

WILLA CATHER

PIONEER MEMORIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
(THE WILLA CATHER SOCIETY)

NEWSLETTER AND REVIEW

VOLUME XLVI, No. 3
Winter/Spring 2003

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Mellanee Kvasnicka, John Swift, Steve Shively, Steve Ryan, Sue Rosowski, John Murphy and Emily Scheuer in the White House East Room.

Willa Cather Honored at White House Symposium

Red Cloud's Pulitzer Prize-winning author Willa Cather was honored at a breakfast reception and symposium in the White House September 17. The program, hosted by First Lady Laura Bush in the elegant East Room, was part of an ongoing Salute to America's Writers series and celebrated three "Women of the West"—Cather, Edna Ferber, and Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Cather's niece, Catherine Cather Lowell, and nephew, Charles Cather, were special guests. Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial executive director Dr. Steve Ryan attended, as did several members of the WCPM board of governors: president John Swift, vice president Mellanee Kvasnicka, John Murphy, Ann Romines, Sue Rosowski, and Steve Shively. A number of WCPM Foundation members also attended.

In prepared remarks, Mrs. Bush praised the writers for their contribution to American letters and the telling of the stories of the West. She spoke of the "forlorn clarity" of Cather's prose and recalled her tribute to the spacious western sky: "Elsewhere the sky is the roof of the world; but here the earth was the floor of the sky." Sharon O'Brien, author of *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (1987), delivered extended comments on Cather.

The two-hour program followed a breakfast reception at which coffee, orange juice, and delicate pastries were served.

Approximately 150 attended.

Distinguished guests included Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President; Alma Powell, wife of the Secretary of State; Joyce Rumsfeld, wife of the Secretary of Defense; Charles Cather; Catherine Cather Lowell; Hugh Sidey, longtime columnist for *Time Magazine*; actress Melissa Gilbert; and actor Bruce Boxleitner.

Cather on Cather II: Two Recent Acquisitions at Drew University

David H. Porter, Williams College

Drew University has recently acquired a substantial trove of Cather materials thanks to the generosity of Finn and Barbara Caspersen, the latter a Drew trustee and author of "'The Flowering of Desire': Willa Cather and the Source of Miracles" (Drew University, 1990). Adding to the intrinsic interest of the materials is the fact that they come from the library of Frederick B. Adams, Jr., former head of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, and creator of a private Cather collection that Joan Crane has described as "[t]he most important repository of bibliographical information on the works of Willa Cather" (Crane xiv).

Among the new Drew holdings are two important Cather typescripts, both apparently dating from 1926, and both containing intriguing revisions, some of them handwritten. One of these typescripts appears to be Cather's final version of the "Biographical Sketch" that was published without attribution by A. A. Knopf in a 1926 pamphlet, *Willa Cather: A Biographical Sketch, An English Opinion, and An Abridged Bibliography*. The other has also been previously published, but as a bona fide interview with Cather,

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- The Pittsburg years by Tim Bintrim
- Margaret Doane on Cather's dreams
- Jo Ann Middleton on her bibliography
- Cather on Cather by David Porter
- Nancy Wurzel on Cather's knowledge of goddess lore
- Chicago meets Antonia

Sherlock Holmes Alert

While our contributors don't require sleuthing to identify, we have a conundrum for all Cather scholars to consider: who wrote the comment at the end of the Cather typescript photographed below, and now available to scholars in the Caspersen Cather collection at Drew? The question raises most interesting possibilities if one of us can answer it: please let us know whether you can identify the handwriting in our photographed Cather page. Meanwhile, for easier identifications:

Tim Bintrim is completing his dissertation on Cather's Pittsburgh years and is an authority on her contributions to *Home Monthly*.

Margaret Doane is beginning here a two-part series on Cather's use of dreams. She teaches at California State University at San Bernadino.

Jo Ann Middleton gives us here a second installment of her bibliography of Cather scholarship in 2000-01.

David Porter, a notable Cather collector and retired college president, provides a second essay illuminating Cather's prowess as a self-publicist.

Nancy Wurzel, who teaches at Baldwin Wallace college in Ohio, shows us Cather's sophisticated knowledge of goddess lore.

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helpless infants somewhere, and you'll see how puffed-up and important you begin to feel. You'll want to do it right over again ^{But don't!} ~~your mind will bubble with platitudes.~~ Goodbye."

Miss Cather's most recent published work is "The Professor's House", which turned out to be a national best-seller. Mrs. Knopf, her publisher, announces ~~with~~ a short novel, "My Hostal Enemy" by Miss Cather, for October!

2003 CATHER CALENDAR

May 2 & 3

48th Annual Willa Cather Spring Festival
"The Best Years": Willa Cather and Childhood
Core Texts: *My Ántonia*, *Shadows on the Rock*
"The Enchanted Bluff," "The Best Years," "Jack-a-Boy"
Red Cloud

May 28-June 2

9th International Willa Cather Seminar,
"Willa Cather as Cultural Icon"
Bread Loaf, Vermont
www.unl.edu/cather

Recommended Reading

The story of the story *A Lost Lady*

Lyra and Silas Garber:

*A First Couple in Frontier History
and in Willa Cather's A Lost Lady*

Written by Lonnie Pierson Dunbier
Illustrated by Louise Meyer Bereuter
Published by Western Edge Press
Paperback. 208 Pages.

Available from the WCPM for \$25.25
(tax, handling & shipping included).

Book proceeds benefit the WCPM Opera House Endowment Fund

Also new in the WCPM Bookstore:
Memorial Fictions:
Willa Cather and the First World War
Steven Trout - Cloth. 225 Pages - \$48.60
(Tax, handling, & shipping included.)

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Chicago Meets Antonia

By Anthony M. Millspaugh

Following the successful inaugural season of the “One Book, One Chicago” citywide reading program, officials announced that, in 2002, the event would be expanded from the previous one-week duration and incorporated into October’s month-long “City of Big Readers: Chicago Book Festival” celebration.

Chicagoans were encouraged to “do their homework” by reading Willa Cather’s *My Antonia*, the city’s third installment in the “One Book” program with special events slated for the week of October 14.

On August 31, the initial print run of 50,000 resource guides was distributed to all seventy-eight Chicago branch libraries, as well as neighborhood schools and local bookstores. The cover for the twenty-page booklet was a photograph of “Cather Country” taken by Lucia Woods for *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*. Woods’ photo also served as the backdrop for the city’s advertising campaign asking Chicagoans “Have you met *My Antonia*?” The cover art was a fitting choice, given that thirty-seven of Woods’ images were on display as “Willa Cather’s Nebraska” on the ninth floor of the city’s main library, the Harold Washington Library Center, during the run of the Chicago Book Festival.

