

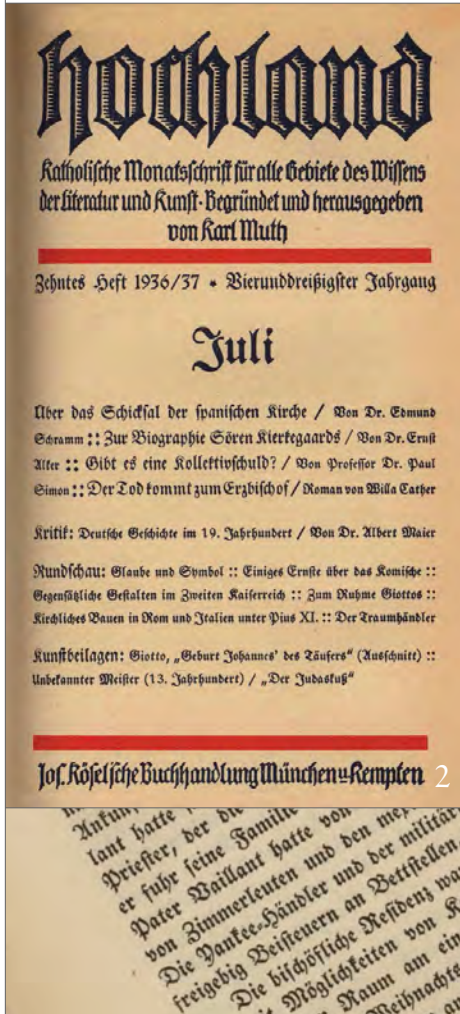
*Death Comes for the Archbishop in Germany*

*My Antonia and Gender Ideals*



# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

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## Letter from the President

### Thomas Reese Gallagher

We have had ourselves a wonderful year, with successful conferences behind us, the *O Pioneers!* centenary drawing to a close, and scores of new visitors experiencing Cather's Red Cloud for the first time (see the inside back cover for a taste). This has also been the year of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*—a feast for readers, and for us. For me, one of the incidental pleasures of reading the letters, and participating in a small way in researching some of them with my Foundation colleague Andy Jewell, was seeing Cather appear in what I think of as one of my own landscapes.

As Richard Harris has discussed in these pages, it was in a September 1, 1921 letter that Cather finally relented and permitted the novel she called "Claude" to be named *One of Ours*. The real story here was Cather's characteristic vehemence in resisting the change, and just how long she held out against it. But my own attention was fixed elsewhere, when, in Andy's company, I saw the original letter in the Barbara Dobkin Collection in New York City: it was written on a piece of letterhead from the Hotel Clarke, in Hastings, Nebraska. The

place where, a couple decades later, my father began his career in the hotel business.

True, in this part of the world, there's nothing particularly remarkable about finding yourself sharing pathways with Willa Cather. But here's one of the ironies of being a hotel kid, as I still see myself: these places that existed so the world could troop through were also one's home turf, or secret garden. External and internal landscapes blend; the Clarke (and later, other hotels like it) was for my siblings and me our hundred-acre wood. Here was Willa Cather in it, making critical decisions.

My reaction, to borrow from Elizabeth Bishop's sublime "Poem": "*Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!*" And the image I've always held dear enlarges somehow, the significance of the place changes.

A small moment; a footnote. I tuck it alongside the pleasures I get from the work, from the many places and landscapes she transformed and made indelible. As Bishop also says, "*Life and the memory of it so compressed / they've turned into each other.*"



## Letter from the Executive Director

### Leslie C. Levy

As I write this, it is Nebraska in the fall. Mornings are crisp, afternoons are glorious, and it is dark earlier. Everywhere you look, the green leaves have changed to gold and amber, with occasional dramatic splashes of red and orange. The fields of corn, soybeans, and milo are mostly harvested. There is something wonderfully nostalgic about the fall in the Midwest, knowing that for more than a century our neighbors, families and communities have engaged in this harvest ritual.

Cather felt this too. Her impressions of the land are apparent in almost all of her most prominent work. She said, "*I knew every farm, every tree, every field in the region around my home, and they all called out to me. My deepest feelings were rooted in this country because one's strongest emotions and one's most vivid mental pictures are acquired before one is 15.*" She added, "*I had searched for books telling about the beauty of the country I loved, its romance, and heroism and strength and courage of its people that had been plowed into the very furrows of its soil, and I did not find them. And so I wrote O Pioneers!*"

It has been an honor to celebrate the 100th anniversary of

*O Pioneers!* this year. Here in Nebraska it has been wonderful to feel the excitement as people attended lectures or book clubs to re-read *O Pioneers!* as part of Nebraska Center for the Book's "One Book, One Nebraska" tradition. Students nationwide participated in essay contests, artists created beautiful pieces evoking the emotions of the book, and accomplished poets crafted poignant and witty passages echoing Cather's work. It has also been a delight to experience the infectious enthusiasm of those reading the novel for the first time—and now looking forward to reading more Cather.

But at the heart of this year's activities, we have celebrated Willa Cather—the artist, the writer, the woman who has indelibly touched so many. Around the world Cather has inspired readers, writers, and scholars for generations. (Among our friends and supporters worldwide, we know, and know of, quite a few Willas!)

Cather's sphere of influence was evident during the 58th Annual Spring Conference in Red Cloud, Nebraska, and again at this year's International Seminar in Flagstaff, Arizona, as we were surrounded by wonderful people from all over the United States, as well as Costa Rica, India, New Zealand, France, Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, and Ireland, whom we would never have met had it not been for Willa Cather.

*Thank you, Willa, for all the bountiful gifts you have given us!*





# Of Nazis, False-bottomed Suitcases, and Paperback Reprints: *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* (*Death Comes for the Archbishop*) in Germany, 1936–1952

Charles Johanningsmeier | University of Nebraska at Omaha

In *Willa Cather: A Bibliography*, Joan Crane provides an extremely intriguing entry for the first German-language edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, entitled *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof*. The first part of this bibliographical description is quite innocuous: “Translated by Sigismund von Radecki. Stuttgart, 1940.” Immediately after this, however, Crane states: “Note: This edition was burned by the Nazis, and the plates were destroyed. The translator carried carbon sheets of his translation into Switzerland concealed under the lining of 2 suitcases.” She then concludes the description by noting, “The edition that follows (E50) was subsequently published in Zurich” in 1940 and 1942 (Crane 327). A Cather novel run afoul of the Nazis? A daring, heroic escape to Switzerland by someone who wanted German-language readers to have access to the novel? These elements would more typically be found in a spy thriller than in a bibliography. Such a dramatic narrative not only makes for interesting reading but also almost certainly pleases those who love nothing more than to hear stories of how particular fictions were so powerful or threatening to the status quo that various authorities moved to prevent their publication or distribution (e.g., via libraries or classrooms). There is only one problem: almost none of what Crane wrote is accurate.

Nevertheless, the real story of how *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* was originally translated into and published in German is still quite fascinating. Its first appearance in Germany certainly gave no indication of any skulduggery or controversy: an English-language edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was published by the German publishing firm of Bernhard Tauchnitz in 1927 without any difficulty, and it was widely available in Germany and throughout the world to those who could read English. After the Nazis came to power in 1933 and attempts were made to translate the novel into German a few years later, however, this novel’s story became much more complicated. Unknown to most Cather scholars, for instance, the first appearance of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in German was as a 1936 serial in a Catholic magazine; this translation subsequently was reprinted in Switzerland as the edition Crane labels “E50” (without any

smuggling across national borders). And in the early 1950s, *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* became very popular among German-language readers and was consequently reprinted numerous times in hardcover before the Knopf firm significantly dampened the growing interest in Cather by denying one publisher’s request to produce a paperback edition. Documenting the history of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof*’s publication during this era and closely examining each textual version is very revealing. Not only does doing so fill a significant lacuna in our understanding of Cather’s growing international reputation during these years (no previous scholarship about these textual versions exists), but it also helps explain why Cather remains a lesser-known and not especially highly regarded writer among German readers today.

Before examining the particular circumstances surrounding the first publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in German as a serial in 1936 and its second appearance as a book in 1940, it is helpful to know the rather volatile societal contexts in which it was translated, produced and read. Most significantly, these events took place during an era dominated by Nazism regime. By July 1932, the Nazi party had used widespread discontent with the economic depression in Germany to win a significant percentage of the vote in general parliamentary elections, making them the largest party in the Reichstag. Adolf Hitler was made Chancellor on 30 January 1933, and after the burning of the Reichstag building on February 27—blamed on Communists—Hitler was given special emergency powers to deal with any opposition that he deemed a threat to the German state.

From the beginning, a major part of the agenda of Hitler’s Nationalist German Socialist Worker’s Party was to control the production and dissemination of literary works, implicitly acknowledging their power to influence readers’ thinking and actions. In early 1933, the Reich issued a decree allowing for the “seizure by the police of any books that ‘tended to endanger public security and order,’” which led to a great many libraries and bookshops being raided (Evans 158). In 1934 alone, according to noted historian Richard Evans, “Four thousand one hundred different printed works were banned by a total of forty different



“censorship bodies” (159). During the years that followed, the Reich tightened its grasp over literary production and distribution, making it impossible for any author to have a work published in Germany without the approval of one of the various Nazi offices responsible for overseeing print production. In September 1933, Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels took control of “the activities of all persons involved in literary endeavor—writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians” (Boyer 270), and not long afterwards, Alfred Rosenberg, director of the Office for the Supervision of the Entire Cultural and Ideological Education and Training of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National German Socialist Workers’ Party), was put in charge of book censorship; one of this office’s many responsibilities was

maintaining and enforcing the “schwarze Bücherliste” (“Blacklist of Books”) constantly updated (Boyer 270).

What finally caught the world’s—and undoubtedly Willa Cather’s—attention were the mass book burnings in 34 German university towns on 10 May 1933. Cather would have been well aware of these book burnings, since they were widely reported in newspapers and magazines she had access to. She was not, however, among those American authors who immediately condemned the book burnings; these included Sherwood Anderson, Faith Baldwin, Irwin S. Cobb, Sinclair Lewis, and Lewis Mumford (“Nazi Pile Books for Bonfires”). A wide range of books were targeted; the circular form letter sent to German librarians stated that they should contribute any book “that works subversively on family life, married life or love, or the ethics of our youth, or our future, or strikes at the roots of German thought, the German home and the driving forces in our people; any works of those who would subordinate the soul to the material” (as quoted in Boyer 269). Jewish writers were, of course, singled out. One of these was Cather’s beloved Heinrich Heine, whose work she knew well from a personal copy she had acquired (possibly as a gift) in the 1890s (now included in the Charles E. Cather Collection). Whether Cather knew it or not, it was Heine who had written prophetically in his 1821 play *Almansor*, “Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen” (“Where they burn books, they will in the end also burn people”). Nowhere among the lists of books known to have been burned by the Nazis in 1933, though, were works by Willa Cather.

As the 1930s progressed in Germany, Nazi control of literary production became more complete. From mid-1935 to the end of 1936 “the Gestapo and the Sicherheitsdienst (the Nazi Party espionage service) periodically purged forbidden volumes on the Index from secondhand bookstores and lending libraries throughout Germany” (Hill 23), a pattern that would be repeated time and again in the following years. Somehow, however, Cather’s works continued to be published, despite their potential for being suspect. One major strike against her was that she was an American author, and most of her works circulating in Germany (under the auspices of the Tauchnitz firm) had been published in English, which alone would have made the Nazis suspicious, because the reading of foreign literature in the original language implied its readers’ “cosmopolitanism” (Hill 26). Fortunately for Cather, though, her works were not perceived as “Modernist,” which to the Nazis was synonymous with “decadent”; any works that included “Modernist” elements such as overt intellectualism, tolerance of racial integration, relaxed morals, and so forth, or which endorsed political ideologies such as socialism or communism, would have been closely scrutinized and possibly banned by the authorities. The fact that Cather’s



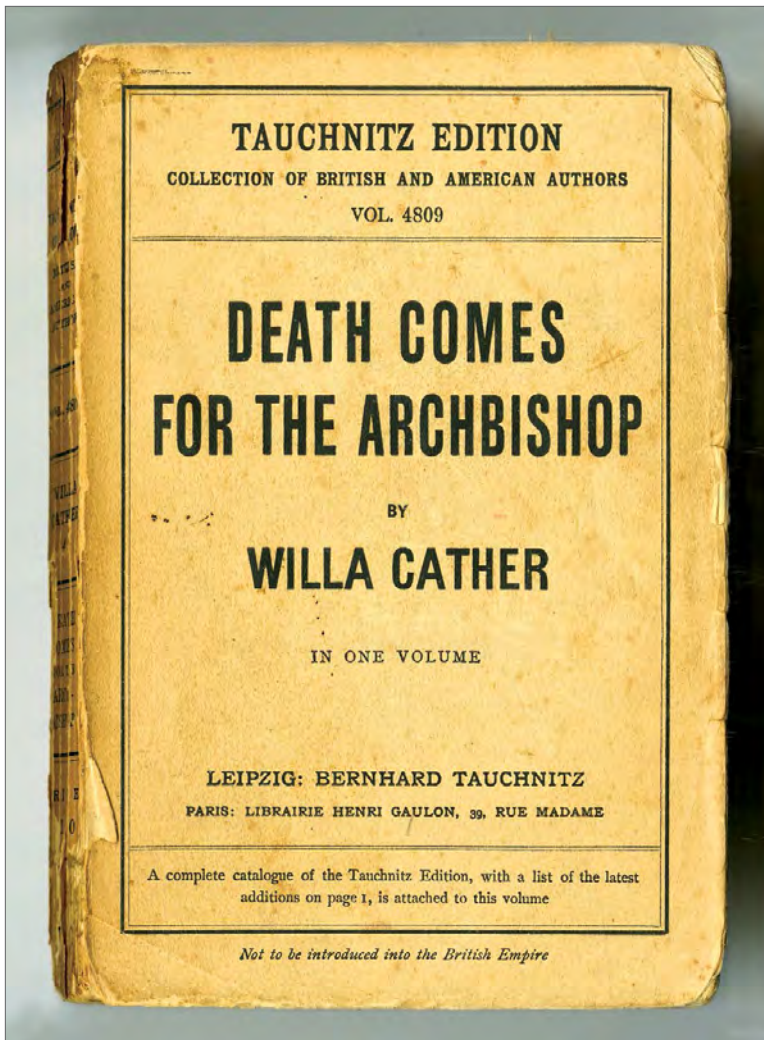
Photo: M. Dierlmayr • München/Sölln

*Karl Muth*

Karl Muth (1867–1944), founder and editor of *Hochland*







The Tauchnitz English-language edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, published in 1927

books—both in English and in German—had not run afoul of the Nazis before 1936 strongly suggests that they did not deem her works “dangerous” in any of the ways noted above.

