

Willa Cather

Newsletter & Review



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11th International Cather Seminar Explores Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds



Marc Chénétier makes a point during a speech delivered at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. Photograph by Betty Kort.



A.S. Byatt responds to Seminar Director Robert Thacker following a paper session at the Abbaye St-Michel-de-Frigolet. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Keynote addresses by Marc Chénétier and A. S. Byatt highlighted the first Cather International Seminar to be held in France. Chénétier, who is President of the European Association of American Studies, has translated eight of Cather's novels. He is Professor of American Literature at the University of Paris 7 and a Senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France. Chénétier spoke at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, discussing the difficulties associated with completing translations and his reactions to the works of Cather. Byatt, who was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1999 in appreciation for her accomplishments as a writer, joined the group in Provence. Having published several literary critiques of Cather works, Byatt's address at the Abbaye St-Michel-de-Frigolet revealed a profound understanding of Cather's texts. Byatt continued as a participant in the seminar in Provence, adding insights throughout the remainder of the seminar.

This International Seminar was the first sponsored by the Cather Foundation. The seminar was supported by a number of institutions and by private donations. Seminar directors included Cather Foundation Board Members John J. Murphy and Robert Thacker and Françoise Palleau-Papin, who teaches American literature at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, University of Paris 3. The Cather Foundation is deeply indebted to these three individuals for arranging what was considered by all involved to be an outstanding international event.

One hundred fifty-one participants traveled to Paris in the latter part of June for the first portion of the seminar and then went by train to Provence for the balance of the time in France. Charles A. Peek, Professor of English at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and president of the Cather Foundation, set a standard of excellence when he opened the seminar in Paris with a paper comparing the challenges facing the Cather Foundation today to the challenges facing Cather's fiction. A limited number of papers followed at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, with the bulk of the papers read at the Abbaye St-Michel-de-Frigolet in Provence.

Typical of Cather International Seminars, the paper sessions alternated throughout the seminar with tours to sites important in Cather's life and work. Highlights in Paris included the *Shadows on the Rock* walking tour conducted by John Murphy and visits to the Musée National du Moyen Age (the Cluny), the Panthéon, and the Luxembourg Gardens. Later in Provence, the seminar participants enjoyed bus tours to Avignon, Arles, and Les Baux.

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**12TH INTERNATIONAL CATHER SEMINAR
SCHEDULED FOR CHICAGO IN 2009**

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln &
The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and
Educational Foundation Announce

*The 12th International Cather Seminar 2009
Cather, Chicago, and Modernism*

Chicago 2009

The 2009 International Cather Seminar will take place in downtown Chicago, June 25-28, 2009. The conference will focus on Cather's modernist aesthetic and on her representations of cities and urban spaces (but not exclusively Chicago). Papers dealing with these topics will be welcome; details will appear in a future issue of the *Newsletter and Review*.

Conference sessions will be held in the seminar rooms and lecture theaters of DePaul University's Chicago Loop campus, while conference delegates will be housed in the historic Palmer House Hilton. The conference program will also feature tours and visits to famous Chicago sites that would have been known to Cather during her first visits at the turn into the twentieth century.

ELDERHOSTEL PROGRAM

**Cather Foundation Hosts
First Elderhostel at
Willa Cather Historic Site
Red Cloud, Nebraska**

June 9-13, 2008

The Cather Foundation will initiate an Elderhostel Program to better acquaint Elderhostel participants with Cather, her writings, and the local settings that influenced Cather's works. Merrill Skaggs will serve as primary lecturer. Participants will enjoy town and country tours, special programming, and have some free time to investigate surrounding historical sites and museums on their own.

For more information, contact Cindy Bruneteau, Education Director, at the Cather Foundation or visit www.willacather.org.

**CALL FOR PAPERS &
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

**WILLA CATHER SPRING CONFERENCE &
SYMPOSIUM**
Red Cloud, Nebraska
June 5-6-7, 2008

Cather and Her Contemporaries

The 2008 Cather Spring Conference at the Willa Cather Historic Site in Red Cloud will be held on June 5-7, 2008, and will feature a Symposium. Paper proposals on Cather's works are invited for presentation on Thursday, June 5th. Special consideration will be given to papers dealing with Cather and her contemporaries—for example, Faulkner, Glasgow, Hemingway, Mencken, Stein, Steinbeck, Wharton and many others—or on the contexts of *One of Ours*.

The two-day conference following the Symposium will feature *One of Ours*, with Charles Peek, Professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Kearney, serving as keynote speaker for the Passing Show Panel. The Conference will include a tour of Red Cloud and the surrounding countryside, with special emphasis on sites related to *One of Ours*.

Proposals and inquiries should be sent to:

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Counterpoint, Memory, and Leitmotifs in Willa Cather's "A Wagner Matinee"

Todd Giles, University of Kansas

Much recent scholarship on Willa Cather has worked to resituate her from the realms of literary realism and local-color fiction to that of modernism through explorations of her interests in and writing about the visual arts and music, as well as her subtle experimentation with broken chronology and narrative ambiguity. An early example of her narrative experimentation can be found in the often overlooked short story titled "A Wagner Matinee," which was first published in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1904 and reprinted a year later in her first short story collection, *The Troll Garden*. A reevaluation of this story—looking beyond its content—helps further solidify Cather's place as an early modernist writer by better defining the often blurry distinctions between realism and modernism which often surround her work. The story, which Cather herself later disavowed in a letter to her friend Viola Roseboro' as a "personal disgrace" due to the way her depictions of pioneer life were received by her family and friends (Woodress 178), deals largely with one of the key issues facing American modernist writers—the country/city dichotomy. Also at stake in "A Wagner Matinee" is another Cather staple: memory—both individual and cultural. What raises the stakes, though, and what makes the story more "modern," is, ironically, revealed through an old-fashioned close formal reading of the text itself, something many Cather critics pass over in favor of a brief summary of the story as a thematic precursor to her later works.¹

"A Wagner Matinee" is indeed an early example of the motifs Cather would further develop throughout her career, but it is much more than that. It is a structurally complex and well-executed example of early modernist writing in that Cather adopts another art form's techniques—the techniques of music—to further her own story's content. Richard Giannone, in *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*, has written an in-depth analysis of the story (41-45), but his interest in the story lies primarily in drawing parallels between the plots of the Wagner compositions and the story itself. While he succeeds in noting many intriguing similarities between the music and the lives of the story's two main characters, Georgiana and her nephew, Clark, Giannone's analysis finally goes no further than a Wagner-to-Cather comparison. The music indeed faithfully reflects the story's plot and emotional content, creating an intensified plot development, but it also operates structurally on a much more complex level, that of making meaning and historical memory.

"A Wagner Matinee" is narrated by Clark, a Vermont boy of unsure parentage who was raised by his aunt and uncle, Howard and Georgiana Carpenter, in rural Nebraska. Now an adult residing in Boston at the time of the story, Clark is visited by his aunt who is in town to collect an inheritance. As the story progresses, we learn that Georgiana was once a music teacher at the Boston Conservatory before her marriage and subsequent move to the Nebraska frontier. Georgiana's move has forced her to give up her music to become a hardened settler's wife. In Boston, Clark breaks Georgiana's musical silence by taking her to hear a Wagner matinee where she breaks out in tears, exclaiming "I don't want to go [back] Clark. I don't want to go!" (241).

As Loretta Wasserman correctly points out in *Willa Cather: A Study of the Short Fiction*,

Among the wonderful touches in "A Wagner Matinee" are the contrasting musical sounds—so different, yet speaking the same need: the soaring orchestral strains of the *Ring*, and behind these the reedy parlor organ, the Methodist hymns, an accordion belonging to a Norwegian farmhand, the idle singing of a tramp cowpuncher who, as a boy in Germany, had heard Wagner's "Prize Song." (30-31)

These contrasting themes are in part what make this story structurally unique. It is widely recognized that *The Troll Garden* is not a random collection of stories, even though, as Sharon O'Brien points out in *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, Cather did not write the seven stories making up the book with the foreknowledge that they would appear in a single volume. The book, built upon "juxtaposition and contrast . . . [is] [c]oncerned with art, artists, and the relationship between art and life, [with] the stories explor[ing] the contradictions and contrasts between aesthetic and commercial values, pure and corrupted art, East and West, civilization and primitivism" (O'Brien 271).

Cather takes these juxtapositions one step further in "A Wagner Matinee" by keenly adopting a literary form of the musical theme and variations for the overall format, while at the same time incorporating two compositional modes that Wagner himself is credited with furthering: counterpoint and leitmotifs. These compositional tools help Cather explore issues of personal and cultural memory by introducing a

Scholarly Contributors

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Andrew Jewell edits the online *Willa Cather Archive* and is Assistant Professor of Digital Projects at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

Counterpoint, Memory, and Leitmotifs (Continued)

complicated set of opposing themes that weave together in what I visualize as something resembling a DNA strand.

Counterpoint involves the simultaneous melodic interaction of separate musical lines, as opposed to the harmonic effects created when melodic strands sound together simultaneously. Leitmotifs are recurring musical themes within a composition—and in Wagner’s case often between compositions (the *Ring* cycle for example)—which are associated with a particular person, place, or idea. Although not the originator of leitmotifs, Wagner is well known for his liberal use of them in his operas, including dozens in the *Ring* cycle alone, parts of which Cather uses to round out the program of her Wagner matinee. The two contrapuntal themes (country/city) work in opposition, while at the same time working together to form the whole. The country/city dichotomy could certainly be further broken down into a series of more specific—albeit reductionary—binary opposites, such as dirty/clean, hard work/leisure, silence/music, barren/rich, unrefined/cultured, outdated/fashionable, old/new, ugly/beautiful, but as Jim Burden, the narrator of *My Ántonia* learns, seeming opposites are in fact inextricably entwined to make up our larger histories.²

What I am referring to as the story’s leitmotifs in “A Wagner Matinee” are simply moments of memory recognition on the narrator’s part, instances when he falls back upon and voices a new remembrance, whether one of his own or one his aunt had earlier shared with him about her own past; they are the narrator’s themes of pasts remembered: “a gulf of recollection,” “I felt,” “I saw,” “I had not forgotten,” “I recalled,” “I saw again,” “I wondered,” “I was in a fever of curiosity,” “I remembered,” and “I questioned.” In other words, they are hints that Clark’s memory is going to take center stage. As with *My Ántonia*, this story is as much about the narrator himself as it is about the main character, Georgiana Carpenter; and like *My Ántonia*, the story addresses

the issue of personal and cultural memory through the use of a complex, although subtle, plot structure. It is with the leitmotif of memory that the contrasting themes of country and city are heralded in throughout the narrator’s telling of the story. With each sounding of the leitmotif we are taken to a past engaged in the country/city counter-strands as seen through his memory’s eye—sometimes the narrator’s shared past (SP) with his aunt as a youth in Red Willow County; sometimes the deeper past (DP) of Georgiana’s youth in Boston, Paris, and Nebraska; sometimes Clark’s past (CP) after he leaves home; sometimes Georgiana’s past (GP) after Clark’s departure for Boston; and finally, sometimes the recent past (RP) of their reunion, which prompts Clark’s writing of the story. All of these temporal strands combine together contrapuntally in a Wagnerian whirlwind which problematizes more than just notions of country/city; they also call into question modes of cultural construction and remembrance.

