

# WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER & REVIEW



Food and Drink and the Art of Willa Cather  
Special Double Issue

## Letter from the President

JAY YOST



**W**ow! Has it really been two years since I became President of the Cather Foundation? What a great ride it's been! No other literary society, performance space, bookstore, art gallery, prairie manager, historic house trust, living museum or archives does what we do, because we do *all* of these things, and

we do them amazingly well.

This issue highlights the many aspects of our magnificent 2010 Spring Conference, for which we published the Cather Foundation's cookbook, *At Willa Cather's Tables*—and need I remind you—a great gift idea.

We recently began our new giving campaign: **Preserving our Past, Pioneering our Future.** These additional

funds will allow us to better fulfill our mission, which includes taking care of our wonderful archives and making sure today's school kids become avid Cather lovers. To those who have already given, thank you so much, and to our generous year-end donors, we are able to do all we do because of your faith in us.

The Cather Foundation also continues to attract new and passionate members to our Board of Governors. Sara Corless of Kansas City, Daryl Palmer of Denver and Gabriel Scala of Oxford, Mississippi were recently elected to join us on our mission, and we are so excited about how each of them is going to make the Foundation even better.

So as I sign off, I want to thank you for your kindness, your support, and the opportunity to have been the President of this wonderfully unique organization. I look forward to working with all of you for many years to come.

## Contents

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>32 "I Have Some Champagne for You":<br/>Wine in Willa Cather's Fiction<br/>DAVID PORTER</p> <p>37 A Plain Legacy<br/>MARY DIXON</p> <p>38 Sanitary Piggeries and Chaste Hens: Willa Cather and the Pure Food Movement<br/>SUSAN MEYER</p> <p>48 "The Bohemian Girl," "Old Mrs. Harris," and the Hospitalities of Red Cloud<br/>DARYL W. PALMER</p> <p>52 Cookbooks, Cooking, and Cather's Art: Exploring the Cather Foundation Archives<br/>ANN ROMINES</p> <p>56 Digesting the Male Tradition: Food and Drink in <i>The Song of the Lark</i><br/>PRISCILLA LEDER</p> | <p>60 "Food To Be Absorbed and Transformed":<br/>The Melting Pots of <i>O Pioneers!</i> and "The Bohemian Girl"<br/>JEAN C. GRIFFITH</p> <p>65 Somewhere Between Temperance and Prohibition:<br/>The Wandering Alcoholics in <i>The Song of the Lark</i><br/>CHARMION GUSTKE</p> <p>70 Food, Drink, and Cather at 2010 Spring Conference</p> <p>72 'A Crime Against Art':<br/><i>My Ántonia</i>, Food, and Cather's Anti-Americanization Argument<br/>ANDREW JEWELL</p> <p>77 Of Coconut Cake and Consommé:<br/>Willa Cather's School of Cookery<br/>ELAINE SMITH</p> | <p>79 Prairie Museum Hosts Cather Cookbook Lunch</p> <p>81 "Driven by Starvation":<br/>Hunger in Cather's <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> and <i>Shadows on the Rock</i><br/>STEVEN B. SHIVELY</p> <p>85 Learning to Like <i>Chili Colorado</i>:<br/>Constructing Culture in <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i><br/>ESTHER M. LOPEZ</p> <p>91 Cather's Virginia Remembered in Shenandoah University Exhibit</p> |
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### RECIPES FROM THE WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION

In acknowledgment of our culinary theme this issue, we are complementing our main contents with a selection of recipes—side dishes!—drawn from *At Willa Cather's Tables* and from volumes in the Willa Cather Foundation Archives.

## Contributors to This Issue

Welcome to this expanded scholarly edition of the *Newsletter & Review*—our largest ever—which invites you to explore a generous selection of the fresh and engaging new scholarship presented at our 2010 Spring Conference, “Food, Drink, and Willa Cather’s Writing.” We are delighted to present the work of this varied group of scholars, as well as our usual news of Cather Foundation doings all over the country—seasoned with a sprinkling of recipes that will allow you to sample the many tastes of Willa Cather’s tables. We hope you’ll enjoy this special issue!

**Mary M. Dixon**, who teaches at Hastings Community College in Hastings, Nebraska, is a visual artist and poet who has published creative work in periodicals and a book of poems, *Eucharist, Enter the Sacred Way*. Her work focuses on women’s spirituality and the Great Plains.

**Charmion Gustke**, a recent Ph.D. from George Washington University, teaches English and Honors classes at Belmont University in Nashville, where she works with her students on a community vegetable garden project. Her dissertation included a chapter on Cather, and her essay in this issue is one of several she has recently presented and published on Cather.

**Jean Griffith** is Assistant Professor at Wichita State University. Her book, *The Color of Democracy in Women’s Regional Writing*, discusses issues of race and ethnicity in Cather’s Great Plains fiction, and she has also published related essays in *Western American Literature* and *MELUS*.

**Andrew Jewell** is Associate Professor in the University Libraries at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is editor of The Willa Cather Archive (<http://cather.unl.edu>), author of several essays on American literature and digital humanities, and co-editor of a new book, *The American Literature Scholar in the Digital Age*.

**Priscilla Leder** is Professor of English at Texas State University at San Marcos, where she specializes in American women writers. She is the author of essays on Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, and others, and most recently, editor of *Seeds of Change: Critical Essays on Barbara Kingsolver*.

**Esther Lopez** is Assistant Professor of English at Georgia College and State University, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate classes on Willa Cather. Her dissertation included a chapter on Cather, and her essay in this issue discusses an iconic food of her native state, New Mexico.

**Susan Meyer**, Professor of English at Wellesley College, is the author and editor of two books on Victorian women’s fiction, essays on Willa Cather, and a forthcoming young adult novel, *Black Radishes*. Her current project is a book manuscript, “Cather in History: Public Health, Race, and the Body.”

**Daryl W. Palmer** is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Regis University, in Denver. Originally an early modern scholar, specializing in hospitality, he has recently turned his interests to Willa Cather and the Great Plains, with articles in *American Literary Realism*, *Great Plains Quarterly*, and the *Newsletter & Review*.

**David Porter** is Tisch Family Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts at Skidmore College, where he teaches in the classics, music, and English departments. His *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* appeared in 2008, and in 2009 he and Lucy Marks published *Seeing Life Whole: Willa Cather and the Brewsters*.

**Ann Romines**, Professor of English at George Washington University, is the author of books and essays on U.S. women writers, including Cather, and is most recently historical editor of the Scholarly Edition of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and editor of *At Willa Cather’s Tables: The Cather Foundation Cookbook*, as well as this issue of the *Newsletter & Review*.

**Steven B. Shively**, Associate Professor of English at Utah State University, teaches classes in American literature and English education. He is author of many essays on American writers and co-editor of *Teaching Cather* and *Teaching the Works of Willa Cather*. He regularly speaks to groups about Cather and other American writers.

**Elaine Smith** is Assistant Professor in the Humanities/Cultural History Department at the University of South Florida. She teaches courses in American culture, with a focus on domesticity and American home life. Her current research is on Cather, modernism, and domestic arts. The 2010 Spring Conference was a homecoming of sorts for her, for her mother grew up near Red Cloud.

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*On the cover: Willa Cather lunching with Jan and Isabelle Hambourg in Ville-d’Avray, 1923. Photo from the Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.*

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## “I Have Some Champagne for You”: Wine in Willa Cather’s Fiction

DAVID PORTER

Any reader of Willa Cather’s fiction soon discovers that topics introduced apparently in passing often prove significant: it is no accident that the opera Paul sees early in “Paul’s Case” is *Faust*, that tale of temptation, or that the thesis Claude Wheeler writes early in *One of Ours* is about Joan of Arc, a woman ready to sacrifice herself for “something splendid.” I had a like experience when Ann Romines invited me to speak on Cather and wine at the 2010 Spring Conference: references to wine in Cather’s fiction, albeit relatively rare, more often than not proved revealing and integral to her design. This paper, like that talk, is but an apéritif: as with the fine vintages Cather so enjoyed, the topic deserves subtler and more leisurely savoring than I can give it here.

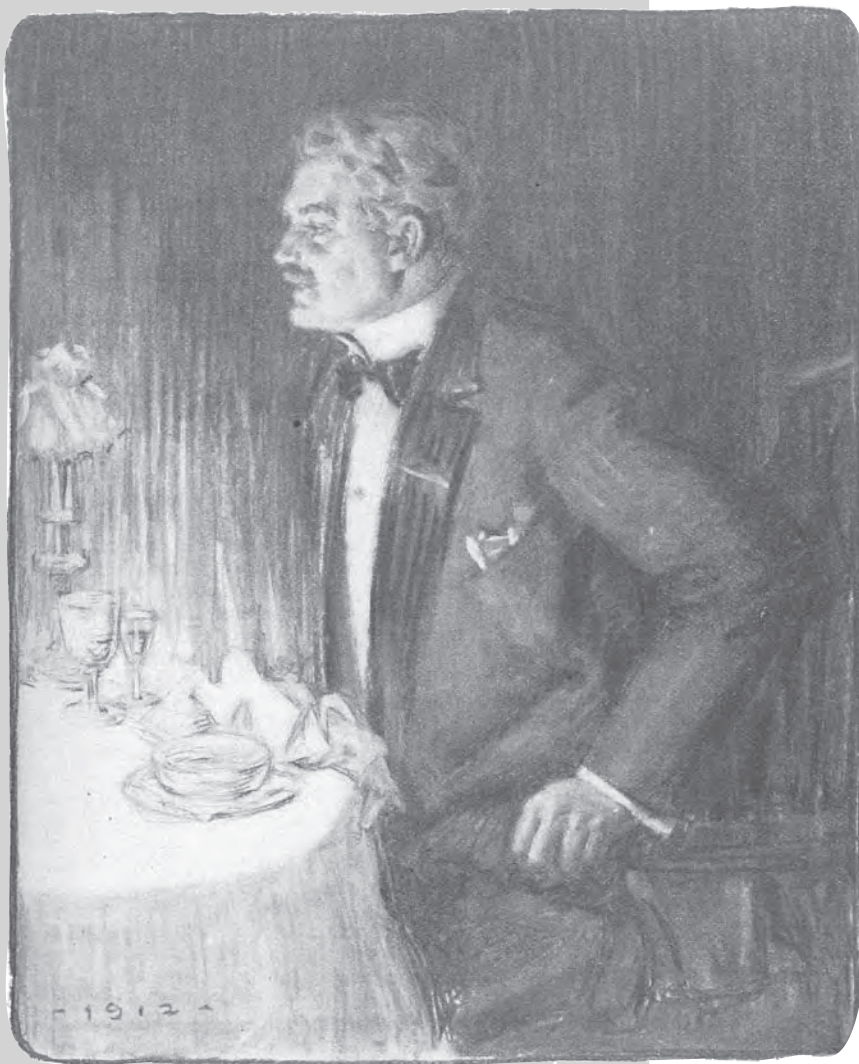
Wine already has a rich bouquet in Cather’s early writing. While she is still at university, she uses wine to express her feelings toward Louise Pound: “For I dream of a smile with its shimmer / Of silver and yellow of wine, / And something that never has left me / Had birth in your eyes and mine” (O’Brien 134). She returns to wine as metaphor in two poems of her 1903 *April Twilights*. In “The Tavern,” wine suggests the warmth of friendship and hospitality: “In the tavern of my heart / Many a one has sat before, / Drunk red wine and sung a stave” (AT 16). And at the close of “Dedictory,” the prelude to her book, and the poem where she first recalls the childhood island adventure to which she will so often return, wine evokes memory, adventure, imagination, and poetry itself:

Let us pour our amber wine and drink it  
To the memory of our vanished kingdoms,  
To our days of war and ocean venture,  
Brave with brigandage and sack of cities,  
To the Odysseys of summer mornings,  
Starry wonder-tales of nights in April. (AT 3)

Wine also figures significantly in two of Cather’s finest early stories. In “Paul’s Case,” wine and champagne track Paul’s gradual yielding to Faustian temptation. Green bottles nestled in ice, glimpsed through a hotel window early in the story, embody his dreams; the champagne ordered at his first dinner at the Waldorf suggests the ersatz realization of these dreams, and the wine drunk too fast and freely at his last Wal-



*These illustrations appeared in the March 1912 McClure’s in its initial serialization of “Alexander’s Masquerade,” published by Houghton Mifflin in April 1912 as Alexander’s Bridge. The two illustrations became one in the 1912 British (Heinemann) edition, called Alexander’s Bridges.*



*The original McClure's caption: "Bartley looked at Hilda across the yellow light of the candles and broke into a low, happy laugh. 'How jolly it was being young, Hilda! Do you remember that first walk we took together in Paris?'"*

dorf dinner foreshadows the dreams' imminent demise. In a pivotal episode of "The Bohemian Girl," the warmth of the rich Tokai that Joe Vavrika serves Nils and Clara in his garden ("You drink him slow, dis wine. He very soft, but he go down hot") soon transfers to their relationship, as Nils watches the late afternoon sun light Clara's face: "[D]eep in the back of her eyes there shone something fiery, like the yellow drops of Tokai in the brown glass bottle" (SP 114, 116).

In Cather's mature fiction, too, wine appears only sporadically but is memorable when it does, as if something saved for special occasions.<sup>1</sup> It is mentioned but once in "Neighbour Rosicky," but who can forget the "bottle of my wild-grape wine" that Anton tells Mary to bring to the picnic where he will reveal what has happened to their corn? "No crop this year. . . . That why we're havin' a picnic. We might as well enjoy what we got" (SP 607-8). Cather's use of wine in this context imbues Rosicky's words, and his brave wisdom, with resonant echoes of the whole *carpe diem* tradition.<sup>2</sup> The theme of wine provides a different but similarly apt index of character in *The Song of the Lark* when Thea Kronborg turns down champagne at dinner after her triumphant last-minute substitution in *Walküre*: "Yes, draught beer, please.<sup>3</sup> No, thank you, Fred, *no* champagne" (EN 607). (Contrast Eden Bower, the very different singer who in "Coming, Aphrodite!" drinks most of the champagne at her dinner with Don Hedger, in part because it recalls her afternoon balloon ride!) And when in *My Mortal Enemy* Myra

Henshawe comments on the topaz cuff links that Lydia

has presented to Oswald—but which Myra knows come from a secret admirer—her reference to wine captures perfectly the bitterness beneath her words: "There's hardly any other stone I would like, but these are exactly right. Look, Oswald, they're the colour of a fine Moselle" (SP 548).

Cather often groups wine references into significant pairs. In *The Professor's House*, for instance, Godfrey St. Peter goes to his office on Christmas day and removes a bottle of fine sherry from the chest where he keeps it, thinking how lucky it is that he had brought back a bountiful supply on his last trip to Spain: "It wasn't foresight—Pro-

A recent dinner in Avignon “consisted of ten courses . . . with wines that made us sad because we knew we would never taste their like again.”

hibition was then unthinkable—but a lucky accident” (*LN* 156). Cather clearly echoes this passage in the last pages of the novel, after the professor has survived his near-death experience and is facing what lies ahead: “He had never learned to live without delight. And he would have to learn to, just as, in a Prohibition country, he supposed he would have to learn to live without sherry” (271).<sup>4</sup> The distant pairing of the two passages deftly captures the professor’s situation and state of mind both in the first part of the novel, where he deserts his family to savor Christmas alone, and at its end, where he anticipates a life “without joy, without passionate griefs” (271).

I will mention but two of the similarly significant pairings in other novels. In *Lucy Gayheart*, Clement Sebastian takes Lucy to dinner and lingers long over the wine he has ordered, while each gradually warms to the other; within a few pages there is the sharply contrasting scene where Harry Gordon takes Lucy to dinner, orders champagne which he drinks swiftly, and then abruptly abandons her after she has lied to him about her relationship with Sebastian. A similar, and again revealing, pairing occurs in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. In the first panel Rachel Blake prepares dinner for her husband and friends to enjoy with fine wines, then joins them for after-dinner champagne; soon after, in a scene that is almost a mirror image, Henry Colbert arrives late to find guests drinking his best Madeira, then joins them for another gourmet meal with fine wines—the dinner celebrating the arrival of Martin Colbert, the intended seducer/rapist of Nancy Till.

As she does in “Paul’s Case,” Cather at times uses wine as a recurrent motif throughout a work. In *Alexander’s Bridge*, Bartley Alexander dines alone on an evening soon after his arrival in London, and soon after seeing Hilda Burgoyne on stage: “He wondered to-night, as he poured his wine, how many times he had thought of Hilda in the last ten years. He had been in London more or less, but he had never happened to hear of her. ‘All the same,’ he lifted his glass, ‘here’s to you, little Hilda. You’ve made things come your

way, and I never thought you’d do it” (*SP* 293-94).

Not long after, Bartley dines at Hilda’s home on Bedford Square:

It was a wonderful little dinner. There was watercress soup, and sole, and a delightful omelette stuffed with mushrooms and truffles, and two small rare ducklings, and artichokes, and a dry yellow Rhone wine of which Bartley had always been very fond. He drank it appreciatively and remarked that there was still no other he liked so well.

“I have some champagne for you, too. I don’t drink it myself, but I like to see it behave when it’s poured. There is nothing else that looks so jolly.”

“Thank you. But I don’t like it so well as this.” Bartley held the yellow wine against the light and squinted into it as he turned the glass slowly about. (306)

Bernice Slote has shown that Cather often associates yellow with passion, and in this pivotal scene where passion takes control, the yellow wine picks up the yellow of Hilda’s dress, her shoes, the table cloth and even the light of the candles (compare the Tokai passage in “The Bohemian Girl,” where the fire of Clara’s eyes recalls the yellow of the wine).<sup>5</sup>

Wine again figures prominently when Bartley later sails back toward England, determined this time to put an end to his affair with Hilda. The fourth night at sea he stays

out until the last tinge of violet ha[s] faded from the water. There was literally a taste of life on his lips as he sat down to dinner and ordered a bottle of champagne. He was late in finishing his dinner, and drank rather more wine than he had meant to. When he went above, the wind had risen and the deck was almost deserted. As he stepped out of the door a gale lifted his heavy fur coat about his shoulders. He fought his way up the deck with keen exhilaration. (317-18)

A few days later, as he nears England and Hilda, he feels “that marvelous return of the impetuosity, the intense excitement, the increasing expectancy of youth” (319). As he speaks of impetuosity, excitement, and youth, can we fail to hear Hilda’s promise: “I have some champagne for you. . . .”?

Wine is a recurrent motif in other works as well. In *A Lost Lady*, to name just one, Cather repeatedly associates Marian Forrester with sherry. When early on she serves it to Niel, her act feels almost an initiation of a youth into civilized adult society, but later her increasing overindulgence in sherry tracks her decline, stage by stage. And between these poles, again a turning point, is that Edenic morning when Niel brings roses to his lady only to find her in bed with her

lover, a morning that begins as “[o]ut of the saffron east a wine-like sunshine thin, yellow, began to gild the fragrant meadows and the glistening tops of the grove” (*LN* 46): yellow, wine, and passion yet once again.

Cather’s use of this motif in *A Lost Lady* is characteristic, for both in her life and in her writing she emphasizes wine’s bimodality. On the one hand, Cather herself saw wine as emblematic of civilized life. In 1902 she wrote that a recent dinner in Avignon “consisted of ten courses, each better than the last, with wines that made us sad because we knew we would never taste their like again” (*WCE* 136). In a 1920 letter to Ferris Greenslet she commented that French wine really was the essence of the culture (*Stout* 79).<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Sergeant recalls Cather shopping for just the right makings for a meal, then at dinner “pouring a dry Burgundy she had found for me” (113).<sup>7</sup> On the other side, however, Cather also saw wine as something that could destroy its users and undermine the very culture that had created it. Writing in August 1936 to Zoë Akins about Jobyna Howland, an actress they had both admired and who had just died after a long alcoholic decline, Cather asked why people over-drink, when a little wine in moderation is so good (*Stout* 196).

She writes a similar bimodality into her fiction, as we have seen in both “Paul’s Case” and *A Lost Lady*. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, where wine appears repeatedly, it is regularly ambivalent in character, associated on the one hand with the civilized and civilizing ways that Latour and Vaillant bring to everything they do, on the other with the undisciplined drunkenness and uncivilized values of priests like Gallegos and Baltazar. Contrast in particular—paired scenes again!—the wine Father Vaillant cadges from a wealthy Mexican to complement the elegant French meal he cooks for Christmas with the fine wines that Fray Baltazar shows off with pride to his fellow priests—and that, consumed too freely along with fine French liqueurs, lead directly to what we can only call his precipitous downfall.

Cather associates wine not just with culture but also with its bipolar opposite, nature—think of the powerful natural forces Joe Vavrika releases when he offers Nils and Clara his Tokai. In *O Pioneers!* Carl Lindstrum sees similar natural

## VEGETABLE OMELET



**Make a purée by mashing up ready-dressed vegetables, together with a little milk, cream or gravy and some seasoning. The most suitable vegetables are cucumbers, artichokes, onions, sorrel, green peas, tomatoes, lentils, mushrooms, asparagus tops, potatoes, truffles or turnips. Prepare some eggs by beating them very light. Pour them into a nice hot frying pan, containing a spoonful of butter; spread the purée upon the upper side; and when perfectly hot, turn or fold the omelet together and serve.**

**The White House Cookbook**

passions in Marie Shabata when he meets her on his return to the Divide and ponders the brilliance of her eyes: “[T]he effect was that of two dancing points of light, two little yellow [!] bubbles, such as rise in a glass of champagne. Sometimes they seemed like the sparks from a forge. She seemed so easily excited, to kindle with a fierce little flame if one but breathed upon her” (*EN* 204-5). As it turns out, Marie’s natural energies are filled with danger, and at the end of the book Carl echoes the very words of this passage, recalling Maria’s sparkling eyes and her native fire—and the inexorable harm they have caused: “It happens like that in the world sometime, Alexandra. . . . I’ve seen it before. There are women who spread ruin around them through no fault of theirs, just by being too beautiful, too full of life and love. They can’t help it. People come to them as people go to a warm fire in winter. . . . You remember those yellow sparks in her eyes?” (288)<sup>8</sup>

In her next novel, *The Song of the Lark*, Cather uses sparkling yellow wine to evoke the passions at work in a different heroine, this time one whose native fire begets creation, not destruction: “What was it she reminded him of? A yellow flower, full of sunlight, perhaps. No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbor, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood” (*EN* 319). It is Thea Kronborg’s native energy that Professor Wunsch evokes in these words, that side of herself that

Thea rediscovers in Panther Canyon, and that will feed her mature art, as Cather reveals by the nature-laden, passionate, sensuous language she uses of Thea's climactic performance: "While she was on stage she was conscious that every movement was the right movement, that her body was absolutely the instrument of her idea. Not for nothing had she kept it so severely, kept it filled with such energy and fire. All that deep-rooted vitality flowered in her voice, her face, in her very finger-tips. She felt like a tree bursting into bloom" (697-98).

Like so much else in her story, Thea's artistic awakening springs from her creator's life, for Cather had experienced a like awakening—indeed, the Panther Canyon episode itself grows directly out of Cather's own experience.<sup>9</sup> In an anonymous 1903 autobiographical sketch that describes her transformative first years on the Divide, Cather mentions what was probably her first encounter with wine: "For two years the child ran wild, living mostly on horseback, scouring the sparsely-settled country, visiting the Danes and Norwegians, tasting the wild-plum wine made by the old women" (Porter 4). Cather later would often speak of how essential the energy, language, stories, and otherness of these immigrant women were to her as a writer. May we not see in the wild-plum wine she first tasted with them a metaphor for what Wunsch evokes in his comparison of Thea to a glass of sparkling Moselle, its bubbles rising and bursting in the glass—the release of Cather's own natural talents, her own "silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood"?

#### NOTES

1. If her fictional characters are any index, wine's place in Willa Cather's early life was similar—rare, but special when it occurred. Thea Kronborg first drinks wine when she gets to Chicago (*EN* 453); Jim Burden has never even seen champagne bottles opened before he watches this happen on stage in Lincoln (*EN* 882), and Claude Wheeler first tastes champagne when he arrives in France as a soldier (*EN* 1195).

2. For classic examples of this theme, with wine prominent in both, see Horace *Odes* 1.11, the poem in which he uses the phrase *carpe diem*, and 1.38, the brief poem of which Cather published a lovely translation in *Hesperian* during her undergraduate days.

3. After Thea's performance of an opera from Wagner's Ring, one assumes she must have insisted on that fine old New York beer, Rheingold.

4. Cather, whom the professor so resembles, was no fan of prohibition: see Klaus P. Stich, "The Professor's House: Prohibition, Ripe Grapes, and Euripides," *Cather Studies* 4 (1991) 75-84, and cf. Woodress 339.

5. See Slote xix-xx on the association of yellow with

passion in *Alexander's Bridge* and other Cather works.

6. Cf. *Shadows on the Rock*, throughout which Cather makes wine an emblem of French culture in the wilderness: one thinks of the two flasks of wine, one red, one white, on the Auclair table in the first dinner scene; of the Count's great cellar of fine wines; and of the carefully chosen wines that Euclide Auclair serves Father Hector and Pierre Charron when they come to his house. It is wonderfully apt that in the dust jacket description of this novel (penned by Cather?) A. A. Knopf compares it to a "superb vintage" (Porter 47).

7. For evidence of Cather's discriminating knowledge of wines, an interest she shared with A. A. Knopf, see the series of letters she writes in 1939-40 to Julian Street, a fellow connoisseur in Princeton, NJ: Stout 221-23, 228.

8. Cf. Carl's comment soon after about seeing Emil & Marie together: "[I]t was something one felt in the air, as you feel the spring coming, or a storm in summer . . . . [W]hen I was with those two young things, I felt my blood go quicker, I felt—how shall I say it?—an acceleration of life" (*EN* 288).

9. Among others, see Woodress 3-11, esp. 8ff.

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# A Plain Legacy

MARY DIXON

*Mary Dixon, who is both a scholar and a creative writer, presented a paper, "Cather's Immigrants: An Attempt to Deal with Displacement," at Spring Conference. She began her paper with this arresting poem.*

I am born of women who wrested life out of the vast sea of grass edging the Missouri,  
Whose lone cause was lifting sustenance from sodden land.

I am born of women whose hands ground corn, baked bread, crocked sauerkraut,  
Whose tears soaked gingham on patched overalls after measles and rubella.

I am born of women whose laughter mocked the joy cry of Canada geese,  
Whose wails disturbed the morning dove.

I am born of women creased with dirt in places where sweat has dried,  
Women polished for Sunday picnics in homemade dresses.

I am born of women who drew bales from the gulf of alfalfa pastureland,  
Who plowed fields behind horses and on tractors.

I am born of women who baked kolaches and rye,  
Who preserved everything eked out of summer.

I am born of women who branded cattle, snaked fence line, milked and herded,  
Who cleaned and nursed and bred and birthed.

I am born of women whose eyes opened wide to prairie windows in golden sunrise,  
Whose eyes closed on an expanse of sky so broad it glutted their imaginations.

I am born of women whose bones break with age,  
Whose wreaths of braids  
Come down in their daughters' caresses.

