as one of the outraged teachers and as an artist feeling oppressed by middle-class Pittsburgh values. Slowly, I began to realize how much this story was about Cather herself,



who at the time was unsure of her future and also dreaming about art, opera, and traveling east. I might mention that I imagine the English teacher in the opera, a mezzo-soprano role, is a sort of cipher representing Cather herself.

**Marvin:** How might your research be reflected in the music?

**Gregory:** It was an interesting coincidence that the real life location of Paul's school in Pittsburgh lies near a rail yard, and that the teachers in my opera sing in train-whistle harmony while accusing Paul of "insolence." Early on I planned out that the train whistle—as a symbol of technology, business and industry—would be a sonic force throughout the score. I love the paradoxical nature of the symbol—the train allows Paul to escape, but then later marks his end. Art, music, and literature in the story are also paradoxical symbols. They represent escape, but they also lead Paul down a road to decadence.

**Marvin:** How do you think Cather viewed Paul?

**Gregory:** I think she was fascinated with the problems he faced. I also think she might have feared him, and the part of herself that was like him.

**Marvin:** Did your cast itself reach any consensus on what they thought of Paul?

**Gregory:** They unanimously loved him. I personally can't quite decide what to think of him, which is why I wanted to write the opera. I do think Paul is very sympathetic, despite his behavior. And I admire his fearlessness and rebelliousness. His despair reminds me of another character I am drawn to, Melville's Bartleby.

**Marvin:** Some who have seen the opera have noticed that it omits any direct reference to the young actor Charlie Edwards whom Paul sometimes helped dress.

**Gregory:** We left Charlie out of Act I so we could intensify Paul's aloneness while in Pittsburgh. We also had to streamline the action in order to pace things correctly, so Charlie and Paul's sister were cut. Many of the singers play multiple roles in the opera and it was the director Kevin Newbury's wonderful idea to have the same actor who plays the Yale boy in Act II dress Paul in both acts. We learn toward the end of the opera who this character is, so it's quite natural for people who are familiar with the story to assume that he's also an allusive reference to Charlie in Act I.

**Marvin:** While that may have been an instance in which the opera omitted something from Cather's own story, were there any ways the libretto added something to the story?

**Gregory:** For the text sung during the Carnegie Hall opera scene I spliced together a few Steven Crane poems. I kind of like that the opera singers are singing a text penned by one of Cather's contemporaries. I mentioned earlier that we saw the English teacher role in the opera as Cather herself. So having her, a lover of opera and literature, listen to an opera within my opera with words by Crane seemed right.

**Marvin:** Did having the same singers play multiple roles serve any other dramatic purpose in the opera?

**Gregory:** Yes, the women all play multiple roles as teachers, singers, and maids. I like that the same singers portray all three of these professions open to unmarried women of the day. One might conclude that they represent three different versions of the same women. The triple casting emphasizes the role that circumstance and choice play in all our lives. Likewise the Yale boy in Act II can come across as



*The UrbanArias production of Paul's Case was performed by Jonathan Blalock (as Paul), Amanda Crider, Keith Phares, Erin Sanzero, James Shaffran, Michael Slattery, and Melissa Wimbish. Kevin Newbury directed and UrbanArias's general director Robert Wood conducted.*

another version of Paul, one with more advantages. Even the school principal in Pittsburgh has a New York counterpart. In Act II he's the bellboy at the Waldorf (though that's a little tongue-in-cheek).

**Marvin:** The opera has now had full productions in two different venues. Has the production evolved in any way?

**Gregory:** The director Kevin Newbury really had a chance to work with the cast as an ensemble. It's relatively rare for the same cast to perform in two different runs. At the New York rehearsals Kevin zoomed in on details, which are vital in an intimate chamber opera venue.

**Marvin:** Reviewers have reported you saying that the opera's score combines musical stylistic elements from both early baroque opera and late modern minimalism. Did anything about the story itself elicit that approach?

**Gregory:** For me minimalism is very American and modern, and I used it in the orchestra to evoke the pulsating drive of machines and industry. The baroque elements initially represented the purely

aesthetic world of Paul, standing in opposition to this churning minimalist pulse. However, as I wrote, I found this planned dichotomy quickly dissolved into something more interesting and nuanced: sometimes the baroque figuration became threatening and gritty and the industrial repetitive figures would start to feel more elegant and dance-like. In this sense the meaning attached to the baroque elements and minimalism flipped at times. That's what I love about music—materials and styles can quickly flip into their opposite. Nothing is ever quite what it seems.