Indeed, by virtue of Cather’s having been awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 and the Tauchnitz edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* being published in 1927, she and this text were fairly well known in 1936, the year Cather and the German translation of it inadvertently became associated with a group of Germans actively involved in resisting the Nazis. In early 1935, Dr. George Shuster, an American scholar living in Germany—and, more importantly, from 1929-1937 the managing editor of the prominent American Catholic periodical *Commonweal* (“President George N. Shuster”)—made arrangements with Karl Muth, the editor of *Hochland*, a German Catholic periodical based in Munich, to publish a translated version of Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as a serial (see Alfred A. Knopf, letter to Robert Murphy, 5 October 1945; and Knopf, letter to George Shuster, 5 July 1945, both Barbara Dobkin Collection). Knopf asked Cather for her permission, and on 13 March 1935,

Cather—well aware of the Nazis’ growing control over literary publication—approved the request: “Considering present conditions in Germany I should think a Catholic publisher was more likely to carry on than any other kind of publisher. The Catholic audience is well organized and knit together, and there doesn’t seem to be such organization of any other kind in Germany excepting the Nazi kind. Several years ago I said I didn’t want a Catholic house to publish the ARCHBISHOP in Germany, but times have changed and Germany has changed. The Catholic audience seems to me the only one there worth reaching” (Cather to Knopf, 13 March 1935, Barbara Dobkin Collection).

After receiving Cather’s approval, Knopf sent the firm’s authorization of such a publication, with three conditions: 1) that *Hochland* would not have to pay serial rights; 2) that in lieu of such payment, the translation should be sent to Knopf to use as it pleased after this serialization, possibly for a German book edition; and 3) that copies of the issues in which *Hochland* appeared should be sent to Knopf (letter, Knopf to Shuster, 5 July 1945; letter, Knopf to Robert Murphy, 5 October 1945, both Barbara Dobkin Collection). *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was duly translated into German in 1935–1936 by the prominent writer Sigismund von Radecki and published in the pages of *Hochland* in nine installments between January 1937 and September 1937. Neither von Radecki’s translation nor these issues of *Hochland*, though, were ever sent to Knopf.

To my knowledge, this serialization has hitherto not been seen, described, or commented on by any scholar. James Woodress does not mention it in *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, the “Textual Essay” in the Scholarly Edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* does not include it, Crane does not list it under “Novels First Published in Periodicals” (252), and although the more recent compilation of German foreign-language translations on *The Willa Cather Archive* website does list the serial, this does not necessarily indicate a familiarity with the actual serialization, for it incorrectly reports eight installments rather than nine. It is tempting, as a Cather scholar, to focus only on the serialized text of the novel in *Hochland* and disregard the contexts in which it was published. Doing so would reveal that “Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof” was non-illustrated and printed on relatively small pages (five inches by eight inches) of low-quality paper in densely-packed Fraktur, a heavy, medieval-looking font that was commonly used in Germany until after the Second World War. In addition, certain aspects of this translation undoubtedly would have appealed to Cather. For one thing, it was carried out by a person well-suited to the task. Born in 1891, Sigismund von Radecki was fluent in Russian, German, and English. At the time he approached Cather’s work he was not only a well-published writer himself but also a recently converted Catholic (in 1931), which would have

likely made him a sensitive and knowledgeable reader of Cather's depictions of the faith. Second, in his translation von Radecki left original Spanish terms in the text and used explanatory footnotes to explain certain terms to readers, instead of simply substituting German translations for the Spanish originals. Cather's feelings about how best to present the Spanish words in the text were revealed in a letter she wrote to Alfred Knopf on 19 April 1938, in which she complained that Marguerite Yourcenar had not used any footnotes in her French translation of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and that she had told Cather she would not include any because, according to her, they "were very objectionable to a French audience, and in such bad taste that she could not use them." In this same letter Cather commended the Italian translator of *Death*, Alessandro Scalero, for putting the Spanish words in italics and including "very clear and enlightening footnotes on such words as 'trapper,' [and] 'gringo,' and very short footnotes telling clearly what a 'mesa' is, a 'hogan,' 'wampum,' etc." (Cather to Knopf, 19 April 1938, Barbara Dobkin Collection).

Von Radecki handled the Spanish words the same way Scalero did; one wonders, indeed, if he consulted Scalero's translation before doing his own. Because the text of "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" was printed in *Hochland* in Fraktur, however, it would have been impossible to italicize the lettering; instead, key Spanish terms were represented in Antiqua font (regular lettering) and accompanied by a superscript number that correlated to a footnote on that page. Most of these notes are relatively accurate. For instance, in one installment the Spanish word "calabozo" is explained simply as "Gefängnis," or "jail" (July 1936: 430); in a later issue, it is presented as "Gefängniszelle" or "jail cell" (April 1937: 389); a "mesa" is "ein steiler, riesiger Felsentisch," or "a steep, giant cliff-table" (August 1936: 514), and "Gringo" is defined as "ein Fremder aus den Vereinigten Staaten" ("a stranger, from the United States") (January 1937: 134), an explanation which, given the context of the word's use in the novel, is correct.

At the same time, though, von Radecki's notes are at times somewhat misleading, which should come as no surprise given he had never been to the United States and is not known to have been

familiar with American Indian cultures. One example of a slight mistake is seen when he explains that "Wampum" is "indianischer Muschelschmuck; auch als Geld benutzt" ("Indian shell ornaments, also used as money") (August 1936: 510). Lost in the translation here is that "wampum" could be used figuratively to embrace all Native American forms of "payment," not just seashells; German readers with even a modicum of knowledge about American geography could have been forgiven for being puzzled as to how such shells would have been found in landlocked New Mexico. Another misleading footnote is for "kiva," described as "die heilige Zeremonial-hütte der Pueblo-Indianer" ("the sacred ceremonial hut of the Pueblo Indians") (September 1936: 41). While a "kiva" is definitely a "sacred" and "ceremonial" place for the Pueblo

Indians, it is definitely not a "hut": it is a large circular space dug out of the ground, reflecting the beliefs of many Pueblo Indians that humans emerged from worlds beneath the earth rather than from the sky. The kiva symbolizes this place of emergence and is a place where worshipers can be closer to the spiritual world. Whether these footnotes were accurate or not, their overall effect was probably to reinforce in German readers' minds the idea that some of Cather's previous German translations had implied: that Cather's texts were valuable chiefly for what they taught readers about life in what to them was an "exotic" land.

Such bibliographic details as these are certainly important for the way they shed light on how the physical presentation of Cather's novel to a large, mostly Catholic audience in pre-war Germany (the reported circulation of *Hochland* in 1936 was 12,000

[Muth]) might have impacted readers' responses to it. However, these factors influenced readers' interactions with the novel less than did certain elements of the larger socio-historical frame surrounding Cather's serialized novel.

One of these elements was unknown to Cather and presumably Knopf: *Hochland* was not simply "a Catholic periodical," as it is described on *The Willa Cather Archive* website's bibliography of German translations; according to historian Derek Hastings, it "was by common acclaim the leading Catholic cultural forum in the German-speaking world" (389). Undoubtedly one effect of the publication of "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" in its pages



Sigismund von Radecki, writer and translator, in a 1946 passport photo





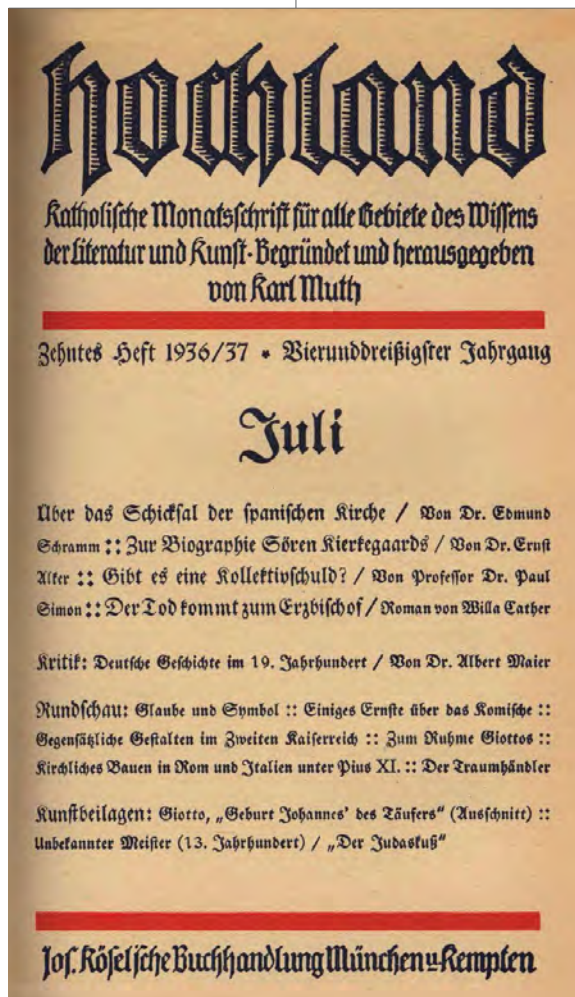
would have been to lead many German readers to the same mistaken conclusion that many Americans came to upon reading *Death Comes for the Archbishop*: that Cather was a Catholic writer (in fact she was raised Baptist and later confirmed in the Episcopal faith).

More important to consider when gauging how readers would have responded to this serialized novel is that *Hochland* was known to be strongly resistant to the Nazi regime. In general, *Hochland* functioned as a liberal counterbalance to the more conservative *Der Gral: katholische Monatschrift für Dichtung und Leben* (*The Grail: A Catholic Monthly for Literature and Life*), which from its beginning in 1906 to its end in 1937 advised German Catholics to focus on their faith and not be as concerned with modern politics (Farías 34), a stance the Nazis would have endorsed. In sharp contrast, Muth's *Hochland*, subtitled *Katholische Monatschrift für alle Gebiete des Wissens der Literatur und Kunst-Begründet und herausgegeben von Karl Muth* (*Catholic Monthly Magazine for All Areas of Knowledge, Literature, Arts, founded and published by Karl Muth*), professed its allegiance to a more "modern" and "liberal" Catholicism. Not only did *Hochland* advocate Catholic engagement with Germans of other faiths but also with modern politics, something the Nazis would not have welcomed. Its ecumenical, inclusive stance is reflected in the tables of contents of the issues in which Cather's novel was serialized; these contained a wide range of materials by authors of different denominations, including literary essays, religious treatises, artwork, and philosophical articles. The "*Hochland* Kreis" or "*Hochland* Circle" of contributors included a number of people known to be resistant to the regime; among these were political theorist Carl Schmitt and the liberal Catholic theologian Theodore Haecker. Another was the Norwegian novelist Sigrid Undset, who had converted to Catholicism in 1924 and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928; according to one source, "She had strongly criticised Hitler since the early 1930s, and from an early date her books were banned in Nazi Germany" ("Undset, Sigrid"). Shortly

after the Nazis invaded her native Norway in 1940 she fled to New York, where she quite coincidentally befriended Willa Cather (Harbison). *Hochland* editor Muth even knew Hans and Sophie Scholl, members of the "White Rose" movement that sought to bring down Hitler. Although Muth himself is not known to have ever been arrested, his place as editor was taken from 1939 to 1941 by Franz Joseph Schöningh, who was in charge when *Hochland* was closed down by the Nazis in June 1941.

The effect of all of these contextual factors on readers of "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" in *Hochland*, of course, must remain speculative, as no reactions to the serial itself are known to have been recorded. Yet one might hypothesize that since no texts published in Nazi Germany could openly express resistance to the ideologies or practices of the regime, and that readers of *Hochland* were thus practiced in reading closely for hints of subversiveness (Ackermann), readers of Cather's novel in its pages probably scrutinized the text very carefully for hints of "resistant" messages. One might imagine, then, that at least some *Hochland* readers would have seen "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" not only as a story about two priests' adherence to their faith in the face of extreme environmental pressures, but also as an inspirational conduct narrative for German Catholics who wished to resist those who sought to make them succumb to a world that they regarded as apostate.