## Sanitary Piggeries and Chaste Hens: Willa Cather and the Pure Food Movement

SUSAN MEYER

After Alexandra Bergson's father dies, at the beginning of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913), the first farming decision Alexandra makes has to do with the care of her hogs. The novel enters into her decision in considerable detail. Fearful because many of her neighbors' hogs are dying, Alexandra asks Crazy Ivar for advice, since he is known for his unofficial veterinary abilities and his sympathy with animals. "You feed them swill and such stuff?" Crazy Ivar asks Alexandra. "Of course! And sour milk? Oh, yes! And keep them in a stinking pen? I tell you, sister, the hogs of this country are put upon! They become unclean, like the hogs in the Bible." He directs Alexandra to fence off a clean sorghum patch. "Let the boys haul water to them in barrels, clean water, and plenty," he instructs her. "Get them off the old stinking ground, and do not let them go back there until winter. Give them only grain and clean feed, such as you would give horses or cattle. Hogs do not like to be filthy." Alexandra's listening brothers, who dislike experiments in farming that might make them seem ridiculous to the neighbors, quickly start hitching up the horses. "He'll fill her full of notions," grunts Lou to Oscar. "She'll be for having the pigs sleep with us, next" (46-47). To her brothers' relief, Alexandra says nothing to them about the hogs. That evening, however, as Alexandra's brothers and her friend Carl, the neighboring boy whom she will marry at the novel's end, splash, their bodies gleaming, in the distant pasture pond, Alexandra sits on the kitchen doorstep, gazing dreamily into the summer evening—and her brothers' relief is to be short-lived. After gazing at the shimmering pond for a while, Alexandra turns her eyes to the sorghum patch. Her thoughts are not those that a reader new to Willa Cather might expect from an adolescent girl musing in the moonlight. Alexandra is dreamily planning out not her romantic future—but her hygienic new pig corral.

It is one of several moments in the novel where Alex-

andra's sexuality is displaced from personal expression into her passion for the land and for farming, and, in particular into her passion for well-conducted, *clean* farming, for the sort of farming where, as Cather writes, using language that is at once sexualized and hygiene-conscious, "the brown earth, with such a strong *clean* smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow" (74). Cather's novels show her to be very interested in hygienic farming and in clean methods of food handling and preparation—the same sort of concerns that drove the turn-of-the-century Pure Food movement. In surprisingly intimate detail, Cather's novels affirm the artistry involved in the production of clean, well-prepared food—in all its stages from farm to table. But to what degree do Cather's beliefs about food coincide with those of the Pure Food movement? And what metaphorical role does clean food play in her fiction?

The Pure Food movement is now best remembered for Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1905), which focused public attention on the problem of contaminated meat products, and for the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, for which Sinclair's novel garnered tremendous public support.<sup>1</sup> Pure Food agitators had been campaigning since the 1870s for improved hygiene standards in food preparation at all stages, from the feeding, transport, and slaughter of animals to the preparation and marketing of food.<sup>2</sup> By the early years of the twentieth century, Pure Food reform was widely discussed and was very much a part of the American consciousness.

Alexandra's decision to create a hygienic new hog compound occurs in the early 1880s, when the novel begins—and Cather is precisely historically accurate in situating disagreements over hog husbandry in this era. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Pure Food reformers were advocating exactly the sort of changes in hog farming that Crazy Ivar suggests to Alexandra. In June of 1875, one eccentric

millionaire and Pure Food reformer, William Emerson Baker of Needham, Massachusetts, welcomed numerous dignitaries to the ceremonial dedication of his model hog compound in order to draw attention to hygiene in the raising of hogs. His guest list included the mayor of Boston, the governor of Massachusetts, and the Vice President of the United States. Baker told his illustrious guests just what Ivar tells Alexandra: hogs, he contended, “were not naturally dirty and would respond amiably to respectful treatment” (Crumbaker 26). The semi-comical dedicatory ceremonies for Baker’s hygienic hog compound extended over three days. The festivities included a military review and a four-hour Grand March, and culminated in speeches and a procession to the hog barn. At the building itself, peering through the door, which was surmounted by an ornate white and gold sign declaring it the “Sanitary Piggery,” the visiting dignitaries observed Baker’s improvements. There they came upon Baker’s best joke: for the occasion he had set up in the barn for the hogs a row of little beds with silk sheets and pillows (26). Alexandra’s brother Lou may not be far off when he mutters that the next step in hygienic farming is “having the hogs sleep with us”!

Baker was an eccentric with a quirky sense of humor, but he was an early advocate for Pure Food reform, and his tremendous wealth enabled him to publicize his ideas to the most highly placed political figures and in the most powerful social circles. He was concerned not only with hygienic farming but with sanitary cooking. In addition to drawing public attention to the need for improved hygiene in animal husbandry, Baker established the Massachusetts Institute of Cookery and the Ridge Hill Laboratories, both of which were devoted to exploring and teaching the most hygienic methods of food preparation (Needham Historical Society 8).

By the early years of the twentieth century, no doubt in part because of the publicity that the wealthy and well-connected Baker generated for his ideas, agricultural bulletins on hog management emphasized the importance of sanitary feed and clean living conditions for hogs (see Rommel, Haskell, Day, Dawson, Oregon State).<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of *O Pioneers!*, one of the disasters that destroys Alexandra’s father is the death of his hogs from cholera. Those who advocated improved hygiene in hog farming believed that hog cholera, as well as other animal diseases, some of which might be passed to humans, were produced, as one hog manual puts it, “by putrid poison in the blood, induced by unwholesome foods, drink, and surroundings productive of disease” (Coburn 243). By showing Alexandra to be willing in the early 1880s to listen to Crazy Ivar’s then-eccentric suggestions about providing hogs with clean living condi-

<sup>3</sup>“Complies with all Pure Food Laws”: Genesee Pure Food Company Jell-O advertisement, McClure’s, November 1907.

**JELL-O**  
*The Dainty Dessert*

**America's Most Famous Dessert**

Has the true flavor of the fruit itself.  
*Lemon, Raspberry, Strawberry, Orange, Cherry, Peach, Chocolate.*  
Small fruit is scarce and high.

**JELL-O**

will prove a most acceptable and inexpensive substitute.  
**Delicate Delightful Dainty**

To prepare, simply add boiling water, cool and serve.

**10c. per package, at all grocers.**

**Illustrated Recipe Book Free.**

Complies with all Pure Food Laws and received Highest Award, Gold Medals at the St. Louis and Portland Expositions.

**THE GENESEE PURE FOOD CO.,**  
Le Roy, N. Y.

Visit our Exhibit at  
**JAMESTOWN EXPOSITION**

tions and clean feed, Cather shows Alexandra to be intuitively in the forefront of hygienic agriculture, agriculture that is good for the farmer and good also for the consumer of the farmer's products.

Pure Food reform was a movement that Cather—and indeed, any thinking, reading, news-following person living in America in the early twentieth century—could hardly have failed to be aware of. *McClure's Magazine*—of course a periodical in which Cather had a personal interest—was particularly involved with the Pure Food movement. In 1915, an essay of Cather's about the New York theater scene, "The Sweated Drama," appeared in the same issue of *McClure's Magazine* as Burton J. Hendrick's second *McClure's* story on the subject, "Eight Years of the Pure Food Law." Hendrick drew attention, both in this article and in an earlier one, "The Farce of the Pure Food Law," to the inadequate protection that the law provided to the American public. Cather is all the more likely to have followed Hendrick's articles closely because they were prompted by outrage over a recent Supreme Court ruling that it was legal to sell food containing small amounts of known poisons. This ruling was over a law-suit involving contaminated flour produced by the Lexington Mill and Elevator Company—which was based in Lexington, Nebraska (Hendrick, *Farce* 78).

During the time that Cather was on the *McClure's* editorial staff, in 1907, and in 1908, when she was acting as managing editor, the magazine ran articles focusing on the Pure Milk campaign, reform directed at keeping tuberculosis-contaminated milk out of the milk supply.<sup>4</sup> Foods advertisements in *McClure's* also frequently mention the Pure Food law to tout the wholesomeness of their products.<sup>5</sup> *McClure's* was so concerned about pure food that in 1914, prompted by the Supreme Court's ruling concerning the Lexington, Nebraska Mill and Elevator Company, *McClure's* Publications hired a chemist, Professor Lewis B. Allyn, to test all foods advertised in *McClure's* as well as its sister publications *Ladies World* and *Harper's Weekly* for the presence of harmful additives now officially allowed by US law. Allyn subsequently became *McClure's* Food Editor. *McClure's* Publications was very serious about holding all of its food advertisers to a higher standard than that of the Pure Food law by insuring that none of the foods advertised in its pages were "poisonously adulterated"—and *McClure's* also emphatically warned readers to be wary that many other foods allowed on the market *were* contaminated in this way (Hendrick, *Farce* 87).

In the episode in *O Pioneers!* in which Alexandra improves the hygiene of her pig corral and elsewhere in her fiction, Cather shows her awareness of some of the central concerns of the Pure Food movement. In "Neighbour Rosicky" (1932), Rosicky alludes to the adulteration and contamination of food when he thinks about "treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poison-

ing their fellow-man" (51). Commercially canned food was also under much suspicion at the turn of the century—some considered the growth of the canning industry to be essential to the feeding of America's burgeoning cities, although others feared that the inferior quality and contamination of canned food led to poisonings and deaths. Cather was evidently among those who were dubious about the benefits of commercial canning. In both Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and her *One of Ours* (1922), salmon in tin cans makes an appearance as an inferior food prepared by women who are negligent in tending to their husbands and households. The attention of Pure Food reformers was also focused on the transport of animals and on poor hygiene in slaughterhouses. Thea, in *The Song of the Lark*, has such an interest in and unsentimental view of meat production that when she plays trains with the children of her piano teacher, Harsanyi, she packs the animals from the Noah's ark into the open coal cars and sends them to the stockyards—making Harsanyi's daughter burst into tears. One of the things that interests Thea most about Chicago—more, initially, than the Art Institute or Chicago's musical opportunities—is its meat-packing industry. She asks to be taken on a tour of the stockyards and slaughterhouses by a young Swede from her boardinghouse. Although the Swedish packing house worker hopes the tour will produce screaming and clutching from Thea and will lead to a sexual opportunity, Thea, oblivious to his groping, instead peppers him with clear-eyed questions about the workings of the packing house. Like the Pure Food reformers, Cather demonstrates an interest in food production, even in its earthiest and bloodiest phases, and represents it as a significant subject, worthy of careful attention from all alert, intelligent people.

But was Cather's fiction colored also by some of the less savory aspects of the Pure Food movement? Hygiene, purity, and bodily health were loaded ideas in early twentieth century America. Pure Food advocates sometimes showed a tendency to associate immigrants with, and to a certain degree blame immigrants for, unsanitary food. Samuel Hopkins Adams's 1907 *McClure's* article about "Rochester's Pure Milk Campaign," for example, falls into making characteristic aspersions about the foolish and unhygienic ways that poor immigrant women feed their children. One summer day, Adams observes an Irishwoman bringing her two and a half year old boy to one of Rochester's pure milk stations and getting what he terms some "tactful advice" from the nurse who dispenses the milk. Adams implies that her maternal ignorance and callousness are the reason for the deaths of five of her seven children. Among the mother's sins against early

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*Opposite: "EGG-O-SEE is made from the choicest selected White Wheat; in the largest, cleanest and most economically operated Pure Food Mills in the World": Egg-O-See Cereal Company advertisement, McClure's, May 1907.*



**More EGG-O-SEE was eaten during the past year than all other flaked foods combined.**

Never before in the history of a food, have the American people given such a sweeping endorsement of merit, as has been accorded EGG-O-SEE.

There is more actual proof of the real value of EGG-O-SEE in this unqualified testimony of the people than in all the claims we might make.

EGG-O-SEE is made from the choicest selected White Wheat; in the largest, cleanest and most economically operated Pure Food Mills in the World, by the famous EGG-O-SEE Process. Thus we are enabled to give the people a large package of delicious food for only 10 cents.

If you are not already one of the great army of EGG-O-SEE users, begin today. Buy a package of your Grocer and be convinced.

**Warm in a Pan before Serving**

In Canada the price of EGG-O-SEE is 15c, two packages for 25c.

**FREE “-back to nature” book**

How to get well, keep well by natural means—bathing, exercise, food, etc.,—and how to use EGG-O-SEE for every meal in the week is told in our expensively prepared booklet, “-back to nature,” sent free. We are glad to send it. You will be glad to get it.

EGG-O-SEE CEREAL COMPANY

868 AMERICAN SAVINGS BANK BLDG., CHICAGO, ILL.



Never accept substitutes; insist on getting what you ask for.

twentieth-century American beliefs about hygiene and the feeding of children appears to be that she has given her little boy cabbage and pork (traditional Irish foods) the evening before for dinner (“with the mercury at ninety” the nurse replies, *sotto voce*, to Adams, as if the mother’s absurdity is self-evident). Adams assumes that all his readers understand why the mother’s decision is foolish, but, a little over a hundred years later, under the influence of different ideas about childhood nutrition, I find myself somewhat bewildered—as bewildered as the Irishwoman seems to have been. Meat and vegetables? The meal sounds pretty healthy to me. Is the problem that these are gas-producing foods? Is it that it is impossible to keep pork cold and therefore safe with early twentieth-century refrigeration techniques in 90 degree weather? Is it that the nurse feels lighter foods—broth or cereal?—are appropriate in hot weather? In any case, the nurse gives the Irish mother a lecture and a bottle of milk, and she goes home, Adams says, “with the beginnings of wisdom, wherewith, haply, to keep the baby from the graveyard whither five others had preceded him” (Adams, Rochester 147). The reader (who is expected to understand immediately why pork with cabbage is a ridiculous and dangerous choice) can feel, like Adams and the nurse, comfortably superior in hygiene and nutritional knowledge.

A turn-of-the-century *New York Times* critique of the dirty food sold by pushcart vendors of New York’s Lower East Side much more directly implies that any health problems of the impoverished Jews living in this neighborhood are the fault of their own appalling hygiene.<sup>6</sup> The author writes of getting a whiff of rotten cheese being sold from a pushcart: “Phew, how that cheese did smell! Yet in spite of the fact that the cheese was a reeking mass of rottenness and alive with worms, the long-whiskered descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah on the East Side would put their fingers in it and then suck them with great and evident relish.” The reform-minded author of this article is not concerned about the effect that the filth of the lower East Side and the food available there has on its residents, since he represents them as completely unwilling to be hygienic. “Cleanliness is an unknown quantity to these people,” he writes. “They cannot be lifted up to a higher plane because they do not want to be.” What concerns the author instead is the effect that these naturally disgusting, filthy immigrants may have on the rest of the city. “If the cholera should ever get among these people,” he warns his readers, “they would scatter its germs as a sower does grain” (East Side Vendors, 17).

Let’s return to William Emerson Baker, who held the ceremonial dedication of the Sanitary Piggery complete with the small beds with silken sheets. The ethnic biases entwined with Baker’s ideas about pure food are even more blatantly in evidence than those of either Samuel Hopkins Adams or the author of the *New York Times* piece about pushcart

vendors. Baker was evidently as concerned with pure race as with pure food. The ceremonial dedication of Baker’s “Sanitary Piggery,” celebrating hygienic food production, veered at times into racist commentary and innuendo. The dedicatory ceremony, attended by numerous visiting dignitaries, included humorous byplay with two piglets, one black and one white. Baker dubbed the piglets the “miscegenation twins,” and made jokes about the ways in which the piglets demonstrated that the white race was ahead of the black. At the dedicatory ceremony, he gave the piglets as gifts to military regiments from Virginia and Baltimore, and in his *Guide to the Ridge Hill Farms* Baker writes with amusement of the regiments returning home from the “Sanitary Piggery” and parading through the streets displaying the piglets—accompanied by marching members of the Ku Klux Klan (Baker 116). That Baker could consider the addition of the KKK (which, by 1875, had already engaged in the burning of black churches and schools, the whipping of black women, the intimidation of black voters, and the widespread murder of blacks [Bryant]) to be a pleasant and amusing amplification of his Pure Food ceremonies hardly needs further comment.

Cather was certainly no William Emerson Baker in her racial attitudes. But was Cather’s concern with purity and hygiene in food production ever colored by the racially and ethnically biased thinking sometimes in evidence in the Pure Food movement? A few passages in Cather’s novels do show some tendency to associate dirty food with immigrants and African Americans. In *The Song of the Lark*, Thea and Fred Ottenburg tease the westerner Dr. Archie on his visit to New York, about his lack of cosmopolitan sophistication. To their amusement, a waiter at Martin’s has “work[ed] a Touranian hare off on him. . . for seven twenty-five” (375). Thea laughingly asks him if the hare had a ribbon on or came in a gilt cage, and asserts that it “probably came from a push-cart on the East side” (376). Thea, Fred, and Cather herself appear to be thinking about reports about the food sold by Jews on Lower East side pushcarts like the one described in the article I quoted earlier. And if Dr. Archie’s hare came from such a pushcart, he seems to be taking his life in his hands by eating it. In that article, the *New York Times* reporter goes on to observe that on a pushcart near that of the cheese vendor pieces of fresh meat and dead fowl were for sale: “A huge swarm of great blue flies buzzed about and laid their eggs on the meat,” he notes, “which was already alive with the larvae of insects.” Thea’s assertion that the naïve Dr. Archie’s hare is from a pushcart, not from Touraine, associates it with not with French culinary sophistication, but with Jews and filthy, putrid food. A few pages later, Thea, dismayed by the very poor quality of the soup sent up to her by her hotel, orders that another dinner be sent up, only to find it even more disgusting and dirty than the first: “there was even a burnt match under the milk toast” (403). Angry over the appalling

management of the hotel, she summons the housekeeper and loudly berates her over some lost laundry, only to rebuke herself later for harming her throat the evening before a performance by getting into a rage: “if I’d let that laundry alone with whatever nigger has stolen it—” she thinks (404). The dirty food leads to and seems loosely associated with Thea’s use of the racial slur—and with Thea’s sense, not condemned by Cather, that many floors below Thea’s lofty apartment the domestic work is being done poorly and dirtily by racially inferior people. Nothing in the novel seems to distinguish Thea’s distressing attitudes here from Cather’s.

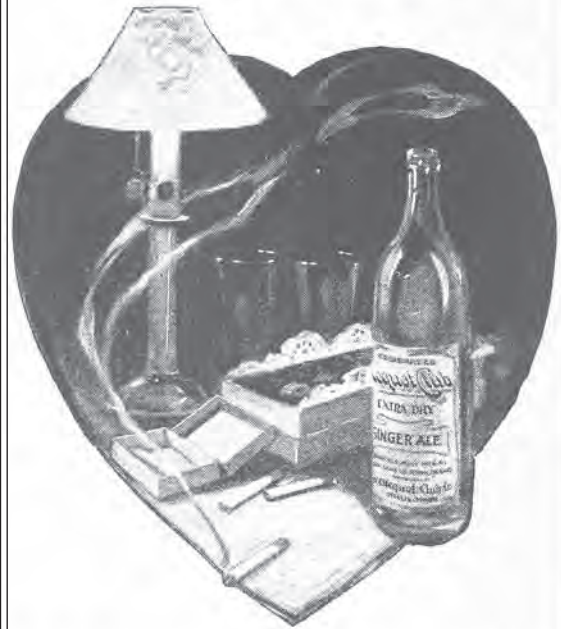
To a lesser degree, *My Antonia* suggests a wariness about the cleanliness of food associated with people of other ethnicities. Jim and his grandmother are appalled by the dirtiness of the food eaten by the Bohemian Shimerdas when they see the “sour, ashy-gray bread” (evidently a primitive sourdough), made with scrapings of dough left to ferment in the bowl from the last batch, that Mrs. Shimerda feeds her family. Mrs. Shimerda boasts, rather unpleasantly, “all things for eat better in my country,” to which Mrs. Burden replies dryly, “I can’t say but I prefer our bread to yours, myself” (75). Mrs. Burden also reacts with disgust to the musty-smelling dried mushrooms that Mrs. Shimerda keeps unhygienically shut up in a trunk “with old clothes and goose pillows” (76).

But when his grandmother isn’t looking, the child Jim does nibble curiously on the corner of one of those dried mushrooms—and as the chapter ends the adult Jim romantically imagines the Shimerdas gathering them in “some deep Bohemian forest” (77). The multiplicity of perspective—Mrs. Burden has one reaction but Jim, as both a child and an adult, has a differing one—suggests that perhaps Cather isn’t as negative about those unhygienic mushrooms as Mrs. Burden is. And in many other places, Cather’s fiction unquestionably celebrates the food of immigrants, particularly Bohemian immigrants: in loving detail she describes Antonia’s spiced plum *kolaches*, Marie Shabata’s delicate little rolls stuffed with stewed apricots, and the hot biscuit and sausage and strong coffee with rich cream that Dr. Burleigh is served at the Rosicky farm in “Neighbour Rosicky.” In *One of Ours*, the little German woman who runs the restaurant by the train depot offers Claude a delicious-sounding “first brown cut” from the breast of a roast chicken with sweet potatoes and gravy (55-56). And if Thea’s comment about the hare from the lower East side pushcart casts aspersions on the cleanliness of the food of Jewish immigrants, this is counterbalanced by the fine cooking of the Jewish Mrs. Rosen in “Old Mrs. Harris” (1932), who offers Grandma Harris what Cather describes in delicious detail as “a sym-

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*A product made with “scientific care and epicurean judgment,” “conforming to the pure food laws of every state.” Clicquot Club Co. advertisement, McClure’s, March 1908.*

## Clicquot Club Ginger Ale



**Clicquot Club Ginger Ale** (pronounced Click-O) is without exception the most delicious and pure Ginger Ale produced.

If you could see with what scientific care and epicurean judgment we make and bottle this beverage, you would use it exclusively.

It is always the same—conforming to the pure food laws of every state.

*If your dealer does not carry it, let us know.*

**CLICQUOT CLUB CO., Millis, Mass.**

metrically plaited coffee-cake, beautifully browned, delicately peppered over with poppy seeds, with sugary margins about the twists” (66).

How can we make sense of these seeming contradictions? Cather’s fiction shows some tendency to associate immigrants and African-Americans with dirty food and with slovenliness, but she does not do so exclusively. The very American-sounding Mr. and Mrs. Tom Marshall in “Neighbour Rosicky” keep a slovenly house where Dr. Burleigh is unwilling to eat (11). Without saying anything about the ethnicity of the proprietors, Dr. Evans in *The Song of the Lark* condemns most Chicago boarding houses as “abominable places, where girls got poor food for body and mind” (148), whereas at the German Mrs. Lorch’s home Thea is very well fed. Niel’s childhood home, in *A Lost Lady*, is kept by a poor cousin from Kentucky who always leaves washing lying about in various stages of completion and who he decides is “probably the worst housekeeper in the world” (27). What Cather’s fiction condemns is slovenliness and dirtiness itself. She does show some tendency, evident in much American writing at the time, to unfairly associate the filth that accompanies poverty with the character of those living in poverty, particularly when they are racially or ethnically different. But she doesn’t always or even usually represent the food of people of other ethnicities as unclean. Clean, industrious, thriving immigrants and their food are celebrated in her novels in loving detail.

Cather’s novels also differ in emphasis from the Pure Food movement in that she is definitely not always positive about agricultural “progress.” Mrs. Tom Marshall’s house, where Dr. Burleigh refuses to eat breakfast in “Neighbour Rosicky,” is “a big, rich farm where there was plenty of stock and plenty of feed and a great deal of expensive farm machinery of the newest model, and no comfort whatever” (11). The Wheeler family farm, in *One of Ours*, is also overstocked with the latest in farming and domestic technology, much of which ends up as unused clutter in the cellar. Claude complains to his brother Ralph, who is constantly buying new gadgets, about the difficulty of cleaning and reassembling the thirty-odd graduated metal funnels in the new milk separator, and Mrs. Wheeler observes mildly that “it’s a great deal more work to scald it and fit it together than it was to take care of the milk in the old way” (33). But the new agricultural development that Cather represents most negatively in *One of Ours* has to do with Claude’s wife Enid and her new techniques for raising poultry.

After Claude marries Enid, and she rejects him in the train on their wedding night, Cather discreetly introduces a break between book two and book three of the novel. In that space between books of the novel, presumably, Claude’s romantic disappointment becomes a settled and confirmed condition. When book three opens, Claude is

alone in Enid’s kitchen, eating the cold supper she has left for him in the icebox: “a dish of canned salmon with a white sauce; hardboiled eggs, peeled and lying in a nest of lettuce leaves; a bowl of ripe tomatoes, a bit of cold rice pudding; cream and butter” (269-70), along with a piece of bread. It is not a very satisfying-sounding supper for a hungry, red-blooded young man who has been working hard on his farm all day. Enid is a vegetarian, of course, and aside from the tinned salmon—a concession, it seems, to Claude’s need for additional protein—the meal is not only cold and vegetarian but predominantly white and pale, with white sauce, whole hardboiled eggs, bread, rice pudding, cream, butter. When Claude’s friend Leonard arrives, he observes the pallid meal with distaste, but doesn’t comment on it. Instead, he admires the Wheelers’ white leghorn chickens—that is, he does so until he notices that they are all hens. Enid keeps only one rooster and she shuts him up in the coop, apart from the females.<sup>8</sup> Leonard can hardly contain his rage on hearing about Enid’s chaste methods of poultry farming: “I raise chickens on a natural basis, or I don’t raise ‘em at all,” he exclaims angrily to Claude, before hurrying home to his own wife (272).

In Susie’s kitchen, where she is cooking dinner, Leonard lets his feelings explode. “I can’t stand that damned wife of Claude’s!” he bursts out. Susie’s kitchen is the antithesis of Enid’s; it is bursting with life and vitality, both culinary and procreative. Susie is cooking a hot meal—she looks up from a steaming pot where she is spearing roasting ears—and she has a baby near her in a buggy. Leonard is so delighted to see the baby that “dirty and sweaty as he was, Leonard picked up the clean baby and began to kiss it and smell it, rubbing his stubbly chin in the soft creases of its neck” (272), and the baby bubbles over with joy. He tells Susie indignantly about Enid’s poultry, complains about what he will do, as he puts it, if Enid “tries to do any missionary work among my chickens” (273), and tells Susie meaningfully, “I don’t believe you would live with the sort of man you could feed out of a tin can” (274). By juxtaposing these two kitchen scenes, Cather implicitly condemns Enid’s cold, pallid, tin can-opening vegetarianism, and indicates that hearty, well-prepared food is associated with healthy sexuality, fertility, and a joyous engagement in life. Whole-hearted participation in life includes getting dirty and then washing, having bodily appetites and enjoying satisfying them—and taking the baby out to admire the pigs, as Leonard does at the conclusion of the chapter. Sexuality, eating, raising a family, and conducting a thriving, naturally-conducted farm are all strongly interconnected in this chapter.

Claude of course should have listened more carefully when Enid’s father discreetly warned him that “Enid is a vegetarian, you know” (202), but at the time he has not come to understand everything that her vegetarianism signifies. Yet Enid does apparently eat meat once in the novel. Cather



## An Educator Wafer, Buttered

Exquisitely crisp and delicious.

