



In This Special Scholarly Edition . . .

~The Willa Cather Foundation looks back at the 2008 Willa Cather Conference Symposium and presents a number of papers from that event, all relating to *One of Ours*.

~Rebecca J. Faber draws upon her deep knowledge of the biographical and historical contexts of Cather's Webster County.

~Julie Olin-Ammentorp brings her past work on Edith Wharton's wartime writings to Cather, elaborating upon the two authors' shared attitudes toward cultural issues.

~Diane Prenatt reads *One of Ours* in relation to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's *Shadow-Shapes* and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.

~Chamion Gustke offers a reading of *One of Ours* in which she focuses on the idea of "mission."

~Jeanne Collins presents a redux of a 1999 object lesson on the Roger Group sculpture mentioned in "The Sculptor's Funeral."



Willa Cather

Newsletter & Review

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Cather and Her Contemporaries, *One of Ours*, and the 2008 Spring Conference

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Editor, Special Edition

This issue brings together four of the papers presented as part of the scholarly symposium held in Red Cloud at the first day of the Spring Conference in June 2008. Beginning with 2006, each Spring Conference in even-numbered years includes such a symposium. In 2008, our theme was "Cather and Her Contemporaries." (An aside: 2010's conference—to be held June 3-5—has as its theme "Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing." See call-for-papers on page 25.) During the day's symposium we heard these papers plus others on Cather and her reviewers, the Pulitzer Prize, Martha Graham, Zora Neale Hurston, and other figures. These symposia offer a fine opportunity for graduate students, scholars new to Cather studies, and regular contributors to present their work in a focused, day-long context. The symposium then carries into the Spring Conference proper, for last year we heard an address from Richard Harris, historical editor of the scholarly edition of *One of Ours* and, as part of "The Passing Show" panel, a keynote address on "Cather and Her Contemporaries" by Chuck Peek. His remarks were ably augmented by Nancy Chinn, David Porter, Guy Reynolds, and Ann Romines.

And since *One of Ours* was the highlighted novel and the conference group visited Bladen and G. P. Cather's grave, much of the discussion centered on that novel. As the four essays included here demonstrate, Cather's art in that transitional book may be readily seen as moving from the parish to the world. Rebecca J. Faber, drawing upon her deep knowledge of the biographical and historical contexts of Cather's Webster County materials, defines the relation between Mrs. G. P. Cather and Enid Royce Wheeler. Following, Julie Olin-Ammentorp brings her past work on Edith Wharton's wartime writings to Cather, elaborating their shared attitudes and Cather's awareness of many of the same cultural considerations that animated Wharton. Taking up Cather's fascinating and long-neglected relation with Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Diane Prenatt reads *One of Ours* in relation to Sergeant's *Shadow-Shapes* and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Finally, Chamion Gustke offers a reading of *One of*

Ours in which she focuses on the idea of "mission"—one of the very considerations with which Faber began in her exploration of the Webster County cultural bases of *One of Ours*. Together, these four papers offer another cogent analysis of Cather's composition of that novel. This issue also includes a redux of a 1999 object lesson on the Roger Group sculpture mentioned in "The Sculptor's Funeral," by Jeanne C. Collins, who also gave a paper at the symposium.

Among the participants in last year's symposium were two of ours who now, most sadly, are no longer among us: Nancy Chinn (Baylor University) and Merrill Maguire Skaggs (Drew University). As I've said, Nancy participated in the Passing Show panel but she also chaired a session at the symposium and, most especially, she introduced one of her students, Adrienne Akins, to the World of Willa Cather during that weekend. Following Nancy's interests, Adrienne gave a paper on Cather and Hurston—but more than that, she revealed in what she saw and heard in Red Cloud as confirmation of what she had learned from her mentor Nancy. Clearly, Adrienne was but one of many. In keeping with such fostering, this issue also includes a memory of Nancy by Anne L. Kaufman.

Last June Merrill Skaggs was also among us, generously participating in all the sessions, anticipating the Elderhostel she was about to direct just after Spring Conference. Unequaled among critics on the subject of "Cather and Her Contemporaries," Merrill had over the years given many presentations on Cather and other writers and, most emphatically, had just published *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2007). It complements her august *After the World Broke in Two* (1990), to my mind one of the great and most perceptive critical studies of Cather's art. This past June, the 2009 International Cather Seminar in Chicago concluded with a memorial to Nancy and Merrill both. In the same vein, this issue of the *Newsletter and Review* is dedicated to them: they embodied just what we are and the values we all celebrate through Cather's most intellectually demanding and very humane art.

Scholarly Contributors

Jeanne C. Collins completed her doctoral dissertation on Cather from the University of Northern Colorado. Now retired, Jeanne taught English in the Aurora, Colorado, Public Schools and at the University of Northern Colorado.

Rebecca J. Faber earned her Ph.D at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln where she studied with Susan J. Rosowski and wrote her dissertation on the historical and biographical contexts of *One of Ours*. Her publications have appeared in *Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather*, and *Teaching Cather*, and elsewhere. She is Assistant Director of Career Services at the University of Nebraska.

Chamion Gustke received her Ph.D. from George Washington University in 2008, where she wrote her dissertation on privileged white women in frontier settings in Jewett's *The Country of the*

Pointed Firs, Cather's *A Lost Lady*, and Ferber's *Giant*. She now teaches English at Belmont University in Nashville. Her recent work includes a paper on Cather and T.S. Eliot's modernism at the last International Seminar in Chicago.

Julie Olin-Ammentorp is a Professor of English and of Gender and Women's Studies at Le Moyne College. She has published on Adrienne Rich, Henry James, and Edith Wharton and her *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War* appeared in 2004. She has presented at the International Seminars in France and Chicago and has an essay forthcoming in *Cather Studies* 8.

Diane Prenatt is Professor of English at Marian University, where she teaches American and European literature. She has published on representations of ethnicity and domestic life in American literature, has an essay forthcoming in *Cather Studies* 8, and has presented at the International Cather Seminars in France and Chicago. She is at work on a biography of Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant.

Cover photograph by Betty Kort. This is one of the beautiful stained glass windows located at the Grace Episcopal Church in Red Cloud where the 2008 Scholars' Symposium was conducted.

Bladen and Salvation: Mrs. G. P. Cather and Making of Enid Royce

Rebecca J. Faber

University of Nebraska—Lincoln

In many interviews Willa Cather was explicit about the way in which she chose and developed the ideas for her works. Cather destroyed (or ordered destroyed) the notes and drafts from her works, making it very difficult for researchers to find the clues to pull together the prototypes and sources for her novels and stories.

In a 1921 newspaper article entitled "Willa Cather Lauds the Pioneer Mother," Cather spoke to a reporter about where her ideas came from and how she set about to develop them. She does not gather material for her stories, Cather explained; they have come to her from personal experience: "I always intended to write, and there were certain persons I studied. I seldom had much idea of the plot of the other characters, but I used my eyes and my ears." Her characters "are all composites of three or four persons," Cather continued; "I do not quite understand it, but certain persons seem to coalesce naturally when one is working up a story." All an artist needs "is the eye to see" (*Lincoln Sunday Star*, 6 November, 1921; Bohlke 44, 45, 46).

If Cather only needed "the eye to see," then it becomes the task of the researcher to find the objects of her vision, to trace the people and incidents of her life and surroundings to determine the "composites of three to four persons" who might be the background for any of her characters. To do so is important to understanding the realism of such characters and the broader issues of the text. Cather realized this need for a reader to see beyond just the characters. In a 1934 letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood, Cather writes that people never seem to understand that a story is constructed from a specific feeling or excitement. She emphasizes that a story is more than just body parts from a person's close and not-so-close friends (Stout 1214: 180).¹

Cather was aware that many readers concentrated on the "who" but not the "what" of the story. Yet one cannot completely separate the two concepts, especially in *One of Ours*, where Cather has openly acknowledged both the "who"—her cousin G. P. Cather—and the "what"—the intense need to tell his story. In another letter to Sherwood written in 1945, just two years before Cather's death, Cather confesses that incidents in her life have always affected her strongly and that she believes that this is the reason why she always has had sufficient material to write about. She notes that she does not so much create as she recalls and reconstructs. She does not remember people and incidents consciously, but they come back to her as if they had been



June 1910 wedding photograph of G. P. Cather and Myrtle Bartlett Cather. Photograph courtesy of University of Nebraska Libraries, Archives and Special Collections.

transcribed there (Stout 1704: 268-69).²

In her essay, "Miss Jewett," Willa Cather writes that in looking at a packet of letters from Sarah Orne Jewett she discovered this idea: "The thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper—whether little or great, it belongs to Literature" (*Not Under Forty* 76), words that explain how Cather came to write *One of Ours*. In a letter dated March 8, 1922, to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Willa Cather wrote that the novel is about her cousin Grosvenor who was very much like her but also very different from her. He could never escape the pain of who he was except through action, and his actions often turned out badly. While Grosvenor turned to action, Cather turned to imagination. For many years they had nothing to do with each other. Grosvenor felt antagonism toward his cousin for the life she lived, and Cather recalled that he would curl his lips when she recounted the trips and experiences of her life that had so little meaning for him. But in 1914 just as the war broke out, Cather was staying at the George Cather farm and, for a week, as they hauled wagonloads of wheat to town, they talked in ways that they had not for many years.

G. P. went to France in July of 1917 and was killed there in May of 1918. That something so magnificent could happen to someone so void of hope moved Willa Cather to write about her cousin, not out of affection, but because she could not escape it. For three years she toiled over the novel. G. P. was such a part of her, she wrote to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, that she felt that some of her was buried with him and that some of him was still living in her (March 8, 1922).³ Through her correspondence with Fisher, the insight into the *why* of Cather writing *One of Ours* is apparent: to provide a tribute to her cousin who did find meaning for his life through his death. G. P. Cather's life and death were a story that "tease[d] the mind" and, for Cather, needed to become literature. Cather's decision to write about G. P. followed his death at Cantigny in 1918, but portions of this story developed as far back as 1914 when war was declared in Europe during that summer when Willa Cather spent so much time with her cousin. When the news of his death reached her she was just completing *My Ántonia*, which was published in September 1918, just as the war was ending. Cather began writing the novel in 1919, titling it "Claude" after the main character whose life would be at the center of the book.

In *One of Ours*, Claude's disastrous marriage to Enid Royce provides one of the most provocative elements of the

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(Continued)

novel; readers love to hate Enid. Given Cather's admission that she grafts three or four characters together, any understanding of Enid begins with the obvious—G. P. Cather's wife. In June of 1910, G. P. Cather married Myrtle Bartlett of the Catherton area. Willa Cather did not attend her cousin's wedding; she did not visit Nebraska between October of 1909 and June of 1912. Myrtle Bartlett was in Texas during Cather's 1909 visit but was in Bladen during Cather's 1912 visit. It appears that to develop the character of Enid, Willa Cather drew heavily from her cousin's wife.

Myrtle Edith Bartlett was born April 16, 1884, the only daughter and only surviving child of Nelson C. and Addie D. Bartlett of Glenwood Precinct (directly northeast of the Catherton Precinct and about 3-1/2 miles southwest of Bladen) in Webster County. She had had a brother, Albert N., who lived from 1886-1894. According to the *Bladen Enterprise*, Myrtle's father, Nelson Bartlett, was "one of our well-to-do and successful farmers" (29 May 1896) as well as a trustee of the Bladen Episcopal Church (17 September 1909). Myrtle's mother, Dorothy Adeline (Addie) McCulla Bartlett, had been born in Richmond, Carleton County, Quebec, Canada, and had moved to Nebraska to live with her sister, Mrs. E.W. Tuttle. She married Nelson Bartlett in September of 1879. Addie Bartlett was a religious woman, having been converted during a revival conducted in 1895, then joining the Methodist Episcopal Church (*Blue Hill Leader*, 27 June 1941). Mrs. Bartlett was the president of the Glenwood Township Sunday School Convention (*Bladen Enterprise*, 22 January 1897).

Little is known about Myrtle Bartlett's early life. When she was eleven, she joined the Methodist Church at Plainview, then transferred her membership to the Bladen Methodist Church, where she remained a member until her death in 1960. Regarding her education, Myrtle attended Plainview school, Nebraska Wesleyan, and the State University in Lincoln (*Blue Hill Leader*, 13 October 1960: 1). In 1903 she moved with her parents to Bladen, where she spent most of her life. She seems, however, to have done quite a bit of traveling with her mother, particularly in Texas. The July 2, 1909, issue of the *Bladen Enterprise* notes that Nelson Bartlett paid for a subscription for Myrtle Bartlett of Eagle Lake, Texas, until January 7, 1910 (4).⁴ In January of 1910 he extended that subscription for Myrtle in San Antonio until July 7, 1910. G. P. Cather renewed his subscription at the same time, listing his address as Route 1, Bladen (*Bladen Enterprise*, 7 January 1910: 1). The May 20, 1910 edition of the *Bladen Enterprise* notes that "Mrs. N. Bartlett and daughter, Myrtle, returned home yesterday after an absence of almost two years in Texas, where they have been, greatly benefited [sic] in health" (Supplement). On June 8, three weeks later, Myrtle Bartlett married G. P. Cather at her parents' home. Myrtle's father, Nelson Bartlett, built a house directly across the street east from his home for the young couple. The deed to the house shows Myrtle Bartlett Cather's name from 1911 until January of 1919.

In *One of Ours*, Cather used Enid's character to examine one of the vexing social issues of this period—Prohibition. Using Enid Royce, Bayliss Wheeler, and Brother Weldon, Cather developed three characters who share this strong anti-drink commitment. And, in doing so, she has captured a

controversy that existed in Nebraska, well documented in the Bladen area during the pre-war years. Both sides of the issue were represented in Webster County. In a May 19, 1904 letter to his father, G. P. Cather writes from Grand Island where he was attending school, "Mr. Emerson, the temperance lecturer in town this week is a fine speaker. He has moving pictures to illustrate his lectures." He continues, "I never heard how the election came out in Bladen over the liquor question. I suppose the temperance [sic] people won though." The April 6, 1906 issue of the *Red Cloud Chief* announces a visit by Mrs. Carrie Nation who traveled the country trying to enlist as much support as possible for the Prohibition stance. The article, entitled "Carrie Nation in Town," reads

Carrie Nation, of Kansas, "blew" into Red Cloud Tuesday morning from the west. While it was generally known that she would arrive, there were few people at the depot to greet her—no brass bands or committees . . . Her mania for destroying saloon property has afforded her the opportunity of posing as a martyr to the temperance cause, and she probably has seen the inside of more jails than any other living woman.

Tuesday was election day and, the saloons being closed, Mrs. Nation had no opportunity to wield her famous hatchet on the bar fixtures of the saloons of Red Cloud.

