

Willa Cather

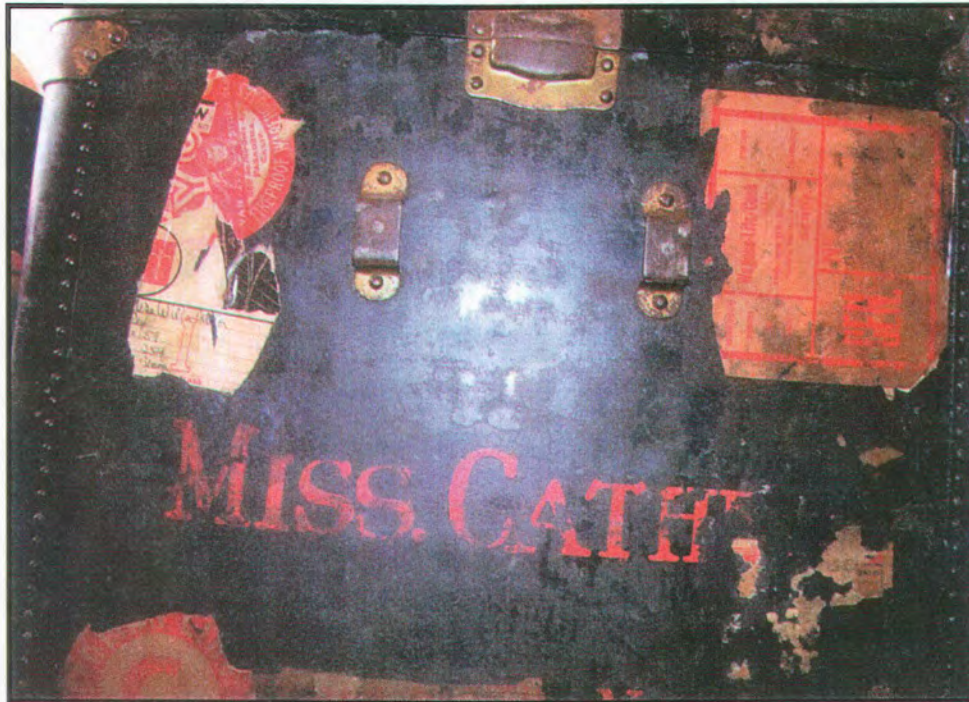
Newsletter & Review



Fall 2005

Volume XLIX, No. 2

Miss Cather's Steamer Trunk Arrives in Red Cloud



Exterior view of Miss Cather's Steamer Trunk. Photograph by Lucia Woods Lindley.

In October of 2004, a very special gift from James Southwick arrived in Red Cloud. It was a large, sturdy, and well-used steamer trunk, stenciled with the name "Miss. Cather" and plastered with battered travel stickers. Inside were more treasures, several elegant evening costumes that Willa Cather had given to her niece, Helen Cather Southwick. They include a turquoise beaded dress with matching evening cape (see p. 45), two additional evening dresses, and two evening bags. This collection confirms Willa Cather's love for rich colors, opulent fabrics, and exotic design. The trunk and its contents are a

marvelous addition to the Cather Foundation's holdings, and we urge you to take a look, the next time you visit the Cather Center in Red Cloud.

When photographer Lucia Woods Lindley was in Red Cloud for the International Seminar in June, she was intrigued by Cather's massive trunk and took the beautiful and evocative color photograph above. Lucia's photographs have been widely exhibited and are well known to Cather readers and scholars, especially in *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*. We are happy to feature her most recent work in the *Newsletter and Review*.

In this issue.....

- ~A portfolio of new scholarship from the 2005 International Seminar by Geneva Gano, Daniel Worden, Michael Schueth, Matt Lavin, Max Despain, Gabriel Scala, and Sarah Gardam, illustrated with blocks from Carrie Jones' Cather quilt
- ~Janis Stout's new essay on Cather and race, "Brown and White at the Dance"
- ~Katy Cardinal on Cather's beaded dress
- ~Plus Robert Kurth's Cather crossword, Antonette Turner's kolache recipe, Willa Cather's 1892 Thanksgiving turkey, and more



Cather Foundation Calendar

The 11th International Willa Cather Seminar

Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, in cooperation with Brigham Young University and St. Lawrence University, announces the 11th International Willa Cather Seminar. It will be held 24-30 June 2007 in Paris and at the Abbey St-Michel de Frigolet. The Abbey is located in Tarascon in the south of France, midway between Avignon and Arles.

"A Writer's World" has been chosen as the seminar theme to encourage broad explorations of Cather's various imaginative intersections—biographical, geographical, historical, philosophical, literary, social, and others. Cather's works as seen from a European perspective will be a particular emphasis; given this, one of the keynote speakers will be Marc Chénétier (University of Paris 7), whose work includes translations of most of Cather's novels into French.

In Paris, seminar sessions will focus on sites in the city that Cather drew upon, most especially for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*. Most seminar sessions will be held at the Abbey, to which seminararians will travel on Tuesday, 27 June. From there, excursions will depart to places in Provence related to Cather's writing, including Avignon, where Cather set "Hard Punishments," the novella she left unfinished. The seminar will be codirected by John J. Murphy (Brigham Young University), Françoise Palleau-Papin (University of Paris 3—Sorbonne Nouvelle), and Robert Thacker (St. Lawrence University).

Inquiries about the 11th International Seminar, including ideas for sessions, expressions of interest, particular themes to be addressed, and other considerations, should be directed to Robert Thacker, Canadian Studies Program, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York 13617.315.229.5970 or 5826 rthacker@stlawu.edu

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New Season at the Opera House to Feature Thematic Structure

"Some Memories are Realities"

(Highlights)

Memories shape us. The sub-themes of the 2006 programming schedule reflect important historic times and events. Below are listed the general themes of programming for 2006.

Looking Back at the Harsh Realities of Childhood—February/March—featuring Lewis Hine's *Crusade Against Child Labor* (Exhibit), Pippa White's "Story of the Orphan Train," the movie *Matilda*, and "The Orphan Trains" documentary.

Our Beloved Western Memories—April/May—featuring "The Grand Ole Opry" (Exhibit), "Always Patsy Cline Show," the "Ride into History" (Humanities Presentation), and the movie *Seabiscuit*.

Forever Young: A Summer Adventure—June/July/August—"Colorbox IV" (Children's Art Exhibit), Missoula Children's Theatre, Prairie Treasure Hunt (Paleontology Dig and Art on the Prairie), and the movie, *Peter Pan*.

Creating New Realities for Women—October—Toni Turnquist (Gallery Exhibit), Pippa White's "L.B. 4:15," the OK Sisters, and the movie *Stepmom*.

Remembering the African-American Experience—November—"Recovered Views: African American Portraits, 1912-1925 (Exhibit), "African-American Pioneers and Entrepreneurs of Nebraska" (Humanities Presentation), and the movie *Amistad*.



New Date for Spring Conference

June 2-3, 2006

Red Cloud, Nebraska

Willa Cather's International Connections

Featuring *Shadows on the Rock*

CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers on the conference theme or other aspects of Cather's life and work are invited for presentation at a special scholarly symposium preceding the Spring Conference, on June 1-2. Symposium participants will discuss current issues in Cather studies with visiting senior scholars and will have opportunities to explore the resources of Red Cloud and the Cather Foundation archives. Papers will be due May 1.

Email proposals by March 1, 2006, to
Betty Kort, Executive Director, Cather Foundation,
bkort@gpcom.net



New Voices in Cather Scholarship

One of the most exciting features of an International Willa Cather Seminar is meeting the graduate students who are the newest crop of Cather scholars. The Seminar held in June 2005 was no exception; a large group of able and engaged graduate students, representing universities from California to Delaware—and many points between!—energized the gathering. Over and over, excellent Seminar papers by graduate students provoked vigorous discussions among Seminarists. For this special feature, we asked the Seminar faculty to nominate graduate student papers that they found especially promising and provocative, and the authors have prepared brief versions of their papers, especially for the Newsletter and Review. We are happy to introduce you to the work of the newest generation of Cather scholars. Watch for these names in the future! —Ann Romines, Issue Editor



Outland Over There: Cather's Cosmopolitan West

Geneva Gano, UCLA

Tom Outland— orphan, cowpuncher, adventurer and explorer, inventor, soldier—seems a composite of distinct American types, but is *The Professor's House* truly presenting Tom as its representative American? While Tom possesses conventionally American traits such as his innate love of freedom, great sensitivity to nature, and wholesome innocence of manners and convention, more striking are the ways in which he exceeds Americanness: his very name, Outland, suggests exclusion rather than inclusion. In the novel, he is aligned with foreign peoples, places, and things, including the cliff dwellers' "Cretan" pottery, his Mexican blanket, and, most crucially, the text's most conspicuous "foreigner," Louie Marsellus. Outland, like Louie, is something of a foreigner who does not really "belong" to any one nation. In this discussion of *The Professor's House*, I argue that for Cather's ostensibly "American" character, Tom Outland, regional identification works against national belonging.

When Louie Marsellus bursts into St. Peter's attic sanctuary to take him out to the lake, he spies Tom's talismanic blanket and flings it across his own shoulders, asking provocatively, "and a very proper dressing-gown it would make for Louie, wouldn't it?" (144). When the Professor identifies it as Outland's, Marsellus regards it with "increased admiration," asserting that he has never been jealous, but rather thinks of Outland "as a brother, an adored and gifted brother" (145). Louie's claims to kinship are often read as yet another encroachment of the stereotypically grasping Jew, Louie, upon the legacy of the "glittering" Tom. However, Louie raises the possibility that the novel's self-proclaimed "native," Tom Outland, and its designated "foreigner," Louie Marsellus, are in fact closely connected throughout the text. In linking these two seemingly dissimilar characters, I propose that Cather denationalizes both Tom and his West. Instead, his West is revealed as a "cultivated," international space.

The most crucial connection between Tom and Louie is their shared status as outsiders to Hamilton. Louie's "foreignness" is a given in the little town, where even the relatively broad-

minded Professor exhibits an anti-Semitic bias. But while Marsellus' foreignness seems to be attributable to his Jewish identity, it is his cosmopolitanism that distinguishes him from the rest of Hamilton. His international acquaintance (such as that he "tots up" with Sir Edgar Spilling), especially his love of France, makes him exceptional.

Marsellus is extremely well versed in life's finer things, which for Cather are French. These include the best hotels in Paris (the *Meurice*), the great French critics, such as Anatole France, and excellent wine ("Burgundy, Burgundy, Burgundy!") (91). His Norwegian architect was trained in Paris (28), and his wife's handmade frocks are French as well (71). While the narrow-minded McGregors "see America first" on their summer vacation to Oregon, the Marsellus entourage goes, instead, to France. Even the name Louie Marsellus evokes France, as "Louie" is an obvious Anglicization of the French, while "Marsellus" rings of the seaport town of Marseilles, home of the Professor's friend Charles Thierault. Marseilles strongly



Claude's View of Leonard Dawson's windmill in *One of Ours*.

recalled the Roman empire for Cather: she wrote as early as 1902 that "one could scarcely feel [more] the presence of Rome" in Italy (Qtd. in Nelson, 8). If the name Marsellus is French, it is also simultaneously Roman; these cross-national, cross-historical connections extend into the new world, even onto the Blue Mesa.

