

50th
Cather Foundation
Anniversary Edition

Willa Cather

Newsletter & Review



Winter/Spring 2005
Vol. XLVIII, No. 3

The Cather Community World-Wide Mourns Death of Susan J. Rosowski

Ann Romines

The Cather Foundation and readers of Willa Cather all over the world are mourning the death of eminent Cather scholar Susan J. Rosowski on November 2, 2004. Rosowski, 62, was Adele Hall Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she had been a professor since 1982. As director of the University's unique Cather Project, she was a pivotal figure in international Cather studies. According to Joseph Urgo, English Department chair at the University of Mississippi and Cather Foundation Board of Governors member, "she was undoubtedly the premier Cather scholar in the country. . . . Her work has continued to inspire a new generation of scholars."

Born in Topeka, Kansas, Sue Rosowski was educated at Whittier College (B.A.) and at the University of Arizona at Tucson (M.A., Ph.D.). Her early scholarship focused on British Romanticism, but after moving to Lincoln with her husband Jim, she discovered, as he said, that "it was really Willa Cather she loved." Rosowski's first book, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (1986) remains one of the most influential critical studies of Cather, and *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the Significance of the West in American Literature* (1999) offers a fresh reading of Cather in the context of the American West and was awarded the Thomas J. Lyon Award for an outstanding book on Western American literature by the Western Literature Association, of which she was an active member for decades, serving as president in 1986-87. Sue's meticulous and groundbreaking scholarship, coupled with her infectious enthusiasm and passion for Cather's fiction, put her at the center of many important projects that have advanced Cather studies. She was General Editor of the award-winning Nebraska Scholarly Edition of Cather's fiction, Editor in Chief of the Cather Archive, and since 1986, the founding Editor in Chief of *Cather Studies*. She edited many influential volumes, including the Modern Language Association's *Approaches to Teaching Cather's My Ántonia* (1989), authored dozens of essays, presented more than 100 scholarly papers and made more than 250 talks to community groups, mostly on Cather. As Cather Foundation Director Betty Kort has noted, Sue "loved Cather, and she brought others to love Cather."



Susan Rosowski with National Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky at Bread Loaf, spring 2003. Photo by Jim Rosowski.

Sue Rosowski was also a legendary teacher, and her students—many of whom are now well-known Cather scholars—remember her ardently as a provocative and inspiring teacher and an indefatigably supportive mentor. She received many teaching awards at the University of Nebraska in both Lincoln and Omaha, and in 2004 received the university system's highest award for Outstanding Research and Creative Activity. The Western Literature Association has just established the Susan J. Rosowski Award for Creative Mentoring and Teaching in Western American Literature in her honor, and *Teaching Cather* is planning a volume of essays honoring Rosowski's teaching.

Sue was a tireless friend and supporter of the Cather Foundation; she had been a member of the Board of Governors for twenty-three years. She directed five extremely successful International Seminars, co-sponsored by UN-L and the Cather Foundation, and was a constant, enthusiastic participant in Spring Festivals and other events in Red Cloud. She delighted in introducing her students, colleagues, and friends to the resources of Willa Cather's home town and state. If you attended the 2004 Spring Festival, you will remember her frank and eloquent talk about issues of death and dying in Cather's fiction, framed by her own current experiences with a terminal illness, metastatic ocular melanoma.

Sue Rosowski died at her rural Nebraska home in Garland and is buried in nearby Germantown Cemetery. She is survived by her husband Jim, her sons Scott and David, two granddaughters, one brother, other family members, and hundreds of devoted students, colleagues, and friends. Her life was celebrated at a memorial service at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Lincoln on December 10, with memories, music, talk, food, and laughter. As Jim Rosowski said, "Sue truly loved her colleagues and students and got as much pleasure from their accomplishments as her own." At the Rosowskis' welcoming home, Cather scholars from all over gathered "for food, friendship and lively discussions."

Those friendships, discussions, and Cather projects will continue, at the Cather Foundation and around the world, and they are Susan Rosowski's loving and invaluable legacy to us.



Cather Foundation Calendar

Spring 2005

50th Anniversary

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation

"The Cather Foundation: 50 Years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration!"

Celebrated in conjunction with the
2005 Spring Festival
April 29-30, 2005

Premiere Performance of Adaptation of "A Singer's Romance"

A Musical Adaptation of Cather's Short Story
Commissioned by the Cather Foundation
Written, and Directed by Jim Ford
Starring Ariel Bybee
April 30, 2005

One Book One State 2005 Nebraska Reads My Antonia

Fall 2005

"Exploring the Caspersen Cather Collection at Drew: A Colloquium"

September 30-October 1, 2005
Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

Summer 2005

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

The 10th International Cather Seminar 2005

Violence, the Arts, and Cather

June 18-25, 2005
Red Cloud, Nebraska &
The University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Keynote Speakers:

Terry Eagleton, Critical Theorist
Michele Barale, Associate Professor of
English and Women's and Gender Studies
Amherst College

"Violence, the Arts, and Cather" will be the theme of the 10th International Cather Seminar to begin June 18, 2005. This will be a joint-sited seminar based in the two prominent places of Cather's Nebraska experience—Red Cloud and Lincoln. The seminar will feature for the first time residency in Red Cloud as well as on the UNL campus and will celebrate the WCPM's 50th anniversary.

The seminar will open with three days in Red Cloud. While there, participants will stay in private homes; meals will be served in the Community Center. Locations for paper presentations, plenary sessions, and performances include the Opera House, the school, and the community center. The second phase of the seminar will be on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. Participants will be housed on campus, and UNL classrooms, auditoriums, and galleries will accommodate presentations and discussions.

Papers on all aspects of Willa Cather's work, life, and times are invited for possible presentation. Diverse critical and theoretical perspectives are encouraged. Those focusing on the seminar theme are especially welcome. Interested contributors should submit abstracts of 500 words with a cover letter and brief résumé by March 18, 2005. Persons whose proposals are accepted will be expected to submit final papers by June 1, 2005. Papers should be 10-12 pages in length (double-spaced, 20 minute presentation time).

Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather's childhood home, and the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where Cather spend her undergraduate years, offer ideal sites for our focus on Cather.

Submit proposals by **March 18, 2005** to:

Guy Reynolds
Director, International Seminar
Dept. of English, Andrews Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0693

Willa Cather

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The Willa Cather Society

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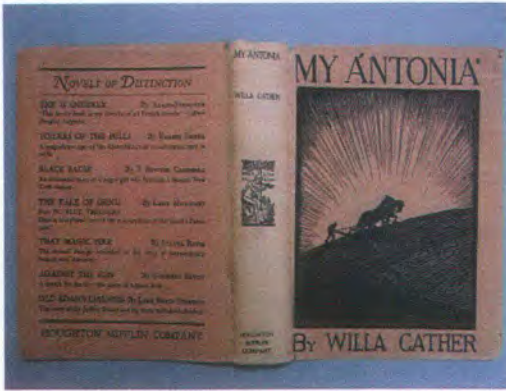
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For further information visit our website at www.unl.edu/cather or the UNL website at www.unl.edu/cather or e-mail Beth Burke, Cather Project Program Coordinator at eburke3@unl.edu.



Cather on Cather III: Dust Jacket Copy on Willa Cather's Books

David H. Porter

“Dust-jacket copy” sounds pretty dry—we might even say dusty!—but in fact the topic involves fascinating issues: Where

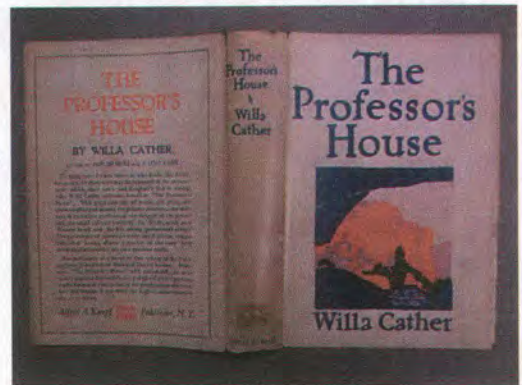
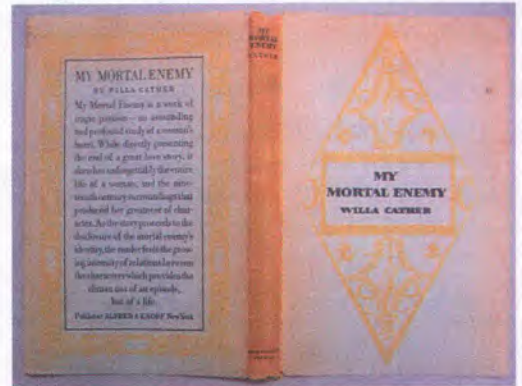
did Willa Cather write “her first story about the prairie country of the West”? What story has “both the grace and the naked ruthlessness that one expects to find only in a fragment of Greek art”? Whom in *SSG* did the author consider “the most interesting figures in the book”? What are we to make of the amazing hybrid *ALEXANDRA’S BRIDGE* that appears on one jacket? Where and when did Cather describe herself as “a sympathetic artist who is neither reformer nor sentimentalist”?

Two previous “Cather on Cather” articles have looked at four promotional pieces written by Willa Cather but published anonymously: biographical statements to accompany *April Twilights* in 1903 and *The Song of the Lark* in 1915; a “Biographical Sketch” for A. A. Knopf’s 1926 booklet about Cather; and a 1926 “interview” that was written to promote *My Mortal Enemy* but apparently never used for this purpose (Porter 2002 and 2003). This article focuses on similar promotional materials which Cather, again anonymously, helped create: the jacket blurbs on her books. Like the texts studied in the earlier articles, these blurbs are often hard to access—and filled with leads to new insights and interpretations. Not only are they rich in intriguing issues such as those with which I’ve baited the opening paragraph, but they further document Willa Cather’s constant and conscientious, if anonymous, efforts to shape the public’s image of herself and her books.

We know Willa Cather took an active interest in every stage of the production of her books. Among the issues she raises in letters to Houghton Mifflin during the production of *MA*, for instance, are the color of the cover and the jacket, the “physical design of the novel,” the type and paper to be used and the “visual effect” of the pages, the clarity of the accent on “*Antonía*,” the deletion of her middle initial from the title page, and the illustrations.¹

Promotional matters especially engaged Cather’s scrutiny. In connection with *SOL*, for instance, she not only writes the biographical statement for the advertising brochure but also suggests that HM capitalize on the current interest in cliff dwellings, advertise at women’s colleges (girls will like the book’s aggressive careerism [!]), and reprint favorable reviews. When she scans HM’s ads and finds them wanting, she herself crafts different copy,² and when similar concerns arise two years later in connection with *MA*, they help motivate her transfer from HM to Knopf.³

Given all this, it is not surprising that Cather also paid close attention to jacket blurbs, knowing as she did that such blurbs not only suggest what lies within a book but can also encourage a purchase. In 1915, for instance, she comments favorably on the *SOL* jacket but corrects its copy and suggests further improvements (Stout #311); soon after *MA* appears, she suggests new promotional possibilities for a revised jacket (#454). And when she finally decides to



*Dust jackets in this article are from the Caspersen Cather Collection at Drew University Library. Photography by Masato Okinaka, Conservator.

Contributors in this Issue:

DAVID PORTER is a familiar contributor to the WCPMN&R, again in this issue doing his usual exceptionally valuable job of exploring the new information Cather scholars can glean from her rare manuscripts and dust jackets. He teaches Classics at Williams College and steadily builds his exceptional Cather collection, while serving on the WCPM Board of Governors.

CAREY CHANEY is one of the independent scholars we welcome as a contributor in these pages. He is by profession a song writer and folk singer who lives in Miami. His website is www.careychaney.com.

STEVE SHIVELY is a former student of Susan J. Rosowski and now serves on the Cather Foundation Board of Governors.

Dusk Jacket Copy

(Continued)

leave HM, one reason she gives is that A. A. Knopf "allowed her to write jacket copy or advertising blurbs" (Woodress 316).

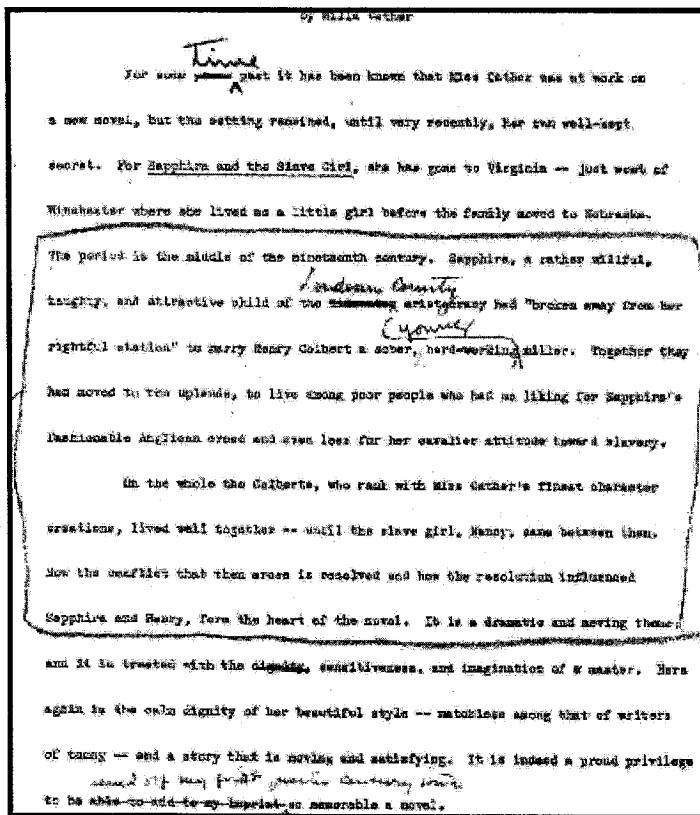


Illustration # 1.