The serialization of Cather's novel in *Hochland* and its possibly indirect involvement with the German Catholic resistance was unknown at the time to both Willa Cather and Alfred Knopf, although presumably George Shuster, who had arranged the serialization, knew very well what publication in *Hochland* would have signified. Knopf and Cather were enlightened about the publication history of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* only much later, after the war. On 5 July 1945, Alfred Knopf wrote to George Shuster, and after recounting to him the terms of their previous arrangement with *Hochland*, stated, "I do not find in our records anything to indicate that *Hochland* ever went through with this deal or that they ever fulfilled their



*The July 1937 Hochland, containing one of the installments of "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" / Roman von Willa Cather*



obligation to send us a copy of their Germany version. Can you shed any light on this subject? If by chance they did serialize the novel, have you a copy of the translation? Or could you suggest where we could get a copy of it?" Shuster replied shortly thereafter, on 2 September 1945: "This translation actually appeared in the magazine. When, however, the publisher requested permission to issue the book Dr. Goebbels' [sic] office replied in the negative. No reason was given." He added, "Whether the translation does exist depends of course upon whether it has survived. On the other hand, there must be issues of the magazine containing the novel" (Shuster, letter to Knopf, Barbara Dobkin Collection).

While informing Knopf about "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" having in fact been translated into German approximately ten years earlier, Shuster also inadvertently deepened the mystery surrounding the novel when he reported that according to his sources, Propaganda Minister Goebbels' office had turned down *Hochland's* request to publish the novel in German as a book. Adding to the sense of intrigue was a piece of paper Willa Cather attached to a letter she had sent to editor Ferris Greenslet some six months earlier, on 31 January 1945. This list is headed, "European Editions of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," and it states: "*Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* (Burned in Germany) – Publisher: Scientia AG. – Zürich, Switzerland – (German translation was burned in the street by Nazi police, and plates destroyed. Meanwhile the translator had escaped into Switzerland, carrying with him carbon sheets of his translation under the lining of two suitcases. Two years later this translation into German was published in Zürich, and had a very large sale.)" (Cather, letter to Greenslet, 31 January 1945). Who provided this list to Cather, and where its author obtained the information contained in it, is unknown, although it presumably came from someone at the Knopf firm.

When Joan Crane many years later recounted this information in her bibliography of Cather's work, she slightly altered it (probably unintentionally) in ways that made the story even more dramatic. As noted earlier, according to Crane, it was no longer the "translation" that was "burned by the Nazis" but rather "This edition," implicitly an edition in volume form of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* that Crane lists as having been printed by the Victoria Verlag of Stuttgart in 1940, what she labels "E49" (327). Crane then provides a bibliographical citation of the edition supposedly produced from von Radecki's smuggled translation, published by Scientia AG publishers in Zurich in 1940, which she calls "E50" (327).

Appealing as it might be to Cather scholars who wish to highlight the subversiveness of Cather's texts, upon closer investigation this story of copies of a book edition of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* having been burned by the Nazis

(presumably in Stuttgart, where the Victoria Verlag supposedly was) and a translation subsequently being smuggled into Switzerland simply does not stand up. First of all, there was no "edition" of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* published in Stuttgart by Victoria Verlag in 1940. Not only is there no listing for such a publication in the "GV" (*Gesamtverzeichnis des deutschsprachigen Schrifttums*, a listing of all books printed and published in Germany), or in the reference work *Handbuch der Weltliteratur* for 1950 (Eppelsheimer 226), but the Victoria Verlag did not even exist in 1940, being active only between the years 1949 and 1953. *WorldCat* does list seven copies of an edition of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* published in Stuttgart by Victoria Verlag in 1940, but it is clear from my examination of one of these copies at the Bennett Martin Branch of the Lincoln, Nebraska, Public Library, that those cataloguers who have dated this edition "1940" are mistaken. These cataloguers were evidently misled by the "Copyright 1940 by Scientia AG. Zürich" notation on an interior page of what is in fact a 1952 Victoria Verlag reprint—one whose production is amply documented in the Knopf archives (Koshland). Significantly, too, the first reference work to record a Stuttgart publication of this novel was not the 1950 edition of *Handbuch der Weltliteratur*, which would have been the case had it been published in 1940, but rather the 1960 edition of the *Handbuch*: "Zürich 1940. 355 S.; Stuttg.<sup>2</sup> 1952; Einsiedeln 1957. 289 S." (the superscript "2" before the 1952 date signifies "second printing") (612).

Further evidence undermining this dramatic story is that before any book could be published in Germany during the Nazi era, the publisher was required to seek pre-approval from one of the many offices overseeing literary production, such as the Reichsschriftumskammer (Reich Chamber of Literature) or its associated Bund Reichsdeutscher Buchhändler (German Reich Book Trade Federation). If Propaganda Minister Goebbels' office had in fact turned down the request made by the editors of *Hochland* to publish "Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof" in volume form, it is simply inconceivable that the novel could have subsequently won from some other agency the approval necessary to have it published in Germany. It is also quite unlikely that, even if copies of the novel were somehow printed in Stuttgart in 1938, they were "burned." A great deal of research has been conducted on Nazi book burnings, and a thorough search of the available German resources by noted scholar Frank Usbeck of the University of Dresden indicates that although a few isolated book burnings took place in Germany 1938 when Austria was annexed, "The lists of burning towns do not include Stuttgart" (E-mail, 18 December 2012).

Even more evidence can be stacked against this tale. Dirk-Gerd Erpenbeck is an independent scholar in Germany and an





## Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof Von Willa Cather

III.

Der Bischof chez lui

Es war am späten Nachmittag des Weihnachtstages, und der Bischof saß briefschreibend an seinem Tisch. Seit seiner Rückkehr nach Santa Fé war die Last seiner Amtskorrespondenz schwer gewesen; doch sollten die engbeschriebenen Blätter, über die er sich mit gedankenvollem Lächeln beugte, weder zu Monsignoris gehen, noch zu Erzbischöfen, noch zu Ordenshäufern — sondern nach Frankreich, in die Auvergne, in seine kleine Heimatstadt; in eine gewisse graue, winklige Straße, gepflastert mit Kieselsteinen und überschattet von hohen Kastanien, an denen selbst am heutigen Tage noch ein paar braune Blätter hängen oder eines nach dem anderen fallen würde, um vom kalten, grünen Mauerefeu aufgefangen zu werden.

Erst vor neun Tagen war der Bischof von seinem langen Ritt hinein nach Mexiko zurückgekehrt. In Durango hatte ihm der alte merikanische Prälat nach einigem Zögern jene Dokumente eingehändigt, die sein Vikariat festlegten und bestätigten, und Pater Latour ritt die fünfzehnhundert Meilen nach Santa Fé zurück durch die sonnigen Tage des Frühwinters. Bei der Ankunft fand er Freundlichkeit statt Feindschaft seiner harren. Pater Vaillant hatte sich den Leuten bereits wert und teuer gemacht. Der merikanische Priester, der die Pro-Kathedrale versah, war mit Anstand zurückgetreten — er fuhr seine Familie in Altmeriko besuchen und nahm all seine Sachen mit. Pater Vaillant hatte von dem Pfarrhause Besitz ergriffen und es mit Hilfe von Zimmerleuten und den merikanischen Frauen der Gemeinde instandgesetzt. Die Yankee-Händler und der militärische Kommandant von Fort Marcy hatten freigebig Weisern an Bettstellen, Decken und vereinzelt Mobiliar gesandt.

Die bischöfliche Residenz war ein altes Lehmhaus, sehr reparaturbedürftig, doch mit Möglichkeiten von Komfort. Pater Latour hatte sich als Studierzimmer einen Raum am einen Ende des Flügels ausgesucht. Dort saß er jetzt, als dieser Weihnachtsnachmittag in den Abend verbämmerte. Es war ein langes Zimmer von angenehmen Ausmaßen. Die dicken Lehmwände waren auf der Innenseite von den geschickten Händen indianischer Frauen geglättet worden und hatten das Unregelmäßig-Frauliche aller Dinge, die gänzlich von Menschenhand gemacht sind. Sie waren von einer beruhigenden Dauerhaftigkeit und Dicke, diese Wände, gerundet an den Türschwelen und Fensterbänken, gerundet in weitem Schwingen um den Ekkamin. Das Innere war in des Bischofs Abwesenheit neu geweißt worden, und das Flackern des Feuers warf einen roßigen Schein auf die leichtgewellten Flächen, die niemals ganz glatt waren und niemals totweiß, denn die Mäßlichkeit des Leumes darunter gab der Kaltstünche einen warmen Ton. Die Zimmerdecke bestand aus schweren Flederstämmen und war belegt mit gleichgroßen rohgeschälten Epenstämmen, die dicht beieinander lagen wie die Rippen des Korbstoffes. Der erdgefärbte Fußboden war mit dicken Indianerdecken belegt; zwei Decken, sehr alt und

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schön in Muster und Farbe, hatte man als Tapeten an die Wände gehängt. Auf beiden Seiten des Kamins waren gestufte Nischen in die Wände eingelassen. In der einen, der schmalen und rundgewölbten, stand des Bischofs Kreuzifix. Die andere war viereckig mit einer geschmückten, rostartigen Tür, und darin lagen ein paar seltene und schöne Bücher. Der Rest der Bibliothek des Bischofs stand auf offenen Widerbrettern am einen Ende des Zimmers.

Die Möbel des Hauses hatte Pater Vaillant von dem abreisenden merikanischen Priester erworben. Sie waren schwer und ein wenig plump, doch nicht unansehnlich. All das Holz zu Tischen und Bettstellen war mit der Art oder dem kleinen Handbeil aus Baumstämmen gewonnen worden. Selbst die dicken Planken, auf denen die theologischen Bücher des Bischofs ruhten, hatte man mit der Art ausgehauen. Es gab zu der Zeit keine einzige Drechselbank oder Sägemühle im ganzen nördlichen Neumeriko. Die einheimischen Tischler schnitten sich Stuhllehnen und Tischbeine und fügten sie mit Holzstiften zusammen statt mit Eisennägeln. An Stelle von Kommoden mit Schubladen wurden Holzkästen verwendet, und manchmal trugen sie schönes Schnitzwerk oder waren bedeckt mit verziertem Leder. Der Tisch, an dem der Bischof arbeitend saß, war importiert, ein Walnuss-Sekretär amerikanischer Arbeit (den einer der Offiziere des Forts auf Pater Vaillants Anregung hergeschickt hatte). Seine silbernen Leuchter hatte er vor langer Zeit aus Frankreich herübergebracht. Sie waren ihm von einer geliebten Tante zu seiner Priesterweihe geschenkt worden.

Des jungen Bischofs Feder flog übers Papier und hinterließ als Spur eine feine, vollendete französische Handschrift in violetter Tinte.

Mein neues Studierzimmer, lieber Bruder, ist gerade da ich eben schreibe, erfüllt vom Wohlgeruch der brennenden Föhrenscheite in meinem Kamin. (Wir gebrauchen diese Art Föhrenholz lediglich als Brennmaterial, und es ist sehr aromatisch, wiewohl zart. Zu unseren geringsten Beschäftigungen haben wir einen ewigen Duft von Weibrauch um uns schweben.) Ich wünschte, daß Du und meine liebe Schwester diesen Schauplatz von Bequemlichkeit und Frieden sehen könntest. Ihr müßt wissen, daß wir Missionare den ganzen Tag über einen Grad und einen breitkrempigen Hut tragen und wie amerikanische Kaufleute ausschauen. Welch eine Freude, nach Hause zu kommen und die alte Coutane anzuziehen! Ich fühle mich dann mehr als Priester (so lange am Tage muß ich „business man“ sein!) und, aus gewissen Gründen, mehr als Franzose. Den ganzen Tag bin ich ein Amerikaner in Sprache und Denken — jawohl, und im Herzen ebenfalls. Die Freundlichkeit der amerikanischen Händler und besonders der Offiziere des Forts gebietet mir mehr als eine bloß oberflächliche Loyalität. Ich möchte den Offizieren in ihrer Aufgabe hier helfen. Ich kann sie mehr unterstützen, als sie ahnen. Die Kirche kann mehr tun als das Fort, um diese armen Merikaner zu „guten Amerikanern“ zu machen. Und es ist gut für das Volk; es gibt sonst keinen Weg, auf dem sie ihre Lage verbessern könnten.

Aber heute ist nicht der Tag, Dir von meinen Pflichten oder Plänen

*The opening pages of Book One, Chapter 3, in the original Hochland publication*

authority on the life and career of the translator in question, Sigismund von Radecki. He has told me that von Radecki knew the owner of the Scientia AG publishing firm in Zürich, Frau Annie Gallus, from their time together in Berlin, previous to Gallus's having established this firm in Zürich in 1937. Yet he also points out that von Radecki did not travel to Switzerland between 1936 (the date of his translation of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*) and 1940, the date when *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* was published in Zürich (E-mail, 6 September 2013). Thus, by no stretch of the imagination can it be said that “the translator had escaped into Switzerland” in 1938 or that he had carried “with him carbon sheets of his translation “under the lining of two suitcases,” as the note attached to Cather's 1945 letter contended. Von Radecki did eventually move to Switzerland in 1946, but by this time it could not be described as an “escape.”

In all likelihood, in the late 1930s von Radecki used a much more mundane method to send his translation to Zürich. Because Germany and Switzerland were not at war with each other, there was regular postal service between the two countries, and presumably

private express services were also still in operation. The border to Switzerland was sealed relatively tightly to Germans wishing to flee the country, but mail was allowed to pass through with relative ease.