City dwellers unfamiliar with the novel or with Cather only had to look through the pages of the resource guide for information. The pamphlet included a brief biography of the author, background on Red Cloud, and a bibliography of Cather works and related texts.

A majority of the information found in the pages of the guide pertained to programs that were scheduled to occur throughout October. Over fifty book discussion groups met principally in libraries. Additional groups met at local bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble and Borders.

A variety of venues hosted special events during the week of October 14. Joan Allen, Tony Award-winning, Academy

Award-nominated actress and one of the founders of the city’s Steppenwolf Theatre group, delighted an audience at the auditorium of the Harold Washington Library Center with a dramatic reading from Cather’s novel. She excitedly shared how *My Antonia* has been a favorite novel of hers since she “was a little girl,” and how delighted she was to be in Chicago celebrating the novel. It was a fitting kick-off to the week.

A group meeting at Puck’s Café on the terrace of the Museum of Contemporary Art on Tuesday, October 15, enjoyed a lively discussion of the novel followed by live jazz music, overlooking Lake Michigan.

The culmination of the week was a panel discussion held in the auditorium of the Harold Washington Library Center on Thursday, October 17. Panelists on the forum entitled “Willa Cather’s Circle of Experience” included Susan Rosowski of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Jonathan Gross, associate professor of English at De Paul University. Gross spoke about the syllabi for a course offered at the university in conjunction with the “One Book, One Chicago” program, named “Cather and the Novel of Immigration.” Mary A. Dempsey, Commissioner of Chicago’s Public Library, moderated the discussion.

As October ended, enthusiasm for *My Antonia* did not dissipate. According to Nanette Alleman, who oversaw all the events, due to popular demand an additional press run of resource guides was ordered and Lucia Woods’ photographic exhibit

was extended at the library through the first of the new year. In mid-November, Antonette Turner and Kay Skupa, descendants of Annie Pavelka, the prototype for *Antonia*, charmed audiences at Women and Children First, the city’s leading independent bookstore, with stories about their famous literary ancestors, and shared examples of their handicrafts. Chicagoans had done more than meet *Antonia*—they embraced her with their legendary big shoulders.



Actress Joan Allen explains her passion for *My Antonia* before presenting a dramatic reading of passages from the novel. This was one of many events that occurred throughout Chicago during the month of October.

Photos courtesy of Nanette Alleman,
Chicago Public Library



Chicago Public Library Commissioner, Mary A. Dempsey, introduces panelist Jonathan Gross at a forum entitled “Willa Cather’s Circle of Experience.”

A Note about Spelling Cather's *Pittsburg*

By Timothy Bintrim

Before reading David Porter's "Cather on Cather: Two Early Self-Sketches" in the Winter/Spring 2002 issue, I had assumed that after quitting her post at the *Pittsburg Daily Leader* in 1900, Cather suppressed her connection with that "yellow" paper. That premise underpinned one chapter of my dissertation. However, as Porter convincingly demonstrates, Cather boasted of her *Leader* work in both the 1903 "Literary Note" and the 1915 *SOL* marketing brochure (though neither, predictably, mentions her greater role in the defunct *Home Monthly* and *Library*). Porter reasons that Cather in 1903 may have used her responsibilities at the *Leader* to augment her spare list of published work, but he seems surprised, as I was, that she still mentioned the newspaper in 1915, with four books already published (58).

After re-reading the sketches, I emailed Professor Porter, thanking him for the specialized information that had challenged and improved my dissertation. While I had his ear, I quibbled with one small matter—his assertion that Cather had misspelled *Pittsburg* in the 1903 note (55). Professor Porter responded cordially to my message by suggesting that I submit this note, a suggestion seconded by issue editor MMS. I agreed in the spirit of sharing specialized information. Surely Cather deserves her reputation as a creative speller, but in the case of the 1903 note mentioning *Pittsburg*, she was correct.

In "A Note on the Editing" of *The World and the Parish*, William Curtin states, "at the turn of the century the forms *Pittsburgh* and *Pittsburg* both were used" (966). Curtin adopted the former spelling in all instances except periodical titles, where emendation might complicate bibliographic searches. Curtin wisely did not digress upon the history of Pittsburgh's spelling, but the topic is addressed by Barry Chad, senior librarian at the Pennsylvania Room of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Public Library:

Pittsburgh was incorporated as a city by an Act of 8 March 1816. Through a printer's error, the **h** was omitted from the printed copy, but the original charter included it [. . .] Through the 19th century, in directories and newspapers, an occasional use of *Pittsburg* will be found, but the predominant usage was *Pittsburgh*. Municipal documents always use the latter spelling. In 1890, the United States Board of Geographic Names decided that the final **h** was to be dropped in the names of all cities and towns ending in *burgh*. (Throughout the period 1890-1911 city ordinances and council minutes retained the **h**.) In 1911, after protests from citizens who wished to preserve the historic spelling, the United States Board on Geographic Names reversed its decision and restored the **h** to Pittsburgh.¹

Two points emerge. First, during the years of Cather's continuous residence in Pittsburgh, 1896-1906, the city was usually spelled without the **h**, at least outside City Hall. My own survey of the city's eight English language newspapers and two society weeklies at the turn of the century confirms that the spelling *Pittsburg* was favored on their mastheads.² My second point is that no one ought to incur blame for using either spelling, for

both are still in widespread use. Last year a study by ePodunk, an internet firm specializing in community profiles, named Pittsburgh "the most misspelled city in America" out of 28,000 communities in its databank.³

In spelling *Pittsburgh*, as in more important matters, Cather resisted change. In *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Harsanyi retains his first press notice, "a clipping from a Pittsburgh paper, giving the list of the dead and injured" in the explosion that took his eye (453).⁴ Whether this nonstandard spelling was by intent or mistake is a matter of speculation. If she erred, Cather may be exonerated by her letters, which record her dissatisfaction with the proofreading *SOL* received from Houghton Mifflin (Stout #323, 356). If intentional, the dramatic date of the passage does fall within the late 1890s. Cather read proofs for *SOL* in July 1915 from the McClung home (Stout #315, 317) and had Glendinning Keeble, music critic for the *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, proofread the musical passages (Stout #305, 313), facts that increase the odds that *Pittsburg* was intended. Possibly more than one proofreader alerted Cather to the missing *h*, but she preferred the spelling of her young adulthood, much as she preferred her own "trademark punctuations" to more standard usages (Porter, "Cather on Cather II," (this issue) n. 11).