*continued on page 22*

## The Genesis of *Paul's Case*

The chamber opera *Paul's Case* was developed by the Brooklyn-based American Opera Projects, with support from the BMI Foundation, the Virgil Thomson Foundation, the "Art Works" program of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. AOP, under the leadership of general director Charles Jarden, specializes in developing and presenting new works of music theater and opera. AOP-developed productions have appeared at the Lincoln Center Festival, Fort Worth Opera, Symphony Space, the Guggenheim Museum, London's Royal Opera House, and many other venues.

*Paul's Case*, with music by Gregory Spears and libretto by Spears and playwright Kathryn Walat, was presented in workshop at AOP in October 2008 and May 2009 (when we first saw it). Subsequent workshop productions were held at Princeton University, Center City Opera Theater in Philadelphia, and the Manhattan School of Music.

In April 2013, the opera was presented in its world premiere by UrbanArias, a Washington, D.C.-based company specializing in short contemporary works. This widely acclaimed production, held at Artisphere in Arlington, Virginia, attracted the attention of the producers of the Prototype Festival, a new annual festival of music theater and opera in New York City. *Paul's Case*, in its UrbanArias production, then received its New York City premiere as one of Prototype's sold-out productions in its January 2014 season at the HERE Arts Center.

As we were preparing to go to press, a new production of *Paul's Case* was being presented by Pittsburgh Opera, February 22 – March 2, 2014, in the George R. White Studio at the Pittsburgh Opera Headquarters.



UrbanArias photography: C. Stanley Photography



On my way home to Maryland after our interview, I wondered what Cather herself might have thought of this opera. Considering the deeply textured beauty of the music, I doubt she would have minded the fact that she would not have gone home humming any melodies. In her *Falstaff* review, Cather wrote: “With the exception of Oberon’s song . . . there are no airs in the opera that will ever be garnered into *Treasures of Song* and other popular collections. The whole composition is as difficult as it is beautiful. . .” (179). She wanted plots of “dramatic significance” and music that was given “direction and purpose and made to tell something of human experience and human passion. . .” (658). For her, *Falstaff* clearly met that test. I believe that she set the same standards for her own work. Notwithstanding her legendary prickliness about adaptations of her own work, I also believe that she would have been gratified to encounter a

serious opera based on one of her own stories, considering that it happens to meet the standards she set. The opera’s incorporation of material from Stephen Crane might also have pleased her. Not only was he one of her contemporaries (as Spears notes above), she actually met and praised him as one who “simply knew from the beginning how to handle detail” (772). In any event, readers, I do hope that each of you will have the opportunity to see and enjoy this musical interpretation of one of Cather’s most enigmatic works.

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HERE photography: Noab Stern Weber, courtesy PROTOTYPE Festival



# Exploring the Southwest with Willa Cather

Julie Olin-Ammentorp | Le Moyne College

The 14th International Willa Cather Seminar, held in Flagstaff, Arizona, was a worthy successor to previous Cather Seminars. Held on the campus of Northern Arizona University (NAU) from June 16th through the 22nd, 2013, the seminar was entitled “Willa Cather: Canyon, Rock, & Mesa Country” and focused on Cather’s Southwestern works, particularly *The Song of the Lark*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *The Professor’s House* (especially “Tom Outland’s Story”). Like all Cather seminars, it also included field trips to locations significant in Cather’s life and works. Wonderfully organized by Ann Moseley, John Murphy, and Bob Thacker, the week-long seminar attracted well over 100 scholars from across the United States and around the world, including France, India, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, and Taiwan. The result was a rich blend of stimulating papers, lively discussions, and meaningful experiences.

Collectively, the assembled scholars brought their considerable expertise to Cather’s work, examining a broad range of topics and employing a wide spectrum of approaches. One of many important strands of research explores the relationship of Cather’s works to those of other authors; increasingly complex, nuanced, and interesting connections are being made between her works and the web of literary history and culture. A number of scholars examined Cather’s relationship to literary modernism, including the conference’s first keynote address by Ann Moseley, who examined the influence on Cather of a range of modernists, including Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner. Rick Millington followed, linking Cather’s career to central texts of nineteenth-century literary culture. During the course of the conference, scholars traced Cather’s connections to modernists as varied as William Faulkner, Robert Frost, D. H. Lawrence, Wallace Stevens, and Oscar Wilde. Others connected Cather’s work to that of her contemporaries, including Mabel Dodge Luhan and Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant. Still further, speakers explored her relationship both to well-known nineteenth century authors, including George Eliot, Balzac, Longfellow, and Tolstoy, and to lesser-known authors such as Paul Zweig and Haniel Long, as well as to authors of the later twentieth century, including Elizabeth Bishop and Leslie Marmon Silko. Further aspects of modernism were explored in papers linking Cather’s work to the influential anthropologists Franz Boas and Elsie Clews Parsons and to the philosophers Henri Bergson and Walter Pater.