Of course, some might still argue that although von Radecki was able to send his translation of Cather's novel to Switzerland by mail or express service, this doesn't mean the Nazis hadn't disapproved of it or even burned it. Yet this scenario—essentially that von Radecki, having somehow known of Nazi opposition to the novel, went ahead and sent it to Switzerland for publication—is highly unlikely, and thus such an argument is quite weak. First, while mail and express services did exist between the two countries, it was widely known that the Nazis were closely watching what was sent through it. If von Radecki had had reason to worry about the Nazis intercepting his translation and this causing him to be punished, he would not have risked sending his translation through the mail. Second, if von Radecki had recently experienced the Nazis burning a copy of his translation (either as loose sheets or as copies of *Hochland*) or destroying plates of a book he had translated, he would not have been foolish enough





to send another copy of the translation into Switzerland with the intention of having it published there. After all, he himself lived in Germany and anticipated continuing to live there for a long time. If he had known the Nazis disapproved of his translation (and by extension, Cather's novel), he would have had to have a death wish to let the words "Übersetzt von Sigismund von Radecki" ("Translated by Sigismund von Radecki") be printed on the copyright page of a German language volume that would undoubtedly have been intended for circulation in Germany as well as in Austria and the German-speaking section of Switzerland. Such a blatantly obvious act of resistance would surely have cost him his life. I would propose that the very fact of this translation making its way to Switzerland through normal channels, and von Radecki's willingness to publicly acknowledge his role as translator, strongly indicates that neither he nor the Nazis viewed *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* as a potentially "subversive" text.

Having said this, I will acknowledge that one part of this whole dramatic story might still be true: it is entirely possible that some office of the Nazi regime denied the application to publish *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* around 1938. This should not, however, be misconstrued as being due to the subversiveness of Cather's text per se. Instead, what most likely would have accounted for such a decision was the fact that it had been published in *Hochland*, which as noted earlier was a periodical deeply suspect in the eyes of the Nazis. It is possible that editor Muth purposely used Cather's novel to encourage resistance among *Hochland*'s readers or thumb his nose at the Nazi authorities, but Cather herself would not have wanted her novel about two obscure French priests in New Mexico in the nineteenth century to find itself in the midst of a very serious contemporary political conflict in Nazi Germany. After all, as she wrote to Ferris Greenslet in January 1945, "I very much dislike being the subject of controversy" (Cather, 31 January 1945).

How, then, one might ask, did a German-language edition of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* come to be published by Scientia AG of Zürich in 1940, if the translation was not "smuggled" into Switzerland? In fact, the arrangements for this publication were quite straightforward. An agreement between Scientia AG and Alfred A. Knopf publishing dated 12 March 1940 granted "the right to sell that book in the German language in an original edition at stated royalties" (Koshland). What Knopf didn't know, judging from later manuscript letters, was that this edition would use the very translation from *Hochland* that his firm was supposed to have received for free in return for the serialization rights. Clearly von Radecki had contracted to supply his friend Frau Gallus, at Scientia AG, with copies of his translation in one form or another. Whether von Radecki knew that in doing so he had broken Knopf's agreement with *Hochland*, or whether he kept

this a secret from Gallus is not known. Alfred A. Knopf realized only much later what had transpired. Until the end of the Second World War, he did not know that *Hochland* had gone through with the serialization; he learned this only in a letter from George Shuster dated 2 October 1945 (Barbara Dobkin Collection). And while he then initiated a search for copies of the magazine's serialization of Cather's novel, there is no record he ever saw any of them. As for the Swiss edition of the novel, published in 1940, in one letter to Parker Buhrman, United States Political Adviser for Germany (Munich) on 6 December 1945, Knopf stated, "I confirm that we did contract with Scientia A.G. of Zurich for a German translation of this novel early in 1940, but your letter is the first indication we have had that Scientia ever went through with the book's production. We have never seen it and it is good news that you are going to send us a copy of it. Scientia contracted to deliver to us two copies of each edition they published so perhaps you could persuade them to send along a second copy which we could deliver to the author" (Barbara Dobkin Collection).

Whether copies of this edition were subsequently sent to Knopf and "deliver[ed] to the author" is unknown. What can be said, though, is that a great deal of effort was expended on the production of this edition. It includes all of the explanatory footnotes that von Radecki had included in his translation for *Hochland* and dispenses with the Fraktur typeface, making it much easier to read. To help the reader, too, this edition includes a very detailed Inhaltsverzeichnis (table of contents) after "Prolog in Rom" ("Prologue in Rome") that goes beyond the simple way in which the American edition divides the novel into nine "books." Here, the table of contents guides the German reader by also providing the short titles which in the American edition are provided at the beginning of each chapter, i.e., "Der hölzerene Papagei" ("The Wooden Parrot").

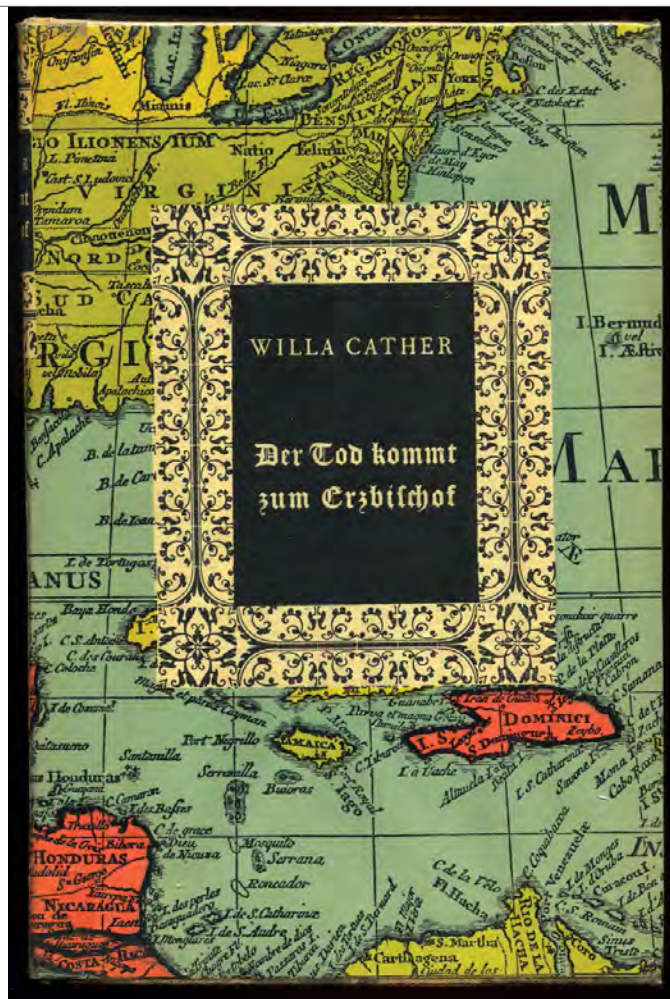
The only place in this edition where one sees Fraktur, interestingly enough, is on the dust jacket, for the title *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof*. This dustjacket is in fact a very interesting component of the edition, with "WILLA CATHER / Der Tod kommt / zum Erzbischof" on the front in white letters in a black box, which is itself encased in a patterned border; all of this is superimposed on an old, multi-colored Spanish map of the New World. The overall effect created is an expectation that this is an historical novel about exploration and adventure, not a modern, artistic experiment in fiction. This attitude is reinforced by the text on the inside flap of this dust jacket. Intended for, and circulated among, Swiss, German, and Austrian readers, it encourages again the attitude that Cather's works should be regarded as a type of "tour" of an exotic land, in this case "die unvergleichliche Hochebene Mexikos" ("the unparalleled high plain of Mexico"). Striking another popular note among Germans



(and German-speaking Swiss and Austrians), the dustjacket copy implies that the novel is chiefly about Father Latour's attempts to bring Christianity to the Indians, the latter a subject of fascination then as now for both Swiss and Germans; the priests' work among the much less exotic "lapsed" Spanish inhabitants of this region was downplayed. For all such readers interested in "Indianer," the book "bietet die Gewähr, dass uns auch wirklich das arteilene Wesen der Menschen eines überaus eigenartigen Landes vermittelt wird" ("guarantees that the native essence of the people of an exceedingly unique land will be imparted to us [readers]"). Yet the writer of the dustjacket copy also acknowledges that Latour "ihm hier eine uralte Tradition gegenübertritt, eine Erfahrung, die keine Sprache ihm übersetzen kann" ("is confronted by an ancient tradition and experience

that no language can translate for him"), and essentially that such conversion is impossible. Thus, the Indians in the novel are described as remaining mysterious and resistant to the ways of white Westerners—exactly the type of "exoticism" that would have appealed to the target audience.

This dustjacket would have confirmed and supported for German readers an understanding of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* as not only a "Catholic" novel but also a narrative about an exotic place filled with exotic people, a perception that had been established much earlier by two German commentators in 1930. Dr. Albert Eichler summed up the novel as one that "führt die Erdenlaufbahn des eindringlich geschilderten tapferen Missionärs von Neu-Mexiko fast bis zur Heiligkeit empor, Hand in Hand mit geschichtlichen, sagenmässigen und landschaftlichen Episoden aus dem bald paradisischen, bald höllischen äussersten Südwesten" ("follows the earthly course of the intensely described courageous missionary of New Mexico almost up to his elevation to bishop, hand-in-hand with historical, legendary, and geographic episodes from a Southwest that is alternately paradisaical and hellish") (8). Another emphasized how, just as in *The Professor's House*, Tom Outland "hatte die Kultur der verschwundenen Indianerstämme



*The Scientia AG Swiss edition, published in 1940*

in New Mexico erforscht" ("had explored the culture of the vanished Indian tribes of New Mexico") (Bruns 67), so "In diese Welt führt uns auch 'Death Comes for the Archbishop'" ("This world is found, too, in 'Death Comes for the Archbishop'") (Bruns 67). This reviewer concluded, "Hier hat Willa Cather's Kunst der Prosa ihr bestes gegeben" ("Here Willa Cather's prose art is at its best") (Bruns 67).

After the end of the Second World War, the popularity of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* among German readers continued to grow. In fact, in 1951 Scientia AG of Zürich, with Knopf's permission, sold German language publishing rights to their translation by Sigismund von Radecki not only to the Victoria Verlag of Stuttgart for reprinting, but also to a German book club based in Hamburg called the "Freunde der

Weltliteratur Lesergemeinschaft G.m.b.H." ("Friends of World Literature Book Club, Inc.") for a "Sonderausgabe" ("Special Edition") of 2,000 copies (Koshland).

These two German editions of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* of 1952 are almost identical to one another. Their only differences are their title and copyright pages, their cover materials and design, and the lower quality paper of the book club special edition. One similarity is their shared "Schutzumschlag" ("Dust jacket"), designed by a man named Rolf Wagner, that has a quite modern appearance, with a red band across the top third, then a black band in the middle, and a brown band covering the bottom third. The lettering, all in white, is superimposed over each section: "WILLA CATHER" over the red, "DER TOD KOMMT ZUM ERZBISCHOF" over the black, and "ROMAN" ("novel") over the brown. Both, too, have the same text on the inside flap of the dustjacket; some highlights include the statements that "Humor durchwaltet selbsts eine so groteskschauerliche Erzählung wie die Geschichte vom Bruder Baltazar und schafft die liebenswert komische Donna [sic] Isabella" ("a striking humor presides throughout such a grotesque, eerie story such as that of Brother Baltazar, and creates the loveable,



odd, Donna Isabella”); that Latour and Vaillant engage in “Pionierarbeit” (“pioneering work”); and that the novel “besitzt schon als Fabel eindringliche Tiefe und ist zugleich erfüllt von jener epischen Kraft, die alsbald zwischen Leser und Darstellung geheimnisvoll starken Kontakt bewirkt” (“though a fable, possesses a striking depth and is simultaneously filled with that epic strength that almost at once brings about between reader and work a strong and mystical contact”). Furthermore, these editions’ texts are printed from the exact same plates as the 1940 Scientia AG edition, with the same detailed table of contents.

Clearly, Scientia AG publishers recognized that there was a sizeable market for *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* in German-speaking countries. Two reprints were not, it saw, enough to satisfy the market. This led the firm to apply to Knopf in January 1952 for “permission to arrange for a German edition [by another publisher] of 20,000 copies, paper bound” (Koshland). It was here, though, that the Knopf firm drew the line. William A. Koshland, writing on the firm’s behalf, firmly declined this request for a third German-language reprinting, telling Scientia AG, “I’m afraid we will have to withhold this permission and insist that you do so as well. Miss Cather was very much opposed to having her work appear in cheaper reprint editions and we feel morally bound to abide by her express wishes in this” (Koshland). This refusal to allow a paper-bound edition of 20,000 copies of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof*

(and presumably of any other of her translated texts), combined with the collapse of the Tauchnitz firm that had been publishing Cather’s works in inexpensive paperback format since the 1920s, would unfortunately serve for a long time to come to impede what appeared to have been a growing interest in Cather’s works.

Today in Germany it is relatively easy to locate and read a paperbound copy of *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* or most any other Cather novel. Nonetheless, as one commentator stated in 2009, “Willa Cather ist bei uns immer noch viel zu wenig bekannt” (“Willa Cather is still very little known in Germany”) (Lueken). Furthermore, on those occasions when her works are discussed, they are analyzed in such a way as to cast Cather as a

regional writer who affords her readers relatively straightforward depictions of the American West of years gone by rather than as a Modernist writer whose fictions challenge readers and deal with larger, more universal issues. Long forgotten are the ways in which *Der Tod kommt zum Erzbischof* was involved with resistance to the Nazis and how publishers clamored to publish it both during and after the Second World War. It is hoped that this account of the novel’s history will encourage greater appreciation of how Cather’s work about two French priests toiling in nineteenth-century New

Mexico was not at all a historical novel divorced from contemporary culture; rather, it raised issues of importance to a very wide range of people in the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, this history highlights, once again, how categorizing Cather as solely a “regionalist” author does not do her justice.