Notes

¹Kari Ronning suggests that the U.S. Board's decisions were part of a nationwide movement to standardize and simplify American spelling, and thinks Cather would resist changes of usage made by fiat. Her critical reading of this note is much appreciated.

²Merrill Skaggs brought to my attention that *The Home Monthly* (1896-1900) and *The Library* (1900-1901) are notable exceptions to the journalistic consensus, favoring *Pittsburgh* both on their mastheads and within their text. Such archaic usage may reflect the conservative values of *The Home Monthly*, but is more difficult to explain in the case of the bohemian *Library*.

³Thanks to Jean Shumway, reference librarian at Butler County Community College, for alerting me to the ePodunk study.

⁴*Pittsburg* is repeated later in *SOL* when Harsanyi credits Theodore Thomas with his own artistic awakening: "I remember when I first heard you in Pittsburg, long ago. It was a life-line you threw me" (471).

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CATHER ON CATHER II

(Continued from page 49)

whereas the typescript reveals without question that it is completely of Cather's own composition—an interview in form only. We publish these two pieces here to suggest their considerable interest and to alert scholars and students to the presence of these and other valuable Cather materials in the Caspersen gift.

"A Biographical Sketch" (1926)

The Winter/Spring 2002 issue of the *Newsletter and Review* contained the texts of two anonymous statements that Willa Cather wrote about herself, one a brief "Literary Note" published in 1903 in connection with *April Twilights*, the other a more ambitious biography, "Willa Sibert Cather. The Development of an American Novelist," published in 1915 in a brochure promoting *The Song of the Lark*. While the 1926 Knopf pamphlet is less of a rarity than these two earlier pieces, both of which are virtually inaccessible, we transcribe Cather's "Biographical Sketch" here so as to make readily available the full cycle of these three related self-descriptions.¹ In addition, the Drew typescript of this sketch gives a fascinating glimpse of Cather's active involvement in composing this sort of promotional material. It is quite apparent that Cather herself wrote the two earlier statements; here we can see her actually doing it.²

"A Biographical Sketch"

Although Willa Cather is generally spoken of as a Western writer, she was born in Virginia, on a farm near Winchester, and lived there until she was eight years old. Her ancestors, on both sides, had been Virginia farmers for three or four generations; they came originally from England, Ireland, and Alsace. When Willa Cather was eight years old, her father took his family to Nebraska and bought a ranch near Red Cloud, a little town on the Burlington Railroad named for the famous Sioux warrior.

Life on a Nebraska ranch, in those days when the country was thinly settled, was full of adventure. Farming was then a secondary matter; the most important occupation was the feeding of great herds of cattle driven up from Texas, and most of the great prairie country from the Missouri River to Denver was still open grazing land. The population of the country about Red Cloud was largely foreign. Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Bohemians, Germans, a few Russians, and to the north the prosperous French Canadian colony of St. Anne.

Willa Cather did not go to school. She had a pony and spent her time riding about the country and getting acquainted with the neighbors, whose foreign speech and customs she found intensely interesting. Had she been born in that community, she doubtless would have taken these things for granted. But she came to this strange mixture of peoples and manners from an old conservative society; from the Valley of Virginia, where the original land grants made in the reigns of George II and George III had been going down from father to son ever since, where life was ordered and settled, where the people in good families were born good, and the poor mountain people were not expected to amount to much. The movement of life was slow there, but the quality of it was rich and kindly. There had been no element of struggle since the Civil War. Foreigners were looked down upon, unless they were English or persons of title.

An imaginative child, taken out of this definitely arranged background, and dropped down among struggling immigrants from all over the world, naturally found something to think about. Struggle appeals to a child more than comfort and picturesqueness, because it is dramatic. No child with a spark of generosity could have kept from throwing herself heart and soul into the fight these people were making to master the language, to master the soil, to hold their land and to get ahead in the world. Those friendships Willa Cather made as a little girl still count immensely for her; and she says she could never find time to be bored in that community where the life of every family was like that of the Swiss Family Robinson. Lightning and hail and prairie fires and drouths and blizzards were always threatening to extinguish this family or that.

All the while that she was racing about over the country by day, Willa Cather was reading at night. She read a good many of the English classics aloud to her two grandmothers. She learned Latin early and read it easily. Later her father moved his family into the little town of Red Cloud, and she went to the high school, but she learned her Latin from an old English gentleman, who had the enthusiasm of the true scholar and with whom she used to read even after she entered the University of Nebraska. She was graduated from that University at nineteen and spent the next few years in Pittsburgh⁴ teaching and doing newspaper work. She chose that city to work in rather than New York because she had warm personal friends there. These were the years when she was learning to write, doing all that work and experimenting that every writer and painter must do at some time or other to find and perfect his medium.

But it was only the winters that Miss Cather spent in Pittsburgh. Every summer she went back to Nebraska and Colorado and Wyoming. For although she says it was in these years that she was learning to write, Miss Cather admits that she spent very little time sitting at a desk. She was much too restless for that and too much interested in people, east and west. She believes that there is no use beginning to write until you have lived a good deal, and lived among all kinds of people. But wherever she went, whatever ties she formed, she always went back to the plains country. The first year she spent in Europe she nearly died of homesickness for it. "I hung and hung about the wheat country in central France," she says, "sniffing when I observed a little French girl riding on the box between her father's feet on an

CATHER ON CATHER II

(Continued)

American mowing machine, until it occurred to me that maybe if I went home to my own wheat country and my own father, I might be less lachrymose. It's a queer thing about the flat country—it takes hold of you, or it leaves you perfectly cold. A great many people find it dull and monotonous; they like a church steeple, an old mill, a waterfall, country all touched up and furnished, like a German Christmas card. I go everywhere, I admire all kinds of country. I tried to live in France. But when I strike the open plains, something happens. I'm home. I breathe differently. That love of great spaces, of rolling open country like the sea,—it's the grand passion of my life. I tried for years to get over it. I've stopped trying. It's incurable."