Through the use of extensive flashbacks that vary in time and place, Cather organizes her story around a complicated unfolding set of memories using the musical form of theme and variations in which a theme sounded and repeated in altered form. In the first theme, or set of flashbacks, Clark’s story alternates between the recent past (RP) and the shared past (SP), and is capped by a recollection of Georgiana’s deep past (DP). The theme then repeats itself identically, and is then varied with the inclusion of Clark’s more recent past (CP) after he leaves the farm. The many-layered flashbacks look like this:

RP, SP, RP, SP, RP, DP.

The theme is repeated:

RP, SP, RP, SP, RP, DP.

Then the variations. Notice the continuation of the original repetition of the recent past (RP) / shared past (SP) theme, also ending with the deep past (DP), which are now interspersed with the inclusion of Clark’s past (CP) after leaving home:

RP, CP, RP, CP, SP, CP, RP, SP, RP, DP.

And then the theme becomes even more varied as Clark gets emotionally caught up as the music washes over him in waves causing a kaleidoscopic climax in which tears flow and the memories of himself and his aunt cross, combine, and confuse:

SP, RP, SP, RP, GP, RP, SP, RP, DP/SP/F.

This final “movement,” if you will, ends with the combined coda of the deep past (DP), the shared past (SP), and the future (F), which



Seminar Director John Murphy stops to discuss a point of interest along the *Shadows on the Rock* Walking Tour in Paris. Photograph by Betty Kort.

work together to end the story in a moment that transgresses time: "I understood. For her, just outside the door of the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curling boards; naked as a tower, the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dish-cloths hung to dry; the gaunt, moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door" (242). This coda, as I'm calling it, combines the strands of Georgiana's deep past (her pioneering days), her shared past with Clark as he remembers his childhood on the farm, and her future to come (what lies ahead when she returns home, although her return is left open for debate).

The story on the surface deals with a woman's decision to marry beneath her at the expense of not only forgoing her autonomy but also her one real passion, music. These issues are certainly at stake and are equally as pressing as any in Cather's work, but when examined alongside her later works, we begin to see just how engaged Cather was early on in her writing career with notions of what it means to script one's past through the exploration of memory. As Hermione Lee says of *My Ántonia*, "History is incommunicable unless the necessary connections are made between the past and present" (146). These connections do not need to operate in a then/now scenario because memory itself always operates in the present moment. In the case of "A Wagner Matinee," memory is reenacted in the present (the writing of the story) through a remembering of the recent past, which is doubly complicated when Clark remembers his aunt remembering her past to him in their shared past—memory as two and three times removed, strands intertwining, muddling up notions of a temporally continuous and individual existence.³ This is, then, as much a story about creating one's history through remembrance as it is about a talented, intelligent woman giving up her career and voice for the stability of marriage.

Interestingly, Richard Wagner is not the only composer Cather engages in this story. At the beginning of his narrative, Clark mentions "Franz-Joseph-Land," presaging the return of another Franz Joseph still to come at the end of the story. Franz Joseph Land is an archipelago of uninhabitable ice-covered islands located in northern Russia, which are named in honor of Emperor Franz Joseph I. Clark's reference to "Franz-Joseph-Land" at the beginning of the story works on two levels. First, it compares the desolation of the barren archipelago to that of the barren Nebraska plains. Second, it sets up the ending of the story, alluding to an earlier Franz Joseph as "the men of the orchestra went out one by one, leaving the stage to the chairs and music stands" (241). This language calls to mind Franz Joseph Haydn's *Farewell Symphony*, best known for the musical joke Haydn wrote into the end of the composition as a subtle hint to his patron to relieve the artists from their extended tours of duty. In the final movement, one by one each member of the orchestra performs a small solo before he ceases playing, snuffs out his music stand candle, and leaves, until only the two first violins are left to finish the score, in much the same way Clark and Georgiana are left to finish their duet at the end of "A Wagner Matinee" after the patrons and performers depart.

As critics have pointed out, attending the Wagner matinee with her nephew has reawakened Georgiana's sense of home; she has become homesick not for the home she just left, but for the home she left thirty years earlier: Boston. Home, not just as place, but also everything in attendance during her childhood—music, passion, Paris, the arts. I would argue too, though, that Georgiana



Cristina Giorcelli, Professor of American Literature, University of Rome 3, answers questions following her paper presentation at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. Cristina's paper, "Writing and/while/as Weaving: *Shadows on the Rock/La Dame à la Licorne*," inspired International Seminar participants to visit *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries Cather saw at the Hotel de Cluny in Paris. Photograph by Betty Kort.

is not the only one longing for her lost past. Clark mentions an earlier bout of loss that he himself experienced as a "Vermont boy near dead from homesickness" in Nebraska (240). Yes, Clark was a "gangling farmer-boy . . . scourged with chilblains and bashfulness" (235), but this Nebraska farmer-boy turned Boston sophisticate (perhaps a bit of a stretch since we know nothing of his present state), while painting what Hermione Lee calls a "pathetic" picture of his aunt (Lee 76), simultaneously paints a seemingly idyllic past for himself, riding herd, studying Latin, Shakespeare, mythology, music, and sharing "glorious moments" with his aunt milking "together in the strawthatched cowshed," telling him "of the splendid performance of the Huguenots she had seen in Paris, in her youth" (237). While we know nothing about Clark's unspoken distant past—his life before Nebraska—we are privy to his beautifully wrought sense of his childhood:

I saw again the tall, naked house on the prairie, black and grim as a wooden fortress; the black pond where I learned to swim, its margin pitted with sun-dried cattle tracks; the rain gullied clay banks about the naked house, the four dwarf ash seedlings where the dish-cloths were always hung to dry before the kitchen door. The world there was the flat world of the ancients; to the east, a cornfield that stretched to daybreak; to the west, a corral that reached to sunset; between, the conquests of peace, dearer bought than those of war. (239)

Bleakness aside, this is not the remembrance of one who despises his surroundings; rather, Clark possesses a keen awareness of, and I would suggest love for, his childhood surroundings in much the same way Jim Burden does in *My Ántonia*: "Mental excitement"—perhaps like hearing a Wagner matinee—"was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. . . . my mind plunged away from me, and I suddenly found myself thinking of the places and people of my own infinitesimal past." (254). Like Clark, Jim here is remembering himself remembering.

Georgiana's presence (and her past), like Jim's remembrance of a remembrance prompted by an outside agent (his studies), acts as a vehicle through which Clark's narrative is transmitted. Georgiana serves more as a dramatic impetus for his memory, a prism through which Clark's past is refracted through recollections of, and confluences with, her earlier memories, in much the same way that the concert serves a dramatic function for her. "A Wagner Matinee," then, is composed of several overlapping layers of historical

memory, layers which, like the music of the Wagner matinee itself, are made up of simultaneous and separate musical lines in interaction. Cather engages in issues of memory to further complicate this otherwise seemingly simple story, which revolves around issues of loss and gain based on the country/city dichotomy, issues Cather takes up more fully fourteen years later in *My Ántonia*: self-sacrifice, discontinuous structures and temporal incongruities, and the lost historical moment of the untamed plains.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Sherry Ceniza for her insightful long-distance comments and encouragement.

Notes

¹ See, for example, brief analyses by Hermione Lee and James Woodress, both of whom consider "A Wagner Matinee" in conjunction with "The Sculptor's Funeral," as stories that in different ways oppose the philistine Midwest to an urban world of culture and beauty.

² This mode of adopting another art form's themes and constructions is something Cather would further develop throughout her career. In a letter to a friend, Cather says of *The Professor's House* (1925) that "the experiment which interested me was something a little more vague, and was very much akin to the arrangement followed in sonatas in which the academic sonata form was handled somewhat freely" (*Willa Cather on Writing* 31). She immediately goes on to say that the structure and setting of the novel is also based on the Dutch paintings she saw in Paris prior to beginning the book. Cather's life-long interest in the arts, whether music or painting, not only influenced her art, it also contributed to what makes her a modernist writer alongside the likes of Faulkner and Joyce.

³ Cather also draws on her own historical memory in "A Wagner Matinee" by including the story of her Aunt Franc and Uncle George (Bennett 12) who, like the fictional Georgiana and Howard, "measured off their quarter section themselves by driving across the prairie in a wagon, to the wheel of which they had tied a red cotton handkerchief, and counting the revolutions" (236) when they arrived in Nebraska as new settlers.

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Scholarships Awarded to International Seminar Participants

In keeping with a long-established tradition of support for graduate students focusing on the works of Willa Cather, the Cather Foundation awarded ten scholarships in response to applications for assistance from students attending the 11th International Cather Seminar in France.

Because of the additional costs of travel, all students received a lower registration fee of \$100, versus the normal \$375 fee. In addition, those students who applied for scholarship support received an additional \$275 grant from the Cather Foundation for a total of \$550. Those students receiving scholarships are listed below:

Allison Carruth (Stanford University)
Shushan Chang (George Washington University)
Julie M. Cox (University of California Santa Cruz)
Sarah C. Gardam (Drew University)
Joy Johnson (University of Georgia)
Sean Lake (Fordham University)
Matt Lavin (University of Iowa)
Julia McCrossin (George Washington University)
Céline Manresa (University of Toulouse-Lemirail)
Gabriel Scala (University of Mississippi)

The Cather Foundation extends thanks to those institutions and individuals who have over the years supported the International Seminar fund, which provides scholarship opportunities to graduate students attending seminars.

"Wagner Matinee" Inspires Performance at Red Cloud Opera House

Cather's short story "A Wagner Matinee" has inspired New York City choreographer Laura Diffenderfer to develop a dance theater piece that mixes video, photography, and dance. The performance début at the Red Cloud Opera House is scheduled for the Spring Conference in June of 2008, with later performances in New York City.

Laura's interest in "A Wagner Matinee" springs from her desire to "engage with questions of place, memory, and the power of art." The performance is set to a Wagner score. Laura will attempt to "inhabit the space between the writer and the reader—between fiction and transcendence."