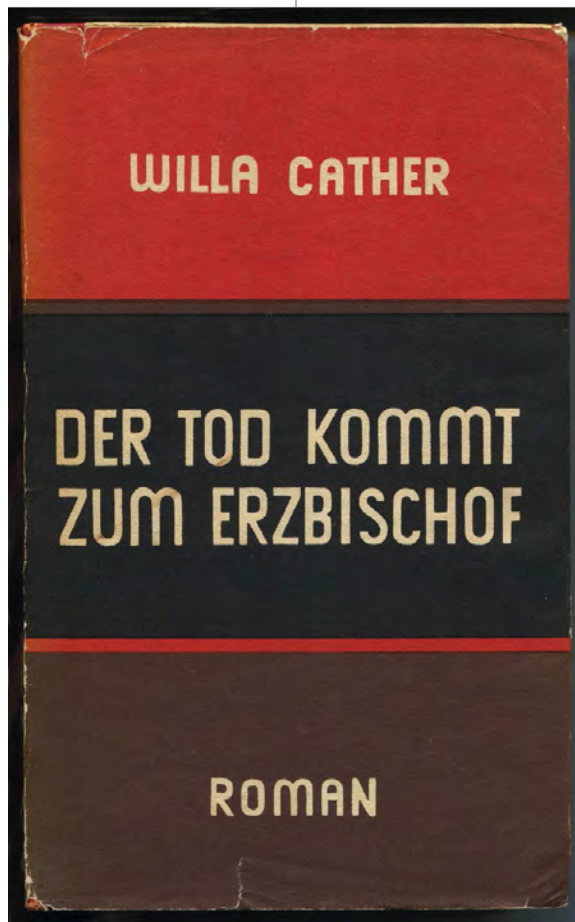
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at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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#### *Charles Johanningsmeier*

*Chuck Johanningsmeier is Professor and Jefferis Chair of English at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. One of his areas of focus is how literary texts have mattered in the lives of historical readers. He is currently researching fan mail sent to Willa Cather during her lifetime, as well as the English-language editions of her works published by the Tauchnitz firm of Leipzig, Germany between 1926 and 1942.*



*The 1952 Friends of World Literature reprint*



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# “Narrative Nostalgia” and Embodied Gender Inversion in *My Ántonia*

Carrie Duke

Willa Cather’s pioneer novel, *My Ántonia*, often presents readers and critics with a quandary over why Cather chose a male narrator to tell the story of a strong woman. Criticism over the choice of the male narrator often interprets this aspect of the novel as revealing Cather’s submission to patriarchy or her inability to express herself in a feminine voice. This question has remained an area of contention in Cather research, but I argue that the use of the male narrator may have been important to the goals of the novel. One of

the guiding forces behind the narrative of *My Ántonia* is a nostalgic longing for an irretrievable past. Although the use of nostalgia has a tradition in classical writing, this sense of loss does not align with the expansionist perspective of the American pioneer. John N. Swift remarks that “Jim’s own perceptual style imitates Virgil’s famous elegiac mode producing *My Ántonia*’s characteristic narrative nostalgia” (109). But this perspective, though classically masculine, contradicts a well-established sense of “American” or “pioneer” masculinity, which according to Frank Meola was the “male ego [that] projects itself outward” (6). Throughout the novel, the women often portray aspects of masculinity that the men fail to achieve, and this is most evident in Jim’s descriptions of gendered bodies. These depictions become representative of

further patterns of gender inversion where the deeply nostalgic longing of the male perspective is juxtaposed to the various women, including Ántonia, who exude the force and vitality of the forward-looking pioneer. This thematic gender inversion, which applies to most of the characters in *My Ántonia*, suggests that in order for the narrative to sustain a deep sense of nostalgia the story should be told from a male perspective such as Jim, and this perspective does not deny the agency and power of Ántonia but rather reinforces her strength and independence.

Critiques of *My Ántonia*’s male narrator blame a variety of possible sources from Cather’s inability to articulate a feminist

point of view to her wholesale acceptance of patriarchy. In her essay “It Ain’t My Prairie,” Marilee Lindemann judges Cather’s choice of a male narrator as exposing Cather’s “deep skepticism about women’s ability to compete in a contest to figure themselves in a culturally powerful way” (119). Although this is an important point about *My Ántonia*, it reduces the value of the male narration. Contrary to this argument, yet still perceiving Cather as unable to express a feminine voice, are the critics who explain Jim’s narration

as Cather’s acceptance of the masculine perspective. Blance H. Gelfant, Michael Gorman, and Marilyn Carlson Aronson examine how Cather identified with both her male narrator, Jim Burden, and a masculine tradition. But there is evidence in *My Ántonia*, that neither Jim, nor most of the men represented in the novel ever achieve a stereotypical or idealized masculine status. Susan J. Rosowski further complicates how we read Jim Burden’s narration by asserting that the female author in the introduction collaborates with the male narrator thereby limiting the authority that Jim, as narrator, holds over the text (90). Jim’s limited authority over the finished text does not, however, answer why he is the character who essentially tells the story.

Rosowski also makes a point of examining how Cather dismisses the traditionally gendered “West” in order

to rewrite the frontier in her own vision. This was a vision where readers encounter what Rosowski terms “a long line of men on the frontier who die, disappear, or retreat” (59). Cather’s portrayal of men in the western frontier differs drastically from the accepted tropes of masculinity at the turn of the century. Elizabeth A. Gagen writes, “[b]etween the Civil War and World War I, America saw a return to the militarized, heroic, warrior forms of masculinity” (23). Popular magazines in this period “continued to offer visions of masculinity that were rooted in Victorian culture,” which presents masculinity as strong and active (Pendergast 33). The ideal of “muscular Christianity” in Britain in the 1850s supported



Unknown residents of Garfield County, Nebraska, ca. 1900



physical exertion in boys and men to prepare the British for “the task of extending their empire around the world” (Kemeny 1234). America inherited many of these Victorian views, and leaders like Theodore Roosevelt adopted these values to encourage “aggressive male behavior in order to preserve their social standing” (1234).

Despite these socially accepted stereotypes, Lee Clark Mitchell explains that “Americans were caught at the turn of the century between traditional gender ideals and new imperatives, leaving them far from self-assured about their sexual identities” (97). Perhaps for this reason, frontier literature tended to depict a traditional image of masculinity. Frank Meola describes how most writing about the West from the nineteenth century onward and literary criticism about frontier writing until the 1970s identify masculinity with expansionism (6). This stems from an understanding of “Puritan attitudes . . . of renewed Anglo-Saxon manliness through territorial expansion” (7).

Despite Cather’s tendency to depict what Rosowski calls the “last men and first women,” in some of Cather’s other works we find evidence of her depicting stereotypical versions of masculinity (59). In her article “Willa Cather and the Cult of Masculinity,” Domna Pastourmatzi writes:

Prowess, vitality, and energy may have been the hallmarks of manhood in the competitive society of early twentieth century America. . . . Using the popular cultural assumptions of her time, Cather distinguishes her macho males (from their androgynous counterparts) with a conspicuously masculine appearance. An examination of physical attributes shows that these characters are endowed with muscular bodies, [and] considerable height. (12)

Obviously there existed a choice in the presentation of each character; Cather was certainly able to write about stereotypically masculine men, but she chose not to place them in *My Ántonia*. This inversion of socially constructed gender roles demonstrates the relevance of gender and gendered bodies to the fictional world of *My Ántonia*. In *My Ántonia*, we see both the strong body and expansionist point of view, rarely in the men, and more readily coming from the women.

Most of the primary female characters in *My Ántonia* do not

follow the ideal of feminine beauty, which depended not only on “delicacy, but also on a life of little physical exertion” (Marquis 982). In her article “The Female Body,” Margaret Marquis writes that Cather’s novels do not concur with the “abundance of literature that represents . . . vulnerable women through correspondingly vulnerable bodies” (981). Marquis explains that traditional feminine beauty was intrinsically tied to ideas of chastity and purity, and for the leisure class this was depicted through physical traits such as “white, weak hands,” which represented that women neither worked nor needed to work (982). Images of hands appear frequently in *My Ántonia*, especially in the characters of Ántonia and her father whose hands are the opposite of their gendered ideals. Ántonia’s hands are described as warm and brown, compared to the delicate white fingers of her father.

Ántonia’s father is one among many of the male characters who do not embody normative gender ideals, but this pattern is evident in the first man the reader meets in the novel: the narrator, Jim Burden. Critics have interpreted Jim as falling short of stereotypical masculinity because he is unable to realize an adult sexuality. According to Ann Fisher-Wirth, Jim only seeks to “possess” Ántonia in an “imaginative, linguistic” way rather than a physical coupling (45). Gelfant writes that Jim’s “real and enduring love for [Ántonia] is based not on desire but on nostalgia” (73). The first image *My Ántonia* gives us of Jim comes from the unnamed female author who views Jim as still having the “impulsiveness” of

boyhood and having an ageless quality (xi). From the beginning we are given a picture of Jim existing in a perennial childhood. This portrayal of Jim Burden, although void of explicit images of his body, creates a desexualized character that does not match his socially accepted tropes of masculine gender.

Even though Jim seems to accept a socially constructed understanding of gender where “[he] is a boy and [Ántonia] was a girl, and [he] resented her protecting manner,” Jim’s representation of characters’ bodies break out of the boundaries of traditionally coded gender (41). When the men are strong, other traits diminish the extent of their masculinity. Jim’s first impressions of his new Nebraska home introduce the reader to Otto Fuchs “a rather slight man,” whose “iron constitution was somewhat broken by mountain pneumonia” (8-12). Fuchs’s body is juxtaposed with



*Mrs. Coubig, Dale Valley, Custer County, Nebraska; detail from 1886 Solomon D. Butcher photograph. This image and the ones on the following pages from the Nebraska State Historical Society's Solomon D. Butcher Collection. nbhips 10000*





*Mrs. Harris, West Union, Custer County, Nebraska, 1886, detail. Nebraska State Historical Society nbbips 10405*

Jim's grandmother, who at "fifty-five years old, [was] a strong woman, of unusual endurance" (10). Jim's grandfather, perhaps one of the few traditionally masculine characters in the entire book, is described with the feminine characteristic of "delicate skin, easily roughened by sun and wind" (12). Ántonia's oldest brother is described as strong, yet the description falls short of the traditional image of masculinity, including a lack of height. Ambrosch is "short, and broad backed with a . . . flat head and

a wide, flat face" (22). Later the reader discovers that Ambrosch ends up living on his wife's farm and being "bossed" by her (338). Ántonia's other brother, Marek, who proves to be a tough worker, is mentally disabled and bears the physical trait of webbed fingers. Ántonia's father demonstrates less than masculine physical traits when the reader compares Mr. Shimerda's "white and well-shaped" hands with the "rich, dark colour" of Ántonia's brown skin (23-24).

The descriptions of the men outside of Jim and Ántonia's family continue this pattern. The Russian pair, Pavel and Peter, also fails to meet the stereotypical representation of physical masculinity. Pavel's "frame, with big, knotty joints, had a wasted look, and the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek bones." The exact opposite of this is Peter who is "short, bow-legged and as fat as butter" (33). Later, before Pavel dies, his body becomes nothing more than a "hollow case" (53). Most of the male characters continue this trend, including Blind d'Arnault who is described as "heavy" and "bulky" on "short legs" (178). Often, the married men appear as mere shadows to their wives. Mrs. Gardener, who is "tall, dark, severe, with something Indian like in the rigid immobility of her face," controls her husband who is "an affectionate little man" (176-177; 185). Wick Cutter's "pink, bald head, and his yellow whiskers, always soft and glistening" are compared to his wife's appearance: "almost a giantess in height, raw boned, with iron-gray hair, a face always flushed, and prominent, hysterical eyes" (203-204). Even the man Jim admires most, Gaston Cleric, is diminished in his masculinity because he makes his appearance in the novel after "having been enfeebled by a long illness in Italy" (249).

The novel maintains this pattern toward the end with the exception of Ántonia's male children, who bear the traits of traditional masculinity. But perhaps these boys and young men are excused from the world of manhood while they are still being raised by Ántonia. Cuzak, Ántonia's husband, however, is described by Tiny as "not a man of much force" (317) and appears as "a crumpled little man, with run-over boot heels" (345). In his telling of the circus, no strong man appears, only a lady acrobat who is able to "float through the air something beautiful, like a bird" (346). During this scene, the topic of Wick Cutter is revisited in conversation, and he is described as "shriveled up . . . like a little old yellow monkey" (350). Finally, we get one more look at Jim from the perspective of Ántonia's photographs where he tries "to look easy and jaunty," but also appears "awkward" (340). Despite the variety of features presented by each of these male characters, each in minor or significant ways does not fulfill all of the identifying markers of what Pastourmatzi recognizes in Cather's "macho men" by being sexual, tall, and muscular.

The major female characters, likewise, break with the socially gendered restrictions Jim's narrative tries to inscribe upon them. Jim does not oppose the social standards imposed on Ántonia by his grandmother when she verbalizes an anxious hope that Ántonia's hard life has not ruined her. Shortly after this incident, Jim relates Frances Harling's report on Ántonia's redeeming body:



*Mary Longfellow, near Broken Bow, Custer County, Nebraska, detail. Nebraska State Historical Society nbbips 10005*







The Crisman Sisters, Goben settlement, Custer County, Nebraska, 1886. Nebraska State Historical Society

nbbips 10604

“she has such fine brown legs and arms, and a splendid color in her cheeks—like those big dark red plums” (149). Although the social norm, voiced through the grandmother, states that hard work can ruin a young girl, *Ántonia’s* body is tangible evidence of the opposite. Frances’s statement intimates that by the very nobleness of her body, *Ántonia* maintains her dignity. This body is not the stereotypically vulnerable feminine body that does not work, but in many ways a body that Cather masculinizes through *Ántonia’s* physical resilience. Although Susan J. Rosowski refers to *Ántonia’s* physical capacity as an embodiment of fertility goddess tropes, there is also evidence that *Ántonia’s* portrays aspects of masculinity (82). Daniel Worden explicates *Ántonia’s* female masculinity in his essay, “I Like To Be Like A Man’: Female Masculinity in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*.” Worden writes, “*My Ántonia* is a history of female masculinity on the frontier, a record . . . of human relations that exceed and contest normative gender roles” (29). When *Ántonia* says, “I

like to be like a man,” it reaffirms the fluidity of gender roles and demonstrates that *Ántonia* is more than just a strong female body; she is also willing to inhabit a masculine perspective (Cather 133).