Textual studies remain a fascinating topic for Cather scholars, who heard Kari Ronning talk about “The Thing Not There,” a gap in Cather’s manuscript for *My Mortal Enemy*. Chuck Johanningsmeier continued his engaging work on contemporary

readers’ reactions to the serial publication of Cather’s work. New directions in Cather scholarship emerged, with a discussion of Cather’s poetry by Bob Thacker, editor of the just-published *April Twilights* in the “Everyman’s Library” pocket poet series from Knopf as well as of the forthcoming scholarly edition of Cather’s *Poems*, and Guy Reynolds tying Cather’s theatrical experience to the material culture of her day. Other approaches and topics included Jungian archetypes, environmental and ecological approaches, feminist readings, ideas of nationhood, Native American issues, the concepts of time and of marriage, the role of religion, the idea of place, creativity and cognitive science, and Cather in the digital age. Unfortunately, a mere list of the topics such as this conveys little idea of the wealth of ideas presented in this amazing array of papers.

Scholars continue to increase our understanding of Cather’s connections to arts other than writing. A strong line of scholarship exploring Cather’s relationship to music continued at this conference, with papers connecting her work to Wagner’s operas, Dvořák’s works, and Schubert’s song cycle *Die Winterreise*. We also had the pleasure of learning more about the music that fascinated Cather, thanks to a wonderful talk and performance by David Porter and John Murphy, along with a specially created DVD of pianist Emily Murphy and soprano Sarah Bach performing pieces important in *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*. Conferees were also treated to Cather’s connections to the visual arts, with Richard Harris revealing Cather’s connection to the influential illustrator Howard Pyle, to John Murphy using the contemporary artist Warren Proserpi’s stunning work “Museum Epiphany III” to illuminate Cather’s thoughts, and to other papers on Impressionism, the Aesthetes, and other artists of Cather’s day. Indeed the only real “problem” with the conference was that one had to make terrible choices during concurrent sessions. One morning, for instance, we had to choose between panels entitled “Latour’s Expanding Universe,” “Threads of ‘Old Mrs. Harris,’” and “Wild Land as Character and Home Development.” Who could not want to attend all three panels?

Certainly a major highlight of the conference was the plenary session entitled “At Long Last—the Letters!” offered by Janis Stout and Andy Jewell, editors of the recently published *Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. They each read aloud some of their favorite Cather’s letters and discussed the editing process and their thoughts about the importance of Cather’s correspondence. As many others have written since their book has appeared, it is just a joy to now have so many Cather’s letters in print at long last.



One of the hallmarks of the Cather Seminars is the inclusion of field trips to places of importance in Cather's life and works. One of Cather's many strong suits as a writer is her ability to write beautifully of places, evoking them for the readers who know them and imaginatively creating them for those who do not. Seeing the places she describes in her works deepens our understanding of the places themselves as we see them through her eyes, while also allowing us to appreciate further her artistry as a writer.

This seminar included two field trips. The first was to Walnut Canyon National Park, perhaps better known to most conference participants as "Panther Canyon" in *The Song of the Lark*, the place where Thea recovers from a taxing winter in Chicago and comes to define herself as an artist. Tuesday, June 18, opened with a keynote address by Dr. Christian Downum, an anthropologist from NAU who is an expert on the archeology of the area and of Walnut Canyon in particular. He oriented participants to the history of the canyon and its human inhabitants. Once we arrived at the park, we were able to walk along the Rim Trail, enjoying views of the Canyon and following the trail down into it. Cather drew directly on her 1912 experience of this place when she described Thea's restorative visit there, describing the small "rooms" built into the canyon walls. The original inhabitants of the canyon plastered the walls and ceilings of these rooms by hand, and their handprints still remain today—a powerful reminder of their presence, of Cather's own visit, and of the fictional Thea's experience of the place.

Our conference organizers had worked with the staff at Walnut Canyon, making special arrangements for us to walk across pasture land to the Ranger Cabin, the prototype for the cabin in which Thea stays, recreating the walk which Thea would have traversed on her morning walks from the cottage on the Ottenburg Ranch to the canyon, allowing us to experience an additional aspect of Cather's powerful text.