A flavor that's sweet and nutlike—the natural sweetness of **whole wheat**—Nature's most perfect food.

I make this **whole wheat Wafer** as my father made it—guarding sacredly his standard of pure food excellence—the standard he set for all

## EDUCATOR CRACKERS

*The Cracker of Character and Economy*

But the baking—there's the real secret. Good old-fashioned ovens bring out a richness of flavor, a delicacy of texture—delightfully different from anything you have ever known.

They're truly the original and best **whole wheat Wafers**—a tempting treat you will never forget.

And I personally sample each day's bake. I insist on absolute perfection—so that you may enjoy **Educator Wafers** just like the ones my father originated.

**Get Educator Wafers from your grocer today.** Look for the name **EDUCATOR**. Serve them for dinner tonight. Tell your husband to butter as he eats them. He'll say, "They're simply great"—all men do.

If your grocer cannot supply you, send ten cents and his name for large trial box.

**JOHNSON EDUCATOR FOOD CO.,**  
32 Batterymarch St., Boston, Mass.



*Educator Crackers advertisement, McClure's, March 1912. The manufacturer notes that he guards "sacredly his [father's] standard of food excellence."*

has Enid deviate from her principles once—and it occurs, significantly, at her wedding. We find this out on the train when she turns Claude away from their nuptial bed on their wedding night. "I'm not feeling very well," she explains to him. "I think the dressing on the chicken salad must have been too rich" (262). Why, one might ask, did the vegetarian Enid go anywhere near the chicken salad? If she has truly tasted it and isn't just making a flimsy excuse, this one experience of eating meat has left her disinclined, to Claude's dismay, for any further contact with flesh.

To Willa Cather, clean food is not chaste food. It may be more hygienic to raise hens without roosters—fertilized eggs go bad faster—but this is not a hygienic Pure Food

farming technique endorsed by Cather. Her novels celebrate food that comes from the rich brown earth, with its "strong clean smell," as she writes in *O Pioneers!*, and from those who farm it with respect, from people who understand nature and live in close connection with it. This kind of farming and preparation of food is represented in Cather's fiction as an art in and of itself. In an interview in 1921 Cather proclaimed, "The farmer's wife who raises a large family and cooks for them and makes their clothes and keeps house and on the side runs a truck garden and a chicken farm and a canning establishment, and thoroughly enjoys doing it all, and doing it well, contributes more to art than all the culture clubs. Often you find such a woman with all the apprecia-

tion of the beautiful bodies of her children, of the order and harmony of her kitchen, of the real creative joy of all her activities, which makes the great artist” (Bohlke 47). Cather was of course interested in other forms of art as well, but she represents the more traditional forms of art—music, painting, theater, writing—as necessarily fed by the art of food production. Art, in her novels, arises from the vigorous, healthy, well-shaped bodies that are produced by good food—which is why it is so distressing for the opera-singer Thea Kronborg to find a dirty burnt match in her supper, or why Professor St. Peter finds his great thoughts inspired by a nicely prepared, simple meal of chicken sandwiches with lettuce leaves, grapes, and long-necked pears.

The production of food, through clean farming and clean food preparation, for Cather, is at the root of what is most precious in life. Clean food—which is not always exactly “Pure Food”—has its own art and even its own sanctity. Mahailey, in *One of Ours*, is simple, but understands life’s most important truths. We are meant to smile but also to understand the poignant rightness of her thinking when we come to the last words in *One of Ours*. “Mrs. Wheeler always feels that God is near,” Cather writes, “—but Mahailey is not troubled by any knowledge of interstellar spaces, and for her He is nearer still,—directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove” (606).

## NOTES

1. Sinclair’s novel did this almost accidentally. He meant to draw the public’s attention to the terrible conditions suffered by immigrant workers in Chicago’s meat processing plants. But what most fascinated the public in 1905 were his descriptions of the filthy conditions of food production—conditions so foul and dangerous that a worker might fall into a vat and remain unnoticed for days, “till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!” (Sinclair ch. 9). As Sinclair later famously observed, “I aimed at the public’s heart and by accident hit its stomach.” He seems to have underestimated the power of his novel’s grotesquely vivid imagery, and his novel reached a public that was primed to be concerned above all with the contamination of its food supply.

2. For a brief overview of the Pure Food movement, see Brown.

3. An advertisement emphasizing the importance of hog hygiene even found its way into the pages of *McClure’s Magazine*. In 1900, the Smalley Manufacturing Company invited readers to send for its free brochure, “Farming on Business Principles.” The ad includes a “Before” illustration that shows hogs standing among cattle in the midst of what is no doubt manure-contaminated mud. One hog slurps from a puddle. The caption reads: “There is something wrong with

the preparation of food when hogs can be fattened on food that cattle have been unable to digest.” An alternate system of hog husbandry is illustrated in the “After” drawing. There cattle and hogs are separated by a fence and both are eating out of clean troughs. “If the food for cattle is properly prepared there will be no waste for the hogs,” reads the caption, “but there will be enough clean, pure food left to fatten twice as many hogs.”

4. Bovine tuberculosis was an enormous problem at the time, affecting, according to records kept by the state of New York, in 1908, some thirty percent of dairy cows (Adams, Solving 205).

5. Sometimes these advertisements allude to the Pure Food law in ways that seem incongruous to a present-day reader. Jell-o, for example (hardly a close-to-nature food!) was produced by the Genesee Pure Food Company and an ad for Omar cigarettes offered the following health claim for its product: “OMAR is manufactured as CAREFULLY as any ARTICLE OF PURE FOOD.”

6. I am indebted to Kraut’s book for bringing this *New York Times* article to my attention.

7. Conlogue contends that *O Pioneers!* is Cather’s affirmation of the New Agriculture, with its application of twentieth-century industrial capitalism to agriculture, but although I agree that the novel values brain power over muscle power and shows the value of some new agricultural developments (such as the silo or the sanitary hog compound), I see Cather as on the whole more skeptical than Conlogue contends about the value of new agricultural (and domestic) technology.

8. Pearl James identifies wartime US Food Administration posters, intended to mobilize women on the home front, as the source of Enid’s method of rearing her poultry. In so doing, she writes, “Cather frames an essentially positive and empowering wartime script for women as one that makes them monstrous and unfeminine” (James 108).

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## “The Bohemian Girl,” “Old Mrs. Harris,” and the Hospitalities of Red Cloud

DARYL W. PALMER

When Charles and Jennie Cather moved their family into Red Cloud, Nebraska, during the autumn of 1884, they joined a bustling community that valued churchgoing, enterprise, progress, democracy, social class, and hospitality. Although much remains to be written about the intimate suppers and elaborate dinner parties of Cather’s Red Cloud, the focus of this essay is on the town’s socials or *sociables*, events that Roger and Linda Welsch call “festival meals” (31). In “The Bohemian Girl” and “Old Mrs. Harris,” Willa Cather clearly celebrates the ice cream and cakes, the bright lanterns and the ornamental woodbine. But her narrators remain slightly aloof, observing everything with a critical eye, carefully probing the motives of hosts and guests while earnestly explaining how hospitality used to matter to people in country towns.

It should be pointed out that most Red Cloudians thought of themselves as Christians, and hospitality has always seemed both essential and uncertain to this group of believers. Jesus made the practice challenging from the start

by laying down difficult protocols: “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind . . .” (Luke, KJV, 14: 12-13). The injunction in *1 Peter* to “use hospitality one to another without grudging” states the imperative even as it implies that some guests are more welcome than others (KJV 4:9). Must we really entertain people we neither like nor trust? Do the poor really have a claim on our cakes? Paul certainly has such doubts in mind when he writes, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (KJV 13:2). More carrot than stick, Paul’s admonition suggests extraordinary rewards for the generous host. Meanwhile, the translators’ use of *entertainment* explains the earnestness of the injunction. Derived from the late Latin *intertenere* (to hold together), hospitality is important because it engenders a web of support and affiliation in a community. It can hold together

the old and the new, the rich and the poor, the familiar and the unfamiliar.

In Cather’s youth, various church and civic groups had these ideas in mind as they hosted events, usually to raise money for their causes. Men played a part. There were the firemen, the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, and the so-called “railroad boys.” But Christian women were central to the public hospitalities of Red Cloud. There were the ladies of the Baptist H. M. Society, the Methodist church, the Congregational Church, and, of course, the Ladies Aid Society. The fact that these societies offered women unprecedented authority and administrative experience would not have been lost on an observant girl like Willa Cather.

Hosting one social after another, these organizations often competed for the same portion of the county’s three thousand inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Organizers had to be imaginative. The Cath-



A picnic at the home of Rev. George Hummel, Webster County, Nebraska.  
Nebraska State Historical Society/RG1543.PH6-61

ers could have attended, for instance, a rag social, an Easter social, a basket social, a lemon squeeze, a necktie social, a pumpkin pie and doughnut social, a blue tea social, and then a popcorn, apple, and rare painting social, an oriental social, a maple wax social, a fairy social, a skating social, and a Ruth and Rebecca social. Many Red Cloudians celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter with elaborate public dinners. As reported in *The Webster County Argus* on 6 December 1883, the Thanksgiving meal cooked up by S. Warnock for all comers (with the price of admission) illustrates the tradition: “About thirty cans of oysters, and the necessary accompaniments of crackers, pepper-sauce, etc. were consumed, besides immense quantities of bread and butter, baked beans, roasted chickens, pies, cakes, pop corn balls and candy” (3, 5).

It goes without saying that sociables centered on food. On 24 November 1881, The Ladies Aid Society was announcing “a regular old-fashioned Thanksgiving Dinner at the M. E. church. . .” (*Argus* 4, 4). The price was 40 cents, and a dime social followed. Three weeks later, the Ladies of the Methodist Society of Guide Rock were ready to give “a social and oyster supper” (*Argus* 4, 3). But they were competing with the Red Cloud Ladies Aid Society who offered, in the same column of the same newspaper, “a ‘mum’ dime social. Every person who comes there and spends the whole evening without speaking a word will be entertained free” (*Argus* 4, 3). On 17 May 1883, the Congregational ladies marked the arrival of spring with an “ice cream festival” (*Argus* 4, 3). From time to time, theme dictated menu. On 1 January 1885, the *Argus* reported that “Corn socials are the latest novelty in that line. The house is decorated with corn, those present wear ornaments of the same, and the cob also figures in the adornments. The bill of fare is comprised of cornmeal mush in various forms—hominy, Johnny-cake, popcorn, corn starch cake, blanc mange, etc.” (3, 4).

And on it went, oysters and ice cream, ice cream and “blanc mange”; but a few ambitious citizens wanted more. In 1884, they formed the Red Cloud Cooking Club. The wife of A. C. Hosmer, editor of *The Red Cloud Chief*, served on the Executive Council. Dr. G. F. McKeeby, Cather’s inspiration for Dr. Archie in *The Song of the Lark*, was a member. On 30 January 1885, the *Chief* reported that “This society will give entertainments for the members and friends, and for the promotion and advancement of the membership in the perfection of the culinary arts” (5, 2). Readers of Cather should remark this motive, this desire to perfect culinary prowess on the prairie. When, many years later, Cather studied the preparation of French cuisine, she was embracing a Red Cloud vision that ended, quite naturally, in hospitality. Soon after the aforementioned report, a Cooking Club banquet was announced. On 12 March the *Argus* gave a full report: “The chief feature of the evening, and probably the one best appreciated by the gentlemen portion of the assembly, was the elegant repast served by the ladies. However, aside from this, a very pleasant time was enjoyed by all fortunate

“A social and oyster supper will be given at the residence of Mrs. C. E. Ferguson and Mrs. H. G. Poers, Friday evening. A feature of the evening’s entertainment will be recitations by Miss Willie Cather.”

enough to be present” (3, 4). Women make the “elegant repast” possible. Men simply enjoy it, at least those “fortunate enough to be present.”

It would be easy to dismiss all this activity as mere diversion, but Hosmer helps us appreciate the power of food in these settings. Writing of J. H. Smith’s surprise birthday party on 30 January 1885, the editor of the *Chief* reports that the middle-aged Smith was temporarily confounded by the fact of his own aging. But Smith’s chagrin “soon vanished after an excellent repast, and before the crowd dispersed he had forgotten he was over twenty one” (5, 4). Two months later, on 27 March, Hosmer described the M. E. Church social: “A splendid supper of cake and ice cream was spread for the comfort of all present” (5, 2). A prairie Boethius, Hosmer encourages his readers to recognize how food shared hospitably imparts both consolation and comfort. The hospitality may be public, but the effects can be personal, intimate, even profound—for those fortunate enough to attend.

This is the world the Cathers entered, and we have many good reasons to believe that Willa drew her own first-hand conclusions about the entertainments. On 26 August 1886, the *Argus* reported that the ladies of Grace Episcopal Church were holding a sociable at the residence of C. F. Cather: “All are cordially invited. Music by the band” (8, 2). On 31 January 1889 the *Argus* reported that the ladies of the B. H. M. society gave “a ‘quotation’ social at Mr. C. F. Cather’s” with a prize for the person who could identify the most quotations (8, 2).

Against this backdrop of Cather hospitality, music, and quotation, one occasion stands out. On 10 September 1885, the *Argus* announced: “A social and oyster supper will be given at the residence of Mrs. C. E. Ferguson and Mrs. H. G. Poers, Friday evening. A feature of the evening’s entertainment will be recitations by Miss Willie Cather. The proceeds are for the benefit of the Baptist church choir. A. Lauterbach will cook the oysters in his famous style” (3, 5). The *Chief*



*A picnic at the tree stand on the Cather homestead, 1910s.  
Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebr.-Lincoln Libraries.*

published a similar announcement the following day, but promised, “The young elocutionist, Willie Cather, will recite some striking pieces” (5, 2). The elocutionist must have been enchanted with this public notice. It was probably her first taste of newsprint and fame, her first opportunity to understand how an identity (“Willie”) could be shaped in print. At the sociable, Willie shared the spotlight with oysters. In this liminal, but utterly public space, she could distinguish herself—alongside food. The following week, as school resumed in Red Cloud, the *Chief* failed to mention her performance in its brief review of the event. Cather may have been disappointed, but an appetite had been formed. For the writer who once said, “my mind and my stomach are one,” it was a recipe for fiction (*Willie Cather in Person* 88).

In “The Bohemian Girl,” Olaf Ericson’s barn-raising represents one version of this recipe. Olaf, as the narrator explains, is a “public man” who entertains for votes (117). Cather introduces the event by focusing on the preparations and the arrivals, the pumpkins, woodbine, and wild grapevines (117). Food matters to the guests, but many of the eaters seem uninterested in culinary quality: “Yense Nelson had made a wager that he could eat two whole fried chickens, and he did. Eli Swanson stowed away two whole custard pies, and Nick Hermanson ate a chocolate layer cake to the last crumb. There was even a cooky contest among the children . . .” (120). The skinny kid won the “cooky

contest” and Fritz Sweiheart nearly succumbed after winning the pickle contest (120). It would be tempting to hear satire in this account, but Cather’s narrator frames the montage by calling it “hilarious” (120). Sociable food need not be sanctimonious food. A barn supper may be a “small miracle” (Rosowski 41).

The supper ends. The dance begins. The narrator confides, “Clara was proving a much better host than Olaf . . .” (122). Indeed, her aura of authority as hostess seems to authorize Nils, who begins to sing “The Bohemian Girl.” Clara warns: “Hush, Nils; every one is looking at you” (123). Our hero doesn’t care. He tells her, “We’re making a legend. Where’s my waltz, boys?” (124). It is tempting here to recall the story of the young Willie Cather who, many years before, may have felt that she was making a country town legend amid the oysters of a late-summer social.

Nearly two decades after “The Bohemian Girl,” Cather published “Old Mrs. Harris,” a deeply autobiographical story that includes portraits of the author, her mother, her grandmother, and of a Ladies Aid Society ice cream social in 1880s Red Cloud. Once again, Cather lingers over the preparations. The twins tend the lawn and unpack chairs. The Methodist ladies “opened up the kitchen to receive the freezers of home-made ice-cream, and the cakes which the congregation donated” (101).<sup>2</sup> Point of view, as Susan J. Rosowski notes, begins to shift and “Cather maintains this rhythm between outside and inside, expectations and reality” (196). In a sense, it is mimesis modeled on hospitality.

Like all such socials of the time, this one is ecumenical, yet conscious of all sorts of distinctions. The narrator explains, “. . . all the good cake-bakers in town were expected to send a cake” (101).<sup>3</sup> As the Rosens arrive, they see the “lighted yard” but notice that “a low board fence” keeps “the poor Maude children” out in the shadows (102). Any good reader of the Bible should recognize this scene as an occasion for unbridled hospitality, but no one else in the Christian town of Skyline seems to register the moment. Then, as the Rosens draw near, “Mrs. Templeton came out from the lighted square” (103). Patterned after Cather’s mother, she knows exactly what to say: “I expect you children forgot your dimes, now didn’t you? Never mind, here’s a dime for each of you, so come along and have your ice-cream”

(103). Far more than money or ice cream, Mrs. Templeton graciously offers the children comfort. In so doing, she epitomizes the kind of hospitality celebrated by the ancient authorities: Victoria really believes that poor people have a place at the community's table. And she instructs her children in this belief, directing them to "let the Maudes sit at your table, and take care they get plenty of cake" (103).

The Rosens notice this behavior, but other residents of Skyline notice other things. Cather's narrator reports that Mrs. Jackson "had been keeping an eye on Mr. Rosen's table" (642). Mrs. Jackson is precisely the sort of woman who irritates Clara and irritated Willa Cather. The neighbor does not like Mrs. Templeton, but what particularly provokes her is Mr. Rosen paying special attention to Mrs. Templeton, who understands (as Cather's mother did) that "being a lady was a performance" (O'Brien 38).

Lacking Mrs. Templeton's élan, Mrs. Jackson uses cake to interrupt the performance: "You folks are about ready for another helping," she remarked affably" (106). When Mrs. Templeton asks for a piece of Mrs. Harris' cake, Mrs. Jackson has the reply: "Well," she remarked with a chuckle that sounded amiable, "I don't know but I'd like my cakes, if I kept somebody in the kitchen to bake them for me" (106). Eventually, she has the chance to conclude: "I tell Mr. Jackson that my idea of coming up in the world would be to forget I had a cook-stove, like Mrs. Templeton" (106). Hospitality can encourage invidiousness and leave us vulnerable. They can expose old animosities and reveal the gaps between the amiable and the mean.

Cather's narrator makes these points implicitly, but her focus remains on Mrs. Templeton: "Her training was all to the end that you must give a guest everything you have, even if he happens to be your worst enemy. . ." (107). This is not Mrs. Templeton's party, but she always sees herself in the role of hostess, a woman responsible for the comfort and consolation of others. The narrator knows this, perhaps Mr. Rosen, but who else? Because only a few of Victoria's neighbors will ever see her clearly, her truly hospitable life is one more obscure destiny. Cather was certainly thinking of her dying mother as she wrote this scene.

In 1928, Jo Frisbie described a visit to the Cather family in the pages of *Present-Day American Literature*: "Although they have lived in Red Cloud for many years, they came originally from Virginia, and they have never lost that quality that the story-books call 'true Southern hospitality'" (*Willa Cather in Person* 105). Frisbie means to compliment the family, but her observation is perhaps more valuable today because of the way it complements a reading of Cather's fiction. No simple writer of "storybooks," Cather celebrates the old ways of hospitality with literary craft and moral force. Her stories explain how hospitality can offer consolation to some and isolation to others. They suggest how the complexities of point of view both mask and reveal sociable motives. Most important, Cather's stories of hospitality re-

mind us that how we share food with others is how we live our lives.

## NOTES

1. It makes sense to talk about these sociables as examples of hospitality even though the hosts collected entrance fees. The money always went to a good cause, which seems to have ennobled and universalized the transaction. Like their ancient and free counterparts, sociables depended on all the conventions of the social form: invitation, welcome, sharing of food and drink, diversions, and customary farewells.

2. The management of ice and ice cream freezers was a real issue, worthy of newspaper comment. See *Argus* (20 July 1882): 4, 4. For relevant ice cream recipes, see Romines, 96-97.

3. For relevant cake recipes, see Romines, 98-99.

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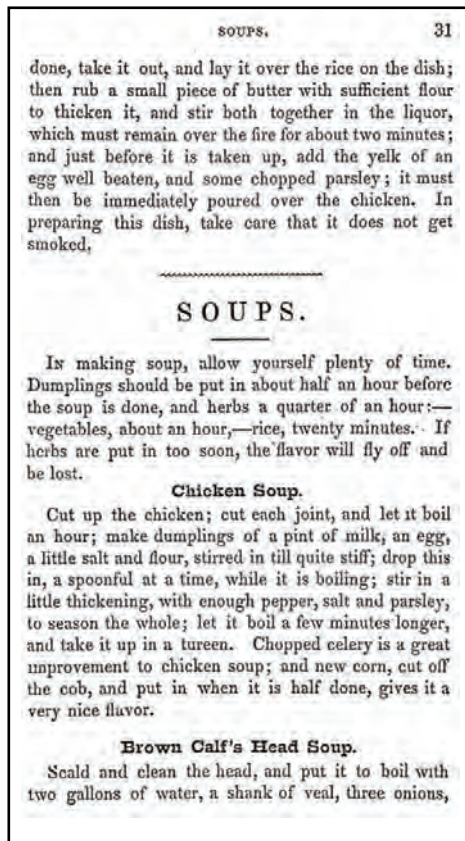
# Cookbooks, Cooking, and Cather's Art: Exploring the Cather Foundation Archives

ANN ROMINES

One of the best-attended events at the 2010 Spring Conference was a panel discussion of "Cather Family and Red Cloud Cookbooks." The subject engaged scholars of Willa Cather's biography, backgrounds, and influences, as well as cooks, cookbook collectors, and students of local and culinary history. The panel also served as a showcase for some of the unique and irreplaceable resources of the Willa Cather Foundation Archives.

Willa Cather herself considered cooking an art: "There is real art in cooking a roast just right," she said in 1921. "The farmer's wife who raises a large family and cooks for them [ . . . ] contributes more to art than all the culture clubs." Such a woman can experience "the real creative joy . . . which marks the great artist" (Hinman 47). If this is true, Cather met her first fellow women artists as a very small child, in the family kitchen at Willow Shade, the Cather home in Virginia. The oldest cookbook in the Cather kitchen, used in both Virginia and Nebraska, was authored by a woman. Later, in Red Cloud, Cather would have seen—and perhaps used—the community cookbooks produced by local women. The publication of a recipe could be a major event in a woman's life; it was often (and sometimes still is) the only occasion her words appeared in public, in print.

The Cather family collection, preserved in the Archives, includes three antique cookbooks<sup>1</sup> and dozens of recipes. Some are clipped from magazines and newspapers; some are handwritten. These handwritten recipes represent vari-



A page from *Domestic Cookery, Useful Receipts, and Hints to Young Housekeepers*. This cookbook and the two shown on the right belonged to the Cather family and are part of the Willa Cather Foundation Archives.

ous women and girls among the Cather family and friends. We find Willa's muffins, sister Jessie's lemon pie, sister Elsie's doughnuts, "Mrs. Cather's Honey Cake" (we don't know which Mrs. Cather), a sister-in-law's caramel ice cream, Cousin Bess Seymour's fruit-cake—and dozens more.<sup>2</sup> Every recipe in this manuscript collection was authored by a woman writer and—potentially—a woman artist, whose medium was food.

Like many others, the women of the Cather household inserted manuscript and printed recipes between the pages of the few published cookbooks they owned; they also added checks and notations and comments about the printed recipes. In the nineteenth century, American women's literacy increased (as it did with every generation of the Cather family, with Willa the first Cather woman to attend university). According to cookbook scholar Janet Theophano, "Cookbooks and recipe collections were a 'place' where" literate women "could engage in compiling, editing, categorizing, composing, and responding to written texts." These women "did not merely receive texts but participated in their creation. . . . As each woman created a book of her own," she became both editor and author (156). We see this in the Cather collection—and many contemporary cooks cherish such collections, as I do in my own mother's and grandmothers' recipe books and boxes. Willa Cather must have grown up with such cookbook-making in progress, and when she came home for Red Cloud visits as a middle-aged woman, she turned to some of the oldest pages in the family book, making desserts from "old Virginia recipes" (Lewis 12).



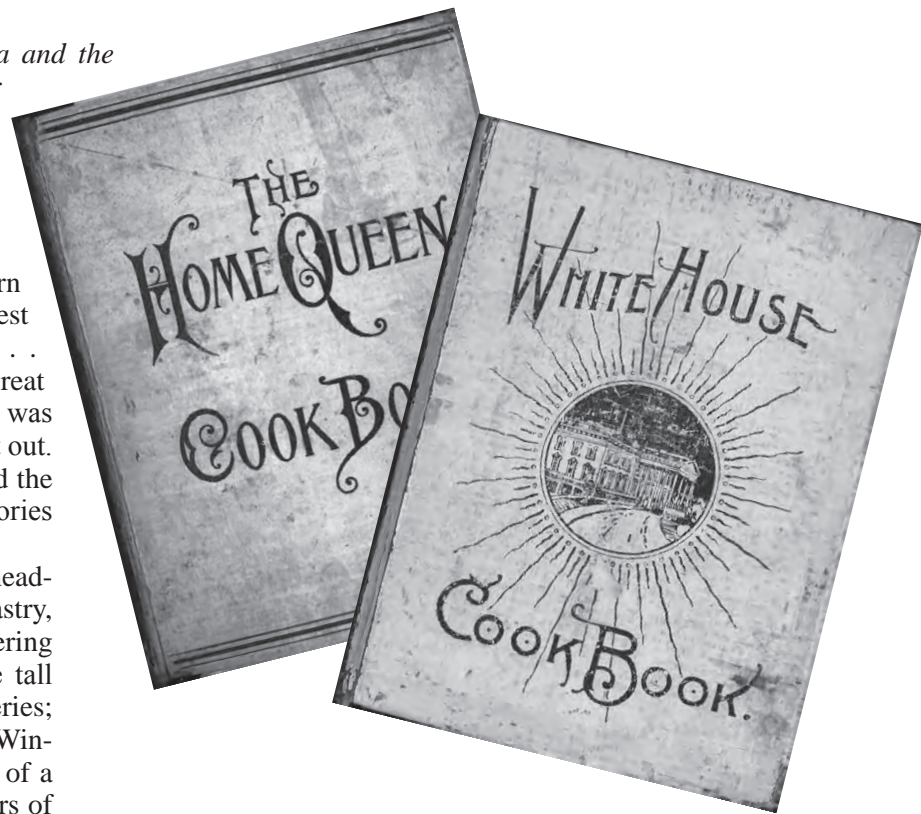
In the autobiographical epilogue of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), written when she was in her later sixties, Cather describes the kitchen at Willow Shade with what seems almost total recall; obviously, this kitchen was the center of Willa's life as a child.

Our kitchen was almost as large as a modern music-room, and to me it was the pleasantest room in the house—the most interesting. . . . Besides the eight-hole range, there was a great fireplace with a crane. In winter a roaring fire was kept up in it at night, after the range fire went out. All the indoor and outdoor servants sat round the kitchen fireplace and cracked nuts and told stories until they went to bed.