Mrs. Nation delivered two lectures at the M.F. church during her stay, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, both of which were well attended. Her talks consisted in the main of a tirade against the Republican party, including President Roosevelt and, as is usual wherever she appears, the temperance cause was injured more than it was benefited [sic]. She succeeded in disposing of a number of miniature hatchets at fancy prices.

Mrs. Nation is a typical Kansas freak, but differing entirely from Jerry Simpson, Mary Ellen Lease, Annie Diggs, et al., in that the latter were possessed of brains.

Mrs. Nation left Wednesday morning for the east. (Nebraska State Historical Society—Red Cloud) Obviously, feelings about Prohibition ran high. The front page of the April 2, 1909 *Bladen Enterprise* announces the topic of an April 4, 1909 Revival Meeting at the Methodist Episcopal Church as "Is the Temperance Movement Losing Ground or Gaining?" (1). The following week the newspaper gives the results of the local election, a contest that was tinged with anti-drink sentiments:

At the village election held Tuesday for the purpose of electing three trustees for the village of Bladen, two of the candidates on the no-licence [sic], or dry, ticket were elected, and the third was tied with a candidate on the high-licence, or wet, ticket . . .

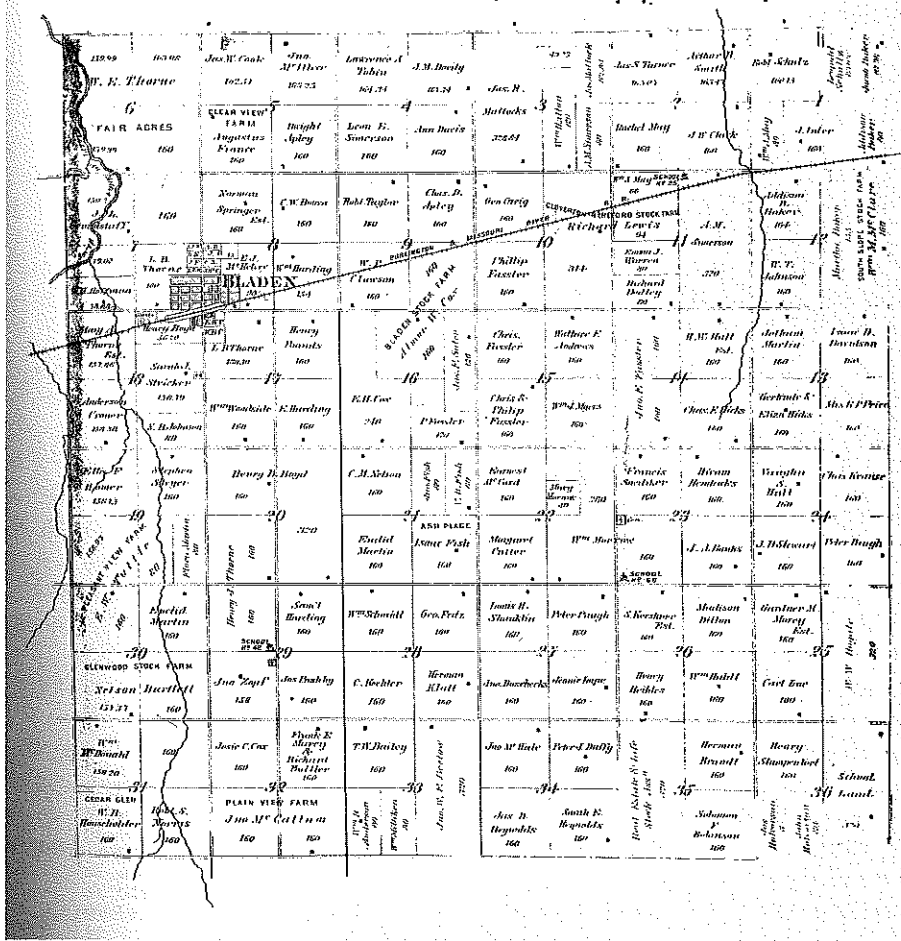
It had been expected that the election would be close . . . The result assures a "dry" town for at least another year. (*Bladen Enterprise* 10 April 1909: 1)

Prohibitionist rallies became commonplace. The *Bladen Enterprise* of July 9, 1909 cites that "A patriotic and temperance meeting was held in the afternoon [July 3] at the Plainview church . . . 'A Drunkard's Life' was rendered by Miss Lambert.

PLAT OF
GLENWOOD

Scale 2 Inches to the Mile.

Township 4 North, Range 11 West, of the 6th Principal Meridian.



Plat of Glenwood Township published in *Webster County: Visions of the Past* by Mabel Cooper Skjelver: M.R. Cooper-Skjelver (1980).

Dr. Martin was the orator of the day. ‘Why I Hate the Saloon’ was his theme” (1). Three weeks later, in the July 30, 1909 issue, the newspaper announced a visiting speaker:

Mrs. Florence D. Richards, who has been before the public for twenty-two years as a lecturer on literature and temperance subjects, in lecture courses at chautauquas, college and high school commencements, Fourth of July and Decoration Day celebrations and other special occasions will speak August 10th before the Chautauqua assembly [at] Red Cloud under the auspices of the W.C.T.U. Mrs. Richards is considered one of the leading attractions of the Chautauqua. (*Bladen Enterprise* 30 July 1909: 5)

Myrtle Bartlett Cather was a member of the local W.C.T.U., devoted to working against the legal sale of alcohol. Her local W.C.T.U. chapter was active in the community, even sponsoring an oratorical contest for children. In April of 1910 the *Bladen Enterprise* carried this announcement: “Anti-saloon and temperance rally at M.E. church Sunday evening. Every lover of truth cordially invited” (1 April 1910: 3).

As this demonstrates, Enid’s fervor in the novel to “save the world” is not fanaticism invented by Cather; it is a

direct reflection of a social movement alive in Nebraska during the years both before and after the war. Cather writes that Enid “had gone to Frankfort to a meeting of the Anti-Saloon League. The Prohibition party was bestirring itself in Nebraska that summer, confident of voting the State dry the following year, which purpose it triumphantly accomplished” (*One of Ours* 173). Claude Wheeler’s friends, Len Dawson and Ernest Havel, are just as devoted to stopping Prohibition as Enid and Bayliss are committed to it. When it came to Prohibition, Nebraska neighbors often opposed each other.

Personal views translated into political views at the ballot box. Each community had choice over its “wet” or “dry” status, and neighboring communities frequently voted differently. The April 8, 1910 issue of the *Bladen Enterprise* notes that “The result of the village election Tuesday was the election of the three ‘wet’ candidates for the village board . . . by overwhelming majorities.” However, “Red Cloud went dry. Blue Hill and Campbell voted to remain wet by small majorities” (1). Two years later, local elections would again show divided responses; the April 12, 1912 issue of the *Enterprise* reported that by nine votes Red Cloud voted to remain dry while both Bladen and Superior voted “wet” (1).

According to *Tower on the Plains*, a history of Lincoln, Nebraska, “Lincoln had been the center of an effort to enact a prohibitory amendment in the state constitution in 1890” (102). Willa Cather would have encountered this controversy as she was attending the University in Lincoln during the first half of the 1890s. In 1908, Carrie Nation visited Lincoln (*Lincoln City Guide* 76); her visit may have had

some impact because in “1909 the drys won in Lincoln by 3349 votes and the saloons were closed. Two years later the wets won and the saloons were opened. Lincoln did not go dry again until the national prohibition years—1919-1933” (*Tower on the Plains* 102). Despite its “wet” status, in 1920 Lincoln was the site of the national convention of the Prohibition Party when it nominated William Jennings Bryan as its candidate for President (*Lincoln City Guide* 77). Bryan refused the nomination.

In the novel, Enid ultimately leaves Claude to go to China, planning to care for her sister Carrie who had been serving as a missionary there before problems with her ill health. Myrtle Cather had no sister. However, it seems that Myrtle did a great deal to help to bring China to Bladen. She was a very active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Bladen, which was deeply interested in the plight of China and its need for missionaries. In developing the character of Enid, Willa Cather relied on her knowledge of the missionary spirit that had developed in G. P.’s community. An article in the October 9, 1908 issue of the *Enterprise* tells of

a missionary [sic] who has spent forty years in China, gave talks at the Methodist Episcopal church Sunday morning and evening of the work that is going on in that

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(Continued)

country. She described the conditions in that country in detail Sunday evening, describing the people, country, mode of living and the way they sell their children and give them away. (5)

Almost three years later, the *Bladen Enterprise* showed a continued interest in this topic and added its editorial voice:

Rev. Hendren was soliciting funds this week for the suffering people in famine stricken China where thousands are dying for want of proper food and where children are being sold into slavery by their parents for a small pittance of food to stay the pangs of hunger and that the child may have food. In our position with prosperity and plenty we little realize what want and suffering means, and out of our bounty we ought to give some amount to this worthy cause. \$1.00 in China will go a long way in supporting a human being. (7 April 1911: 1)

Myrtle Cather actively participated in the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The program of an upcoming meeting published in the August 2, 1912 issue of the *Bladen Enterprise* notes that Mrs. G. P. Cather, Jr. will speak on "Our Medical Missionaries" and that her mother, Mrs. Bartlett, will present a section of the program entitled "Our Hospitals and Dispensaries" (2 August 1912: 4).

The Women's Foreign Missionary Society of Bladen helped to send two young women to China as missionaries. The first, a Miss Ellison, a graduate of the Taylor University of Upland, Indiana, visited Bladen in 1912, staying with the Householder family of that community. The newspaper noted that she "has been preparing herself for missionary work in foreign fields and will leave in the near future for China" (*Bladen Enterprise* 30 August 1912: 1). In October the *Enterprise* published "Methodist Church Notes," suggesting that

The Missionary Society should be commended for its way in raising money to help pay the outgoing passage of Miss Ellison, missionary to China.

Miss Ellison was at the campmeeting this summer and at the prayer-meeting at Plainview first following the campmeeting. She gave a fine talk about her purpose as a missionary. (4 October 1912: 4)

The *Enterprise* recorded a succession of local programs focused on China. The following month the Foreign Missionary Society met at Myrtle Cather's home with a program that included "China's Break with the Past," a leaflet entitled "Storm and Stress in China," "The Grappe [sic] with the Opium Evil, Yuan Shi Kai's Work" (given by Myrtle Cather), a story entitled "An Amazon in Cathay," and "Religious Liberty in China" (1 November 1912: 1). The meeting in February of 1913 featured a program about China and Bengali [sic] (7 February 1913: 1).

The following month the topic was the Chinese Church (7 March 1913: 1). In April the meeting was again at Myrtle Cather's home with a program about medical missions, especially its value in China (4 April 1913: 1). The May topic was the literature of China (4 May 1913: 1).

Much of Myrtle Cather's social life centered on her church and its commitment to world-wide missionaries. According to the *Enterprise*, on April 23, 1913, "Mrs. Rev.

Jackson and Mrs. G. P. Cather went as delegates to Trumbull . . . to attend a district meeting of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society" (1). Elections at the Bladen Methodist Episcopal Church in July of 1913 resulted in Nelson Bartlett on the committee for Foreign Missions and Myrtle Cather as President of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society (1 August 1913: 1). A few weeks later the paper reported that "Mrs. Rev. Jackson and Mrs. G. P. Cather, Jr., are in attendance at the Topeka branch of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society in session at Beatrice at this time. The meetings will be attended by delegates from Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa,

Missouri and a part of South Dakota" (10 October 1913: 1).

Also attending that meeting was Ethel Householder, a local woman who was about to become a missionary in China, an event of some importance in Bladen. A reception in her honor was held shortly before her departure, and the Methodist Church notes in the *Bladen Enterprise* relate that "The reception at Plainview church for Miss Ethel Householder ought to command the attention of the whole community. It is an honor for this community to be represented in the Missionary field, and we feel that Miss Ethel has prepared herself to be in every way a fit representative" (7 November 1913: 1). The program included a speech by Miss Householder on "China, as I anticipate it" and a response and prayer by Nelson Bartlett (8). The *Bladen Enterprise* covered the event and provided a long editorial about the subject under the title "Miss Householder Goes to China"; a portion follows:

So we should not be surprised that one in our own midst should receive the call to work in the foreign field; rather we should congratulate ourselves that one of our number has had the desire for this work and has fitted herself for the great duties of evangelism.

We are proud of the fact that Bladen is sending such a loveable character as Miss Householder to teach to a benighted people the teachings of the meek and lowly Jesus. . . .

Miss Ethel will soon leave for an extended sojourn in western China where she goes in the capacity of a Christian missionary. . . .

Miss Ethel is a genuine Christian lady, full of grace and truth, and in addition to this she has thoroly [sic] prepared herself for the work which she is to do. She thus goes splendidly equipped to carry the light into the darkest recesses of the earth. . . . we were being honored because one so well fitted for this great work was being called from our own community and that our



Bladen Methodist Church as of November 23, 1911. Photo by Mrs. Richard Larrick, *Webster County: Visions of the Past* by Mabel Cooper Skjelver: M.R. Cooper-Skjelver (1980).

prayers and love would accompany her across the seas. (14 November 1913: 1)

The same issue included an article written by Mrs. Nelson Bartlett entitled "Why Did Miss Householder go to China?", providing answers based on faith and God's will. Mrs. Bartlett ends with the statement: "Her great sacrifice for the Chinese should inspire us for greater work in the home-land for the cause of missions" (8).

Approximately six months later, in May of 1914, the *Enterprise* printed a letter from Ethel Householder in which she described her trip to China and mentioned that Miss Ellison was with her (1 May 1914: 4). Another letter from Ethel Householder was published two weeks later as she thanked Bladenites for their donations and requested their prayers for the workers among the Chinese people (15 May 1914: 4).

When Willa Cather visited her cousin G. P. in Nebraska in August of 1914, she would have been aware of both Myrtle Cather's involvement with the Women's Foreign Missionary Society and the community's interest in foreign missionaries, specifically Miss Householder, "one of theirs." There is also a direct relationship between Ethel Householder and Myrtle Bartlett Cather since Householder wrote to Mrs. Bartlett and Myrtle in 1915 thanking them for the Sunday School material they had sent her (29 October 1915).

Cather's treatment of the character of Enid shows a lack of sympathy for Enid's cause. According to Mildred Bennett in *The World of Willa Cather*,

Miss Cather's stated antagonism against missionaries to China may have come from her dislike of a Red Cloud girl who married a dentist and went to China as a missionary. When she returned several years later with many curios, linens and objects d'art, Willa suspected that she had acquired them by some sort of mis-dealing with the natives. She could not endure the exploitation of possessions and experiences when this woman charged for her lectures. Willa felt that the ancient civilization of China could get along quite well without our cultural interference. (136)

While Myrtle Bartlett Cather never left her husband to go to China as Enid did, two things are clear. First, she devoted a great deal of her time to the Women's Foreign Missionary Society and its interest in sending missionaries to China. Second, Myrtle Bartlett Cather and G. P. Cather spent a consistent amount of time away from each other during their marriage. In 1912 they spent two months apart. Myrtle spent from December 1913 until May, 1914, away from her husband. Myrtle often travelled with her mother to locations to improve her mother's health; G. P. took hunting trips and visited automobile shows. So Cather's fictional account of Enid Royce Wheeler's interest in missionaries and action to leave her husband hold believable ties to the lives of G. P. and Myrtle Cather.