The second field trip took place on Thursday, June 20th. The morning began bright and early at 8:00 a.m. with plenary addresses. Melissa Homestead discussed the Southwestern travels of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis, and Mark Madigan followed with an account of Cather's resistance to what she perceived as an inferior French translation of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. With these thoughts in mind, we boarded the buses at 10:00 a.m. for the hour-long drive to Winslow, Arizona, where Cather had visited her brother Douglass in 1912. Our first stop was at the celebrated La Posada Hotel. The hotel is a former "Harvey House"—an early chain of hotels that spread across the Southwest, providing comfortable lodgings and good food for travelers. When Tom Outland tells Roddy Blake in *The Professor's House* that he owes him "a Harvey House breakfast," he means a good one, and from our delicious lunch there it was clear that the tradition of excellent dining has continued at La Posada. We also had time for guided tours of the hotel with the current "Harvey Girls." While in Cather's day

these were young women who staffed the hotel and restaurant, they are currently docents who dress in period costume and describe the heyday of the hotels and of La Posada in particular. As we sat in the shade under a wide porch roof and listened to amusing tales of the past, it was remarkably easy to imagine Cather's experience there decades ago. Now as then, La Posada and its gardens provide a lovely green oasis in an arid country.

After lunch we continued to the Homolovi Ruins State Park, an archeological site once inhabited by the ancestral Hopi. Walking the trail on our own or with a Park guide, we were able to explore the stabilized ruins of ancient stone dwellings. We also had the pleasure of finding pottery shards throughout the area and, like Thea with the shards she finds in Panther Canyon, we were free to pick them up and examine them—so long as we put them back down afterwards. Then we continued to the Little Painted Desert, which Cather and her Mexican guide Julio explored during her 1912 visit. With our buses parked near the canyon's rim, we were able to wander along the edge of the canyon in the hot sunshine and strong wind, admiring the reddish striations in the canyon's sides and in the irregular hilly formations below. As I looked down into the canyon, I had a new appreciation for Cather's adventurousness and stamina. For her and Julio, an outing to the Little Painted Desert meant a day-long ride on muleback through the dry desert terrain. However intriguing the landscape and enjoyable the company, such an undertaking is not for the faint of heart. No air-conditioned buses and coolers full of water bottles for them!

The seminar was all in all a wonderful experience. In addition to the concurrent and plenary sessions and the field trips, the campus itself was handsome. Rimmed with pine-covered hills, a mix of interesting new and beautiful historic buildings provided a lovely setting. As always at Cather Seminars, the spirit of camaraderie grew over the week, with plenty of socializing not only at formal events such as receptions and the lovely closing banquet but also over meals in the dining hall as we fetched our morning coffee and evening desserts. The success of this Cather seminar, like others before it, rests not only on the fascinating work of the more than one hundred scholars in attendance, but of the organizers and staff. Like a theatrical performance, there is a vast amount of work that goes into the entire production, from conceptualizing the conference to issuing the call for papers, to selecting panelists and organizing papers into coherent groups that speak to each other in meaningful ways. And then there's the whole facilities side of the conference—everything from dormitory availability to menu selection, to organizing bus tours, ordering box lunches and, in the desert climate, providing lots of cold water. From the angle of the audience—or in this case, the conference participant—everything seems to happen seamlessly. Although we were all ready to return home at the end of this rich week, I'm sure we are all looking forward to the next Cather Seminar as well.



# A Special Cather Number of *Studies in the Novel* Published

The fall 2013 issue of *Studies in the Novel*, guest edited by board member Andrew Jewell and focused on Cather, has recently been published at the University of North Texas. Entitled “The Work of Willa Cather: Creation, Design, and Reception,” this special issue offers a dozen original essays and Jewell’s overview introduction.

The essays reflect, in quite significant ways, the progress of recent Cather studies, most particularly in their use of newly discovered archival materials. They also focus sharply on Cather as a collaborator, with Ashley Squires detailing the collaborative authorship Cather engaged in when she first went to *McClure’s Magazine* and worked on *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*. Similar studies of collaboration are offered by Robert Thacker on Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin, Richard C. Harris on Alfred and Blanche Knopf, and Melissa J. Homestead on Edith Lewis as she and Cather made the southwestern novels. Sarah Clere treats Cather’s shapings of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* while three other scholars consider Cather’s reputation abroad. Guy Reynolds treats Cather and the British, Françoise Palleau-Papin looks at her reception in France, and Charles Johanningsmeier looks at Cather’s reputation in Germany between 1926 and 1952.