We had three kitchen tables: one for kneading bread, another for making cakes and pastry, and a third with a zinc top, for dismembering fowls and rabbits and stuffing turkeys. The tall cupboards stored sugar and spices and groceries; our farm wagons brought supplies out from Winchester in large quantities. Behind the doors of a very special corner cupboard stood all the jars of brandied fruit and glass jars of ginger and orange peel soaking in whisky. Canned vegetables, and the preserved fruits not put down in alcohol, were kept in a very cold cellar: a stream ran through it, actually! (279-80)

This is a knowledgeable description of an organized and well-equipped workplace—with three tables, each designed for a specific culinary task, and ample space for multiple workers (quite unlike the cramped kitchen of the Cather childhood home in Red Cloud). There seems to be a plentitude of foodstuffs—wild foods (such as the rabbits—as a child, Willa prided herself on her rabbit traps), farm-raised foods, and foods bought in nearby Winchester, a well-provisioned small city. The cupboard holds an abundance of foods preserved by cooks who had mastered a variety of preservation techniques. This is not just basic sustenance, but includes such non-necessities as spices and “ginger and orange peel,” suggesting possibilities of elegant cookery.

The Cather kitchen in Virginia also represents a transition between two stages in American domestic history. When Willow Shade was built by Willa's grandfather Cather, in 1851, cooking was done the old way, in the great kitchen fireplace, with hooks and a crane for hanging pots. The cast-iron cook stove, which revolutionized cookery for American women in the nineteenth century, did not come to Willow Shade until relatively late.<sup>3</sup> The large “eight-hole range” that Willa remembered was an 1872 addition, in the year that her parents, Charles and Mary Virginia, married. Sister Elsie



wrote that, when “mother came to Willow Shade to live, Father bought her a cook stove. It was considered new and very grand” (Elsie Cather).

The woman who seems to have presided over this impressive kitchen was not the bride Mary Virginia, but her mother: Grandmother Rachel Elizabeth Seibert Boak. Willa was born in this grandmother's house, and when the young family moved to Willow Shade a few months later Grandma Boak accompanied them and stayed with the family until her death in Red Cloud in 1893. Rachel Seibert had married William Boak at the age of fourteen, and they had run a hotel in Martinsburg, Virginia, for several years, with slave assistance, while he also served in the Virginia legislature, in Richmond. Then the Boak family moved to Washington D.C. in the 1840s; he worked at the Department of the Interior and they kept a boardinghouse on Capitol Hill, with the assistance of one male slave. Willa's mother was born in Washington—her parents' last child—in 1850. Three years later, William Boak died, leaving his family with almost no financial assets. So Rachel Boak took her children to the little Virginia town of Back Creek Valley, where her parents lived and kept the mill, and moved into a house given her by her father—that house where Willa was born.<sup>4</sup>

Cather elaborated this grandmother's history in *Sapphira*. In the novel, Rachel Blake (closely based on Rachel Boak) learns cookery in Washington from a woman who is a professional caterer, from Louisiana, an area already known for excellent and often sophisticated food. Rachel delights in

preparing elaborate banquets for her husband and his male guests, using the ample resources of the Washington markets (which Cather describes in knowledgeable detail) and she employs the African American caterer, a former slave, to assist with the cooking and to serve. This all suggests that Rachel Boak had a history as a sophisticated cook, who had cooked or supervised cooks in a hotel and a boardinghouse and would have known just how to roast those dismembered fowl and to use the ginger and orange peel and other ingredients in the Virginia kitchen. And at Willow Shade, servant assistance was easily available, both from former slaves of Rachel Boak's parents and from the local poor white Appalachian women.

As young Willa sat among the older women in this kitchen (her young mother is never mentioned there), she was surrounded by cooks who knew what they were doing. The visiting Nancy, a former family "slave girl" who is now a professional housekeeper in Montreal, expertly roasts the coffee, and her mother, Aunt Till, formerly the slave housekeeper of Rachel's mother, jumps up to turn the loaves baking in the oven: "I'll just turn the bread for you. . . . I seem to smell it's about ready" (281). As an experienced and accomplished cook, Till can discern the stage of the bread's baking by its smell. In this kitchen, cooking and storytelling—two central art forms of Willa Cather's life—are intertwined. The older women exchange stories as pound cake or marble cake is "baking in a slow oven" (280)—and little Willa listens.

In that Virginia kitchen, Rachel Boak had at least one printed cookbook at hand: Elizabeth Ellicott Lea's *Domestic Cookery, Useful Receipts, and Hints to Young Housekeepers*, which had been published in 1846, in nearby Baltimore, and went through multiple editions for decades. Grandma Boak's copy, now one of the treasures of the Cather Foundation Archives, is the 1853 edition; it was published the year that Rachel became a widow and moved back to the Virginia countryside, in reduced circumstances, without the slave assistance that she had had for all her previous life. Elizabeth Lea came from the prosperous educated, and influential Ellicott family, of the Baltimore area; when she wrote the cookbook, she was also a widow, living on a rural farm. According to food historian William Woys Weaver, Lea's book "forms one of the most varied samplings of the rural American cookery of her era" (xvii), and it is typical of the part of northern Virginia where the Cathers lived, not far from both the Pennsylvania and Maryland state lines, with strong food influences from both Germany and the British Isles, the areas from which Willa Cather's ancestors immigrated. Elizabeth Lea herself was a "strong-willed" woman who, like Grandma Boak, raised her children independently after her husband's early death. She was disabled and often bedridden for the last decades of her life, but this did not deter her. From her upstairs bed, she "shout[ed] down" her "recipes or corrections" to her nurse/companion "or the family

cook. . . . Over each detail [of the cookbook], she maintained a firm hand" (xxv).

Elizabeth Lea was a Quaker; her recipes are typically Quaker in their "practicality, economy, and simplicity" (Weaver viiix), qualities that the Cather/Boak family doubtless appreciated. Like most Quakers, Lea opposed slavery, as Grandma Boak came to do. Rachel Boak's husband had come from a Quaker family and several Cather relatives and friends were Virginia Quakers—the only major Southern Christian denomination to oppose slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. So we can see how strong the affinities between Rachel Boak and Elizabeth Lea must have been.

Lea's book had originally been drafted as a manuscript cookbook for her just-married daughter, and its recipes are written in conversational paragraphs. The tone is clear and direct, making few assumptions about the reader's knowledge of cookery. For example, here is how she begins her section on Soups: "In making soup, allow yourself plenty of time. Dumplings should be put in about half an hour before the soup is done and herbs a quarter of an hour—vegetables, about an hour,—rice, twenty minutes. If herbs are put in too soon, the flavor will fly off and be lost" (31). Such practical, lucid, and specific instructions are helpful even to inexperienced cooks. I certainly could have used such advice, when I started making soups!

As Willa Cather depicted her grandmother in *Sapphira*, Rachel Blake put her sophisticated city life behind her when she came to live on Back Creek; when curious neighbors asked about Washington ways she replied, "I hardly remember. All that is gone. . . . This is my home now" (146). The foods that Rachel Blake prepares and shares in the novel are simple and practical, but they require skill and experience. To her poor white friend Mrs. Ringer, Rachel takes a loaf of "light bread" (yeast-leavened bread made with wheat flour, instead of the local staple, cornbread), as well as sugar cakes and a jar of freshly roasted coffee. For the minister who is helping her nurse a sick child, she prepares a nourishing chicken broth. Recipes for all are found in Lea's *Domestic Cookery*—in fact, the book includes recipes for every food mentioned in *Sapphira*. When we examine the Cather family's preserved copy of this important book, we can see that the women of the family have, indeed, made it their own over a period of many years. It is marked, annotated and worn; some pages are stained and spotted, while a few others are missing. And the book is interlarded with clippings from Eastern newspapers—news, recipes and household hints—that clearly predate the Cathers' move to Nebraska. One early clipping, for example, gives instructions for the care of little girls' hair. Perhaps that little girl was Willa, the first girl born in the Cather-Boak family?

When the family moved to Nebraska, nine-year-old, homesick Willa longed for the taste of home—the roast mutton she had enjoyed on the family's Virginia sheep farm. Al-

though she came to love the new flavors she encountered in Nebraska and the French cuisine she later enjoyed, she also retained a taste for the flavors of Virginia she had first enjoyed as a child, such as those Virginia puddings she recreated in her elderly parents' Nebraska kitchen. In the 1930s, when brother Douglass came to celebrate Christmas with her and Edith Lewis in their Park Avenue apartment, Willa stuffed the turkey herself—for only she remembered how to do it as Grandma Boak had done, in the Willow Shade kitchen, with Elizabeth Lea's cookbook at hand. Such women cooks—and artists—were an enduring, influential presence in Willa Cather's life and art.

The 2010 Spring Conference topic, "Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing," opened up a variety of fresh and suggestive topics for Cather scholars and readers, as the essays in this issue attest. And the cookbook panel demonstrated how invaluable the resources of the Cather Foundation Archives can be in such scholarship. Barbara Johnson reported on her extensive research in the Cather family recipe and cookbook collection, suggesting all that collection can reveal about the family tastes and history, as well as their participation in local Red Cloud community life. Nancy Picchi introduced the earliest known Red Cloud community cookbook, produced by the "Ladies of the Congregational Church," probably in the early 1890s, and suggested what it reveals about the cooking habits and aspirations of women in Willa Cather's Nebraska home town. Suzi Yost Schulz explored a variety of local cookbooks and what they revealed about community life and history for her, as she was growing up in Red Cloud. And Cather scholar Kari Ronning drew on the Archives' extensive files of vintage Red Cloud newspapers to show how food and cooking were important to the town's public entertainments and social events—often attended by young Willa Cather—which were reported in detail in the newspapers. (For example, Daryl Palmer's essay in this issue is based on his Archives research on local hospitality, as reported in these newspapers.)

This panel generated lively discussion and enthusiastic responses, and it spotlighted the importance of the Cather cookbook and recipe collection as one of the many invaluable resources preserved in the Cather Foundation's unique Archives. If you are interested in exploring the cookbook/recipe collection or other treasures of the Archives, please be in touch with the Cather Foundation to arrange an appointment.

## NOTES

1. The three cookbooks in the collection are Elizabeth Ellicott Lea's *Domestic Cookery, Useful Receipts, and Hints to Young Housekeepers* (1853 edition), *The Home Queen Cookbook* (1901 edition), and *The White House Cookbook* (1905 edition). All were very popular American cookbooks that went through multiple editions and are now collectors'

items. A selection of recipes from these cookbooks is included in Roger L. and Linda K. Welsch, *Cather's Kitchens*; this book is largely based on research done in the Cather Foundation Archives.

2. All the manuscript recipes mentioned here, as well as others, are included in *At Willa Cather's Tables: The Cather Foundation Cookbook*.

3. For a discussion of the cast iron cook stove's influence, see Strasser (36-41).

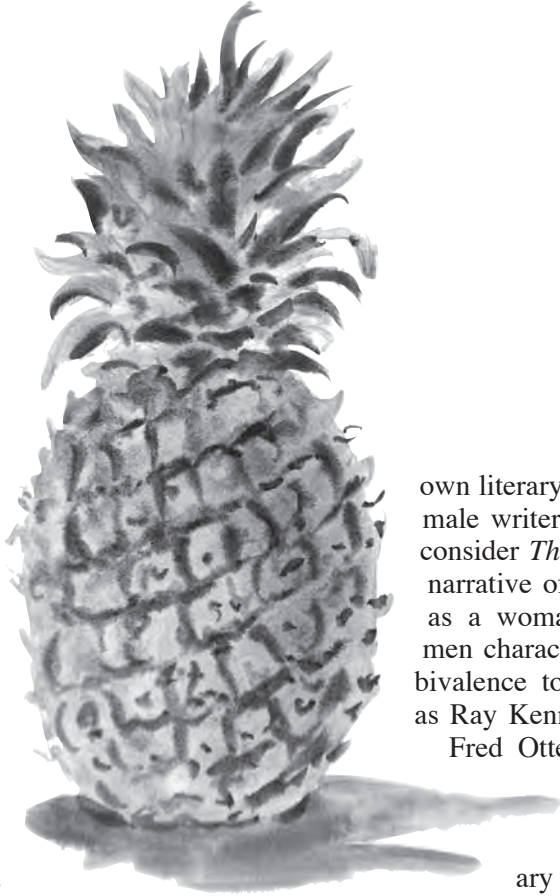
4. For further information about the histories of the Boak and Seibert families, see my "Historical Essay" in the Scholarly Edition of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

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## Digesting the Male Tradition: Food and Drink in *The Song of the Lark*

PRISCILLA LEDER



In *The Song of the Lark*, the singer Thea Kronberg undergoes an epiphany as she bathes in the river at the bottom of Panther Canyon and imagines the Native women artists who made pottery there long ago: “The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself. . . . In singing, one made a vessel of one’s throat and nostrils and held it on one’s breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals” (263). Given the female landscape of the canyon and Thea’s identification with women potters, scholars such as Elizabeth Ammons have associated this powerful scene with Willa Cather’s own acceptance of herself as a woman artist, the culmination of the long and sometimes difficult process documented by Sharon O’Brien (Ammons 128-130). The “shining, elusive” element which the creative woman shapes into art is at once air and water—universal, circulating substances essential to life itself. Along with that essential element, however, the woman artist must make use of more solid stuff—the material and cultural reality within which she lives, moves, and has her being. In *The Song of the Lark*, food and drink represent the clay that forms the vessel, the everyday reality that Thea must digest and metabolize into her own unique, specific art.

Much of the food Thea consumes comes from men, hardly surprising, since at the time the novel was written, men not only held economic and political power but also dominated the world of art and culture. Up until the encounters with Sarah Orne Jewett that led to *O Pioneers!*, Cather’s

own literary world had been dominated by male writers such as Henry James. If we consider *The Song of the Lark* as a veiled narrative of Cather’s own coming of age as a woman artist, we can imagine its men characters as expressions of her ambivalence towards them. Characters such as Ray Kennedy, Dr. Howard Archie, and Fred Ottenburg provide vital financial and emotional support for Thea’s career, just as male writers fed Cather’s literary imagination. However, by explicitly denying those characters

the artistic power given to her woman protagonist, Cather mitigates the intimidating force of men and symbolically subsumes them to her own art.

On a train journey from Chicago to Moonstone, Thea ponders the gifts she has received from men, wondering, “Why had [they] cared so much? . . . It was something that had to do with her that made them care, but it was not she. . . . Perhaps each of them concealed another person in himself . . .” (189). Laura Dubek identifies that “second self” as the “true natures” which men must suppress in order to perform masculine identity and retain the power that goes with it (294-5). By participating vicariously in Thea’s art, they find their repressed “second selves” in her by taking on a role traditionally ascribed to women—that of the supportive nurturer who finds “her” highest expression through another. In keeping with their function as representatives of the influential, canonical men writers who nurtured Cather, they offer gifts associated with power—fruit, suggesting knowledge; alcohol, representing self-forgetfulness, and

more substantial fare, especially flesh, figuring sensuality and material acquisition.

Near the beginning of the novel, Dr. Archie gives the eleven-year-old Thea a paper bag containing “a long bunch of white grapes, with a little of the sawdust in which they had been packed still clinging to them” (12). Grapes, which figure repeatedly in both Biblical and classical traditions, suggest the accumulated knowledge of Western civilization. Dr. Archie, “the intellectual of the town,” as Richard Giannone describes him, functions as the bearer of that knowledge (88). Thea has “never had more than one grape at a time”; similarly, she has experienced little of that knowledge, which in her relatively provincial household functions more as decoration, like her father’s “somewhat pompous English vocabulary” and the book of Byron’s poems that serves as “an ornament for his parlor table” (14, 13). In keeping with her background, Thea at first experiences the grapes visually, “holding the almost transparent fruit up in the sunlight” (12). She approaches them cautiously, “feeling the pale-green skins softly with the tips of her fingers” (12). The description ends there, before she swallows even a single grape, but her appreciation of them begins the process whereby Thea, with Dr. Archie’s help, will consume the fruit of knowledge and eventually leave behind the confining Eden of her childhood.

Ray Kennedy, the freethinking railroad brakeman whose legacy makes it possible for Thea to study music in Chicago, does “everything he [can] to provide recreation for her. He brought her candy and magazines and pineapples—of which she was very fond—from Denver . . .” (95). Thea’s favorite pineapples also suggest knowledge, but not the venerable Western intellectual tradition of Dr Archie’s grapes. Pineapples, a new world fruit very popular during the early twentieth century, recall Ray’s adventurous spirit, reflected in his “open, American face” (40). Thea relishes Ray’s stories of his travels in Mexico and the American Southwest; Giannone argues that those stories engage her imagination with the open horizons of the Southwest and “communicate heroic ideals,” thus preparing her for the epiphany of Panther canyon (88). Though tropical, the pineapple recalls the plants of the Southwest with its agave-shaped leaves, its prickly, forbidding exterior, and its succulent interior filled with thirst-quenching liquid. This exotic fruit holds the nutrients that the contemplation of distant landscapes and unfamiliar cultures offers to the open mind, just as the more familiar grapes convey the Western intellectual tradition.

Fruit, like knowledge, brings little danger of overindulgence, unlike the alcohol that can be distilled from fruit. Two more of Thea’s childhood friends, her piano teacher A. Wunsch and “Spanish” Johnny Tellamantez both engage in destructive alcoholic binges, yet they inspire and discover in Thea the true artistic spirit. As Ann Moseley puts it, “Wunsch discovers her talent and awakens her artistic

Thea’s favorite pineapples . . . suggest knowledge, but not the venerable Western intellectual tradition of Dr. Archie’s grapes. Pineapples . . . recall Ray’s adventurous spirit, reflected in his “open, American face.”

desire; and Johnny’s mandolin quickens the Dionysian passions and rhythms hidden deep within her body” (21). In a revealing image, Wunsch imagines Thea as “a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbour, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood” (27). Once released, effervescence, like the biological “discharge of energy,” continues by itself. Similarly, artistic expression involves an element of self-forgetfulness, a yielding to the unconscious. In Chicago, Thea’s piano teacher Andor Harsanyi “persuade[s] her to drink a little wine,” apparently the first alcohol she has ever consumed, to accompany a dinner his wife has prepared. Later that evening she sings for him, revealing for the first time the essence of her artistic vocation, the natural gift which she has hitherto subsumed to the conscious discipline of the piano. Releasing some of her inhibitions, she can “let [her] voice out” at Harsanyi’s request and begin her development as an artist.

Alcohol symbolizes the element of self-forgetfulness necessary for artistic expression, but too much can destroy, as Wunsch and Johnny’s binges demonstrate. Their plight serves as a warning against self-indulgence, but it also emphasizes the artist’s need for an appropriate outlet. Johnny does not work as a musician but as “a painter and decorator” “as regular and faithful as a burro” (36, 38). The animal image suggests his dehumanization as a worker and as a Mexican. Whenever a visit to the saloon releases his artistic impulse, he plays, sings, and drinks to the point of collapse. Wunsch’s art has been thwarted by bad luck;

## DUCK PIE



Cut all the meat from cold roast ducks; put the bones and stuffing into cold water; cover them and let boil; put the meat into a deep dish; pour on enough of the stock made from the bones to moisten; cover with pastry slit in the centre with a knife, and bake a light brown.

The White House Cookbook

he has “played in orchestras that were never paid and wandering opera troops that were disbanded penniless” and been reduced to teaching unappreciative students (26). Given a consistent outlet for their expression, both men might have avoided their affliction. (In his brief reappearance at the end of the novel, an apparently sober Johnny is working as a musician.)

Because her natural artistic impulses find their proper release, Thea avoids the destructive self-indulgence of Wunsch and Johnny. In persuading Thea that she will “never find [her]self” as a concert pianist, Harsanyi acknowledges the potentially destructive effects of thwarting the natural artistic impulse: “In the effort to [become a pianist], I’m afraid your playing would become warped, eccentric” (182). As she acts on his advice and begins to study voice, Thea encounters another set of gifts—the material rewards that the artist needs but must not be driven by, symbolized by the pleasures of the body—food, drink, and sex. With the help of Fred Ottenburg, she learns to assimilate those pleasures to her singing and to accept them as its reward.

Confronted by showy, inartistic singers as she plays accompaniments for her voice teacher Madison Bowers, and with Bowers’ own cynical attitude towards their failings, Thea grows discouraged by the “rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink” imagining that “its chief concern is its digestion” and feeling appalled at its appetite for bad art. Apparently overindulged by their admirers, both Bowers and Miss Jessie Darcy, one of his highly successful pupils, suffer from dyspepsia, consuming money and adulation for

their own sakes rather than metabolizing them to fuel worthwhile art. Blessed with a healthier digestion, the beer prince and talented amateur musician Fred appreciates both good food and good music: “When he was in Germany, he scarcely knew where the soup ended and the symphony began” (245). Recognizing Thea’s ability, he nourishes both her career and her body with his wealth and connections. Fred’s gifts help Thea understand how money and adulation, motivated by genuine appreciation, can nourish art. Years later, Thea recalls the suppers Fred bought her in Chicago: “I’m still singing on that food” (371).

Receiving a pineapple from Fred, Thea recognizes him as a source of wider knowledge like Ray Kennedy, but thinks, “I don’t want him for a teacher. . . . I’ve had

such a string of them. I want him for a sweetheart” (248). In becoming the sweetheart she wants, Fred awakens her sexuality. When he visits her in Panther Canyon, they enjoy a sunrise breakfast, including bacon and coffee with cream; the heavy, flavorful, protein-rich fare suggests the erotic possibilities of his own male flesh, which Thea will come to relish on their trip to Mexico. Sexuality feeds the beauty and charisma she will draw upon as a singer. “‘It’s only since you’ve known me,’” Fred claims, “‘that you’ve let yourself be beautiful’” (308).

Unfortunately, Thea’s artistic gifts cannot exempt her from the strictures of her culture. Since the unhappily married Fred cannot marry her, material support from him seems like payment for sex—something that poisons her sense of herself rather than feeding her art, and taints the flavor of his gifts. Rejecting further help from Fred, Thea turns to Dr. Archie to fund the European study that has become vital to her career. The three of them dine together in a French restaurant, where Fred shows Thea a kind of contrasting mirror image of the successful artist’s free, unencumbered enjoyment and healthy assimilation of material pleasure: “Fred pointed out to Thea a big black French baritone who was eating anchovies by their tails . . .” (317). For Cather, the baritone’s nationality embodies cultural refinement, while his race suggests innate natural ability,<sup>1</sup> and the combination makes him the consummate artist. Consuming a small, protein-rich delicacy, he relishes economic rewards and nourishes himself without gorging. With their salty flavor and soft texture but phallic shape, the anchovies suggest both

male and female sexuality, the free enjoyment of which can enhance the singer's art. Finally, the baritone consumes the treat in his own way, as the artist must make himself.

Years later, having made her professional debut in Europe and in the midst of her second New York season, Thea demonstrates definitively that she can successfully metabolize money and adulation into art. After sharing a meal with both Fred and Dr. Archie on a night off, Thea receives a request to complete the difficult role of Sieglinde for a singer who has been taken ill. Singers usually fast before a performance, and Thea laments, "If only you hadn't made me eat—Damn that duck!" (368). The irrational intensity with which she berates herself and/or Fred—"Idiot, idiot!"—conveys not only her concern for her performance but also her barely acknowledged fear that she has gorged herself on Fred and Archie's love and money for their own sakes, an indulgence that could fatally hamper her art. "That duck" might prove especially indigestible because it is flavored with the sexual desire of both men: as Dubek points out, Dr. Archie's love for Thea incorporates an unacknowledged erotic element (297).

Thea sings Sieglinde "magnificently," transforming their love and returning it as the art which feeds not only Fred and Archie but her "young and hungry" fans in "the upper circles of the house" (369). "I didn't feel my dinner, really" she reports afterwards. "I am hungry again" (370). She begins her second meal by "eating celery stalks at once, from the base to the foliage," mirroring the baritone's anchovies with a more chaste, vegetarian appetizer that also recalls those first grapes. The robust fare that will complete her meal—raw oysters, "grilled chops with kidneys, and salad"—shows her potential for assimilating more intense and demanding forms of adulation; she will later enjoy an affair with another singer and eventually marry Fred after the death of his wife. With the addition of the effervescent "draft beer" that she also orders, Thea's festive supper shows her capacity to metabolize to her art all of the gifts than men can offer.

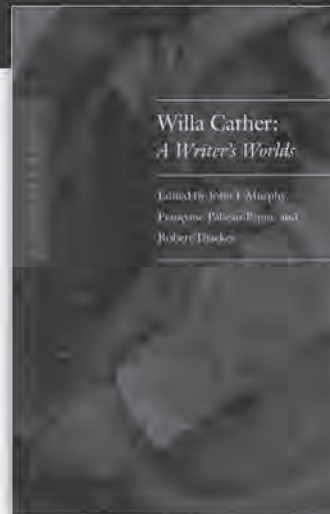
As she hungrily devours her food, Thea invites Fred to watch her sing Fricka in *Das Rheingold*. When Fred dismisses Fricka as "not an alluring part," Thea retorts, "Fat German woman scolding her husband, eh? That's not my idea. Wait till you hear my Fricka. It's a beautiful part" (373). Just as she transforms men's gifts, she can take characters, even stereotypes, invented by men and assimilate them to her own art, even as her creator, Willa Cather, learned to assimilate the men's tradition that fed her imagination to her own woman's literary art.

## NOTES

1. Cather also drew on this racial stereotype, common during her lifetime, in her portrait of the African American musician, Blind d'Arnault, in her next novel, *My Ántonia* (1918).

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### Cather Studies, Volume 8

Willa Cather:

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## “Food To Be Absorbed and Transformed”: The Melting Pots of *O Pioneers!* and “The Bohemian Girl”

JEAN C. GRIFFITH

In one of the most quoted lines of *O Pioneers!*, Carl remarks to Alexandra in what is clearly the authorial point of view that “there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before” (110). In the Nebraskan setting of the 1913 novel and of the 1912 short story, “The Bohemian Girl,” that resembles it, one of those stories—perhaps the most important one—plots the rewriting of an old-world tale on what was considered a new frontier. It was a narrative that fascinated Willa Cather. In both her fiction and her life, she told and retold stories of European immigrants who adapt themselves to a new environment by repeating the ways of their homelands. To what extent this repetition includes revision and transformation was, of course, a matter of some ambiguity for Cather. As we know, Cather had a great respect for many aspects of European cultures, which she often used as yardsticks against which to measure aspects of American culture she disliked. She deplored the pro-assimilation approach many of her contemporaries took to the incorporation of immigrants into an American “melting pot.” Yet, because European immigrants had to adjust themselves to a new environment and to sharing that environment with other groups previously unfamiliar to them, life in the United States, both as it was in reality and as it is depicted in Cather’s fiction, was not an exact replica of life in turn-of-the-twentieth-century France, Sweden, or Bohemia. Debates about how much immigrants should cling to their old ways or assimilate new ones often were grounded in the assumption that European peoples differed from one another not just culturally, but biologically. Like many of her contemporaries, Cather seems to have shared this assumption. As one interviewer put it, her “foreigners are true to type” (*Willa Cather in Person* 22), and as scholarship on Cather by critics such as Guy Reynolds and Marilee Lindemann has since pointed out, Cather’s immigrants differ from one another as much as they differ from non-immigrants (Reynolds, *Willa Cather in Context* 10 & “Willa Cather as Progressive” 26; Lindemann 40). Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has persuasively argued that “scholarship on immigration has generally conflated race and color, and so has transported a late-twentieth-century

understanding of ‘difference’ into a period whose inhabitants recognized biologically based ‘races’ rather than culturally based ‘ethnicities’” (6). Jacobson goes on to suggest that “in the interest of an accurate historical rendering of race in the structure of U.S. culture and in the experience of those immigrant groups now called ‘Caucasian,’ we must listen more carefully to the historical sources than to the conventions of our own era; we must admit of a system of ‘difference’ by which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites.” For our purposes, this means we must take Cather seriously when she writes of a French “race” or of Bohemian “blood.” Doing so, I think, will give us a better sense of where Cather stood in early-twentieth-century discussions about immigration, and a better understanding of the stories she told and retold about immigrants in Nebraska and elsewhere.