Louie's French cosmopolitanism is the key to his relationship to Tom Outland's West. According to Elizabeth Sergeant, the New Mexico territory reminded Cather most of France; it was like "the country between Marseilles and Nice, but more luminous. Even finer than the Rhone Valley" (81). Edith Lewis affirms this connection, observing that "something in the Provençal landscape . . . deeply stirred" Cather while she was abroad in 1902, "something that in a hidden way linked itself with the American West" (56). Cather's syllogistic logic starts to fall in place here. The south of France strongly evokes Rome and its empire; New Mexico strongly evokes the south of France. Thus, Tom Outland's intense connection of the *Aeneid* with the Blue



New Voices in Cather Scholarship

Outland Over There (Continued)

Mesa: "When I look into the *Aeneid* now, I can always see two pictures: the one on the page, and another behind that," the image of the Mesa world (228).

Rather than proposing that, in Cather's mind, Tom Outland is essentially French, I would like to suggest that Tom is, like Louie, "foreign." That is, in making Tom a Westerner, and connecting him to New Mexico in particular, Cather distances him literally and figuratively from the representative "American" places of the novel, the American Everytown, Hamilton, and the national capital, Washington D.C. Tom Outland's New Mexico is an international, if not quite cosmopolitan, space: its temporary residents, including Roddy Blake, Henry Atkins, Father Duchene, and the collector Fechtig, seem to hail from almost anywhere but the state. And the place "Tom Outland's Story" describes is not exactly American: New Mexico is a territory until 1912, many years after Tom leaves the mesa. By implying that the fictional Blue Mesa is located in the territory of New Mexico, Cather displaces it from the United States proper: its real-world counterpart, Mesa Verde, is located in Colorado, which claimed statehood in 1875. Blurring the state boundaries thus destabilizes the Blue Mesa's national status. Cather's displacement seems especially pointed when we remember that the real-world Mesa Verde had been explicitly nationalized—as a National Park—in 1906.

Territorial New Mexico, part of the nation's frontier past, has been established by scholars including Elizabeth Ammons, William Handley, Guy Reynolds, and Joseph Urgo, as critical to understanding Cather's view of U.S. nationalism and of empire-building more broadly. Cather's transformation of the U.S. National Park of Mesa Verde to the territorial Blue Mesa typifies the way in which *The Professor's House* invokes the category of the national, but then immediately destabilizes it. Cather's work is indeed, as Reynolds claims, "about" nation and empire, but it resists and transcends a nationalist perspective, as the international links between Outland and Marsellus show. By attending to such important distinctions, we are able to detect a resistance to U.S. nationalism that has rarely been highlighted in Cather's writings.

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"I Like to be Like a Man":

Female Masculinity in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*

Daniel Worden, Brandeis University

In *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, Sharon O'Brien insists on Cather's "female" experience in a developmental narrative that traces, as the book's subtitle claims, Cather's "emerging voice" as it goes through an adolescent tomboy phase. As Cather matures, O'Brien argues, she comes to grips with her essential femaleness, womanhood, and femininity, conflating all of these into the umbrella phrase "female experience." For O'Brien, the central character of *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra Bergson, "defies traditional conventions of womanhood, to be sure, but she is a woman nonetheless—not an imitation man, not a grown-up William Cather" (425). This characterization of Cather's development refuses to think of female masculinity as anything but a developmental stage on the way to a proper femininity, a stage characterized by mimicry of patriarchs or naive tomboyism.

Rather than reading Alexandra Bergson as defying conventions of womanhood yet "a woman nonetheless,"

I read her as adopting conventions of masculinity to become masculine, refusing any claim that gender has an essential relation to the sexed body. In doing so, Cather's texts offer up a more radical critique of the gendered binaries that construct the social. Gendered experience itself becomes shot through with social conventions that can be reworked and reformed to produce alternative structures of becoming and belonging.

Opposed to many feminist readings of Alexandra's masculinity, which associate Alexandra with femininity while finding problematic her association with masculinity, I read the novel as treating Alexandra's masculinity as an unproblematic position, and one that is quickly understood in the Nebraskan public sphere. After being introduced in her manly dress, Alexandra takes off her veil and places it on Emil's head, exposing her hair to the wandering gaze of "a shabby little traveling man" in town: "'My God, girl, what a head of hair!' he exclaimed, quite innocently and foolishly.

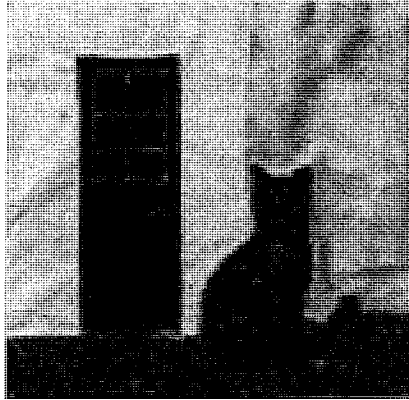


Mrs. Forester walking through her grove in *A Lost Lady*.



She stabbed him with a glance of Amazonian fierceness and drew in her lower lip—most unnecessary severity” (15). Alexandra’s severe look symbolically castrates the drummer, who “let his cigar fall to the sidewalk and went off weakly in the teeth of the wind to the saloon.” Castrated by Alexandra and bitten off by the wind, the drummer proceeds to the bar, the narrator giving one final remark about him: “When a drummer had been knocking about in little drab towns and crawling across the wintry country in dirty smoking-cars, was he to be blamed if, when he chanced upon a fine human creature, he suddenly wished himself more of a man?” The narrator refers to Alexandra as a “human creature,” avoiding a gendered noun, and the drummer’s frustration at not being “more of a man” stems from his inability to subject Alexandra to the gaze, his failure to exert dominance over a female body that turns out to have an “Amazonian” masculinity about it.

While *O Pioneers!* is often treated as Cather’s emergence as an artist, the first instance of the novelist finding her voice and her region, *My Ántonia* is treated as a masterpiece, as the pinnacle of Cather’s Nebraskan imagination. Interestingly, this text often proves even more problematic for feminist readings than *O Pioneers!* because of its narrative form. The narrator of the introduction—a writer, who identifies herself as a woman in the 1918 edition and is often considered an autobiographical character—runs into Jim Burden, an old friend from Nebraska. They strike up a conversation based on a shared affiliation: “We agreed that no one who had not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it. It was a kind of freemasonry, we said” (ix-x). This claim, that the narrator and Jim are members of the same fraternity, casts them as not only equals but also as both masculine. As Michael Kimmel charts in *Manhood in America*, at the turn of the century “fraternal orders boasted a membership of 5.5 million American men out of a total adult male population of about nineteen million” (171). The fraternity of which the narrator and Jim Burden find themselves a part is a disciplined grouping of masculine members, united by



The cat, Blue Boy, in “Old Mrs. Harris.”

a particular idea of the public and religious spheres that stands in contrast to the dominant order.

If *O Pioneers!* focuses on the solace that the land gives in an increasingly patriarchal and rigorously hierarchical public, then *My Ántonia* deals with the possibilities of producing an alternative lineage in the West that allows for one to “like to be like a man” (133), as Ántonia Shimerda states. Ántonia’s family actively builds its own history and expands outside of the nuclear family. The novel’s closing emphasizes the way in which Ántonia provides a model of masculinity for Jim Burden. By returning to visit Ántonia, Jim “had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what little circle man’s experience is. . . . Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past” (360).

This “incommunicable past” is not lost to history but is instead a living process, a way of building public memory. While *O Pioneers!* ends with the promising persistence of Alexandra’s masculinity through the land, *My Ántonia* is a history of female masculinity on the frontier, a record—like Ántonia’s box of photographs—of human relations that exceed and contest normative gender roles. In her frontier novels, Willa Cather communicates an “incommunicable past” by blurring time, gender, property, and family in ways that create a masculinity unhinged from the constraints of the “normal.”

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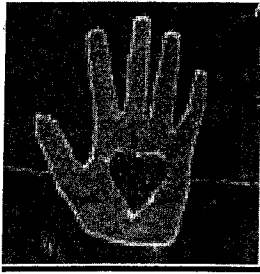
“Blank Isolation”: Cather, Celebrity, and the “long strain” in *The Professor’s House*

Michael Schueth, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

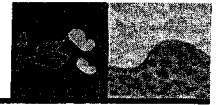
This paper concentrates on a previously unknown letter recently donated to the Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives and Special Collections by the Southwick family. The letter, from Isabelle McClung to Willa Cather’s sister Elsie Cather, documents a serious illness Cather suffered during the summer of 1923 while she was in France visiting McClung and her husband, Jan. McClung tells Elsie that a doctor diagnosed Cather as suffering from “a long over strain” and recommended that she rest at the

French spa resort Aix-les-Bains. This diagnosis of a “long over strain” is absent from Cather’s letters; to friends and family she relates that her stay at Aix-les-Bains was a rest cure for hand, shoulder, and back pain.

Yet, as McClung relates in her letter, Cather had become completely worn down over the previous year, concurring with Woodress’ account that the “early 1920s . . . were for Cather . . . a period of midlife crisis” (291). Critical controversy over *One of Ours* had propelled Cather into the public spotlight and winning



New Voices in Cather Scholarship



"Blank Isolation" (Continued)

the Pulitzer Prize just after her arrival in France had only increased the media frenzy. In this letter, McClung writes to Elsie explaining the steps that had been taken to secure Cather's health:

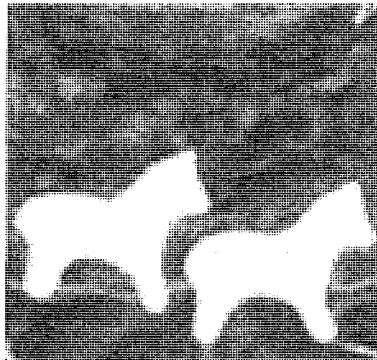
On Saturday I'll take her to Aix les Bains. Try to settle her comfortably and return home on Monday. I am coming away at once because Dr. Litchfield in whom we have great confidence says the thing Willa most needs just now as he put it—Blank Isolation—to be *entirely alone*, without friends, family, sympathy, or even the smallest bit of interest in *anything personal* around her. (IM to EC, Aug. 28, 1923)

McClung further relates to Elsie that Dr. Litchfield recommended that Cather keep no dates, that she be "free of all those things," and that she "rest absolutely for several weeks" because "it is no universal disorder—only a long over strain." Cather's trip to Aix-les-Bains may have also been a seclusion away from her growing celebrity, as McClung relates that "The place we found for [Cather] in Paris is comfortable and quiet . . . but even these people know who she is and try to get a look at her." At Aix-les-Bains, Cather no doubt received such isolation, although she did write at least a half-dozen letters (and probably more) through the end of her stay in late September. Aix-les-Bains was and continues to be an international center for spa treatments, especially thermal baths, said to relieve joint problems and other health conditions. The elite spa resort was not out of step with a newly anointed celebrity such as Cather—the town prides itself on its celebrity guests dating back to the nineteenth century.