*Ántonia* is not the only woman whose body becomes representative of frontier strength and expansionism. When Jim recalls the “hired girls,” he states, “I can remember something unusual and engaging about each of them. Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigor . . . a positive carriage and freedom of movement” (192). Even Lena, whose legs and arms “kept a miraculous whiteness” (160), demonstrates an incredible physical strength as “she used to run barefoot over the prairie until after the snow began to fly” (259).

Toward the end of the novel, *Ántonia* continues to show her amazing physical prowess. While pregnant, she does the “work of a man” and comes in from the field to give birth to her child “without a groan” (308). One of Jim’s last descriptions of *Ántonia*, before he separated from her for twenty years, is of her “strong



and warm and good . . . brown hands” (313). Compared to her father’s frail white hands, *Ántonia’s* hands represent strength in the world of *My Ántonia*. Later, when Jim returns to *Ántonia*, her body, though battered is “not diminished,” and most importantly *Ántonia* retains her “inner glow” (321-25).

*Ántonia* also retains her energetic focus on the future and demonstrates her masculine attitude toward her frontier life. Opposed to this is Jim, who is not the “male ego [that] projects itself outward” but rather the one who returns inward toward his memories. Jim finds in his memories a way to access that which he believes is true and universal. When Jim remembers *Ántonia*, he thinks, “She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on the little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions” (342). Here we see Jim drawing a direct connection between *Ántonia’s* body and her outflowing feelings. *Ántonia* represents the expansionist spirit both through her body, which has created farms, gardens, orchards, and children, and through her expansive perspective of the future. *Ántonia* relates to Jim that it was only through her strength and forceful spirit that her family has remained farming on the frontier. *Ántonia* says that Cuzak “knew very little about farming and often grew discouraged. ‘We’d never have got through if I hadn’t been so strong . . . I never got down-hearted’” (332). Like *Ántonia*, many of the characters described in Cather’s novel create an inverted binary opposition where the female is the strong, expansionist pioneer and the male becomes a weakened or awkward body filled with memory and nostalgia. This difference is especially highlighted in *Ántonia’s* family. *Ántonia* works for a future that includes reproducing new life through her children and gardens, but her father could not continue in a life that did not include his past in Bohemia.

The last sentence of the novel is especially critical for understanding one of the major thematic trends in *My Ántonia*. Jim writes, “Whatever we had missed, we possessed together, the incommunicable past,” demonstrating that the novel is heavily imbued with nostalgia and a sense of loss (360). The narrator of *My Ántonia* must be a character who can carry this level of nostalgia for an irretrievable past. In order for the novel to perpetuate the longing for that which remains incommunicable, *My Ántonia* should be told by Jim Burden. Unlike the forward-looking women such as *Ántonia*, Mrs. Shimerda, Lena, or Tiny, who continually work in expectation of their next conquest, the nostalgic narrator must be a character who can honestly believe that the best days are the first to flee. This is a perspective probably not held by *Ántonia*, who constantly looks to the future with hope for her children and land. Because of the way *My Ántonia* is gendered, a vulnerable female longing for the past would be entirely incongruent.

Therefore, when confronted with the question of why a man tells the story of *Ántonia*, it becomes abundantly clear that one of the primary female characters of this novel could not have presented the story in a similar manner. In order to tell a story so centrally nostalgic, a male voice should present his memories. A story from *Ántonia’s* perspective, though probably filled with memories, would also look outward into the new lives of her children rather than inward in an attempt to reclaim her lost childhood. This does not entirely explain why Jim could not have told the story without being framed by the nameless female author. Perhaps Cather, knowing that the nostalgic narration must come from a male voice, still wanted a powerful female voice in “control” of her third prairie novel, just as her other prairie novels are expressed through female voices.

In *My Ántonia*, the pictures of various characters’ bodies build a running theme within which traditional gender roles become inverted: women are the originators of strength and expansion, and men, though possibly supportive, become vessels of retention and regression. Turn-of-the-century American culture often depicted men as the strong bodies that would conquer new territories, while women were often portrayed as bodies that could not and did not work. Although the male narrator implicitly accepts this social norm, Jim’s descriptions often break free from these restrictions. The inversion of traditionally gendered bodies



Sarah Jorn, Dry Valley, Custer County, Nebraska, 1886. Nebraska State Historical Society nbhips 10181





becomes representative of a world where women and men are unconstrained by their socially constructed stereotypes. But Cather retains a restriction on this new world created in *My Ántonia*, and almost every important man and woman holds true to his or her new inverted type. Within this restriction, the most probable character to tell the story of a regressive longing for a childhood past, depleted of sexuality and reproduction, is likely to be the voice of the nostalgic male.

**Carrie Duke**

*Carrie Duke is a PhD student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, studying environmental justice in literature. Her dissertation will focus on issues of dispossession and gardening in American literature from 1850-1950.*

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*Mrs. Bader, near Millburn, Custer County, Nebraska, 1904. Nebraska State Historical Society nbhips 11993*

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# Cather Camp

Following the 14th International Cather Seminar in Flagstaff, Arizona, the editors of the Newsletter & Review invited a pair of participants—veteran seminarian Françoise Palleau-Papin and first-timer James Jaap—to discuss their experiences at the seminar and in Cather studies. Tracy Tucker, the Willa Cather Foundation's Education Director, conducted and participated in this e-mail dialogue. This continues a series begun with "Recalling Northampton" in our Fall 2011 issue, in which scholars Elisabeth Bayley and Sarah Clere discussed the 13th International Seminar at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

**Tracy:** Thanks to both of you! I hate to interrupt your summer vacations, but there's no rest for Cather scholars. Was Flagstaff work or vacation for you? James, I know your family came along, right?

**James:** Hi, Tracy and Françoise. For me, the seminar was a mix of vacation and work. Yes, my family did come along and they had a wonderful vacation! They were busy with many activities; I, however, was focused on the conference. This was my first experience at the Cather International—I am fairly new to the field of Cather Studies—and I was nervous about my paper on Cather and the Southwest painter, E. L. Blumenschein. I wanted to make a good impression.

It has only been in the past two or three years that my research has focused on Cather. I wrote my dissertation on Irish autobiography, but after I finished, I no longer was interested in Irish literature. When my wife went back to school, I took an administrative position, and put any thoughts of research on the back burner. I had always loved Cather, so after a colleague of mine asked if I would write a review of the critical editions of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* for *Resources for American Literary Study* (RALS), I was hooked.

As I was studying the stories of YBM, I was struck at how important Pittsburgh, my hometown and where I currently live, was to her fiction. It appeared that there was not much examination about Cather's ten years in the city, and I began to write about her six

Pittsburgh stories, beginning with "Paul's Case." During my research, I realized that many works of art she would later reference in her fiction, she saw in Pittsburgh at the Carnegie Museum. Interestingly, in my digging, I located the actual painting by Rico that Paul loses himself in front of. The Carnegie Museum of Art held only one painting by Martin Rico y Ortega, *San Trovaso, Venice* and they sold it in 1950. Through the wonders of Google, I tracked the painting to a woman in Florida, Caroline Hurwick. When I contacted her, she had no idea it was a famous work referenced in the work of Willa Cather. All she knew was that her father had purchased it from the Carnegie for \$500. (She has since been reading all of Cather's works!)

In 2011, I resigned my administrative position to focus on teaching and my new research agenda. I've been researching Cather ever since and I couldn't be happier. This year, I received one of the Woodress Fellowships, and am currently concluding my four-week stay in Lincoln. (I now have been away from home for five weeks; needless to say, I'm ready to get back.)



Caroline Hurwick's *San Trovaso, Venice*, originally from the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh

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*"In my digging, I located the actual painting by Rico that Paul loses himself in front of."* — James

*"He was delighted to find no one in the gallery but the old guard, who sat in one corner. . . . After a while he sat down before a blue Rico and lost himself."* —Willia Cather, "Paul's Case"

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But it hasn't been all work. My family and I did go to the Grand Canyon one day. And while in Nebraska, I took a few days and went to the Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, and the Badlands National Park. So, while the conference, and my summer of Cather, has been work in a sense, it was work I truly enjoyed!

**Françoise:** Hi, both of you, over the shimmering waves. My family did not join me, and it was no vacation officially, but for me a trip to the USA is always marked by nostalgia for the time I spent in Chicago and Philadelphia when I was working on my PhD on Willa Cather. I flew out in a vacation spirit but then jet lag hit me. I arrived late the day before the conference began, and



the nine-hour difference had me wide awake in the middle of the night. That morning, as on all the following, I could keep up with all my e-mails from university work in France and put in at least three hours of work before hitting the road for the conference.

The first morning, after e-mailing from 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m., I had Flagstaff all to myself, as the conference only began in the evening. I found it a great place to shop in, got fancy clothes for my teenage daughters who were busy at home taking end-of-the-year exams or doing an internship that required nice, semi-casual, semi-office clothes (with teenagers, how do you put the whole thing together if it's two halves of everything?). Miraculously, Flagstaff had the answer. That meant bulkier luggage on the way out than on the way in, and a vague reassurance that I was still a mom from afar. Then I'm very proud of the bolo tie that I found in Winslow for my husband. He still has to wear it. That morning, I thought of Cather and doubted that she came to Flagstaff to shop! She may not have had e-mail, but she sure wrote letters from Arizona. Then a funny thought occurred to me, as the conference made us follow Cather's footsteps in Arizona, and as part of the fun of those Cather conferences (I've co-organized one, and been to many) is all about stepping back into her lifetime, on her premises: for me, any travel back and forth between the USA and France means terrible jet lag, but it didn't for her; considering the

slower pace of travel, one could adjust to the time change more gradually, on a ship across the Atlantic. So work, holiday? Yes, for me, too, it was a bit of both. The conference always took my mind off the most pressing issues of work at home, and jet lag turned me dizzy with sleep at odd hours, so that I had to take things easy, and the papers had better be very much alive and kicking! Which they were, I hasten to add.



*Tracy Tucker*

Then, meeting Cather folks is always so much fun—sharing meals and chatting away on excursions felt like going to summer camp. As my fellow Cather scholar and friend Marvin says, don't we love going to Cather camp!

**Tracy:** Cather Camp: I love that! You know Willa camped a lot—maybe we should think about tents and horses next time, instead of dorms and buses Or, you know, maybe not.



*James Jaap with his children, James and Camille*

I didn't realize that it was your first International Seminar, James! You fit in like an old pro. It was my first Seminar as well, and I wasn't completely sure what to expect. Of course being there as staff is a little different from being there as a presenter, panelist, or "regular folk," but on the whole it was great fun. One of the best things about my work as Education Director is the truly mind-boggling array of questions the Foundation receives about various books, about Cather's correspondents and acquaintances and family members, and on interpretations of her works. So I've referred to so much of the scholarship that's been done in the past, and Flagstaff was my first chance to put faces to names, which is always fun.

Françoise, as you said, the papers were wonderful—I was so sad to have to miss a few due to event planning business—and I felt like I learned tremendously. I've been away from the University (of Nebraska-Lincoln) for a couple of years now, and Flagstaff actually made me antsy to start work on some new research. That doesn't happen every day, at least for me! Like James, I didn't come into this as a trained Cather scholar, and so I'm a bit trepidatious. How do you feel your papers were received?

**Françoise:** How do we feel our papers were received? That's not for us to say, is it? (Yours from a heat wave in Paris. Meltingly, with sweaty, podgy fingers on the keyboard . . .)

**Tracy:** Let me rephrase the question. I think most of us who have presented at various conferences have witnessed (or maybe even experienced?) that dreadful awkward silence after a paper. I didn't see any of that in Flagstaff—and so I'm wondering if that's the way Cather scholars roll at all the seminars. I do know that the directors of the seminar really want to build that collegiality and collaboration.

**James:** Sorry it has taken me a while to respond, but I've just finished my Woodress Fellowship, and am leaving Lincoln today to return to Pittsburgh.

Cather Camp, eh? I'm no fan of camping (I like to call it "hauling"), but Cather Camp sounds fun. Françoise, I too





thought about following Cather's path, especially when we were at Walnut Canyon. How much it must have changed since she trod those paths? I'm guessing the sense of awe was similar to what we felt—although we had more access to water and restrooms and less access to ancient artifacts!

I thought my paper went well. I argued that Cather's friend, the painter E. L. Blumenschein, may have influenced Cather in several works, although his name appears in none of Cather's biographies. I argue that in "Coming, Aphrodite!," Blumenschein served as the prototype for Don Hedger, and in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather's verbal description bear a striking similarity to several of Blumenschein's paintings. It's always hard to judge how a paper is received, and I've been to numerous conferences where the sense of collegiality is not there; I gave a paper at the James Joyce International several years ago and the crowd was nowhere near as friendly and kind. Shocker, I know.

When my session was over, several people asked me to send them my paper, and Janis Stout came up to me and said, "You've convinced me." Later, Ann Romines's sister Marilyn stopped me and told me how much she enjoyed my paper. I knew then that it had gone well!

So yes, the Cather folks are very collegial and friendly, and I feel that after my first Cather International, I made some friends and some great connections as I continue my journey into Cather's world.

**Tracy:** Yay, for home-going! Laura Goldblatt, one of your fellow Woodress Fellows, is in Red Cloud this weekend working with some of our Mildred Bennett Collection and Cather Foundation history, and she told me that you were winding things up in Lincoln. So did that go well? The Woodress Fellowship is a great program—and so important for helping get new Cather scholars started.