Another section treats the design and marketing of Cather’s works, with Sharon O’Brien looking closely at what she calls “Cather’s struggle to save *My Antonia*” while Lise Jaillant looks at *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in the Modern Library. There too Matthew J. Lavin presents a detailed examination of the first appearance of Cather’s “My First Novels (There Were Two)” in *The Colophon* and Kari A. Ronning examines Cather’s books as physical objects in great

and fascinating detail. Altogether, this special issue of *Studies in the Novel* reveals the vibrancy of Cather scholarship and studies now, and especially the numerous ways Cather and her art are still being discovered.

Robert Thacker

*Studies in the Novel*



SPECIAL NUMBERS

THE WORK OF WILLA CATHER:  
CREATION, DESIGN, AND RECEPTION

Guest Editor: Andrew Jewell

fall 2013 — volume 45, number 3

published quarterly at the university of

north texas



# Essays on Cather Published in Rome

*Letterature d'America*, the University of Rome's quarterly review, has devoted an entire issue (v. 33, n. 144, 2013) to Willa Cather. Professor Cristina Giorcelli, a Cather devotee and a managing editor of the journal, promoted the issue among her colleagues and asked me to gather and edit six essays by established Cather scholars. Giorcelli laments Cather's neglect in Italy in her preface to the collection, which we titled "Willa Cather: Enduringly Contemporary." A 1925 photo of Cather appears as the frontispiece.

The collection can be viewed as a starter of sorts for the Cather Symposium to be held in Rome's Centro Studi Americani, June 12–14, 2014 (for information, email Mark Madigan at [mmadiga2@naz.edu](mailto:mmadiga2@naz.edu)). The issue's six "starter" essays were written with the general reader in mind and are summarized below.

My own introduction of Cather, "Willa Cather: Comprehensive and Neglected," weaves her biography through the wide range of her work, which embraces romanticism, the novel of manners, revolt from the village, and modernism, and poses reasons for her neglect. Steven B. Shively's "The Damning Echo of Nebraska in *One of Ours*," integrates the Nebraska and French components of the novel through the threat to civilization of false cultural values.

Richard H. Millington's "Willa Cather's Two Modernisms" juxtaposes the standard authenticity-seeking modernism of *The Professor's House* and Cather's richer strain of anthropological modernism evident in "Old Mrs. Harris," *My Antonia*, and *Shadows on the Rock*. In "Daisy, Lily, and Marian: Cather Revises James and Wharton," Julie Olin-Ammentorp explores Cather's unique take on the novel of manners, highlighting her development of the judgmental man/beautiful woman situation.

As the expert on Cather's language of food and cooking, Ann Romines surveys this ingredient of the canon as expressing Cather's deepest concerns, from immigrant tensions in America to the terrible power of slave ownership. Ann Moseley rounds off the collection with "The Golden Light of Wisdom in Willa

ANGLOAMERICANA

Anno XXXIII, n. 144, 2013



## LETTERATURE D'AMERICA RIVISTA TRIMESTRALE

JOHN J. MURPHY, *Willa Cather: Comprehensive and Neglected*

STEVEN B. SHIVELY, *The Damning Echo of Nebraska in Willa Cather's One of Ours*

RICHARD H. MILLINGTON, *Willa Cather's Two Modernisms*

JULIE OLIN-AMMENTORP, *Daisy, Lily, and Marian: Cather Revises James and Wharton*

ANN ROMINES, *The Well-Furnished Table: Food and Willa Cather's Art*

ANN MOSELEY, *The Golden Light of Wisdom in Willa Cather's Late Fictions*

BULZONI EDITORE

ISSN 1125-1743

Cather's Late Fictions," which interweaves themes of transience and permanence in *Lucy Gayheart*, *Obscure Destinies*, and "Before Breakfast."

Copies of this collection, published by Bulzoni for the University of Rome, are available through the Cather Foundation bookstore.

John J. Murphy



# A New Recording of Libby Larsen's *My Antonia*

We thank our friend Jane Dressler for pointing us to a wonderful new recording of Libby Larsen's song cycle *My Antonia*. Jane Dressler commissioned this work and premiered it in 2000 in Brownville, Nebraska, at the Eighth International Cather Seminar.