Cather began planning *The Professor's House* during her stay at Aix-les-Bains. Her stay at the resort may have kept her out of the spotlight, but when she returned home public interest was nevertheless brighter than ever; the publicity she now garnered as the Pulitzer winner had "made it ever more difficult to preserve her privacy" (Woodress 294). With such a context surrounding the writing of *The Professor's House*, I argue that Cather's specific experiences with her rising celebrity and subsequent "strain" were so immediate to her life and art that these themes of celebrity and illness are central to the novel.

My reading of *The Professor's House* demonstrates these themes. First, I note that, like Cather, St. Peter suffers from a "diminution of ardour" (13), and his life similarly revolves around celebrity—not his own, but that of his former now-dead student, Tom Outland. Cather also shows a personal connection to St. Peter by affiliating him with France: he tends a little French garden where he "worked off his discontent" (15). Also similar to Cather's need for "blank isolation" in France, St. Peter values his old study

because it "was the one place in the house where he could get isolation, isolation from the engaging drama of domestic life" (53). By depicting St. Peter in an exhausted state similar to her own, Cather importantly threads the pressures that fed his malaise back to celebrity culture: the Professor is now among only two at his university who do not do commercial research; his former student Tom Outland has been transformed from a brilliant young scholar into a commercial patent, and his family is squabbling over the income that commercial application generates. Most centrally, Cather highlights the degree to which the St. Peter family benefits from Tom's posthumous celebrity. His daughter, Rosamond, and her husband, especially, bask in all the trappings of modern American celebrity: furs, cars, European vacations, jewelry, and, interestingly enough, "lunch with celebrities"—all things made possible by Tom's genius and by his death (156).

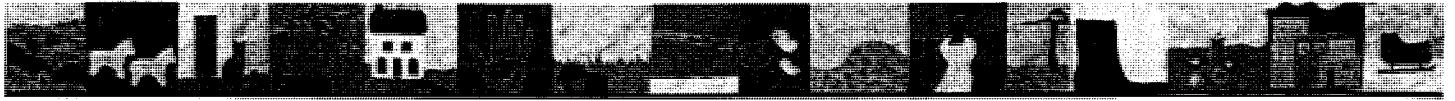


The white mules from *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Even while Cather's health may have suffered from the various pressures she faced as an emerging celebrity figure during the summer of 1923, she continued to participate and to sell her books as a celebrity author. Unlike Tom, who died before he had to face the pressures of his celebrity, Cather had to manage the realities of her modern culture: she sold movie rights to her books for large profits, had her photograph taken by celebrity photographer Edward Steichen, and began preparing a literary legacy by editing a volume of Sarah Orne Jewett's stories as well as re-editing her own earlier work. The McClung letter is an important document because it offers new insights into both the novel and Cather's life; it further opens new dimensions of her celebrity, especially drawing out connections between celebrity culture, illness, and Cather's darker work of the 1920s.

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Intellectual Warfare in Collier's Magazine: Art versus Advertising in Cather's Serialized Novel *The Professor's House*

Matt Lavin, Utah State University

Imagine picking up an issue of *Collier's* magazine at the end of July in 1925 and turning to the eighth installment of Willa Cather's most recent novel, *The Professor's House*, which was characterized by advertisements as "a novel of present-day American life" and "a work of intense characterization" (*Collier's*, May 31, 34). You have followed the work installment by installment

since the beginning of June, anxiously awaiting each new issue of the magazine. On this day, however, you notice something strange. The main character Godfrey St. Peter sits in his study thinking about what his friend Tom Outland meant to him and wonders, "what would have happened to him once the trap of worldly success had been sprung upon him . . . What change would have come in his blue eye, in his fine, long hand with the backspringing thumb?" (July 25, 28). On the opposite page of the magazine is a 10x15-inch full-page advertisement for Hudson-Essex, "the world's largest selling 6-cylinder cars" (29). Is this simply an ironic coincidence, you wonder, or is it possible that the medium—consisting of advertisements, articles and editorials that glorify what Cather calls the trap of worldly success—might be in conflict with Cather's message?

Cather's novel, of course, is not the first to embody this paradox, nor will it be the last, as magazines like *The New Yorker* continue to publish works of literature alongside advertisements of potentially contrary philosophies. But the fact is that competing values run rampant throughout the serialization of Cather's 1925 novel, which leads to some interesting critical questions. Published in nine installments that summer, the story was often accompanied by teasers for other articles and advertisements for new products. Illustrations by in-house artist Frank Street adorned the copy, further creating an interpretive lens that shaped the first impressions of *Collier's*'s wide readership. Even St. Peter's famed declaration that his shopping trip was an "orgy of acquisition" appears alongside an ad for Coca-Cola and a promo for *The Book of Baseball Etiquette* (July 4, 33). The question is not simply how advertisements and illustrations affect a reading of the novel, but rather, how the magazine's attitudes toward the nature of innovation, materialism, and technological advancement influence a novel that is fundamentally about the emptiness of a way of life based on these values.

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on Cather's commentary on science and technology, hoping to illustrate how different Cather's attitudes were from the magazine's over-arching worldview. Simultaneously, I hope to dispel myths of Cather as an ivory tower novelist. While she certainly did not agree with her contemporaries about science and technology, she was an engaged participant in the debate of her historical moment. Her celebration of Outland as an innovator, for example, parallels *Collier's*'s view of American ingenuity. A *Collier's* editorial from June 13 typifies the magazine's ideology: "The human race has moved forward," it states, "because here and there a gifted man and woman took the time to think and had the courage to go where truth led" (22). It is no coincidence that the John Scopes trial was occurring that same summer, which framed the way in which *Collier's*'s editorials made their case. Darwin often became the embodiment of scientific ingenuity, just as Outland does for Cather.



By
**WILLA
CATHER**
ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK STREET

him to stop on his
noon and help
new furniture. As
Gregor's pickup
at four o'clock, I
car standing in
chauffeur and
seat. Just then
the bungalow
to the sidewalk
father. He notices
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this? This

"My dear," he sighed, "we should have been shipwrecked together when we were young. He saw her lip quiver, and she began looking at the house through the glasses

Illustration by Frank Street. This image, which appeared in *Collier's* alongside the June 20, 1925, installment of the serial version of Cather's novel *The Professor's House*, shows Godfrey St. Peter and his wife Lillian at the opera together. It exemplifies the way illustrator Frank Street chose to focus on the luxurious aspects of St. Peter's life rather than the emptiness of it. The illustration leads off the installment even though the opera scene occurs several pages later.



Intellectual Warfare (Continued)

Yet where Cather differed from her contemporaries was in her opinion of whether innovations like cars and household electricity actually improved quality of life. Readers were constantly writing letters about traffic disputes, but for the most part, technology was seen as a positive influence. Even an advertisement for swimwear (which was placed near an illustration of St. Peter swimming) claims, “[We] have prepared something to fire your enthusiasm and win your applause: Swimming suits such as had never been made before! Here is complete freedom at last . . . fabric as supple as the form it sheathes . . . responsive to every movement” (June 13, 31). This advertisement, like many others, markets comfort, freedom, a newly discovered desire, and the technology that made them possible. Conversely, Cather is famed for describing *The Professor's House* in terms of a pursuit of materialism that actually reduces quality of life.¹

Further competing with Cather's anti-materialism are the illustrations published in tandem with the serial version. Drawn by Frank Street, an in-house illustrator, the portrayals depict a surprising environment. Suddenly, Cather's stuffy characters do not seem drab but rather, aristocratic. If we turn to the first installment's lead illustration, for example, we see a genteel party populated by high society figures. They are comfortable, successful, and arguably uncomplicated, seemingly a depiction of the culture of Hamilton College as a sort of utopia of material success. Conversely, St. Peter sees science and technology as distraction from true philosophical understanding. “Science hasn't given us any new amazements,” he states, “except of the superficial kind we get from witnessing dexterity and sleight-of-hand. It hasn't given us any richer pleasures, as the Renaissance

did, nor any new sins—not one!” (June 13, 30). If we take this statement to be an articulation of Cather's own aesthetic, as I do, then Cather's ultimate indictment of science and technology comes from her skepticism that either could replace spiritual depth.

Cather's positions on technology and commerce suggest that she did not share with her *Collier's* contemporaries a progressive vision for U.S. culture. Instead, she reflects on the emptiness of mainstream attitudes and choices. As a result, the text becomes an important way of analyzing the degree to which Cather was of her cultural moment. While she certainly did not share the same opinions about progress, achievement, and the philosophical solutions offered up by science and technology, she was engaged in a debate with her contemporaries. As a result, an analysis of Cather's serial novel has important implications when it comes to understanding Cather's literary aesthetic.

Note

¹“On *The Professor's House*” perhaps best embodies Cather's awareness that St. Peter's story was a depiction of the pitfalls of materialism. She states, “In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty jealousies—until one got rather stifled” (*On Writing* 31).

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Fruit Trees and Acacia Blossoms: Grafting a Unique Perspective of American History in Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

Max Despain, University of Delaware

Willa Cather reveals an obsession with both personal and social history in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. She sees the recounting of history, to use Herbert Butterfield's words, as a creative act of translation (par. 1). By writing a revisionist version of American history in this novel, Cather challenges received notions of the past, which she views as being as flawed as memory itself. Employing the metaphor of grafting fruit trees, Cather produces new varieties of Americans in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* that highlight her unique perspective on the formation of America. The unusual viewpoint Cather gives the history of the New Mexico Territory provides a new historical framework with which to explore her fiction.

Cather's Bishop Jean Marie Latour illustrates the connection between personal experiences and new circumstances.

The priest finds himself having reveries of his European past while in America. On his first morning back in Santa Fe after the long journey to Durango, Mexico, to gain the proof of his authority, he awakens to the unexpected ringing of an Angelus. There was no working bell when he left, and the tones give him the sudden sense he is lodging in Rome again. Latour's mnemonic conflation makes a strange land familiar. The priest has not lost his connection with France in his new home and the similarities resonate with cultural familiarity.

Latour becomes acclimated to his new home by making it a bit of Europe. Not long after he and his Indian guide Jacinto ride past acacia trees like those found in southern France, he experiences a conversation emphasizing the critical role individual memory plays in making up a person and a new community. He



Europe" Her Own Story of the

thinks: "there was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him" (332). By adding the opinion that Jacinto's upbringing had trained him to meet any situation, the bishop honors Indian culture; perhaps, more importantly, he defines it as a "culture," similar, if not equal, to Europe (333). Cather expresses the same opinion by allowing us into Jacinto's point of view long enough to show his admiration that the bishop does not put on a "false face" when speaking with Indians (333). The bishop treats all the people with basic dignity and respect. At the same time, Cather affords her characters the same kind of deference by validating subordinate perspectives like Jacinto's. She emphasizes the Frenchman's and Indian's memories as a diverging point in their similarity. While they share a present life in the New Mexico Territory where Latour feels he is gaining Jacinto's friendship without knowing how (333), the disparate experiences they each bring to the moment ultimately guarantee they cannot fully understand each other.