Laura Diffenderfer's work has been shown in New York City at WAX, The Flea, University Settlement, Merkin Concert Hall, the 78th Street Theater Lab, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and at the Contemporary Art Center in North Adams, MA. Laura graduated with a BFA in dance from Marymount Manhattan College and received an MA in Performance Studies from NYU in 2005. Last year, she produced a shared evening of work at the IRT Space where she presented *Trying to Remain Upright*, a dance inspired by a program note written in 1968 by Yvonne Rainer. She has published several dance-related articles, most recently "Octavio Campos and the Business of Art," which can be read in *Movement Research Performance Journal* #30.

Cather's *A Lost Lady* and Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*

Richard C. Harris, Webb Institute

In an April 1945 letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood, Willa Cather remarked that she had not so much invented her fictions but rather had remembered and arranged people, places, and situations from her past, had ordered various elements that coalesced as they came to mind (29 April [1945], Cather Foundation). While all of Cather's novels to one extent or another demonstrate the validity of this comment, *A Lost Lady* (1922) perhaps more than any other illustrates the point and provides insight into the particular nature of Cather's creativity. As critics have shown previously, Cather brings together in this novel the form and substance of the Renaissance pastoral, she draws upon conventions from medieval chivalric tales, she alludes to Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 and suggests a number of parallels to *Hamlet*, she at least nods at Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and *A Sentimental Education*, and she "borrows" several incidents and character traits directly from the nineteenth-century Russian writer Ivan Turgenev's story "First Love." I contend that Wilhelm Müller's and Franz Schubert's early nineteenth-century versions of the traditional story *Die schöne Müllerin* (*The Beautiful Maid of the Mill*) were additional influences on Cather's narrative.

As Cather told Flora Merrill in 1925, the idea for *A Lost Lady* had been "a beautiful ghost in my mind for twenty years before it *came together* [italics mine] as a possible subject for presentation" (Bohlke 79). As a young girl growing up in Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather had been fascinated by Lyra Garber, the wife of the town's most prominent citizen. The incident that provided the catalyst for Cather's beginning to write the book was her reading an obituary notice for Lyra Garber in June of 1921 (Woodress 340). As I demonstrated in an article published in *Studies in American Fiction* many years ago (Spring 1989), Cather obviously found sources for a number of the basic character traits for Marian Forrester and Niel Herbert, as well as for essential plot elements, and even for particular incidents, in Ivan Turgenev's story "First Love." Cather wrote several letters immediately before and after the publication of *A Lost Lady* that indicate she was aware of new translations of Turgenev and was remembering if not rereading a number of his works (see Stout, nos. 472, 574, 750). Just as Cather's reading of Turgenev's works clearly suggested certain elements in *A Lost Lady*, the publication of Max Friedländer's great edition of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* in early 1922 may also have suggested additional ways in which she could develop the story of Marian Forrester.

Richard Giannone pointed out almost forty years ago that music plays a major role in Cather's fiction. Musical references appear in fourteen of the twenty-five stories she published between 1892 and 1905. In addition, music and musicians are the focus of *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), and are important in *One of Ours* (1922) and *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), as well as in the collection of stories published in the volume titled *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920). Cather's first love was opera, especially Wagnerian opera, but over time she developed a special passion for the

music of Schubert and Beethoven, both of whom she would favor for much of her life. A 1918 letter to Ferris Greenslet, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, illustrates the point: there Cather notes that she had listened to recordings of Beethoven and Schubert the previous evening and that one could travel anywhere and find no better music than that; not even the gods on Mount Olympus had music to surpass theirs ([September 1918], Houghton Library, Harvard).

Cather regularly mentioned Schubert's music from the 1890s on. For example, in her story "The Prodigies," published in 1897, she refers to one of his best-known pieces, *Ständchen* ("Serenade") as "that matchless serenade" (CSF 415); she also refers to the poignancy of Schubert's works in her short story "Eric Hermannson's Soul" (1900). The remarkable child Jack-a-Boy in Cather's 1901 story by the same title is imagined as one, who, had he lived longer, might have been able "to sing a little like Keats, or to draw like Beardsley, or to make music like Schubert" (CSF 320). Three decades later, in *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather spoke of the "the dark beauty" and tragic profundity of the Schubert *Lieder* (30).



View from a courtyard at the Abbaye Saint-Michel, which hosted the Cather International Seminar in Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Cather and Schubert (Continued)

I had long found it puzzling that in his chapter on *A Lost Lady*, Giannone had almost nothing to say about possible allusions to the classical repertoire in what is clearly one of Cather's richest works. Work on Cather and Schubert that began with a paper for the 2005 Drew University Cather Colloquium, on Cather's gift of a volume of Schubert's letters to Yehudi Menuhin, provided an answer to my feeling that there must be something more going on with music in *A Lost Lady* than Giannone suggests. Müller's and Schubert's poetic and musical versions of *Die schöne Müllerin* seem to underlie, at least in part, Cather's depictions of several of the main characters, i.e., the center of consciousness, Niel Herbert; the villainous Ivy Peters; the charming yet threatening Frank Ellinger; and even the central character, Marian Forrester; as well as particular flower and color symbolism.

In both the Müller and Schubert "narratives," an idealistic young man becomes infatuated with a beautiful woman. She rejects him because she becomes interested in a bolder, more dashing man. The young man is overwhelmed by disillusionment and despair, and he finally commits suicide. It is the essential plot of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and any number of nineteenth-century romantic stories. The suicides excepted, in simple terms, this summary might be said to characterize the basic situation in Cather's *A Lost Lady*.

The history for the archetypal tale Müller and Schubert developed in the nineteenth century extends at least as far back as the Middle Ages when it was part of the literature of the chivalric tradition. In the late eighteenth century the story was picked up most notably by Goethe and by the Italian operatic composer Giovanni Paisiello in a 1788 production titled *Love Contested, or The Beautiful Miller Maid*. According to Susan Youens, author of the most comprehensive study of the background of *Die schöne Müllerin*, Paisiello's comic opera was reinterpreted in Romantic terms by Schubert's source, Müller (4). In *Die schöne Müllerin (Im Winter zu lesen)* [*The Beautiful Miller's Daughter (To Be Read in Winter)*], an anthology of seventy-seven poems published in 1817, Müller gave the traditional folk stories a much darker, more tragic dimension. Schubert, in the twenty *Lieder* of his song cycle, *Die schöne Müllerin*, would make the story less tragic than Müller's, but Müller remained his chief source.



Nancy Chinn smiles at a response from a member of the audience, following her presentation, "St. Peter's 'little joke': Cather's Tableau Vivant in *The Professor's House*." Nancy gave her presentation at the Salle du Bon Pasteur at the Abbaye Saint-Michel during the Cather International Seminar in France. Photograph by Betty Kort.

In the Müller and Cather renditions of the story, the main part of the narrative is framed by a prologue and epilogue. (Schubert did not set Müller's poetic prologue and epilogue to music.) Cather, like Müller and Schubert, begins by establishing the pastoral setting in which the action takes place. All three works begin with a boy or young man drawn to the natural setting by the water—a brook in Müller's prologue and in Schubert's song "Where To?," and the creek and marsh at the beginning of *A Lost Lady*.¹ In all three cases the setting is described in classic pastoral terms. Müller's description is very elaborate, with the stream flowing through a landscape covered with flowers and into a beautiful little grove; Schubert's brook is "freshly and wondrously bright," and the sun shines warmly on the scene. Likewise, in *A Lost Lady* the Forrester's marsh, described in great detail, is edenic in its unspoiled beauty (*Lost Lady* 14-15).

In Schubert's fourth song in the cycle, the young miller gives thanks to the brook for having brought him to the place where the miller's daughter lives; he and other young men relax in the setting, "and in a pleasant hour," he says, "she approaches the lads . . . and glances around to see that everything is in order." Similarly, in chapter two of *A Lost Lady*, we are introduced to Marian Forrester, who brings cookies to the boys playing in the marsh. In both the Müller/Schubert versions, and Cather's novel, it immediately becomes clear that the young man idolizes this woman, whom Youens describes as a sort of "Madonna-of-the-fields" (171). Müller says, "she stands there also as our mistress, / and almost like the eye of God, her image is always nearby us." To Schubert's young man, the mill maid is an object of pure affection. To Cather's Niel Herbert, Marian Forrester epitomizes the charm, grace, and sophistication of a "lady"; she is "one of the most beautiful things in his life," "an aesthetic ideal" (82-83).

In song 6 ("Curiosity") Schubert's lover asks the brook whether the maid loves him or loves him not. He is crushed when she fails to realize his love for her (song 7), and in typical romantic fashion, he waivers between delight and despair, according to whether his love seems to pay attention to him and return his affection. He reflects, "If only the beautiful Millermaid / Would notice my faithful thoughts." Niel, like Schubert's young man, would do anything to gain the fair lady's attention and appreciation, even, for example, agreeing to play host to Constance Ogden in order to serve Marian Forrester.

As I have shown previously, Cather clearly drew from Turgenev the basic details for the scene in which Niel discovers Mrs. Forrester's affair with Frank Ellinger. Like the naïve Vladimir Petrovich of "First Love," who also learns that a woman he adores is having an affair, Niel Herbert throws flowers he had brought for the fair lady into the mud when he discovers her infidelity. However, another interesting parallel between Cather's novel and the Müller/Schubert versions of *Die schöne Müllerin* also involves flower symbolism. In song 9, "The Miller's Flowers," Schubert's lover, having picked forget-me-nots from the side of the brook, says,

Right under her little window,
There will I plant these flowers. . . .
And early in the morning, when she opens the
shutter up,
Then look up with a loving gaze.

On a June morning Niel too brings flowers to lay on the sill of Marian Forrester's window. Schubert's song 18 is titled "Dried Flowers," and in song 19, "The Miller and the Brook," the flowers are no longer forget-me-nots but roses and wilted lilies. If we remember that Cather would later tell Carrie Miner Sherwood that her writing had not been invented but rather had involved the coming together of remembered and rearranged elements, Cather's passage involving the flowers may, in fact, be one of the most important revelations of how her mind worked, of the associative nature of her creative imagination. She certainly was drawing on a very similar passage in Turgenev in which Vladimir Petrovich carries roses to offer to his fair lady, she suggests Schubert's mention of roses and lilies, and she quotes from Shakespeare's Sonnet 94, "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds" (82).