Cather’s stance on immigration is important not just for our understanding as her readers, but also because she was considered in her day to be something of an authority on the matter. In the words of one interviewer from whom I take my title, “here is an American to whom European culture (and she has always had plenty of that) is but food to be absorbed and transformed into a new product, quite different, unique, inimitable, with a harmonious perfection of its own” (*Willa Cather in Person* 38). Clearly this is an invocation of the melting-pot ideal, one which I am not entirely sure Cather would have approved of and one which I think misrepresents her position on assimilation. But it is one that helps us to understand the role that food played in Americans’ and Cather’s thinking about immigration. While the “melting pot” metaphor drew from images of chemical mixing, it was often a culinary metaphor, with the language of “ingredients,” “soup,” “seasoning,” and the like accompanying it. And as we all know, food was important to Cather. The ability to appreciate good food and wine was a mark of cultural sophistication for her, and the groups she endowed with this cultural sophistication (the French, of course, being foremost among them) tended likewise to be those she endowed with a rich artistic life. Good cooks, in other words, paved the way for good artists among specific racial groups,



and the corresponding absence of good cooks among a group doomed its art as well.

As Cather once remarked, “a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages,” and the association made in her fiction between culinary ability, artistic acumen, and racial identity is especially interesting in light of her dedication to telling the immigrant’s story (*Willa Cather on Writing* 16-17). For that dedication, she claimed, grew out of her childhood experiences of listening to immigrant women tell stories of their homelands while churning butter or making bread. Becoming fused in her memory with issues of diversity and assimilation, food and drink are used in myriad ways throughout her works, and the ways they are so in the early short story, “The Bohemian Girl,” and her (second) first novel, *O Pioneers!*, set important precedents for later texts. First, food, drink, and culinary ability are all manifestations of old-world retentions, symbolic of the “traits” specific European groups possess in Cather’s way of thinking. Second, food is an expression of culture, and as such, it can be shared between groups. Third, food marks the rewriting of old-world tales in the New World, the various stages of the settlement process through which immigrants acclimate to American life. And because it

does so, it helps Cather’s works reveal the tensions that arise between characters’ preservation of specific European “traits” and the sharing if not blending of their old-world cultures. For if Scandinavians, Germans, or Anglos can learn to appreciate (and even bake) Bohemian *kolaches*, than in what sense can *kolaches* be said to be Bohemian? And if *kolache* are not Bohemian, how can we distinguish Bohemians from others? Both biological necessities and important aspects of culture, food and drink mark the respect Cather evinced for specific European groups, on the one hand, and the diversity she celebrated, on the other, in contradiction to the melting-pot ideal. They also mark, as we shall see, an anxiety in Cather’s works that if the celebration of diversity and the sharing of cultures are taken too far, they might end in the same loss of racial specificity called for by proponents of the melting pot.

In *O Pioneers!*, first-generation immigrants Mrs. Bergson, Mrs. Lee, and Ivar—all having relocated to Nebraska as adults—associate food with their homelands. For Mrs. Bergson, who “could still take some comfort in the world if she had bacon in the cave, glass jars on the shelf, and sheets on the press,” food serves as a talisman against the disorientation she experiences as an immigrant (34). As a Swede, she



“Barn Dance from ‘The Bohemian Girl’” by John Blake Bergers

goes to great lengths to supply herself with fish and, more significantly, she uses sugar the family cannot well afford to satisfy her preserving “mania,” resisting the American dictate that success be measured by how well we “get on” financially (33). Mrs. Lee’s defiance of the pressures to assimilate are more furtive, for she partakes of her beloved beer and sugared brandy—both of which define her as foreign, according to the more assimilated, younger generation—only when she is away from her family in the shelter of Alexandra’s “asylum for old-time people” (91). Similarly, in “The Bohemian Girl,” Johanna’s gift for cooking and her association with culinary bounty are considered old-fashioned remnants of her Bohemian past. At first glance, *O Pioneer!*’s Ivar, who is almost exclusively associated with the out-of-doors, might seem the opposite of these women, who cling to old-world traditions housed in the domestic sphere. But Ivar’s racial “trait” of living outside is motivated by a rejection of the “littered” homes of Americans whose kitchens are full of “broken food” (40). Ivar is the character most resistant of Americanization in the novel, and perhaps because he is a man, food is used to signal that resistance in more metaphorical than literal ways, as Mrs. Bergson’s, Mrs. Lee’s, and Johanna’s are. When the demands placed upon him to

## Cather's use of culinary metaphors in these early works establishes her concerns for the future of culture itself in her region and in her country . . .

conform to American mores are at their height, Ivar likens himself to another immigrant, Peter Kralik, whose foreignness was signaled by his being “different in his stomach” (88). Both Ivar and Peter, who, as Ivar tells it, swallowed a snake he then had to feed and stupefy with drink, are associated with old-world myths and folkways that younger immigrants dismiss.

In addition to signaling all immigrant races' old-world retentions and their resistance to assimilation, food and drink point to specific racial characteristics of different European groups and, within those groups, both positive and negative manifestations of racial identity. There are, of course, abundant references in both texts to Bohemians and alcohol: in *O Pioneers!*, our first glimpse of this group, the “lusty” admirers who surround Marie, includes mention of the men smelling of the raw alcohol they drink to warm themselves (3), and Frank Shabata is clearly drunk when he murders his wife and Emil. And in “The Bohemian Girl,” Vavrika, the fun-loving saloon keeper with bloodshot eyes and great affection for music and dance, drinks and serves others drink in every scene in which he appears. Much can be said about this association in Cather's works of Bohemians and alcohol. First, they are not the only European races to be so associated; they share the association with other Catholic groups, like the French. But the French relationship to alcohol differs from that of the Bohemian, which lacks the sophistication with which Cather endows the former group, as when Raoul Marcel practices the “Gloria” while polishing the mirrors of his father's saloon (218-19). Second, note that in *O Pioneers!*, both the “lusty admirers” and the jealous husband's drinking are associated with Marie, so that their acts of drinking become symbolic of her intoxicating nature. Third, just because the Bohemians' manner of drinking lacks the sophistication of that of the French does not mean that Cather necessarily associates Bohemians with drunkenness in an entirely negative way (although that is indeed the case with Frank). Instead, Cather often uses Bohemians' penchant for drinking to make manifest the teetotaling intolerance of

Scandinavians like Mrs. Ericson, who repeatedly complains about Bohemian drinking practices and fails to appreciate that Vavrika's saloon exists as an old-world haven in the midst of houses “full of babies and washing and flies” (the same kinds of homes, presumably, from which *O Pioneers!* Ivar flees).

Furthermore, if Frank's drinking differs from that of the French, it also differs from Vavrika's, and this discrepancy can be accounted for by the particular Bohemian groups from which they come. According to Cather (and she was by no means alone here), Bohemian immigrants could be divided into two groups, who, some argued, belonged to different European “stocks” who settled eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> The first wave of Bohemian immigrants, “people of a very superior type,” as Cather writes in her “Nebraska” essay, came in response to “the revolutionary disturbances of 1848,” and they were “distinctly different” from the inferior group of Bohemians who came later for “economic causes” (4). Marie, her father, and the Vavrikas belong to the first group, while Frank clearly belongs to the second, which accounts for the murderous effects of his drinking, his gluttony (Marie keeps him appeased at the church supper by repeatedly filling his plate, for example) and his resemblance to a “wild” cannibal who looks as if “he could eat everybody alive” (111).<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, certain kinds of behavior at mealtimes, in addition to a prudish prejudice against imbibing alcohol, are positive or negative traits of Swedes and other Nordics. The common logic of the day held that immigrants from Northern Europe, because they shared so-called native Americans' Nordic origins, were better able to acclimate to life in the United States (the idea being that life here was less foreign to them than to other groups). Both Alexandra and her brothers seem predisposed to succeed in the New World, but because she does so while appreciating the old and they do not, she represents a racial exemplar, while they represent the “stupid copies” of “smug American citizens” Cather lambasted in her public statements (*Willa Cather in Person* 71-72). The differences between them repeatedly become disagreements, most of which take place at the dinner table. Indeed, all of the Bergson family meals end in arguments between Alexandra and her brothers: there are two separate debates about whether to sell the land or buy more, and, of course, a more contentious one regarding Ivar's fate (55, 61, 92). This latter disagreement, capped off by Carl's arrival and the brothers' awkward responses to it, foreshadows the Bergson siblings' final break when Alexandra announces her upcoming marriage.<sup>3</sup> At the supper table, Alexandra conducts herself with characteristic coolness and grace, while Lou is described as flying at his chicken and Oscar as lifting his head up from his plate only to make acerbic remarks (94, 97). The Bergson meals are so tense that the reader feels some relief, when, in the next meal scene of the novel, Alexandra eats with her farm hands rather than her family. The discussion about the

new silo that occurs during this supper is far more cordial, and in the absence of her brothers, Alexandra's faculty of orchestrating good conversation and diffusing disagreement are more successful. In "The Bohemian Girl," all the Nordics, save Nils, lack the *esprit de corps* to conduct good mealtime conversation, as do Lou and Oscar. Clara sees this failure to do anything other than eat at mealtimes as an Ericson trait—"there never was such a family for having nothing ever happen to them but dinner and threshing"—a description in keeping with Olaf's antisocial conduct at the barn dance. For the Ericsons, food and drink are utilitarian. For the Vavrikas, including Clara, whose "domestic infelicitous" seem due to her unhappy marriage rather than to any inherent lack in herself—food and drink are to be shared, enjoyed, and accompanied by good music, dancing, laughter, and conversation.

But as much as these works depict food and drink in ways that indicate racial particularity among diverse groups, they also create the possibility for interactions between groups, interactions in which Bohemians most often participate. And the possibility of interracial relationships between Bohemian women and Nordic men seems a major concern in Cather's works. Johanna appeases the ever-cranky Olaf with food—"bait a bear with honey, as we say in the old country"—and the first time food is shared in *O Pioneers!*, it is shared by Marie, who gives the candy she has received from her "lusty" admirers to Emil in an act that foreshadows her later relationship to him. This poignant moment early in their association also foreshadows the ambiguity with which Cather treats cross-European racial alliances. While the earlier "Bohemian Girl" portrays the relationship between the Nordic Nils Ericson and the Slav Clara Vavrika as a happy one, it is one that becomes associated with the Old World rather than the new, as Clara and Nils return to Europe. Further, Cather would go on to recreate that relationship in many respects in *O Pioneers!*, but in the novel, of course, this extra-marital, cross-racial alliance ends in bloodshed. Such a revision of one of Cather's common stories of immigrants is interesting in light of this early moment in which Marie shares her candy with Emil. Reinforcing her association with intoxication, the juxtaposition of Marie and candy is a sign to Carl that she is the kind of woman who "spread[s] ruin" around her "just by being too beautiful, too full of life and love" (270). "Do you remember," Carl asks Alexandra, "how all the Bohemians crowded around her in the store that day, when she gave Emil her candy?" Like candy, Marie is almost too sweet, someone to be enjoyed in small rather than in large quantities.

The orchard—the setting for the illicit encounters between Emil and Marie, including their last, fatal one—is another example of the ways food is coupled with mixing among different European groups. As orchards often are in Cather's works, the orchard here is planted by Germans. But

the French leave their mark upon the Lindstrum orchard, which later becomes the Shabata orchard, in the form of the apricot trees Carl plants, the seeds of which come from French vendors traveling with the circus. While the French might share their seeds, they do not intermarry with other groups in the novel, as is made clear in the contrast between Marie and Emil's forbidden love and the socially-sanctioned marriage between Amédée and Angélique. Emil himself makes this comparison with another food metaphor:

It seemed strange that now he should have to hide the thing that Amédée was so proud of, that the feeling which gave one of them such happiness should bring the other such despair. It was like that when Alexandra tested her seed corn in the spring, he mused. From two ears that had grown side by side, the grains of one shot up joyfully into the light, projecting themselves into the future, and the grains from the other lay still in the earth and rotted, and nobody knew why. (148)

While both men die at the end of the novel, Amédée, like the one ear of corn, has projected himself into the future with his son, while Emil has not.

The evolution of the Divide from a raw prairie to a settled and fecund one is portrayed in terms as ambivalent as Emil and Marie's relationship is, and again, references to food and drink help us to trace this ambiguity. As we have seen with the "lusty admirers" who drink raw alcohol to keep warm, or as we see with the drummer who takes a drink to calm his nerves after the young Alexandra scorns him, food and drink are used in the beginning of the novel as physical or emotional necessities (15). In the absence of an established society, food provides the pioneers on the Divide a sense of ritual, as the women pack up groceries and the men buy candy to signal the end of a cold winter's afternoon (20). Marie's act of sharing her candy is a sign of the ways food will take on more cultural meanings as the society of the Divide begins to coalesce. As we have seen, part of the way that occurs is by adjusting various old-world food and drink customs to life in the New World. Yet the novel exudes a sense of regret that, as Reynolds has written, "an idealized community" is "slipping away" under the increasing "standardization of American culture," as well as a lament that food and drink are assuming more individualistic, less communal functions ("Willa Cather as Progressive" 21). Characters that disdain anyone for being different in their stomach, to paraphrase Ivar, and themselves lack culinary sophistication are associated with the increasingly homogeneous American culture that, Cather asserted, could not produce good art. And again, it seems that Scandinavians like Lou and Oscar are the most susceptible to such flaws. This Americanized generation places material value over any other, collecting tableware that is purely ornamental—pieces

that litter the table but are not actually used to serve food or drink—in obedience to the “standards of the new prosperity,” as even Alexandra does (92). As Carl asserts when he describes the anonymity of restaurant dining, eating seems increasingly disconnected from community, although not for the French, of course, who raise food and drink to religious significance with the communion ceremony (114). The same is true in “The Bohemian Girl.” Unlike the unassimilated Vavrika, Olaf is a poor host, leaving his guests in the middle of the barn dance because the purpose of such an event for him is not to celebrate community but to show off how much wealth he has accumulated.

Illuminating specific groups’ traits and the possibilities and limitations of too much mixing among groups, Cather’s use of culinary metaphors in these early works establishes her concerns for the future of culture itself in her region and in her country, concerns we see most of her subsequent fiction take up as well. Associated both with culture and biology, food and drink reveal the difficulties for Cather in teasing out what, in a given group, is intrinsic and what is extrinsic. To think of race, or what we today would consider ethnicity, only in terms of culture—because culture can be shared—is to risk transformation, or as Cather might understand it, erasure of culture itself. Even in our supposedly post-racial era, food still elicits these same anxieties. We speak of certain manifestations of a type of cuisine as authentic or inauthentic, and we search out the former and ridicule the latter. We assume that food labeled a certain ethnicity is better if made by a person of that ethnicity. And we continue to attribute authenticity to certain kinds of dishes—especially those that can be associated with a particular ethnic or regional culture—and not to others, as Cather did when she spoke of the “unmusical discord against the sense of taste” that is the typical American plate, with its “confusion of flavors and odors” (*Willa Cather in Person* 83 & 84). Each dish and each ingredient has its place—recall her dictate not to pour champagne into a salad dressing—just as each European group does (*Willa Cather on Writing* 16). But there are limits to the extent they should be mixed together. While most of us are not so particular about salad dressings, we assume that there is no such thing as “American” food or that American food is, for better or for worse, inauthentic precisely because it is so often a mix of other countries’ food traditions, as if those traditions themselves are static. Such suppositions about food customs echo Cather’s need for essentialist notions of group identity to shore up and to validate cultural traditions. As it did for Cather, food reveals our efforts to celebrate diversity and the limitations we continue to place upon it.

#### NOTES

1. See, for instance, discussions of the racial background of the inhabitants of Bohemia in Lothrop Stoddard’s *Racial Realities in Europe* and Edward Ross’s *The Old World in the*

*New*, both important texts in the eugenics movement.

2. Renee Laegreid argues that all Bohemians in the novel fall into what she calls the “bad immigrant camp.” While I agree that all Bohemians in *O Pioneers!* share certain tendencies (like drinking), I also think it is important to take into account the differences—class-based ones being the most significant—between her Bohemian characters.

3. Cather’s novel prevents cross-racial marriages of Bohemians and Nordics (Marie to Emil, for example, or the Smirka boy to Signa) but not of Nordic groups like Swedes and Germans, as we see here.

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# Somewhere Between Temperance and Prohibition: The Wandering Alcoholics in *The Song of the Lark*

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In Memphis, during the early 1900s, my great-grandfather, Papaw Brown, also known as Windy (for his long-winded tales), was a conductor for the freight unit of Illinois Central. His family, like most railroad families during this time, lived in walking distance to the train station, with the back of their home in eyeshot of the rail yards. For years, I have heard stories about the entertaining characters, hobos and tramps, who were fed and sometimes even clothed by my great-grandmother in the backyard of their home. To the chagrin of the family and of neighbors, Nellie Brown, the daughter of a devout Methodist minister, was “hobo-friendly.” The house was marked by a sign unrecognizable to civilians, and word spread accordingly throughout the subterranean rail culture that food (most notably biscuits) could be found in a basket on the back stoop while Papaw Brown was at work—and only when he was at work.

During the series of depressions that hit the United States between 1873 and 1939, millions of migrants traveled around the country in search of temporary shelter, food, and work (Cresswell 175). Where there was a railroad, there were hobos, and their shadowy presence was a common sight in both small and large towns. These men, and occasionally women, whose lives were irrevocably tied to the dangers and adventures of train jumping, were often alcoholics and came from a variety of backgrounds.

Tales of these wanderers and their alcoholism have always intrigued me, much in the same way that Spanish Johnny, Professor Wunsch and the water-supply tramp intrigue

the young Thea Kronborg. While scholars such as Joseph Urgo have discussed these characters and the influence of the railroad in catapulting Thea to success in *The Song of the Lark*, the role of alcoholism in the novel has been greatly overlooked, despite the book’s being published in 1915, during the height of temperance hysteria.

One cannot discuss the alcoholic conflict of this period without addressing, however briefly, the highly publicized national debate between the “drys” and the “wets” prior to the 1920 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment banning the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors” within the United States. This amendment, often viewed as a commentary on the nation’s attempt to harness and control immigrant cultures and industries, would have the distinction of being the only constitutional amendment ever to be repealed.

Prior to the Civil War “the antebellum flow of emigrants from Germany was second only to the tide from Ireland” (Lender and Martin 61). Faced with an often hostile environment, Germans and Irish seized drinking as a major sign of ethnic loyalty. Hard drinking for the Irish symbolized their unwillingness to Americanize, but for the more successful and moderate Germans, drinking was a tradition. The German drink was “lager beer” and the best was made from only water, hops, and malt. German brew masters began proliferating in the 1840s, leading historians to characterize this period as the “German beer invasion” (Lender and Martin 62). Local, family oriented brewing became the rule and by the turn of the century, German breweries had become part



*Bowie, Arizona, 1895: A beer car on the Gila Valley, Globe and Northern Railway provides a backdrop for a temperance group. Ryder Ridgway Photographs, Arizona Collection, Arizona State University Libraries.*

of the urban and economic landscape (61). Anheuser-Busch, Pabst, Schlitz and Coors are legacies of great German brewery fortunes. In *The Song of the Lark*, the Ottenburg brewing dynasty, whose “visiting card is on every beer bottle” (277), and whose capital is essential to Thea’s early success, is a composite of these brewing empires.

Alongside the rise of the marketing and consumption of alcohol was the proliferation of temperance organizations. By the 1890s the annual intake of beer was 855 million gallons—most of which was consumed in saloons subsidized by breweries, which provided buffets, lines of credit, mailing addresses, check cashing and occasional bedding for their customers (Okrent 26). By 1900 there were nearly 300,000 saloons—licensed and unlicensed—across the country (26-27). The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874 by Frances Willard, took the lead in championing hatred against the saloons and generating genuine sympathy for the alcoholic victims lured by these boisterous watering holes. The WCTU remedy was “gospel temperance,” a moral attempt to spark a spiritual rebirth in the alcoholic (Lender and Martin 116). That Cather’s Mrs. Livery Johnson, “a fierce WCTU worker”(54), was one of Thea’s natural enemies suggests that Cather’s sympathies

were not necessarily aligned with this particular branch of reform club, despite its affiliation with women’s suffrage.

The Anti-Saloon League was the vision of Reverend Howard Hyde Russell, who “saw both the popular appeal of temperance and the past political mistakes of the crusade” (Lender and Martin 126). It is this movement, according to Daniel Okrent, that is responsible for developing the tactics and muscle necessary to rewrite the Constitution (35). By 1913, two years before *Lark* was published, over half the population (46 million people) lived under some type of prohibitory law. With the rise and success of urban progressives, Congressional strength amassed to pass the Webb-Kenyon Act, banning the shipment of liquor from wet to dry states (Lender and Martin 129). According to scholars Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby March, this act legitimized a view of temperance as a means to alleviate poverty and confront the moral decay caused by the demon alcohol (125). Cather’s depiction of alcoholism, however, suggests a more complicated and compassionate view, showing the cultural significance of the alcoholic and his influential role in the imaginary landscape of the artist.

For Ann Romines, alcoholics Professor Wunsch and Spanish Johnny, represent the darker human realities of the

art world and are “the hearts” of the liminal occasions propelling Thea’s creative spirit (147). The music lessons instructed with inspired diligence by Wunsch and the sultry Mexican dances orchestrated by Spanish Johnny link Thea to the errant wanderings and internal conflicts of both the desire and the struggle to achieve creativity. While foreshadowing Thea’s international success, these borderland figures also establish the necessary homelessness and emotional unavailability of the committed artist. If they are the hearts of the novel, then the heart is exactly what must be sacrificed, denied and abandoned in the artistic project. As musical conduits to Thea’s burgeoning career, these slippery characters are cast at their own expense. Their failures warn against excess and sentimentality, underscoring, as Urgo asserts, that one does not climb “without stepping on something or someone” (137).

The alcoholic conflict in *Lark* is a conflict of contagion and escape. In Cather’s 1938 essay “Escapism,” she states that the condition every art requires is freedom from “adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter” (26). Sherill Harbison expands Cather’s argument here to conclude that for Thea, art is sacred, and becoming an artist means being able “simultaneously, to abandon her body to sensuous experience and to control that experience, keeping it from contamination” (xvi). Spanish Johnny is the antithesis of the unadulterated citizen artist: “He is good at heart, but he has no head” (42). Emotionally energetic and prone to delusions of grandeur, common to alcoholics, “a little thing is big to him” (42). Lacking a sense of proportion and control, he is a man very much of his body. Cather goes to great lengths to generously detail his physicality: “he was very handsome; slender, gold-colored, with wavy black hair, a round, smooth throat, white and burning black eyes. His profile was strong and severe, like an Indian’s. What was termed his ‘wildness’ showed itself only in his feverish eyes and in the color that burned on his tawny cheeks” (40). Cather creates a sentimental and intriguing portrait of the corporeal struggles of the alcoholic by evoking a connection between Johnny’s passion for music, his earthy handsomeness, and his Moonstone popularity, “unusual for a white man, for a Mexican it was unprecedented” (40-41). Undermining common stereotypes of the drunken Indian and immigrant, Cather constructs a cultural aesthetic around Johnny that is disarming, creating one of her more memorable and dear characters: “Nobody knew exactly what was the matter with Johnny, and everybody liked him . . . he was . . . faithful as a burro. Then some night he would fall in with a crowd at the saloon and begin to sing”—eventually hopping a train, wandering southward from saloon to saloon until he was “all but destroyed” and would return to his wife (41). While the saloon is the site of contagion, Johnny’s wild and furious connection to music is the spell that keeps him running—“it was like something calling one” (42). His alcoholism feeds his art and is primi-

tive in its demand for recognition; “people listen to him and it excites him” (42).

In *Moonstone*, “public sentiment was lenient toward Johnny but everybody was disgusted with Mrs. Tellamantez for putting up with him. . . . [she] got all the blame” (41). Thea has an ambivalent relationship with Johnny’s wife, registering the complex discord with which Thea approaches the cultural divide of gender and ethnicity. Thea compares Mrs. Tellamantez to Spartan women, with a strong face and a high nose not uncommon in Spain; however, this transnational admiration is compromised by Mrs. Tellamantez’s passivity, for which, Thea muses, there is “nothing so sad” (40-41). As Carol Mattingly states, in her work *Well-Tempered Women*, addressing the concerns women writers had about alcohol before prohibition, “even when authors praise women who remain with drunken husbands, they seem to undermine that support” (134). By portraying Mrs. Tellamantez as both awe-inspiring and humble to a fault, Cather works with and against the homogenizing strategies of nineteenth century temperance rhetoric, which simultaneously glorified and victimized the wives of alcoholics.

Johnny’s wife’s “fateful resignation” is echoed in the codependent Mrs. Kohler, who lives to take care of her husband and the alcoholic Professor Wunsch (inspired by Cather’s German itinerant piano teacher Schindelmeisser). Wunsch followed Spanish Johnny into town after one of his “tramps,” only to be cultivated and harbored by Mrs. Kohler—“the old woman went at him as she did her garden” (24). The correlation between Wunsch and Mrs. Kohler’s garden, where her primary purpose is to provide “shade,” highlights the insidious and overgrown nature of the disease from which alcoholics suffer and the hard work required to care for and control the alcoholic and to enable him to function in society. Mrs. Kohler “sewed and washed and mended for him, and made him so clean and respectable that he was able to get a large class of pupils” (24). As caretaker of both her men and her plants, she pours herself into her projects, hiding “behind the growth she had fostered” and “blind like an owl” (24) to the cunning depths of alcoholism.

The Kohler garden is an essential phase in Thea’s cultural development and a necessary distraction from the ordinariness of her family life: “had it not been for Professor Wunsch, she might have lived on for years in Moonstone without ever knowing the Kohlers, without ever seeing their garden or the inside of their house” (25). The Kohler oasis is delineated by Cather as “a jungle” and “a relief map” (26), naturally stubborn, giving no indication of its future August ordered bloom or its winter demise. In the blaze of the vast prairie, Mrs. Kohler’s garden is an accomplishment, a masterful simulacrum of her “own Rhine Valley” and the perfect place for Wunsch to hide, the place where he wishes to be buried “at the end of his days” (24). That Wunsch’s final alcoholic tantrum is an act against the garden (the chopping of

Thea, driven by the ethos of destiny, attains success by transforming discord into the harmony of her gift—she takes what is useful and disregards the rest.

the dove-house) indicates the violent resentment he harbors towards both domesticity and the “common memories of another country” (25). The Kohlers’ home, on the margins of town, is thus the location of Thea’s first intimate interaction with the double life of the artist who must traverse, and often reject, social boundaries and societal standards.