A typescript I own in which Cather has revised copy for the *SSG* jacket offers striking evidence for her ongoing attention to such matters up to the end of her writing career. The first of its two pages appears to be a blue carbon copy *not* typed by Cather.⁴ She has noted minor changes to the beginning and end of this draft (all adopted in the final jacket blurb);⁵ has begun revising its central portion, which describes *SSG* itself; and has then circled this entire section. (See Illustration #1). The typing on the second page has faded badly, but it is nonetheless clear that this typing, unlike that on the first page, *is* Cather's own, a fact established both by typographic details that square with other Cather typescripts and also by three pencil corrections that are clearly in her hand.⁶ Below this typed section Cather has written the lead-in to the next sentence of the blurb ("and it is treated etc" [*sic*]), and at the bottom of the sheet she has noted, again in pencil, "I suggest the above paragraph take the place of the paragraph in your copy which I have enclosed in pencil. Hastily W. S. C." (See Illustration #2). Finally, it is Cather's typed revision on this page that becomes the central paragraph of the jacket blurb when the book appears.⁷

We shall return later to the substance of Cather's *SSG* jacket revision, but for now the important point is that in this typescript we see Cather, at the time of her last novel, not only reviewing and revising jacket copy but also completely rewriting the portion that describes the novel itself. What we find here squares with what we can intuit with other jackets. We know, for instance, that Horace Greenslet wrote some jacket material for Cather's HM books, but we have also noted her

direct involvement with the *SOL* and *MA* jackets, and we shall see that it is her voice, not his, that sounds in those portions of HM jackets that—like the heart of the *SSG* blurb—describe the books themselves. Similarly, though A. A. Knopf suggests that Edith Lewis helped draft some Knopf jacket copy,⁸ we have seen that one of Knopf's draws for Cather was his assurance that she could write such copy. Taking everything together, it seems that though others may often have drafted initial jacket copy, Cather herself reviewed and revised it; when it came to descriptions of her books or herself, she is likely, as in the *SSG* typescript, to have played an even more active role.

In what follows, I include all jacket copy that contains original commentary. I omit blurbs that quote reviews of earlier books and indicate the location of blurbs only when more than one appears on a single jacket (see Crane for fuller information). The copy I transcribe here is that of the first edition jacket, both because such jackets are the hardest to access and because, as the editors of the *CSE LL* put it, "the first edition represents Cather's most intense creative engagement with her work."⁹ Although my purpose here is to make jacket blurbs available for study rather than to discuss them in detail, I offer some general comments after *MA* (Cather's last HM book) and after *MME* and *NUF* (in each case following five Knopf volumes). Comments on the *SSG* jacket lead into some concluding observations. *AT* and *TG* do not appear because the former had no jacket and the jacket for the latter contains no copy relating to Cather or the stories in the book.

Alexander's Bridge (1912)

Some six or eight years ago, Miss Cather's collection of short stories entitled "A Troll Garden" was hailed by critics both in this country and in England as a collection of the first distinction, and fit companion to the stories of Mrs. Wharton; and a novel by the same hand was eagerly desired. This now comes in "*Alexander's Bridge*," a story that will take its place among the brilliant first novels of American writers. It is dramatic, powerful, and haunting to the memory,—marked in an uncommon degree by the qualities of distinction, of excellence of workmanship, perceptiveness, actuality and the spiritual sense of life.

O Pioneers! (1913)

A stirring romance of the Western prairies, embodying a new idea and a new country. There are two heroines,—¹⁰ the splendid Swedish girl, Alexandra, who dares and achieves, and the beautiful Bohemian whose love story is the very story of Youth. It is only by a happy chance that a creature so warm and palpitating with life is ever enticed into the pages of a novel.

My Autobiography (1914)¹¹

It is an inspiring story—and a typical story—this life of a North of Ireland boy. The vicissitudes through which he rose make a fascinating narrative as he tells it in a quiet style well colored with humor and anecdote.

"My Autobiography" is more than a human document however, for S. S. McClure has been in the forefront of many movements in the last decade—from the exposure of predatory corporations by the Tarbell articles on "Standard Oil" to the revolution in child education

through the Montessori Method. Kipling, Stevenson and many other famous authors were introduced to an American audience by Mr. McClure, and the writers, editors and famous men of a generation have been his friends and intimates.” [sic]

The Song of the Lark (1915)

The story of a great American singer,— her childhood in the Colorado desert, her early struggles in Chicago, her romantic adventures among the ruins of the Cliff Dwellers in Arizona, her splendid triumphs on the operatic stage. It is a story of aspiration and conflict, of the magnificent courage of young ambition, and of the influence of four men upon the singer’s career.

The title of the book was suggested to the author by Jules Breton’s famous painting, “The Song of the Lark,” reproduced on the front jacket.¹²

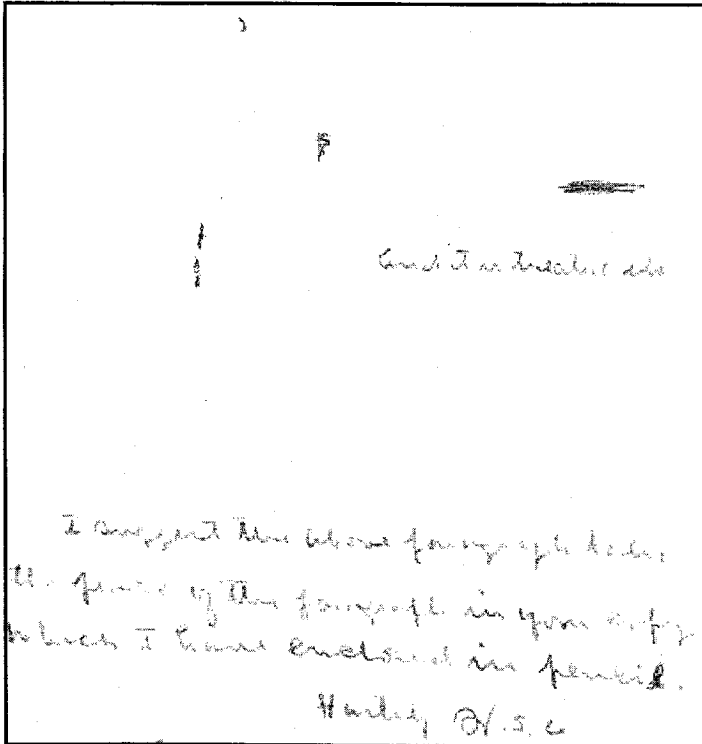


Illustration #2.

My Ántonia (1918)

Of all the remarkable women that Miss Cather has created no other is so appealing as Ántonia, all impulsive youth and careless courage. Miss Cather has the rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth.

MY ÁNTONIA is a love story, brimming with human appeal, and a very distinguished piece of writing.

We unreservedly recommend it to all lovers of good stories and to those who appreciate the very best in fiction.

Houghton Mifflin Company (front cover)

A New York lawyer, whose worldly and successful career has been shaped by a brilliant marriage, tells the story of the one woman who has most influenced his inner life and stirred his imagination,— a Bohemian girl, Ántonia Shimerda, whom he first knew in his boyhood on the Nebraska prairies. Her family are poor homesteaders. Their

tragic adventures among the unexpected hardships of the wild frontier form the first thrilling and memorable chapters of the book. Out of their grim tragedy arises the beautiful figure of Ántonia. One sees her as a child, running about the red prairies in her rabbit-skin cap, or huddling in the draw-side cave with her family, so burning with vitality that no disaster can crush her; as a girl, gallant and defenseless in her struggle with the world; as a young woman, surrounded by the sordid gossip of a little town, too simple and unreflecting to arm herself against the misfortune which overtakes her, but so valorous that she conquers in spite of it.

Of all the remarkable portraits of women that Miss Cather has done, no other is so poetic and appealing. Ántonia has the freshness and vitality of the new soil from which she springs, the vigor of the great prairies on which her vivid and enthralling personal drama unfolds. (inner front flap)

We know that portions of Horace Greenslet’s “house memos” on *AB* and *MA* found their way onto these jackets (Brown 159, Greenslet 119), that he filed a similar memo for *OP* (Brown 179), and that both he and Cather worked on the advertising brochure for *SOL*, some of which reappears in the jacket material for that book (Porter 2002, 58). Greenslet could be eloquent—as in the lovely conclusion to the *MA* blurb (“Ántonia has the freshness and vitality of the new soil from which she springs,” etc.). Nonetheless, his language abounds in generalities—*AB*’s “excellence of workmanship, perceptiveness, actuality and the spiritual sense of life,” or his advice to *HM* that *OP* “ought to . . . definitely establish the author as a novelist of the first rank” (Brown 179); and what one notices in jackets after *AB*’s is that they move toward specificity. The *OP* jacket begins by calling the book “a stirring romance,” but what follows is precisely what is lacking in the *AB* jacket—vivid description of the novel’s “two heroines,— the splendid Swedish girl, Alexandra, who dares and achieves, and the beautiful Bohemian whose love story is the very story of Youth.” The *SOL* jacket moves a step further, in its few lines suggesting its heroine’s “magnificent courage of young ambition,” “her childhood in the Colorado desert, her early struggles in Chicago, her romantic adventures among the ruins of the Cliff Dwellers in Arizona, her splendid triumphs on the operatic stage.” The longer of the two *MA* blurbs completes the progression, bringing before our eyes the young Ántonia as she runs about the prairies or huddles in the cave, tracking her progression from hardships to triumph, making us feel the “burning vitality” by which she survives it all. At a later time Cather would claim that *MA* contains “no struggle for success” (Bohlke 77), but here, at the time of the book’s first appearance, we have an Ántonia who—like Alexandra and Thea—“conquers” in “her struggle with the world.”

The vigorous evocations of Alexandra and Marie, Thea, and Ántonia in themselves suggest Cather’s hand. In addition, Ántonia “running about the red prairies” uncannily foreshadows Cather’s description of herself in 1926 as “racing about over the country” (Porter 2003, 53), and the choice to devote the opening of the longer *MA* blurb to Jim Burden honors Cather’s distinctive narrative structure for this novel. Two very different voices sound in the generalities on *MA*’s cover and the telling specifics inside its jacket: we know the cover blurb comes largely from Greenslet (Brown 212-13); one senses the description of the

Dusk Jacket Copy (Continued)

book must be Cather's. The *SOL* jacket blurb is almost identical with what we find in the *SOL* brochure, on which she worked, and much of which she wrote. As for *OP*, who but Cather herself could have come up with the happy notion of the author having to "entice" Marie Shabata into the pages of her novel?

The jacket for *My Autobiography*, like those for *OP*, *SOL*, and *MA*, stresses its tale of someone who, like Alexandra (and, of course, Thea and Antonia), "dares and achieves." Inasmuch as Cather wrote *My Autobiography*, she probably "ghosted" its jacket as well; that its themes so resemble those of these HM jackets is unlikely to be mere accident.¹³

Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920)

There are not many living writers from whom a new book commands the mixture of excitement, anticipation, and curious respect with which each successive volume of Miss Cather's is now awaited.

This collection of eight stories is a new exhibition of the writer's power and remarkable artistry. The theme on which all the stories more or less loosely hang—youth's adventure with the many-colored Medusa of art—is in itself fascinating; but it is the writer's quick, bold cutting into the very tissues of human experience and emotion, the daring play of her imagination, that make each of these stories stand out as a separate new discovery about character and life.

studio skylights. This story of a young painter, drawn by accident under the overwhelming obsession of a woman's beauty, has both the grace and the naked ruthlessness that one expects to find only in a fragment of Greek art. *The Diamond Mine*, the story of a great singer's life, is a whole novel resolved into its elements and foreshortened with an ironic simplicity.

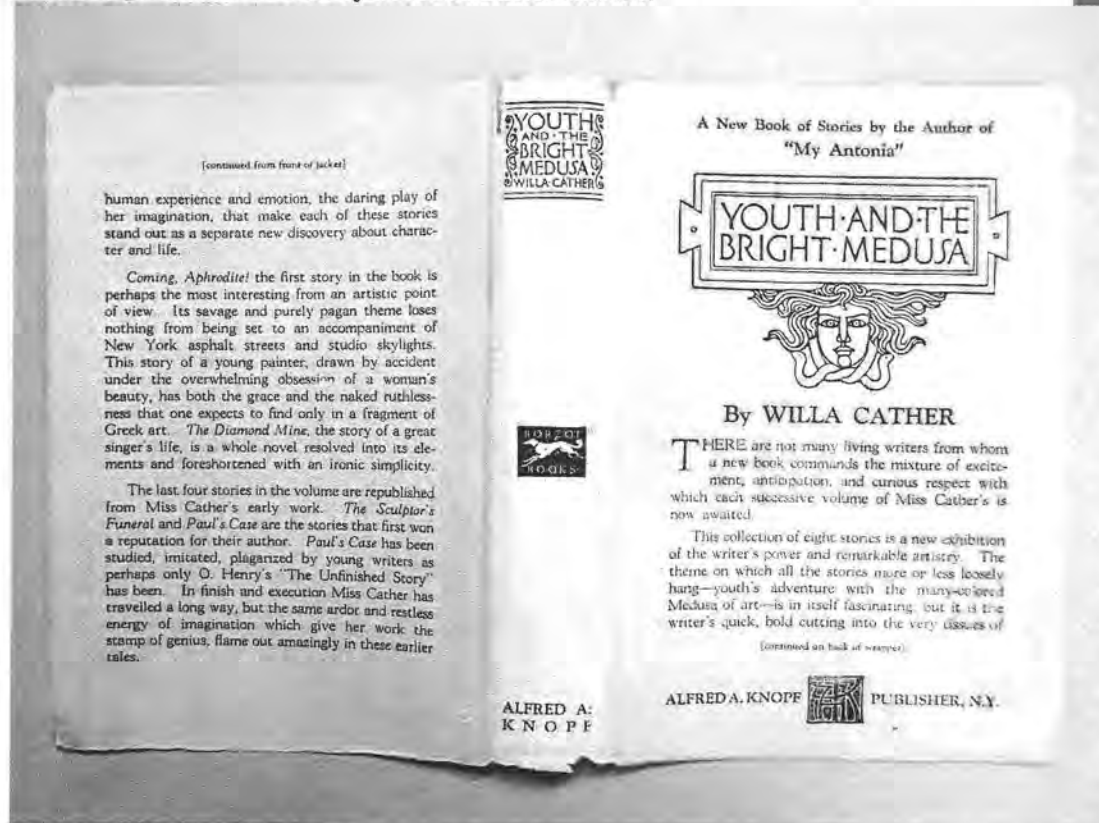
The last four stories in the volume are republished from Miss Cather's early work. *The Sculptor's Funeral* and *Paul's Case* are the stories that first won a reputation for their author. *Paul's Case* has been studied, imitated, plagiarized [*sic*] by young writers as perhaps only O. Henry's "The Unfinished Story" has been.