The idea of "walking where Cather walked" is an intriguing one. Maybe y'all have seen the promotions for this, but *The Grapes of Wrath* turns 75 this year, and one of the commemorative events is an organized journey from Oklahoma to California, to retrace the route the Joads took (and the journey that Steinbeck himself took). We probably came close in Walnut Canyon (or as close as the National Park Service could allow us), but if we were going to try for a more exact journey, where would you want to go? Victoria, British Columbia, is high on my list (either as a single location, or a journey from San Francisco to Victoria, as Cather did it).

**Françoise:** Of course by "Cather Camp" I did not mean camping, but something in the spirit of a summer camp, where you meet outside of your routine, you're a little bit like teenagers, you hang out, you share a passion, you have devotional moments intellectually, if I can keep stretching and mixing the metaphor, because Cather tends to draw more than casual interest. For years, Cather scholars felt that they were holding the banner somewhat in isolation. In France, there are few of us, but we are a small

country. I like the idea of studying Cather in relation to her time, not as a lone creator. So if it takes a geographical pattern too, expanding the conference reach in the country and abroad because she's been around a lot, that's a good thing. Visiting the places she visited adds variety to our regularity. I did not pay attention to her trip to Victoria, even though it is a pretty island, because she does not much write about it, unless she incorporates her impressions elsewhere, by displacing them to other places. Grand Manan was a very significant discovery for me, just before the Quebec conference many years ago. She wrote about it, but I had never been there. All of a sudden, I could add the physical picture to the mental one I had while reading her, this time following the fictional example of Tom Outland on the Mesa, when he was reading the *Aeneid* and looking up from the page, mixing times and locations to meet a single purpose, something like founding a nation. The story

"Before Breakfast", for example, which I like a lot, is a Grand Manan story. San Francisco would be a great idea, although she does not mention it much, simply because it is such a beautiful city. But I am getting carried away! Summer time, we all need to escape from the drudgery of our keyboards, right?

Right now for example, I am making many phone calls in France to find out more about Joséphine

Bourda, Cather's beloved cook, and her descendants. It is thrilling to see the way she related to people, and the consequences to this day, although sometimes very indirect. So that's expanding my Cather research geographically, as well as through time. In my paper, I argued that she was influenced by the French writer Pierre Loti, an influence she claims in her letters but that has not been considered seriously to this day. She was influenced by a certain strand in his works, not by all of them. She got me to read Loti, whom I confess I had never read, and who is a great writer. She expands my literary horizons because she was so well-read, and she connects people. It was moving to speak to one of Joséphine Bourda's grandchildren on the phone. More about that later. Please send me some cool, I'm baking in Paris!

**Tracy:** No, no—I took what you meant with the camaraderie of a camp experience. It put me in mind of some of Cather's trips west, though, which were tents and horses and fires, etc. While



Françoise Palleau-Papin



that might be fun, I'm not sure how instructive it would be.

I confess I haven't read Loti. Looking at a short biography, he seems to have been quite a traveler, which I'm sure Cather appreciated. I'll be interested to read your paper—which works seem like influences.

And yes, the lasting effects of Cather's friendships are amazing—and continue to spread. This week we had a French literature teacher here visiting; she teaches *My Ántonia* every year. I took her to the Pavelka farmhouse, where we peered in all the windows and looked in the fruit cave and visited the trees.

But at the Cloverton Cemetery, visiting Annie's grave, we met a woman and her teenaged son—the great-great-grandson of Annie and John! And it's always such a pleasure when those meetings happen. Our visitors are just tickled that the Pavelkas are still here, that Annie's legacy is still here, and at the same time, Annie's descendants seem so pleased that people are visiting the farm and the graves and that we still care about Annie's life. It's really quite touching....

And I cannot send you any cool. We're all out.

**Françoise:** Imagine, real campfires to chat about

Cather with wood smoke in our eyes and the whiskey jar passing around. With mules to carry our backpacks, naturally. OK, I'll stop right there, I know Jim does not like camping!

The Cather-Loti connection is in Loti's most *démeublés* narratives, like the travel narrative *The Desert*. That is a very good book.

I'm curious about the French literature teacher—that's great. I remember going on that tour in yellow school buses at the first Cather Conference I attended, when I was writing my PhD twenty years ago. We were in a heat wave too, and the school buses had no air conditioning. That was roughing it, a tour of the prairie and the graveyards under the sun, stepping out into the bright light, stepping back into the oven-like bus, but it was a glorious day. And that evening, when we were all sweaty and grimy, we had a *Victorian* dinner in the Red Cloud gymnasium. Red Cloud

families had lent their best table wear—white linen, silverware, crystal, the works!—to dress the tables, and we had the most delicious dinner, with five courses, ending with port and nuts in true Victorian fashion, served by hosts wearing long black dresses and black suits. To this day, I'd like to thank them. Thank Pat Phillips for me again, will you? The chef was an incredibly great cook from a famous hotel, and the reception was simply grand. We felt underdressed for the occasion, but treated like royalty! It was memorable. So much for camping on Cather camp!

About the Cather-Joséphine Bourda connection, it is strange to call people up so many years after the fact, and tell them that a famous American author writes about their grandmother in her

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*"The Cather-Loti connection is in Loti's most démeublés narratives, like the travel narrative The Desert. That is a very good book."*—Francoise

*"Le Pecheur d'Island', 'Le Desert', 'Le Roman d'un Spahi' and a dozen more are surely among the most beautiful things in the world."*—Willa Cather, in a 1907 letter

---

letters, and in very laudatory terms. I got to speak to very helpful municipal secretaries too, and I sent them *My Ántonia* in a French translation to thank them for their invaluable help (because their archives were not available online, and they did the research for me to save me the trip to their village from the other

end of France). It feels like spreading the good news. I guess this is the real meaning of the expression the word gets around. Well, Cather sure got around, and still does.

**Tracy:** Was this the "Lost Lady" conference, where they showed the old Barbara Stanwyck movie? There's a part of me that's very jealous of you folks who joined in earlier. We have exciting projects underway now too, of course, but I always read about the earlier conferences when the Miner girls and Annie Pavelka's children attended and shared their personal stories of Willa . . . and then of course, neither of you ever met Mildred, but the more of her letters I read, the more I admire her tireless work in creating the kind of organization we have. I wish I'd met her. But I feel that way about a lot of people who do literary things that not everyone is doing, who go against the grain. Cary Nelson, for example, who



Henri Rousseau's 1891 portrait of the French writer Pierre Loti (pseudonym of Julien Viaud)



has done so much recovery work with quote-unquote radical poetry. I met him once, couldn't bring myself to talk to him, or even ask him to sign my book :)

In that vein, is there a Cather scholar who, more than any other, brought you to Cather studies? I know my own first contact with the scholarly work was Patrick Dooley's essay in *Cather Studies* 5. It was such a pleasure to meet him finally in Flagstaff—and realize that he had actually attended a presentation that I made at another seminar! And I thought no one was really that interested.

**James:** Two small items I'm taking from this exchange: Cather Camp differs from Cather Camping. And it is hot everywhere!

I'm behind on my replies; it has taken me a few days to get back on my feet in Pittsburgh after the Woodress. But I'm getting back in the swing of things, my wife and children, and even the dog missed me, and I'm working on my fall classes and my other stuff, including, of course, Willa.

The time in Lincoln was very productive. The folks in the archives are extremely helpful, and the Cather collection is great. The recent additions from the Charles Cather collection are very interesting, and include some fascinating letters from Edith Lewis to the family. The UNL archives also has a fantastic collection of art books—the Stuart P. Embury, M.D. collection, and it includes thousands of volumes, including biographies of all of Cather's favorite painters, and all the old catalogs for the Carnegie Internationals, dating back to the first, 1896, which Cather attended and wrote about for the *Home Monthly*.

There are a lot of places I would like to go, including Quebec, but after the recent conference, I've been thinking about Taos and Santa Fe. To follow, at least in part, the journeys of Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* would be amazing (and today far less dangerous). I'm also interested in the art and artists of these cities, and Cather's relation to them. Cather knew all the members of the Taos Society of Artists. Flagstaff and Arizona was really only part of her Southwest experiences; New Mexico was another.

Currently, I'm trying to trace a different path, her path through industrial Pittsburgh from 1896 to 1906, and studying her Pittsburgh experiences and stories, often in relation to art, music, painting, and sculpture. In her ten years in Pittsburgh, Cather wrote a lot—hundreds of reviews and articles, not to mention about thirty short stories. And she saw a lot—plays, musical performances, art shows, horse shows, horse races, etc. When I was in Lincoln looking at her journalism, I realized she was busy every night at one of the eight Pittsburgh theaters, and often for several evenings in a row. She also loved the Carnegie. She was often there for a musical performance of some sort, and wrote about it often. Two of her stories, "Paul's Case" and "A Gold Slipper" are set in part at the Carnegie. The Carnegie also introduced her to many of

the painters and artists that would populate her fiction. Despite the importance of the city, it seems that not so much has been written about its importance to Cather.

I'm hoping to change that a little and have the International Seminar come to Pittsburgh in the next few years. Maybe I could find a nice campground!

**Françoise:** I'll say this: Yes to an international conference in Pittsburgh!! Duly noted. Thank you! and about the Victorian dinner, Tracy, that was at the fifth international conference in Hastings and Red Cloud in 1993, not the one that showed the film of *A Lost Lady*.

Yours from Amboise, the home of Leonardo da Vinci's last years. (Did Cather ever visit the Loire valley?)

**Tracy:** Santa Fe was wonderful—we made a brief (oh-too-brief) stop on the way to Flagstaff, as I suspect a few other seminarians did. I got some great shots of the cathedral and Loretto Chapel, but . . . definitely needed more time to do it better. I'm guessing that neither of you meant to do the journey on mule-back. I'm always going to be out-voted on these things, I see.

### *James Jaap*

*James Jaap is Senior Instructor of English at the Greater Allegheny campus of the Pennsylvania State University. After many years as an administrator, he has recently returned to full-time teaching and has focused his research on Cather's Pittsburgh years. He was a 2013 Woodress Visiting Scholar at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.*

### *Françoise Palleau-Papin*

*Françoise Palleau-Papin teaches American literature at University Paris 13, Sorbonne Paris Cité. She is author of This is Not a Tragedy: the Works of David Markson, a critical monograph (Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), and co-organized the 11th International Willa Cather Seminar in Paris and Provence with John Murphy and Robert Thacker in 2007.*

### *Tracy Tucker*

*Tracy Tucker is a short-story writer and photographer, a dog-person, a suburban farmer, and Education Director of the Willa Cather Foundation. She volunteers with Little White Dog Rescue and, like all English majors, tells people she is at work on a book. She lives in rural Nebraska.*



# Blanche Housman Gelfant (1922–2013)

David Stouck | Simon Fraser University

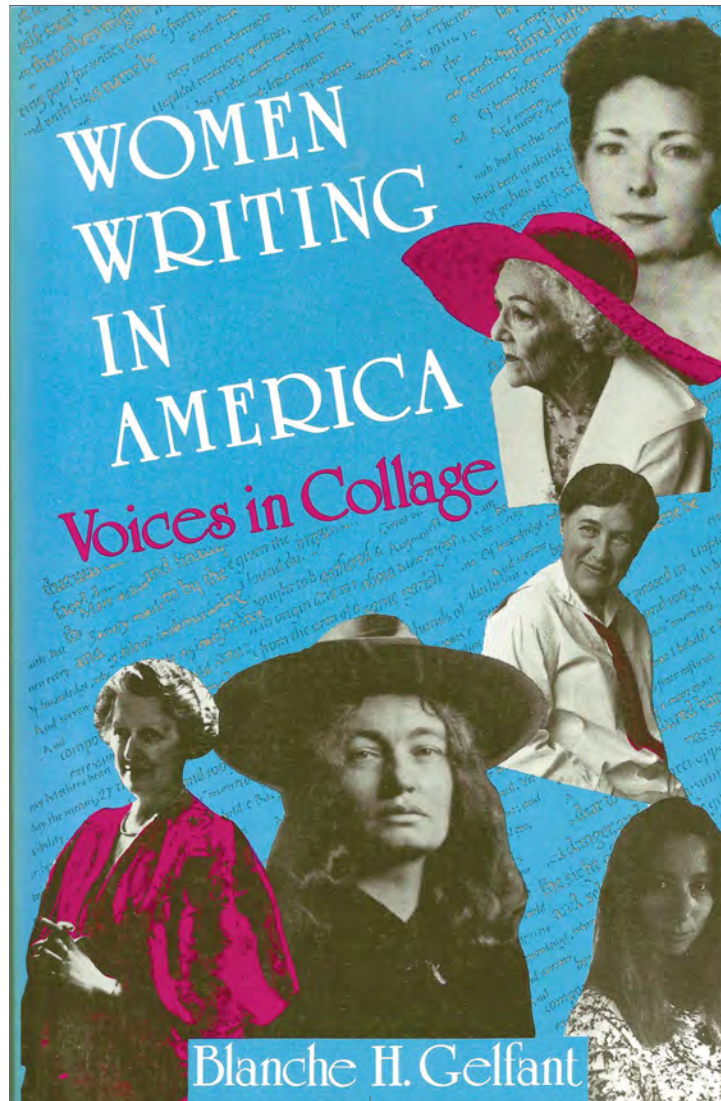
When the Modern Language Association presented Blanche Gelfant with the Jay B. Hubbell Medal in 1995, she was described for the audience as a lecturer and scholar whose work had become “legendary among students of American literature.” Her books including *The American City Novel* (1954), *Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage* (1985), and *Cross-Cultural Reckonings: A Triptych of Russian, American, and Canadian Texts* (1995) were cited as pioneering studies because they drew on a wide, sometimes unfamiliar, spectrum of authors, cultures, and critical approaches. For those who know her work on Willa Cather, the terms pioneering and legendary ring not only apt but true.