For all her openness to other cultures, Cather privileges the European characters' memories as being the dominant roots for the new growth of Americans. Cather eschewed the metaphor of the melting pot in favor of grafting fruit trees. Cather uses this metaphor as early as her 1918 novel, *My Ántonia*, in which Ántonia's husband learns grafting in California (*My Ántonia* 219). A closer look at the art of grafting fruit trees shows that a graft from one tree is added to another so that it shares the root system of the original tree. The cultivar or new variety of fruit usually can only be produced by grafting; a different form of fruit will grow from the seeds of the new variety (Wienmann par. 2). Cather sees the new people coming together in the New Mexico territory as feeding out of the root of the Catholic Church, but forming new varieties of Americans who cannot be identically reproduced in their children. The roots of the tree sustaining the different grafts and varieties are the cultural heritage and experience of Europeans, like Bishop Latour, who influence how Mexicans, Indians, and Americans develop as they become Catholics. Just as the priest reflects with Jacinto, though, the new Americans can never intimately know the experience that he brings as the rooted tree, and, in this metaphor, he is not influenced by their cultural history. They draw nourishment and growth from his experiences, without consciousness of the source.

Latour notes half-dead peach trees in the enclosed garden of the deserted cloister on the mesa at Acoma. Nearly 150 years

prior, a greedy Spanish priest had forced the Indians to provide water, their most precious commodity, for his garden. Eventually they overthrew the priest and his trees are the "kind of unlikely tree that grows up from an old root and never bears" (*Death* 339). In



The cruciform tree in *Death Comes For The Archbishop*

a connection with a missionary priest's desire to cultivate believers, the peach trees bear witness to the Spaniard's early failed presence with the Acomas. The peach trees support no grafts and produce no fruit. At his residence in Santa Fe, the Bishop establishes a garden of fruit trees with switches brought from St. Louis. Within six years, cuttings from them were already bearing fruit in Mexican gardens (398). In contrast to the greedy Spaniard's withered peach roots, Latour's presence has helped the

Catholic Church flourish in New Mexico much as his fruit trees bear produce from his labors.

The continual bond with their imported religion helps build diverse varieties of Americans formed by personal and cultural memories growing out of grafts from Catholic roots in New Mexico. Cather brings a new version of the New Mexico Territory's history to her readers' attention. Giving voices to minority characters, she shows a culture growing from religious origins that nourishes a broad spectrum of traditions into new kinds of Americans.

"The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government."

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A copy of Willa Cather's *December Night* is a wonderful gift for someone special to you during the holiday season. And don't forget that this year you can purchase *December Night* Christmas cards as well. Log on to www.willacather.org and make your purchase now.



Willa Cather's Autobiographical Act And the Need for (Dis)Closure

J. Gabriel Scala, University of Mississippi

Though there is no verifiable evidence of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse in Cather's childhood, if we are to read *The Song of the Lark* as autobiography, we must account for the undercurrent of violence and sexual desire that flows uninhibited between the characters of Thea and Dr. Archie. The novel's opening scene of a direly ill Thea does more than "cast the doctor in . . . a nurturing role" (O'Brien 91); it also asks the reader to witness what on the surface looks like a doctor caring for a very ill child. However, if we look more closely at Cather's word choice and the psychological implications of the event, we find a much grimmer image:

Presently she felt him taking off her nightgown. He wrapped the hot plaster about her chest. There seemed to be straps which he pinned over her shoulder. . . . That, she felt, was too strange; she must be dreaming anyhow, so she succumbed to her drowsiness. . . . When she was conscious at all, she seemed to be separated from her body; to be perched on top of the piano, or on the hanging lamp, watching the doctor sew her up. It was perplexing and unsatisfactory, like dreaming. (300)

Not only is there a blatant sense of force being used against the child who is stripped, strapped, pinned and eventually forced to succumb, there is also clear evidence of the dissociation commonly described in victims of child sexual abuse. The feeling of being separated from the body has long been associated with the mind's defense against abusive or violent situations best described by Judith Herman in her book, *Trauma and Recovery*:

Sometimes situations of inescapable danger may evoke not only terror and rage but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calm, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings The person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will shortly awaken. These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle. (43)

Yet, it is not only the reader who bears witness to Dr. Archie's improper behavior; Thea's sister is portrayed as suspecting some impropriety: "Dr. Archie's whole manner with Thea, Anna often told her mother, was too free. He was always putting his hand on Thea's head, or holding her hand while he laughed and looked down at her" (411-12). Even Ray Kennedy, who "often turned to her a face full of pride, and frank admiration," knew that "his glance was never so intimate or so penetrating as Dr. Archie's" (390).

It is curious that Cather would choose to open *The Song of the Lark* with a very ill Thea Kronborg, aged eleven—about

the age of Cather herself when her family moved into the town of Red Cloud from the Divide—as if her life began with that episode. That year also marked the beginning of town doctor Gilbert McKeeby's appearances in Cather's home and life, as well as his appearance in the life of Cather's mother, Virginia. Sharon O'Brien writes: "Willa Cather's attraction to the medical profession in general and to Dr. McKeeby in particular should be connected with the daughter's relationship to her mother" (91). Indeed, Mildred Bennett reports that in the year of the Cathers' move to Red Cloud, Virginia Cather became extremely ill and Dr. McKeeby was "practically forced" to minister to her. Bennett writes: "[w]hen Mrs. Cather opened her eyes and saw the capable-looking, dignified man, she relaxed, confident he could save her" (110). This singular ability to miraculously effect a cure for Cather's mother must have contributed to the "almost magical power over the environment" (91) that O'Brien says Cather believed doctors held, and the fact that Cather's apprenticeship



The cliff dwellings in *The Song of the Lark*.

to McKeeby began immediately after this episode might indicate a pathological attachment to the very man who was abusing her. More important, though, is Bennett's report that soon after Dr. McKeeby tended to Virginia, "he cared for Willa during what was probably a siege of poliomyelitis"(110).

While there is some legitimate speculation as to whether Cather had polio as a child, there is no reason to doubt that she did suffer some illness at this time which would have required Dr. McKeeby's attention. In fact, though it is likely Cather did not have polio, it is possible that the disease Bennett describes as probable "infantile paralysis" (40) was actually a case of nineteenth century hysteria. Jean-Martin Charcot, the French neurologist who preceded Freud and Janet in their work on hysteria, in 1880 demonstrated that the symptoms of hysteria were psychological rather than physical. These symptoms included sensory loss, convulsions, amnesias, and motor paralyzes (Herman 11). Judith Herman admits that modern "descriptions of the psychology of incest survivors essentially recapitulate the late nineteenth-century observations of hysteria" (32).

Whatever possible connection there may be between Cather's early illness and nineteenth century hysteria, she chose to begin *The Song of the Lark* with an accounting of that



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illness and Dr. McKeeby's treatment of it. If we are to explore the possibility of Cather's novel being a disclosure of childhood sexual trauma, we must reevaluate the accepted notion that the move from Virginia to Nebraska was the central trauma in Cather's life and work. Likewise, it is vital that we also review her pervasive fear of mutilation, her adolescent gender play, and the self loathing and self deprecation with which she greeted herself when ill throughout her lifetime as markers pointing to an as yet undisclosed sexual trauma.



Subverting the Male Gaze: Willa Cather's Lena Lingard and William Faulkner's Lena Grove

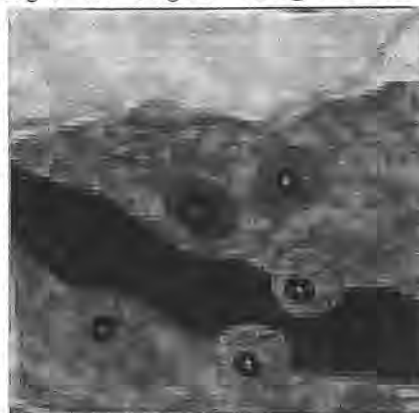
Sarah C. Gardam, Drew University

The resemblance in background, appearance, and manner between Lena Lingard in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918) and Lena Grove in William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) proves absolutely uncanny. The similarities between the two women open up the possibility that Cather's Lena Lingard inspired Faulkner's Lena Grove, reinforcing the scholarship of Merrill Skaggs, Joseph Urgo and others who have tracked the previously undetected textual exchanges and influences occurring between William Faulkner and Willa Cather.

The two Lenas come from parallel backgrounds and move or behave in comparable fashion. Both Lenas grew up rural and poor, stepping in as mother figures to take care of a weaker woman's children. The Lenas resemble each other physically; the authors first introduce them as young, blond, pretty and barefoot. Lena Lingard spends her summers "bareheaded and barefooted, scantily dressed in tattered clothing" (138), while Lena Grove's shoes are "but slightly worn, since in the summer neither of them wore shoes at all" (4). Both girls first appear dressed in blue, Lena Grove in "a shapeless garment of faded blue" and Lena Lingard in a "blue cashmere dress" (7; 135).

Lena Lingard and Lena Grove perform a similar function in these novels as targets for the objectifying male gaze. Male anxieties constantly wash over the two Lenas as various men envision the two as representative entities and interpret their thoughts and actions accordingly. The naïve Byron frequently envisages Lena Grove the way he wants her to be, claiming that she "needs a place where it will be kind of home to her" because he wants to live with her as a husband, when really the evidence suggests that she loves traveling more than anything and feels overjoyed to have left home (283). Jim Burden, as narrator and therefore primary arbiter and labeler of Lena Lingard, also imparts many of his secret desires and ideas to Lena's character.

Like Byron, Jim's idealizing eyes tint Lena with varying hues of affection and drama. He admits that "Before I knew Lena, I thought of her as something wild, that always lived on the prairie, because I had never seen her under a roof." The adult Lena Lingard surprises him with her business acumen because he has always seen her as a seductive, silent but siren-like woman. He admits: "Lena's success puzzled me. She was so easy going; had none of the push and self-assertiveness that get people ahead in business" (197). Jim mistakes Lena's quietness for passivity, just as many of the characters (and critics) of *Light in August* interpret Lena Grove's quietness as helplessness, or even stupidity.



The road lined by sunflowers in *My Ántonia*

The attitudes toward marriage expressed by Lena Lingard and Lena Grove reveal their evasion of traditional social consequences for single, non-virgin girls. Interestingly, each Lena's method of defying the assigned gender roles is the inverse of the other Lena's method. In addition, they both ultimately employ oppressive social constructs as strategies to achieve autonomy.

Lena Grove spends most of *Light in August* looking for the man she is supposed to marry. Mary Joann Dondlinger claims that, "if she were not actively looking for the guy who got her 'in trouble,' she would not have gotten a free ride; she would not be 'getting around'" (114). By using her social categorization as abandoned-pregnant-girl-trying-to-legitimize-her-child, Lena Grove gains the traveling experience she discovers she loves. Lena Lingard also circumnavigates social constructs, though she uses the traditional female trope of dressmaking to do so: Lena employs the conventional female's need for adornment (to garner the objectifying male gaze) in order to make a living. She has taken on one feminized role to escape another—the role of becoming somebody's wife. Both Lenas manage to take the unjust objectification of their sexual lives and find ways to make their own decisions and enjoy daily life.