Interestingly, Susan Youens, in her work on Schubert, has also seen the relationship between Müller's poem and Shakespeare's sonnet; the chapter in which she specifically examines similarities and differences between the Müller and Schubert versions of the story of the maid of the mill is titled "'Lilies that fester': Sex and Death in Muller's and Schubert's Cycles."² For Niel Herbert, as for Schubert's young man, the



Julie Olin-Ammentorp, English and Women's Studies professor at Le Moyne College, answers a question after presenting a paper comparing Willa Cather's and Edith Wharton's views on World War I. Julie presented her paper in the Salle du Bon Pasteur at the Abbaye Saint-Michel in Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.

morning has brought only disappointment and disillusionment. It is also interesting to note that in a poem Schubert chose not to set to music, possibly because of its sexually charged innuendo (Youens 190-91), Müller suggests that if one were to look into the fair lady's window, he might well be terribly shocked by what he saw.

The most important influence of this material upon Cather's novel, however, may well have involved the creation of Cather's antagonists, Ivy Peters and Frank Ellinger, both of whom are seen by Niel as threats to his beloved Marian Forrester and as rivals to his own affections. In Schubert's eleventh song, titled "Mein!," the hero is overwhelmed by a sense of love's fulfillment and hope for the future. The young miller's sense of bliss is suddenly interrupted, however, by the appearance of a hunter. In song 14, "Der Jäger" ("The Hunter"), the young man exclaims to the hunter,

Remain, presumptuous hunter, in your own hunting-grounds!
Here there is no game for you to hunt;
Here dwells only a little doe, a tame one, for me. . . .
Then leave your guns in the woods,
And leave your barking dogs at home,
And stop the horn from blowing and hooting. . . .
And leave the mills and the miller in peace!

The young man's reaction to the hunter's appearance is understandable; the intrusion represents the antithesis of bucolic goodness. Early in *A Lost Lady*, the boys' play in the creek and marsh is interrupted by Ivy Peters, who appears on the Forrester property, "dressed in a shabby corduroy *hunting* suit, with a gun and game-bag" (17; italics mine).³ The other boys are stunned at Ivy's audacity in bringing a gun onto the Forrester property; his boldness is matched only by his arrogance in expressing a complete disrespect for what the Forrester marsh and Marian Forrester, in particular, represent. Like the serpent in the garden—to whom he is specifically compared (he has eyes like those of a snake [19]), Ivy Peters will end the boys' play and, with the horrific blinding of the woodpecker, will ruin the day.

Ivy Peters is immediately established as a threat not only to young Niel, who breaks his arm while trying to put the bird out of its misery, but also to Marian Forrester, whom Ivy refers to and treats with total disdain. Youens sees lines in Schubert's "Der Jäger" about a boar trampling a garden as a symbolic suggestion of the hunter's despoiling the body of the miller maid. Cather's brutal description of Ivy Peter's blinding of the woodpecker—and she stresses that it is a *female* woodpecker—can similarly be interpreted as foreshadowing the despoiling of Marian Forrester.

If Müller and Schubert's hunter as described in Schubert's song 14 suggested qualities of the character Ivy



Steve Shively and Bruce Baker walk away from the Palais des Papes (Palace of the Popes) in Avignon. Photograph by Betty Kort

Cather and Schubert (Continued)

Peters, Schubert's song 15, "Jealousy and Pride," may have suggested not only the character Frank Ellinger, but also something of Niel's awareness and distrust of Ellinger's imposing sexuality. From the moment he first sees Ellinger, Niel is disturbed by his whole manner; Niel intuitively feels he must try to protect Marian Forrester from him. In describing the hunter in Müller and Schubert, Youens says, "In sexual matters . . . he appears quasi-animalistic, driven by instinct and sudden, overwhelming urges, the violent virility of it all compelling to that which is most animal-sexual in women. When one adds defiance of bourgeois laws and hyper-freedom to the mixture, one has the *Jägerheld* ['hunter hero'], a creature both men and women were taught to admire and to fear" (71). Does this description not apply perfectly to Frank Ellinger, who, though he cared lovingly for his invalid mother, had been described as a "notoriously 'wild'" and "terribly fast young man" (47-48)?

From the moment he hears the hunter's horn (a rather obvious phallic symbol), Schubert's young miller is intimidated. If previously he had felt incapable of making the maid pay attention to him when he was with the other lads (song 5), now he is overwhelmed by the strength, force of character, and sexuality of the hunter. The same feelings are displayed by Niel Herbert in chapter four of *A Lost Lady* where Cather says of Frank Ellinger,

His chin was deeply cleft, his thick curly lips seemed very muscular, very much under his control, and, with his strong white teeth, irregular and curved, gave him the look of a man who could bite an iron rod in two with the snap of his jaws. His whole figure seemed very much alive under his clothes, with a restless, muscular energy that had something of the cruelty of wild animals in it. (44)

Soon both Niel and the reader will learn that it is this very forcefulness and "animal magnetism" (a kind of sadistic quality) that Niel's fair lady, Marian Forrester, finds so appealing about Ellinger—when Ellinger and Marian go to "cut cedar boughs," he takes off his glove "with his teeth," he squeezes her hand so hard he hurts her, he "crushes" her against him (62-63).

In song 14 of Schubert's cycle, the hunter is reprimanded for having entered the miller's pastoral paradise; in song 15, however, the brook urges the young lover to question not the hunter but the maid:

To where are you going so quickly, so ruffled and wild . . .
Do you hurry full of anger for the arrogant hunter?
Turn around and scold first your millermaid,
For her light, loose, little flirtatious mind,

Didn't you see her standing at the gate last night,
Craning her neck toward the large street?
When the hunter returns gaily home from the catch,
No decent girl sticks her head out the window.

As most readers of *A Lost Lady* soon realize, it is not Marian Forrester but rather Niel's idealized vision of her, his expectation that she always be the lady but never the woman, that is the fundamental problem in *A Lost Lady*. Niel's reaction to his shocking discovery that Marian has failed to live up to his idealized vision of her certainly has parallels in Turgenev's "First Love," but a comparable description of disappointment and rage

also appears in what is perhaps the most powerful of all the Müller poems, "Blümlein Vergißmei" ("Little Forget-Me Flower"). In both the Müller and Schubert versions of "The Beautiful Maid of the Mill," the distraught young man ends up committing suicide. In Cather's novel Niel is devastated by his discovery, but Cather did not choose a dark ending for her version of the story. *A Lost Lady* is more *Bildungsroman* than Romantic tragedy. Although we are told that it was "an aesthetic ideal" as opposed to "a moral scruple" that Marian's affair with Ellinger had "outraged," Niel is overwhelmed by his discovery of her sexuality. Initially, Niel Herbert, like Müller's and Schubert's miller lads, unable to see Marian Forrester as Madonna, can see her as little more than whore. (Youens sees this dichotomy as "a central theme in *Die schöne Müllerin*" [162].) After significant time has passed, however, he is able to feel that he is "very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him into life" (163).

In the Scholarly Edition of *A Lost Lady*, Susan Rosowski notes that Cather began writing her new novel in the winter and spring of 1922, and that "she proceeded with remarkable speed" (189). Cather would tell Flora Merrill in 1925 that she wrote the book in five months (Bohlke 77). As the rest of the composition history makes clear, however, completion of the novel was difficult, with Cather writing several versions and still at work on the manuscript at least through July 1922, with final revisions done in January 1923 (*Lost Lady* 189). Edith Lewis's description of Willa Cather's "method of working" (126) perhaps throws some interesting light on how Cather's knowledge of the Müller/Schubert



Betty Jean Steinshouer, Cather scholar and Chautauqua presenter, shares a moment with Evelyn Funda, Utah State University specialist in Western American women's writing. The two are standing in the main courtyard of the Abbaye Saint-Michel. Photograph by Betty Kort.

versions of the miller maid's story played into the writing of *A Lost Lady*. Cather, Lewis says, generally began with "a firm underlying design" (126) for a new novel, but then "writing with her was a form of improvisation" (126): "During the time she was not writing, or engaged with something else, I think she was very much preoccupied with the past out of which her story sprang; not actively trying to construct anything, but surrendering herself to memories, impressions, experiences, that lay submerged in her consciousness; letting them come to the surface, and relate themselves to the theme of her narrative" (127). Speaking more specifically of Cather's interest in music, Lewis

comments, “Music, for Willa Cather, was hardly at all, I think, an intellectual interest. It was an emotional experience that had a potent influence on her own imaginative processes—quicken[ing] the flow of her ideas, suggesting new forms and associations, translating itself into parallel movements of thought and feeling” (47-48).

The parallels between *A Lost Lady* and Müller and Schubert’s versions of *Die schöne Müllerin* are likely attributable to Cather’s previous knowledge of the works, whatever “lay submerged in her consciousness” that was called up, perhaps, by the new edition of the song cycle. Willa Cather often drew upon and borrowed heavily from sources. She was generally reluctant to reveal those sources and influences, though she did tell the poet Orrick Johns in a November 1922 letter that she was surprised that he had seen the Parsifal allusion in *One of Ours*, despite her having buried it so deeply. In the case of *A Lost Lady*, the same sort of influence that Johns saw in *One of Ours* only weeks after its publication may have been “buried” for over eighty years.

Cather herself said three years after the novel was published that a certain type of writer, herself included no doubt, has “a brain like Limbo, full of ghosts, for which [one] has always tried to find bodies” (Bohlke 79). The text of *A Lost Lady* evidently took shape, “came together” as numerous literary ghosts—Turgenev, Shakespeare, Flaubert, and others—flooded Cather’s mind after she read about the death of Lyra Garber. Recognizing Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* as another “ghost” that went into the making of *A Lost Lady* not only adds a new dimension to our reading of this particular novel but also suggests yet again the rich texture of so much of Cather’s fiction.



International Seminar participants toured the Citadelle des Baux at Les Baux-de-Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Notes

¹Translations from the German are those found at “The Fair miller-maid: Song Cycle by Franz Peter Schubert.” <http://www.recmusic.org/lieder>.

²This chapter on the Müller/Schubert versions of *Die schöne Müllerin* provides many additional fascinating insights into Cather’s novel. It is highly recommended to anyone interested in *A Lost Lady*.

³Youens discusses the color symbolism in *Die schöne Müllerin* at length. Of particular note is her description of the association of the color green with evil. In chapter 2 of *A Lost Lady* Ivy Peters appears in a corduroy hunting suit (the standard color for corduroy originally was green), and in chapter 7 of part I, Niel hears Frank Ellinger’s “fat and lazy” laugh behind the closed “door-like green shutters” of Marian Forrester’s room (82).

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Richard Harris, J. J. McMullen Professor of Humanities at Webb Institute in New York, listens intently to a comment from an audience member at the Amphithéâtre, Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, following his presentation of a paper called “‘Pershing’s Crusaders’: G. P. Cather and the American Expeditionary Force in France.” Photograph by Betty Kort.