It is Wunsch’s vulnerability and insatiable desire as an artist, and an alcoholic, that allow him the insight to recognize Thea as a vessel: “What was it she reminded him of? A yellow flower. . . . No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine.” Mary Titus’s reading of this passage focuses on Cather’s sustained attention to male authority (29). Reading this passage in terms of Wunsch’s alcoholism, however, subverts the male gaze—decentering male spectatorship into a portrayal of consumption and female gain. After all, as Mrs. Kronborg states, it is only because Wunsch drinks that he, an otherwise distinguished musician, would be teaching in the remote town of Moonstone (18). Thea’s “power of application” serves to remind Wunsch of his own failed “standards and ambitions” (29). Unable to conceive fully the reality of his own demise, as denial is a symptom of the disease of alcoholism, he envelops his losses in Thea’s “seriousness,” creating an image of her that is consumable: “He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbor, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood—Wunsch felt ashamed and dragged his slippers along the path” (30). Cather, describing the delusional functioning of the alcoholic brain triggered by the urge to drink, allows Wunsch to momentarily transform Thea into an object of consumption, leaving him heavy with guilt as he realizes what he has done.

The regional specificity of the wine/Thea mirage serves to complicate this moment with nostalgic longing, propelling Wunsch deeper into the familiar territory of shame and homesickness. The Moselle region, one of thirteen regions in Germany that produce wine, is best known for its steep

65-degree inclines, the highest of any vineyard in the world. The high altitude of the region produces a grape that yields ripe celebratory fruit with an effervescent finish. The likelihood of Wunsch’s procuring this elegant wine in rural Colorado is dim, emphasizing the irony of his longing, which is not so much about male authority or its demise, but about Wunsch’s restlessness and how Thea benefits from it. Without citizenship, or loyalty to a cause, the artist, as Cather implies in “Escapism,” is plagued by uselessness, and in the case of Wunsch, self-pity, illustrated in his downtrodden shuffling. The reader is never informed of which came first—Wunsch’s homelessness, his failure as an artist, or his alcoholism, but Cather is clear that these are not arbitrary connections—one feeds the other, inspiring a cycle of get-aways that always conclude with the same diseased end.

The importance of escape and its connection with contagion and alcoholism are echoed in the bizarre tale of the tramp who appears in *Moonstone*. His dramatic suicide in the water-supply tank, contaminating the drinking water and leading to the deaths of several adults and children, is a reminder of the infectious and dangerous potential of alcoholism to defile not only the individual who suffers, but the entire community as well. Thea is plagued by the tragedy and “hatred” of the episode: “Even when she was practicing, the dreams of the tramp kept going on in the back of her head. . . . She kept seeing him in his bedraggled clown suit . . . playing his accordion before the saloon” (120). The repetition of this haunting imagery serves to caution Thea about the sinister side of ambition, while also warning against parodies of art brought on by the “drink of fury.” The tramp (like the singing “cow-puncher” in “A Wagner Matinee”) is, after all, a costumed performer, playing for a drink. That Thea is reminded of the tramp’s “miserable sort of show” during her practice gives order and logic to the chaos of the event, transforming her concern into a celebration of her talent and survival.

The influence of these displaced alcoholics on Thea’s artistic development is consummated in the shadowy presence of Spanish Johnny in New York City at the close of the novel. Johnny, whose sensuousness represents the cultural divide Thea has both crossed and denied in order to secure her success, has joined a Mexican band touring with Barnum and Bailey and has come to silently witness Thea’s performance. Recalling the water-supply tramp before him who also traveled for low wages with the circus, Spanish Johnny’s “irregularities had become a regular mode of life” (396). It is interesting to note that P.T. Barnum was one of the nation’s best-known proponents of prohibition, employing his “promotional skills” to persuade men to pledge abstinence from alcohol by presenting “moral plays” about the psychological horrors and physical permutations caused by the disease of alcoholism—“as many as 3,000 people would view a single performance” at his American Museum in New



York City (Okrent 11). Ironically, Barnum and Bailey were able, as Cather implies, to employ men for “low wages” due to alcoholism, thus profiting from the very disease against which they were rallying.

Even with Johnny’s face shriveled and worn by the “ex-tasis” of his drinking, Thea “would have known him . . .” (396). But she is not aware of him, for she has dedicated herself completely to her art. While Deborah Lindsay Williams observes this moment as an example of Thea’s cosmopolitan mutuality (167), I read it as confirming Thea’s detachment from the emotionalism of the “real” world and all its messiness. As Cather states in the 1932 Preface to the 1915 edition of *Lark*, Thea’s “dry and preoccupied” personal life is a necessary component of her success as an artist (433). Johnny’s return here, his corporeal connection to the world, is a response to the pleasure Thea’s successful performance gives him. His “smile which embraced all the stream of life that passed him” “is the only commensurate answer to the artist’s query—“what was the good of it all”—a question Thea does not consider, and a smile with which she does not engage (396).

In Upton Sinclair’s novel *Love’s Pilgrimage*, published in 1911, he describes his attitude towards alcoholism as follows:

It was the Highway of Lost Men. They shivered and drew their shoulders together as they walked. The lights from saloons and pawnshops fell upon their faces—haggard and gaunt with misery, or bloated with disease . . . as they shuffled on. (quoted in *The Cup of Fury* 19)

Sinclair’s understanding of the deleterious effects of alcohol is unmistakable here, recalling my great-grandmother’s sympathetic portrayal of the lost souls wandering the railroads, plagued by alcoholism and homelessness. Cather’s view of alcoholism, and the artist/wanderers caught in between, as illustrated in *The Song of the Lark*, is not so clearly defined, and symbolizes the murky discourse, the artistic struggle and the cultural variances surrounding the debate over alcohol. For Thea, art is imprisoned in her body—there is nothing to spare, and each artistic expression is precious and measured, springing from, as Cather reminds us in “Escapism,” “an uncontrollable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man” (19). Wunsch and Spanish Johnny are unable to harness the revelations inherent in the artist’s journey. Alcoholism thus functions as both a private and a public matter, problematizing the fragile boundary between the dis-eased alcoholic/artist and the community seeking his salvation. In depicting Wunsch and Spanish Johnny’s conflicts with alcoholism in the frame of artistic expression, Cather suggests that the demands of the artist require a certain resistance to humanity, a solitary self-acceptance in which fantasies of artistic freedom are an abstract goal. Thea,

driven by the ethos of destiny, attains success by transforming discord into the harmony of her gift – she takes what is useful and disregards the rest. Wunsch and Spanish Johnny, however, are caught within the double-bind of alcoholism and immigration, serving as reminders that “success is never so interesting as struggle” (“Preface” 433).

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## Food, Drink, and Cather at 2010 Spring Conference



Above, left to right: Ann Romines and Julia Howard Helvey at the cookbook signing; Jeanne Collins making up her mind; Susan Meyer delivering her keynote address; David Porter speaking on wine; bounteous desserts.

About 200 scholars, readers, and Cather fans took part in the 55th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference in Red Cloud, 3-5 June. Directed by Ann Romines, the conference focused on “Food, Drink, and Willa Cather’s Writing,” and garnered enthusiastic comments from participants: “wonderful speakers,” “great program” and “great camaraderie,” discussions that “enhance understanding of Cather.”

An opening day of scholarly papers highlighted the important ways that food and drink figure in Willa Cather’s work. This was the first gathering to focus on this rich subject, and—as the papers in this issue show—it opened up many topics for exploration. After the day’s menu of scholarship, everyone relaxed in the Opera House Gallery at an ice cream social, modeled on “Old Mrs. Harris,” and featuring homemade ice cream and an array of “special” cakes, including Mrs. Harris’s delectable “white coconut.”

Friday morning began with a panel on “Cather Family and Red Cloud Cookbooks,” highlighting a treasure of the Cather Foundation Archives: the Cather family collection of cookbooks and manuscript recipes (p. 52). Next, winners of the Foundation’s annual Norma Ross Walter Scholarship read their essays. In the afternoon, editors of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition discussed food and drink issues in the novels they edited, and Jean Griffith, of Wichita State University, talked about food, race, and ethnicity in *O Pioneers!* and “The Bohemian Girl” (p. 60). Then everyone adjourned to the Gallery to celebrate the Foundation’s new publication, *At Willa Cather’s Tables: The Cather Foundation Cookbook*. Opera House volunteers served refreshments made from their cookbook recipes, and the book’s editor and forty-plus contributors signed their recipes for the many purchasers of

the book. After dinner, a wine tasting featured wines reflecting Cather’s taste, which David Porter, of Skidmore College, discussed in “Willa Cather and Wine” (p. 32). The evening ended with more festivity at the restored Burlington Depot, with Nebraska beer, cider, and music by Mike Adams.

Saturday began with two conference traditions: a service at Grace Episcopal Church, to which Cather belonged, and kolache at the Opera House. Susan Meyer, of Wellesley College, presented the provocative keynote address, “Sanitary Piggeries and Chaste Hens: Willa Cather and the Pure Food Movement” (p. 38). Respondents Andrew Jewell, Daryl Palmer, and Phyllis Palmer led off the discussion that followed. Lunch was another conference tradition: a salad lunch prepared by the local P.E.O. chapter.

Saturday afternoon offered a “Kitchen and Prairie Tour,” with readings from Cather’s work. At the Cather Childhood Home, participants sampled Virginia pound cake and Willa’s own muffin recipe; at the Harling House, they sampled hickory nut cake from the Miner family recipe. Out at the Pavelka farm, the Pavelka family’s kolache were served, and visitors to the Cather Prairie explored edible plants growing there. In the evening, everyone returned to the Opera House for a festive barn dance modeled on “The Bohemian Girl,” with music by the Smith Family Band and a bounteous supper prepared by the Red Cloud Women’s Chamber. Everyone went home well-fed and with stimulating ideas about “Food, Drink, and Willa Cather’s Writing.” Again and again the words echoed, “I will be back next year!” Another good time is in store then—next year we will have “Willa Cather and Her Popular Culture,” April 29-30, 2011.

*Photo credits: Romines and Helvey, William Helvey; Collins and desserts, Jay Yost; Meyer and Porter, Barb Kudrna*

# CARRIE MINER SHERWOOD'S CHRISTMAS PLUM PUDDING

In a December 1921 letter, Willa Cather thanked her old friend Carrie Miner Sherwood for the Christmas pudding Sherwood had sent her from Red Cloud. From Sherwood's personal papers, this is the likely recipe for that Christmas delicacy.



1 cup finely chopped beef suet  
2 cups bread crumbs  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup raisins  
1 cup washed currants  
1 cup blanched almonds, chopped  
½ cup citron, sliced thin  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon ground cloves  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
½ teaspoon grated nutmeg  
4 well-beaten eggs  
1 cup milk  
1 teaspoon soda, dissolved in 1 tablespoon warm water  
flour as needed, about 1½ cups

Put fruit in a bowl and sprinkle with flour to coat.

In a large bowl, mix the eggs, sugar, spices, and salt with milk. Stir in the fruit, chopped nuts, bread crumbs, and suet. Add the dissolved soda and enough flour to make the fruit stick together (about 1½ cups). Pack the mixture in greased mold; tightly close and seal the mold. Boil or steam for 4 hours.



**THE CATHER FOUNDATION  
WISHES YOU A DELICIOUS  
AND HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!**



## 'A Crime Against Art': *My Ántonia*, Food, and Cather's Anti-Americanization Argument

ANDREW JEWELL

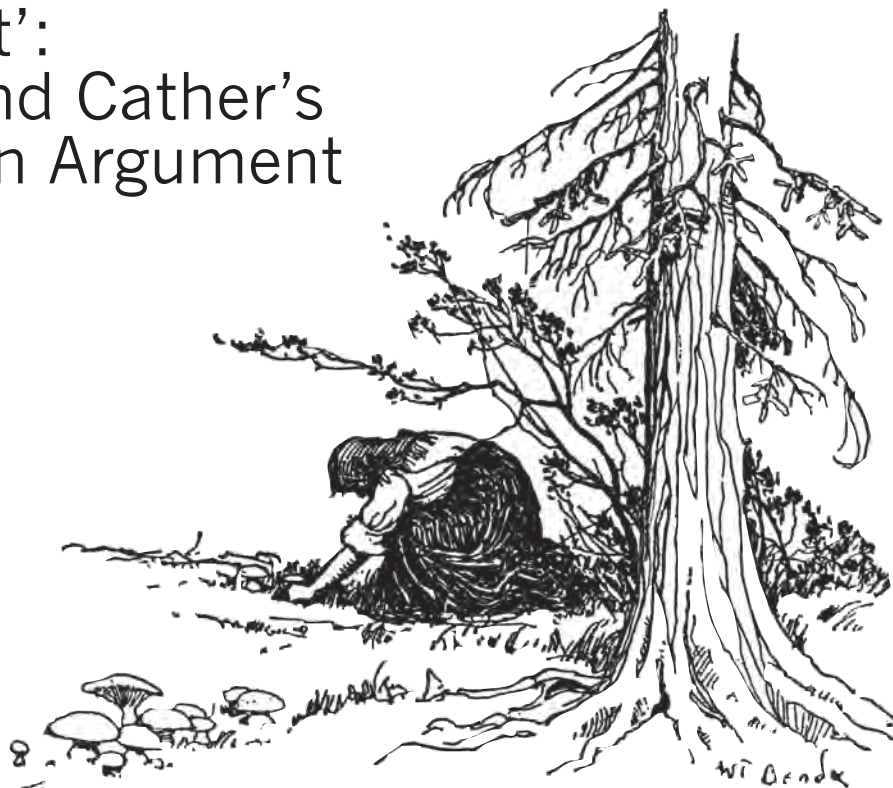


Illustration by W. T. Benda for *My Ántonia*, 1918.

In late October 1921, after spending time in Red Cloud, Nebraska, Willa Cather stopped in Omaha before returning east. While there, she consented to give a few lectures. She told the Omaha Society of Fine Arts that she was “not a public speaker,” but, characteristically, she followed that caveat with a provocative lecture. Her topic was “Standardization and Art,” and she argued that the cultural trend toward monoculture, from English-language-only laws to imitative fashion choices, was deadening to the production of art. “Art must have freedom,” she argued, and could not thrive in a world fixated on convenience and conventionality:

Too many women are trying to take short cuts to everything, . . . They take short cuts in their housework, short cuts in their reading—short cuts, short cuts. We have music by machines, we travel by machines—soon we will be having machines to do our thinking. There are no short cuts in art. Art has nothing to do with smartness. Times may change, inventions may alter a world, but birth, love, maternity, and death cannot be changed.

Her argument about the proper environment for creativity often referred to the kitchen. “No nation has ever produced great art that has not made a high art of cookery, because art

appeals primarily to the senses,” she claimed. “The Americanization committee worker who persuades an old Bohemian housewife that it is better for her to feed her family out of tin cans instead of cooking them a steaming goose for dinner is committing a crime against art” (*Willa Cather in Person* “1921”).

That Cather’s speech about “Standardization and Art” referred regularly to cooking suggests the significant role gastronomy played in her conception of the world. Indeed, she stated the importance quite clearly in a 1925 interview: “Is cooking important? Few things in life are more so! My mind and stomach are one! I think and work with whatever it is that digests” (Tittle). In this essay, I argue that the points she made in her 1921 lecture—that the homogenization efforts of “Americanization” inhibit the creation of rich and meaningful culture, and that food is an important articulation of that culture—were present in her 1918 novel, *My Ántonia*. Indeed, in its restrained way, *My Ántonia* makes a powerful argument for the central role of quality food in the establishment of a diverse but harmonious and satisfyingly complex American life.



*The Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of American Regional English* both credit Willa Cather’s 1918 novel *My Ántonia* with introducing the word “kolache” into

the English language. As the novel nears its conclusion, Jim descends into the fruit cellar with the Cuzak children, where one of the boys points to the spiced plums, explaining, “Mother uses them to make *kolaches*” (381; italics in original).<sup>1</sup> A kolach, which etymologically comes from the Czech word for “circle” or “wheel,” is a round, slightly sweetened roll made out of yeast-leavened dough that is traditional in eastern Europe, especially in the region encompassing the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia. Its top has a large depression typically filled with jams made from apricots, prunes, or other fruit; a poppy-seed filling; or cheese, usually cottage cheese or quark, which is a fresh, mild white cheese common in Europe.

This lexical introduction needs to be understood in context. In 1916-1918, when Cather was writing *My Ántonia*, the United States was in a debate about the effect of and response to the large immigrant populations recently arrived from southern and eastern Europe. In his important 1916 essay “Trans-National America,” Randolph Bourne saw the “melting-pot” ideal as a failure, a naive and fruitless attempt to push Anglo-Saxon culture on a varied populace. His essay, though, is not simply a diatribe against the “Americanizing” campaigns, but a highly optimistic vision about the power of a pluralist society: “the contribution of America will be . . . an intellectual sympathy which is not satisfied until it has got at the heart of the different cultural expressions, and felt as they feel. It may have immense preferences, but it will make understanding and not indignation its end” (94).

As other critics have already pointed out, Cather’s *My Ántonia* expresses a vision of the United States that allows for the peaceful co-existence of multiple cultural perspectives and habits, a vision in line with Bourne’s notion of a “trans-national” nation; according to Guy Reynolds, Cather “crystallised in fiction the hopes for a pluralist community” (73).<sup>2</sup> Though there are many examples in the novel of Cather appreciating and valorizing the diversity of perspectives and cultural affinities, the brief kolache conversation is a perfect articulation of Cather’s trans-national vision. In the last section of the novel, “Cuzak’s Boys,” Jim returns to Nebraska, sees Ántonia for the first time in many years, and tours her home. While in the fruit cellar, this exchange takes place:

“Show him the spiced plums, mother. Americans don’t have those,” said one of the older boys. “Mother uses them to make *kolaches*,” he added.

Leo, in a low voice, tossed off some scornful remark in Bohemian.

I turned to him. “You think I don’t know what *kolaches* are, eh? You’re mistaken, young man. I’ve eaten your mother’s *kolaches* long before that Easter day when you were born.” (381-382; italics in original)

The “older boy” who speaks the first sentence was born in Nebraska and is legally an “American”; he, in fact, has never personally been in any other nation other than the United States. And yet, the speaker identifies himself as something other than “American,” for, he says, while pointing at his family’s spiced plums, “*Americans* don’t have those.” He clearly self-identifies, along with the rest of his family, as Bohemian, not “American.” His ability to assert such a self-identification depends upon a conception of citizenship that is, to use Bourne’s word, “trans-national.” This Cuzak boy—and Cather through him—is briefly but forthrightly expressing a conception of a multinational citizenry by reference to kolache. Equally important is Jim Burden’s response to the Cuzak boys. Jim, of Anglo-Saxon heritage, is more traditionally “American” according to the perspective of 1918 (and, as the older boy indicates, according to the perspective of the Cuzak family), but he is able to claim kolache as a familiar food. In fact, his history with the kolache is longer than the Cuzak boys’.

In this brief exchange, we have access to a profound conception about identity in relation to nationality: the Cuzak boys define themselves against “American” despite their American citizenship, and Jim Burden, the “real” American, finds familiarity in the very food that the Cuzak boys assume will make them foreign. The kolache both are and are not a marker of nationality. Or, to put it another way, the kolache demonstrate that European traditions and folkways can be successfully maintained in an American context, and that all Americans can embrace the imported traditions as part of their own pluralist nation. It is a hopeful moment, one that echoes Bourne’s sunny sense that “America is already the world-federation in miniature, the continent where for the first time in history has been achieved that miracle of hope, the peaceful living side by side, with character substantially preserved, of the most heterogeneous peoples under the sun” (93).

Unfortunately, Bourne’s ideal of a trans-national America was not a universally held sentiment in the 1910s. In fact, as already referenced above, this period saw a great deal of effort to replace the multi-national character of the U.S. population with a more homogenous, “Americanized” vision. As Cather knew, one major attempt to do this was witnessed in the effort to create a national cuisine. This so-called national cuisine ignored most of the established regional traditions that were created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—the creole cooking of Louisiana, the Tex-Mex cuisine of the southwest, or the German-inflected eating of the upper midwest, for example—and asserted as “American” a way of eating modeled on New England habits: roasted meats, creamed codfish, chowders, brown bread, and an absence of fresh vegetables. “By proposing a national cuisine,” food historian Donna Gabaccia argues, “domestic scientists helped arm a variety of reform movements aimed at

By introducing kolache made with home-canned plums to English-language readers, [Cather] forcefully inserts a “foreign,” handcrafted food and therefore challenges the widespread attempts to homogenize American cuisine.

limiting, or even turning back, the tide of cross-over foreign foods and eating customs” (125). Italians were told that it hindered good digestion to cook meat, cheese, and macaroni together, and families from eastern Europe were warned that pickles could harm their kidneys (Gabaccia 128). In 1917, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor declared that the root cause of malnutrition was “ignorance, not poverty” (Levenstein 99), and efforts to modify the eating habits of the poor were bent on ridding diets of the heavily spiced food, which were thought to expend too much digestive energy, in favor of the “dainty,” white-sauced cuisine of Anglo-Americans (Levenstein 103-4).

This resistance to non-Anglo food traditions was part of a bigger movement at the turn of the century to modernize, standardize, and scientifically prescribe cooking and eating. This domestic science movement was the forbearer to much we now recognize as common in our food culture: an emphasis on food as a vehicle for nutritive elements (for example, defining food consumption as the consumption of “protein” or “vitamins”); an effort to make food preparation more convenient and regularized; and development of recipes and diets that focused on nutritional needs and economics without high regard for the social or cultural function of eating.<sup>3</sup> Many of the researchers scientifically analyzing food also became involved in reform efforts, founding institutions designed to provide nutritious, economic food to the largely-immigrant working class. These “public kitchens” tried to address the problems of the poor in urban areas, but did it through a belief in the nutritional deficiencies of traditional southern and eastern European cuisines and in the inability

of the working class woman to provide the proper diet for her family (Levenstein, 44-60; 98-108). In what is probably a coincidence, one of the “public kitchen” reformers in New York City, where Cather lived while writing *My Ántonia*, was Florence Adele Sloane Burden, a member of the Vanderbilt family known in the New York society pages as Mrs. James Burden (Levenstein 111),<sup>4</sup> which resonates with the briefly sketched character of the wealthy reformist Genevieve Whitney, the Mrs. James Burden of the novel. So the “Americanization committee worker” Cather evokes in her 1921 speech is not a paranoid invention, but a reference to real “reform” initiatives happening in kitchens around the U.S.

The food culture context of *My Ántonia*, then, was one of increased pressure and temptation to forego long-held food traditions in favor of scientifically sanctioned standardized eating. It is this context that gives Cather’s depiction of food in the novel a good deal of its power. By introducing kolache made with home-canned plums to English-language readers, she forcefully inserts a “foreign,” handcrafted food and therefore challenges the widespread attempts to homogenize American cuisine. Interestingly, in *O Pioneers!*, published only five years earlier, her language reflects a more cautious approach to “foreign” foods like kolache. During the visit of Alexandra Bergson and Mrs. Lee to Marie Shabata’s home, “Marie took out a pan of delicate little rolls, stuffed with stewed apricots, and began to dust them over with powdered sugar,” offering the women a pastry “the Bohemians always like . . . with their coffee” (194). The language of this scene, unlike that in *My Ántonia*, assumes a reader who is an outsider to the food tradition represented. The kolache is described rather than named. In *My Ántonia*, however, no such efforts are made to describe. Instead, the kolache are just there, part of the characters’ lives.

This kolache scene is not an isolated moment of food subtly evoking significant meaning in the novel. There are several scenes where food plays a consequential role: Grandma Burden’s gingerbread, the pumpkins in the garden, and Ántonia’s cakes for Charley Harling, for example. Of special significance, though, is the scene in the novel in which Mrs. Shimerda, overcome with gratitude at gifts from the Burdens, gives them a teacup-sized bundle of dried mushrooms. It is a scene that at once exemplifies the culinary conservatism of many Americans while arguing for the transportive power of a more adventurous palate. Grandmother Burden’s mystification at the mushrooms suggests the mainstream, conservative response. She could not accept Mrs. Shimerda’s assurances that the dried mushrooms were very delicious (indeed, the whole family expressed this opinion), or the hint that they would absorb moisture and swell. Instead, in her confusion—“They might be dried meat from some queer beast,” she tells Jim, “I’m afraid of ’em” (89-90)—she tosses the mushrooms in the

fire. Jim, on the other hand, has a mind more receptive to difference. He has a curiosity, and a faith, which his grandmother lacks. He tastes the brown chip, and though he finds the taste “strange,” it is also unforgettable and deeply evocative to him. “They had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest . . . . .” he thinks after tasting one (90). This sentence makes meaning through several different methods: coming on the heels of Jim tasting the mushrooms, we know that this short sentence represents his psychological reaction to the event, and that reaction is one of wonder and exoticism. The insertion of the word “probably” after “They had been gathered” lets the reader know that we are in the midst of Jim’s speculation. The exoticism comes from the willfully vague and suggestive “some deep Bohemian forest.” It is, perhaps, an imaginary forest closer in Jim’s mind to the fairy tale world of Hansel and Gretel than to the actual experience of the Shimerdas: the forest is “deep,” it is “Bohemian.” But more than the words, perhaps, it is Cather’s use of punctuation that underscores the rich suggestiveness of Jim’s imagination. After the word “forest” there are seven periods, an extended ellipsis that finishes not only the sentence, but the chapter. It is the only time in the novel—indeed in all of her fiction—that Cather uses such punctuation, and its effect is to invite the reader to follow Jim imaginatively into the deep Bohemian forest.

But, as many will remember, the mushroom scene exists in the novel not only in words, but also in illustration (see illustration). One of the eight W. T. Benda drawings that accompany the text in the first edition features a woman bent over behind a large tree picking wild mushrooms. As one of the illustrated scenes, the mushroom episode is propelled to a high level of importance, a scene that, in its evocative character, is put forward as a central moment of communication in the novel. And, tellingly, what is illustrated is not any of the action witnessed in the novel: it is not Mrs. Burden giving a teacup full of dried mushrooms to the Burdens, nor Jim chewing a corner of the brown chip. Instead, it is a drawing of Jim’s imaginary response to the taste. The drawing appears to be—and is—a visualization of an event that happened in Europe, and yet the novel’s context demonstrates that the event actually is imaginary; the Bohemia of the drawing exists in Jim’s young mind. It is tasting that inspires Jim’s sensitivity to and interest in a foreign land. The mushrooms, then, trans-nationalize Jim’s imagination, and, simultaneously, the reader’s. It is an effect explicitly contrary to reformers and industrialists pushing a standardized, “Americanized” cuisine.