Subverting the Male Gaze (Continued)

This autonomy keeps the Lenas independent from us, the readers, as well as from the men in their lives, although we intermittently spy a sign of fervent feeling. Lena Grove always sounds so self-contented when she thinks about traveling; she gets such joy out of it. Lena Lingard also recognizes the pleasures of travel; she wishes for Jim to be a traveling man because “they had a gay life of it; nothing to do but ride about on trains all day and go to the theaters when they were in big cities” (141). These details link the two women through their love of watching life as if it were a kind of passing show. Lena Lingard’s love of the theater comes across more passionately than Lena Grove’s affinity for travel, as is evident from her passionate weeping during the play *Camille*. Perhaps the theater affects Lena so dramatically because she has spent her whole life being stared at as if she were on stage.

The scene at the theater and the general attentiveness of Jim Burden’s narrative illuminate Lena Lingard’s deeper self more than *Light in August* reveals Lena Grove’s. Andre Bleikasten recalls how Faulkner himself articulated Lena first as a symbol subsuming “some of that pagan quality of being able to assume everything” (qtd. in Bleikasten 133). This explains in part why her secret, individual self never manifests itself in the text. Bleikasten captures this thought nicely: “a woman cannot be apprehended in her unique, irreducible individuality, she must be made to stand for something else, something larger, so as to be more effectively diminished”

(139). This certainly also proves true in the case of Jim Burden’s already discussed projections of Lena Lingard (and the other hired girls) as the demigoddesses of his past.

Eerily akin in description, attitude and function, these two Lenas endeavor to chip their own realities from the often stony ignorance of the male narrative’s stare. Lena Grove and her possible prototype, Lena Lingard, continue to confound those who refuse to look beyond the limited, projected versions of these women, just as they manage to confound customary behavioral tropes in the societies of *My Ántonia* and *Light in August*.

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A Message from the President

Since my last message, two interesting things have come my way; and the combination of them re-emphasizes the point I hope to stress during my tenure: Cather is both a local treasure and a global literary figure. As the promoters of her work, we have an obligation to balance both the local and the global aspects of her work. Red Cloud is important, and unique among literary landscapes. The work of international scholarship is important, and its excellence is receiving long overdue acknowledgement.

So, I found most interesting the two things that I noted had come my way.

First, Nancy and I had the opportunity to see the Jim Ford/Ariel Bybee production of “A Singer’s Romance.” Their infusion of opera (not to mention

Cather’s stage presence) brings Cather’s setting to life and adds to our sense of Cather as a figure on the world stage. As I grew up, names like Toscanini and titles like *Cavalleria Rusticana* came only as echoes from the sounds of a distant world. If they had any reality in the small Nebraska town in which I grew up, it was their brief and fleeting presence in a Community Concert program. But Cather lived in that distant world, had commerce with these arts, knew these people and was known among them. In a very real way, they knew her before most of us did.

Then, secondly, through that odd virtual community that seems to form out there in the cyber space of the Internet, I received an email from a Thomas Hutson. Until his retirement, Hutson was a U.S. Consul General with the Diplomatic Corp. Living now in Iowa, he wrote to commend the “international” emphasis in my first message; but the fascinating part of his correspondence was how, despite a career on the international stage, he remains immersed in the local scene of Red Cloud, where he lived as a child. Two particular interests of Hutson’s, the formation of the WCPM and Bob Beardslee’s “Hometown Memories” from the *Red Cloud Chief*, both strike at the unique and significant role that Red Cloud plays, both in Cather’s life and fiction and in our promotion of her work. She was “one of ours” before she was “one of theirs.”

The WCPM is a river fed by two streams. If either dried up, the river would be endangered. To whatever extent parochialism existed in the past on either front, we can no longer afford it. Without the international scholarship, the investment in Red Cloud would come a cropper; if there were no Red Cloud, the scholarship would be vastly impoverished. Let’s move ahead on both fronts.

“Happy Days!”
Charles Peek

Brown and White at the Dance: Another Word on Cather and Race

Janis P. Stout

Racial difference is one of the most persistent problematics unsettling the polished surfaces of Willa Cather's fiction. Toni Morrison has famously directed our attention to Cather's participation in an ingrained American racism, especially by the privileging of whiteness, and others—notably Walter Benn Michaels, Patricia Yeager, and Loretta Wasserman, and more recently Timothy Bintrim and Jean Griffin—have addressed the subject. But critical comment on race in Cather's writing has been sporadic, and for the most part, has centered on black-white dynamics surrounding either Blind D'Arnault in *My Ántonia* or Nancy, Till, and other black characters in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Such studies have primarily been limited to the "images of" kinds of descriptive analysis, that is, to the ways in which Cather viewed others, racially. With few exceptions, her own subject position has been assumed, as if, as a white person, she herself were not racialized.¹ The analytic gaze has rarely been turned on the whiteness that is so predominant in her work—despite the fact that as one looks more closely at it, one sees that it is really quite problematic. Nor has much attention been given to the role of brown-skinned people in her fiction of the West, despite the fact that the frontier West was both in fact and in its imaginative representations so complex a site of multi-racial dynamics.² Only in the lively debate over Cather's portrayal of Padre Martinez in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has her expressed attitude toward New Mexico Hispanos and Mexican Americans been significantly interrogated.

Certainly I do not exempt my own work from this indictment. In an article published in the Fall 2003 issue of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* ("'Poor Caliban': Willa Cather and the Song of the Racial Other"), I did make a beginning in the examination of Cather's subject position of whiteness, however, in considering a particular aspect of the racial dynamics that extend across much of her fiction as well as letters—a linkage of darker skin color with music or song. In the present essay, I seek both to follow up on that beginning and to address issues of whiteness and of brown-white racial dynamics in the West as these are seen in two parallel moments in Cather's work, the early short story "The Dance at Chevalier's" and the dance scene in *The Song of the Lark*.

Probably the schematic that most readily comes to mind when we compare these two texts is one of progress from an unthinking acceptance of racial stereotyping, in the early story, to a more highly nuanced, enlightened acceptance of racial others, in the novel. After all, we know that Cather expressed crudely

racist (including anti-Semitic) sentiments in some of her early journalism—specifically, a group of hackneyed sketches published in the *Nebraska State Journal* in 1893 and a review of a series of paintings of racial types by Jibert Vos in January 1901—but that by 1915, in *The Song of the Lark*, she celebrated a heroine who resisted her family's prejudice against Mexican people. By 1918, in *My Ántonia*, Cather became a spokesperson for the richness of immigrant diversity on the plains, and by 1940, in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, celebrated a heroine who actively resisted society's institutionalization of racial prejudice in the form of Black slavery. We could see the story and the episode from *Lark* that I will discuss, then, as stages in a narrative of progressive enlightenment. In my view, such a schematic is not entirely accurate.

"The Dance at Chevalier's" appeared in the Pittsburgh magazine *The Library* in April 1900, only seven years after the scurrilously derogatory *Nebraska State Journal* sketches.³ Like these early sketches, with their stereotyping of blacks, Italians,



Snapshot of American Indian women and children in New Mexico; from the Cather collections at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Archives and Special Collections.

Jews, and Irish, "The Dance at Chevalier's" is marked by a blatant and crude racism—this time, directed primarily toward Mexicans.

In Bintrim's words, "racial typing serves as characterization" (230). Two contrasting characters are introduced at the opening of the story, one called only "Signor" or "The Signor," with no proper name, who is labeled "a little Mexican," and the other, implicitly white, given a proper name, Denis, but also racially labeled as a "big choleric Irishman" whose animal urges are "untrammelled by anything of a reflective nature" (*Collected Short Fiction* 547-48). This description of Denis as a kind of mindless brute reflects a cultural hierarchy that long positioned the Irish as an inferior and in fact not truly white group—a group that in Noel Ignatiev's terms had to "become" white.⁴ But if Denis is a man low on the social scale, he is at any rate higher than the Mexican. He is, for example, a reasonable if not altogether desirable suitor for the daughter of Chevalier, the ranch owner for whom he works, while the Signor, clearly, is not.

We quickly learn that the Signor cheats at cards and has a "greasy hand"—a descriptor reminiscent of the insulting epithet "greaser," which in fact Cather soon applies to him directly. When Denis discovers cards up the Signor's sleeve and, being "too quick for him," pins him with a knife, the Signor "snarls" a threat. At that point an onlooking Eastern newspaper man called Burns, whom we might take as a stand-in for the author herself in her role of observer and commentator, warns Denis to watch out for him. His warning is couched in crudely racist terms surely offensive

Brown and White at the Dance

(Continued)

to most readers today: "They are a nasty lot, these Greasers. I've known them down in Old Mexico They'll knife you in the dark, any one of them. It's the only country I could never feel comfortable in" (548). Denis initially seems more willing than Burns to judge a man by his performance, pointing out that the Signor is "a good hand enough" and "first-rate" in working cattle. Even so, he agrees, "I don't like Greasers myself, they're all sneaks" (548). And when Burns speculates that the rancher's daughter might have "[some]thing to do" with the Signor's remaining in the Oklahoma cattle country,⁵ the label Denis has applied to him, "sneak," readily becomes "snake": If he thought that, Denis says, "I'd trample him like a snake!"

The Mexican at once proceeds to demonstrate that indeed he is a "sneak." Putting on a false smile, he approaches Chevalier's daughter, Severine, asking her to tie up his cut hand. As she bends to do so, he sneaks a kiss. When she protests, calling him "you sneak" (549), he flares up in the hot-tempered way of the stereotypical Mexican, tells her that he has seen her kissing the "hulking Irishman," and threatens to kill her if she does so again. "I like to kill the things I love," he avows—obviously a cruel man as well as a hot-tempered and sneaky one. At Severine's admission that she is in love, he asks if it is "the Irishman" in a voice that "whistle[s] in the air like a knife"—an analogy that brands him with the stereotype of the knife-wielding Mexican, even though it was not he but Denis who first pulled a knife in this story. But the Mexicans are a people who love their vengeance and are not above blackmailing young girls—the Signor gets Severine to promise to kiss him in exchange for keeping her secret that she is in love with Denis.

During the titular dance, which occurs that night, the Signor slips down to the barn to saddle his horse in preparation for making a quick getaway after carrying out his revenge. As he does so, he observes Denis put his arm around Severine and pull her close. He then slips back to his room, gets out a mysterious bottle of liquor, on which, as if in proof that he deserves the more bestial of the epithets Denis has assigned to him, he gazes with "snaky eyes" (553). Luring Denis up to his room, he gives

the dense Irishman a drink and tells him that Severine is playing them both false. Just watch her by the windmill during the next dance, he says—knowing, of course, that she will be there with himself, paying him the kiss she earlier promised. With "the hand of death already heavy upon him"—for the liquor is, of course, poison—the Irishman dances one last dance with Severine, then falls, accusing her of having conspired with the Mexican in murdering him. But Burns, the newspaper man, only partly credits this dying accusation. Disregarding any possible guilt by the somewhat ambiguously white woman, he blames it all on "that damned Mexican" (555)—now long gone on a fast horse, demonstrating the truth of Denis's earlier assertion that Mexicans who "come up in this country" have "always got into some sort of trouble and had to light out" (548).