Myrtle Bartlett Cather survived her husband by forty-two years, continuing to live in Bladen, teaching Sunday School, giving music lessons, and taking care of her mother following her father's death in 1922. She never remarried, and she and her mother continued to travel south for their health. Mrs. Bartlett suffered an attack of pneumonia and died in 1941 (*Blue Hill Leader* 20 June 1941). Myrtle Bartlett Cather died at Mary Lanning Memorial Hospital in Hastings, Nebraska, October 4, 1960. Her obituary noted that

Her life was sweeter because of the willingness to help those needing a helping hand and gave liberal support to numerous charitable institutions. Great generosity was also accented by her special interest in foreign missionary work in different countries; and her Bible was a source of great strength and comfort . . . Her friendly disposition and cheerful smile will be greatly missed by a host of friends and those who loved her most. (*Blue Hill Leader* 13 October 1960: 1)

Myrtle Bartlett Cather is buried next to her husband near Bladen in the East Lawn Cemetery.

Myrtle Cather's estate stipulated that a sizable sum of money be left to her church; the money was used "for a new electric organ, chimes, and a piano" (*Bladen Centennial* 33). She left a large amount of money to the United Methodist Women of the Bladen Methodist Church in trust; each year they can only spend the interest on it. She also left money to St. Paul's Theology School in Kansas City; each year one student receives a scholarship, known as the Myrtle Cather Scholarship, funded by the interest on that money.

As this discussion demonstrates, Willa Cather drew consistently from Myrtle Bartlett Cather to develop the character of Enid Royce Wheeler. In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather suggests that in many ways Myrtle Bartlett Cather was more "Enid-ish" than the character portrayed in the novel (Cather to Fisher 13 March 1922). Just how much of Myrtle Bartlett Cather exists in Enid is something readers can only speculate about. What we do know is that Cather tied Enid's character to the reality of the Prohibition movement in Nebraska and to Bladen's fascination with missionaries in China, two themes in Willa Cather's home community that she crafted into her novel.

Notes

¹ Eagle Lake is located about one hundred miles west of Houston, and Myrtle Bartlett's uncle, William McCulla (her mother's brother) died there in March of 1909 where he had gone for health reasons, according to the March 19, 1909 edition of the *Bladen Enterprise*.

² Personal interview with Geneva Lewis, August 1993. Ms. Lewis is the current owner of the G. P. Cather/Myrtle Bartlett Cather home.

³ The name *Carrie* is a Cather family name, that of Willa Cather's paternal grandmother and of G. P. Cather's oldest sister.

⁴ Personal interview with Geneva Lewis, August 1993.

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Managing Editor's Note:

When Bob Thacker, our new issue editor, sent me the files containing the scholarly articles for this issue of the *Newsletter*, I began reading Becky Faber's paper immediately because it was on top. And as I read, I became increasingly interested—and amused. Her article deals with one of my mother-in-law's aunts, Ethel Householder. Believe me, we heard plenty through the years about the wonderful life Aunt Ethel led as a missionary in China! But what immediately came to mind was the temperance issue. Ron's father, who had a delightful sense of humor, used to joke about the absurd lengths his wife's family went to in order to avoid alcohol in any form. Becky's paper confirms in no uncertain terms the family's temperance issues and my father-in-law's unguarded opinions.

As I read, I also realized that buried in my basement somewhere was a photograph of all ten Householder sisters—the



The Householder sisters—including Aunt Ethel. Photograph courtesy of the Kort/Householder Family Collection.



Virgil Albertini presents the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship to Mindy J. Blunk at the 2009 Willa Cather Spring Conference. Mindy is from Carleton, Nebraska. She was graduated from Bruning-Davenport High School. Her proud parents are Jack and Judy Blunk. The scholarship is given annually to a high school senior woman planning to attend a college or university and majoring in English. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

two brothers, one being my husband's grandfather, were not included. I found the photograph and talked to both Bob and Becky about this extraordinary image; both thought it should be included with the paper. However, though I know Ethel is one of the ten, I don't know which one. My husband's mother named them and recited their histories any number of times—and they were quite accomplished women, but we paid little attention and now his mother is deceased. No one wrote the names on the back, darn it! Therefore I did not feel that it was appropriate to add it to Becky's ever so well documented paper. However, I decided that *Newsletter* readers might enjoy the photograph and a little of its history as a postscript to the scholarly article.

Finally, it has been impossible to ignore Becky's discussion of Cather's dislike for *missionaries to China*—pointedly that would be Ethel. Many people in south central Nebraska have served as prototypes or partial prototypes—Cather, as Becky points out, always had three or four persons in mind for any given character. We did not know that we had a prototype in our family though, and the reaction has been interesting. We would prefer to be related to the prototype for Enid rather than say Wick Cutter, for example, but, more to the point, we probably have more empathy now for the families of those who have been pointed out or suggested as prototypes in Cather's real and imaginary portrayals of the people she knew in her early years. Small towns in this area are replete with examples, and some families to this day have not forgiven Cather for sharing their families' foibles and secrets with the world. My husband and I are not going quite that far.

—Betty Kort

Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, and American Soldiers in France

Julie Olin-Ammentorp

Le Moyne College

In the spring of 1918, about a year after the United States had finally declared war on Germany, Edith Wharton addressed a group of American soldiers in Paris, a talk which she would revise to become the introduction to her book *French Ways and Their Meaning*. Her goal in both her speech and *French Ways* was to provide American soldiers an introduction to French culture—first, in the hope that their American behavior would not offend French sensibilities; second, and more positively, to urge U.S. soldiers to appreciate the accomplishments of the French and carry some aspects of French culture back home after the war. Both the negative and positive aspects of this goal were implied in her urging American soldiers not to focus on “what America can teach France” but rather on “finding out what France can teach us” (264).

As this summary may indicate to those familiar with Willa Cather’s work, Edith Wharton’s concerns about American soldiers and her admiration of French culture were much like Cather’s. Placing Wharton’s “Talk to American Soldiers” side by side with Cather’s First World War novel, *One of Ours*, suggests that Cather’s Claude Wheeler and the men under his command would have been the perfect audience members for Wharton’s speech.¹ Like Wharton, Cather loved and admired France and French culture—an attitude reflected from her earliest European travel writings (collected in *Willa Cather in Europe*) through many of her novels, most notably *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*.² Reading *One of Ours* in the light of Wharton’s “Talk” illustrates the extent to which Wharton and Cather—authors usually assumed to be fundamentally different from each other—shared the same fears about, and hopes for, American soldiers in France, once the United States finally joined the war.

Indeed, Cather and Wharton are rarely compared, perhaps largely because they are seen as so different (see Fryer). In biographical terms, for instance, Cather was from a Virginian and Midwestern middle-class family, Wharton from New York City’s upper class; insofar as each drew on her biographical background in her work, their novels differ significantly in subject. In most of their work, too, their styles are notably different, with Wharton (particularly in her best-known works) being self-consciously epigrammatic and often satirical, while Cather is known for her equally conscious and yet apparently unselfconscious, “transparent,” and generally non-ironic prose. Certainly Cather’s celebrated portraits of hardworking, self-reliant Midwestern women differ dramatically from Wharton’s best-known heroines: Alexandra Bergson and Lily Bart exist in the same historical framework, yet function in what seem to be entirely different social and physical worlds. And surely Wharton’s frequently satirical portraits of Midwesterners (such as Undine Spragg in her 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country*) have done little to endear her to the readers who admire Cather’s Alexandra and Antonia.

And yet the attitudes and fundamental beliefs of these two authors, both so important to American literature of the first

half of the twentieth century, have much in common—perhaps in no area more so than in their love of France and French culture. For instance, the extraordinary similarities of the two texts central here illustrate the extent to which, particularly in the context of the First World War, their interests coincided.

Among other matters, Wharton and Cather were both concerned about how American soldiers would comport themselves in France. Although Wharton’s letters about American soldiers are almost uniformly glowing, her speech reveals some anxiety about the way Americans might behave—not on the battlefield, where she was sure of their abilities, but “at the rear,” where they were posted in French cities and towns. For example, she tells the soldiers that, accustomed to being able to buy certain things in the United States, they may have been frustrated not to find these things in France—and that they may have consequently assumed that France was culturally inferior to the U.S. because of these absences. In her short 1918 novel, *The Marne*, she depicted such a scene. Troy, her main character—a young American man who has lived in France as well as the U.S.—is frustrated with this attitude:

They wanted to know, in God’s name, where in the blasted place you could get fried hominy and a real porter-house steak for breakfast, and when the ball-game season began, and whether it rained every day all year round; and Troy’s timid efforts to point out some of the compensating advantages of Paris failed to excite any lasting interest. (78-79)

Wharton’s most extreme example of American provincialism in France in *The Marne* is not a soldier but a young Midwestern woman, Hinda Warlick, who has come over to “carry America right into the heart of France.” She tells a group of American soldiers, “We must teach her to love children and home and the outdoor life; and you American boys must teach the young Frenchmen to love their mothers” (61). Wharton drives home Hinda’s ignorance by summarizing the young woman’s sense of French history: “she appeared to think that Joan of Arc was a Revolutionary hero, who had been guillotined with Marie Antoinette for blowing up the Bastille” (60). (Hinda is fairly representative of Wharton’s portrayals of Midwesterners—though to Hinda’s and Wharton’s credit it can be said that Hinda eventually comes to understand that the French already support all the “values” she thinks she has come to teach them.) In her speech to the soldiers, Wharton addresses the issue of the American assumption of cultural superiority by asking the soldiers to entertain a certain cultural relativism. She notes sensibly that “tastes are bound to differ in different countries,” and asks the soldiers, with dry humor, to reflect that “liking corn-beef hash for breakfast instead of a roll and butter is not a necessary proof of superiority” (266). In short, she encourages them not to treat the French as people possessed of only a second-rate civilization.

In an essay written for *Red Cross Magazine*, entitled “Roll Call on the Prairies,” Cather also expressed concern about

Cather, Wharton, and American Soldiers

(Continued)

how U.S. soldiers would behave in France—observing that many of the soldiers themselves were concerned about this issue. In Nebraska, she writes, proud parents are reading aloud the letters sent home by their sons. She notes that “The most amusing were those which made severe strictures upon American manners; the boys were afraid that the French would think us all farmers! One complained that his comrades talked and pushed chairs about in the Y hut while the singers who came to entertain them were on the platform. ‘And in this country, too, the Home of Politeness! Some yaps have no pride,’ he wrote bitterly. I can say for the boy from our town that he wanted to make a good impression” (28-29). This is a concern she also portrays in Claude Wheeler, who tells the soldiers under his command about “the bad reputation Americans had acquired for slouching all over the place and butting in on things,” and “urge[s] them to tread lightly” (277).

As helping American soldiers “make a good impression” on the French was one of Wharton’s primary goals in her speech, how much Claude would have appreciated it if his men could have heard the straightforward and practical advice which Wharton gave her audience. For instance, she explains how *politesse*, or “politeness,” works in French commerce:

When you go into a shop, for instance, perhaps you just stroll in as you would in New York or London, and say, “I want so and so—”

Well, that is not the way it’s done here. In France, in the humblest shop or restaurant, when a customer goes in he is expected to lift his hat and say, “Bonjour, Monsieur,” or “Bonjour, Madame,” before he asks for what he wants; . . . And when it is handed

to him, he is expected to say “Merci, Madame” or “Monsieur,” and to repeat the bow and the “Bonjour” when he goes out. (266-67)

She explains that “If [the soldier] omits all this, he will very likely meet glum faces,” and that the French may “see a personal affront where none was intended” (267). She tells the soldiers that “You may regard this as making a lot of fuss about trifles; but our daily life is mostly made up of trifles, and . . . politeness,

8.

help us, as they did ~~used~~ before. And they would probably have been a good deal surprised to find that everything we ate and smoked and drank was different — and not nearly as nice, to their taste. But what should we have ~~said~~ ^{thought} if they had immediately begun by saying that it was France’s mission to educate America? It seems rather more sensible to conclude that tastes are bound to differ in different countries — and, at any rate, that liking corn-beef hash for breakfast instead of a roll and butter is not a necessary proof of superiority.

But perhaps you will agree to this, and say that, nevertheless, you find the people you come in contact with in hotels and shops and trolleys are not always as pleasant as you had expected. Well — perhaps you don’t always know the rules of the game — the game of politeness. ^{You must remember that} They are very different in Latin and Anglo-Saxon countries, and nine-tenths of the surface-misunderstandings are due to the fact that ~~we~~ English and Americans don’t realize what importance the Latin races attach to certain little ceremonious observances.

When you go into a shop, for instance, perhaps you just stroll in as you would in New York or London, and say: “I want so and so —”

Well, that is not the way it’s done here. In France, in the humblest shop or restaurant, when a customer goes in he is expected to lift his hat and say: “Bonjour, Monsieur,” or “Bonjour, Madame,” before he asks for what he wants; and if he does, the chances are he will get the article more quickly — and perhaps it will cost him less. And when it is handed to him, he is expected to say “Merci, Madame” or “Monsieur”, and to repeat the bow and the “Bonjour” when he goes out.

Sample of Edith Wharton’s typescript for “Talk to Soldiers,” a portion of which is quoted below (266-267). Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

men go back to the “grocery shop” where they have already tried the patience of the shopkeeper. This time, however, Claude is with them, and on entering the store, Claude’s habitual politeness and his bits of French lead him to the proper behavior:

Claude took off his hat respectfully, and performed the bravest act of his life; uttered the first phrase-book sentence he had ever spoken to a French person.

. . . Looking the old woman in the eye, he steadily articulated:

though it sometimes takes a little longer, is in fact a short cut, since it carries us straight to the heart of the people to whom we show it” (267). Further, she notes that the current historical context—that is, the war—makes it more important than ever that American soldiers exercise *politesse*: “it seems to me that politeness is most especially due . . . when one has come to help that country in a terrible crisis, and when she [i.e. France] is bound to bear with everything from the people who have come to her aid” (267).