President's Message

Dear Catherland,

The extraordinary seminar in Paris and Avignon, with participants from across Europe and Asia besides the "usual suspects," demonstrated the widespread appeal of Cather regardless of national boundaries. Since her fiction is always crossing those boundaries, and confounding our narrower nationalisms as it does so, this should come as no surprise. Rather, it is another reminder that we cannot interpret our mission as a foundation narrowly.

The seminar insisted on high levels of scholarship and a high quality of argument, while being open to all approaches to Cather. Conversations during the seminar reminded us not to neglect the wide range of interests, including Cather and sexuality, Cather's literary inheritance, and the social and material conditions she addresses.

Ann Romines, Betty Kort, and President Peek pose following President Peek's introductory address to Cather International Seminar participants at the Café Solférino in Paris. Photograph by Françoise Palleau-Papin.

I wonder if, in addressing the many and varied interests in the mesas and canyons of the southwest (*The Professor's House*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Song of the Lark*), Cather wasn't being prescient about the many and varied interests in her work; and if, in the clash of those interests, she wasn't anticipating our varied approaches to her art and to art itself.

We will continue to address Cather and her work at the next Spring Conference and Festival, June 5-7, 2008, in Red Cloud under the title "Cather and Her Contemporaries."

With the seminar behind us and the conference ahead of us, I was doubly interested when my good friend Bob Hamblin, a leading Faulkner scholar and director of the Faulkner Center at Southeast Missouri State University, sent me this poem:

MY MOTHER'S INITIALS

I took books home from college
for my mother to read,
and she read them all.
When she finished one she would
write her initials and date
on the back flyleaf.

Heedless of time, neither of us
bothered to preserve the books,
but a few have survived,
long past her death and now
undoubtedly not far from my own.
I'm looking at our copy of *My Ántonia*,
with my underlinings and marginal notes
and her penciled entry at the end:
"Finished Reading Apr. 16-66 PLH."

It's my favorite Cather novel
because *Ántonia* reminds me
of my mother: a country girl,
minimally schooled, untraveled,
hard-working, lovingly devoted
to husband and children.

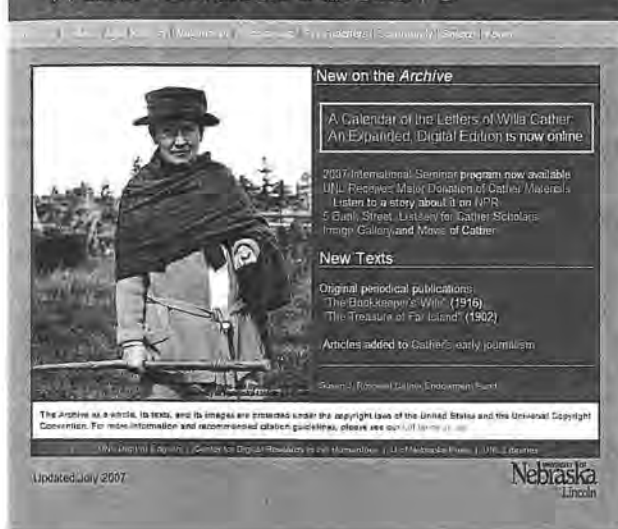
I don't recall any of our
conversations
about the book, but when I hold it
in my hand, and look
at that sacred, deathless script,
I feel her presence
and wonder which book
I should next give her to read.

—Robert Hamblin

The poem's portrait of someone caring for literature, caring for reading, caring for Cather, caring for her son and the shaping of his mind and life—that to me is a poignant portrait, one we should keep in mind, as we continue to ask, which book should we next give someone to read? In what way can we help the stories pass across place and time, generation to generation?

With many thanks to John Murphy, Françoise Palleau-Papin, and Robert Thacker for the seminar, and to Robert Thacker and Joe Urgo for the coming conference, and to Betty Kort whose fine hand helps direct it all, I am sincerely yours,

Chuck Peek



Willa Cather in the Digital Age: the Online Archive

In the essay that follows, Andrew Jewell describes the newly expanded *Calendar* of Cather's letters (in paraphrase) that he and Janis Stout have edited, and which is now available at the Willa Cather Archive (<http://cather.unl.edu/>). The *Calendar* has immediately become an authoritative, necessary tool for Cather scholars—and a source of information and pleasure for readers interested in the human woman behind the literary work.

The new *Calendar* is one of several features of the Willa Cather Archive, a joint effort of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, the UNL Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, the Cather Project at UNL, and the University of Nebraska Press. Over the past decade the Archive has evolved into a nationally recognized leader among literary websites devoted to providing access to digitized archival material and related scholarly content.

In addition to the *Calendar*, the Archive offers its users a host of materials—too many to list here—including, among other things,

- the full texts of the Scholarly Editions of *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*;
- scanned versions of the first editions of several other works prior to 1922;
- much of the short fiction;
- the interviews and other materials collected in Bohlke's *Willa Cather in Person*;
- Cather's early journalistic and student writing;
- a gallery of hundreds of photographs;
- the entirety of James Woodress's *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*;
- audio and film clips of Cather;
- issues of *Cather Studies*, *Teaching Cather*, and *The Mower's Tree*.

More material is added regularly, and new projects are under way (including, for example, a geographical locating tool to pin down the well-traveled author's whereabouts at any moment of her life, and a bibliography of Cather's own reading). Most of the texts at the Cather Archive are fully searchable, and thus offer both shortcuts and wholly new avenues for archival research.

The Archive is available without restriction to any interested user at <http://cather.unl.edu/>.

Hundreds of New Cather Letters Revealed

Andrew Jewell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

We live in a deeply ironical time in the history of Willa Cather scholarship: on the one hand, restrictions in her will prevent the quotation of any of Cather's correspondence in any publication; on the other, a wealth of new letters written by Cather has recently come to light, letters rich with her distinctive voice, intelligence, and sensibility. As scholars, we are in the unfortunate situation of reading and knowing extraordinary new Cather texts while simultaneously we are prevented from writing or talking about them directly. Nevertheless, we are growing experienced in negotiating this difficult situation, and this essay is an attempt to do just that—to reveal something about the new letters without breaking the legal restrictions in place.

Since the publication of Janis Stout's 2002 volume, *A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather*, nearly 700 new letters have been located, which means that Cather scholars must now consider a correspondence with about 40% more letters than previously known, or approximately 2500 letters in total. Given the numbers, it is virtually impossible to adequately represent them in a brief article. It seems a shame to ignore the details of the individual pieces of correspondence, letters that are often

revealing, funny, emotional, vibrant, and pointed. But it also feels inappropriate to ignore the big picture, the archival story behind the numbers. So, I will try to do both. I want to begin by giving a brief overview of all the letters that have emerged since the publication of Stout's volume in 2002, then delve into a couple of the "greatest hits" from the new group that suggest the astonishing richness of the new materials, and, finally, explain the efforts underway to continue the great work Stout did with her book.

The 700 or so new letters have emerged in two basic ways. The first, and by far the most significant, has been through major new acquisitions at archival depositories. Drew University has acquired about 110 letters written by Cather to various people, most significantly Trixie and Sidney Florance, Achsah and Earl Brewster, and Louise Burroughs. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has acquired about 550 new letters written predominantly to Cather's parents, sister Elsie Cather, brother Roscoe Cather, sister-in-law Meta Cather, and nieces Helen, Virginia, Margaret, and Elizabeth Cather. These letters are a part of three new collections: the Philip and Helen Cather Southwick

Hundreds of New Cather Letters Revealed (Continued)

Collection, the Susan and James Rosowski Cather Collection (given in honor of the Rosowskis by an anonymous donor), and the Roscoe and Meta Cather Collection. The second way letters have emerged is through the continued description, indexing, and re-discovery of materials already in repositories. We have found out about many of these letters through tips from Cather scholars, diligence of archivists, and online searchable finding guides. It is through this second method that ten letters from Smith College, six letters from the University of Virginia, six letters from the College of the Holy Cross, and scattered letters from Yale, UCLA, the New York Public Library, the Bancroft Libraries, the American Antiquarian Society, and others came to light.

To give a sense of some of the amazing letters that are now available for research, I want to focus in on three in particular. Though many, many of the new letters are of keen interest to scholars, I selected three letters that strike me as particularly illuminating, primarily for the way they reveal Cather's thinking about her work and her contemporaries, but also because they are vibrant, witty, and emotionally charged. I wish I could quote these letters directly, for we can fully experience the correspondence only when Cather's language is intact, but I must, like every other scholar working with her correspondence, fall back begrudgingly on paraphrase.

The first letter is one of two recently uncovered by an archivist at Dartmouth College that are written to Robert Frost.¹ Following on the heels of a letter proclaiming her fondness for Frost's work and disparaging the work of Edgar Lee Masters and Ezra Pound, Cather writes on January 20, 1916, from 1180 Murray Hill Avenue in Pittsburgh:

Dear Mr. Frost:

Wishes she could be in New York for the Poetry Society banquet, but cannot. Regrets missing the opportunity to meet him and Mrs. [Elinor Miriam White] Frost. Wonders if he ever chanced to meet Miss [Sarah Orne] Jewett. Has often thought, if she had lived to see them, that Frost's books would have been a great encouragement to her in a world full of poets like Witter Bynner and Phoebe Snow. Unfortunately, Frost's fellows in the Poetry Society are so wound up in the ideal of "free verse" that they can't distinguish a line by him from one published in a rural newspaper. They don't even know enough to dislike Florence Earle Coates or Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Many of the so-called "poets" seem to be so just to make Miss [Jessie B.] Rittenhouse happy. Thankfully, the success of junk only damages things in the short term. Fears that if she ever attended a meeting of the Poetry Society she would be unable to suppress her opinions, and begs Frost to keep them private. Since poetry needs publicity as much as anything else, perhaps the Rittenhouse crowd will actually help Frost somewhat. Anyhow, more subtle methods can still succeed. Has shown many of his poems to others, including "The Mountain," "Mowing," "Going for Water," and "The Tuft of Flowers," and no one needs to have them explained, nor has anyone's sensibility been altered because, in Mr. [Edgar Lee] Masters's words, "the hammock fell/ Into [sic] the dust with Milton's poems

[sic] " [from Masters's poem "Many Soldiers" in *Spoon River Anthology*]. Not everyone believes that is symbolic! Willa S. Cather

This letter to Frost is one of many that have recently emerged that are written to contemporary writers, artists, and luminaries; among them are several letters to painters Earl and Achsah Brewster at Drew University, re-discovered letters to the poet Louise Imogen Guiney at College of the Holy Cross and Thornton Wilder at Yale, letters to arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson at Dartmouth, and letters to Frederic Gershom Melcher, bookseller and creator of the Caldecott and Newberry awards for children's literature, at the University of Virginia.