As this summary has made obvious, the social hierarchy of "The Dance at Chevalier's" is based on racial distinctions. White femininity is cleared of imputed stain; the unwhite white, the Irishman, is characterized as dense and driven by lust but is given bare acceptance to normative society; and the brown-skinned Mexican carries all the stain commonly attributed to him in prejudicial stereotypes (and also carries the plot, providing the only dramatic interest in sight).

Fifteen years after "The Dance at Chevalier's," Cather published her third novel, *The Song of the Lark*⁶ with a dance scene that similarly involves both explicitly white and explicitly Mexican characters. The (very) white heroine, Thea Kronborg, mixes freely with members of the Mexican community of Moonstone, Colorado, in a way that seems quite different from the mixing we have seen in the short story. Indeed, this dance episode is customarily taken as evidence of Thea's, and thus presumably Cather's, cosmopolitanism and freedom from narrow prejudice. Thea's family may consider the Mexicans of "Mexican Town" (a kind of designation familiar to those of us who grew up in the South and heard a similar phrase for racially marked sections of our own towns) inappropriate company and Thea's mixing with them a disgrace, but she herself resists such racial exclusiveness, exclaiming angrily, "Why, what's the matter with the Mexicans? . . . They don't trouble anybody, and they are kind to their families and have good manners" and are, moreover, "a talented people" (214-15).

Thea's terms, while indicating a favorable view of the Mexican people she knows, are nevertheless troubling in their generality. She assumes she can apply blanket descriptors to the



Snapshot of men sitting in front of an adobe house in New Mexico; from the Cather collections at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Archives and Special Collections.

entire category of people present in this conversation only as "they," the "Mexicans." But if we turn to the scene of the dance itself, we see that Cather presents it in terms that endorse Thea's generalization. The men are "graceful and courteous," and interactions among members of the community are "friendly," showing "no neighbourly grudges" and "no constraint of any kind," but only a "natural harmony" (SL 208). Two young cousins attending the dance, whose last names are Ramas, are alike "handsome, smiling youths . . . with pale-gold skins, smooth

cheeks, aquiline features, and wavy black hair" and are even "dressed alike, in black velvet jackets and soft silk shirts" (208). Again, the terms may be flattering, but they are troubling in their uniformity. They do not accord a full, complex humanity to the people at the Mexican dance, but make them into idealized mannequins.

What is better, from the standpoint of white subjectivity, is that these handsome and graceful people adore Thea. The Ramas boys find her "dazzlingly beautiful" and put down their velvet coats for her to sit on while they and the others who visit at Johnny's house after the dance sit on the gravel. Why? Because of her whiteness: "her hair and fair skin bewitched them. '*Blanco y oro, semejante le Pascual!*' (White and gold, like Easter!)" (209). Her whiteness sets her apart from all other women at the

ball. While dancing, she is the “one blonde head moving among so many dark ones” (209), and she is the only woman at the later singing-party who can really sing. When Johnny says that there is no one who can sing the alto part but the girls can “make some noise,” the older women laugh and the narrative voice explains that “Mexican women of the poorer class do not sing like the men. Perhaps they are too indolent” (212). Once again Cather’s method is to generalize, to make pronouncements about an entire people—this time not so idealizing a pronouncement as those made under the spell of her infatuation with the golden-skinned Mexican man named Julio whom she had met in Arizona in 1912, who also sang to her and who provided the model for the Ramas boys’ “pale-gold skin.”

In “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” stereotyping is crude and derogatory. In the dance scene in *The Song of the Lark*, stereotyping is less crude and is explicitly derogatory only when the women are pronounced “indolent,” but it is stereotyping nonetheless. Blanket statements are made about a racial group from a viewing perspective of whiteness. Indeed, the distinction between white and nonwhite is clear in Thea’s defense of her participation in the dance against her prejudiced sister’s attack, when she insists that the Mexicans are “just as clean as white people” (214). Her terms set up categories that she condescends to view as equals, but those very terms maintain the separateness of the categories.⁷

In the dance sequence, Thea takes the place of the white belle of the ball in the earlier story. This time her ultra-whiteness not only structures the hierarchy of the occasion, as it does in “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” but is expressly given tribute at the one point when the text presumes to reach into the minds of “the Mexicans.” If Thea’s interactions with her Mexican neighbors are more respectful and open-minded than those of her family—and indeed they are—they are also based on an assumption that whiteness has its privileges, an assumption that Cather imagines is willingly shared by brown-skinned people as well. Whiteness is ultimately just as privileged in this scene, which was apparently intended to show the richness of Mexican culture and Thea’s freedom from narrow prejudice, as it is in “The Dance at Chevalier’s.” Mexican people are still labeled, and they are still viewed as being simple, natural, and unreflective. We can be glad that such terms as “greaser” and “sneak” have gone by the board, but we may wonder how much gain there is when Cather chooses to present a people as a pretty and exotic backdrop for Thea’s exceptionalism—and glad to serve in that way.

It is time for examinations of race in Cather’s work to go much further than they have heretofore, and for such examinations to be carried out by scholars much better grounded than myself in the disciplines of critical race studies and whiteness studies.

Especially it is time for examinations of race in Cather to take up, in a systematic, thorough, and theoretically-informed way, the white perspective of her work—the assumption that those labeled white are somehow race-neutral and can serve as the human standard from which all others depart. Most emphatically it is time that critics took up the racial dynamics of her fiction of the West.

Notes

¹This specious assumption is regularly pointed out by scholars doing whiteness studies. Examples of such work are Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (2001); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1990); and Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1997).

²See, for example, the essays in Jameson and Armitage, *Writing the Range*.

³The story was one of several works Cather published pseudonymously, in this case, under the name Henry Nicklemann. For the sketches and review that I have described as racist, see *The World and the Parish*, ed. William M. Curtin, 7-23 and 812. The sketches include denigrating and trite portraits of a Negro minister who foolishly wears two pairs of glasses, a pair of “woolly-headed” ten-year-olds, a big-talking drunken Irishman, a Jewish baby who stops crying and settles into contentment when given a coin to grasp, and a misshapen Italian. In the 1901 review, she dismissed the faces of Hawaiian men and women, as shown in Vos’s portraits, as having “little more spirituality” than those of Negroes.

⁴See also Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998) and Ian F. Haney-Lopez’s *White by Law* (1996), a historical study of court cases in immigration law that turned on whether certain groups were or were not white.

⁵The setting of this story is puzzling in the extreme. Labeled “the cattle country,” and once referred to as Oklahoma, it is populated by a peculiarly large number of Frenchmen by way of Canada. Cather seems to have merged Oklahoma with Louisiana. I have not explored, here, the Cajun motif that results, but it is worth considering.

⁶Actually, it was apparently her fourth, since there is evidence in her correspondence of a completed, but destroyed, first novel set in Pittsburgh. Rather than writing “My First Novels [There Were Two],” then (see *Willie Cather on Writing*), she might more accurately have written “My First Novels [There Were Three].” Letter to Dorothy Canfield, March 1901; see *Calendar of Letters* #68. But *Lark* was her third published.

⁷An interesting perspective on the white-nonwhite distinction in the Southwest is provided by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca in her folkloric memoir *We Fed Them Cactus* (1954), when an Anglo homesteader addresses her father from a distance, then, when he comes closer, says “I thought you were a white man.” De Baca is insulted, not because the white-nonwhite categorization should matter so much to their new neighbor, but because her father has been assigned to the wrong category. As a member of a longtime resident family of Hispanos, or Spanish-blooded people—a mark of prestige over darker, mixed-blood Mexicans who may have arrived later—he is “very fair skinned” with blue eyes. She attributes the newcomer’s mistake to the ignorance of people who thought that whites were necessarily “those who spoke the English language” (149).



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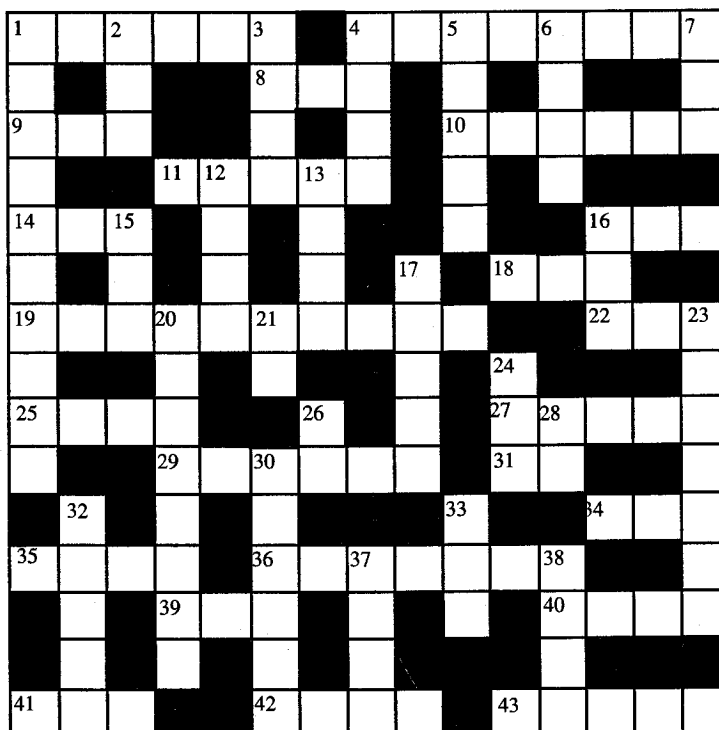


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Cather Crossword #3

Robert H. Kurth

Editor's Note: As a special feature for this final issue of the Cather Foundation's anniversary year, we have revived a favorite from previous years. In 1988, Robert Kurth delighted readers of the *N&R* with two Cather crossword puzzles. Dr. Kurth is a retired physician from Kansas City and an enthusiastic reader and collector of Willa Cather's fiction; he and his wife Doris established an important Cather collection at the University of Nebraska's Love Library. He devised this new Cather puzzle especially for us, as a celebration of the WCPM's fiftieth birthday.



ACROSS

1. "A _____ Matinee"
4. Antonia's surname in the novel
8. A span of time
9. A short sleep or doze
10. Wrote book about Cather's imagination
11. Composer of *The Bohemian Girl*
14. Not him
16. Before jazz
18. Noises a cow makes, this onomatopoeic word
19. Cather's explorer friend
22. Mythological small person
25. Great Lake
27. Book IV of *My Antonia*: a _____'s story
29. Textual editor of Scholarly Edition
31. Synonym of upon
34. What we breathe
35. Apparel or court case
36. Volume editor for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*
39. Accrue or increase
40. Wicked
41. A palindrome, this organ
42. Biblical boat builder
43. "The Enchanted _____," early Cather story

DOWN

1. WC born near _____, Virginia
2. Interruption
3. "To the _____ author" (S.S. McClure's inscription)
4. Antonym of "different"
5. Celebrating the Cather Foundation's 50th anniversary with this fall 2005 _____ of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*
6. God of love
7. _____ of the covenant
12. Variants of Ann include Annie, Anne and _____
13. Payments for services rendered
15. Diminutive of the first name of Sapphira's youngest daughter
16. Fish eggs
17. Red-breasted bird
20. Model for Thea Kronborg
21. After the "talkie" version of *A Lost Lady*, Cather said _____ to films of her work.
23. "The Sculptor's _____"
24. First word in the title of final story in Cather's 1932 collection
26. Antonym of off.
28. First word in title of a 1908 Cather story, on which Sarah Orne Jewett advised her.
30. *The Troll* _____
32. Blank book
33. Tavern and hotel
37. Given name of protagonist in *My Mortal Enemy*
38. A marine mammal

Note: the solution to this puzzle will be posted on our website, www.willacather.org

The To-do List . . . and More!