Cather illustrates the importance of “politeness” vividly in one scene in *One of Ours*. In a small French town, Claude finds “nine of his men in nine different attitudes of dejection . . . Sergeant Hicks explained that they had been trudging about the town, looking for cheese.” Hicks cannot remember the French word for cheese and has lost his French phrasebook. He and the

"Avez-vous du fromage, Madame?" It was almost inspiration to add the last word, he thought. (262)

The doffed hat, the "Madame"—if Claude does not follow Wharton's suggestions to the letter, he nevertheless captures the spirit of *politesse* that she encourages. And of course Claude finds that his good manners and a little bit of French do get him the "results" Wharton promises. Now that the shopkeeper understands what the men are looking for, she takes Claude "by the sleeve, pull[s] him out of the shop, and r[uns] down the street with him"—taking him to a *fromagerie*, where cheese can be purchased (262).

The trip to the *fromagerie* proves a success from a gastronomic standpoint, but a disaster from a cultural one. The American soldiers get the cheese they so desire, but behave greedily, not even attempting to be polite. Worse, they ignore the shopkeeper's protests "that there was a restriction on milk products; . . . she could not sell them so much" (262). Cather does not mince words, explaining that the soldiers "fell upon her stock like wolves. The little white cheeses that lay on green leaves disappeared into big mouths. Before [the shopkeeper] could save it, Hicks had split a big round cheese through the middle and was carving it up like a melon." The shopkeeper, appalled, "told them they were dirty pigs and worse than the Boches, but she could not stop them" (263). "Worse than the Boches"—damning words indeed. Of all the men, Claude is the only one who has any idea why she is so upset. When he tries to explain to Hicks ("apparently there's some sort of restriction; . . . we've about cleaned her out") Hicks' response typifies American soldiers at their worst: he imagines he can placate the shopkeeper with money and a gift of sugar. "'One of the fellows . . . told me you can always quiet 'em if you give 'em sugar,'" he says, then asks the woman in English, as he holds out a handful of money, "'What's the matter, ain't this good money?'" (263). Cather's perspective now switches to that of the French shopkeeper: "She was distracted by the noise they made, by their bronzed faces . . . crowding so close to her. . . . [S]he made rapid calculations[,] intuitively that "The money that lay in their palms . . . was a joke to them. . . . Behind them were shiploads of money, and behind the ships . . ." (last ellipsis in the original), and decides to charge them each two and a half times what the cheese is worth (263).

The shopkeeper's overcharging the soldiers resonates with a point which Wharton makes in her speech: "When I spoke just now of the grumpiness of some French shopkeepers, and said it might be due to your not always knowing the French forms of politeness, I daresay you thought to yourselves: 'That hasn't been our experience. The people we've dealt with have been polite enough, but they've cheated us in every way they could'" (268). The soldiers in the *fromagerie* are unaware they've been cheated, but Cather's brief excursion into the shopkeeper's consciousness explains why such cheating might occur: the Frenchwoman does not see herself as "cheating" the soldiers in the usual sense. In fact, having decided to overcharge them by two and a half times, she makes change scrupulously. But as they leave the shop, she tells them (in French

which they cannot understand) "what big stupid they were, and that it was necessary to learn to count in this world." Cather tells us (surprisingly) that the shopkeeper "liked them well enough," but adds that she "did not like to do business with them . . . fictitious values were distasteful to her, and made everything flimsy and unsafe . . . She liked them, but not the legend of waste and prodigality that ran before them—and followed after" (263-64).

This is surely a point with which Wharton would have agreed: the French are more conservative financially, and less prone to waste, than Americans. Cather's depiction of the men devouring nearly the entire supply of cheese for a whole village illustrates the French point of view on what the soldiers might see as "having a healthy appetite" and "patronizing local business." By the standards of someone like Claude's father, the shopkeeper has not been invaded; she has simply done a wonderful morning's worth of business. But this is not an attitude the shopkeeper would condone: from her perspective, the men are shamefully wasteful—wasteful of her cheese and of their own money. In her speech to the soldiers, Wharton provides another possible explanation for behavior like the shopkeeper's. Asking the soldiers to reflect on the general question of cheating "foreigners," she wonders whether such cheating might happen "in our American cities, if there were suddenly poured into them a few hundred thousand helpless foreigners with money in their pockets? Or has the millennium really come in America? I didn't know it had" (268).

Of even graver concern to Wharton and Cather, the behavior of Claude's men suggests that some American soldiers might worsen, rather than improve, the crisis in France. Cather drives this point home in recounting the Frenchwoman's thoughts: "All this was not war, —any more than having money thrust at you by grown men who could not count, was business. *It was an invasion, like any other.* The first destroyed material possessions, and this threatened everybody's integrity" (264; italics added). In a way, the American "invasion" is worse than war: "threaten[ing] integrity" is, from a cultural standpoint, even worse than the destruction of material possessions.

"When people ask me if it has been a hard or easy road, I always answer with the quotation, 'The end is nothing, the road is all.'" —Willa Cather

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Cather, Wharton, and American Soldiers

(Continued)

If, on one hand, Wharton and Cather were concerned with the behavior of American soldiers in France, they were, on the other, also optimistic that some American soldiers could, in Wharton's phrase, "learn from France." Wharton reminded the soldiers that the France they were seeing was a country already worn down by nearly four years of warfare. This is the France that Claude sees: at one point he reflects that "There was nothing picturesque about [the ruins], as there was in the war pictures one saw at home. A cyclone or a fire might have done just as good a job. The place was simply a dump-heap" (307). Yet even in this state France is admirable; soon after Claude sees the "dump-heap," a little French girl shows him the ruins of "a church—evidently one of the ruins of which they were proudest—where the blue sky was showing through the white arches" (308). Wharton, too, reminded her audience of how much there was to admire in French culture, remarking not only on "the beauty of the cities[,] "the great Museums[,] and the brilliance of French literature, but also on "the splendid roads[,] "the perfection of the vegetable and fruit-culture[,] and "the scientific care of the great forests" (263)—the last two in particular being accomplishments that would resonate with Claude. For he is particularly impressed, even moved, not only by French architecture, but also by the care the French take of their gardens and trees, even when these are half-ruined by war. Moreover, he is impressed by the order and beauty of the two households in which he stays—the Jouberts' and the Fleurys—families which go on stoically in spite of having lost their sons to the war—a scenario Wharton also portrays in her novel *A Son at the Front*.

Near the end of her speech, Wharton asks her American audience to look beyond the superficial differences that separate France and America in order to see "how close the real French heart is to the American heart" (269). Claude, and Cather, would agree with Wharton's point overall—but might want to point out that there is more than one kind of "American heart." The "French heart" may be very like David Gerhardt's—David who

has a certain French irony in his observation to Claude that the war is "a costly way of providing adventure for the young" (339). And, ultimately, the "French heart" is like Claude's—though it has taken a world war to bring Claude to France in order to discover this. But there is another kind of American heart,



This photograph from Edith Wharton's files illustrates nicely a passage from *One of Our* where Claude sees sky through the ruins of a bombed church and thinks how proud the French are even of their ruin. (See quoted passage (308) on previous page in this article.) Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

the kind belonging to Claude's fathers and brothers—that is, to those who care only about material possessions. Because of his own rich cultural background, David (for all his abilities) cannot really comprehend Claude's honest remark that "I never knew there was anything worth living for, till this war came on. Before that, the world seemed like a business proposition" (338-39). In France, Claude finds what Cather found both on the East Coast and in France, and what Wharton so valued in France: a different way of doing and seeing things, an approach to life that does not put financial success above all other goals. The young Frenchwoman Mlle. Olive articulates this point for Claude. Discussing the people of her town who have returned since France has regained it from Germany, she says, "They must love their country so much . . .

when they endure such poverty to come back to it . . . Even the old ones do not often complain about their dear things—their linen, and their china, and their beds. If they have the ground, and hope, all that they can make again. This war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feeling matters."

Exactly so [Claude thinks]; hadn't he been trying to say this ever since he was born? Hadn't he always known it, and hadn't it made life both bitter and sweet for him? (312)

While his comrades Hicks and Dell Able daydream about starting a garage back in the U.S. after the war, Claude daydreams about farming—but in France, not in Nebraska. For Claude, the point is not the farming itself, much less the money-making, but rather the privilege of living in a culture where "the

feeling matters,” where, as Cather writes in another passage, daily life was “reinforced by something that endured . . . against a background that held together” (328). In the end, this is the same belief that the *fromagerie* shopkeeper holds: the integrity of the system is more important than the individual, and certainly far more important than individual greed or individual profit. Her “cheating” the soldiers is, paradoxically, also a defense of the central tenets of the society which Claude comes to admire: the appreciation of personal and cultural integrity over material possessions.

In concluding her speech, Wharton urged American soldiers to observe the wonders of French civilization around them:

I beg of you, now and then, to spare a little time to look at [Paris]—at the great buildings, the beautiful squares and avenues and parks and fountains and bridges.

We all take a pride in our cities at home—but sometimes we’re inclined to think they’re beautiful enough because we live there. The French think, on the contrary, that, because they live in Paris it’s their duty to keep on making it more and more beautiful When they have any public improvement to make, they try to make it beautiful as well as useful. . . .

I ask you to look about you here, and notice the beautiful things, and send home pictures of them, especially of the things we might all have—the splendid solid walls along the rivers, the beautiful bridges, the perfect roads, the exquisitely kept public parks and gardens.

Send home as many pictures of them as you can, and try to get the people at home to copy these things in the measure in which they can. The more beautiful our towns are the more we shall all love them (270, 271)

Wharton’s message would not have been lost on Claude—had he survived the war and decided to return to the United States.

It is possible, of course, that Wharton and Cather exaggerate the importance and beauty of French culture. One reviewer of Wharton’s *French Ways and Their Meaning* certainly thought so, asking caustically, “Can it be possible that America will survive this apologist and France this defender?” (Tuttleton 273). Claude’s mother echoes this reviewer when she thinks that Claude “died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be” (370). Indeed, Claude’s idealism is such that it would be hard for “any country” to be as fine as his imagination of it—and yet he surely would have enjoyed a chance to discuss the many admirable aspects of French culture with Mrs. Wharton, who, in turn, would have been delighted to meet a young man of such perception. Surely Claude Wheeler is an illustration—perhaps, coming from the pen of a Midwesterner, a better one than Wharton herself could have fashioned—of exactly what both Wharton and Cather wanted American soldiers in France to think about: not what they could “teach France,” but rather “what France could teach” them.

Notes

¹ Doing this, of course, puts a fictional audience—Claude Wheeler’s men—in a historical setting in a way that conflates history and fiction. As Cather critics have observed, however, her work often follows historical models closely. Further, the proximity of history and fiction for both Cather and Wharton, particularly in this period, is suggested by the fact that the commanding officer of G. P.

Cather (Willa Cather’s prototype for Claude Wheeler) was Theodore Roosevelt Jr., son of Wharton’s friend Theodore Roosevelt. (See Harris 667.)

²The 2007 International Seminar in Paris and Tarascon, France, highlighted the extent of Cather’s admiration of French culture; many papers from this conference are forthcoming in *Cather Studies 8: Willa Cather: A Writer’s Worlds*.

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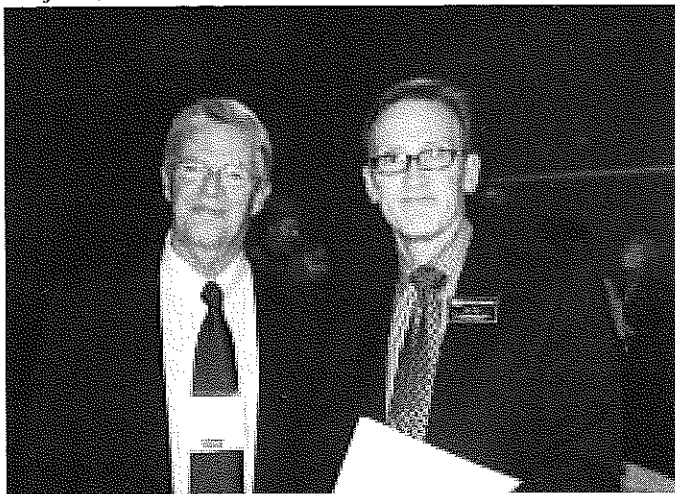
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Spring Conference Features Willa Cather "On Deck"

Charles Peek and John Murphy

Seminar Directors

Spring Conference 2009 highlighted Cather's later Nebraska fiction. Andrew Jewell, editor of the University of Nebraska—Lincoln's Willa Cather Archive, introduced proceedings with speculations about who Cather was and what she was like based on a delightful selection of photos of her from the University's collection. We were struck by how frequently we see her "on deck" and on top of things in various parts of the world and by how engaged she appears. This Cather stayed with us through the weekend, confirmed by the presentations and by the helpful biographical comments of Toni Turner, granddaughter of Annie Pavelka who was the prototype for *Antonia* in *My Antonia*, and several members of the Cather family, including Jim and Angela Southwick of Herber City, Utah, Jim and Trish Schreiber of Meadow Vista, California, Margaret Ickis Fernbacher of Willoughby, Ohio, and John Cather Ickis of Alajuela, Costa Rica.



Bishop Frank Griswold and Jay Yost, President of the Cather Foundation, talk at the reception prior to the Board of Governor's Dinner during the Spring Conference. Photograph by Barbara Wiselogel.

Cather readers participated in lively discussions of *Lucy Gayheart*, *Obscure Destinies*, and "The Best Years," as well as other stories. In his Saturday morning address, "Not Stories at All, But Life Itself," Bishop Frank Griswold (former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and long-time Cather enthusiast, now of Philadelphia) illustrated how Cather follows the "lines of spiritual motion" to create her "revelatory narratives," noting Cather's "profound openness" about those experiences that stem from all of us "facing into the same wind." (Watch for Griswold's essay in a future issue of the *Newsletter and Review*.) Texas A&M University-Commerce Professor Ann Moseley, in her talk "Transience and Permanence," traced the development of Cather's fiction from explorations of youth, under the rubric that the best days are the first to flee, to explorations of the "golden light" of a wisdom that comes with age. She and her respondents in the "Passing Show" drew out ways Cather's fiction reflects Kierkegaard's remark that life is understood backwards but must be lived forward.

Continuing the theme of wisdom and art as they emerge from tough times and hard experiences, the conference gave

some focus to Woody Guthrie and his Great Depression music, led by University of Nebraska at Kearney Professor Katherine Benzel and songwriter Mike Adams, and we meditated together with Reverend Ruth E. Eller of Centerville, Utah, in a Taizé service. The use of simple melodies and Latin words by the nondenominational community of Taizé in France and the phenomena of pilgrimages to that community originated after World War II and, like Guthrie's songs, from suffering and disillusionment. Addressing Guthrie and his musical story in a Cather context was a persistent program suggestion of the late Cather Foundation Board of Governors member Don Connors.