Miss Cather's first published book was a volume of verse, "April Twilights" (reissued in 1923 as "April Twilights and Later Verse"). While she was in Pittsburgh she had been working from time to time on a collection of short stories. In 1904 she sent the manuscript⁶ of this volume of stories, entitled "The Troll Garden," into the publishing house of McClure-Phillips. The manuscript came under the eye of that most discerning of American editors, S. S. McClure, who had already so many discoveries to his credit. He telegraphed Miss Cather to come to New York at once for a conference. He published her book, and published several stories from it in "McClure's Magazine." Two of these, "The Sculptor's Funeral" and "Paul's Case," attracted wide attention, and for several years imitations of them kept turning up in the manuscript bags of New York editors.

Two years after he accepted her book of short stories, S. S. McClure offered Miss Cather a position on his magazine. She joined the McClure staff in the winter of 1906. Two years later she became managing editor of McClure's and held that position for four years. During that period of editorial work she wrote very little. She traveled a great deal, in Europe and in the American Southwest, Arizona and New Mexico. In 1912 she gave up editorial work and wrote her first novel, "Alexander's Bridge." This was followed by "O Pioneers!" "The Song of the Lark" and "My Antonia," "Youth and the Bright Medusa," "One of Ours," "A Lost Lady," "The Professor's House," and "My Mortal Enemy."⁷ Nearly all of these books have been translated into various European languages, and Willa Cather has a rapidly growing European reputation.

As noted in our previous "Cather on Cather," this 1926 "Biographical Sketch" is only two-thirds as long as her 1915 biography—c. 1200 words as against c. 1800. Although it notes the attention garnered by Cather's early stories and ends with a reference to her "growing European reputation," it is also largely free of the "puffery" that at times protests too much in the two earlier versions.⁸ True, the pamphlet's substantial "English Opinion" by Alexander Porterfield discusses and praises Cather's writings up through *The Professor's House*, thus minimizing the need for self-promotion in her own article. Nonetheless, one senses in her essay a self-confidence lacking in the earlier pieces, an awareness that her reputation is now so firmly established that she need do little more than list her impressive bibliography, as she does in the final paragraphs.⁹

Porterfield's survey of her writing also permits Cather to devote the bulk of her attention to her Nebraska upbringing—an emphasis interesting in light of her resistance elsewhere (including at the start of this very essay) to being type-cast as a "Western writer," and further evidence of a heightened self-confidence, a growing comfort with acknowledging her roots and the part they play in her writing.¹⁰ She begins by building an artful counterpoint between her early Virginia years and what she found in Nebraska: "an old conservative society" against "this strange mixture of peoples and manners"; the "slow" (albeit "rich and kindly") "movement of life" in Virginia against "adventure" and "struggle" in Nebraska; predictable continuities there, constant uncertainties here, the latter evoked in a sentence whose breathless anacoluthon itself contrasts sharply with the measured cadences of her description of Virginia: "Lightning and hail and prairie fires and drouths and blizzards were always threatening to extinguish this family or that."¹¹

Not only does the 1926 sketch contain numerous details of her childhood not present in the earlier statements, but Cather also goes out of her way to evoke the lasting emotional ties she feels to the land in which she grew up. She does so especially through the wonderful passage about the homesickness she experienced on her first trip to Europe, a passage for which there is no counterpart in the 1915 statement. And where in that statement she uses direct quotation of herself primarily to talk about her literary career, here she focuses it on the feelings of her time abroad:¹² "I hung and hung about the wheat country in central France," she writes, "sniffing when I observed a little French girl riding on the box between her father's feet on an American mowing machine, until it occurred to me that maybe if I went home to my own wheat country and my own father, I might be less lachrymose."

It is instructive to compare this passage with the "Barbizon" chapter of *Willa Cather in Europe*, which contains Cather's original account of that first trip, in 1902, to "the wheat country in central France."¹³ Here too she dwells at length on the details of the country and its people, associating them specifically with the Nebraska she knew as a child and commenting that they "recalled not a little the country about Campbell and Bladen" (two towns close to Red Cloud). "To complete the resemblance," she adds, "there stood a reaper of a well-known American make, very like the one on which I have acted as supercargo many a time. There was a comfortable little place where a child might sit happily enough between its father's feet, and perhaps if I had waited long enough I might have seen a little French girl sitting in that happy sheltered place, the delights of which I have known so well" (WCE 122). This section, written some 24 years earlier, is clearly the source of her 1926 description of the little French girl. Not only has Cather in the 1926 sketch recast this memory as a quotation that she places in her own mouth, but she also transforms the little French girl she "might have seen" into one she did see! Even in this short promotional piece, Cather the novelist is clearly at work, using her imaginative freedom to enhance the emotional power of her story.¹⁴

Although the published version of the sketch differs only in minor details from the corrected typescript now at Drew,¹⁵ the revisions Cather made before submitting this final version are revealing. Of particular interest is the care she took with the close of the section that contains the memory of the little girl. In the Caspersen typescript one can see that this para-

graph originally ended as follows: "I go everywhere, I admire all kinds of country. But when I strike the open plains, something happens. I'm home. I breathe differently. That love of great wide spaces, of rolling open country like the sea, - it's the grand passion of my life. I tried to go to France to live, I tried for years and years to get over it. I've stopped trying. It's incurable." One can then see Cather working on this passage. A deleted quotation mark suggests that at one point she thought of ending the quotation after "I breathe differently." She crosses out "wide" in "great wide spaces" and eliminates "and years" from "for years and years." She has particular problems with the phrase about living in France. She adds a comma ("I tried to go to France, to live"); notes in longhand, then inks through, a transposition ("I tried to go to live in France"); finally she draws a line through the whole phrase and writes it by hand, as a separate sentence, into an earlier position, where we find it in the final version: "I go everywhere, I admire all kinds of country. I tried to live in France. But when I strike the open plains, something happens. I'm home. I breathe differently. That love of great spaces, of rolling open country like the sea, - it's the grand passion of my life. I tried for years to get over it. I've stopped trying. It's incurable." A quick comparison of this final version with where Cather began suggests the degree to which these several modest changes give her corrected typescript a grace and directness it originally lacked.

The trimming of "wide" and "and years" is characteristic of what Cather does elsewhere in this short manuscript. Thus "Struggle is the thing which appeals to a child . . ." becomes "Struggle appeals to a child . . ."; "after she entered the freshman class of the State University of Nebraska" becomes "after she entered the University of Nebraska"; and before the sentence that begins "Later her father moved his family . . ." Cather has crossed out "When she was old enough to . . ." Slight in themselves, these and other such changes help give the 1926 sketch a spare eloquence that contrasts sharply with the relative wordiness of the 1915 "Development of An American Novelist" —a contrast comparable to that between the language of the chronologically proximate *Song of the Lark* and *Professor's House*. Albeit in microcosm, we can see at work in Cather's revisions of this typescript the same quest for balance and economy, the same ear for rhythm, that were creating the classic language of the novels of the mid-1920s.¹⁶

Finally, it is worth noting that Cather not only took seriously the writing of her portion of the 1926 Knopf pamphlet but also felt comfortable referring people to it for information about herself. When in 1929 a correspondent requests biographical information in connection with an article he is writing on her novels, she sends him a copy of the pamphlet (Stout #988).