\$2.25 net

WILLA CATHER

wrote her first short story some fifteen years ago. It was published in *McClures*, having been accepted by correspondence with the author, who was in the West. She was also asked to come east as a member of the magazine's staff. For several years she devoted herself to editorial work in New York and abroad. It was in Italy curiously enough, that she wrote her first story about the prairie country of the West, where she spent her childhood, and which has since become so much her field. The next summer, which she spent in London on magazine business, found an echo in her first novel, "Alexandra's Bridge," published in 1912.

"My Antonia" was her last published work prior to the present one.



Dust Jacket for *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, 1920.

Coming, Aphrodite! the first story in the book is perhaps the most interesting from an artistic point of view. Its savage and purely pagan theme loses nothing from being set to an accompaniment of New York asphalt streets and

In finish and execution Miss Cather has travelled [*sic*] a long way, but the same ardor and restless energy of imagination which give her work the stamp of genius, flame out amazingly in these earlier tales. (front cover, continuing onto back)

Willa Cather wrote her first short story some fifteen years ago. It was published in *McClures* [*sic*], having been accepted by correspondence with the author, who was in the West. She was also asked to come east as a member of the magazine's staff. For several years she devoted herself to editorial work in New York and abroad. It

was in Italy, curiously enough, where she wrote her first story about the prairie country of the West, where she spent her childhood, and which has since become so much her field. The next summer, which she spent in London on magazine business, found an echo in her first novel, "Alexandra's [*sic!*] Bridge," published in 1912.

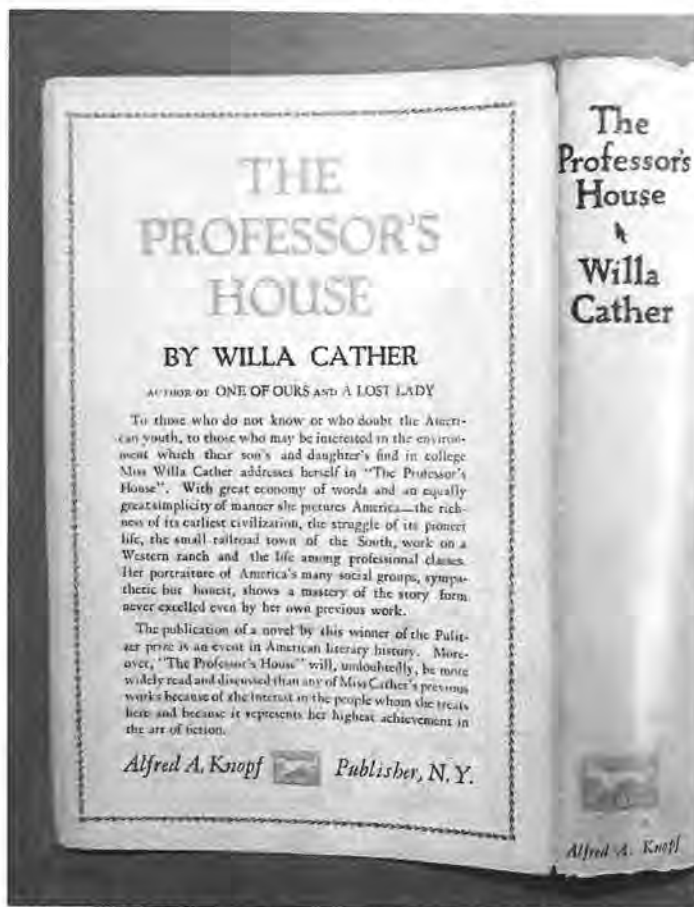
"My Antonia" [sic] was her last published work prior to the present one. (inner front flap on opposite page.)

One of Ours (1922)

More and more have we come to recognize in Willa Cather our greatest living woman novelist. ONE OF OURS, a novel to which she has devoted nearly three years (she is one of the few writers of today who refuses to be hurried) is her first long novel since MY ANTONIA (1918) [sic], and shows her at the very fullness of her powers. Nothing that Miss Cather has ever written has quite prepared one for this book—and yet everything that she has written has been a preparation for it. Here, you will say, is an authentic masterpiece—a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age.

All the magic of Miss Cather's subtle and flexible style, all the passion of her daring, impatient mind, are lavished upon the presentation of a single figure—a sort of young Hamlet of the prairies—and upon the haunting story of his struggle with life and fate. ONE OF OURS is the intimate story of a young man's life. Claude Wheeler's stormy youth, his enigmatic marriage, and the final adventure which releases the baffled energy of the boy's nature, are told with almost epic simplicity. But behind the personal drama there is an ever deepening sense of national drama, of national character, working itself out through individuals and their destiny.

Alfred A. Knopf



Back and spine of dust jacket for *The Professor's House*. 1925.

A Lost Lady (1923)

In an atmosphere as individual and full of color as that of the old manor-houses in Russian novels, Miss Cather unfolds this romance of the old West; not the West of the pioneer this time, but of the railroad aristocracy that grew up when the great trans-continental lines were being built across the plains[.]

A whole epoch lives again in the little group of people so wonderfully pictured in this story of an incorruptible man and the beautiful woman who was his wife, and of the house in which their moving drama took place[.]

In every page there is a melancholy beauty, a thrilling pathos; it underlies the easy brilliance of the writing, the vivacity with which Miss Cather gives us all the idiosyncrasies of that lavish, generous, careless era. Through the whole story one figure stands out with irresistible fascination—the figure of Marian Forrester, full of feminine mystery and charm, inscrutable in her weakness and her reckless courage. She is one of Miss Cather's greatest triumphs[.]

The Professor's House (1925)

To those who do not know or who doubt the American youth, to those who may be interested in the environment which their son's and daughter's (sic!) find in college (sic) Miss Willa Cather addresses herself in "The Professor's House". With great economy of words and an equally great simplicity of manner she pictures America—the richness of its earliest civilization, the struggle of its pioneer life, the small railroad town of the South, work on a Western ranch and the life among professional classes. Her portraiture of America's many social groups, sympathetic but honest, shows a mastery of the story form never excelled even by her own previous work.

The publication of a novel by this winner of the Pulitzer prize is an event in American literary history. Moreover, "The Professor's House" will, undoubtedly, be more widely read and discussed than any of Miss Cather's previous works because of the interest in the people whom she treats here and because it represents her highest achievement in the art of fiction.

My Mortal Enemy (1926)

My Mortal Enemy is a work of tragic passion—an astounding and profound study of a woman's heart. While directly presenting the end of a great love story, it sketches unforgettably the entire life of a woman, and the nineteenth century surroundings that produced her greatness of character. As the story proceeds to the disclosure of the mortal enemy's identity, the reader feels the growing intensity of relations between the characters which provides the climax not of an episode, but of a life.

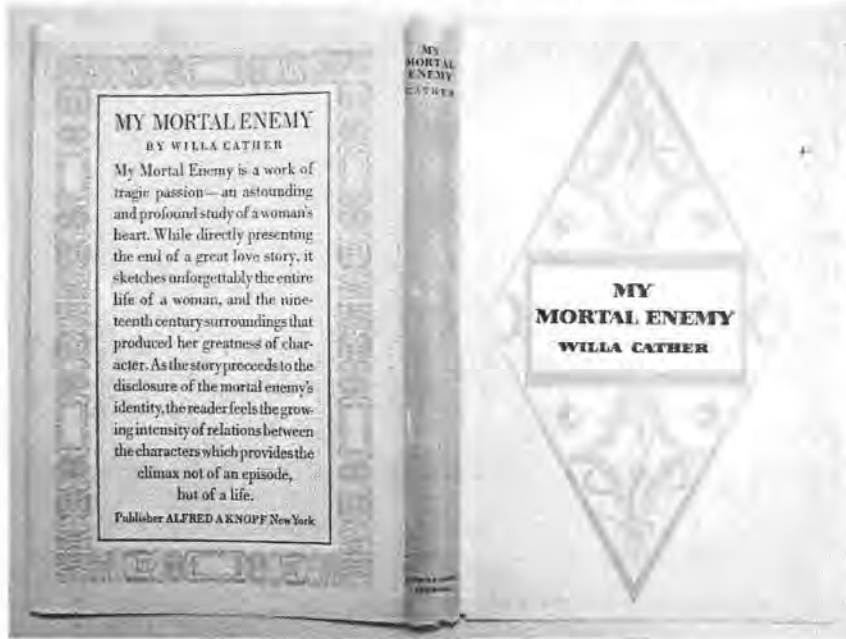
A. A. Knopf offered Cather a greater role in composing jacket copy, and in these first Knopf jackets she uses this license in ways that build on the role she apparently played with HM jackets. What strikes one immediately are the fascinating insights these early Knopf jackets offer into the souls of their books. Claude Wheeler is "a sort of young Hamlet of the prairies" whose "final adventure . . . releases the baffled energy of the

Dusk Jacket Copy
(Continued)

boy's nature" and whose "personal drama" is set against "an ever deepening sense of national drama." *LL* creates "an atmosphere as individual and full of color as that of the old manor-houses in Russian novels" for its story of a woman "inscrutable in her weakness and her reckless courage." *MME* is "an astounding and profound study of a woman's heart."

The *PH* jacket seems a special case. Although it makes interesting comments about the book's broad scan of American life ("the richness of its earliest civilization, the struggle of its pioneer life, the small railroad town of the South," etc.), I must admit that in it, as in the jacket for *AB* (which we know comes primarily from Greenslet), I do not hear Cather's voice. What I miss in both of these is precisely what I find in the others, and what we see Cather

anticipation, and curious respect" that await each new Cather book; *OO*'s jacket calls Cather "our greatest living woman novelist" and *OO* "a novel to rank with the finest of this or any age"; the *PH* jacket dubs the novel "an event in American literary history." What remains memorable, though, are not phrases like these but the jackets' vivid evocations of the books themselves. And that, of course, is precisely what Cather would have wished—that if a jacket could capture a book's allure, could take potential readers inside its covers, the book would sell itself. It is noteworthy—and a point to which we shall return—that conventional hype disappears from the jacket of *MME*: all there is by way of promotion for *MME* is the back cover's terse but penetrating description of the book itself—a statement that, to be sure, suggests the power of Cather's writing but that says nothing about her previous triumphs, or her stature as a writer.



Above: Outside cover of *My Mortal Enemy*, 1926. Below: Inside flaps

contributing to the *SOG* blurb—an evocation of the vibrant tale one will find within. To juxtapose the rich human descriptions of the *OO*, *LL*, and *MME* jackets with what appears on the *PH* jacket is to marvel that there is no mention there of Godfrey St. Peter or Tom Outland, no allusion to the inner drama the book traces. The blurb's first sentence confirms my suspicions: even if one ignores the egregious punctuation,¹⁴ would Cather herself have perpetrated the absurdity of casting *PH* as an introduction to campus life?

In contrast, Cather's voice sounds loud and clear throughout the *YBM* jacket—as though she were reveling in the new-found freedom Knopf offered her. Where the *PH* jacket unaccountably bypasses the book's characters, *YBM*'s jacket bills each of its stories "as a separate new discovery about character and life" and introduces us enticingly to the protagonists of "Coming, Aphrodite!"—"a young painter, drawn by accident under the overwhelming obsession of a woman's beauty." At the risk of scantling the rest of the collection, the jacket draws us into the "savage and purely pagan theme" of its opening story, making us curious to experience "both the grace and the naked [a resonant word, given the story!] ruthlessness that one expects to find only in a fragment of Greek art."

By no means does more conventional hype disappear in these jackets. The *YBM* cover begins with the "excitement,

Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927)

Jacket quotes reviews of earlier Cather books but contains no blurb for *DCA* itself.

Shadows on the Rock (1931)

Seldom has any novel been as widely bought and as dearly loved as *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. I assure Miss Cather's readers that *Shadows on the Rock* is of the same superb vintage[.]

Alfred A. Knopf (front cover)

The setting of *Shadows on the Rock* is for Miss Cather a new one—Quebec, in the last year of Frontenac's life—and she recaptures the very tone and feeling of the seventeenth century in this old French city, built on a rock on the great St. Lawrence.

For me to praise this novel would smack of impertinence. It is enough to say that it is every bit as good as we have come to expect from one whose title to first and foremost of living, if not of all, American novelists few would challenge.

Alfred A. Knopf (rear cover)



Obscure Destinies (1932)

SHADOWS ON THE ROCK won for Willa Cather what is probably the largest and most enthusiastic audience of any American novelist today. And now, a year later, it is a pleasure to offer to those same readers a book written with all the charm and artistry which they have come to expect from one who unquestionably ranks with the greatest of living authors.

In the three stories which make up this volume Willa Cather returns with fresh enthusiasm to the Western scene of her earlier novels.