The conference enjoyed many moments of fun and fellowship, facilitated by the superb efficiency of the Opera House staff (even to the venue changes caused by the weather). Anecdotes by her son, Dr. William Bennett, highlighted our centenary tribute to Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Foundation founder Mildred R. Bennett, which included a showing of Joel Geyer's "Singing Cather's Song" with Nebraska Public Television's Ron Hull as MC. Betty Kort's readers theater entertained those at the Donors' Dinner at the Opera House, while other participants enjoyed the cider, beer, and brats that accompanied Mike Adams' playing of Woody Guthrie songs and Kate Benzel's narrative of Guthrie's life at the Burlington Depot. On Saturday we all gathered at the Red Cloud Elementary School for our "favorite salad lunch of the year," sponsored by the PEO. On Friday evening, the Red Cloud Women's Chamber hosted a delightful dessert reception after the Bennett tribute.

The conference welcomed "home" many returning as well as several first time participants. Together we congratulated the winners of the Norma Ross Walters scholarship and had Foundation Board member Tom Gallagher update us on the new Cather website. We also received Jay Yost's presidential report and UNL Professor Guy Reynold's invitation to the upcoming 12th International Cather Seminar, in Chicago (25-28 June). Visitors got to see the Depot and St. Julianna, Grace, and Baptist churches, the Cather Childhood home, the Yosts' one-room school, and other sites. As always, we refreshed ourselves with one another's company and our traditional kolache.

Thanks for everyone's participation, all the fine presentations, the good work in Red Cloud, and the continued interest in and support of Cather and the Cather Foundation.

--Charles Peek and John Murphy, Seminar Directors

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Willa Cather Spring Conference

Red Cloud, Nebraska

June 3-5, 2010

Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing

Featured texts:

O Pioneers! and "The Bohemian Girl"

“How to Tell a True War Story”:

Reading *One of Ours*

Through Sergeant’s *Shadow-Shapes* and Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*

Diane Prenatt

Marian College

Willa Cather and Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant had not seen each other in some time when they met in Central Park for tea in May 1919. Sergeant had been in France since September 1917, covering the war for the *New Republic*. She had just arrived home a few days before and was still recuperating from a serious injury she had suffered on a Marne battlefield; she was using two canes and was accompanied by her younger sister Katharine. In *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (1953), Sergeant describes



Sergeant with two of her nurses at the American Hospital in Paris, 1919.
Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Cather on the occasion as “charming . . . warm . . . outgoing,” delighted that the wisteria was in bloom (155). On the other hand, in his memoir *Let Me Finish* (2006), Roger Angell, *New Yorker* editor and Katharine Sergeant’s son, relates his mother’s version of that meeting. In 1965, Katharine—by then, Katharine Sergeant

White, herself a longtime fiction editor of the *New Yorker*—wrote that Cather was not simply being sociable on that day, that it was “evident to me that Miss Cather was there for another reason—to get factual detail and background for her own novel in progress [*One of Ours*]” (106; original emphasis). Sergeant’s war memoir *Shadow-Shapes* would be published the following year, and *One of Ours* two years later.

Willa Cather’s appropriation of the material of other people’s lives—her incorporation of details from Dr. Frederick Sweeney’s diary into *One of Ours*, for example—lends credibility to Katharine Sergeant White’s suspicion that her sister’s wartime experience was a source for *One of Ours*. Was she right? We have only as much of Cather’s and Sergeant’s conversation as Sergeant gives us, but can a reading of *Shadow-Shapes* tell us anything about *One of Ours*? In part to answer that question, I assigned *Shadow-Shapes* last fall to an American Modernism class in which we were also reading *One of Ours* and *A Farewell to Arms*, among other literary works. This is a 300-level class I’ve taught several times, with varying focus; this time, I hoped to refine the generalizations I typically make about the effects of World War I on Modernist literature. Furthermore, I had only recently read *Shadow-Shapes* for the first time myself, and my enthusiasm for it had put me in touch with Sergeant’s family, who approved my proposal to write a critical introduction and set of notes for a republication of the memoir. I hoped my students would let me know what a more general reader of the memoir needed by way of context to appreciate Sergeant’s book as much as I did.

We began the course as we often do, with a reading of *The Waste Land* as a means of surfacing Modernist themes and images. We then read *A Farewell to Arms*, noticing some of those waste land motifs—the dust and the rain, the seasonal dormancy in which the novel begins, the unsustainability of relationship and human life with which it ends—and we talked about how traditional notions of heroism are reconfigured in that novel through the perspective of Hemingway’s anti-hero Frederic Henry. We next read *One of Ours* and tried to articulate Cather’s waste land vision. We compared Claude’s idealized notions of heroism to Frederic Henry’s hard-boiled nonchalance, and Claude’s relationship with Enid to Frederic Henry’s with Catherine Barkley, each in its own way so anti-romantic, anti-domestic. We looked at the way both novels challenge conventional structures of religious faith and patriotism.

Finally, I distributed eighteen recycled binders enclosing downloaded copies of the long out-of-print *Shadow-Shapes*. I gave the class some biographical information about Sergeant, whose memoir on Cather they were somewhat familiar with—that Sergeant had begun writing French literature reviews and cultural commentary for the *New Republic* when it was founded in 1914; that she was deeply knowledgeable about French culture and that once war was declared, her “sketches” of French life became increasingly pertinent; that as a correspondent in France, she wrote regularly about the American Expeditionary Forces and

“How to Tell a True War Story”

(Continued)

the Red Cross; that she was politically engaged and brought a highly developed social conscience to her observation of the war; that by 1917 her byline was on the cover of the magazine, which promised readers an upcoming series of her reports from France. Just to keep them interested, I told them about Katharine Sergeant White’s suspicion.

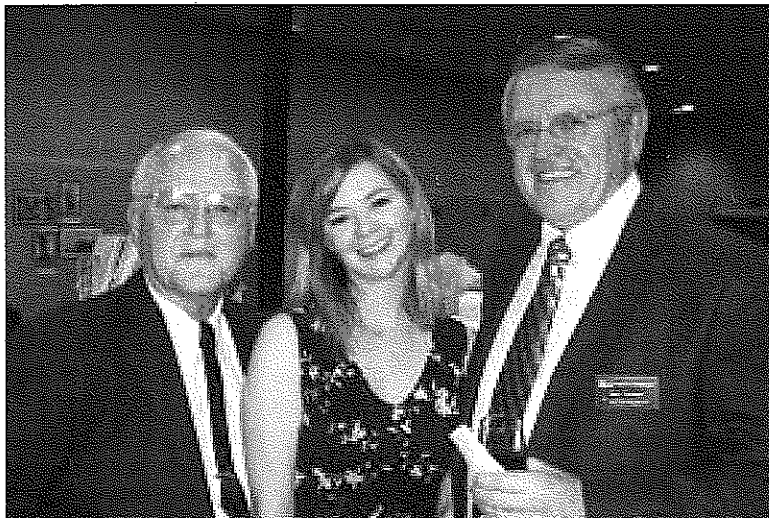
Our discussion of Sergeant’s memoir began with Jonathan, one of my most engaged students, asking, “Why can’t we just go buy this at Border’s? It’s so good!” “Why indeed?” I responded. Let’s talk once again about canon formation—and specifically, what happens when women write about war. “Did Hemingway read this?” he asked. “Because it sounds an awful lot like *A Farewell to Arms*.” We weren’t able to answer that question. *Shadow-Shapes* was reviewed in the *New York Times* by Amy Lowell and was fairly well promoted by Houghton Mifflin, so any serious reader interested in the same topic might have known about it. There doesn’t seem to be any evidence that Hemingway did. And while *A Farewell to Arms* was published nine years after *Shadow-Shapes*, the hospital romance at its heart first appeared in 1924 in *In Our Time*. Nevertheless, Jonathan’s question helpfully complicated the simple issue of whether Cather had “borrowed” from Sergeant.

Shadow-Shapes and *A Farewell to Arms* do share a similar plot trajectory, beginning with the wounding of the narrator and depicting the course of his/her recovery. Both can be read as trauma narratives. Both narrators deal explicitly with the clinical realities of their injuries and, more subtly, betray their struggle to accommodate the event imaginatively and to convey it through traditional narrative. In contrast, of course, *One of Ours* deals very little with personal combat injuries. More than half of the novel is concerned with Claude’s life before he ships to France. Once the novel shifts to France, scenes of actual combat are few; Cather seems much more interested in Claude’s interactions with French domestic culture. Claude dies almost immediately from his single injury, which he suffers in a traditionally noble pose stripped of the ugliness, pain, and dirt described by both Sergeant and Hemingway, the detail that, as Tim O’Brien puts it, “makes the stomach believe” (84).

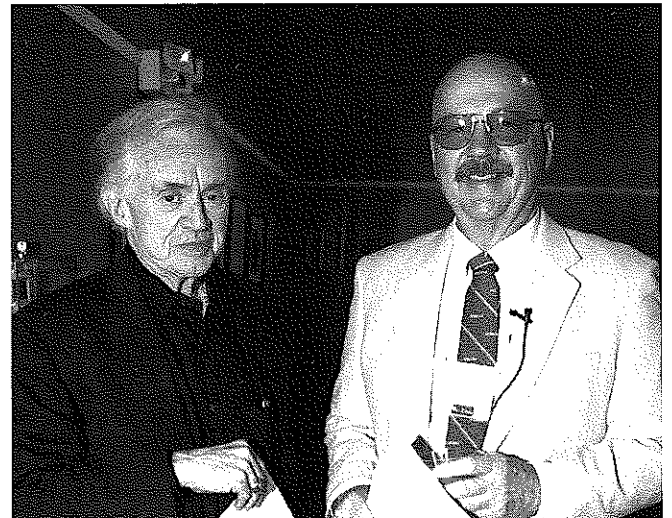
In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry is occupied in the very ordinary act of eating cheese when a shell hits the riverbank dugout he is occupying with several others. “There was a flash . . . and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind. I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and . . . [t]hen I floated, and . . . I felt myself slide back” (54). He hears his comrades screaming in pain, and it is some time before he moves: “as I did so something inside my head moved like the weights on a doll’s eyes and it hit me inside in back of my eyeballs. . . . I . . . leaned over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn’t there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin” (55).

Almost a month before the Armistice, in 1918, Sergeant was touring the reclaimed battlefield at Mont-Bligny with two other journalists—Cecil Dorrian, a correspondent for the *Newark Evening News*, and Eunice Tietjens from the *Chicago Daily News*, later co-editor of *Poetry* magazine with Harriet Monroe—under the official supervision of a French lieutenant and a young French woman who worked for the Red Cross. Although the lieutenant gave strict instructions to the women not to pick anything up from the ground, Tietjens picked up a German Bible and someone else, an Italian helmet. The French woman picked up a German hand grenade, which detonated. Tietjens, who had walked away from the others and so was not injured, described the incident twenty years later:

I saw [the French woman] . . . fall over on her back. The long Red Cross nurse’s veil she wore had been blown . . . away . . . Her long hair was standing straight up from her head, her body from the waist up was quite naked. Her right hand was missing. She had been, as the French say, completely *éventrée* [eviscerated], and for some seconds after she fell all her entrails boiled up through the broken abdominal walls like some hideous fountain. The lieutenant [who had lost his arm] began to scream, a high piercing scream of agony like a woman’s. Elizabeth Sergeant made no sound, only sank slowly to the ground, her eyes, which caught mine, curiously unveiled in the way in which eyes become in the face of death. (161-162)



Jerry McDole, Cindy Bruneteau, and Gary Thompson converse at the reception preceding the Board of Governor’s Dinner during the Spring Conference. Photograph by Barbara Wiselogel.



Long-time board member Ron Hull with Dr. William Bennett, speaker at the wine and dessert reception for Mildred Bennett’s Centenary. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

Sergeant herself recollects the same moments in impressionistic shards in *Shadow-Shapes*:
 the Frenchwoman, stretched on her back, with her blue veils tossed about her. Great gashes of red in the blue. "Macabre of the movies" . . . [A]loud I hear a voice, which is mine, add: "She is dead." . . . I seem oddly unable to get up. . . . Blood! Thick and purplish, oozing slowly out of jagged holes in my heavy English shoes and gaiters. I seem to be wounded. Queer, because no pain. (16-17; original emphasis)

These details emphasize the extent to which both Sergeant and Hemingway's Frederic Henry find it difficult to convey their experience in conventional mimetic narrative: Henry's synaesthetic description of noise as color, his sense of being out of body; Sergeant's spontaneous translation of the horrific scene into cinematic spectacle; Henry's run-on sentences; Sergeant's fragments; both narrators' objectification of experience robbed of its subjective physical and emotional content: my knee isn't where it should be; I can only surmise from this blood that I am wounded, for I feel no pain.

Briefly, Sergeant's lower legs and feet were filled with metal fragments from the exploded hand grenade. Her left ankle was all but destroyed and she almost lost her left foot to infection. She was first treated at the military hospital at Mont-Notre-Dame and was then transferred to the American Hospital in Paris, where she remained for more than six months.

Tim O'Brien, in the piece from which I take my title, writes:

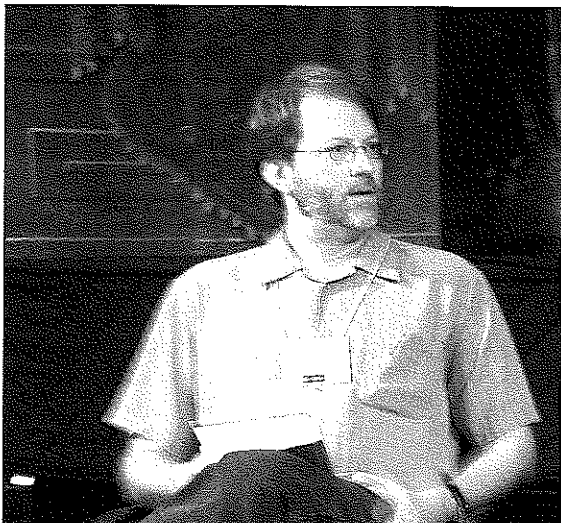
In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. . . . [T]here is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed. (78)

In contrast to Sergeant's and Hemingway's "surreal seemingness," Cather's description of Claude's injury and death is conventionally representational: He "sprang . . . out on the parapet" to rally his men, "directing them with his voice and with his hands" (385). When he is shot, he simply "sway[s] as if he had lost his balance and were trying to recover it." His men carry

him out of the line of fire. "He was not bleeding very much. He smiled at them as if he were going to speak." Then, "the smile had gone . . . the look that was Claude had faded." He is dead of "three clean bullet holes" (386). Sergeant's and Hemingway's narratives illustrate that the essence of battlefield experience is that it is almost not transmissible, almost beyond articulation. They convey the extent to which the new technology of the Great War revised the imagination, a fact registered by Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*. Her fiancé was "a very nice boy . . . [who] was killed in the Somme" (18), she tells Frederic Henry. She had thought he would return with ". . . a sabre cut . . . something picturesque," but instead "[t]hey blew him all to bits" (20). My students readily identified the picturesque quality of Claude's death; they could understand Hemingway's dismissal of *One of Ours* as something Cather picked up from the movies.