A Willa Cather "Interview" (1926)

If the first Caspersen typescript gives documentary proof of something long understood by Cather scholars—that Cather herself wrote the "Biographical Sketch" for the 1926 Knopf booklet—the second gives similar proof of something not previously known—that a short "interview" with Cather, originally published in the *Nebraska State Journal* and reprinted in L. Brent Bohlke's *Willa Cather in Person*,¹⁷ is not a real interview at all but an autobiographical fiction created by Cather herself. The occasional handwritten corrections in the manuscript are clearly Cather's, and a quick comparison of the typing¹⁸ with that of the 1926 sketch confirms that only she can have written it—both her own words and those of her interlocutor! The

Caspersen manuscript thus answers the questions Bohlke raises as to the origins of this interview, though we still do not know how it got from Cather's desk to the *Nebraska State Journal*, where it appeared on September 5, 1926.¹⁹ A short note appended to the typescript, written in pencil and in a different hand (and missing from previously published versions), is also revealing, for it clearly suggests that Cather wrote this brief piece—like the 1926 sketch—for promotional purposes.

[Untitled]²⁰

Interviewed at the Grand Central Station where she was waiting for a train one hot July day, Willa Cather said:

"Yes, I'm going out of town, - it's rather evident. No, not West this time. I have just come back from three months in New Mexico. Now I'm going up into New England."²¹

"What part of New England?"

"Oh, several places! Mr. Knopf and Mr. Reynolds will always have my address, if you should wish to reach me about something important. Seriously, I'm going away to work and don't want to be bothered."

"But this is vacation time."

"I've just had a long vacation in New Mexico. I need a rest from resting."

"Are you beginning a new novel?"

"No, I'm in the middle of one."

"When will it be published?"

"The book? About a year from now. The serial publication will begin sometime this winter. I want to finish the manuscript by the middle of February and get abroad in the early spring."

"I suppose, Miss Cather, it's no use to ask you for the title. You told me several years ago that you never announced the title of a new book until it was completed."

"Did I tell you that? Well, this time I'll make an exception. I don't like to get into a rut about anything."²² I call this book 'Death Comes for the Archbishop.'

"And the scene?"

"Oh, that remains to be seen! My train is called."

"One general question on the way down, please. What do you consider the greatest obstacle American writers have to overcome?"

"Well, what do other writers tell you?"

"Some say commercialism, and some say Prohibition."

"I don't exactly agree with either. I should say it was the lecture-bug. In this country a writer has to hide and lie and almost steal in order to get time to work in, - and peace of mind to work with. Besides, lecturing is very dangerous for writers. If we lecture, we get a little more owlish and self-satisfied all the time. We hate it at first, if we are decently modest, but in the end we fall in love with the sound of our own voice. There is something insidious about it, destructive to ones [*sic*] finer feelings. All human beings, apparently, like to speak in public. The timid man becomes bold, the man who has never had an opinion about anything becomes chock full of them the moment [*sic*] he faces an audience. A woman, alas, becomes even fuller! Really, I've seen people's reality quite destroyed by the habit of putting on a rostrum front. It's especially destructive to writers, ever so much worse than alcohol, takes their edge off."

"But why, why?"

"Certainly, I can't tell you now. He's calling 'all aboard'. Try it out yourself; go lecture to a Sunday School or a class

CATHER ON CATHER II

(Continued)

of helpless infants somewhere, and you'll see how puffed-up and important you begin to feel. You'll want to do it right over again. But don't! Goodbye."

Appended note, handwritten, by someone other than Willa Cather:²³

Miss Cather's most recent published work is "the [sic] Professor's House", which turned out to be a national bestseller. Mr. Knopf, her publisher, announces a short novel, "My Mortal Enemy" by Miss Cather, for October.

The addendum locates the composition of this "interview" to the period between September 4, 1925, and October 20, 1926, the respective publication dates for *The Professor's House* and *My Mortal Enemy*. In addition, one assumes its composition must fall sometime close to the "dramatic date" implicit in the interview itself—a hot day in July 1926, "about a year" before the publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and with serial publication of that novel to begin "this winter" (serial publication of *DCA* began in January 1927, and the book itself appeared on September 2, 1927).²⁴

Though even less self-promoting than the roughly contemporaneous 1926 "Biographical Sketch," the "interview" shares with that piece Cather's obvious comfort with her growing fame, and by its very form it obviously carries to new lengths her habit of putting words into her own mouth! That this piece has hitherto been taken for an actual interview is a delightful twist—testimony to Cather's skill in catching the tone and character of this sort of hasty conversation with a famous author.

And that its promotional purpose has become apparent only through the appended note suggests the degree to which Cather could write promotional copy that has historical value—as, indeed, in the case of her 1903, 1915, and 1926 biographical sketches.

But whereas these three sketches are fascinating above all for the insights they give into Cather's view of herself at three stages of her evolving career, this "interview" can stand by itself as a witty mini-drama replete with its own setting, plot, and vividly realized characters and dialogue. Its polish is the more remarkable in that the paucity of corrections in the typescript, and the presence of two uncorrected typos, suggest that it was quickly composed—a candid snapshot rather than a carefully posed self-portrait. Cather's keen ear is again apparent, this time in her deft evocation of her own voice—jaunty, insouciant, self-assured. A change she makes at the end underscores her effort to capture her crispness of speech—as well as to enhance the urgency of the conductor's "All aboard!" a few lines earlier. Her conclusion originally ran as follows: "You'll want to do it right over again; your mind will bubble with platitudes. Goodbye." In the typescript she has inked through the second clause and replaced it with a sharp admonition: "You'll want to do it right over again. But don't! Goodbye."²⁵ The only other

substantial change noted in the typescript is of the same ilk. The passage about the "lecture-bug" originally read, "In this country a writer can get on at all only by being rude to womens [sic] clubs and colleges. He, her, she, has to hide and lie . . ." Cather has inked out from "can get on" through the obviously tentative "He, her, she," a change that both makes for economy of language and also again captures her own blunt manner:²⁶ "In this country a writer has to hide and lie and almost steal in order to get time to work in, - and peace of mind to work with."