In *Neighbour Rosicky* admirers of *My Ántonia* will discover a story that is almost like a pendant to that remarkable book (which is much more popular today than when it was first published fifteen years ago). Anton Rosicky is a Bohemian exile, who, after many experiences in London and New York, lives out his life on a prairie farm.

Either of the *Two Friends* might have stepped out of the pages of *A Lost Lady*, and might have belonged to the circle of Marian Forrester's chivalrous admirers. They are American business men of the Old West, the age of railroad-building, large outlook, liberal methods, romantic feeling, "when business was still a personal adventure."

Old Mrs. Harris stands alone. Miss Cather has never written anything in the least like this before. Tragic human meanings underlie its apparently careless and light-hearted mood. The scene is a Colorado town in the brilliant sand-hill country; the story is the old riddle of human relationships, the struggle of three women who live under one roof each to live her own life and follow her own destiny.

Lucy Gayheart (1935)

Willa Cather's new novel needs no introduction: I will comment only as to place and time. It is Romantic . . . Western . . . Modern . . . a story of the passionate enthusiasms of youth, which triumph even when they seem to fail.

Alfred A. Knopf

Not Under Forty (1936)

Studies of Literary Personalities and Certain Aspects of Literature. This short book is the first collection of essays Miss Cather has published. Its revealing chapters concern some of the authors she admires and what she admires in them, so that the result is a considerable expression of her convictions about the art of writing generally.

Knopf's use of favorable reviews to advertise an author's work—and HM's apparent recalcitrance in this same regard—were among the considerations that led Cather to change publishers,¹⁵ and from *LL* on, all the Knopf jackets adopt this practice. The jackets from *DCA* through *NUF* devote much space to squibs from such reviews, and the rear covers of *OD* and *LG* are devoted entirely to extended passages from *SOR* reviews. Only the *SOR* jacket ("first and foremost of living, if not of all, American novelists") and the first paragraph of the *OD* blurb (" . . . unquestionably ranks with the greatest of living authors") hype Cather's preeminence in the manner familiar from earlier jackets.

Noteworthy also, again in contrast to earlier jackets, is the relative paucity of space these five jackets devote to the books themselves. *DCA*—remarkably—receives no blurb at all, *NUF* only a brief description squeezed in small print onto the bottom of the front cover. Placement, typography, and A.A. Knopf's signature lend weight to the blurbs describing *SOR* and *LG*, but these too are relatively brief. That said, these jackets still offer much to pique our interest—*NUF*'s statement that taken together its essays represent "a considerable expression of [Cather's] convictions about the art of writing generally"; the attention paid to setting in the *SOR* jacket, to the exclusion of plot and character (similar to what we find on the *PH* jacket, though articulated far more convincingly); the return on the *LG* jacket to the theme of youth and its triumphs—a topic central to many early jackets¹⁶ but that, with this one exception, virtually disappears from jackets beginning with *LL*.

As with *YBM*, it is again a collection of shorter fiction that receives the most extended treatment. Unlike the *YBM* jacket, however, which deals mainly with one story among the book's eight, the *OD* jacket gives brief but memorable descriptions of each of its three. That diffuse generalities in the first two paragraphs yield to cogent specificity in the final three, at that very point where the blurb turns to the stories themselves, leads one again to suspect Cather's hand, especially given the descriptions we find (and the close parallel with the *SSG* jacket, where we see Cather rewriting the portion that describes the novel). The association of "Neighbour Rosicky" with *MA*, of "Two Friends" with *LL*, can only have been made with the author's approval, and the parenthetical comment on *MA* reflects Cather's oft-repeated recollection that *MA* had begun poorly but gained in reputation over the years.¹⁷ That "Old Mrs. Harris" is an entirely new departure picks up another Cather hobby horse, that she never repeats herself,¹⁸ and what follows is full of telling *aperçus*—e.g., the contrast between the story's "tragic human meanings" and its "apparently careless and light-hearted mood," its focus on "the old riddle of human relationships." One notes too that the first and third descriptions end with humans living out their lives—the theme that, in contrast to *LG*'s "passionate enthusiasms of youth," has been so much on Cather's mind from *LL* on.

Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940)

For some time past it has been known that Miss Cather was at work on a new novel, but the setting remained, until very recently, her own well-kept secret. For *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* she has gone to Virginia—just west of Winchester, where she lived as a little girl before the family moved to Nebraska.

The chief theme of the novel is the subtle persecution of a beautiful mulatto girl by her jealous mistress. The unconventional opening chapter at the breakfast table strikes the keynote of the whole story, in which strong feelings and bitter wrongs are hidden under the warm atmosphere of good manners and domestic comfort. The period is 1856, just before the outbreak of the Civil War. The setting is the beautiful Virginia countryside, and the narrative is peopled with unusual characters: the mountain people, grim disapproving "Republicans," and *Sapphira*'s African slaves, who are, and doubtless were meant to be, the most interesting figures in the book. These colored folk are

Dusk Jacket Copy

(Continued)

presented in an unusual way. They are attractive to the writer as individuals, and are presented by a sympathetic artist who is neither reformer nor sentimentalist.

The theme is moving and dramatic; and it is treated with the sensitiveness and imagination of a master. Here again is the calm dignity of her beautiful style—matchless among those of writers of today—and a story that is moving and satisfying. It is indeed a proud privilege to round off my first quarter-century of publishing with so memorable a novel.

Like all the jackets from *LL* on, that for *SSG* promotes Cather's earlier work, listing twelve previous books on its inner rear flap. The rear cover mentions that *SSG* "is Miss Cather's first novel in five years. Her last previous novel was *Lucy Gayheart*"—a deft lead-in to the citation of two *LG* reviews. The blurb for *SSG*, located on the inner front flap, is considerably fuller than those for most recent books—thanks in good part to the revised and expanded description of the novel that we know Cather herself wrote.

Here is the description originally proposed to Cather in the blue carbon draft:

The period is the middle of the nineteenth century. Sapphira, a rather willful, haughty, and attractive child of the Tidewater aristocracy had "broken away from her rightful station" to marry Henry Colbert a sober, hard-working miller. Together they had moved to the uplands, to live among poor people who had no liking for Sapphira's fashionable Anglican creed and even less for her cavalier attitude toward slavery.

On the whole the Colberts, who rank with Miss Cather's finest character creations, lived well together—until the slave girl, Nancy, came between them. How the conflict that then arose is resolved and how the resolution influenced Sapphira and Henry, form the heart of the novel. It is a dramatic and moving theme;

This proposed copy, while true enough to the book, scarcely earns the conclusion toward which it moves—"It is a dramatic and moving theme." By contrast, Cather's new description probes what the book is about in ways that only she could know. She begins with its larger theme, comments in telling detail on the role of its opening chapter, and vividly evokes the novel's major and minor characters. The result is a description that not only captures the novel's unique character but that also suggests why it is indeed "dramatic and moving." Finally, it is fascinating and valuable to know that Cather herself wrote both the statement that the African slaves "are, and doubtless were meant to be, the most interesting figures in the book" and the description of herself—now late in her career—as "a sympathetic artist who is neither reformer nor sentimentalist."

While we lack similar documentary evidence for other blurbs, the typescript for this final jacket, in concert with the rest of what we have seen—including Cather's anonymous but clearly documented composition of other promotional copy—gives reason to believe that language on her books' jackets normally bears at least her stamp of approval and may often reflect her direct input. Accordingly, the copy here transcribed offers important glimpses

into how Cather wished to present herself and her work at different stages of her career. The italicized phrase is important: with this jacket material, as with the anonymous biographical statements, we must always remember that Cather's purpose is not only to provide insight into her books and herself but also to attract readers and buyers. One cannot help wondering, for instance, if it was for such promotional reasons that an author who would subsequently eschew the Wharton/James model permitted her *TG* stories to be called "fit companion to the stories of Mrs. Wharton,"¹⁹ or that an author who had expressly turned from writing novels in the traditional mode was willing at the time of their first publication to have *OP* billed as "[a] stirring romance" and *MA* as "a love story"?²⁰

Given that by 1920 Cather had composed the 1903 and 1915 promotional biographies, one turns with particular interest to the biographical blurb inside *YBM*'s jacket. Although it resembles those earlier pieces in its occasional bending of the truth (e.g., that she "wrote her first short story some fifteen years ago"—i.e., in 1905), this blurb also contains valuable new insights. Its comment that a McClure's trip to London "found an echo" in *AB* predates by eleven years what Cather writes about *AB* in her 1931 essay, "My First Novels [There Were Two]" (*WCOW* 91-92; Cather's 1922 introduction to *AB* does not mention the London tie). The comment that "it was in Italy . . . that she wrote her first story about the prairie country of the West" is even more striking, referring as it must to her 1908 Italian trip and "The Enchanted Bluff," which appeared in April 1909. Not only does the language suggest the importance Cather attached to this particular story, but that she wrote it in Italy is new information.²¹ Even the amazing allusion to "Alexandra's Bridge" seems to point to Cather. It is hard to see why either a drafter of jacket copy or a typesetter would make this error—but one can easily imagine Cather doing so on her typewriter. If so, does the fact that she made it, and failed to correct it, suggest an intriguing connection in her mind between the hero of *AB* and the heroine of *OP*—a Freudian slip as richly suggestive to us as it was subconscious on Cather's part?

Similarly intriguing is the same jacket's comment on the four stories from *TG* that are included in *YBM*: "In finish and execution Miss Cather has travelled a long way, but the same ardor and restless energy of imagination which give her work the stamp of genius, flame out amazingly in these earlier tales." The English "travelled" is a spelling Cather favored, and that Knopf editors elsewhere changed to "traveled" (Porter 2003, 57 n. 15). Its presence here suggests Cather's hand, and hence her approval for this account of her early writing. In turn, its language squares with that of other early jackets—e.g., Cather's ability "to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth" (*MA*), "the passion of her daring, impatient mind" (*OO*—cf. "the daring play of her imagination" elsewhere on the *YBM* jacket). Compare the quite different language we find on later jackets: "a melancholy beauty, a thrilling pathos," that "underlie the easy brilliance of the writing" (*LL*); "sympathetic but honest" (*PH*); "astounding and profound" (*MME*); "the sensitiveness and imagination of a master" . . . "the calm dignity of her beautiful style" (*SSG*). These last phrases provide useful evidence, for they come from a portion of the *SSG* typescript that Cather herself edited, rewriting the last sentence and deleting an otiose "dignity" four lines earlier. Cather closely scanned this description of herself

on the *SSG* jacket, and one suspects she did the same with such descriptions on other jackets as well.

Let me conclude with some brief comments on the larger implications of Cather's involvement in the promotional activities that have been the focus of these three C on C articles. The full exploration of this topic is the focus of a larger study on which I am working, but here I offer six interrelated propositions which, though over-simplified and un-nuanced, at least hint at some interesting possibilities:

1. From *MA* through *DCA*, jacket descriptions of Cather's books become progressively shorter, moving to the extreme compression of *MME*'s blurb—and the absence of any blurb on *DCA*²² Jacket copy hyping Cather's prior successes follows a similar course, yielding from *LL* on to the quotation of reviews by others.

2. In the same way, Cather's 1926 biographical statement is shorter than its 1915 predecessor and far less strident in its self-promotion; instead, the 1926 pamphlet hypes Cather and her career largely by including articles and reviews by others (Porter 2003, 54).

3. Cather's mixed feelings about her self-promotional activities are implicit in that she publishes her three biographical statements anonymously. And do we not hear in the central topic of her 1926 "interview"—a warning against the addictive attractions of "the lecture bug"—echoes of Cather's weariness with her own long courting of public favor?

4. *MME*, the book this "interview" was intended to promote, has at its center a woman tortured by material concerns. The books that precede *MME* begin with variations on the theme of youthful ambition/courage winning through to success (*OP My Autobiography SOL MA*), then turn in *YBM* to stories which without exception—albeit in different ways—explore the confrontation of youthful ambition and talent with the "many-colored Medusa of art."²³ *OO* is about a young man who rejects society's external values in favor of more idealistic goals; motivating both Marian Forrester in *LL* and Godfrey St. Peter in *PH* are values that transcend money; and the protagonists of *DCA* and *SOR* notably rise above material ambition.

5. The jackets of the books in question reflect this progression, explicitly emphasizing youth and ambition/success in their descriptions of *OP*, *My Autobiography*, *SOL*, and *MA*, evoking the conflicts youth faces in their descriptions of *YBM* and *OO*, and in blurbs for the later novels rarely mentioning either youth or ambition. At the same time, jacket language describing Cather's art moves from an emphasis on youthful fire and daring to one on pathos, melancholy, honesty, and depth.

6. At the fulcrum stands *MME*. One can read this "work of tragic passion," this "profound study of a human heart," as a refraction of Willa Cather herself, who in 1926 stood atop an ever more brilliant career which her own unflagging promotional efforts had helped construct—but who shows signs of being weary with this subservience to the Medusa of art: as she helps shape the jackets from *LL* on, and writes her 1926 statement, she inclines less and less to promote herself, more and more to let others speak on her behalf; her 1926 "interview" focuses on the insidious, addictive dangers of playing up to the public; and in the period leading up to *MME*, she apparently pays little heed to reviewing what her "jacket ghost" has proposed for *PH*, choosing instead, like Godfrey St. Peter, to stick to her study and let the sordid, ambitious scramble proceed without her.²⁴

When a new English edition of *SOL* appears in 1932, Cather's Preface comments on these very themes with reference to Thea Kronborg—the power and excitement of artistic ambition on the one hand, the human price exacted by such ambition on the other. And the jacket for a 1938 "New Edition" in the United States expands the first edition's "magnificent courage of young ambition" into the following: "[Thea] grows all at once into a powerful and willful young creature, gets her courage, and begins to find herself. Thea Kronborg is sublimely egotistic and every influence, natural and human, she turns into account to help her in her career. There is always the struggle between the human and the artistic in the woman herself. . . ."²⁵ It could be Cather describing herself—for the intriguing texts studied in these three C on C articles, most of them written by herself, and all dealing with herself, make it abundantly clear that she too was "a powerful and willful young creature," was "sublimely egotistic," was adept at turning "every influence into account to help her in her career"—and that she too had experienced "the struggle between the human and the artistic." No wonder she can give so profound a portrait of Thea Kronborg.