By the time *One of Ours* was published, the authority of the eyewitness account had replaced moral ideology as the validation of the "true war story": if you had seen what I have, you would not tell with such high zest what Wilfred Owen called "the old lie" in his "*Dulce et Decorum Est*." Catherine Barkley tells Frederic Henry, "People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on" (20). In her memoir of Cather, Sergeant writes of *Shadow-Shapes*, "My best readers were my comrades in a shared experience, a sort of mystery" her memoir could only hint at, "not fully communicated to those who had not participated" (163). Cather, she reports, "easily shun[ed] the actual perception that an ankle or a leg had been filled full of steel" (164). She clearly understood that Cather was in search of authentic details for *One of Ours*; she knew that Cather was talking to veterans who had returned to the city. "War was a story to Willa," she writes. But no "soldier she had met on Broadway had told her the truth of it. He couldn't. He wouldn't. Neither would, nor could I" (163). The war posed something of an obstacle to what Edith Lewis calls Cather's "great gift for imaginative historical reconstruction" (119). It would seem that the essence of this story, the hallmark of its authenticity, was something that by definition could not be acquired from reading or conversation.

Shadow-Shapes reveals Sergeant negotiating her entitlement to the authority of her experience, whereas *One of Ours* lacks an awareness that there is anything to be negotiated.



Steven Trout participates in a panel discussion titled "Reading *Obscure Destinies*" during the Spring Conference. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.



Cider, Beer, Brats, and Music, Burlington Depot: Woody Guthrie program by Mike Adams and Katherine Benzel, Burlington Depot. Sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

“How to Tell a True War Story”

(Continued)

Like Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, Sergeant narrates the details of her injury and treatment straightforwardly, but does not allow them to absorb the narrative. Like Frederic Henry, she exhibits almost unimaginable stoicism in the face of her ordeal; she attributes hers to a New England upbringing. “I am just as bad as the men [in the hospital] at night, but for New England pride” (14), she writes. When she is told a month after the accident that her foot has slipped in its cast and will have to be manipulated back into position, she writes, “Query suppressed by New England pride: How does [it] feel when the foot is twisted back to a right angle with the leg?” (118-119). She deflects her own suffering to the men wounded in combat around her: “I have still less right than the soldier to complain. Voluntarily, for the sake of my profession I ran a risk . . . and luck was against me” (33). She had reported extensively on wartime nursing for the *New Republic* and so, in contrast to Frederic Henry, she is able to think of her nurse as something other than the prettiest girl she’s ever seen. She had already written about the first nurse who tends to her, for example, a graduate of Mayo whose heroic actions under siege at Soissons had earned her the Croix de Guerre. While still in New York, in anticipation of writing about Red Cross nursing, Sergeant had attended a lecture on the innovative Carrel-Dakin treatment of war wounds, which she subsequently underwent herself. (The treatment, developed by the French surgeon Alexis Carrel, involved irrigating wounds with a hypochlorite solution—essentially, diluted household bleach—and was enormously successful in decreasing the rate of infection from war wounds, typically suffered in bacteria-laden environments. It probably saved Sergeant’s left foot.) “Now I know how *that* feels,” she remarks with typical understatement after her first treatment (41; original emphasis). These experiences, with their clinical, easily objectified details, she has no difficulty in writing about.

Already apologetic, as a non-combatant and a woman, about her claim on the attention of the medical staff, Sergeant reveals in her memoir a hyperconsciousness of the boundaries of her own narrative authority. A self-described Francophile, she is deeply saddened by the wartime devastation of the French countryside, the cherished *terroir*, as well as the loss of human life, as her articles in the *New Republic* and *Harper’s* reveal. In *Shadow-Shapes*, however, she appears highly sensitive to the entitlement of the French to their own grief, and it is her French visitors and the French hospital staff who voice that grief. When it comes to military experience, she allows combatants to speak for themselves—including her brother-in-law Ernest Angell, stationed near Dijon, and her friend Rick, an aviator who lost his crew at St. Mihiel. Even political analysis—and she is very astute herself—she quotes from the journalists who visit her during the days of the Paris peace talks. “What right do I have to rolls and jam?” she remembers thinking during breakfast, when she could hear ambulances carrying “our young veterans, armless, eyeless, choking with gas and blood” through the Paris streets (61).

The question for my class would seem to remain: Did Cather borrow from Sergeant? Did she use her experience? The fact is, the more we read these texts, the less we cared—and the less we felt able—to resolve the question. The immediacy

of Sergeant’s narrative and the depth of her reflection on her experience create their own power. Cather’s novel is another thing entirely—beautiful and powerful as well, but something quite different. While *Shadow-Shapes* is an excavation, *One of Ours* is an invention. And as Sergeant herself acknowledged in her memoir of Cather, Cather’s unique process of transforming the materials of her life into art resists articulation. There is no question of Sergeant’s accuracy when she reports that she could not, would not convey to Cather the essence of her own experience of war.

Katharine Sergeant White was a smart woman, deeply loyal to her older sister, and probably not typically as literal as her suspicions of Cather make her sound. Besides Katharine, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant had a sister Rosamond. Doubtless, there is there some echo of those sisters’ names in the names of Professor St. Peter’s daughters, Kathleen and Rosamond. Charles Sergeant suffered an episode of erysipelas, as does Claude Wheeler. *Shadow-Shapes* includes references to Puvis de Chavannes’ painting of St. Geneviève watching over the city of Paris; Cather was to comment later that *Shadows on the Rock* was in the flat, unaccented style of Puvis de Chavannes. In *Shadow-Shapes*, Sergeant describes French girls in lavender-scented shawls; at the Joubert home, Claude falls asleep in lavender-scented sheets. But it doesn’t take much personal authority to report the presence of lavender in France. There’s an iconic little scene in *Shadow-Shapes* of Sergeant meeting a soldier for a drink in the garden. He’s drinking Benedictine. Trying to renew my students’ interest in the original question, I told them the scene reminded me a little of Claude drinking brandy in the Jouberts’ garden. That’s lame, they said. Does it matter that Sergeant describes him as a freckle-faced, carrot-topped boy? Lame, they said.

I don’t believe that Katharine Sergeant White often concerned herself with Cather, but about four years after her statement about the Central Park meeting, she wrote to a gardening friend who seemed to be interested in Cather’s fiction, “. . . possibly . . . you know my sister’s book on Willa C. They were friends in their younger years, and the book is sentimental in part. No one tells the real Cather story” (33-34).

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“As if something obscure had been made clear”:
The Making of a Mission in Cather’s *One of Ours*

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This paper explores the ways in which traditional familial and gender structures are deterritorialized in Cather’s *One of Ours* (1922) by sacrificial ideals of duty and cultural codes of service. As Caren Kaplan, following Deleuze and Guattari, suggests, we must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often sites of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices, to comprehend our unique abilities distinct of our family of origin (194-95). Where we come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new. Cather’s sentiments towards deterritorialization are realized during those moments in the text in which Claude embraces the intensity, the conviction, and the splendor of life in war-torn France. Claude’s interaction with bucolic figures such as Louis and Mademoiselle Olive, for example, allows him to feel an acceptance he has never felt at home: “the feeling of being completely understood, of being no longer a stranger” (337). At home in Nebraska, Claude is discontented and always disappointed: “Claude knew, and everybody else knew, seemingly, that there was something wrong with him” (93). But in the countryside of France, where cottonwoods grow freely and the harvest is late, Claude feels a “real bond between him and this people” (294). The intimacy with which Cather captures Claude’s connection to France suggests that Claude is most “at home,” most connected to himself and others, in the uncertainty and upheaval of the geographical crossings necessary for deterritorialization.

Examining the bonds of deterritorialization in terms of both practice and purpose, Claude’s military duty in France and Enid’s mission work in China are best understood as linked expressions of an authoritative self which demand recognition beyond the confines of nation and home. They are complementary movements: Enid’s missionary travels setting Claude free to effectively and passionately pursue his military service. Implicit in the act of deterritorialization, of becoming, of mapping new realities in foreign locations, is what Deleuze and Guattari term the “abstract machine.” This is much more than language: it makes no distinction within itself between content and expression; it has no form of its own; it knows nothing of the distinction between the artificial and the natural world (141). The deterritorializing aspects of Claude’s perceptions of the war are highlighted by understanding them in terms of the mechanics of abstraction. Cather colors Claude’s experience in France in terms of memory, disorientation, and the spiritual satisfaction of materiality. This is perhaps most apparent when Claude, sight-seeing for the day in Rouen, wanders off from Company B and falsely assumes he has found the Cathedral of Rouen:

While he was vainly trying to think about architecture, some recollection of old astronomy lessons brushed across his brain,—something about stars whose light travels through space for hundreds of years before it reaches the earth and the human eye. The purple and crimson and peacock-green of this window had been

shining quite as long as that before it got to him. . . . He felt distinctly that it went through him and farther still . . . as if his mother were looking over his shoulder. (297)

Debra Rae Cohen suggests that this scene attests to the overdetermined nature of the distance between Cather and her protagonist, pointing to Claude’s idealized vision of France and its culture (184-185). While distance is the defining feature of Claude’s architectural disconnect, I find his cosmic maternal musings on “old astronomy lessons” and the angelic figure of his mother to authenticate Claude’s sense of duty and close the space between Claude’s past and present. Characterizing what Stephen Trout has termed as the “cross-cultural yearning” (93) highlighting Claude’s heroic destiny, the fact that Claude is in the wrong church, while constructing the ironic subtext of the novel, does not detract from Claude’s passion for a connection to something greater than himself, to civilizations outside and beyond his own individual trajectory. As a function of the abstract machine, the war and, I would argue, missionary work operate as the body and content of the novel, working within a continuum of history that is neither totalizing nor structuring. Security, tranquility, and the homeostatic equilibrium of the machine are never guaranteed; these missions, these sites of salvation, are intriguing because of their danger and their potential to carry their participants to the absolutes of the world. Missionary work offers Enid a sacred escape from the bonds of the marriage bed, allowing her to travel, to save, to nurse, and to pursue the Christian ideals that most inspire her. Claude’s participation in the war gives him a primal purpose, “a fateful purpose” (269) through which he may break from the falseness of the normative, “choking” (193) structures governing his Nebraskan farm life. The satisfaction Claude experiences in France, when read in relation to the compelling nature of missionary work in China, shades Cather’s rendering of the war in terms of corporeal sacrifice and the abstract possibility of meaning despite violence, death, and loss.

Pearl James considers Cather’s depiction of Enid as misogynistic, stating that Enid’s unnatural femininity and bid for independence threatens Claude. Returning to Sinclair Lewis’ account of the “Enid problem” as the central conflict of the novel, James contends that Cather “demonizes Enid so that the reader will begin to favor Claude” (95). Female monstrosity, James suggests, is symbolized by Enid’s refusal to consummate her marriage, her vegetarianism, her expert driving skills, her systematic managing of the household, and her “fanatic” enforcement of scientific farming (separating the roosters from the hens), all of which leave Claude feeling frustrated and neglected (108). These traits represent, for James, Enid’s disciplinary approach to sexuality and home economy, and are directly related to wartime educational propaganda aimed at women. For James, Cather portrays Enid as a danger, a threat, representing the war’s dystopic aspects and the machine culture of modernity (102-103). While I agree that Cather’s portrayal of Enid should be read through the lens of modernity, I disagree

The Making of a Mission

(Continued)

that a modernist framework encourages a demonic delineation of Enid. Rather I suggest that Cather employs Enid's journey to China as the fulfillment of her personal mission, a mission that maps Claude's duty in France with the sacred fervor of "tasting a new kind of happiness, a new kind of sadness" (338), delineating the strict parameters of sacrifice and spirituality amidst the chaos of the modern world.

Claude's attraction to a spiritual destiny is first seen in his interest in the legend of Joan of Arc, about whom Claude often thought "when he was bringing in his cobs in the evening, or when he was sent to the windmill for water" (58). Joan of Arc, martyr, saint, soldier, is the subject of Claude's final thesis for his European History course, and is a living figure in Claude's mind, preparing him to embrace the inconsistencies of war and the sacredness of his duty in France. Cather weaves the legend, the image, and the myth of the incorporeal Joan of Arc into Claude's narrative of personal development to map Claude's destiny beyond the Nebraska frontier. Claude is not threatened by Joan of Arc's religious convictions or intimidated by her manly armor. She is as "miraculous" to him as a young man, as she was when he was boy and his mother told him her story (58).

Claude is drawn to the unattainable Enid, "who could be admirably silent and was cool and sure of herself under any circumstances" (114) in the same way in which he is drawn to Joan of Arc. Both are extremely devout, strong women, who transcend the cultural and gendered constraints of their sex in pursuit of divine guidance. While critics such as James read Enid's lack of sexual desire as her most threatening quality, I suggest that it is Enid's virginity, her ability to resist corporeal pleasures that allows her to leave Claude and "be of use" (116), thus encouraging Claude to explore his own interior ambitions. Seeking advice and spiritual guidance from Brother Weldon, Enid describes herself as not naturally drawn to people: "I find it hard to take the proper interest in the church work at home. It seems as if I had always been holding myself in reserve for the foreign field, by not making personal ties" (116). Enid's search for fulfillment of her divine duties is materialized in prayer, during which it seemed as if a finger were pointing her "over there," and she felt that her work "lies far away" (117). Enid's expression of poetic longing affirms her melancholic discontent with the bounded duties of religion and matrimony. Brother Weldon, as guide and interpreter, responds to Enid in a tone of relief "as if something obscure had been made clear" (117), offering momentary relief and understanding to Enid's abstract longing and disconnect. What is obscure here is Enid's inarticulate desire to find meaning in a world in which she is an outsider. What is made clear is that Enid is dissatisfied with her role at home and seeks to be of service beyond the traditional roles of wife, mother, and daughter. This revelation marks a defining moment in the text and prepares the reader to accept Enid's desire for a spiritually disciplined life in which she awaits to "take that road" towards spiritual renewal (117).

In the following scene, as if to confirm that deterritorialization is literally the driving force behind Enid's metaphorical quest, she skillfully takes the wheel during a thunderstorm carrying the couple safely home. Enid's ability to drive does not so much illustrate her technical savvy as it

does her need to be in control, to be moving, to be shifting her location, trespassing the territories of daughter, wife, and mother. Claude "was chafed by her stubbornness, but he had to admire her resourcefulness in handling the car" (119). This scene makes three main points: First, that Claude's "admiration" for Enid is also a source of discontent, confusing his feelings of insecurity and masculinity with his deep respect for female independence; second, that Enid is not going to satisfy Claude, proving the disconnection between duty and desire; and finally, the expertise with which Enid handles the car compared with Claude's nervous, uncontrolled driving attest to Enid's compatibility with modernity and Claude's resistance to technology.