The hard-working immigrant settlers that populate Cather's early novels would probably understand the modern multi-tasking, over-committed American's satisfaction in crossing off another task on our to-do lists. But sometimes even the most conscientious to-do-list maker keeps pushing an important good intention to the bottom of the list because other must-do-now items keep getting in the way.

Are must-do-nows the reason that you keep pushing to the bottom of the list your intention to give to the Willa Cather Foundation to meet the NEH challenge grant? If so, the calendar says you must put that task at the very top of your list now! If the Willa Cather Foundation doesn't raise all of the \$825,000 by July 1, 2006, we risk losing some of the \$275,000 the National Endowment for the Humanities will give to our endowment.

The \$1.1 million endowment will allow the Willa Cather Foundation to hire archival and programming staff so that the newly renovated Red Cloud Opera House can become a center for those who love to read Willa Cather and those who continue to contribute to the important scholarship about her work. It will keep Willa Cather's literary legacy alive for future generations.

Put your gift to the Willa Cather Foundation for the NEH challenge grant at the top of your to-do list today! And then write your check before the end of the day. Please help us meet this important goal.

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The Executive Director's Report

2005 has been a year of firsts for the Cather Foundation. The Foundation celebrated its 50th anniversary at what was, by all accounts, an extraordinarily successful Spring Festival. For the first time, we hosted the first half of a Cather International Seminar at the Red Cloud site. The Foundation for the first time commissioned a theatrical performance with Jim Ford's adaptation of "A Singer's Romance." The Foundation sponsored the first "One Book One State" reading program, featuring *My Antonia*, and for this effort the Cather Foundation has received the prestigious Jane Geske Award from the Nebraska Center for the Book for its "exceptional, long-term contribution to . . . literacy, reading, book selling, books, libraries, and writing in Nebraska." The Opera House was the site of the first showing of the PBS special "The Road is All." The ownership of the Cather Memorial Prairie has been transferred from the Nature Conservancy to the Cather Foundation, with a grand dedication planned as part of the 2006 Spring Conference next June. And to top off the year, the Cather Center has been teeming with visitors this summer.

All of these extraordinary events took creativity and teamwork. Our Foundation Board of Governors and our outstanding staff can take credit for their hard work and dedication. We also acknowledge the support of a number of institutions that provided grant funds to make these events possible. But none of this would have been successful without the full and continuing support of our Cather Foundation members and friends. We extend a special *thank you* to everyone who has had a part in all of these unforgettable events.

As for 2006, the Foundation is already working to build upon this extraordinary set of firsts. The 2006 Spring Conference in June will anticipate the 2007 Willa Cather International Seminar through a series of "French Connections," including Cather's French-Canadian experiences in Nebraska, and, of course, French food, French wine, French music, . . . and *Shadows on the Rock* and *O Pioneers!* in particular.

As we go to press, Jay Yost, who is a member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors, and Foundation member Tom Gallagher are planning a terrific fund raiser in New York City for the Cather Foundation NEH Challenge grant to endow the Red Cloud Opera House. The "Weekend with Willa" events will span four days and include readings, panel discussions, music, walking tours, and a culminating reception and screening of the PBS American Masters film biography of Willa Cather called "The Road is All." Nebraska's own former Senator Bob Kerrey, president of The New School, will host this final main event. We appreciate the support being given to the Cather Foundation by friends from throughout the East Coast and Nebraska who will be supporting our efforts to meet this important NEA challenge.



**WILLA CATHER
NEWSLETTER AND REVIEW**

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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 on disk in Microsoft Word and should follow *The MLA Style Manual*

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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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Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

Object Lesson: The Beaded Dress

Katy Cardinal



person's memory: "I want the one of her in Canada wearing a fur coat," or "You know, the one of her in the straw hat with cherries on it." One by one, as I found the requested items, I became aware of this woman's unique sense of style, how her selection of clothing balanced out her strong features, giving even a simple middy blouse a sense of presence and strength. The clothing made the picture.

Among the elegant garments from Willa Cather's wardrobe that recently came to Red Cloud in her steamer trunk, the most striking was a bright turquoise velvet dress with ornate beading. Everyone who saw it remarked about its surprising color and design. The dress had no written identification, not even a label. In what year and to what event would she have worn it? The intense blue of this dress still stands out, even after what must be a period of eighty years since it was made.

When Willa Cather was growing up, many women were still wearing tight corsets and full Victorian petticoats. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff has shown, her "stunningly attractive" and elegantly dressed mother, Virginia Boak Cather, "enacted her own complex version of turn-of-the-century 'femininity.'" By her early teens, as photographs show, Willa was experimenting with fashion, and "she vigorously and flamboyantly renounced the 'uniform' of late Victorian 'femininity' that Mother had so faithfully honored" (199). By the early twentieth century, when Cather was in her twenties and thirties, the Arts and Crafts movement had created a new demand for naturalness, draped shift silhouettes, and stylized designs of flowers and ethnic symbols. Later, World War I brought about more radical changes and new freedom in women's clothing. Gone were the restrictive waistlines and billowing skirts. Hemlines rose to show ankles, and bare arms and V necklines

Several years ago, while helping to locate photographs in the Cather archives, I found some incoming requests were difficult to fill because our master list simply stated who was in each picture, the date, and sometimes the photographer. For example: "Willa Cather, 1915." The requests, however, described the desired photos by way of specific details that had stayed in that

became popular in the daytime, although denounced from pulpits. Clothing was a way to rebel, a form of art, and a way to show personal style.

We often associate the "roaring" 1920s with short flapper dresses. However, this era didn't begin until 1926. It was preceded by an even bigger trend: Orientalism. The designs of Leon Bakst for the Ballet Russe immediately influenced clothing styles. (Bakst's work was known and admired by Cather; she chose him to paint her portrait in 1923 and sat for him in his Paris studio.) Colors were bright, fabrics were lush, and women were seen in shimmering dresses with beading and embroidery. The 1922 discovery of King Tut's tomb also influenced this "exotic" fashion trend. High fashion belonged to the wealthier women of society who relied on Paris couture houses for handmade, one-of-a-kind dresses.

Willa Cather's turquoise dress reflects these trends. The design is an asymmetrical shift with a single panel on the right side that runs from under the arm to the hem. A ten-inch beaded border, which runs along the hemline, is made up of hundreds of small pearls, black glass outline beads, and finely faceted crystal and magenta beads. The beading design includes stylized lilies, a tree of life, and a variation of the ram's horn. Linda Ames, a specialist

in antique and vintage clothing, dates the dress at approximately 1925. . . . Before that the early twenties had longer skirts, and after, the seam placement took on a hard architectural look. I would guess it is French . . . it could be from one of the Paris couture houses . . . but without a label we can't be sure. The fabric is silk velvet. The beading, most likely done by hand, was very time consuming (Ames).

What was Willa Cather celebrating, around 1925, that would have called for a handmade, specially designed dress?

The Professor's House was published in that year; Cather received \$10,000 for the serial rights, and the book sold very well. We know that some of this money went for luxurious clothing; Cather wrote to her old friend Irene Miner Weisz that her Professor had bought her a mink coat (Stout 122). We have pictures of Cather in the coat. Are there also photographs, still out there, that show her wearing the beaded dress? What about the other pieces in the trunk? Do they tell stories too?

We may never know all the answers, but one thing is certain: this dress needs a permanent home, a special case for display. Many people have marveled over it, along with the other wonderful pieces from Willa Cather's wardrobe.



Detail of hem. Photograph by Barb Kudrna

(Continued on page 47)



Kolache Controversies

Ann Romines

At the most recent Spring Festival, I gave a talk about *My Ántonia* in which I mentioned the “kolaches” Ántonia baked for her family. Later I was genially accosted by a member of the audience—who turned out to be a descendant of Annie Pavelka, Cather’s model for Ántonia. “Well, you made a grammatical error,” he told me. “There is no such word as *kolaches*, *Kolache* is the plural, and *kolach* is the singular.” Of course I apologized profusely (even though I had been quoting Cather, who wrote “*kolaches*” in her novel). And I began to realize what an important and controversial topic *kolache* are in Nebraska!

That weekend, as always, a Saturday morning feast of *kolache* and coffee was a favorite feature of the Festival. Round pastries, made of a light, sweet yeast dough and filled with a variety of fillings, disappeared rapidly from the heaping trays filled by Kiley Maudlin, Red Cloud’s current purveyor of *kolache*. And all weekend, all over town, I overheard people chatting about whether those pastries were really *the* authentic version that their grandmothers used to make. Everyone agreed on the sweetened yeast dough, with some kind of a filling. But should the filling be visible, as in the Maudlin pastries, or hidden inside the rolls as a surprise, as in the *kolache* Betty Kort remembered her Czech grandmother’s making? Should *kolache* be round, made from balls of dough, with an indentation for the filling, or flat squares, like those that another Pavelka described her mother making, which “looked like little diapers”? I learned that back in the 1980s, when Dolores Albertini made square, folded *kolache* for the students in her husband Virgil’s Cather seminar, the shape was so controversial that it was featured in the *Omaha World Herald* as a part of the ongoing “Great Kolache Controversy”! And, in a breakfast-table conversation with Nebraskans at my bed and breakfast lodgings, I also learned that, in some people’s opinions, *kolache* aren’t really authentic unless they are made with goose or duck fat—or at least home-rendered lard. When I flew home from my weekend in Red Cloud, I carried a large box of Kiley Maudlin’s *kolache* to share with my students—as well as a headful of questions about this controversial Bohemian treat. Hoping for some answers, I turned to a reliable cookbook source: *Favorite Recipes of the Nebraska Czechs*, published by the Czech community of Wilber, where Willa Cather had researched Czech names for *My Ántonia*. There I found fourteen separate recipes—all for round *kolache*, with fillings including peach, prune, apricot, cherry, pineapple, poppyseed, and cottage cheese.