Notes

¹See, respectively, Stout #383, 394, 398, 401, 407-8, 402, 411-13, 420-21, 423-24.

²See, respectively, Stout #312, 324, 328 (cf. 330, 348), 329, 344-45.

³See Stout #528, to Ferris Greenslet: "Has not seen Knopf for a while but has watched his advertising and decided to sign with him for 'Claude.' Decision based solely on publicity." On the change, see Woodress 316-18; *LL* (CSE) 177-85.

⁴Most notably, this first page differs from other Cather typescripts in the font it uses and in its placing of spaces around the double-dash when it appears.

⁵The most substantial is to the final sentence. In place of the draft's language, "It is indeed a proud privilege to be able to add to my imprint so memorable a novel," Cather suggests, "It is indeed a proud privilege to round off my first quarter century with so memorable a novel"—a decided improvement, and one that shows Cather putting her words into A.A. Knopf's mouth!

⁶Typeface matches that in the Drew typescripts discussed in Porter 2003, as does the use of "z" to cross out words (Porter 2003, 57 note 18).

⁷The only changes are one correction of punctuation, one transposition of words.

⁸Knopf 211. Cather herself mentions Lewis' active participation in such activities in Stout #455 and 475.

⁹*LL* (CSE) 327. It is a pleasure here to thank the Clifton Waller Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia and the Caspersen Collection at Drew University for providing me access to several of the rare jackets on Cather's earlier books.

¹⁰Cather often uses this comma-dash combination (cf. Porter 2003, 57 n. 15), and its presence here may be a further hint of her involvement. That this same punctuation occurs at analogous points in the *SOL* and *MA* blurbs would seem further confirmation, though it is only fair to mention that it appears also in a portion of the *AB* blurb written by Greenslet.

¹¹Though published under McClure's name, *My Autobiography* was written by Cather. Georgine Milmine's *Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy* (1909), also written in large part by Cather, is omitted here since I have not seen a copy of the dust jacket noted in Crane 217.

¹²While the 1915 *SOL* jacket pays prominent tribute to Breton's painting, in 1931 Cather indicates that she'd like the picture removed for the new edition: Stout #1087; cf. Woodress 259. The *SOL* jacket's rear inner flap cites reviews of *OP*, using as lead-in an expansion of the tack taken on the *OP* jacket: "A New Woman! A New Country! A New Idea!"

¹³The front of the jacket also contains a plug from Booth Tarkington. Even here one suspects Cather's hand, for though Tarkington's words claim to be about "McClure's story," in fact they focus on the excellence of the writing (cf. the first paragraph of the blurb—"a quiet style well colored with humor and anecdote"): "Nothing I have ever read was more touching than the early passages; nor more perfectly and beautifully written. What is told is very wonderful, and the way it is told just plain noble. It can stand, right now as a model of 'literary workmanship'—only it doesn't seem to be 'workmanship,' it just seems to be truth. It's as simple as a country church—or a Greek statue."

¹⁴To judge by the evidence, Cather's review of jacket copy cannot have included proofreading jackets at the final stage. The original blurb for *PH* seems to have been short-lived: the jacket on a first-edition *PH* I own has already replaced this

19-line blurb with a perceptive 19-line statement about the book by Grant Overton.
¹⁵On Cather's frustration with HM concerning reviews, see Stout #461, to Greenslet.
¹⁶The same theme sounds also on a brief blurb that accompanied the mail-in order form promoting the first appearance of *AT* (cf. Crane 5 n. 2): "... the tone of the whole collection is like that of a beautiful April evening, when the old world is young again ..."
¹⁷See Woodress 301; Stout #650, 1529, 1633, 1671.
¹⁸See, e.g., Skaggs 2-3; Porter 2002, 59.
¹⁹Cf. Stout #369, 577, etc. Ferris Greenslet, who was largely responsible for the *AB* jacket copy, also subsequently rejects the Wharton/James model: Greenslet 118.
²⁰Cf. Cather's comments in Bohlke 77; also Woodress 290; Skaggs 3.
²¹Woodress discusses both the Italy trip and "The Enchanted Bluff" (198-99, 205), but neither he nor others I have seen trace the origin of this story to Cather's time in Italy.
²²During this same period, jacket covers with illustrations (*LL*, *PH*, *DCA*) and bold design (*MME*) replace covers with extensive promotional copy (*YBM*, *OO*). This increased emphasis on graphic elements does not, however, fully explain the gradual diminution of copy over this period: *OD* and *SSG* have brilliant designs that fill their covers—but also have substantial blurbs for the books on their inner flaps.
²³In this respect, note esp. the first four stories in *YBM*, all written in the years following *SOL*, and all focusing on opera singers who—like Thea in *SOL*—must confront the conflicting demands of artistic integrity on the one hand, career-building on the other.
²⁴It was a paper by Merrill Skaggs at the 2003 Bread Loaf Cather Seminar, "ICONOClastic CATHER" (soon to be published as an article), that started me thinking in these terms about the 1926 "interview" and its relation to *PH* and *MME*. Although Skaggs does not interpret Cather's comments on "the lecture-bug" in the way I suggest here, she brilliantly probes the rich suggestiveness of this short and fascinating document.
²⁵The edition in question is Crane A8.b.ii (page 51). I am indebted to Andrew Scrimgeour, librarian at Drew University, for information on this *SOL* jacket.

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President's Message



This year the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation turns fifty, and we should celebrate. In my experience with similar celebrations, the wedding anniversary of a long-married couple for example, friends spend time talking about how long they've known the couple, recalling how they met them, and remembering some of the experiences they've shared. Let me start.

I've known the Cather Foundation for thirty of its fifty years, going back to 1975 when, as a student in Bernice Slote's Plains literature class, I made the trek from Lincoln to Red Cloud for Spring Conference. That year the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie was dedicated and my memories of that trip are (1) it was a very windy day to be standing on the prairie, (2) the kolaches were delicious, and (3) the people that I met were unusually welcoming. Three years later, fresh out of graduate school, it was my great good fortune to be hired as curator of the Cather museum. One of my enduring memories of that time is sitting in a corner of the Cather Foundation office sipping wine with Maya Angelou (who was smoking a cheroot) and Mildred Bennett, listening to them talk about Willa Cather.

Now it's your turn. How do you know the Cather Foundation? What do you remember?

It's customary, too, at such celebrations to toast the honoree. So I raise my glass to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, to the founders who met around Mildred Bennett's kitchen table, and to all the people whose contributions of time, energy, creativity and financial support made the first fifty years so successful. Congratulations! I'm proud to be a part of you! And I'm confident that the best years are yet to come!

Ann Billesbach
President, Cather Foundation Board of Governors

P.S. Did I forget to mention anniversary gifts? Of course, most invitations to anniversary celebrations say, "Your presence will be your gift to us" or "Please, no gifts." But we have an endowment to build, and buildings to care for, and events to sponsor, and many more people to introduce to Willa Cather and to the WCPM. So a little cash in recognition of our first fifty years would be most welcome. And you don't even need to gift wrap it.

A Graveside Service to Celebrate and Remember the Life of Susan J. Rosowski

Germantown Cemetery near Garland, Nebraska

Friday, December 10, 2004

Steve Shively, Officiant—Josh Dolezal, Musician

Steve Shively: Welcome to this service that begins a day of tribute and remembrance of Susan Rosowski. It is good to look out and see Sue's family, her students, her friends and colleagues. I am Steve Shively, one of Sue's former students and her friend; Sue's husband Jim has asked me to lead this service of remembering. The offerings of music are from Josh Dolezal, a PhD candidate in the UNL Department of English who has worked with Sue since 1997.

We gather in this peaceful place this morning
To share both our joy and our sorrow,
To support each other, and
To find some measure of comfort and peace.

Sue's gravestone contains some of the memorable words from Willa Cather's story "Neighbour Rosicky": "It was a nice graveyard . . . sort of snug and homelike, not cramped or mournful,—a big sweep all round it. A man could lie down in the long grass and see the complete arch of the sky over him. . . . And it was so near home." Later, at the end of the story, Cather speaks through the thoughts of Rosicky's doctor: "It struck Doctor Ed that this was really a beautiful graveyard. . . . This was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind forever stirred. Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met that sky. . . . Nothing could be more undeathlike than this place. . . . Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful." Indeed, we should say the same about Sue—a life that was complete and beautiful.

I believe Sue would tell us to listen to other voices as well. I turn to a more contemporary voice, the poet Ted Kooser, Sue's friend and colleague, and her neighbor, who lives just over yonder. His poem provides a remarkable echo of the Cather passage.

"There Is Always a Little Wind," by Ted Kooser.

There is always a little wind
in a country cemetery,
even on days when the air stands
still as a barn in the fields.

You can see the old cedars,
stringy and tough as maiden aunts,
taking the little gusts of wind
in their aprons like sheaves of wheat,

and hear above you the warm
and regular sweep of wheat being cut
and gathered, the wagons creaking,
the young men breathing at their work.

Ted begins his poem with a windy cemetery, but he ends it with breathing human beings. Sue's explication of "Neighbour Rosicky" in her book *The Voyage Perilous* makes a similar move from the lovely graveyard to human love. She writes of Dr. Ed, "who appreciates the welcome of a warm home" and "pauses to

remember breakfast at the Rosicky's." (We understand because we just experienced a warm welcome and breakfast at the Rosowski's.) Sue writes of characters in this story who "awaken to life" and "awaken to beauty." That is what she would wish for us, even today, because, she writes, "'Neighbour Rosicky' is about power—the power of a man who, like Christ, changes the world by inspiring others to love." Sue tells us that "the story's climactic scene is about" the "sacred power of love." Rosicky's daughter-in-law Polly "takes his hand and opens herself to the grace of love." It is in this place, in this community of Sue's family and friends, that we too can know "the grace of love."

Sue and Jim received a letter this fall that expresses such love. Sue's student Michael Schueth will read it now.

Michael Schueth:

"Anonymous, from Red Cloud.
Autumn 2004

Sue,

There is a time to live and a time to die. We know we can't control the time to die. But from your time of living, we have gained some insights into how to live.

You have given us guidance toward quality in living.

We ask your forgiveness in succumbing to the error of not expressing to you our deep feelings during your time to live. Tardily, we say them now.

You served as a powerful influence on all of our lives. We appreciated your vibrancy. You expanded an energy in showing your caring about others and reflected your generosity of spirit toward those for whom you cared deeply.

You touched the lives of a great many, touched them with your concern. There existed more influence than you would commonly have known.

You had the talent and generosity of spirit to help so many of us when we needed you. Often you would serve as a sounding board when we required a sympathetic ear. We give you our gratitude for your many kindnesses, delivered always with no thought of repayment. Your willingness to serve as a dependable person in a crisis, minor or major, is an attribute we well admired—and took advantage of.

Your devotion to the study of Willa Cather, her times and her writing, goes without saying. You led the pack in creating the followers and the scholars. Your value in this area will remain without parallel. As a teacher, you stood on the top of the mountain.

Saint Paul maintained that the greatest good that could ever come to a human is the ability to love and to be loved. Without that quality we are nothing. You exemplified that good.

This is a brief summary of our feelings and thoughts. Although you have preceded us in the time to die, you have helped illustrate to us how to make the most of our time to live.

Thank you,
Rest in peace,
God love you,
Your friends."

(Continued on Page 65.)

St. Peter, Blue Mesa, “Ruins,” and “Archaic Forms”

In Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*

Carey Chaney

Space I have already proved to be infinite; and space being infinite, matter, as I have said, must also be infinite, lest after the winged fashion of flames the walls of the world should suddenly break up and fly abroad along the mighty void . . . and the earth in an instant withdraw from beneath our feet and amid the commingled ruins of things in it and of heaven (ruins unloosing the first bodies) should wholly pass away along the unfathomable void, so that in a moment of time not a wrack should be left behind, nothing save untenanted space and viewless first-beginnings.

From *De Rerum Natura* by Titus Lucretius Carus¹ (Munro 3:26)¹

In Willa Cather’s novel *The Professor’s House*, Godfrey St. Peter recalls a long-ago summer spent with Tom Outland in Hamilton. It is a time when Tom confides his secret to the professor and a time when the two men become closer; they go swimming in the afternoon, share fine meals cooked by the professor, and “if the evening happened to be rainy or chilly,” they would sit “inside and read Lucretius”(173). The reference to Lucretius is one of many literary allusions in *The Professor’s House*, but Cather uses it to punctuate a time of relative intimacy between the professor and Tom Outland.² The question is whether this allusion has a more extensive relevance to the novel’s thematic concerns? I will employ the ideas of Lucretius (as discussed by Niall Rudd in *The Classical Tradition In Operation*) and Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “Lucretius”³ in order to trace a thematic vein in *The Professor’s House*: My intention is to explore a network of ideas beneath the surface of Cather’s novel.

The central impression at the beginning of the novel is of the professor alone in his old house, reminiscing and choosing to cling to his study as a refuge from the distractions of the prosaic. He is also avoiding marital and parental duties and coming to terms with the intimations of his own mortality. When St. Peter wrote his *Spanish Adventurers In North America* in this study, it became a place of contemplation, intense research, and generativity. However, at some point it seems the professor chose a life of the mind apart from his wife—thereby excluding himself from his own marriage. This situation resembles stories surrounding the life of Lucretius, as portrayed by Tennyson:

Lucilia, wedded to Lucretius, found
Her master cold, for when the morning flush
Of passion and the first embrace had died
Between them, tho he loved her none the less,
Yet often when the woman heard his foot
Return from pacings in the field, and ran
To greet him with a kiss, the master took
Small notice, or austere, for—his mind
Half buried in some weightier argument,
Or fancy-borne upon the rise
And long roll of the Hexameter—he past
To turn and ponder those three hundred scrolls
Left by the teacher, whom he held divine. (198)

The Tennyson poem may have been a direct inspiration. Its scenes, philosophical concerns, and phraseology may have suggested a “form” for Cather’s own narrative and thematic structures.⁴ A specific example of this connection will be discussed later.