Larsen's *My Antonia* is included on "In My Memory: American Songs and Song Cycles," featuring the tenor Kerry Jennings accompanied on piano by Amanda Asplund Hopson. Jennings is Assistant Professor of Music at DePauw University and an accomplished performer on the opera and concert stage. Listening to a tenor sing *My Antonia* texts more familiarly taken by a soprano, it becomes easy, as Jane says, to picture "Jim Burden as a young tenor going out into the world." (We can report that "The Hired Girls" passage in particular is very fine.)

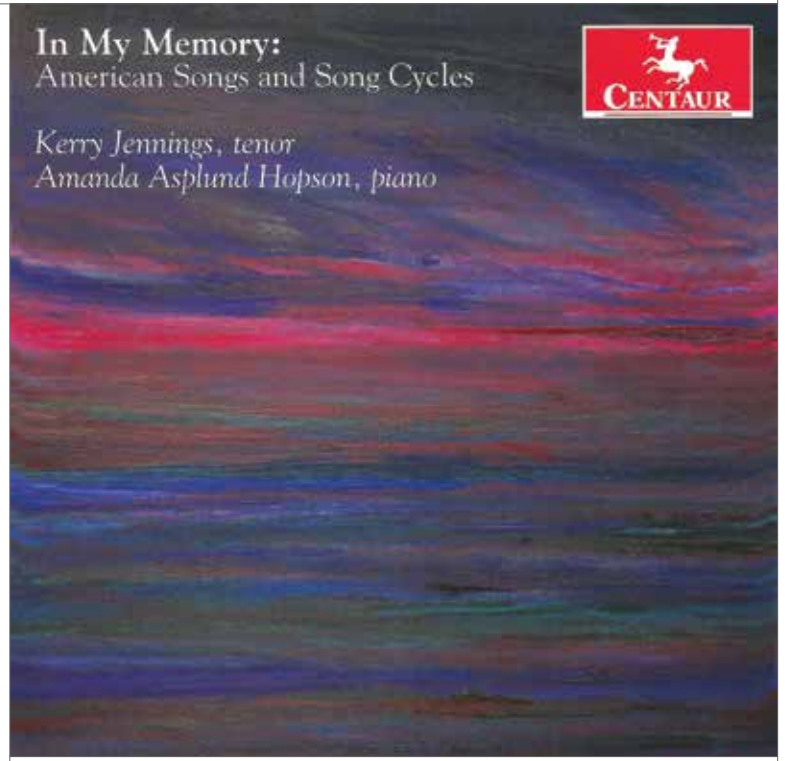
Released by Centaur Records, the recording also features works by composers Tom Cipullo, Lori Laitman and Richard Pearson Thomas. It is available on Centaur's website at [centaurrecords.com](http://centaurrecords.com) and can be sampled on composer Libby Larsen's site at [libbylarsen.com](http://libbylarsen.com) (in the "Voice" category under "Works").

TRG

In My Memory:  
American Songs and Song Cycles



Kerry Jennings, tenor  
Amanda Asplund Hopson, piano



## Contributors to this Issue

**Richard M. Berrong**, Professor of French at Kent State University, writes on the relationship between French Impressionist painting and the literature of its era. In addition to various articles, he recently published *Putting Monet and Rembrandt into Words: Pierre Loti's Recreation and Theorization of Claude Monet's Impressionism and Rembrandt's Landscapes in Literature*.

**Isabella Caruso** is Professor Emerita of English at City University of New York-Kingsborough. Her work on Cather has largely focused on Cather's views on art and the artist as well as Cather's New York City connections. She has published in the *Newsletter & Review* and most recently in the Spring 2013 issue of *Teaching Cather*, Spring 2013.

**Marvin Friedman** is a native Nebraskan and graduate of the University of Nebraska and Harvard Law School. Following his retirement from the practice of law, he has become an independent and often-published literary scholar and a regular presenter at Cather seminars and colloquia.

**Julie Olin-Ammentorp** is Professor of English at Le Moyne College. She has published extensively on Wharton (including *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War*, 2004) and Cather, including an article on Wharton's and Cather's World War I novels in *Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds* and another, "Thea at the Art Institute," in *Willa Cather and Modern Cultures*. She is honored to have been elected recently to the Cather Foundation Board of Governors.

**Françoise Palleau-Papin** is Professor of American Literature at the University of Paris 13, Sorbonne Paris Cité. After completing a PhD dissertation on Cather, she has published a critical monograph on David Markson *This Is Not a Tragedy* (Dalkey Archive, 2011), and edited a collection of essays on William T. Vollmann (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011).