Finding "time to work in, - and peace of mind to work with," was close to Cather's heart in 1926. Although more comfortable with the public than in the past, more ready to "enjoy her fate as a leading American novelist" (Sergeant 195), she still resisted the potential threat to her writing. "As she became more widely known, as her books became celebrated," comments Edith Lewis, "the demands on her time and strength of course greatly increased. The luxury she prized above all others was freedom;

and she now found her freedom hampered at every turn . . . She was, of course, continually pressed to give interviews, to give lectures, to join societies, to work for charities—all the clutter of irrelevant activities that obstruct the life of any artist who becomes famous"²⁷ (Lewis 136).

Prominent among this "clutter of irrelevant activities" was the "lecture-bug." In late 1921 Cather gave several speeches in Nebraska, and in 1922 she delivered a series of lectures at the Bread Loaf School in Vermont, experiences she often enjoyed but that just as often left her exhausted and even ill.²⁸ In the following years, especially after she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923, lecture invitations poured in. In early 1923 she reports that her secretary has declined almost a hundred requests; late the same year she declines to give the William Vaughn Moody Lectures in Chicago; in

March 1924 she notes that she can hardly write for fending off people inviting her to speak (Stout #673, 709, 727).²⁹

In 1925 she relents and lectures at Bowdoin College in May, in Chicago (the Moody Lecture she'd earlier declined) and Cleveland in November (Woodress 361, 378-79, Stout #779, 782, 799-802, 805).³⁰ That her 1926 "interview" takes its cue from these last engagements is clear from a *Cleveland Press* interview at the time of Cather's November 1925 lecture in that city:

"And are you working on a new novel now?" I asked Miss Cather.

"Yes."

"When will we have it?"

A period of ominous silence. Then, flushed with a slight pique, Miss Cather brusquely exploded. "Say, even my publishers don't dare ask me that! I get my books out when I can, and not before."

"And its title, please?"

"I never give out titles or any information about my books until they are ready," she replied. (Bohlke 87)

The whole passage, and especially the comment about releasing titles in advance, has obviously helped shape Cather's fictional "interview" the following summer. Though the tone of



this latter interview is amusing and light-hearted, with little hint of the peevishness noted in the *Cleveland Press*, behind it one hears a serious Cather reminding herself of what she had long known, and what the 1925 lectures had brought home to her: "Lecturing is very dangerous for writers There is something insidious about it, destructive to one's finer feelings You'll want to do it right over again. But don't!"³¹

What makes all of Cather's "puff pieces" so fascinating is that within this avowedly promotional medium she comments so thoughtfully about her art, and the life of the artist. In reading the 1903, 1915, and 1926 promotional sketches we not only meet Cather the PR maven but also learn a great deal about how "this most autobiographical of writers"³² perceives herself at three different stages of her career. The same is true of the 1926 "interview," and perhaps to an even greater degree, in that the topic that takes over the interview reflects precisely what was on her mind at this time—the danger posed by those seductive intrusions that threaten her freedom, that take her mind off her real work.

The same introspective focus that renders the 1926 "interview" so revealing also undermines its value as a "puff piece," and aside from its appearances in the *Nebraska State Journal* and the *Argus* (with no mention of *My Mortal Enemy*), it seems never to have been used. In her three biographical pieces Cather shows an unerring instinct for writing material that will both appeal to the public and also express her own insights and feelings—the 1926 sketch is a perfect example.³³ In contrast, for the bulk of this 1926 "interview" she is riding her own pet hobby horse. She does so wittily and delightfully, but the hobby horse is more relevant to herself than it is to her public: strictures on the "lecture-bug" seem unlikely to sell copies of her latest book!³⁴

The "talking to" she gave herself apparently worked. A few months later she tells Marion Edward Park, president of Bryn Mawr College, that she steadfastly refuses to speak at colleges but will relent in this one case—on condition that Ms. Park not spread the word to other college presidents! (Stout #861, 865) From this time on, Cather gave almost no public talks, heeding her own words about this addictive, intrusive habit: "destructive to writers, ever so much worse than alcohol, takes their edge off." In light of its train-side setting, might we say that composing this "interview" helped get Willa Cather back on track?³⁵

Notes

¹The Caspersen gift includes copies of both the 1926 and 1933 versions of the pamphlet (it was reissued yet again in 1941). The text of the "Biographical Sketch" is much the same in all three issues. On the supplementary materials contained in the later editions, see Crane 315, Porter 60 note 11.

²It appears that Cather wrote the sketch in the second half of 1926. On May 28, 1926, she wrote Blanche Knopf about the possibility of a Knopf publicity booklet that would include an article from the *London Mercury* (i.e., Porterfield's "An English Opinion"). She asks for the opportunity to review the proofs, including any biographical information, but makes no mention of writing anything for inclusion (Stout #834).

³The version printed here is taken from the 1926 pamphlet—see below for its minor variants from the typescript.

⁴It is clear from the Caspersen typescript that by 1926 Cather was spelling this city's name with an "h," whereas she spells it "Pittsburg" in her 1903 "Literary Note." On the different

spellings, see Timothy W. Bintrim's note in this issue of *WCPMN&R*.

⁵Cather changes "about" to "around" in the 1933 and 1941 versions of this sketch.

⁶Cather changes this to "manuscripts" in the 1933 and 1941 versions.

⁷This list is updated in the later versions—through *DCA* in 1933, *SSG* in 1941.

⁸Compare, e.g., the laudatory modifiers that dot the 1903 statement—"delightful volume of poems," "remarkably discriminating dramatic criticism," "clever dramatic and literary criticism," or the ending of the 1915 statement, with its reference to Cather's "position in the front rank of American writers," her place "in the little group of American novelists that count . . ." (Porter 55, 58).

⁹Cf. Sergeant 194-95 on Cather in the mid-'20s: "The increase in her literary reputation helped . . . to give her a basic confidence in her own direction. Successful, handsome and blooming, even accessible at last, she allowed the world to have its charms for her."

¹⁰On Cather's resistance to being pegged a "Western writer," see Porter 59, 60 note 20.

¹¹The whole sketch is built around artful contrasts—riding around the country by day, reading in the evenings; winters in Pittsburgh, summers in the West; Europe vs. home. And when (speaking about France) Cather contrasts her love of the "the flat country" with others' preference for "country all touched up and furnished, like a German Christmas card," she recalls her early comment (vis à vis Nebraska and Virginia) about a child's preference for struggle and drama over "comfort and picturesque-ness."