Late in “The Hired Girls” section of the novel, in the summer before Jim leaves for college, he visits the river with *Ántonia*, Lena, Tiny, and Anna Hansen. Sitting atop a bluff after their lunch, the girls point out their father’s farms in the distance, beginning with a dutiful American catalogue of “how many acres were in wheat that year and how many in

corn.” However, the conversation quickly turns away from cash crops and to the distinctive eating habits of the Scandinavian and Bohemian immigrant families. Tiny Soderball tells the group that her “old folks . . . put in twenty acres of rye.” The Soderballs get the rye ground for flour for their own bread. “It seems like my mother ain’t been so homesick, ever since father’s raised rye flour for her,” Tiny says (272). Importantly, the twenty acres of rye they grow, ostensibly to make their own “nice bread” (272), is done at the expense of the extra income that would likely come from planting the same land in wheat or corn. This choice to prioritize a culinary tradition over farm income is contradictory to the dominant American model of wealth acquisition at the expense of small human comforts. At least, that is how Cather understood the dominant model of American farmers, as various moments in her fiction indicate. For example, remember Mary Rosicky’s response when told she could make more money like her neighbors if she sold all her cream: “I’d rather put some colour into my children’s faces than put money into the bank” (“Neighbor Rosicky” 24). Importantly, the small comfort of planting rye, of doing something contrary to the dominant American model, works: Mrs. Soderball is less homesick and easier in her mind. A life is improved when it indulges a personal comfort and defies the pressure to grow as much corn and wheat—and make as much money—as possible.

The novel is filled with small details which suggest that the world of *My Ántonia* is filled with people who, like the Soderballs, protect and preserve their culinary traditions: Jelinek’s saloon serves “rye bread . . . smoked fish and strong imported cheeses to please the foreign palate” (247-8); Mr. Harling consumes smoked salmon, anchovies, and beer before bed; and Mrs. Shimerda cooks ripe cucumbers in milk and makes bread raised with bits of old sour dough. Even the Burdens maintain culinary traditions from their family’s British past, as when Mrs. Burden makes Jim’s “favorite pudding, striped with currants and boiled in a bag” (75). At the end of the book, when Cather gives us the large, ebullient, successful Cuzak family, the reader gets a vision of a family unburdened by the homogenizing Americanization movement. They prosper in Nebraska fully in touch with their Bohemian past, a trans-national family able to comfortably blend life in the United States and their own family identity as non-“American.” And, in one of the final scenes of the novel, the Cuzaks’ dignity as a non-Americanized family is reaffirmed when “the long table was laid, and two brown geese, stuffed with apples, were put down sizzling before *Ántonia*” (406). No Americanization committee worker could convince this Bohemian housewife to commit a crime against art.

In 1924, Rose Feld interviewed Cather in the *New York Times Book Review*, and Cather’s response signals the food-consciousness that surrounded the composition of *My Ánto-*

nia: "Is *My Ántonia* a good book because it is the story of the soil?" Feld asked her. "No, no, decidedly no," Cather responded,

There is no formula; there is no reason. It was a story of people I knew. I expressed a mood, the core of which was like a folksong, a thing Grieg could have written. That it was powerfully tied to the soil had nothing to do with it. *Ántonia* was tied to the soil. But I might have written the tale of a Czech baker in Chicago, and it would have been the same.

In what way would have the tale of the Chicago baker been the same? It could not have emerged from her memory and personal relationships the way *My Ántonia* did. Perhaps the sameness would have been in the contours of the story: an immigrant who makes a life in the United States but who does not succumb to the conformist pressures of "Americanization" (which, in the same interview, Cather called a "deadly disease"), a person who, while living in Chicago, is nevertheless a "Czech." It is not incidental, perhaps, that this alternative *Ántonia* is a baker. The context of the comment on the novel in this interview is a discussion of the restlessness and materiality of American life, and shortly before making the comment about her novel, Cather told Feld, "[immigrants] have come here to live in the sense that they lived in the Old World, and if they were let alone their lives might turn into the beautiful ways of their homeland." Like *My Ántonia*, the story of the Czech baker in Chicago would have to be about preservation of "beautiful ways," of, to use another Cather phrase from the interview, "first-rate things." For a Czech baker, of course, that critical, "first-rate thing" would have been a pan of fresh kolache.

#### NOTES

1. All of my citations to *My Ántonia* are to the first edition of the novel since my argument is concerned with the context of that particular 1918 publication. The first edition can be accessed through both transcription and page images on the *Willa Cather Archive* at <http://cather.unl.edu/0018.html>.

2. To read more critical discussions of Cather and transnationalism, see Reynolds's entire chapter "My *Ántonia* and the Americanisation Debate" and Catherine Morley's "Crossing the Water: Willa Cather and the Transatlantic Imaginary," *European Journal of American Culture* 28.2 (July 2009) 125-140.

3. There are several works of food and cultural history that document this movement. See, for example, Harvey Levenstein's *Revolution at the Table* (Oxford UP, 1988) and Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at*

*the Turn of the Century* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986).

4. The full name of Mrs. James Burden was discovered through "Vanderbilt family" entry in Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanderbilt\\_family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanderbilt_family))

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# Of Coconut Cake and Consommé: Willa Cather's School of Cookery

ELAINE SMITH

Willa Cather was a noted celebrant of food. It is easy to conjure from her canon iconic scenes of pleasure and bounty: *Ántonia's* well-stocked fruit cave, enormous threshing dinners, jolly family meals with the Cuzaks and the Rosickys. Her general attitude, repeatedly dramatized, is that food should be carefully prepared, generously shared, and enjoyed. This essay, however, deals with three instances from three separate works in which food and the rituals of its consumption are shown not as celebratory and sustaining, but at least initially as repulsive, strange, grotesque and possibly dangerous. These moments stand out precisely because they go against the predominant associations Cather makes with food.

If we take education to be a move away from the known and familiar out into the unknown, one way of reading *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, and "Old Mrs. Harris" is as the educational journeys of Jim Burden, Niel Herbert, and Vickie Templeton—all young people about to move from their small Western towns into the wider world. In each work Cather presents a cultural conflict, contrasting the known mores of the family and the small town with those of a wider world. Through food and food practices, each young person learns about his or her own taste and the varying tastes of the world (hence, Willa Cather's "school of cookery"). Furthermore, we readers are as involved in these lessons as well. Cather's prose is structured in such a way that we too are put to school, but to learn slightly different lessons. Among other lessons, we learn the value of ritual, the importance of daring, and the inevitability of



*"Niel remembers, as we do, the glittering elegance of the first party. . . . The customs and courtesies of the table stand for Niel as indications of Daniel Forrester's stolid, upright character. . . ."*

change. The world Cather constructs for the reader, the one into which she launches her young heroes, is intensely modern: unstable, decentered, and cosmopolitan. In these scenes of food and food practice Cather suggests both the nature of the modern world and strategies for managing its disquieting uncertainties.

To begin with the earliest, least complicated example, in *My Ántonia* the clash of cultures that prevails as a theme throughout the novel can be found in the incident of the dried mushrooms. It is Jim's first winter on the divide. Though the cold is a threat, the Burden household is snug and safe around the glowing range. But their immigrant neighbors are

close to starvation, reduced to gleaning rotten potatoes and eating prairie dogs. Mrs. Burden has brought the Shimerdas a hamper of food, and in return Mrs. Shimerda “opened her wooden chest and brought out a bag made of bed-ticking . . . stuffed full of something. . . . She measured a teacupful, tied it in a bit of sacking and presented it ceremoniously to grandmother” (75). These are the dried mushrooms, a signifier of misunderstanding and difference, which we can see by the extremely different reactions these “little brown shavings” provoke. Gathered in some Bohemian forest, “brought so far, treasured so jealously” (77), they represent all things good in the flavors of home to the Shimerdas. “Much better than you have here.” Marek jumps around, smacking his lips; Antonia says, “This is very good . . . Cook with rabbit; cook with chicken, in the gravy” (75). But, kind-hearted as they are, and prompted by their Christian teaching, Grandmother Burden and Jake react with deep distrust and suspicion to the stranger and his food. “They ain’t dried fish, and they never grew on stalk or vine. I’m afraid of ’em. Anyhow, I shouldn’t want to eat anything that had been shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows” (76), Caroline Burden declares, and she tosses the precious, alien food on the cookstove fire. Not before Jim, in his role as mediator and observer, risks a taste. His reward for such transgressive bravery comes years later as a memory and clarity; by the time he narrates the book, he has traveled far enough to understand the meaning of those crumpled bits of home.

My second example deals not so much with dishes and ingredients as with rituals of eating, food service and presentation. It is much more complex in that we are asked to observe, compare, and finally evaluate two dinner parties through multiple points of view. With the second dinner party in *A Lost Lady*, Cather suggests the constancy of change and the importance of custom. The scene is drawn almost point for point in deliberate contrast to, if not parody of, the original party that took place four years earlier. Niel Herbert, the novel’s protagonist and dominant voice, is continually trying to determine the value of Marian Forrester. She is the lady toward whom he assumes a chivalric, romantic attitude until rude facts such as her infidelity make him question his judgment.<sup>1</sup> Through Niel’s questioning, Cather makes the quality and value of Marian Forrester’s character one of the novel’s central issues. Early on, Cather teaches us that in order to judge her properly ourselves, we must extricate ourselves from Niel’s point of view. Though Cather would, I believe, endorse many of Niel’s pronouncements, she repeatedly undermines his reliability—he’s a child; he’s a romantic, and he’s a snob.

Niel remembers, as we do, the glittering elegance of the first party, and judges this second dinner a pathetic and degraded version of the original. At the Christmas-time dinner, Captain Forrester performs the elaborate rituals of consideration and politeness: “What part of the turkey do you prefer,

Mrs. Ogden?” “Mrs. Forrester, what part of the turkey shall I give you this evening?” (46) “Is smoke offensive to you, Mrs. Ogden?” “Is smoke offensive to you, Constance?” (53). Ritual is by its nature repetitive. The customs and courtesies of the table stand for Neil as indications of Daniel Forrester’s stolid, upright character: “He was a man who did not vary his formulae or his manners. He was no more mobile than his countenance. . . . His clumsy dignity covered a deep nature, and a conscience that had never been juggled with” (46). And in this steadfastness he is the opposite of his mercenary wife.

At the second party the damask, the shaded candles and the silver dishes on the dinner table remain the same, but the characters have shifted. We are given Ivy Peters instead of Frank Ellinger; Ivy’s sister, Annie, instead of Constance Ogden. Niel, not the Captain, carves the roast fowl. Mrs. Forrester still wears her glittering earrings, but instead of broadcloth dinner dress, Ivy Peters brags about his cheap and shoddy clothing. This time Marian Forrester’s wit and vivacity are not balanced by her husband’s stolid presence; instead the lively hostess is seen by the town gossips as a “Merry Widow,” preying on the young men (148). Good manners are in part a performance of accepted conventions, and the merry widow is acting a part. As in a Shakespearean play when the rude mechanicals mock the high seriousness of the main plot, it seems to Niel that the local clowns are mimicking the behavior of their betters. To his eyes, Mrs. Forrester “was still her indomitable self, going through her old part,—but only the stage-hands were left to listen to her. All those who had shared in fine undertakings and bright occasions were gone (159). Niel bitterly regrets these changes. He is angry at his liege-lady for continuing life on any terms, and he wonders, perhaps with a tinge of jealousy, why she should have gone to the trouble for a bunch of boys who would have preferred beefsteak and potatoes to the cock-tails, duck and frozen pudding (154).

Mrs. Forrester herself provides one answer to Niel’s question: “I hate to see them [the boys of the town] growing up like savages, when all they needed is a civilized house to come to, and a woman to give them a few hints. They’ve never had a chance. . . . Suppose you had grown up like Ed Elliott and Joe Simpson?” (148). Another answer to the why of such effort is provided by Ed Elliott himself, who reappears in the novel’s last scene and is, significantly, given the last word.

Though as children they ran in the same crowd, Ed Elliott was no particular friend of Niel Herbert’s. His relations were against him.<sup>2</sup> His mother is one of the snoops and scavengers invading the Forrester place during the Captain’s last illness; his father is an oily shoe salesman, known as “the Don Juan of the lower world of Sweet Water” (12). Years after he has left his home town, Niel meets Ed Elliott by chance in a Chicago hotel. The details here are important.

We see Ed through Niel's eyes, a "broad shouldered man with an open sunbrowned face" (164), who recognizes Niel first and greets him politely. Ed has become a mining engineer. While on site in Argentina, he found Mrs. Forrester living in Buenos Ayres with a rich and devoted second husband. "I recognized her by her laugh" (164). The reintroduction of Ed Elliott and the details of this scene speak to the importance of Mrs. Forrester's long ago dinner when she "tried to do something" for the boys of the town. Ed Elliott's career, manners, education attest to the polish one can acquire if generous people such as Mrs. Forrester take the time to give him "a hint or two." The forms Mrs. Forrester flouted and adhered to were critical to the kind of civilized lives these two men now lead. Their parallel responses of gratitude suggest that they both owe her a debt:

"So we may feel sure that she was well cared for to the very end," said Niel. "Thank God for that!"

"I knew you'd feel that way," said Ed Elliott, as a warm wave of feeling passed over his face. "I did!" (166)

These are the last words of the novel. It would seem that Ed Elliott, too, was "very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him in to life" (163). And we are encouraged to imagine that that dinner, experienced by Niel as a grotesque travesty, may have meant something entirely different to Ed Elliott, who needed the guidance in customs and manners Marian Forrester was gracious enough to give him.

Thus far we've learned that what you eat becomes who you are. And how you eat reflects your civilization, culture and character. Willa Cather incorporates both these truths in her story, "Old Mrs. Harris." The coconut cake and the consommé of this essay's title come from this story. In it Cather again uses food and food practice to delineate cultural difference and signal character traits. The pleasant nature of the Templeton home is indicated by their open hospitality; as poor as the family is, a visitor is offered lemonade in a frosty glass or a hot toddy in a smoking mug. Wealth and class are distinct; poverty does not preclude good manners.<sup>3</sup> The Rosens' food also indicates their culture (and status) in the town of Skyline. The consommé on which Mrs. Rosen spends hours and "wastes so much good meat" (129) is not what you get when you open a can of Campbell's. It takes care and effort, sometimes days of boiling and straining, and as such, represents the painstaking ways the Rosens arrange their lives. The coconut cake, equally good, serves a very different function, and stands for a different culture. Mrs. Jackson, who represents Skyline's "snappy . . . Western democracy" (112), disapproves of Mrs. Harris's delicious coconut cake because she and her cohorts consider it a product of the Templetons' aristocratic Southern ways: "I don't know

*continued on page 80*

## Prairie Museum Hosts Cather Cookbook Lunch



*Barbara Johnson*

On July 27, the Dacotah Prairie Museum in Aberdeen, South Dakota, celebrated the tenth anniversary of its annual cookbook luncheon series with a menu based on the Cather Foundation's newly published cookbook, *At Willa Cather's Tables: The Cather Foundation Cookbook*. Scholar Barbara Johnson, who researched Cather family recipes for the cookbook, planned the menu and prepared much of the food, using cookbook recipes. The museum guests feasted on Pork Loin Roast (as served at a Cather Spring Banquet in Red Cloud), Roast Leg of Lamb (prepared in honor of Willa Cather's father, a sheep farmer), Green Beans with Cherry Tomatoes (as suggested by Cather's menu for a Sunday dinner on Grand Manan Island), Willa's Muffins (a handwritten recipe Barbara discovered in the Cather family recipes preserved in the Foundation Archives), Southern White Coconut Cake (like that served at the ice cream social in "Old Mrs. Harris"), and Sour Cream Chocolate Cake (as suggested by the menu for the barn dance supper in "The Bohemian Girl"). The new cookbook was for sale at the museum, and a few lucky attendees won door prizes from the Foundation Bookstore in Red Cloud—and three additional coconut and chocolate layer cakes, baked by Barbara. A delicious time was had by all!

If you would like to plan a menu for your own Cather lunch or dinner, the new cookbook offers many tempting possibilities. Copies of the book are available from the Foundation Bookstore.

but I'd like my cakes, if I kept somebody in the kitchen to bake them for me," Mrs. Jackson remarks with deliberate malice (106) .

Mrs. Rosen is making consommé when Vickie comes to announce she has won the competitive scholarship. Such a dish as consommé is part of the wider culture Vickie seeks to enter by attending University. As Father Latour famously remarks of Father Vaillant's French onion soup, in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, "There are . . . a thousand years of history in this soup" (41). Such food, Cather suggests, is fundamental to European culture, carrying in its essence the ability to read German or write French. The Rosens are, in a way, guides and gatekeepers, ushering Vickie into a foreign world. More widely traveled, more widely read, more sophisticated, they understand and support Vickie's desire in a way her family doesn't. Before she goes home, she goes first to them with news of her triumph, and Mrs. Rosen marks the occasion with appropriate ritual—she invites Vickie to lunch: "Go in and announce yourself to Mr. Rosen" (130). The formalities of the Rosen's table turn the occasion into a rite of passage, and the rest of the scene reinforces the portentous nature of the step Vickie is about to take. As she does every day, Mrs. Rosen sets the table with silver, her beautiful dishes, and her best linens. Vickie, the novice, is required not just to taste strange and disagreeable foods, but is told she must learn to like them: "you are to eat your tomatoes with an oil dressing, as we do. If you are going off into the world, it is quite time you learn to like things that are everywhere accepted" (132). Vickie acquiesces, "though ordinarily, she thought a French dressing tasted a good deal like castor oil" (133). The Rosens' lesson is clear and a bit frightening: you have been admitted to a wider world, but you will be required to eat different things. You will become someone else.

Vickie is aware that she will change, but we readers notice, as Vickie does not, that the lives all around her are also in flux. Mutability, one of the fundamental, harsh facts of life, is a dominant theme of this story. Change is everywhere: Her grandmother is dying; her mother is expecting a new baby; Mrs. Rosen is travelling. Her awareness that nothing will ever be the same adds to the hard-headed Vickie's emotional state. At this point in the story, in the midst of all this shifting and instability, Cather seems to pose a question to both Vickie and the presumably more sophisticated reader: what can one rely on? What can Vickie carry with her into the future? If we have been paying attention, Cather has given us some strategies for facing change and uncertainty. Carry an open attitude. The examples of both Jim Burden and Niel Herbert tell us: don't condemn too quickly. Your certainties about the world will be challenged by other cultures and other people with their distinct, strange traditions. You will be proved wrong in your perceptions and assumptions—all frightening and discouraging inevitabilities. But—and this, I

believe, is the lesson from Grandmother Harris—as anyone, young or old, travels out in the world, she carries sustaining memories and customs from the past. As much as she liked grand French cooking, Willa Cather was not a food or cultural snob; she knew that the coconut cake served with pride by the Templeton family at the ice cream social represented another valued culture. Coconut cake—white cake with white icing, fluffy with freshly grated coconut (the best version has a lemon curd filling)—is a quintessentially Southern recipe: white, gooey, sweet, and absolutely, seductively delicious. Just as with the Shimerdas' cherished mushrooms, there is in it a feeling of place, locale, in those lemons, that sugar, and the coconut. So as you move out into unfamiliar territory, you can take flavoring from the past and some recipes. Then, when needed, you can bake yourself a taste of home.

## NOTES

1. Cather employs a rhetorical pattern of question and response throughout the novel to establish this theme.
2. Otto Fuchs uses a similar expression to explain to Jim Burden his grandmother's objection to anyone eating prairie dog (69).
3. This point is also made by Grandma Harris, who states that she would feel truly poor if their family could not support a gracious, welcoming parlor presided over by a well-dressed mistress (112-113).

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# “Driven by Starvation”: Hunger in Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*

STEVEN B. SHIVELY

The topic of hunger in Willa Cather’s fiction is no less filling than the topic of food; indeed, it yields a rich harvest for perceptive readers. Just as Cather’s treatment of food has proved to be complex and full of multiple meanings, so too the topic of hunger has many dimensions. Sometimes—memorably—hunger is stark and real: young Anton Rosicky in London, betraying the trust of his kind landlady and eating the Christmas goose; the Shimerda family in their dugout the first year on the prairie, eating Mr. Bushy’s discarded, rotting potatoes; stories in *Shadows on the Rock* of men forced to eat dogs in the winter wilderness of Quebec; the Navajo people chased from their land by Bishop Latour’s friend Kit Carson. In these and many other examples, however, Cather moves hunger beyond its literal reality and uses it for a variety of purposes: plot, character development, thematic reinforcement, and a way to explore the full range of how the human spirit responds to life. Hunger in Cather’s fiction becomes a site for transformation, an illustration of what Susan Rosowski called “the extreme intensity of the romantic impulse toward resolution” (207).

Cather probably would have counted hunger among those “physical sensations” which, she wrote in “The Novel Demeublé,” should not be “minutely and unsparingly” described (37). If hunger is only a physical sensation, it is not worth more than a passing mention. Cather’s approach—an expansive, symbolic presentation of hunger—is illustrated in the early *McClure’s* story, “On the Gull’s Road.” She brings together a dying—but beautiful—woman and a young, lonely artist, and both are moved by each other, by the sea off Italy, and by the “nations and navies” buried in it; those lost nations and navies evoke Troy and Greece and Rome, and fantastic, mysterious people. These are places and people, Cather writes, who can “ma[k]e life something more than the hunger of the bowels” (86). Later, in her essay on “Escapism,” Cather echoes this sentiment when she quotes Homer (in *Ulysses*) to affirm that people should not be “the slaves of the belly” (22). In the same essay she separates belly hunger from nobler hungers when she writes that the “Indian women” of the pueblos “experimented” through their pottery “with form and color to gratify something that

had no concern with food and shelter” (19). That observation comes close to summing up the project of Cather’s art as she wrote of people who made something more of life than the hunger of the bowels, or they died trying.

A good starting point for a study of hunger in Cather’s fiction is the textual analysis tool Token X on the electronic *Cather Archive*. A check of word frequency reveals a significant difference in Cather’s word choice. The word “starvation” is used only three times in the entire corpus of Cather’s fiction, and “starve” is used only five times, only once after 1920’s *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. But Cather uses “hunger” eighteen times and “hungry” sixty-four times. Indeed, “hunger” is the more suggestive term, the more evocative, the word that lends itself best to metaphor and multiple meanings. One can hunger for so many things. Relatively few people have known starvation, but all have known hunger. Starvation suggests an ending, complete denial, often even death, but hunger is motivation, desire, something one strives to satisfy.

Early on, even in the period when Cather was writing naturalistic, usually unhappy stories, hunger is commonly metaphorical rather than literal. In her first published story, “Peter,” the hunger is not for food, but expresses “the great hunger men felt” for the voice and face of Sarah Bernhardt (542). “Great hunger” indeed. It is this ability to perceive a human truth, to feel and to dream, to know the desire of the human soul that makes Peter’s suicide so moving to readers. One of the epigraphs for *The Troll Garden*, from Christina Rossetti’s poem “Goblin Market,” is “We must not look at Goblin men; We must not buy their fruits;/ Who knows upon what soil they fed/ Their hungry, thirsty roots?” The passage speaks to the mysteries of evil, resisting temptation, and the compelling nature of desire rather than to feeding one’s stomach. In “Eric Hermannson’s Soul” Cather puts Eric and Margaret atop a windmill to survey the world and each other and then tells us that “Margaret wondered if she would not hunger for that scene all her life” (376). If this woman, so worldly, had not been able to imagine even in some limited way the power of the moment, the suppressed spirit of this man, the untouchable beauty the world offers, then her abil-

Cather redefines the hunger theme, using stories to move beyond deprivation and starvation to express what she calls in *Archbishop* “the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring. . . .”

ity to transform Eric’s starved and beaten soul would have been completely false. Her power to imagine the hunger that lasts a lifetime allows her to touch Eric, and that touch will feed him for his lifetime. Cather did not, of course, give the feeling she labels as hunger only to beautiful, artistic women; also in “Eric Hermannson’s Soul” the primitive, the needy, the “cowering, sweating multitude” (359) gather together in the Lone Star schoolhouse on the Nebraska Divide to sing in a dozen dialects a hymn that “voiced all the vague yearning of these hungry lives, of these people who had starved all the passions so long” (362).

A closer look at Cather’s significant uses of hunger in two of her longer works reveals the complexities of her use of the hunger theme. Two later novels—*Shadows on the Rock* (1931) and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927)—demonstrate the ways this theme stimulated her throughout her writing career, even as she herself had less reason to be hungry for material possessions and success. Readers and critics have long noticed the importance of domestic ritual, including cooking and eating, in *Shadows on the Rock*; feeding the hungry is part of that domestic ritual, and hunger reinforces several of the novel’s key themes. Chief among these themes is continuity of cultural heritage—Cather writes that “The sense of ‘our way,’ –that was what [Madame Auclair] longed to leave with her daughter” (32-3). The notion of essential cultural traditions passed through the successive generations of female members of a family is strong when it comes to feeding the hungry. Back in Paris, Cécile’s grandmother had fed “poor old Bichet” (107); Euclid Auclair tells Cécile, “In very cold weather your grandmother would put a couple of bricks among the coals when she was getting supper, and old Bichet would take these hot bricks

down and put them in his bed. And she often saved a cup of hot soup and a piece of bread for the old man and let him eat them in the warm kitchen” (108). Then in Quebec Cécile’s mother continued the practice by feeding Blinker, the poor tender of the ovens for the baker, who “got no soup there” as “Madame Pigeon had too many children to feed” (20). Cather writes that “[Cécile’s] mother had begun to look out for Blinker a little before she became so ill, and he was one of the cares the daughter had inherited. . . . Madame Auclair felt sorry for the poor fellow and got into the way of giving him his soup at night . . .” (21). And now, in the novel’s present, Cécile, the third generation of Auclair women, not only continues to feed Blinker but also recognizes the needs of young Jacques Gaux and feeds him, first by “giv[ing] him a piece of good bread to eat” (62), later sharing a special cup of chocolate with him on All Saints Day, and then becoming his main source of decent sustenance.

This heritage of three French women feeding the needy serves not only to reinforce the importance of domesticity, but it also serves to establish an outward-looking concern in the novel. Some readers criticize *Shadows* not only for being too interior, too tied to crowded apothecary shops, to kitchens, to hidden cells, but also for being too insular in the narrow concerns of its main characters. But these women do not just care for their families—they have something of a missionary’s zeal in finding and caring for those in need. In each case, it is also clear that feeding the hungry involves considerably more than literal food. Even Jacques recognizes this in his childish way:

Much as Jacques loved chocolate (in so far as he knew, this was the only house in the world in which that comforting drink was made), there was something he cared more about, something that gave him a kind of satisfaction,—Cécile’s cup. . . . Before the milk or chocolate was poured, he liked to hold it and trace with his finger-tips the letters that made it so peculiarly and almost sacredly hers. Since his attention was evidently fixed upon her cup, more than once Cécile had suggested that he drink his chocolate from it, and she would use another. But he shook his head, unable to explain. That was not at all what her cup meant to him. Indeed, Cécile could not know what it meant to him; she was too fortunate. (103-4)

We might say she was not hungry enough—not for chocolate, but for beauty, for the sacred, for care and comfort, for elegance, for all of those things Jacques unknowingly longed for. Cécile wanted such things, but Jacques hungered for them.