# Barb Sprague



Red Cloud and Catherland's beloved Barbara Sprague died around 5:00 a.m. Thursday, January 9, 2014, surrounded by all her children. The Church held her Rosary the following Sunday and conducted the requiem celebrating her life on the day after. It took helpers from

four churches to handle the hospitality lunch following!

There had been few if any signs of frailty, and, indeed, Barb had played for three Masses just the weekend before her death. (The organ itself gave up the ghost just before Barb's funeral!) True to her nature, she kept up right to the end and didn't waste much of the final day in dying.

Along with John English, Barb was the last continuous performing member of the St. Juliana Choir, formed in 1970 at the encouragement of Mildred Bennett to help celebrate the rededication of St. Juliana Falconieri, Red Cloud's first Roman Catholic Church.

Resident and visitor alike knew Barb as the master of the old pump organ in Grace Church, the Cather family church where Bishop Beecher confirmed Willa and later

gave her eulogy. For more than 50 years, Barb played at every annual Spring Conference service and for a host of other occasions such as Cather birthday anniversary services. The exertion of pumping that organ may have contributed to her longevity!

In recent years she often provided piano music for artist receptions in the Opera House Gallery. In addition, as part of various Red Cloud church and civic groups, she prepared and served food for a host of events, including our Elderhostel/Road Scholar weeks.

She had a great smile and always volunteered cheerfully and enthusiastically. Steve Shively recalls how much many of our guests (including his parents during an Elderhostel) enjoyed visiting with her. Chuck Peek recalls how much she welcomed guests to Grace Church when she played there.

Barb served on the Red Cloud City Council and made many unsung contributions to the welfare of the Red Cloud community. Besides being a friend to Red Cloud, she was a great friend to the Cather Foundation and to many of the members of its staff, Board of Governors, Advisory Board, and ranks of other volunteers. Fittingly, she is the posthumous recipient of the Miriam Mountford Volunteer of the Year Award for 2014, and Fritz Mountford has assured us how much this would fulfill his family's intent for the award.

On a very personal level, many of us feel her loss deeply. How we will miss hearing her play at services and events, especially as part of the celebration when the construction on the Moon Block ends and the National Willa Cather Center becomes a reality! Out of whatever different memories and associations, all of us can relate to Jim Southwick's

sentiment: "I will always remember how beautifully Barb played at my mother's memorial service in Grace Episcopal Church."

*We welcome contributions to the Willa Cather Foundation in Barb Sprague's memory as a way to honor her many contributions to the Foundation's work.*

**John English, Chuck Peek, and Steve Shively**



*Barb Sprague at the organ at St. Juliana, 1977. Front row, left to right: Barb, Fritz Mountford, Melody Bobrer, Sue McNeil, Gerilyn Giebler, Alicia Blue. Back row: Mark Swanson, Pastor Frank Schroeder, Marianne Fitzbiggon, Jeanne Phillips, John English, Patti Blankenbaker, Marian Schultz (in the doorway), Dick Lawson, Father Edwin Stander.*

# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

Volume 57, No. 1 | Spring 2014



## **The Willa Cather Foundation** **Established 1955 by Mildred Bennett**

Leslie C. Levy, Executive Director

[www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org)

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The *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should not exceed 3,500 words; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment and should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the Seventh Edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

Direct essays and inquiries to Ann Romines at [annrom3@verizon.net](mailto:annrom3@verizon.net).

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The *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* (ISSN 0197-663X) is published three times a year by:

The Willa Cather Foundation  
413 North Webster Street  
Red Cloud NE 68970

(402) 746-2653

(866) 731-7304

Fax: (402) 746-2652

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Visiting Red Cloud?

Plan to stay in the  
Cather Second Home.