¹²The self-citation in 1926 is also invented expressly for the occasion, whereas those in the 1915 statement are drawn from an actual earlier interview: see Porter 58, 60 note 15.

¹³Although *Willa Cather in Europe* was not published until 1956, it consists of only slightly edited versions of essays Cather wrote in 1902 for publication in the *Nebraska State Journal*.

¹⁴Cather also used many materials from this same 1902 essay to suggest the sense of familiarity Claude Wheeler feels in his first days in France. See *OO* 339ff., and George N. Kates' introductory comments to "Barbizon" in *WCE* 115-16.

¹⁵The published version corrects Cather's "lightening" to "lightning" and changes her "offered" and "travelled" to the more usual American spelling of the words. It also at one place changes one of her trademark punctuations, the comma followed by a single dash (, -), to a simple dash but leaves it intact at another (note Cather's use of this same distinctive punctuation in the "interview" reproduced below). The typescript is written with a purple typewriter ribbon; most of Cather's handwritten corrections are in black ink, though three minor adjustments—all apparently at the last stage—are in pencil.

¹⁶Cf. St. Peter's comment on Tom Outland's journal: "If words had cost money, Tom couldn't have used them more sparingly" (*PH* 262).

¹⁷Bohlke 89-91, including useful introductory comments.

¹⁸E.g., her distinctive purple typewriter ribbon, and her frequent use of "z" (usually alternating with "x" or the hyphen) to type over letters and words she wishes to delete.

¹⁹It also appeared on September 16 in the *Webster County Argus*, with credit to the *NSJ*. I owe this information to Dr. Kari Ronning, who also kindly tracked down copies of these two arti-

CATHER ON CATHER II

(Continued)

cles, neither of which gives any further hints as to how the interview found its way to *NSJ*.

²⁰The text published here is taken from the Caspersen typescript; it differs in only minor details from that published in Bohlke 90-91.

²¹Cather's 1926 New Mexico trip in fact lasted closer to six weeks than three months. She stopped in Red Cloud on the return trip, then left for New York on July 21 (as reported in the July 22 *Webster County Argus*, information I again owe to Kari Ronning). Her immediate destination in New England (artfully camouflaged in the "interview"!) was the MacDowell Colony in Peterboro, New Hampshire. See Woodress, 393-95.

²²Cather here plays with a favorite theme: compare the delight with the endless variety of life on the Divide that she expresses in her "Biographical Sketch," or the following from her 1915 statement: "One thing is certain—she will not repeat herself." (Porter 58)

²³Merrill Skaggs and I assume this note must have been added by a Knopf editor working with Cather on promotion of *My Mortal Enemy*, but neither we nor those we've consulted have been able to identify the handwriting. We include with this article a photograph of the typescript's final page in hopes that someone else may be able to do so—e.g., someone with access to the extensive Cather/Knopf materials in the Alfred and Blanche Knopf collection at the University of Texas in Austin.

²⁴On the publication history of *DCA*, see Crane 128-29. A summer 1926 composition date for the "interview" squares also with the early September date at which it appeared in the *Nebraska State Journal*.

²⁵Cather's manner in this "interview" closely approximates the description given by Burton Rascoe in 1924: "Her conversation is staccato; she chops her spoken sentences out incisively, in short, neat links." "She is free from the usual inhibitions to comfortable and easy discourse; she uses good, colloquial and pungent words" (Bohlke 66, 63).

²⁶"Her sentences are crisp and almost terse," wrote a 1925 interviewer (Bohlke 87).

²⁷Cf. the following passage from *The Professor's House*, where St. Peter imagines the intrusions that would have plagued Tom Outland had he not died before "the trap of worldly success had been sprung on him What change would have come in his blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas?" (*PH* 260-61) On this passage's reflection of the intrusions Cather herself was resisting at the time, see Brown 237-39. Cf. St. Peter's comment earlier in the novel, when Marsellus speaks of attending his lecture in Chicago: "Come if you wish. Lectures seem to me a rather grim treat, Louie" (*PH* 77).

²⁸See Woodress 319-22, Stout #552, 555, 560, 562 574, 580, 608, 612, 615, etc.

²⁹Among them was an invitation to lecture at Bread Loaf again in 1924: Stout #721.

³⁰For the substance of the Bowdoin and Chicago talks, see Bohlke 152-68.

³¹On the self-referential quality of her "interview" comments, see Bohlke 140.

³²Skaggs 10.

³³Yet another area where Cather was personally involved in promotion was the creation of dust-jacket blurbs for her novels. Here too she displays the same balance between promotional savvy and authorial insight, as I hope to show in a future installment of "Cather on Cather."

³⁴A repeated theme in Cather's letters of 1925 and 1926 is her intention to get off the lecture circuit. In June 1925 she vows not to lecture the following winter (Stout #785); in December 1925 she answers a request by saying that she rarely gives lectures (Stout #808); the same month she again turns down an invitation to lecture at Bread Loaf—and says she probably won't have time ever to lecture there again (Stout #812). She had sounded the same theme in earlier years as well—see, e.g., Stout #591, 613—but never so persistently as in the year of her interview about the "lecture-bug."

³⁵The only real exception is a speech she gave at Princeton in 1933, with simultaneous broadcast over NBC: see Woodress 450-51, Bohlke 168-70.

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Bibliography for 2000-2001 Continued

By Jo Ann Middleton

Willa Cather's New York: New Essays on Cather in the City (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2000), ed. Merrill Maguire Skaggs, moves us up the coast to the city that Cather called home for 41 years. This volume of twenty essays, first presented at the 1998 Drew University Cather colloquium, attests to the centrality of New York City to Cather's writing. In "From Cornfield to the Big Apple Orchard: New York as School for Cather and her Critics" (pp. 21-42), John J. Murphy provides a thorough and comprehensive context for the essays which follow, noting the sites Cather knew, visited, and blended into her fiction. Merrill Maguire Skaggs focuses on Cather's little-known familiarity with Cos Cob, Connecticut, a retreat for New York artists and "McClure's folk" "alike in "Young Willa Cather and the Road to Cos Cob" (pp. 43-59). In "Willa Cather's Political Apprenticeship at McClure's Magazine" (pp. 60-74), Joseph R. Urgo examines Cather's tenure at McClure's, clearly demonstrating the esthetic, political, cultural, and literary transformations she engineered there, and elucidating the ways in which these affected her later work. Robert K. Miller's "'Behind the Singer Tower': A Transatlantic Tale" (pp. 75-89) enumerates the contemporary disasters Cather fictionalized to reveal cultural anxieties that surface in her work. My "Willa Cather and Modern Medicine" (pp. 90-102) traces Cather's lifelong interest in medicine and doctors, details what we know of her medical history, and explores her integration of these experiences, friendships, and information into her fiction.