Both the hunger of desperation and the hunger of inspiration inhabit this novel. The hunger of the empty belly oc-

curs outside the shelter of Quebec, either in historic France or in the wilderness. Auclair tells Cécile of a time “a long while ago” when Paris was under siege; “famine grew until there was no food at all” (148). In desperation the victims of the famine ate the powdered bones of the dead, which proved poisonous rather than sustaining. In the novel’s present, Father Hector tells of the terrible hunger he and Antoine Frichette endure on their trek to bring the sacrament to a man dying in the winter wilderness. Twice he uses the words “empty belly” (167) to express their hunger. Even heroic Pierre Charron justifies eating dog and *tripe de roche* (“a kind of moss”) to Cécile with the simple yet pointed statement, “Try starving once; it’s a long business” (216). While such statements emphasize the threats faced by the small, isolated village of Quebec, especially the dangers that lie outside the sheltering community, hunger is not without purpose. The hunger of Father Hector and Frichette is made sacred by their holy cargo, ironically bringing Eucharistic food to a dying man. Father Noël Chabanal, whose futile efforts as a missionary among the Huron are nevertheless inspiring, “lived upon fasting” before his martyrdom (174). Food deprivation is one of the ways by which the recluse Jeanne Le Ber becomes saintly: “If any dish of a rich or delicate nature was brought her, she did not eat it, but fasted” (155).

As much as *Shadows on the Rock* features wonderful food, its hungers (and its foods) are larger than themselves. Hunger resides among the stories that do not simply define a culture but also create it. These stories express the hungers of people separated from their homeland, the yearning hungers of the young and those who seek closeness to God, the longing hungers of the lonely and the spiritually deprived.

The foods that resolve those hungers—inasmuch as they can be resolved—are the foods of companionship, of comfort, of human attachments, of caring angels, foods of the soul and the spirit.

Hunger in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* illustrates typical Cather narrative techniques of using temporal distance and indirect narration to mitigate the horrors of hunger; furthermore she juxtaposes stories of

hunger with narratives of plenty. An early instance occurs when Bishop Latour makes his first trip to Ácoma; his guide Jacinto tells him the story of the people of the neighboring Enchanted Mesa, who, when a storm broke off their only passage from the top to their food source, “perished up there from hunger” (102). It is one of the few instances in Cather’s oeuvre of hunger resulting in death; this story, its awfulness already diminished by historic time and the indirect narration of Jacinto, is immediately followed by Jacinto’s explanation of the mesa of Ácoma as a sanctuary. Furthermore, the people of Ácoma, descended from relatives of those who perished on the Enchanted Mesa, triumphantly relish their victory over the spoiled Fray Baltazar.

Later in the novel, Cather tells the story of Don Manuel Chavez, who, as a sixteen-year-old soldier, was left for dead yet survived for several days in the desert with no food by eating cactus. By the time we hear his story, however, he has inherited wealth, bought the place of his trials, and become one of the wealthy favorites of the salon of Doña Isabella Olivares. Cather gives a brief account of Captain John Frémont’s expedition through the Rockies, noting that he and the other survivors of his party “had come half-starved into Taos . . . having eaten most of their mules.” That sentence is immediately followed by this: “Within twelve months everything had changed” (257). The change is the Colorado gold rush, and eventual growth, prosperity, and adventure. Cather mentions the early Spanish friars—long before the time of her priests—noting that in this hard country these early missionaries “thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks . . . broke long fasts by unclean and repugnant food” (291). But the stories of their troubles, presented as almost a history lesson, are immediately followed by the inspirational and happy story of Father Junípero Serra, who, in time of great need as he crosses the desert, finds salvation in the miraculous appearance of the Holy Family, who provide him with food and shelter.

The final story of hunger in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is truly awful. Cather acknowledges the horror:

The expulsion of the Navajos from their country, which had been theirs no man knew how long, had seemed to [Bishop Latour] an Injustice that cried to heaven. Never could he forget that terrible winter when they were being hunted down and driven by thousands from their own reservation to the Bosque Redondo, three hundred miles away on the Pecos River. Hundreds of them, men, women, and children, perished from hunger and cold on the way; their sheep and horses died from exhaustion crossing the mountains. None ever went willingly; they were driven by starvation and the bayonet, captured in isolated bands, and brutally deported. (307-8)



## THE AUCLAIRS' CUP OF CHOCOLATE



1 tablespoon ground cocoa powder  
1 scant tablespoon sugar  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
dash of ground nutmeg  
dash of ground black pepper  
small dash of salt (a few grains)  
1 cup whole milk  
1/8 teaspoon vanilla

With a fork, whisk the cocoa powder, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, and salt together in a mug. In a separate bowl or pan, heat the milk until it is quite hot but not yet boiling. Slowly pour the milk into the mug while whisking with the fork until the dry ingredients are fully incorporated. Add the vanilla, stir again, and enjoy.

Andrew Jewell

But this terrible scenario continues with the U.S. Government surprisingly admitting its mistake and permitting the Navajo “to go back to their sacred places” (312). When Bishop Latour first sees this homeland in the Canyon de Chelly, after the exile has ended, it is a place of happy, fulfilled people—as Cather writes, “it was like an Indian Garden of Eden” (313). While readers do not know this happy ending as the story of deprivation is told, we do know that the Navajo leader Manuelito has survived, that he still leads his people, and that the Archbishop is grateful God has let him see the righting of old wrongs.

Through such narrative techniques, Cather mitigates the horrors of deprivation so that hunger becomes an element in the crucible that transforms people, makes them quiet heroes. Even more, Cather redefines the hunger theme, using stories to move beyond deprivation and starvation to express what she calls in *Archbishop* “the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring . . .” (103).

This approach to hunger permeates much of Cather’s fiction, from the early stories of hungry pioneers on the Divide to her novels of characters who hunger for something

special in life. For Willa Cather hunger—even starvation—is not failure, not decline, not a wasting away of the spirit. It is not a political or social problem to be solved. Hunger in Cather’s fiction offers a shared language and a shared experience to name what Cather calls, in *My Mortal Enemy*, Myra’s “groping hunger for life” (74). As we feast on Cather’s foods, we would do well to remember the hungers that prompt the feasts.

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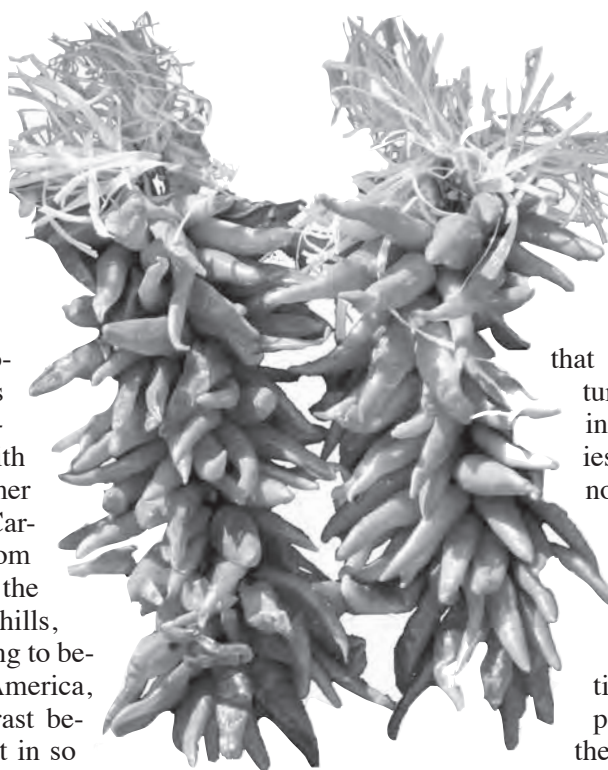
Photograph on previous page: Willa Cather’s baby cup by Betty Kort



# Learning to Like *Chili Colorado*: Constructing Culture in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

ESTHER M. LOPEZ

The first sentence of the Prologue of Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* establishes her concern with dining and agriculture: "One summer evening in the year 1848, three Cardinals and a missionary Bishop from America were dining together in the gardens of a villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome" (3). By choosing to begin her narrative in Europe, not America, Cather is able to set up the contrast between Europe and America present in so much of her fiction and to provide a European or "old-world" perspective on the territories recently acquired that year by the United States.<sup>1</sup> The view of the hills and the gardens that sets up these contrasts establishes Europe as a settled, easily navigable country, with cultivated gardens, as opposed to the "vague" new territory, "the middle of a dark continent" where Latour will soon find himself "wandering in some geometrical nightmare" (5, 20, 17). As the opening conversation between the Cardinals and Bishop Ferrand also makes clear, the French missionaries will find themselves entering into an already complicated political situation where they will be caught between the relatively new American presence whose authority they will help to establish and the Mexican and Indian population who prefer their traditional ways and are in most cases highly suspicious of the new American government. In this essay I argue



that Cather employs food and agricultural metaphors to illustrate the ways in which both the French missionaries and the Americans will and will not change as a result of their interactions with each other. Although the French missionaries come to respect the people of the Southwest, their insistence on imposing food and agricultural practices that they deem proper upon the people of the "new territory" betrays the extent to which the missionaries will not *completely* assimilate to their environment. At the same time, their presence and influence foreshadows the impending Americanization of the New Mexico territory.

In the prologue, Cather also establishes patterns of behavior associated with food and drink that will recur throughout the novel in at least three ways. First, a lack of discriminating taste is associated with life on the frontier. The missionary, Bishop Ferrand, is so eager to press his case that he offends his host by "neglect[ing]" his Burgundy, explaining that he has "lost [his] palate for vintages" while working on the shores of Great Huron. The loss of the Bishop's palate (taste) here foreshadows Father Valliant's subsequent acquisition of a taste for beans and chile over the course of his career in the Southwest. Second, Cather emphasizes the contrasts between Europe

and the Southwestern United States by employing landscape metaphors that are often meant literally: Ferrand tells the Cardinals that the new country will “drink up his [the new Bishop’s] youth and strength as it does the rain” (11); later, Latour reflects that the “old countries were worn to the shape of human life. . . . But in the alkali deserts the water holes were poisonous, and the vegetation offered nothing to a starving man” (290). Third, the prologue also sets up a racial hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> Ferrand refers to the church in this new territory as an “Augean stable” (7) and describes the Mexicans as “a naturally devout people . . . [who are] untaught and unshepherded” (9).<sup>3</sup> In referring to the church in the new territory as an Augean stable, the French priests are equated with Hercules, and the church with a large, smelly, dirty stable inhabited by thousands of animals. Racial stereotypes generally depict Mexicans (who are in charge of the church until Latour arrives) as smelly, dirty, and subhuman, or animalistic. When the Bishop visits Padre Martínez’s home (Martínez represents “the old order”), it might as well be an Augean stable, as its “disorder was almost more than his [Latour’s] fastidious taste could bear” (150). Martínez himself is described in animalistic terms. After first meeting him, Latour recalls that he appears “rather terrifying . . . with his big head, violent Spanish face, and shoulders like a buffalo”; when Latour meets him again in Taos, he notes that his face does not have “blank areas of smooth flesh, as in Anglo-Saxon faces” and compares his lips to “the flesh of animals distended by fear or desire” (33; 147). Ferrand also describes the Indians as possessing a proclivity for violence. Ferrand states that the new Vicar “will be called upon for every sacrifice, quite possibly for martyrdom,” because “last year the Indian pueblo of San Fernandez de Taos murdered and scalped the American Governor and some dozen other whites” (11). Ironically, Padre Martínez himself will later describe the Mexicans and Indians as “savage races” (155). This is not to say, however, that Cather does not present some characters from these groups in a positive light; I am arguing instead that she recognizes racial types. As Guy Reynolds argues, racial hierarchies had “loosened” during this period, so “previously polarized cultures” did interact with each other in ways they would not have in the past (163).

Food and drink figure prominently in distinguishing between those who possess good taste (civilized people) and those who do not (uncivilized people), and the racial hierarchy that Cather establishes ensures that for the most part, taste will be defined by Europeans. Taste, for Cather, includes the ability to appreciate good food and wine, such as Father Valliant’s onion soup; the recognition that such food is the product of tradition and history, an appreciation for the agricultural and domestic labor needed to produce such food, and a willingness to engage in at least some of this labor oneself. Finally, those who possess taste also understand the importance of ritual and take the time to appreciate social

customs such as business lunches and parties. Those who possess taste do not inhale their food as Trinidad Lucero does. The line between those who possess good taste and those who do not does not always break down neatly along racial lines, but there are clear patterns, and the first chapter of the narrative demonstrates what the missionaries will find valuable and worth preserving in their new environment.

After Latour makes it out of his “geometrical nightmare,” he finds himself in the oasis of *Agua Secreta*, where he meets a kind family who immediately take him in. In one of Cather’s best known sources, the *Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf*, William J. Howlett quotes an English traveler, George F. Ruxton, who visited New Mexico and Colorado in 1846. Ruxton reinforces various stereotypes regarding Mexicans and Indians, and interestingly, he also finds that the Pueblos are “partially civilized” and maintains that they “cultivate the soil in a higher degree than the New Mexicans themselves” (Ruxton qtd in Howlett 260). Yet the “brilliant gardens [and] boy driving a flock of white goats toward the stream” that the Bishop spies when he arrives at *Agua Secreta* seem to belie Ruxton’s idea that New Mexicans are inferior to Pueblo cultivators of the land and suggests that such divisions fall not along racial but community lines (24). Latour’s meal there, which consists of “a pot of frijoles cooked with meat, bread and goat’s milk, fresh cheese and ripe apples,” is the result of some care being taken to make what is presumably homemade cheese made from the local goat’s milk (25). Given Cather’s approbation for homemade items and the miraculous nature of Latour’s sighting of the settlement, the community is certainly meant to earn the reader’s approval. The community does conform to Ruxton’s description in that everyone is illiterate and many are anti-American, and the anti-American sentiments voiced in this episode do intimate that if the missionaries will not fully assimilate to their environment, these new Americans will not assimilate to their circumstances either. And while Cather displays respect for agricultural communities such as this, the reader learns that Latour and Valliant find New Mexican agriculture and the diet it yields somewhat backward when they discuss foods they no longer have access to.

What is lacking in New Mexico, as far as both Latour and Valliant are concerned, are vegetables and other staples. When Valliant first arrives in New Mexico, he laments the lack of things like olive oil and lettuce. And as the editors of the Scholarly Edition note, Valliant’s bemoaning of the lack of lettuce is curious because recorded eyewitness accounts and evidence from excavations at Santa Fé “disclose a substantial list of European cultivars grown in New Mexico during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” including lettuce and carrots (Dunmire & Tierney 41). So, either Cather did not know that a wider variety of vegetables were cultivated than she allows for in the narrative, or she chooses to exaggerate in order to highlight the difficulties the mis-

sionaries have adapting to their new environment and to help solidify the racial hierarchy grounded in questions of taste she has created.

Even today, one marker of the extent to which newcomers have embraced a new identity as New Mexicans is the degree to which they exhibit a passion for one of the state vegetables (even though technically, it's a fruit), chile. Chile, in New Mexico, is spelled with an e, and refers to both the pepper itself and the sauce made from it. For the French missionaries, who find it overly spicy, it is an acquired taste. Latour asks for his portion of lamb without chile at the christening feast in *Agua Secreta*, and Valliant cooks his own lamb leg at Señor Lujon's to prevent it from being cooked (and to his taste, over-cooked) with onions and chile. Like the French missionaries themselves, chile is also an immigrant. In *Wild Plants of the Pueblo Province*, William Dunmire and Gail Tierney assert that chile was "native to Mexico" and brought to New Mexico by the Spaniards (41). Like all varieties of chile, though, it "originated near Boliva" (Martin). Of course, although chile is not originally native to New Mexico; after its introduction various new varieties were developed. And although Latour refers to it as a "condiment" (31), I would argue that this is something of a misnomer, as the sauce that is made from it is central to New Mexican cuisine. If chile, then, is both an immigrant and an essential part of New Mexican life—much like the French missionaries themselves—then the missionaries' initial distaste for it can be viewed as one marker of the degree to which they have not assimilated. At the same time, given chile's own immigrant status, its presence also indicates that, contrary to Latour's idea that *Agua Secreta* is "older than history," the history of New Mexico has been one of conflict and change from the beginning (33).<sup>4</sup> And although the arrival of the French priests did indeed change New Mexico, such changes were not one-sided.

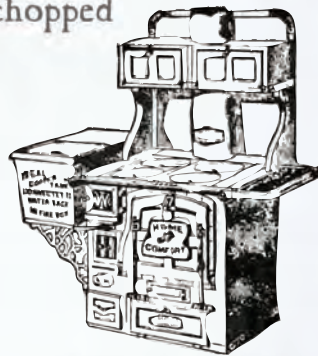
The French priests impact the new diocese's food and culture, as the early Spanish missionaries like the ill-fated Baltazar did, but inevitably, they are affected by their life in this new territory as well. The degree to which such impact becomes reciprocal is perhaps most evident when one examines the case of Valliant. Although Latour certainly appreciates fine cuisine, Valliant is more preoccupied with food. He is the one who "instructs" Fructosa in cookery and Señor Olivares "always gave Father Valliant something good for the palate, and Father Latour something good for the eye" (187). Yet by the time he inveigles Latour to send him back to Arizona on a missionary trip, Valliant's tastes have changed; he argues that he has "almost become a Mexican," citing as evidence that he has "learned to like *chili colorado* and mutton fat" (217). The "almost" is important here, because if on the one hand he identifies with the Mexicans—an identification rooted in part in a shared diet based on local food—on the other hand, he still recognizes

Even today, one marker of the extent to which newcomers have embraced a new identity as New Mexicans is the degree to which they exhibit a passion for one of the state vegetables (even though technically, it's a fruit), chile.

that he is not a Mexican either. This recognition is based on a sense of racial superiority. Despite his deep affection for the Mexicans and his corresponding ability to appreciate some aspects of their culture, he persists in seeing them as "little children" who are "not thrifty" and have "no veneration for property, no sense of material values" (216).<sup>5</sup> Of course, Valliant does not have much "veneration for property" as far as his own person is concerned; he accumulates property for a collective entity, not an individual. Moreover, he does recognize that the U.S. is a materialist culture and that some respect for thrift is warranted in this new era. One might argue that this is especially true in the "wild frontier" he describes to Latour, where the lost souls he yearns to minister to are "like seeds, full of germination but with no moisture" (215). In his biography, Howlett also employs essentialist characterizations like those mentioned to Mexicans and Indians; after extensively quoting Ruxton, the English traveler mentioned earlier, Howlett takes some issue with his characterization of the people but also asserts that although Ruxton's "pictures" were "exaggerated," there was "a semblance to truth and nature in them" (263). Howlett goes on to state that Machebeuf's letters indicate that, while he did find "depravity" among the Mexicans, he also found "much good" (263). This characterization of Machebeuf's letters resonates with Valliant's characterization of the Mexicans as a child-like people whose seeds of faith he longs to help germinate. His new taste for *chili colorado* and mutton fat then, are indicative of his relationship to the people: he will tend them as one tends plants, and in so doing, feel a deep connection to them. But at the same time,

# CALABACITAS

- 16-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained,  
or one small box frozen corn  
[or an equivalent amount of fresh corn, cut off  
cob]
- 3 fresh zucchini approximately 8 inches long,  
sliced ½-inch thick
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 4-ounce can green chilies, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- cheddar cheese, grated
- vegetable oil



In a heavy skillet with a small amount of vegetable oil, sauté the corn, zucchini, and onion. Cover and steam until tender. Add the green chilies and salt and pepper to taste. Heat thoroughly, and serve hot with grated cheddar cheese.

The Mabel Dodge Luhan House  
Taos, New Mexico

his status as a gardener, not a part of the plant itself, reveals his paternalism, a paternalism rooted in his belief in a fixed racial hierarchy.

By “harvesting” lost souls via his missionary work, Valliant (and Latour) change the metaphorical landscape of the territory, and in so doing, they prepare the way for the Americanization of it. Yet at the same time, since Valliant and Latour are French, not American, their relationship to the Americans is also somewhat distanced. Reflecting on the private lives of French missionaries in the United States, Michael Pasquier notes that many of them felt a sense of “disorientation” which they responded to “by performing a sort of double life . . . as public representatives of a supposedly static church and as private colleagues concerned with

the actually dynamic state of affairs in different parts of the United States” (19). The “double life” that Pasquier refers to here is perhaps nowhere more evident than at the end of the narrative when Latour reflects upon his retirement. Unlike Valliant, Latour never expresses a taste for *chili colorado*, and he even contemplates retiring in France. However, “in the Old World he found himself homesick for the New,” even though “he enjoyed his dinner and his wine, and the company of cultivated men” (286; 287). That Latour finds “cultivated men” in France but prefers New Mexico because of the “peculiar quality in the air of new countries” is striking in that his presence in New Mexico contributes to the very cultivation he flees in France (287). Latour believes that “this peculiar quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvest,” but seems content to contribute to this process, by urging the young missionaries “to encourage the Mexicans to add fruit to their starchy diet” (278). That Latour finds it necessary to advocate such encouragement demonstrates the extent to which the Mexicans remain invested in their own agricultural practices. They are willing to adopt some new agricultural practices, but will do so slowly, and at their own pace. Meanwhile, Latour is able to enjoy his own mix of the Old and the New while waking every morning feeling like “a young man” (287).

In asking these young missionaries to continue the work that he had already started, as indicated by the presence of cuttings from his fruit trees “yielding fruit in many Mexican gardens,” Cather indicates that the Americanization process has begun and that the “dark continent” will indeed “bear harvest” (209; 20; 287). One might further argue that by ending her text in

the new world, Cather acknowledges the march of progress. The two hundred year old apricot tree that Latour discovers in what becomes the place of his retirement also symbolizes the coming together of cultures, in that it, like the peach trees mentioned throughout the book, was originally cultivated in China and Europe, and “introduced to the New World by Spanish colonials” (277).

Nevertheless, the “tip-tilted green field” Latour recalls at the end of the novel is in France, not New Mexico, and while this makes sense given that Latour is “returning home,” other factors undermine the idea of celebration that Latour’s future orchard represents. For if the apricots he grows there also recall the peaches scattered throughout the novel, it is worth noting that Kit Carson “cut down the terraced peach

orchards” of the Navajos in driving them from their country (308). As Guy Reynolds argues, this portrayal of Carson undercuts the mythic portrayal of him earlier in the novel and contributes to Cather’s “conflicting interpretations of American history” (167). Moreover, since Baltazar dies when his peaches are “just coming ripe,” the “two thin, half-dead peach trees” Latour sees at Ácoma reveal that even when change occurs it will not necessarily last if it is implemented in an overly aggressive manner (118; 108). In this context, Latour’s reflection that “his diocese changed little except in boundaries. The Mexican were always Mexicans, the Indians were always Indians” seems to betray Cather’s own ambivalence about the changes occurring in the Southwest.<sup>6</sup> Of course, things will change, and while the addition of more fruits and vegetables to starchy diets is a good thing, such changes may come at the cost of the “individuality” that Latour misses when the plaza begins to fill with “incongruous American building[s]” (282). If “Man was lost and saved in a garden,” the garden that blooms in the Southwest will not be entirely to Cather’s liking (279).

#### NOTES

1. See John Murphy’s historical essay in the Scholarly Edition, 333-34.

2. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson emphasizes that contemporary scholars need to remember that people in the early twentieth century “recognized biologically based ‘races’ rather than culturally based ‘ethnicities’” (6).

3. The idea that Mexicans are ignorant yet “naturally devout” recalls George Frederickson’s concept of “romantic racialism.” Although Frederickson applies this concept to black-white relations, his theory resonates with Cather’s depictions of some of the Mexicans in the novel. According to Frederickson, “romantic racialists acknowledged that blacks were different from whites and probably always would be, they projected an image of the Negro that could be construed as flattering or laudatory in the context of some currently accepted ideals of human behavior and sensibility. At its most tentative, the romantic racialist view simply endorsed the “child” stereotype of the most sentimental school of proslavery paternalists and plantation romances and then rejected slavery itself because it took unfair advantage of the Negro’s innocence and good nature. . . . A further development of the romantic racialist position was to deny unequivocally that these traits constituted inferiority, and its logical extreme was to argue . . . that the Negro was a superior race—‘the choice blood of America’—because his docility constituted the ultimate in Christian virtue” (101-2).

4. For example, the corroded medals, the bell, and the apricot trees all show a history at work before the French priests arrive. The editors of the Scholarly Edition note that the “corroded medals” are “intended by Cather to emphasize

the complex history of New Mexico” (401).

5. This description clearly aligns with Fredrickson’s romantic racialism paradigm since it is the child-like nature of the Mexicans that makes them so religious.

6. Here I also have in mind Cather’s response to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant upon her return from a visit to New Mexico. Cather remarked to her that “to quit industrialized urbanity, to explore on horseback ancient America where primitive pioneering conditions still prevailed, and the overwhelming drama of nature still ruled men’s minds and thought, must have been . . . an immense relief from wounds and world problems” (164). This comment seems to me to demonstrate Cather’s desire that New Mexico remain relatively unchanged.

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## Cather's Virginia Remembered in Shenandoah University Exhibit

Since May 2010, the Winchester-Frederick County Visitor Center on the campus of Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia, has featured "Willa Cather: Virginia Remembered." Mounted by the Willa Cather Institute of Shenandoah University, this elegant small exhibit displays "Historical Artifacts and Contemporary Photographs Celebrating Willa Cather's Virginia Heritage." The exhibit focuses on places and persons Cather portrayed in her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), which is set in Cather's Virginia birthplace during the 1850s, the last decade of slavery. The centerpiece of the exhibit is mid-nineteenth century portraits of Willa Cather's maternal great-grandparents, Ruhamah Lemmon Seibert and Jacob Seibert, who were prototypes for Sapphira and her husband in the novel. These portraits hung in a family home on "Hollow Road," where Willa Cather almost certainly saw them, until the 1960s; they were then inherited by a family member and kept in storage until recently, when the owners lent them to the Cather Institute. Nearby, the exhibit showcases



*Pictured above: Portraits of Ruhamah Lemmon Seibert and Jacob Seibert, prototypes for Sapphira and Henry in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, by an anonymous itinerant artist. Loaned to Willa Cather Institute by Kay Muse Bolliger and Joyce Muse Cornell.*

an elaborate album quilt made in the village of Back Creek Valley, Willa's home, in the 1850s; it is embellished with many names of Cather relatives and neighbors and evokes the tightly knit community into which Willa was born. The quilt was the gift of the local Robinson family, also Cather relatives.

Contemporary photographs are eloquent reminders of how much of the Virginia that Willa Cather knew and wrote into her novel is still visible, including her childhood home, Willow Shade, her nearby birthplace at her grandmother's house, and the eighteenth-century "Mill House," home of Ruhamah and Jacob Seibert, where much of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is set. The Shenandoah exhibit certainly fulfills its goal: to introduce viewers to Cather's Virginia both in the pages of her novel and as it still exists. Maps and a brief tour guide of local sites are available, for readers who would like to tour Willa Cather's Virginia, with a copy of *Sapphira* in hand.

*For more information about the exhibit and the Willa Cather Institute at Shenandoah University, contact the Institute's director, Professor John Jacobs (jjacobs@su.edu).*

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