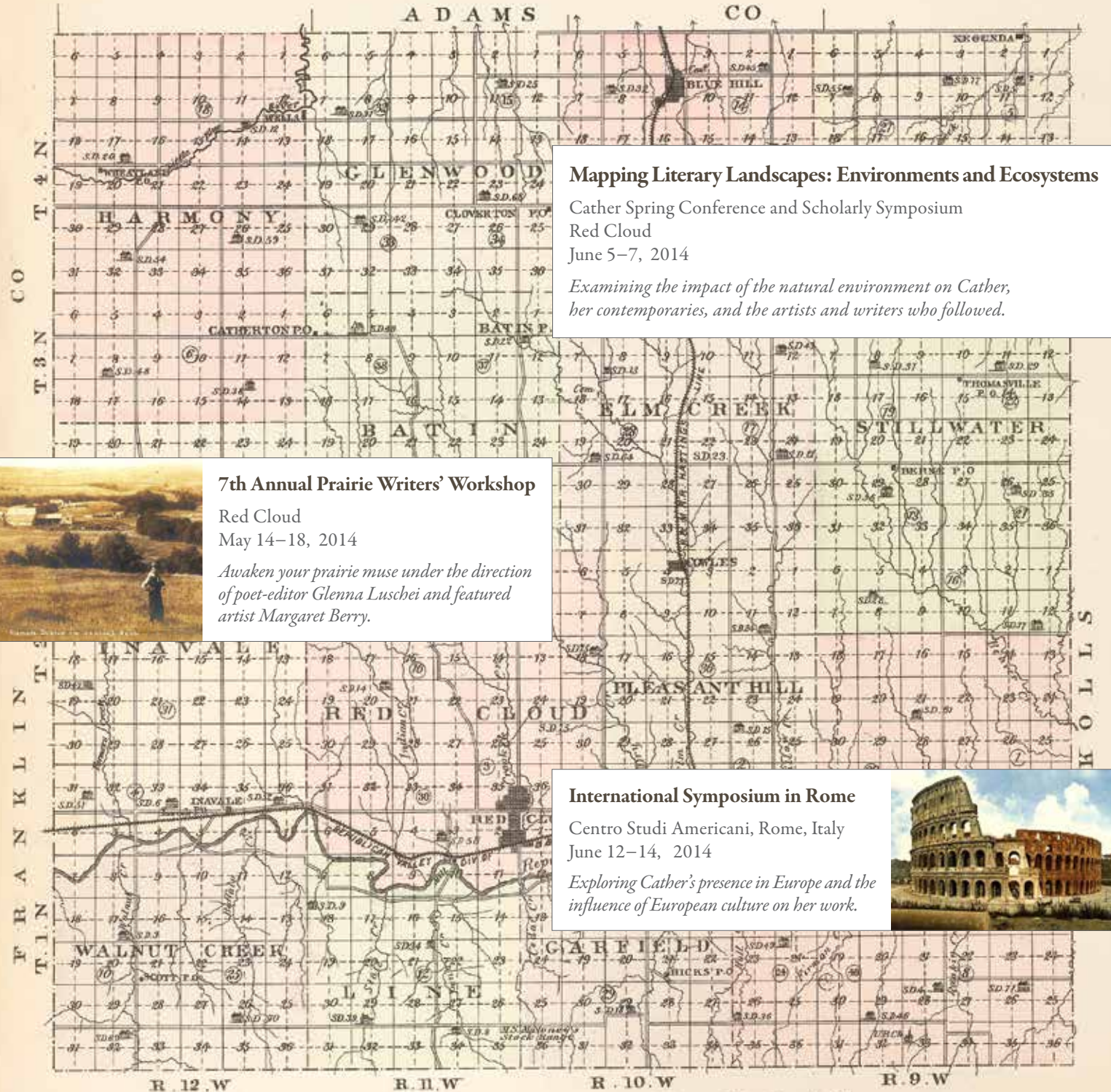
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# WEBSTER

COUNTY

Scale 1/2 Inch to 1 Mile



## Mapping Literary Landscapes: Environments and Ecosystems

Cather Spring Conference and Scholarly Symposium  
Red Cloud

June 5-7, 2014

*Examining the impact of the natural environment on Cather, her contemporaries, and the artists and writers who followed.*

## 7th Annual Prairie Writers' Workshop

Red Cloud  
May 14-18, 2014

*Awaken your prairie muse under the direction of poet-editor Glenna Luschei and featured artist Margaret Berry.*

## International Symposium in Rome

Centro Studi Americani, Rome, Italy  
June 12-14, 2014

*Exploring Cather's presence in Europe and the influence of European culture on her work.*



*I find that this Map agrees with our records and in my opinion is an excellent Map of Webster County*

Aug 29th 1884

*J. P. Bayha*  
County Clerk

TABLE OF EXPLANATIONS

TOWNSHIP LINES	ROAD DISTRICTS	
SECTION LINES	SCHOOL DISTRICTS	
QUARTER SECTION LINES	CEMETERIES	
RAIL ROADS	MARSHES	
RAILROADS INCOMPLETE	STREAMS	
PUBLIC ROADS	POST OFFICES	PO

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