As the novel opens, the professor’s study is described as a place of life and work already accomplished, a place of memory,

and of decomposition. Because all the furnishings in the lower stories of the house have been removed, a part of the professor’s life has literally been “withdrawn from beneath” his “feet.” He continues to sit at his desk amid the old notes that informed and structured his histories, amid Augusta’s old dress patterns. In short, the professor’s study is a place of “commingled ruins.”

St. Peter’s attic has a thematic relation to Outland’s Cliff City on Blue Mesa: they are both places of “commingled ruins”; both represent a kind of present suspended in the past; and both contain “archaic ‘forms’” (33). Initially, the most obvious “forms” presented to the reader are Augusta’s dress-making forms. “The bust” has the appearance and semblance of sensuality, of “deep breathing softness,” but provides a very “unsympathetic” tactile impression: “It was a dead, opaque, lumpy solidity, like chunks of putty, or tightly packed sawdust—very disappointing to the tactile sense . . .” (19). For something that gives the appearance of sensuality or sexuality, this object seems to represent a complete lack of these qualities. It’s emblematic of the lack of sensuality and sexuality in St. Peter’s relationship to his wife, yet “the bust” is also imbued with family memories. His daughter’s dresses were stitched on these “archaic” forms; the life of the family had been interwoven in the presence of these objects.

Tennyson’s poem evokes the dreams of Lucretius, and it provides another perspective on Godfrey’s “ladies”: “Then, then, from utter gloom stood out the breasts, the breasts of Helen, and hoveringly, a sword now over and now under, now direct, pointed itself to pierce, but sank down shamed at all that beauty; . . .” (200). The action of the sword resembles the action of a needle, but St. Peter, unlike Lucretius (who is dreaming the role of Menelaus [Rudd 108]), has relinquished the sword and picked up a pen. The professor’s successes (his career as a scholarly author respected by academics) and failures (the lack of intimacy in his marriage as a result of his research) are commingled: The needle that stitched party dresses in some way became a sword.

One way to explore ideas beneath the surface of Cather’s novel would be through a discussion of Epicurean philosophy. Niall Rudd describes Lucretius as a disciple of Epicurus, and this connection might assist in tracing the characterization of Godfrey St. Peter. In summarizing an aspect of Epicurean thought, Rudd states, “As for life, sensible people would do their best to avoid all kinds of stress, including those caused by greed, ambition, and sensual indulgence. Erotic obsession should be avoided; but if this proved impossible, desire should be appeased with the least possible emotional disturbance” (92). The foregoing seems a very accurate

description of St. Peter's behavior, and the following only partially departs from what we know of the professor: "It was best to live quietly with one's family and friends, enjoying the gentle pleasures, not least those of philosophical study and conversation"(92). Obviously, St. Peter is not portrayed as a conscious adherent to Epicureanism, but Cather may have used this belief as a philosophical framework upon which to base her character and as part of an explanation for his marital difficulties.⁵

To examine another aspect of the ideas of Lucretius as a follower of Epicurus, we must return to Augusta's dress-making forms. Cather took great pains to describe the sensations produced by touching "the bust." It almost seems as if Cather wanted the reader to consider the elemental substance of this object, the form beneath the form. This brings us to the philosophy of "atomism," a philosophy that Epicurus appropriated from Democritus (Rudd 91). Again, Rudd supplies a brief summary:

... atoms, i.e., invisible entities, were the constituent material of all things. They varied in shape, size, weight, and motion, but were in each category infinitely numerous. Invisible themselves, they entered into countless combinations to form the objects of sense, thus producing secondary effects like hardness, color, and smell. They continued in ceaseless motion, even inside solid objects, thanks to the existence of void, i.e. totally empty space. All bodies underwent continuous change, partly because of this inner movement, partly because they were constantly bombarded from without, and partly because they threw off filmy images of themselves — images that rendered them visible by coming into contact with the spectator's eye. While the universe was infinite and eternal, our own world was neither. It had come into being in a random way, and it would eventually dissolve, liberating its atoms to form new combinations (91-92).

Atomism, as just described, infers the impermanence and corruptibility of all matter. Tom Outland's discovery at "Blue Mesa" (the desiccated body of "Mother Eve" and others) (213) is a dramatic example of this corruptibility. Yet, Cather uses phrases like "archaic forms" and "airy" (or) "shadowy crypt" (110) to describe St. Peter's study, and one has difficulty avoiding the inference that the study is meant to be a corollary to the ruins at Blue Mesa. In this sense, St. Peter, like Outland on the Mesa, can be perceived as suspended in time and space, witnessing and eventually becoming part of the disintegration of matter, and the liberation and re-combination of atoms.

Lucretius denied the existence of the soul after death, believing that it dissolved with the corruptive body. But, in *The*

Professor's House, Willa Cather seems to challenge the poet's hypothesis. Her characters constantly gaze at the "filmy images" of the deceased Tom Outland; his memory, his work, his *soul* are seen to have a living presence. Yet, in another sense, Outland has evaporated into a gas, dissolved into the realm of pure science — to "wholly pass away along the unfathomable void."

Notes

¹Translated as "On The Nature of Things." (The passage quoted is from Book One, Verses 1102-1115) H.A.J. Munro's three-volume translation of works by the Roman poet Lucretius was first published in 1864. Cather would certainly have had access to a later edition of Munro's translation. A translation of *De Rerum Natura* by Cyril Bailey, now considered the standard reference work, was published at Oxford by Clarendon Press in 1947.

²Obviously, Cather does not specify what passages in Lucretius the two characters find enjoyable. Since *De Rerum Natura* concerns itself with the meaning and substance of all things, the Lucretius poem could be seen as providing the two characters with a fascinating perspective on Outland's discovery at "Blue Mesa." In a completely different vein, Book Four of *De Rerum Natura* contains what A.N. Jeffares called (in reference to the Dryden translation) "The finest description of sexual intercourse ever written . . ." (See Jeffares. W.B. Yeats- Man and Mask). Rudd describes the same passage as being "dispassionate and rather clinical . . ." (103). By extrapolation, we might surmise that Cather wanted her characters to be perceived as reading a *risque* (though high-toned) book in the original Latin (?) and perhaps enjoying a bit of titillating, "locker-room" style repartee. It's doubtful this is all Cather had in mind. (See note # 4). I suspect the allusion was meant to be multi-dimensional. In any case, Cather's reasons for making a seemingly casual, passing reference to Lucretius are certainly open to further speculation.

³Tennyson and the "distinguished Latinist" Munro, were contemporaries, at Cambridge (Rudd 102).

⁴Tennyson's poem makes extensive use of a story about Lucretius, now considered apocryphal, perhaps originally recorded in St. Jerome's *Chronicle*. As the story goes, Lucretius was gradually driven insane by a love potion administered by his wife. *De Rerum Natura* was supposedly written during periods of lucidity (Rudd 103). In formulating her story of Godfrey St. Peter, and assuming a familiarity with the Tennyson poem, it seems unlikely that the above story was lost on Cather.

⁵In describing the novel to Robert Frost, Cather wrote, "This is really a story of 'letting go with the heart' but most reviewers seem to consider it an attempt to popularize a system of philosophy" (Sergeant 215). Cather may have wanted to show the professor in the process of "liberating" himself from an "archaic form" such as Epicureanism in order to become a "primitive" or to otherwise arrive at a way of life that would enable him to "face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future" (283).

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Special thanks to David H. Porter of Skidmore College, who offered generous assistance in accounting for reference materials used, notably a hard-to-find Munro translation of Lucretius, and for recommending the Bailey translation. Thanks also to Niall Rudd, whose chapter "Tennyson and Lucretius—Two Attitudes to Atomism" can be considered invaluable in understanding Lucretius as one of the many keys to *The Professor's House*. The initial idea for this essay was prompted by a remark in a lecture by Suzannah Cohen at the University of Utah. Ms. Cohen: someone was listening.

Ron Hull Inducted Into Broadcasters Hall of Fame



Ron Hull.

After an impressive 49 years of service to broadcasting, Ron Hull was inducted into the Nebraska Broadcaster's Hall of Fame at the 33rd Annual Hall of Fame Awards on August 11, 2004, in Lincoln, Nebraska. Ron is a long-time member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors and is presently Special Advisor to the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (NET) and

Professor Emeritus of Broadcasting at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Ron was formerly manager of KUON-TV and Associate General Manager of the Nebraska ETV Network.

On the national level, Ron served as Director of the Program Fund for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and as a Special Advisor to Programming at the Public Broadcastings Service, serving two terms on the Board of Directors. He was a Program Advisor for the development of television in Saigon.

Presently Ron serves as chair of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commission, Past President of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, and is a former board member of the John G. Neihardt Foundation.

Willa Locates Willa's Inscription



Willa Felzien holds book inscribed by Willa Cather. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Foundation Director Betty Kort was surprised late this past summer to receive a call from Felicia Cogley summoning her to the Hastings Public Library. Once there, she was ushered to the basement where boxes upon boxes of donated old books were heaped in a pile. There in the middle of it all sat Willa.

Willa Felzien is a volunteer at the Hastings Public Library in Hastings, Nebraska, who sorts through donated books which are gathered together each summer for a huge book sale. On this particular day

she had found a prize! Willa was holding a small green book, measuring less than four inches by six inches and titled *Essays on Nature & Culture* by Hamilton Wright Mabie. Inside was an inscription: "To Mrs. Case from Willa Christmas 1904." The handwriting was that of Willa Cather. The name "Willa" had caught Willa Felzien's eye for obvious reasons.

"I very seldom see my name, but then I thought, this wouldn't be in a book that was a hundred years old!" remarked Willa Felzien. She realized the book was from a box marked "Red Cloud." "I knew I had something."

Evangeline J. Case was the prototype for Miss Knightly in Cather's "The Best Years." According to Red Cloud native Suzi Schulz, she was also Willa Cather's favorite teacher in Red Cloud. Obviously Willa Felzien has found a gift Willa Cather had given her former teacher.

Both Willa and Felicia agreed that Mrs. Case's book should belong to the Cather Foundation, and it was promptly handed over. Another small green book called *Little Classics*, edited by Rossiter Johnson, with Evangeline J. Case's name inscribed in the front, was also donated. The two books seemed to be paired together.

Nebraska Preservation Award

Presented by

Lawrence J. Sommer

Director and State Historic Preservation Officer

On October 9, 2004, the Cather Foundation was the recipient of the coveted Nebraska Preservation Award. Lawrence J. Sommer, Director and State Historic Preservation Officer, presented the award to Cather Foundation Executive Director Betty Kort at the 2004 Historic Conference and 126th annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society. Lawrence Sommer's remarks, delivered at the State Historic Society's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha, are reprinted below.

The Nebraska Preservation Award was created in 1988 to recognize significant achievements in historic preservation. The award is given for one of two categories: "brick and mortar projects," or "individual or group achievements." The selection is made by the State Historic Preservation Officer, from recommendations of the Nebraska Historic Preservation Office professional staff.

This year's recipient is the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Foundation for the preservation and restoration of the Red Cloud Opera House. The project represents not only the preservation of an important historic building, but its future use as a dynamic facility for multiple offerings.

The Red Cloud Opera House serves as a vital connection to Willa Cather, her childhood in Red Cloud, and her writing, which will illuminate the history of Nebraska and its people for generations to come. The facility will contribute substantially to the experience of those who visit Red Cloud.

The award also recognizes the long-standing and productive relationship between the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.



Executive Director Betty Kort (center) receives Nebraska Preservation Award on behalf of the Cather Foundation. Photo courtesy of NSHS.

Correction

In the Winter/Spring issue of 2004, I incorrectly cited Cather's hostess, living near the NEVIN family, from SEWICKEY, PENNSYLVANIA, as Dorothy Strang. While that was the name used by her nephew who reported the hospitality, he momentarily confused it with his mother's maiden name. The correct name is DOROTHY SLACK. Apologies.

—Merrill Skaggs

"The Road is All" Premieres in Red Cloud Opera House



Producers Joel Geyer and Christine Lesaik with Cather Foundation Director Betty Kort who is holding a plaque given by NETV in recognition of the partnership formed between the Cather Foundation and NETV in order to produce "The Road is All." Associate Producer, Michele Wolford, stands to the right. Photograph courtesy of the NETV staff.

Just as Willa Cather could paint a breathtaking landscape with words and transform the ordinary into art, so too did Joel Geyer and Christine Lesaik use a palette of breathtaking vistas, intimate settings, intense interviews, and scores of vintage photographs to artfully recreate the life of Willa Cather in the newly released PBS biography of Willa Cather. The program was made even more stunning through the use of high definition technology.

The first screening of the PBS biography of Willa Cather occurred at the Red Cloud Opera House on October 17. Producers Joel Geyer and Christine Lesiak introduced the film to a large and appreciative audience. "The task was daunting; the result, simply splendid!" remarked Cather Foundation board member Bruce Baker. "Joel Geyer and Christine Lesiak have successfully integrated biography, text, and commentary into what the poet Keats would call 'a thing of beauty'. What a joy to see this beautiful film in the beautifully restored Opera House."