Cather portrays Claude's suspicion of technical progress and the mechanics of modernity early in the novel when he decides that "machines could not make pleasure, whatever else they could" (39). They could not make agreeable people, either (39). Claude, already seeking to fill the emptiness marking his Nebraskan life, mistakenly assumes machines should serve beyond their function. Enid, on the other hand, has a utilitarian perspective on machines and easily moves between modernity and tradition. Cather highlights this ability by portraying Enid in Claude's mother's "new grey house-dress" once they have settled to spend the evening at the Wheeler farm. Enid's costuming here reveals the performative aspects of femininity as well as Enid's ability to assimilate as duty requires. Later that evening, Claude is glad that Enid drove them home and they did not stay at the Rices' for what was sure to have been a "dismal" evening (120). Enid's ease and comfort in the Wheeler household gives him "unaccountable pleasure" (120), suggesting Claude's eagerness to secure Enid in the role of wife and mother. Yet, underlying this momentary sense of familial happiness is the fact that Enid's decisions are to be trusted and may ultimately lead Claude to experience new, deeper rewards not bound by the traditional binaries of masculine/feminine.

The divine direction, for which Enid was looking in conversations with Brother Weldon, comes after she and Claude have settled into an unhappy marriage in the form of a letter informing Mr. Royce—Enid's father—that his other daughter is seriously ill in a mission hospital in China. Mr. Royce first shows the letter to Claude, allowing him to mediate the message through Claude and express his disappointment in his daughters who, unlike Mr. Harrison's daughters, have not stayed at home and worked to pay off his notes. Focusing his problem on China, as merely a name on a map, Mr. Royce concedes that "a man hasn't got much control over his own life" (192). Ironically, it is the presence of the letter and Enid's decision to go to China to care for her sister that allows Claude to be liberated from the torments to which Mr. Royce refers. Once Enid makes up her mind, inspired by her conviction and never questioning the "rightness of her decision" (193), the familiar objects of their home stifle Claude. He is despondent and at a loss that Enid has an alternative duty from which no feeling or association can keep her. Enid's missionary duty, her choice to leave her husband and follow her heart, reflects the Christian ideals against which she accuses Claude of rebelling in leading a "purely selfish life" (195). Enid considers her own act of deterritorialization, of moving beyond her marriage, as a selfless expression about which she is resolute and fearless.

Although Cather does not discuss the political climate in China at the start of the First World War, her readers were

most likely aware of the troubled past experienced by Christian missionaries working in China. For missionaries in China, the opening of the twentieth century was a period of transition and violence. The Boxer Rebellion, an uprising by members of the Chinese Society of Right and Harmonious Fists against foreign influences, took place in China from November 1899 to September 1901, during the final years of the Manchu rule. In June of 1900, the Boxers invaded Beijing and killed 230 foreign diplomats and foreigners. Foreign media described the fighting going on in Peking as well as the alleged torture and murder of captured foreigners. While it is true that tens of thousands of Chinese Christians were massacred in north China, many horrific and gruesome stories that appeared in world newspapers were widely exaggerated. A wave of anti-Chinese sentiment arose in Europe, the United States, and Japan. During the uprising forty-eight Catholic missionaries and 18,000 Chinese Catholics were murdered. 222 Chinese Eastern Orthodox Christians were also murdered, along with 182 Protestant missionaries and 500 Chinese Protestants known as the China Martyrs of 1900. More than 50,000 Chinese civilians were accused as Boxers and executed by foreign troops. The impact on China was immense. Soon after the rebellion, the Imperial examination system for government service was eliminated; as a result, the classical system of education was replaced with a Westernized system. The Boxer uprising helped to create a readiness for change in China. Many Chinese assumed that to modernize, China would have to import and adapt from the west. Since missionaries contended that Western progress derived from its Christian heritage, Christianity gained new favor. The missionaries, comprised of more women than men, were accessible sources of information; parochial schools filled to overflowing. Church membership expanded and Christian movements like the YMCA and the YWCA became popular community and social structures offering medical treatments and educational opportunities. The number of Protestant missionaries had surpassed 8,000 by the beginning of the war, altering the nature of Chinese communities (see Esherick).

This history, however briefly summarized, suggests that Enid's mission, like Claude's, is an act of service which is purposeful and meaningful, with its own unique set of demographics, dangers, and political posturing. Cather's decision to send Enid to China is not, as James argues, to make her disappear, but to make apparent the agency involved in sacrifice, the intimacy of violence, and the possibilities available to those willing to transgress the boundaries of what is familiar, what is safe. Thus, contextualizing Claude's duty in France as a response to Enid's missionary convictions encourages the reader to recognize the spiritual, not corporeal, ideals structuring Claude's drive towards the dangers in France: "He was enjoying himself all the while and didn't want to be safe anywhere" (267). The violent history of missionary work in China shadows Claude's self-actualization in the line of duty, cultivating his belief that "life was so short that it meant nothing at all unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured" (350). What endures in the novel is Mrs. Wheeler's faith in the fact that Claude had found his place, "for him, the call was clear, the cause was glorious" (394).

Merrill Maguire Skaggs contends that the discomfort Claude's character inspires in many readers is derived from the fact that Claude follows heroically tragic female figures

such as Anna Karenina and Cleopatra (40). By expanding Skaggs' reading to include Joan of Arc and Enid, we may articulate Claude's "death drive" in relation to Enid's mission of deterritorialization, delineating the desire to serve as a retreat from order, health, safety, family and tradition. The topography of pain and imagining construct Claude's final moments in memory and nostalgia: "He felt only one thing; that he commanded wonderful men" (390). The abstract mechanics of the war thus become the vehicle through which homo-social bonds are memorialized and obscure expressions of individual authority are made clear. Just as Enid's life is inspired by the Christian ideals of her mission, Claude's death is realized in the strength of his final command and the endurance of his beautiful beliefs.

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MANAGING EDITOR'S NOTE

With this issue we extend our sincere thanks to John Swift for eleven years of outstanding service as an issue editor for the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* and we welcome his successor, Bob Thacker, who is serving as issue editor for this Special Edition.

Each of our three issue editors is responsible for one issue of the *Newsletter and Review* each year. The issue editors work steadily throughout the year to gather and edit appropriate materials for this excellent publication. The Cather Foundation Board of Governors appreciates this volunteer service and extends thanks to all of our past and present scholars who have served in this essential capacity.

—Betty Kort, Managing Editor

The Archive



Left: "Rogers Group" located at the Cather Childhood Home in Red Cloud. Above: The sculptural group is situated on the piano in the parlor opposite the family Bible. Photographs by Betty Kort.

The Rogers Group: An Object Lesson Revisited

Jeanne C. Collins

Denver CO

In this issue Jeanne C. Collins revisits the very first Object Lesson published in the Willa Cather Newsletter and Review, Volume XLIII, No. 2, in which Katy Cardinal and Ann Romines describe the free-standing sculpture of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins created by John Rogers, discuss its significance in Cather's short story "The Sculptor's Funeral," and point out the frequency of other Longfellow citations in her works. Collins carries the discussion further by pointing out a subtle detail of Cather's description of the sculpture in Cather's short story.

In the fall of 1999 an Object Lesson in the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* focused on a free-standing sculpture called *The Rogers Group*, located in the Cather Childhood Home in Red Cloud and described in Cather's short story "The Sculptor's Funeral." As noted there, the base of the sculptural group is inscribed with a line from Longfellow's narrative poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish": "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" Of particular interest in Cather's story is the smilax (*smee'-lax*) that wreathes the base of this Rogers group in the Merrick home. Winding the smilax around the base obscures the quotation, so both the act of wreathing and the smilax itself add to the impact of the story.

This quotation is not visible to Stevens, the student who visits the Merrick home as he accompanies his mentor's body back to Sand City, Kansas, for burial. He is struck nearly speechless upon seeing the stark lack of aesthetic sensibility in the great man's family home. He does not speak of Harvey Merrick's accomplishments, most likely because he assumes that the family and community are well informed and proud of Harvey's fame—or because he is so astonished at everyone's callous behavior. The men sitting with the body do not "speak for" Harvey Merrick; they only carp, criticize, and disparage: they speak against him. Jim Laird, no laudable example of human conduct himself, as he freely admits, is Merrick's sole supporter. He rips into those assembled for their hypocrisy.

Who added the smilax to the base of the sculpture? Harvey's hysterically grieving mother, whose affected grief is quickly replaced by anger over a trivial error? Or the faithful servant sniffing in the doorway? Certainly not the father—it seems more "a woman's touch." John Alden finally did speak for himself in the poem, but in Cather's story Harvey Merrick cannot, and no one but Laird tries.


In addition to representing a "silencing" of the voices in the story, the smilax around the base introduces another contrast. "Wreathed" connotes the ancient custom of rewarding accomplishments with laurel wreaths, the equivalent of awarding medals, but the object so carefully decorated with the wreathed smilax is a low-priced, mass-produced, art-for-the-common-man object that cannot equal Harvey Merrick's artistic reputation—that is, his artistic merit, to point out another bit of Cather's linguistic slyness: Merrick-Merit.

Over 300 species of smilax (from the Greek word for *clasping*) abound worldwide. One particularly thorny variety grows in the Midwest, including Kansas. One has the common name "bindweed" and is well known for snarling farm machinery. Another variety was long-favored for bridal bouquets, not only for its softer leaves but also because it maintains its green coloring, to symbolize enduring love and a long marriage. Taken together, these qualities subtly convey the underlying tensions and contrasts of the story.

The storied and therefore eternal love between John and Priscilla pairs with the long life of the vine and its keeping life-like qualities after being cut, but it is hard to discover genuine love among the characters Cather portrays. Only the servant woman seems sincerely moved and only Laird speaks his heart—and the truth--on his friend's behalf. The bindweed nickname fits nicely with the community attitude represented by the watchers: they would have bound him to their ways, as Jim Laird confesses he has been bound. Harvey himself had no talent for nor interest in agriculture or business, and only snarled the machinery of the local economy by neglecting the cows and overpaying for a team of mules. Finally, the thorny, clasping quality of smilax underscores the pettiness that can stifle the artistic spirit if one does not cut away to pursue a personal vision. The palm on Harvey Merrick's coffin lid shows he was able to do so, although we have no account of his struggle. Willa Cather was able to cut away, as well, even though she drew heavily on both the positive and negative aspects of her Red Cloud years. She escaped the clasping thorns but was tied by the *evergreen* qualities of the source of much of her greatest work. Cather's seemingly random detail of a homey touch reveals both her scathing assessment of human behavior and her increasing skill and depth as a writer.

Note

Having viewed the Rogers Group at the Childhood Home in Red Cloud, visitors should make an effort to view the four long glass cases displaying John Rogers sculptural groups at Pioneer Village, located in nearby Minden (just south of Interstate 80 on Nebraska Highway 10). Pioneer Village offers an extensive collection of Americana chronicling the Midwestern pioneer era. My sincere thanks to Marshall Nelson, General Manager, and Monica Miller for assistance in preparing this article.

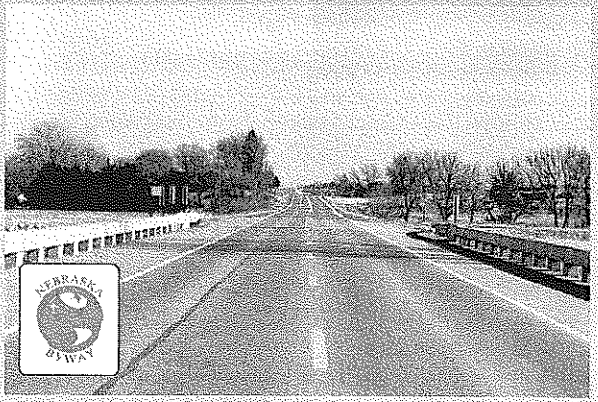


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Nancy Chinn, International Seminar, France, Summer 2007, demonstrating that "infectious laugh." Photograph by Betty Kort.

A Remembrance of Nancy Chinn

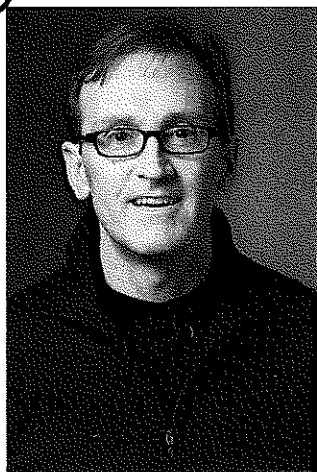
Anne L. Kaufman

Milton Academy

The 1993 International Cather Seminar in Hastings, Nebraska, brought me many dear friends and a treasured place in a special community. It was Nancy Chinn's first Cather seminar too, and her gentle and supportive presence is a highlight in my memories of that experience. During that week together, we went on many walks together through the baking-hot streets of Hastings as well as on the Cather Prairie itself, and during those walks I first made the acquaintance of Nancy's husband David, her son Nathaniel, and their summer home in Maine through the stories she told me as we walked. When we met again in Quebec City two years later, they were utterly familiar to me through Nancy's stories and letters (in those days, yes, we did still write letters). Nancy modeled fine scholarship in myriad ways; to me, her genuine interest in people and her tireless efforts to broaden communities are a lasting legacy. Although she didn't quite like being told she was the nicest person around, Nancy was always the first to welcome a new face and her attention was unfailingly genuine.

There has already been a great sharing of grief on line in the days since Nancy's death, and Steven Shively's lovely words resonate for us all: "Nancy was an important part of the Cather community as a scholar, a teacher, a colleague, and a welcome and convivial friend for conversation. I'm grateful that Nancy felt 'at home' with us, but I'm saddened that there will now be an empty spot in that home." For my part, Nancy showed me a great deal about what it means to be a scholar, a friend, and a mother. I can still hear her voice, hear her infectious laugh, and see her warm welcoming smile.

Jay Yost—President's Message



So we're riding down in the elevator from our apartment, heading to work on a Saturday morning....an unfortunate habit we've gotten in to whenever we're home in New York for the weekend. We (that would be my partner, Wade Leak and I) are chatting about what all we have to do in our offices today. I mention that I need to write my 500-word "President's Message" for the *Cather Newsletter*, and I ask Wade what he, as a Cather supporter, would like to hear about. After a slight pause he answers: "viral Cather" — which is perfect.