By far the largest collection of letters, however, has been the new Roscoe and Meta Cather Collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, nearly 400 letters and postcards written to Cather's brother Roscoe, his wife Meta, and their daughters Virginia, Elizabeth, and Margaret Cather. Edith Lewis wrote in *Willa Cather Living* that, "Of all her family, Roscoe was the one nearest to her, understood her best. He had felt from the first the promise and importance of her work, and had followed it with faithful sympathy and devotion. . . . [Her] correspondence with this brother told, I think, more about her work and herself than any of her other letters" (188-189). Many of the letters that have emerged in this collection live up to the expectation Lewis sets in her memoir. Though it is an oversimplification to claim that letters to any one correspondent are the most revealing letters she ever wrote, the letters in the Roscoe and Meta Cather Collection are incredibly rich and detailed, covering a wide and varied range of topics, including Cather's work, her finances, her feelings about friends and family, and her perspectives on a range of issues from healthcare to Johnny Walker Black Label whiskey. In addition to the powerful letters reflecting on her writing life, a highlight of this collection is the charm and playfulness Cather displays particularly in letters and postcards to and about her nieces Margaret, Elizabeth, and Virginia. She writes long and witty letters to Roscoe about the developing characters of his daughters, claims that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a *Swiss Family Robinson* kind of book and especially written for her nieces and nephews, and sends a series of postcards from France of the gargoyles of Notre Dame. On one of the postcards, she even indicates where Quasimodo threw the wicked priest off the parapet.

I want to look closely at two letters Cather wrote to her brother Roscoe, letters that demonstrate the rare trust and intimacy of their relationship. The first is a letter written August 26, 1940, reflecting on the novel she's just completed, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. As before, I will paraphrase.

Dear Roscoe:

His granddaughter is delightful. Everyone at Whale Cove Cottage enjoyed seeing the photograph of Elizabeth's daughter, and all send their best to her. Completed the final chapter of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* last week, which she had written by hand three times, and telegraphed Knopf. His reply is enclosed; please send it back. The name is pronounced "Sapphi-ra" with a short "i", like Mediera or Zamira, not like the biblical "Sapph-eye-ra." It is an English name based on the biblical name. When she is back at her good typewriter, will write more. The old one she has

at Grand Manan is the same \$30 machine she bought from a destitute man in Cheyenne when she was there with Roscoe and Douglass. She used it for all her early novels. Likes to write the first draft of a novel by hand. Has handwritten *Sapphira* twice; some parts of it were even written three or four times by hand. Technically, it is the hardest novel she ever attempted, and it has been difficult to work on. There is a formal experiment in it that many will not appreciate, one that she acknowledges reveals the whole enterprise. Though most will not notice, the novel has a hidden performance beneath the main one. That hidden performance is revealed in the Epilogue, which is where the motivation and authority for the entire novel is contained. She had to provide an accurate description of what happened

to her as a child, or the whole novel would be an unnatural construction like so many other fictions of the slave-holding South, full of fancy clothes and houses, pretentious talk, and Uncle Remus speech. Has written the honest language of black Virginians, which is not much like Uncle Remus dialect. That way of speaking has been constantly playing in her imagination since she began writing the book. While writing, she traveled South to make sure she had it right, using the only notebook she ever needed: her ear. Hopes Roscoe will save this letter until after he's read the novel, for it is her first commentary on it. Roscoe is the only member of her family who gives a damn. That hasn't always bothered her, but as she ages

she longs for the attention of her family. Still, it is better to have disinterested relatives than to have the kind D. H. Lawrence has. Barrie and Thomas Hardy, thankfully, left only their books to speak for them, and that is how it should be. Is exhausted, so is writing thoughtlessly. Please excuse her. Love, W.

This letter is captivating for what it explicitly reveals, like Cather's claim that *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* was written directly against popular portrayals of the American south and, particularly, African Americans, portrayals which she recognizes as dishonest. But the letter is equally compelling for the emotional isolation Cather expresses late in her life, the sense that, at the end of her career, Roscoe is the only member of her family that cares about what she does.

The final letter that I want to linger over is another late one written to her brother Roscoe, a letter written from The Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, on November 6, probably in 1938. It is, like much of her later correspondence with Roscoe, reflecting on her life and the long relationship she has shared with her brother.

Dear Roscoe:

Can't believe he was sweet-talked by an insurance salesman! The doctor she consulted in New York thought his problems were likely due to mistakes made by his doctor. He should have gone to the Mayo Clinic where they have more experience with such procedures and where they consider the effect of the surgery on one's life. They would not operate on her appendix, despite its poor health, because they thought it would rob her of her energy, and, for reasons she doesn't understand, they would not operate on Dorothy Canfield's deforming goiter. Roscoe tends to trust people too much, which is his one endearing fault. It is one thing when it compromises his mind and money, but he shouldn't let it endanger his body! He has trusted



Roscoe Cather. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Archives and Special Collections.

his two well-intentioned brothers too much, but at least that doesn't put his body in danger. Is by herself at the Shattuck Inn, a place that has been very good to her over the years. *My Antonia* and *A Lost Lady* were completed there, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was started there. Wrote her best things there. Isabelle first introduced her to it. Her death, right on the heels of Douglass's, has been devastating. Isabelle cared more about Cather's work over 38 years than any other person. She herself has cared so much about different places and people that it will destroy her in the end, but it has been the source of her success as a writer. People refer to her "classic style," but not many understand that the intensity behind the plain language is what really matters. Figured out a long time ago that if one was devoted to the subject, one could write very quietly and get other people caught up in it, even people reading in different

languages—Hungarian and Romanian are the most recent of her many translations. That's the main thing: one must honestly and plainly love something. Never tried to develop that part of herself; in fact, she has tried to push it back since she was twenty years old. Such repression is what gave her a decent "style," which is another word for the writer himself, his character and history. Isabelle witnessed her whole story. She is tired out now, however, and can only work an hour and half each day, which she does to flee from herself. The words don't come as easily or as clearly as they used to. Maybe she'll recover, who knows. The current book keeps getting disturbed by death and sickness, and she continues writing not for the sake of the novel itself, but for the solace of losing herself in writing, something that has been completely engrossing to her. Goodbye, Roscoe. This is the first long letter she has written to anyone other than poor, devastated Jan Hambourg. W.

Deeply reminiscent of Cather's articulation of literary writing in "The Novel D meubl ," that "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created" (Cather 41), Cather's description of writing as a devotional act is striking. For Cather, writing was an emotional process as much as it was an intellectual one, and nowhere is her emotional sensibility so revealed as it is in her correspondence.

These three letters—and the rest of the roughly 2500 Cather letters known to exist—are an important part of a new edition of Janis Stout's 2002 *Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather*. In June 2007, the *Willa Cather Archive* (<http://cather.unl.edu>) published an expanded, digital edition of the book, co-edited by Janis Stout and myself and with much editorial assistance from Sabrina Ehmke Sergeant. The first installment of this new edition contains about 240 more letters than appeared in the print volume, and the rest of the letters will steadily be included over the next couple of years. The digital design of this new edition will allow for endless flexibility and growth: when more letters come to light in the future, as they inevitably will, the new edition will include them. The digital *Calendar* aims to be a comprehensive resource for all Cather scholars and readers who are interested in her correspondence. In addition to flexibility, the digital environment allows for sophisticated interaction with the letter entries. For example, readers are able to search across the letters in multiple ways, to generate automatic indices of all the addressees, names, places, repositories, or works mentioned in the correspondence, and to see thumbnail biographies and images of many of the individuals referenced. In short, the digital *Calendar* is a useful, freely available, and authoritative research tool for anyone studying Cather's life and writings.

Since we embarked upon this digital edition two years ago, the number of known new letters has tripled, and it will take a considerable amount of time before summaries of all letters will be published, before the comprehensive edition of our dreams will be realized. Though the digital *Calendar* promises to be a powerful tool for Cather scholars, one hopes that its usefulness is only temporary and that, before too many more decades pass, it can be replaced by full access to Cather's own words.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks go to Sarah Hartwell at Dartmouth College who looked beyond our request and found the two letters from Cather to Frost. All work with Cather's correspondence depends upon the excellent work of archivists around the country.

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Mark Madigan, Professor of English at Nazareth College (New York), presents his paper, "Willa Cather in Paris: The Mystery of a Torn Photograph," during the second Plenary at the Amphith atre, Sorbonne Nouvelle, in Paris. Photograph by Betty Kort.



Janis Stout, Editor of *Willa Cather and Material Culture*, addresses a group at the 2007 Cather Spring Conference. She is standing beside Betty Kort's framed photograph of the Turkish Lady, an artifact from the Nebraska State Historical Society's Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

2007 Cather Spring Conference Highlights Cather and Material Culture

Janis Stout's keynote address was central to the 2007 Cather Spring Conference in Red Cloud. The conference was planned around Stout's book, *Willa Cather and Material Culture*, and highlighted a wide variety of artifacts important in the life and writing of Willa Cather. At the Cather Center, scholars presented information on a wide variety of subjects, including Cather's scrapbook, clothing, and special editions of her works. Scholars and participants also explored the historic buildings at the Cather Historic Site in Red Cloud and examined the artifacts within them. All of these activities emphasized Cather's use of objects to express meaning.

Gracing the Gallery at the Cather Center were Betty Kort's photographs of artifacts from the Cather Foundation and from the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection owned by the State Historical Society. The St. Julianna Choir performed on the Opera House stage under the direction of Fritz Mountford, and David Porter presented the first concert performance on the Cather Foundation's new Steinway piano.

Highlights of the banquet, eloquently orchestrated by Ron Hull as Master of Ceremonies, included presenting the Volunteer Award to local resident Patty Hutton and recognition of the Norma Ross Scholarship winner, Justine McMullin from Leigh High School, Leigh, Nebraska.

Because the 11th International Willa Cather Seminar in France followed directly on the heels of the Spring Conference, this issue of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* concentrates on that event. The Winter issue of the *Newsletter* will focus on the 2007 Spring Conference in more detail.

Cather and Criticism in the Classroom: A Teaching Experiment

Josh Dolezal, Central College

In Ted Kooser's "Night Class," a group of poets hashes out a workshop in a room like a sour ice cream carton, with chairs circled around a "pit" where the poems "fly at each other / with blades on their spurs." The world beyond the classroom is quiet and still, bathed in darkness, a girl in a white coat "crossing the hour like a moon." While the poets battle it out, she passes below their window and disappears, as oblivious to them as they are to her. The irony here—that the classroom cuts the poets off from the real poem happening outside—is both comical and sad. But the image does ring true, as teachers of literature face a similar challenge in trying to bring the world of criticism alive. When I began my senior seminar on Cather this spring at Central College, I wanted to breathe some life into the research process and turn the circle of chairs that Kooser describes toward the world outside. I had used speaker phone interviews in other classes, largely to circumvent the sizable costs of bringing writers to campus, and I thought this could be a way to make the critical conversation seem more personal and more accessible to students.