Lesiak and Geyer spent four seasons filming scenes connected to Cather's life and her novels. The film featured settings from Red Cloud, Lincoln, Spring Creek prairie in Denton; the Stuhr Museum of the

Prairie Pioneer in Grand Island; Santa Fe; Taos; New York; and beyond. Among the people interviewed in the film were historian David McCullough; Cather scholars Susan Rosowski, Richard Giannone, Guy Reynolds, and Joe Urgo; biographer Cynthia Griffin-Wolff; poet Tony Mares; writer Vivian Gornick; Antonette Turner, the granddaughter of Annie Pavelka, prototype for *Antonia* in *My Antonia*; cultural critic Margo Jefferson and *New Yorker Magazine* staff writer Joan Acocella.

According to Geyer, "It's very fitting that we're doing this in this space and in this time." Geyer went on to talk about Willa Cather's own experiences in the Red Cloud Opera House. The 90-minute film was also shown at Scottsbluff and premiered at the Rococo Theatre in Lincoln, Nebraska, as part of the 50th Anniversary Celebration of Nebraska Public Television.

"The Road is All" concentrated on Cather's novels as a vehicle through which to tell the story of Cather's life. Cather herself said that if people wanted to know her, they could learn about her through her novels. The emphasis upon Cather's triumphs and her failures as she struggled to become a great artist added a profound impact to the film.

The biography was a project of NETV Network and WNET in New York. The project began with seed money from the Cather Foundation and then received major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The preview of the film in Red Cloud was sponsored by Nebraskans for Public Television, Alltel, Union Pacific Railroad, and the Cather Foundation. The biography will be aired in the fall of 2005 on PBS as part of the American Masters Series.



Large and appreciative audience prepares to view "The Road is All" at the Red Cloud Opera House Auditorium. Photograph by Betty Kort.

Graveside Service for Susan Rosowski (Continued from Page 61.)

Guitar music by Josh Dolezal.

Steve Shively: I ask now that you take a moment to remember Jim, Scott, David, and all who mourn, that we might not be overwhelmed by our loss, but that goodness and compassion may bring us consolation, so that we will have strength to meet the days to come.

And I ask that you remember Sue, that we give thanks for her presence among us, that we remember the love and friendship she gave us, and that through remembering her we might find the inspiration and strength during our time on earth to live in such a way that we might continue Sue's work and make the world a better place.

In Death Comes for the Archbishop Cather's Bishop Latour said, "Miracles . . . seem to me to rest not so much on faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made fine, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always."

And so let us end by remembering the miracles about us always: the beauty of this place, the land and sky; ourselves and our stories; and, always, Sue.

Vocal and Guitar Music by Josh Dolezal

Steve Shively: It is for us now to go forth into the morning,
To go in peace,
To create and sustain community,
To celebrate the gifts of place and people,
To remember and honor the life of Sue Rosowski.

Amen.

2005 Willa Cather Spring Festival to Celebrate 50th Anniversary of Foundation

"Some memories are realities,
and better than anything that
can ever happen to one again."

—*My Antonia*

The 2005 Spring Festival will be the central focus of the Cather Foundation's 50th Anniversary celebration. This conference will provide the theme for the entire year's programming at the Red Cloud Opera House and is the impetus for a state-wide project to read *My Antonia*. The Festival will be a celebration of the achievements, the goals, and the dreams of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

The theme of the Festival will be "50 Years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration: Memory and Storytelling in Willa Cather's *My Antonia*." The conference will take to heart Cather's message in *My Antonia* that constructing history through memories and storytelling is central to building the future, as we focus on the memories of the founding and building of the Cather Foundation over the past fifty years. During the "Retrospective" on Friday afternoon, activities will include a video of the life of founder Mildred Bennett and personal accounts of the history of the Foundation.

New to the Festival will be a Friday morning awards ceremony featuring the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship winner and presentation of Willa Sibert Cather Writing Prizes to the four winners of a state-wide writing contest to be held in connection with the One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Antonia* initiative. (See page 68 for details of the writing competition.) Students who receive these awards will be asked to read their winning papers.

During the Festival, Mary Vaughan will exhibit prairie paintings inspired by Willa Cather and the landscape around Red Cloud. Mary will give a "gallery talk" during the Festival and be available to sign prints and posters.

The Saturday events will continue to focus on the theme through the established traditions of the Festival. Events will include kolaches and coffee, the St. Juliana Choir, the Grace Church Service, the Passing Show, the bus tours, group discussions, the banquet, and special evening entertainment.

Central to all activities on Saturday will be the Passing Show, which will feature a paper by Cather scholar Ann Romines, George Washington University, focusing on memory and why people read *My Antonia*. The panel will respond to Ann's presentation and audience participation will be welcomed as usual.

After the evening banquet, "Storytelling" continues with the 90-minute performance of "An Adaptation of the Singer's Romance," a musical adaptation of Cather's short story. In anticipation of the 50th Anniversary of the Cather Foundation, the Cather Foundation commissioned James Ford to write, direct, and stage this production. This is a perfect example of something new and grand constructed from an old story.

O Pioneers! Translated into Chinese

Bruce Baker reports that Zhu Jiong-Qiang, a longtime professor at Hangzhou University in Zhejiang, China, has translated *O Pioneers!*, "Neighbour Rosicky," and "The Old Beauty" into Chinese. His book is now available and a copy has been sent to the Cather Center in Red Cloud.



OUR WCPM FOUNDER: MILDRED BENNETT
Merrill Skaggs

As the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Foundation celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, during Spring Conference of 2005, it remembers with admiration and awe the efforts of Mildred Bennett, its founder. In 1955 Mildred gathered the first core group of Cather advocates—Harry and Helen Obitz, Josephine Frisbie, Jennie Reiher, Carrie Miner Sherwood, Frank O'Rourke, Dr. L. V. Jacks—and with them incorporated the organization dedicated to preserve information and artifacts associated with Willa Cather's fiction. Since that time, the WCPM has become an energizing force on Red Cloud, Nebraska's main street.

Mildred Rhoads Bennett was born in Elk Point, South Dakota, and moved with her family to Iowa and then to Kansas. She attended Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, and started to read Willa Cather's fiction when she began teaching in Inavale; her pupils included the children of Nebraskans who had once grown up knowing Willa Cather. After Mildred's young husband, just out of the military service in 1946, began to look for a place to start a medical practice, she chose Red Cloud as the recognizable location for many Cather fictions.

Thereafter Mildred interviewed anybody who had had close contact with Willa Cather, and she steadily compiled facts about the people, places, and landscapes that entered Cather's great fiction. The results of her researches were a landmark book of her own, called *The World of Willa Cather*, first published by Dodd, Mead in 1951. It continued to serve as the basis for much subsequent and seminal Cather scholarship. This indefatigable promoter of Willa Cather's fiction died in Red Cloud, in 1989.

Invitation

A number of individuals from the Cather Community have contributed memorials to the Cather Foundation in honor of Dr. Susan Rosowski. The Cather Foundation is pleased to receive memorials in Susan's name.



**WILLA CATHER
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The *Newsletter and Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 2500-3000 words; they should be submitted 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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CALL FOR PAPERS

The *New Steinbeck Society of America* and the
Editorial Board of *The Steinbeck Review*

present

Steinbeck and His Contemporaries

March 22-25, 2006

Sun Valley Resort

This first conference of The *New Steinbeck Society of America* (NSSA) invites Steinbeck critics, members of other author societies, and American and world literature scholars in general to offer a critical view on John Steinbeck in relation to any of his contemporaries—Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Cather, Anderson, Wright, Dos Passos, Miller, Stegner, Hurston, Bellow, Pound, Hughes, O'Connor, Lewis, London, and others. Comparative studies are also invited on select authors who have had a direct literary influence on Steinbeck—Mallory, Shakespeare, Twain—as well as on contemporary writers who share common thematic and stylistic elements—Ray Carver, Barry Lopez, Charles Johnson, Terry Tempest Williams, and others. The conference's aim is for a better appreciation of all authors as well as of Steinbeck's particular standing among his literary peers today, with a range of comparative perspectives—aesthetic, philosophical, biographical, etc.—invited.

Conference highlights include the following:

*Keynote address on Steinbeck and Richard Wright by **Charles Johnson**, 1990 National Book Award Winner for *Middle Passage*, with a book signing to follow the banquet.

*Addresses by John Ditsky, President of the NSSA, and Stephen Tanner, Ralph A. Britsch, Humanities Professor of English at Brigham Young University.

*Saturday tours of Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound landmarks and historical sites.

*Art galleries, entertainment, dining, and skiing at the nation's premier vacation resort.

Please send a letter of intent, one-page abstract (in triplicate), and vita by **September 1, 2005** to:

Dr. Stephen K. George
English Department
Brigham Young University-Idaho
Rexburg, ID 83460-0820
Fax: (208) 496-1944

Please direct inquiries to
GeorgeS@byui.edu.

Correction for "Incident in St-Malo"

After years of intimacy with texts, they can become one's own creations, which is a problem for many of us scholars. In my narrative on the she-ape of St-Malo (Fall '04, 28), I misremembered the locale and the host of the dinner at which Captain Pondaven tells his story. The dinner is set on the waterfront not on the ship, and Pierre Charron not the Captain is the host. Sorry, John J. Murphy.

Two Nebraska High School Writing Competitions to Highlight Spring Festival

Two high school writing competitions will be featured at the Spring Festival in 2005. Winners of both competitions will be featured on Friday morning of the Festival and will receive a variety of cash prizes, awards, and scholarships. Students will be asked to read their winning entries as part of the awards ceremony.

The Norma Ross Walter Scholarship will be awarded to a high school senior woman from Nebraska, who plans to major in English, and carries with it a \$1000 scholarship to the school of her choice. This contest has been sponsored by the Cather Foundation for many years. The application for this award requires an essay about Cather's writing. The essay is the most significant factor in determining the winning entry, which will be published in *Teaching Cather*. A standing committee of the Cather Foundation administers the contest and selects the winner.

With the advent of the One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Antonia* project, a second writing competition is being promoted. The "Willa Sibert Cather Writing Prize" will be offered to all eleventh and twelfth grade Nebraska high school students in the spring of 2005. This writing contest is sponsored by the Cather Foundation in cooperation with UNO and Hastings College. This competition requires a fiction or non-fiction piece to be submitted by February 15, 2005. Four first place awards will be given. All winners will receive the "Willa Sibert Cather Writing Prize" certificate, a \$150 cash prize, and a special gift from the Cather Foundation. In addition, the entries will be published in the *Nebraska English Journal* and/or the *Federated Woman's Club Writing Journal*. Winners must attend the awards ceremony at the Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska, on April 29th.

The One Book One State writings will be judged by personnel at the University of Nebraska Omaha and Hastings College. Dr. Sue Maher, Graduate Program Chair of English at UNO, says that her program is thrilled to participate in the judging of this writing contest. "*My Antonia* continues to resonate with modern readers," Dr. Maher adds, "and students will be encouraged to connect Cather's great novel to their own lives, to see the ties between the past and the present." Dee Yost, Hastings College Librarian and a board member of the Cather Foundation, is also pleased that Hastings College students and faculty are involved with the a contest involving young writers. Yost stated, "We expect to see fresh perspectives on Cather's *My Antonia*."

The Cather Foundation and the One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Antonia* Steering Committee hope that this writing contest will provide further inspiration to high school students to read good literature, including *My Antonia* and other works by Willa Cather. There is always the possibility that another budding professional writer of Willa Cather's caliber will find inspiration through this writing competition.

Contest rules and entry forms may be downloaded from www.willacather.org for both competitions. High School English teachers across the state are being alerted to the competition.

NEBRASKA CITIZENS TO READ MY *ÁNTONIA* IN SPRING OF 2005

2005 will be very special in Nebraska. Citizens across the entire state will be invited to read the classic novel *My Ántonia* by Nebraska's own Willa Cather through a new initiative launched by the Willa Cather Foundation, the Nebraska Library Commission, and the Nebraska Center for the Book.

The Cather Foundation and the newly formed One Book/One State Nebraska State Steering Committee, chaired by Sue Maher from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and new member of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors, are hoping that librarians across the state will pitch in to help make this a successful undertaking. Partial funding for the initiative has been provided by the Nebraska Humanities Council.

The goal is to have every community in the state develop activities connected to the reading of the novel by the end of the third week in April in time for a statewide program on *My Ántonia* to be held in Willa Cather's Red Cloud at the annual Willa Cather Spring Festival on April 29-30, 2005. Cather scholars from throughout the United States will be available to lead discussions and answer questions about *My Ántonia*.

A writing competition will be conducted for secondary students in schools across the state. (See page 68.) Winners will receive cash prizes and awards on April 29th in special ceremonies at the Red Cloud Opera House.

"Prairie Song" Central Image of One Book One State Initiative

"Prairie Song," an acrylic painting by Mary Linnea Vaughan, is the central image chosen for promotional materials for the One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Ántonia* project to be completed in the spring of 2005. (See poster image on back cover of this issue.) The painting was inspired by the countryside around Red Cloud, Nebraska, in the summer of 2004. This is the same countryside that provided the setting for *My Ántonia*.

"Prairie Song" was one of several paintings completed in an artist-in-residence project sponsored by the Willa Cather Foundation and the Nebraska Arts Council. Mary's prairie paintings will be exhibited in the Opera House Gallery during the upcoming Cather Spring Festival at the end of April.

Mary Linnea Vaughan, a native Nebraskan, now lives in Santa Rosa, California, where she works as a professional artist. Mary is a landscape painter and is interested in the earth and organic forms. She has an MFA from Maine College of Art and an MA from Rhode Island School of Design. She has painted extensively in Ireland, France, and various parts of the United States, and has had wide experience as an art teacher.

Mary is an ardent Cather fan and has attended all of the Willa Cather International Seminars. While working as an artist-in-residence at Red Cloud in the summer of 2004, Mary read Cather works continuously and used Cather's writings as inspiration for her paintings. Those attending the 2005 Spring Festival in Red Cloud, Nebraska, April 29-30, can look forward to the exhibition of Mary's paintings from her recent prairie experience here in Nebraska. The paintings will hang in the Gallery of the Cather Center during the month of May. For more information about the artist, visit www.maryvaughan.com.