It was time, I decided, to consult one of the ultimate sources for Cather readers. So I put in a call to Bladen, Nebraska, to Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, the granddaughter of Annie

Sadilek Pavelka and the goddaughter of Willa Cather. Mrs. Turner is known all over Nebraska for her Nebraska Humanities Council-sponsored programs on Czech culture and her family’s Cather connections. And she had a lot to say about *kolache*! Oh yes, she remembered her grandmother’s delicious *kolache*. “She filled them with those spiced plums, like Willa Cather says in *My Ántonia*. Those were the wild plums. We can’t eat them today, because they spray the trees.” Now Mrs. Turner—who is in her eighties—still loves to make *kolache* herself (substituting a variety of fillings for the spiced plums). Are her *kolache* round or square? “Well, my mom made them square and I make the round ones, now. Both are good.” Mrs. Turner is remarkably tolerant of “modern” *kolache* innovations. “I even hear you can make them out of that new frozen bread dough,” she says. “The important thing is not to be stingy with the filling.”

Mrs. Turner has shared her own current *kolache* recipe, which includes a few modern innovations of her own, such as rapid-rise dry yeast, as well as instructions for making both round and square rolls. Why not join Nebraska’s Great Kolache Controversy and try making both?

Kolache as made by Antonette Willa Skupa Turner

1 ½ c. warm water	1 ½ c. evaporated milk
1 stick margarine	(1 13-oz. can)
½ c. plus 1 T. sugar	¼ c. lard or Crisco ¹
2 pkg. fast rising dry yeast	1 T. salt
1 whole egg plus two egg yolks	½ c. warm water
	about 6 c. flour

Mix 1 ½ c. warm water, evaporated milk, margarine, and lard. Add ½ c. sugar, salt, and 2 c. flour. Pour yeast in ½ c. warm water and add 1 T. sugar (this should foam up in a couple of minutes). Add egg and yolks to first mixture. Stir in yeast mixture. Add remaining flour. Dough should be soft. Cover and put in a warm place; let rise until doubled. Punch down the dough.

With greased fingers, make round balls the size of a LARGE walnut and flatten out the doughballs on a greased baking sheet and let them rise in a warm place. Then make a large indentation with two fingers. (I always melt shortening and lightly grease the dough before I make the indentions.) Fill indentions with filling of your choice (about one rounded tablespoon). Sprinkle filling generously with white shredded coconut. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Let the *kolache* rise again until double, then place them on your lower oven shelf. When half baked, move to upper oven shelf. *Kolache* are done when nicely browned. Remove from baking sheet and cool on rack.

(Continued on page 47)



Kiley Maudlin’s kolache. Photo by Betty Kort.



How my mom, Julia Irene Pavelka Skupa, made kolache: After the dough has risen once, roll out a large hunk of dough until about ¼-inch thick. Cut dough into 2" squares. Stretch each square and place about one heaping tablespoon prune filling in the center of each square. Then take opposite corners of dough and pinch them together *very firmly*. (Otherwise the *kolache* will fall apart.) Let rise again, until double. When the *kolache* are ready to bake, brush with melted lard. Bake as above.

Kolache Fillings

Poppy seed filling (my favorite): Use a can of Solo brand poppyseed filling. It needs to be thinned. I use about ½ c. of my home-canned pears, well mashed, and mix into the filling. I have also used applesauce to thin the filling.

Cherry filling is popular. I use the canned cherry pie filling (Wilderness brand) and found out if I chop up the cherries it works very well.

Prune filling. Buy the pitted prunes. Cook in water to cover until tender. Mash them well. For 2 lb. prunes use ½ c. sugar and 2 t. cinnamon; stir together well. Taste it and see how it tastes. [This is closest to Antonia's spiced plums.]

Apricot filling is good. Using canned apricots, mash them up and sweeten to taste.

Note: Additional recipes for *kolache* and fillings are available in *Favorite Recipes of the Nebraska Czechs* and in *Cather's*

Kitchens: Foodways in Literature and Life, by Roger L. and Linda K. Welsch. Both books are available through the Cather Foundation bookstore.

Note

¹ Mrs. Turner says, "Since I don't get the home-rendered lard, I use the butter Crisco now."

Object Lesson (Continued from page 45)

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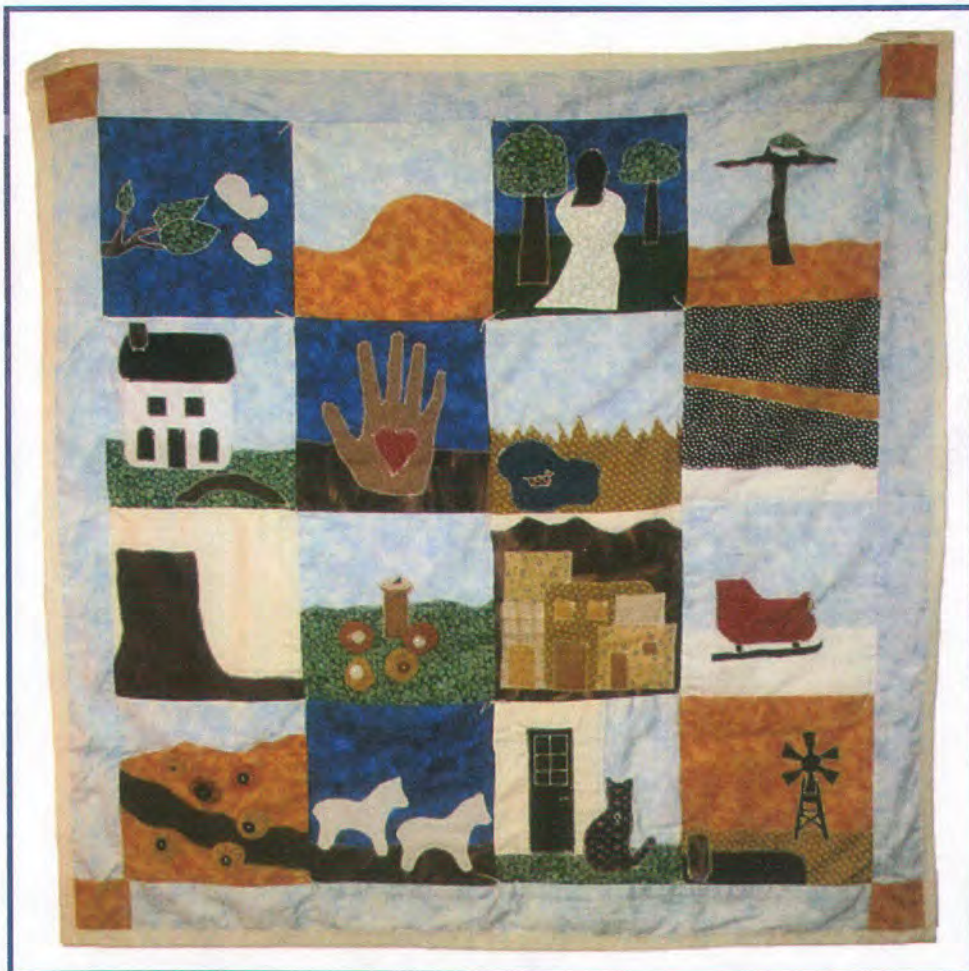
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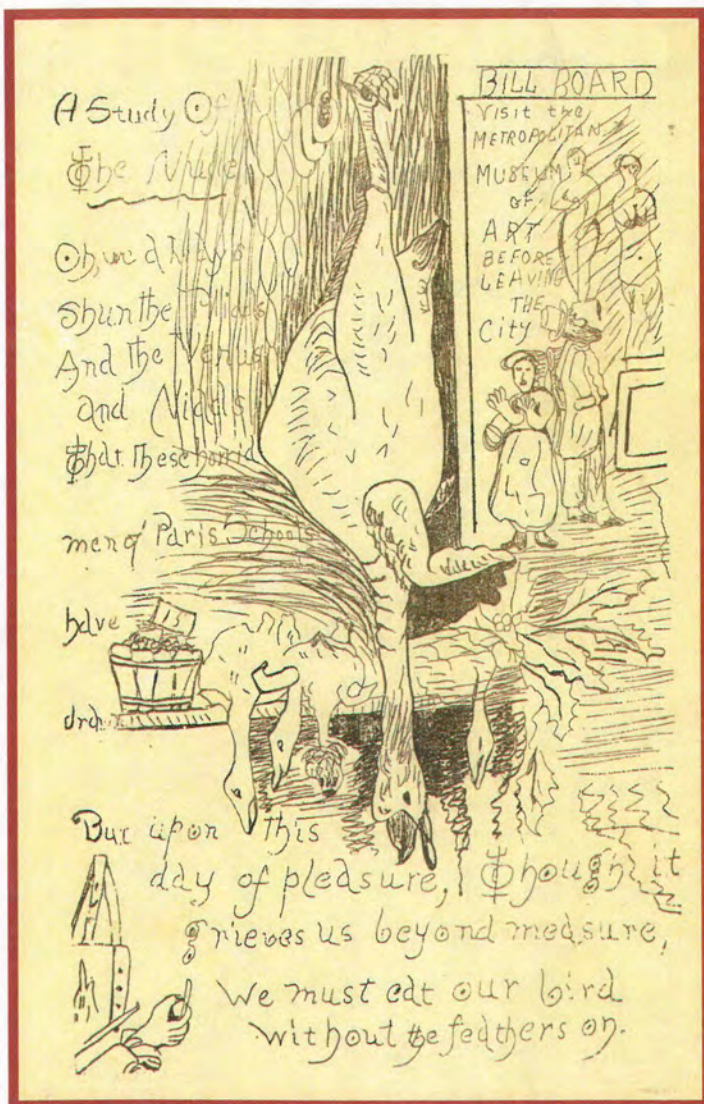
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A New Cather Quilt

The quilt at left, which illustrates scenes from Willa Cather's fiction, has been used for illustrations throughout this issue. It is another discovery from the International Cather Seminar, cosponsored by the Cather Foundation in June, 2005. In Lincoln, Professor Susan A. Schiller of Central Michigan University presented "Creating Art to Understand Art: A Holistic Relationship between Students and Cather." Her paper described an undergraduate class in which students were required to produce creative projects inspired by their readings of Willa Cather. One such project was this strikingly graphic quilt, designed and executed by Carrie Jones. From the Forrester house to Harry Gordon's sleigh to the two white butterflies from *O Pioneers!*, all 16 quilt blocks evoked enthusiastic recognition from Seminar participants. The quilt was Carrie Jones' gift to her professor, and we are happy to share it with you, with the permission of Susan Schiller.



Reproduction of drawing courtesy of the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Archives and Special Collections.

A Study of the Nude

*Oh, we always
Shun the Phidias
And the Venus
and Nidias
That these horrid
men of Paris schools
have drawn.
But upon this*

*day of pleasure, though it
grieves us beyond measure,
we must eat our bird
without the feathers on.*

*—From the Hesperian,
attributed to Willa Cather*

In November, 1892, the University of Nebraska's magazine, *The Hesperian*, of which 18-year-old Willa Cather was literary editor, produced its first "holiday edition," for Thanksgiving. The issue included a comic story set in Rome, "A Sentimental Thanksgiving Dinner in Five Courses," signed by Cather. It also featured an unsigned cartoon frontispiece that has been attributed to Cather, who was the only female member of the *Hesperian* staff (note the female artist's hand in lower left corner). In this illustrated verse, the young artist mocks contemporary objections to nudity in art, shows off her knowledge of classical sculpture, and celebrates a (nude) Thanksgiving turkey.

Happy Thanksgiving!



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