We first spoke with Debra Cumberland about her essay "A Struggle for Breath: Contemporary Vocal Theory in Cather's *The Song of the Lark*." The class read her article to prepare, and I asked students to email interview questions before our next meeting so that I could organize a guide to keep the discussion moving. We then gathered around a speaker phone to make the call. I knew that Deb had written this article as a graduate student, so I wanted to ask about her process: how the idea came to her, how she went about the research, what kinds of revisions the

paper saw. The fact that the article was engendered by Deb's lifelong interest in music and experience as a vocalist helped frame literary scholarship as an extension of one's personal life.

The group had established some context for Freudian criticism before reading John Swift's essay "Cather's Archbishop and the 'Backward Path,'" as Blanche Gelfant's article on sublimation and the "forgotten reaping hook" in *My Antonia* and Joan Acocella's chapter "Politics and Criticism" inspired spirited discussion of the purpose of scholarship. Once again I solicited questions from the group to prepare. One student asked about authorial intention: "Did Cather purposely include these incidents to create a theme of premature ending for *Latour*, or are they merely accidental inclusions that we pick out and string together to form our own interpretation?" Another wondered why John thought literary criticism was worthwhile. His reply was a much-needed boost and became a kind of mantra for the class: "Because the alternative is silence."

Our last phone conference with Melissa Homestead began with an overview of her work on Edith Lewis, particularly Lewis's editorial hand in Cather's writing process. Students had prepared questions about *Shadows on the Rock* after reading Ann Romines's essay "After the Christmas Tree: Willa Cather and Domestic Ritual," and many wanted to address questions about gender, particularly in light of Cather's early resistance to conventional roles and satirical review of sentimentality in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. One student asked, in light of Cather's view of miracles in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*:

"Can we consider Auclair a reconciling factor between religion and rationality?" Melissa's rich knowledge of Cather's personal life helped orient our discussions of gender and belief within the context of Cather's letters and archival materials in Lincoln.

Near the end of the term, in preparation for final revisions to the seminar paper, I asked the class to imagine themselves entering a room full of people talking about Cather. The introduction was their chance to show that they were knowledgeable enough about the conversation to be taken seriously, and the thesis was their chance to not only gain the attention of this group of scholars, but to make the specialists catch their breath at the thought of a new idea. Our talks with Deb, John, and Melissa helped this scenario become more than a metaphor.



Josh Dolezal's senior seminar from Central College culminated with a visit to Red Cloud and the 2007 Spring Conference. Photograph by Nasra Al-Habsi; courtesy of Josh Dolezal.



Director of Education and Archives Joins Cather Foundation Staff

The Cather Foundation is pleased to introduce Cynthia Ann Bruneteau as the new Education Director and Archivist. Cindy comes to the Foundation with a Master of Arts Degree in English from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Most recently she was Editor of Omaha NetShops and had been an instructor at UNO, Creighton University, and Metropolitan Community College.

Along with routine responsibilities for educational programming, grant writing, and archival work, Cindy will be in charge of Prairie Programming and the new Elderhostel Program. Cindy received training for the Elderhostel Program in Las Vegas in August.

Red Cloud Opera House Hosts Documentary

A World War II documentary titled THE WAR premiered at the Red Cloud Opera House on September 23rd. THE WAR, a seven-part series, began on PBS September 26th.

This seven-part series is directed and produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. THE WAR is an account of World War II taken from the personal accounts of a few men and women from four American towns. According to PBS, "The series explores the most intimate human dimensions of the greatest cataclysm in history—a worldwide catastrophe that touched the lives of every family on every street in every town in America—and demonstrates that in extraordinary times, there are no ordinary lives."

See www.willacather.org for more information about the Red Cloud Premiere or visit www.pbs.org/thewar/ for more information about the program itself.

Between Fences

In little towns, lives roll along so close to one another; loves and hates beat about, their wings almost touching. On the sidewalks along which everybody comes and goes, you must, if you walk abroad at all, at some time pass within a few inches of the man who cheated and betrayed you, or the woman you desire more than anything else in the world. Her skirt brushes against you. You say good-morning, and go on. It is a close shave. Out in the world the escapes are not so narrow.

—Lucy Gayheart

The Barnes County Historical Society in Valley City, North Dakota, is planning an exhibit that will include the above quotation taken from Willa Cather's *Lucy Gayheart*. The exhibit will take place during May and June of 2008. Called "Between Fences," the exhibit will reflect on how fences take their physical forms and usages and implications and then branch off into the metaphorical fences found in small towns. For more information, contact Wes Anderson at the Barnes County Historical Society in Valley City, North Dakota, or see http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/exhibs_fences/fences.htm.



As the 11th International Cather Seminar ends, Keiko Arai, University of Maryland, and Yoshiko Kayano, Meisei University, Tokyo, say goodbye in the main courtyard of the Abbaye Saint-Michel in Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.



Steve Shively delivers a paper at the Abbaye Saint-Michel in Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Board Member takes New Position

Steve Shively, shown here delivering a paper called "Willa Cather's Geography of Order in *One of Ours*" at the final Plenary session of the 11th International Cather Seminar, is traversing a bit of "geography" himself. Shively, a member of the faculty of Northwest Missouri State University and an editor of *Teaching Cather*, has accepted a position at Utah State starting in the fall. Shively is a member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors and, for several years, chair of the annual Spring Conference in Red Cloud.

Responding to “Breaking the Shackles”

[The Spring 2007 *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*, a special edition edited by John J. Murphy, Professor of English Emeritus at Brigham Young University, elicited a lengthy letter from Janis Stout, Professor of English Emerita at Texas A&M University. We have invited John Murphy and Catherine Morley of the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford, both of whose essays in the issue raised concerns for Professor Stout, to respond, and the entire exchange follows.]

Janis Stout writes:

I write in response to the recent “Special Edition 2007” of the *Newsletter & Review*, which I have found in some ways disquieting. Primarily it is the prescriptiveness and apparent either/or thinking of John Murphy’s opening manifesto “Breaking the Shackles” and his essay “Escaping the Prairie and Approaching Quebec” that trouble me, but also certain assumptions as well as omissions of Catherine Morley’s “Voice of the Prairies?”

Professor Murphy wishes to discount Cather’s ties to region (that is, to Nebraska; Virginia does not come into play here) in order to construct her as an internationalist—more specifically, a Francophile. In a heavily judgmental vocabulary of smallness and largeness he argues that Cather has been “shackle[d]” to Red Cloud and has thereby been “reduced to provincial status.” Critics, he says, have been “reluctant to discuss” her address to “contemporary life” or “broad cultural themes.”

It would seem that we cannot have both the world and the parish, or the world *in* the parish, but must disparage Cather’s finding of significance in locality and the quotidian if we are to acknowledge and appreciate her interest in other scenes and other matters. This all one or all the other approach seems to me to be not only Eurocentric but really reductive. Surely it is the richness of interplay (and even conflictedness) among multiple interests, multiple affiliations and choices, that accounts for her power as a writer.

Beyond this overriding objection, I have to question Professor Murphy’s position in a number of other ways as well. Why, I wonder, must world literature be our “principal concern” if we are to “be contributive”? Why is it more meritorious to seek “the larger concern” of European tradition(s) than the enormously complex and seldom understood ancient cultures of the American Southwest? Even if we grant—as I do not—that the Southwest or the domestic or the rural is a “small” matter, why is largeness necessarily better than smallness? Why are explorations of gender or of race in Cather’s writing and thinking evidence of “small context”? They seem like pretty large human issues to me. Why is it “unfortunate” for readers to be “turned off” by the characters of Noël Chabanel and Jeanne Le Ber in *Shadows on the Rock*? Various readers have provided reasoned rationales for objecting to these characters; why are their readings “unfortunate” and Professor Murphy’s positive one not? Can’t our ideas and interests simply be different, without being subjected to such judgments?

I am equally troubled by the seeming determination to ignore existing scholarly work on Cather in both Professor Murphy’s and Catherine Morley’s essays. To be sure, they both cite the scholarly editions; I would wish everyone would do so. But their acknowledgment of the richness of Cather scholarship is otherwise scanty. Murphy, for example, laments the limiting of

Cather to her ties to a “small town on the edge of oblivion” as if there had not for years been valuable work coming out on Cather and New York, and Virginia, and the Southwest, and the arts (largely). He deplores “the neglect of Cather as a writer of broad cultural themes” as if Joseph Urgo’s and Guy Reynolds’s and Jo Ann Middleton’s and Steven Trout’s books (for example) did not exist. Broadening and deepening our understanding of how fully Cather was implicated in and responsive to culture has been the motivating force of much, if not most, of the scholarly work on Cather for two decades.

Similarly, Morley’s claims that “pre-conceived notions of simplicity and parochialism still surround Cather’s writing” and that she needs to be understood in connection to modernism can only be made by ignoring most of the important recent work. Morley claims that critics have conceived of Cather in “homey” and “folksy” terms—I am hard pressed to think of anyone who has written in such terms, and certainly not recently. Cather’s art, Morley announces, was “profoundly influenced by the great European tradition.” Quite aside from my problems with any notion of “the” great tradition, as if there were only one, or with the notion of identifying “greatness” solely with European traditions, as seems to be implied here, I am troubled by the lack of any acknowledgment of, say, Susan Rosowski’s careful examination of Cather’s ties to English Romanticism fully twenty-one years ago. Cather has long since been recognized as an urbane modernist. To be sure Morley’s more specific project of considering her alongside John Dos Passos has not, and I look forward to it.

In contrast to these problematic assertions, let me point to and praise the balance and thoroughness of Mary R. Ryder’s essay in the same issue, “Cather’s Nod to Mickiewicz.” Ryder demonstrates an awareness of previous work exploring Cather’s involvement with the Classical and European traditions that Murphy and Morley believe have been neglected. She also demonstrates that the European epic tradition represented by Adan Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*, the same tradition Cather invokes in *O Pioneers!* and in much of her later best work, is profoundly rooted in the local. Rather than dismissing the local as “provincial,” such work discovers meaning and dignity within a specific human place—even, or especially, a “home place.” No place, I would insist and Ryder implies, is intrinsically more worthy of attention than another.

As Ryder reminds us, Cather herself said that her art began when she “cease[d] to admire and beg[a]n to remember.” John Murphy seems to wish to reverse that direction, as if she became an artist by ceasing to remember and beginning to admire. But Cather’s richness is that she does both. She is always complex, always multi-faceted, always multi-directional. She should not be reduced to simple and judgmental either-or categories.