Mary Vaughan paints in makeshift studio at the Depot. Photograph by Betty Kort.

"Prairie Song" Promotional Items Available



At left, WCPM employee Diane Karr models a "One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Ántonia*" T-shirt printed in full color, featuring the landscape painting by Mary Vaughan (shown right). The Cather Foundation website www.willacather.org is printed on the back. Color: white. Sizes: small, medium, large, and extra large. \$12 each.

"Prairie Song" note cards (with "Prairie Song" print image at right), measuring 4" x 6" folded, blank inside. Six cards per package, envelopes included, \$7.50 per package, plus postage and handling.

"One Book One State Nebraska Reads *My Ántonia*" poster (back cover of this issue) measures 12" x 18" in full color on heavy 80# gloss stock. \$8 each, plus postage and handling.

Call toll free 1-866-731-7304 to purchase any of the above items.



"Prairie Song" print. 11" x 14"

The "Prairie Song" Color Print (above), produced on heavy 80 lb. stock, measures 11" x 14" and can be framed in a standard cut, 16" x 20" mat. The prints sell for \$15.00 each, plus postage and handling. (Mat is not included.)

Cotley/Cather 2005 Writing Prizes To Be Awarded in April at the Opera House

The Cotley/Cather 2005 Writing Prize is a joint venture of the Cather Foundation and Cotley College. This is an invitation to high school women in six midwestern states to compete for participation in the Emerging Women Writers of the Heartland Symposium to be held at the Red Cloud Opera House on April 12, 2005. Junior and senior high school women from Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Kansas may compete. Topics from four categories, including poetry, drama, short fiction, and non-fiction, will be considered.

Finalists in the competition will meet at the Red Cloud Opera House to take part in a symposium led by writing specialists and leadership professionals and will complete additional writing samples at the symposium. These writing samples, along with the original writing entries, will determine the four winners. Each will receive cash prizes of \$200. In addition, three Cotley/Cather finalists will receive \$3000 scholarships to Cotley College.

Cotley College is co-sponsoring this competition as part of its Women's Leadership thrust. Willa Cather provides an ideal leadership model for women. The Cather Foundation is pleased to participate in this endeavor as part of its educational mission.

For rules and application forms, please visit www.cotley.edu/home/departments/leadership.html or www.willacather.org.



News from the Executive Director

In this issue, I am devoting my space, usually reserved for general Cather news, to my friend, colleague, and mentor, Dr. Susan J. Rosowski.

My husband and I shared an adventure with Jim and Sue a few years back. In telling this story, I know I am sharing experiences similar to those many others have known.

Sue was once my "official" mentor. She continued as a friend and "unofficial" mentor to the end. In 1989, I had applied for and received the first Reader's Digest Teacher Scholar Award given by the National Endowment for the Humanities to a Nebraska secondary teacher. This meant an invitation to Washington D.C. and the White House; and I would spend one full year studying independently on a subject of my choice, that being Plains literature with an emphasis on Willa Cather. Needing a mentor, I stumbled blindly onto Dr. Susan Rosowski's name and called her. With her usual grace, she agreed to lead me through my year of study. That was the beginning of a sixteen-year friendship.

Needless to say, I profited from Sue's direction, so much so, in fact, that a year later Sue and I were invited by NEH to return to Washington D.C. to give a presentation on what is involved in a "successful mentor/student relationship." We took our husbands along on what we called our "road trip." I remember particularly the way Sue came to enjoy my husband's sense of humor. She liked to laugh, and she loved the sound of genuine laughter. The NEH put us up at the Watergate for a week. Ron and I had an ordinary room—at least in terms of the Watergate, but Jim and Susan were assigned to a state suite. The Rosowski family could have put their entire house inside of their accommodations! We all laughed about that.

Susan and I presented to the second-year crop of Teacher Scholars and participated in a variety of other NEH programs and events during our week-long stay. But, of course, we had our evenings to ourselves, the most special being a night at the Tabard Inn where my husband and I were guests of Jim and Susan. We

were delighted that Ann Romines joined us as well. Both the conversation and the food were exceptional—one of those times we have remembered often over the years.

When I met Sue, my children were nearly grown, and I had recently returned to teaching. I was "behind schedule" and could not imagine much future for myself as a woman just starting a career. Susan changed all that for me. Like Cather, she envisioned women as having divergent career paths, but with endless, long-term possibilities. Sue was herself a role model for what one woman is capable of achieving; and, in the process, she changed so many lives. Everyone's regret is that her own long-term possibilities were cut so short.

True to her calling, Sue remained actively involved in work connected to Cather scholarship until the very end of her life, and she generously shared her time and talents with students and colleagues. This past summer she contributed enormously to plans for the June 2005 10th Willa Cather International Seminar.

I know that I speak for a host of people throughout the country in saying that Susan Rosowski was extraordinarily generous in giving of her personal resources, her time, and her talents. Her hallmarks included leadership, scholarship, friendship, good humor, kindness, and a special brand of wisdom—all important to a life well lived.

At her memorial service, someone said that no one ever ended a conversation with Sue without feeling better for it. I could not agree more. I hope my short

remembrance brings back memories for *NL&R* readers of a life that was "complete and beautiful."* Susan, we all find assurance in knowing you are at peace on that beautiful hilltop near Garland, Nebraska, with "a big sweep all around it."*

*(Quotes from her gravestone inscription from "Neighbour Rosicky.")



Susan Rosowski at the Vermont 9th Cather International Seminar, Spring of 2003. Photograph by Jim Rosowski.

Teaching Cather plans a special collection of essays in honor of Susan J. Rosowski. For more information contact the editors, Steve Shively and Virgil Albertini. (660) 562-1566 shively@mail.nwmissouri.com



2005 Red Cloud Opera House Calendar Highlights

50 Years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration

JANUARY: Governor's Proclamation—One Book/One State: *My Antonia* Programs and events scheduled throughout Nebraska culminating with Spring Festival in Red Cloud, April 29-30.

JANUARY: "Will Rogers"—One man performance starring Charles Davies.

FEBRUARY 12: Hastings Symphony Orchestra — A multi-media event. The grand scale of symphonic music will complement the past grandeur of hundreds of years of tradition and sense of place to be found in Igor Grossmann's photographic exhibit in the Gallery. **Pre-Performance Humanities Program:** Dr. Bryan Jensen will introduce the audience to the music to be played and its association with the photographs in the gallery. **Companion Gallery Exhibit: Images Gone with Time—Igor Grossmann** Photographic reflections of Slovak folk life, 1956-1965, sponsored by the Slovak-American International Cultural Foundation and Bolchazy Carducci Publishers, Inc.. (www.slovakculture.org)

MARCH 1-2-3 and 8-9-10: "On Golden Pond"—Community Theatre Production

MARCH 4-5: Ruth Davidson Hahn—Multi-media event. Unique collaboration with renowned visual artist Terry Rosenberg which will later travel to the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City. New solo dedicated to Willa Cather. (rdhdance.org)

MARCH 18: Wild Clover Band Instrumental group focusing on Irish fiddle tunes, some American fiddle tunes, and Irish folk music. **Humanities pre-performance presentation:** Dave Klein, Director, will discuss Irish music and Irish history in a pre-performance presentation with continued narration as the band performs. (www.wildcloverbands.com)

MARCH 15-APRIL 15: Photography Exhibit featuring photographer Dr. Bert C. Frichot III—Nature and Landscapes.

APRIL 22: Gil Garcia Quartet This quartet of talented musicians concentrates on jazz renditions of American classics.

This particular program will feature music from the Big Bands of the World War II era.

Pre-Performance Humanities Presentation: Gil Garcia, Director, will discuss jazz, the history of jazz music in the 20th century, and the social implications of the Big Band era.

APRIL 29-30 Spring Festival—Theme: 50 Years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration

Special Features: One Book One State Reading of *My Antonia* and "An Adaptation of 'A Singer's Romance'"(a play with opera)— **Humanities Post-Performance Talk:** James Ford

MAY: Painting Exhibit by Mary Vaughan Exhibited in the gallery

JUNE 18-25: 10th Willa Cather International Seminar in Red Cloud (and Lincoln)

Gallery Exhibit: "Moving the Fire: The Removal of Indian Nations to Oklahoma" (In conjunction with the 10th Cather International Seminar; see www.exhibitsusa.org for details) **Humanities presentation:** Jack Cardinal discusses exhibit.

JULY: Lincoln Contemporary Dance Project—dance program specially prepared for the Red Cloud Opera House

Pre-Performance Presentation: Elizabeth Govaerts Maude will discuss the history of dance in Nebraska and the special preparations made for this presentation.

AUGUST: Missoula Children's Theatre Two live performances of children's stories and fairytales, involving local children. **Post-Performance Presentation:** Charles Davies presents a historical perspective of early rural children's theater.

AUGUST: Road Show, Seasoned Broadway Performers, Cast and Play to be Announced.

SEPTEMBER 1-OCTOBER 13: Grant Reynard and World War II: Images from the Home Front—a multi-themed ARTreach traveling exhibition designed by the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA), featuring a series of twenty original magazine illustrations by artist Grant Reynard. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

NOVEMBER: Discovery Mime Theatre Having studied under Marcel Marceau, Mary Inman and Brian Begley provide an imaginative combination of mime, mask, music, and drama.

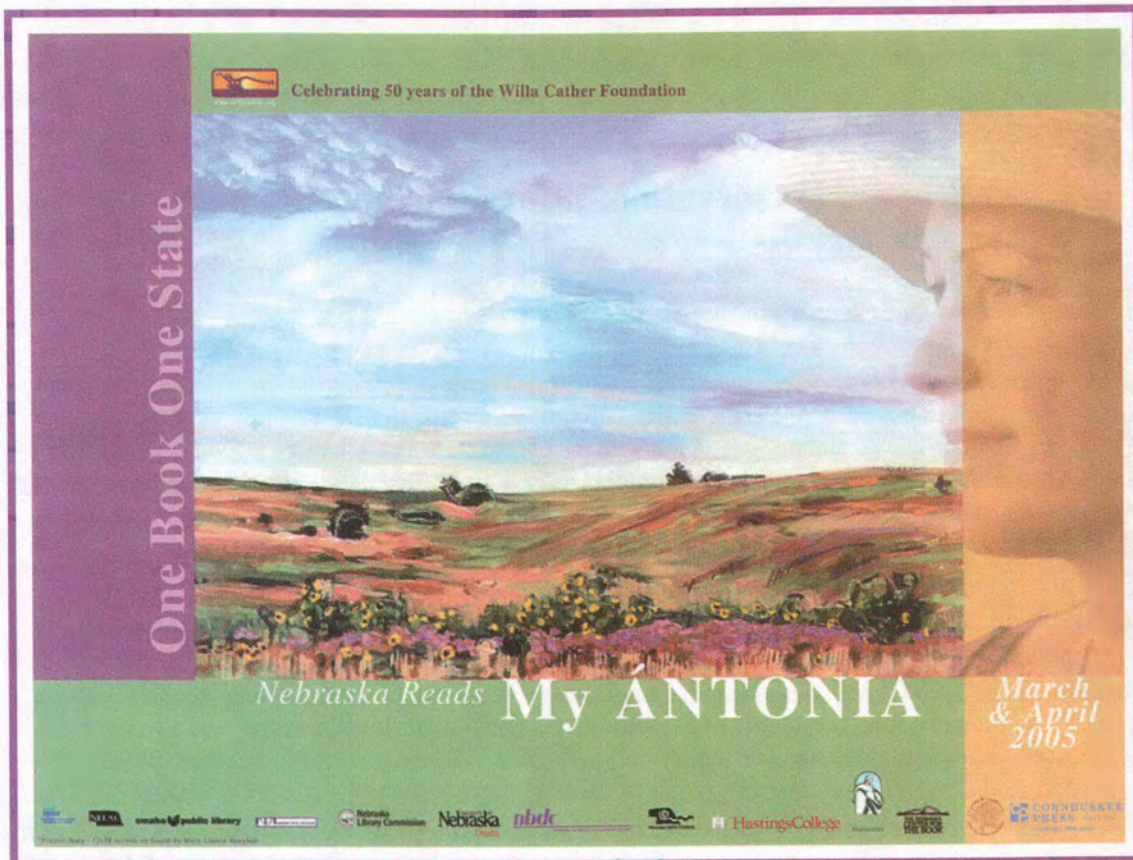
Humanities Presentation: Mary Inman and Brian Begley will discuss the history of Mime.

NOVEMBER: "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever"—Community Theatre Production

DECEMBER: Hastings Madrigals Holiday Opera House Benefit Performance, Chuck DeWall, Director
Cather's Birthday, "Bruce Baker and Cather" and Grace Episcopal Traditional Service
John Blake Berger's Cather Paintings Exhibited in the Gallery



Visit www.willacather.org for additional upcoming events.



Readers of My Ántonia nationwide are invited to attend the Willa Cather Spring Festival, April 29-30, 2005

On April 29-30, 2005, the Cather Foundation will celebrate 50 years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration. Please join others in helping the Foundation to celebrate 50 years of memories. The focus of the conference will be "Memory and Story Telling in Willa Cather's Fiction" with an emphasis on Cather's classic My Ántonia. All conference participants are invited to read My Ántonia and join in a discussion of the text. The Spring Festival will be marked by all of the traditional events that have highlighted this conference over the years, including tours, discussion groups, the Passing Show, entertainment, kolaches and coffee. Please join Cather scholars, Cather fans, and honored guests for these special events. (To purchase the 18" x 24" poster, call toll free 1-866-731-7304.)



**Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial
and Educational Foundation**
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