Paraphrasing Wikipedia, a "viral phenomenon" is *an object able to replicate itself or convert other objects into copies of itself when it is exposed to other objects.*

As a member of the Cather Foundation, each of us is an object who has a sincere appreciation of Cather's works, so when we expose our love of Cather to others, we can often convert them into copies of ourselves. How cool is that! Just by letting people know how important Cather is to us and by sharing her books with them, we can start our own individual viral marketing campaigns that will help to ensure that Cather is read by continuing generations.

Wade is one example. When we were in Red Cloud for Spring Conference in April, he bought an armful of Cather novels from the Foundation's bookstore to give to his assistant and other colleagues at Sony Music. Now these are pretty highly educated people, but many of them had only a passing familiarity with Cather. Some, however, are now on to their second novel, having exchanged their copy for some else's, and Cather now seems to pop up in conversations in the most unexpected ways.

A second example is Brad Morrow. Brad was the wonderful keynote speaker at the recently completed (and wonderful) 12th International Cather Seminar in Chicago, jointly sponsored by the Cather Foundation and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Thank you, Guy Reynolds!).

Brad, besides being a novelist, is a professor of literature at Bard College, the founder and editor of the noted literary journal, *Conjunctions*, and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in fiction in 2007. When Guy Reynolds asked Brad to give the keynote address, it was based on Brad's love of the American Southwest and his love of Cather.

As it turned out, however, Brad's mother had been born and lived near Red Cloud until the mid-1930's, and her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are buried in or near Red Cloud. So in preparing for his keynote, Brad took the opportunity to research his family's Nebraska roots, and in doing so, re-ignited his intense admiration of Cather's writing. By visiting Red Cloud and Catherland, and experiencing what Cather so eloquently described in her Nebraska novels, he inadvertently became a viral Cather proselytizer. He started chatting about Cather with his friends, lending them copies from his library, engaging New York literati about Cather in various ways and, of course, he himself became a member of the Cather Foundation. His current plans include a formal public speech at Bard based on his keynote address, possibly followed by an article or lengthier piece on why Cather means so much to him, and his family's connections to her legacy.

So besides all of us continuing in our role as devoted (and generous) members of the Cather Foundation, each of us can do our part to make Cather come alive to others: talk her up, and share your copies with family and friends. Soon we'll have started our own viral phenomenon of exposing Cather with others who don't yet realize that they'll love her as we do.

... burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation ... —My Antonia



Prairie Writer's Workshop

Suzanne Kehm makes use of the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie as inspiration for her writing during this year's Prairie Writers' Workshop held July 13-17. Throughout the week artist in residency Timothy Schaffert instructed courses on fiction writing. At the conclusion, workshop participants shared their work with the public at a reception held on July 17. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.



Willa Cather Spring Conference
Red Cloud, Nebraska
June 3-5, 2010

CALL FOR PAPERS:

Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing

A Scholars' Symposium scheduled for June 3 will kick off the annual Spring Conference, this year an exploration of the importance of food and drink in Cather's writing. This day of scholarly papers and discussion will be followed by two days of events related to the conference theme, including kitchen tours at Cather-related sites, food and wine tastings, talks, panels, and lively discussions of food-and-drink related issues in Cather's work and life, and a variety of celebratory events in Cather's Nebraska hometown and the surrounding countryside.

For possible presentation at the Scholars' Symposium, please submit abstracts of approximately 300 words for papers related to the conference theme. Presentation time for papers will be 15-20 minutes. The featured texts for this conference will be *O Pioneers!* and "The Bohemian Girl," but papers addressing food and/or drink issues in any aspect of Cather's career will be welcome. A partial list of possible topics:

- Food, ethnicity, and place
- Food and drink as transmitters of culture
- Food, drink and class
- Food, food preparation, and matters of gender
- Food/drink and celebration, such as barnwarmings in "The Bohemian Girl," various Christmas celebrations, Mrs. Forester's dinner parties.
- Food/drink and religious celebration, such as communion
- Food as comfort and nurture (as in "Neighbour Rosicky")
- Domestic culture and its transmission, as in *Shadows on the Rock* or Marie's career in *O Pioneers!* Also the tyranny of domestic culture, especially food preparation, as in "A Wagner Matinee" or Pauline's career in *Lucy Gayheart*
- Wine and/or beer: Vavrika's saloon "The Bohemian Girl," temperance in *One of Ours*, wines in *The Professor's House*, alcoholism in *The Song of the Lark*, etc.
- Food production: agriculture and the Great Plains (*O Pioneers!*, *My Antonia*, *One of Ours*, etc.) as well as agriculture in other regions, as in *Shadows on the Rock*, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*
- Cookbooks (The Cather Foundation Archives contains the Cather family collection of cookbooks)
- Willa Cather and twentieth and twenty-first century food issues

Paper presenters at the Scholars' Symposium will be invited to submit their papers for possible publication in a special expanded edition of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*.

Please send your proposals, as well as questions about this event, to Professor Ann Romines, conference co-director, at annrom3@verison.net. Proposals are due by 1 Feb. 2010.

Willa Cather Foundation Seeks Executive Director

The Willa Cather Foundation, located in Red Cloud, Nebraska, invites applications for the position of Executive Director/CEO. The successful candidate will have excellent leadership, management, and organizational skills; have a minimum of five years of related experience; and possess a bachelor's degree. Candidates are expected to have significant leadership/management experience and a demonstrated ability to manage and motivate others.

An advanced degree is preferred, as is experience in not-for-profit corporate management, grant solicitation and administration. Experience or knowledge of American writers, especially Willa Cather, is desirable, but not required.

The Executive Director reports to the Foundation's Board of Governors and is responsible for oversight of staff, fund development, project management, marketing of Foundation programs, financial management, implementing the strategic plan, Foundation correspondence, and representing the Foundation publically in selected forums, conferences, and other venues.

Operationally, the Executive Director will manage the Foundation's daily programs, services, and finances including administration and maintenance of numerous nationally designated historic sites and the Foundation's archives, town and country tours, operation of the Foundation's bookstore, and the awarding of scholarships and writing prizes to future English majors and aspiring writers. Further, the Executive will oversee the programming in the restored 1885 Red Cloud Opera House, the Foundation's Art Gallery, and the restoration and conservation of the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. While located in the small Nebraska community, the Foundation serves an international audience. More information about the Foundation can be viewed at www.WillaCather.org.

The Willa Cather Foundation was founded in 1955 to promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collections relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, and later became associated with the Nebraska State Historical Society. The Foundation meets its mission by providing for Willa Cather a living memorial, encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities, and perpetuating an interest throughout the world in her work. The Foundation serves an international audience through its programming, seminars, conferences and affiliated members. Its offices are located in Red Cloud, Nebraska. The successful applicant will live in Red Cloud or must be able to travel to Red Cloud on a very regular basis (housing provided). Otherwise, the Foundation Board will consider remote management.

Qualified candidates should e-mail résumé, cover letter, and salary requirements to:

Michael R. Avery
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mavery@gpcom.net



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The *Newsletter & Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 3000 words; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment and should follow MLA guidelines.

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

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**WILLA CATHER
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Mrs. Bennett and seven other founding members of the Board of Governors defined the Foundation's mission, which has evolved into these

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To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.

To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.

To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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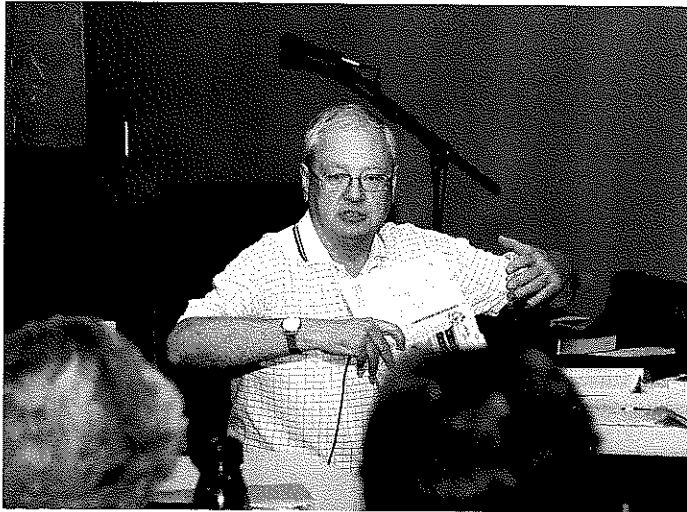
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Special Summer Event

2009 Elderhostel



Instructor Steve Shively addresses the group during morning lectures in the Opera House Auditorium. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

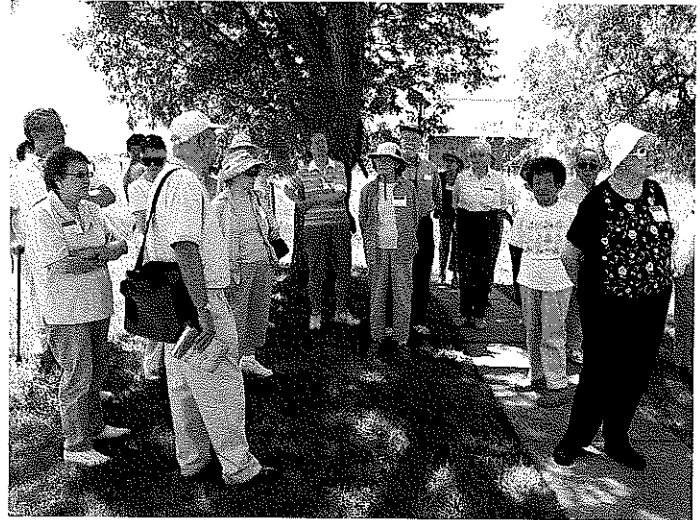
Elderhostel 2009, held in Red Cloud from June 15-19, was a resounding success. For the second consecutive year, the Cather Foundation partnered with Elderhostel, a national organization sponsoring over 8,000 programs a year for older learners, to offer Red Cloud: Willa Cather's Window to the World. Twenty five participants from eight states spent five days learning about Cather's life and writing, exploring Cather-related sites, and enjoying the ambiance of Red Cloud.

Stephany Thompson, Programming Director for the Cather Foundation, served as coordinator for the event, and the lead instructor was Steve Shively, long-time teacher of Cather's works and member of the Foundation Board of Governors. The entire staff of the Foundation joined the effort by welcoming participants, answering questions, conducting tours, operating the bookstore, providing refreshments, helping with meals and transportation, making sure the properties were in good shape, and doing all of the things that make the Red Cloud experience so memorable. Staff members Barb Kudrna and Cheryl Wilson even shared photos and family stories to enrich class sessions.

The community of Red Cloud did its part as local businesses—restaurants, lodging facilities, grocery store, pharmacy, bookstore, convenience stores, caterers, newspaper, transportation providers, souvenir outlets—worked hard to meet people's needs. Local women's groups provided meals, and the Opera House volunteers made sure evening programs were pleasant events. Long-time Foundation friends Doug and Charlene Hoschouer shared some of their Cather treasures with the group.

The week was grounded in Cather's literature as morning class sessions focused on this year's featured texts: *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and the short stories "Peter," "A Wagner Matinee," and "Neighbour Rosicky." Afternoon tours explored town and country sites with South Dakota-based scholar Barbara Johnson presenting new information about the stained glass windows in Grace Episcopal Church.

Each evening participants attended programs in the Opera House. Bladen residents Antonette Turner, granddaughter of Anna Pavelka, and Geneva Lewis, who lives in "Claude Wheeler's house," charmed the group with their memories and stories. Kerry Grombacher and Judy Coder entertained a large crowd of area residents and



Elderhostel participants visit the Pavelka Farm. Steve Shively, front left, provides information to the group. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

Elderhostel participants with a rousing performance of contemporary country music. From Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, Cather Foundation board member Joel Geyer offered a fascinating commentary to accompany a showing of the PBS documentary on Cather's life, *The Road Is All*, which he directed.

A unique and special aspect of this year's program occurred because instructor Steve Shively's parents, Bob and Nancy Shively from Ft. Collins, Colorado, were students in the class. Participants gave rave reviews to the entire program, with many promising to read more of Cather's works and to return to Red Cloud. Even in the midst of tough economic times, the Cather Foundation has found a recipe for success with its Elderhostel programs.



Elderhostel group photograph: Class of 2009. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

The Willa Cather Foundation

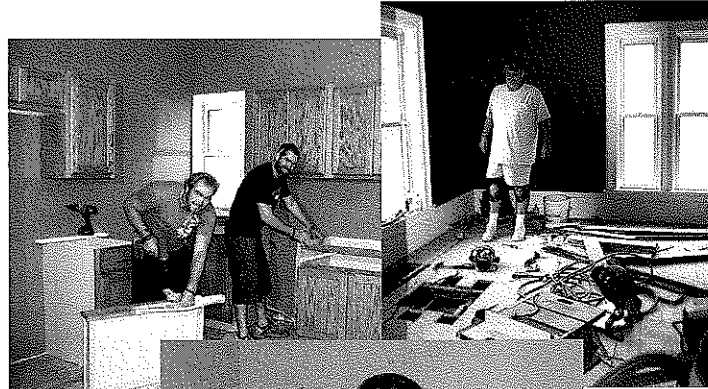
Preserving the Past . . . Informing the Future

Harling House Second-Story Restoration Coming to Completion

If you are planning a tour of the Cather Historic Site in Red Cloud this fall, you are in for a treat. The final touches are being placed on the second-story restoration of the Harling House, a major setting for the novel *My Ántonia*. The walls and woodwork are painted, the kitchen is installed, the floor is being refinished, the drapes are on the sewing table—all work is being carried out with the greatest of care.

The Cather Foundation wishes to thank the many volunteers and those who have donated materials to this project. Without this generosity, the Harling House upstairs restoration would not be nearing completion.

The project will not be finished until the appliances are installed, rugs are on the floor, drapes and curtains are



Top left and clockwise: The Zach brothers install the kitchen cabinets (cabinets partially funded by E-Z Kitchens); Craig Sass of Sass Flooring prepares floors for stain and finishing; Betty Kort congratulates Ron Braumbaugh, general contractor, for a job well done; Cather Center Staff Member Cheryl Wilson takes a bow for her work painting the walls and refinishing the staircase. Photographs by Betty Kort, Building and Sites Committee Chair, Cather Foundation Board of Governors.

hanging, and some additional pieces of furniture are in place. Here is where you, our readers, can be helpful. Please consider the following possibilities:

Consider donating a new or used floor area rug for the kitchen, bedroom, or parlor. Oriental rugs with dominant blues, golds, and reds are preferred. Contact the Cather Center Office if you think you may have a suitable donation.

Consider “buying a spindle” for the open staircase. The cost is \$100.00 each. We will place your name on a plaque as a contributor and you will have the satisfaction of knowing you have supported the second-story Harling House restoration efforts.

Consider making a major donation to the restoration of the first story of the Harling House. The goal is to complete the restoration of the entire house as soon as possible, but we need your help.



WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION
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