Responding to “Breaking the Shackles” (Continued)

John Murphy responds:

While I meant my preface and essay titles to be “arresting,” I’m quite surprised by the fervor of this response, although not by its source. Janis Stout has taken issue with almost everything I’ve written on Cather over the last dozen years.

First of all, unless read for the specific purpose of taking issue, neither my preface “Breaking the Shackles” nor my essay is based on either/or thinking. Rather than ignoring Cather’s ties to region, the preface states that “our *small context* preoccupations need to connect to *large context* ones in order to be contributive;” thus it is calling for the exact same “richness of interplay” Stout espouses. Additionally, one has to consider that the essay was an address to a Cather Spring Conference audience and that the subjects and themes of these conferences have focused primarily (although not exclusively, I admit) on Cather as a prairie writer. My own efforts on the Cather Foundation Board of Governors since 1984 have been devoted to having the Red Cloud-based Foundation serve as the center for the study of Cather in a *large context*. This was the reason why in the late 1970s I suggested the sponsoring of Cather seminars similar to those on Faulkner being held at the University of Mississippi, and why I was asked to direct the first such seminar in Red Cloud and Hastings in 1981. So much for Stout’s “overriding objection,” which seems an example of the “*small-context*’ terrorism” Milan Kundera mentions in his *New Yorker* essay (01/08/07).

Secondly, the *large context* I refer to would include American as well as European traditions. Cather certainly admired the Southwestern landscape and the legacy of its Native culture, its ruins and artifacts, but aside from such appreciation the “interplay” with Natives in her work is restricted primarily to the *Archbishop* and thus between Europeans (French priests and Anglos) and Natives or between Europeans and Hispanics descended from Natives and Spaniards. Perhaps Cather’s own confession in her letter on the *Archbishop* should silence Stout’s protest: “The longer I stayed in the Southwest, the more I felt that the story of the Catholic Church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories.” That’s the story Cather told, and it remains a Euro-centered one, unless her critics decide to rewrite it. Ditto for *Shadows*, a variation on the church’s story in another North American locale. Yes, I believe it’s “unfortunate” when Cather critics are “turned off” by seventeenth-century devotees like Chabanel and Jeanne LeBer, because Cather wasn’t. To be sure, such characters might seem peculiar to some of us today, but Cather’s sympathy was large enough to embrace them and make both inspirations for decidedly positive characters in her novel. I always thought that literature should expand our experiences and knowledge and make us more tolerant, that its purpose was not for supplying us with lifestyles and worldviews to take issue with because we don’t like or don’t understand them.

Thirdly, I hadn’t the least intention of putting down work by Urgo, Reynolds, Trout, or Middleton, since the work of each one is in the direction I’m calling for. However, while their work helps put Cather in the *large context*, it hasn’t changed the popular concept of Cather among academics outside the Cather camp. The tradition of seeing Cather as a prairie writer is a major key that is hard to change, and more recently it has been “enhanced” by the minor one of Cather as a lesbian writer. I suspect that the

modernist Cather comes in a distant third (unless queer aspects are construed as modernist ones), and that that is the reality that Catherine Morley is addressing, although she herself should respond to Stout.

Finally, in my book on *My Antonia* I struggled over its fifth chapter, “The Alembic of Art,” to show how Cather’s depictions of what was positive and art-worthy in Nebraska owe much to Virgil, the Bible, classical mythology, European and American writers and painters, etc. Cather viewed the world, as most Americans do (whether consciously or not), through a Euro-American lens, and even in “Tom Outland’s Story” imports a French-speaking Belgian priest to explain ancient Southwestern culture to her cowboys. When Cather “cease[d] to admire and beg[an] to remember” (to quote Stout’s edited quote), it was through this lens. To put it another way, during her mature phase Cather remembered through what she had learned to admire, and as she aged her memory embraced a larger world than the prairie one. That is the kind of filter Ryder’s fine essay on *O Pioneers!* uses, which is why I selected it for the Special Edition 2007.

Catherine Morley responds:

While I enjoyed reading Janis Stout’s vigorous letter, I rather suspect she has misunderstood, or perhaps mischaracterized, my paper. And I am sorry to hear that it troubled her, but perhaps I can relieve her anxiety here. Of course I am aware of the splendid work of scholars such as Middleton, Rosowski, Reynolds, and Urgo, but a 3,500-word paper gives little opportunity to doff one’s cap to every last Cather scholar. And of course almost all Cather scholars are well aware that she was far more than a parochial regionalist writer, as the richness and diversity of the contributions to recent Cather conferences and the last edition to the newsletter would suggest. But there is equally no doubt that in the wider literary community—especially in Europe—Cather still is given little intellectual coverage and is not widely taught. This, at least in part, is attributable to the “prairie” label. The recent *Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (2005), for example, devotes just three paragraphs to Cather under the heading “Regionalism in American Modernism.” Even Richard Gray’s huge *History of American Literature* (2004) affords her a mere two and a half pages. Whatever else they may disagree on, I am sure that both Janis Stout and John Murphy would concur that Willa Cather and Cather studies deserve a lot better.



Catherine Morley, Associate Fellow of the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford and Academic Fellow at Oxford Brookes University, makes a point following presentation of her paper, “A Writer’s World: Willa Cather and Transnationalism.” Catherine presented her paper at the Salle du Bon Pasteur at the Abbaye Saint-Michel in Provence. Photograph by Betty Kort.



The Executive Director's Report

This summer's 11th International Cather Seminar in France was incredibly successful by all accounts. The papers were excellent, and the arrangements were so keenly planned that I saw no real glitches anywhere along the way. This International Seminar was the first to be solely sponsored by the Cather Foundation, but the Foundation has been involved as a co-sponsor for ten others. Now seems an appropriate time to express our appreciation to all of the seminar directors over the years. Each seminar makes its own demands, and hearty individuals respond, giving generously of time, energy, talents, and educational resources. Each director devotes two or more years to the project, seeing to everything from the broad picture to the minute details. And each director expects at least one catastrophe. All things considered, we have been fortunate. Though there have been a few irritations, no major catastrophes have occurred. Rather we have seen a string of phenomenal successes. For all of these efforts, the Cather Foundation is grateful. Our thanks are profuse.

I don't think that anyone would dispute the fact that the 11th International Cather Seminar in France was by far the most complex, requiring extensive travel and preparation on the part of the directors. Seminar directors John Murphy, Bob Thacker, and Françoise Palleau-Papin put in long, hard hours to plan this seamless week in France. They deserve thanks and full credit for their tireless efforts.



Françoise Palleau-Papin.
Photograph by Nancy Peek.

Françoise is likely known to most of you from the Quebec Seminar in 1995, where she played a significant role. Françoise, of course, was key to the seminar in France. She knew the territory, and her buoyant personality kept everyone smiling throughout the week. I was on the same touring bus as Françoise on all of our outings—no accident on my part. Her running commentary of the countryside was such a pleasure. But most importantly, Françoise was, on an impressively sophisticated academic and cultural level, the indisputable liaison between the English-speaking directors and participants and our French hosts. She played an important role in the planning of the seminar and facilitated each and every event.

Bob Thacker was responsible for the “nuts and bolts” of the seminar. This was the second time that Bob has served as a director for an International Seminar outside of the United States, the first being the Quebec conference in 1995. Bob was responsible for all physical arrangements and a large and complicated budget that refused to stay stable—fluctuating to an alarming degree in concert with the exchange rate between the dollar and the Euro. Once the arrangements were made, Bob kept us all on track with commanding presence, whether meeting a train schedule, presenting papers, or finding the bus after a long day of touring. As for the budget, we join Bob in the hope and expectation that, when all is settled, the budget does balance!



Robert Thacker. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Finally, I extend special thanks to John J. Murphy. I am in agreement with those who see this seminar as an outgrowth of John's life work. John was chosen as editor of the



John J. Murphy. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Scholarly Edition of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* because of his incomparable knowledge of the European influences that permeate Cather's novels, and particularly the *Archbishop*. We see this knowledge informing the editorship of the 2007 Special Edition of the last *Newsletter and Review*, in the brochure that advertised the 2007 11th International Cather Seminar, in the carefully designed program of the seminar, and in the very nature and form that comprised the activities of the International Seminar in France. Not everyone will always agree with John, but no one can deny the quality and competence of his work. Since I work very closely with John, I know firsthand the effort he puts forth to make certain that everything is done appropriately and professionally. The seminar in France was a case in point. I want to end by commenting on John's fine seminar paper, “The Green Vase, Yellow Orange, and White Chapel: Defining Willa Cather.” His presentation clearly “defined” the work of Willa Cather in the broadest of strokes. Approaching Cather's work from an artist's perspective, John gave the participants the opportunity to see and hear and feel the artistry that permeates Cather's writing. His paper was clearly a performance that captured what so many of us sense but cannot so masterfully articulate. Bravo.

The kind of care and effort that went into this seminar (and all of the seminars of the past) never sees just rewards other than the gratefulness of the participants, the Cather Foundation, of course, and the academic world, in general. On every level, we count on finding volunteers like Françoise, Bob, and John. Again, our hearty thanks.



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

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Send letters and news items to

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

**WILLA CATHER
PIONEER MEMORIAL
& EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
(The Willa Cather Society)
Founded 1955 by Mildred Bennett**

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

AIMS OF THE WCPM

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

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

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

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

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Red Cloud Opera House Schedule

Fall & Holiday Events

September 2 at 2:30—**Sarah Arneson Vocal Concert**
Sponsored by the Nebraska Arts Council
and the Aleck and Francis Arneson Family Farm

September 8 at 7:30—**Turtle Creek Bluegrass Band**
Sponsored by the Nebraska Arts Council

September 23 at 2:00—**“The War”**
PBS Premier

Directed and Produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick

September 23 following “The War”—
Pippa White’s “Voices from the Resistance”
Sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council

November 8 at 7:30—**“It Was a Dark and Stormy Night”**
Theatre of the American West

November 25 at 2:00—**“Life in the Middle of America”**
Produced and Directed by Jeff Haller
Presentation and
GALLERY EXHIBIT

Sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council

December 7 at 7:00—**“Singing Cather’s Song”**
A celebration of Willa Cather’s birthday and of
Mildred Bennett.

New Year’s Eve—**“You Must Remember This”**
Dance, reminisce, and request your favorite song at
Rick’s Café!

October/November—**“Old Jules Country”**
GALLERY EXHIBIT
Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center

Become a member of the Cather Foundation! Your membership will help support the world-wide promotion and preservation of the life, times, sites, and works of Willa Cather.

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December Night now on Sale!

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