Blanche Gelfant’s essay titled “The Forgotten Reaping-Hook: Sex in *My Ántonia*” (1971), has been described as changing the course of Cather criticism, beginning with the writer’s most famous novel. Until that time *My Ántonia* had been acclaimed as a glowing celebration of America’s pioneer past, specifically the history of European settlement in the region of the country known as the Midwest. But Gelfant’s essay did something different—it examined that history as a text from which many disquieting realities had been omitted. Using scenes and references to sex, she unearthed a vein of deception and cruelty in the novel that exposed another reality—one that accepted, sometimes endorsed, violence and misogyny. She was, in other words, the first to deconstruct the novel in a way that made it a much larger and more challenging book than it had been understood to be before.

She feared when she sent the essay out for publication it might meet resistance. “What journal would publish an essay on redoubtable Willa Cather that had ‘sex’ in the title?” she wondered. But the time was right for this disruption of a national myth and for bringing sociology and politics to the table as critical strategies in literary study. She explained her approach in an interview leading up to the Hubbell award:

My interest has not been in arguing with critics (whom I read conscientiously), but rather in discerning complexities that make a story or a novel a work to wonder at or wonder about. I am critical of what I read, and I think I can see the strange, unmanageable, and aberrant aspects of a text and the lapses in a writer’s art and social sympathies. But to me the wonder is that the text remains hypnotic, and indelible, an enduring experience, even though I may be in profound disagreement with its social and political views.

There followed six more essays on Cather, including her introduction to the Penguin edition of *O Pioneers!*, each one as perceptive as the first and written in the sophisticated and polished style that was her trademark. She was writing at the same time articles on Meridel LeSueur, focusing particularly on LeSueur’s explorations of native culture, but regrettably could not find a publisher who would take seriously her proposal for a book that would place the two writers together in one critical volume.





Blanche Housman Gelfant was born in New York City, received her B.A. from Brooklyn College and earned her graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where she met her husband. The latter was hired at Syracuse University and for many years, while raising a family, Blanche taught composition at the SUNY Upstate Medical University at Syracuse. In 1972, when she was 50, came a significant change in her professional life when she became one of the first women to secure a tenured position at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, an appointment that was further enhanced when she became the Robert E. Maxwell Professor of Arts and Sciences.

Those who knew Blanche were not only taken by her singular perspicacity but her mischievous sense of humor. At conferences her table was always bright with laughter, a joie de vivre that did not diminish with age. Nor did her desire to read and write lessen. At the time of her death from a fall at her home in Hanover she was writing an essay on the American novel and the Civil War. In

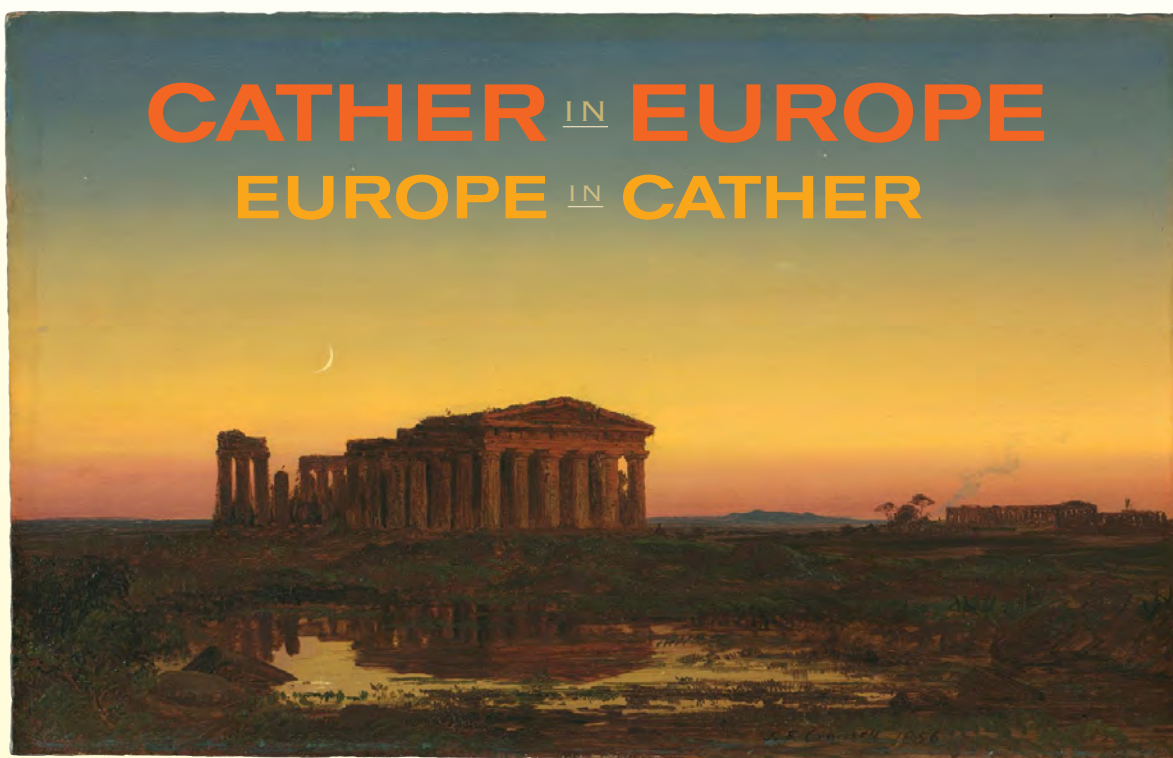
the last e-mail my wife and I received she wrote as follows: "Alan has brought me the new book of Willa Cather's letters, which I have started to read. The introduction pays extraordinary tribute to Cather as a novelist. Reading that tribute makes me want to read all of Cather's novels once again, but as I mentioned before, I'm re-fighting the Civil War."

An idealist and a perfectionist, Blanche Gelfant is survived by her daughter, Nina, her son, Alan, and grandson, Samuel, and by her unique legacy to American letters.

**David Stouck**

*David Stouck is professor emeritus of English at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is the author of Willa Cather's Imagination (1975) and co-editor with John J. Murphy of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of Shadows on the Rock.*

**June 12-14, 2014**



**Centro Studi Americani, Rome**

The symposium will explore Willa Cather's presence in Europe, both as a traveler and writer whose works have been published in Europe and translated into many European languages. Additionally, scholars are encouraged to consider the influence of Europe and European culture on Cather's works, the representations of Europe in her fiction, and connections between Cather and European artists and writers.

**Paper abstracts (500 words) due February 15, 2014**

**Contact Mark Madigan: [mmadiga2@naz.edu](mailto:mmadiga2@naz.edu)**



# Mapping Literary Landscapes: Environments and Ecosystems

## Willa Cather Spring Conference and Scholarly Symposium

June 5–7, 2014  
Red Cloud, Nebraska

### Call for Papers

The 59th annual Spring Conference and the one-day scholarly symposium preceding it will focus on the complex impact of the natural environment on Cather and her contemporaries, and on the writers and artists of the generations that have followed.

Drawing upon recent scholarly analyses focused on Cather's "ecological imagination," this conference seeks to broaden and extend these ideas, both within Cather studies and beyond. From her earliest fiction, Cather was closely attuned to the world around her, and her beautifully limned landscapes are integral to her characters, defining them and their situations. In *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, Cather was the first American novelist to treat the Plains of Nebraska as setting; as such, she taught her readers how to read that landscape, how to integrate with it. Beyond grasslands, Cather mapped many other literary landscapes: the Southwest in three novels, colonial Quebec in *Shadows on the Rock*, the New York streetscape in "Coming, Aphrodite!" and other stories, and the wooded ridges and valleys of Virginia in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Throughout, we experience the reverse of what Cather says of Clement Sebastian in *Lucy Gayheart*: he "had missed the deepest of all companionships, a relation with the earth itself, with a countryside and a people." Her characters possess—and are possessed by—landscapes, formidable and formative environments, that shape and color Cather's work. While acknowledging connections to Cather and to her far-seeing art, we encourage analyses drawing from similar concerns and sharing a similar ecological imagination while focusing elsewhere.

The 2014 Spring Conference will provide a lively forum for discussing Cather's environments and her environmental themes. With the Cather Prairie as backdrop, scholars, artists, and readers will discuss the many literary mappings in her fiction and the informing landscapes of her life. Important to this discussion are those writers, artists, and scholars who continue to interpret the many diverse landscapes that Cather loved. The one-day scholarly

symposium opening the conference (Thursday, June 5, 2014) will focus on Cather's various environments, her diverse literary mappings. Having taught readers to understand the Plains, Cather and her influence have persisted as presences. How has that affected today's ecological thinking and aesthetics? Who might also be seen in similar fashion? How has such environmentally attuned writing shaped contemporary culture? Which other figures need to be seen as compatible?

Possible paper topics include:

- Ecocriticism and American fiction
- Cather as literary cartographer: *Is the land still "The great fact"?*
- The setting as character
- Reinterpreting the prairie environment
- Spiritual geography in American fiction
- Cather and the cosmopolitan landscape
- Cather's influence on contemporary Plains writers
- Environmental naturalism in American fiction
- Sustainable practices in Cather's fiction
- Reading the Plains today
- Plains landscape and Plains poetry

Proposals, inquiries, and expressions of interest should be sent by February 15, 2014 to:

**Susan N. Maher** (smaher@d.umn.edu)

College of Liberal Arts

1208 Kirby Drive

Duluth, MN 55812-3095

**Tracy Tucker** (ttucker@willacather.org)

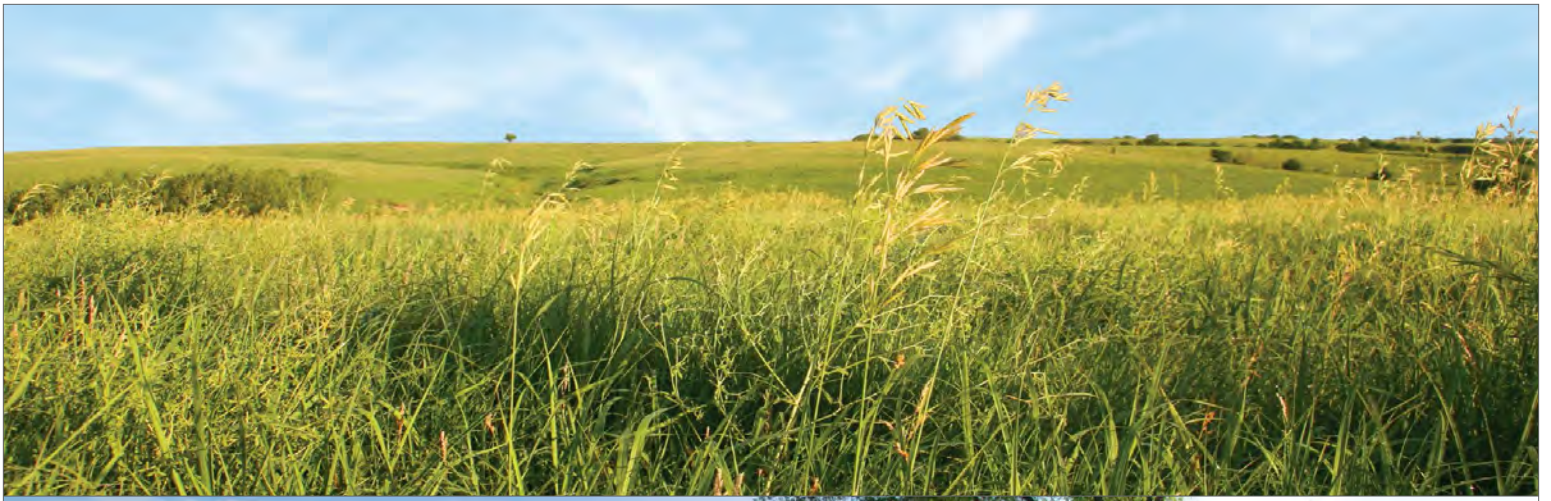
The Willa Cather Foundation

413 North Webster

Red Cloud, NE 68970









# Willa Cather NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

Volume 56, No. 3 | Fall 2013



## The Willa Cather Foundation Established 1955 by Mildred Bennett

Leslie C. Levy, Executive Director

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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).

Send letters and inquiries to Thomas Reese Gallagher at [tgallagher@nyc.rr.com](mailto:tgallagher@nyc.rr.com)

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*Preserving our past,  
pioneering our future: the  
National Willa Cather  
Center begins to take shape.*





# NEW FRIENDS FROM BRAZIL



In July, 40 high school English teachers from Brazil took a break from their professional development course at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to spend a weekend in Red Cloud. Sponsored by UNO's International Professional Development department and its "Nebraska Neighbors" program, their visit gave them the chance to taste life in a small Midwestern community and also learn more about the life and work of Willa Cather. The Foundation welcomed them to Red Cloud with a community dinner, followed by town and country tours, a visit to the Cather Prairie, and other local attractions (yes, including the bowling alley). If they can use these cultural experiences in the classroom with their students, we'll have done our job.

Photographs by Shane Pekry







January



February



March



April



May



June



July



August



September



October



November



December



## 2014 Willa Cather Wall Calendar

Be inspired throughout the year with scenes and events from Cather's life and work.

### FEATURING

- Beautiful images of places important to Cather
- Cather quotations on every page
- Notations of important dates in Cather's life and career
- All major holidays
- Large 12-inch by 11½-inch format

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