The first of a series of essays dealing with the arts, Cynthia Griffin Wolff's "Morality and the Naked Lady" (pp. 105-120) establishes a theoretical framework for the essays that follow by considering the unsuspected consequences that occur when an artist working in prose fiction elects to refer to another medium. Kathryn H. Faber's "In the City of New York: Two Artists at Work" (121-43) pairs Cather's New York cityscapes with Child Hassam's paintings of Fifth Avenue, midtown and the three Squares; Sherrill Harbison focuses on Cather's use of Wagnerian aesthetics ("Cather, Fremstad, and Wagner" [pp. 144-58]); Gretel D. Weiss provides a close reading of Schubert's *Leider* in "Lucy Gayheart and Schubert" (pp. 159-68); and Evelyn Haller ties Cather to the ballet through her portraitist Leon Bakst ("Willa Cather and Leon Bakst: Her Portraitist Who Was Designer to Diaghilev's Russian Ballet" [pp. 169-89]).

Literary connections are the focus of five authors. Gloria Rojas finds echoes of Walt Whitman throughout Cather's work, a tribute to her literary father ("Throw Out the Furniture, Rip Out the Curtains: Cather's Whitman and Whitman's Cather" [pp. 193-200]); Robert C. Comeau draws our attention to the hitherto unnoticed influence of Huckleberry Finn on *My Ántonia* ("Willa Cather and Mark Twain: Yours Truly, Jim Burden" [pp. 201-10]); Deborah Lindsay Williams compares Zona Gale's New York experience to Cather's ("Pernicious Sisterhood: Willa Cather and the Problem of Literary Sisterhood" [pp. 211-22]); Mona Pers documents details of Cather's friendship with Sigrid Undset in "Meeting in New York: Willa Cather and Sigrid Undset" (pp.

223-31); and Laura Winters examines the debt of postmodern novelists Christopher Coe, David Leavitt, Alain de Botton, and Toni Morrison to the theme of exclusion so pervasive in Cather's work ("Exclusion as Adventure: Willa Cather and Postmodernism" [pp. 232-40]).

Cather might have written about rural America, but she did so through an urban perspective, and Ann Romines expertly elucidates the crucial connections between the Back Creek women of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and urban life in "Sapphira and the City" (pp. 243-256). In "City Consciousness: A Comparison of Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*" (pp. 257-65), Heather Stewart Armstrong suggests that the very different urban worlds which Thea and Carrie encounter are the result of their creators' very different "perspectival and philosophical differences." Jessica G. Rabin enumerates ways in which the Jewish, cosmopolitan, and foreign Rosens cross cultural barriers and bring a different set of ethically based values to Skyline in "Like a Rose Among Thorns: Ethnicity, Demography, and Otherness in Willa Cather's 'Old Mrs. Harris'" (pp. 266-78). Cather's notions of what constitutes "success" occupy Joanne Stone Morrissey in her provocative essay, "Success and Willa Cather: The Uncelebrated Victories in *Obscure Destinies*" (pp. 279-88). To conclude the volume, Susan J. Rosowski suggests that Cather's comic sensibility had its roots in New York, and proposes that she set out to claim comedy for America in *Song of the Lark* by sending provincial Thea to the big city in "Thea Kronborg, a Distinguished Provincial in New York: or, Willa Cather's Cultural Geography of Humor" (pp. 289-305).

Companion essays to this collection are Carol Iannone's "Willa Cather's New York" (*Modern Age* 42:2, 192-98) and Sherrill Harbison's "Willa Cather and Sigrid Undset: The Correspondence in Oslo" (*RAL*, 26:2, 236-59). Iannone explicates Cather's New York stories to demonstrate "the way the city becomes one of their characters, part of the felt life of their imaginative worlds." Harbison's valuable essay reviews the friendship between Cather and Undset and includes an annotated list of the 19 Cather letters discovered in Norway in 1999.

A Special Issue of *American Literary Realism* (33:2), edited and introduced by Susan Rosowski, collects seven essays that focus on Cather's "life-long engagement with issues of representation identified with the literary school of realism." Douglas J. Colglazier reprints here in full a 1892 *Hesperian* article in which the collegiate Cather expresses her views on realism in "Willa Cather on Henrik Ibsen's Realism: The Protest Against Lies" (pp. 99-103). In "Responding to Romance with Realism in Cather's 'Tommy, the Unsentimental'" (pp. 104-09), Debra J. Seivert persuasively argues that Cather's story, written a year following her graduation, was a response to James M. Barrie's romantic *Sentimental Tommy*. Paul R. Petrie traces the tension between the social materials of realism and "an aesthetic that regards these materials as ancillary to the true aims of art" arising from Cather's struggle with Howellsian "cultural presence"

Continued on page 68.

The Non-Interpretation of Dreams: Cather's Use of a Detail in Characterization

By Margaret Doane

Cather's characters dream. Her novels contain over a hundred references to dreams, and dreams are an important device for revealing character in all but one novel, *A Lost Lady*. Both major and minor characters have dreams which provide potential self-knowledge, express fears and anxieties, and reveal deep yearnings. Most of the briefly presented dreams are simply used to emphasize known aspects of character or situation: Claude Wheeler dreams he will never escape from Nebraska; Lucy Gayheart dreams of struggling to save Clement Sebastian; Bishop Latour nostalgically awakens thinking he is in France. Two groups of dreams, however, are presented in more complex and enigmatic ways. In one group, readers understand dreams but characters do not: St. Peter believes he would like to be shipwrecked with Lillian, but he is alone in his actual shipwreck dream and fails even to contemplate the potential meaning of the dream or the self-knowledge this might bring. In another group, characters have full knowledge of dreams but readers do not: Alexandra eventually identifies "clearly" the strong figure of her recurring dream, and she "[knows] at last for whom it was she had waited and where he would carry her" (165). Readers, however, are not told of the identity of the figure and are further baffled when the dream seems to prompt Alexandra to go see Frank Shabata. Shorter dreams emphasize known aspects of character, but longer dreams are presented more enigmatically. These dreams are dropped into the narratives without authorial comment and either reveal to readers major aspects of character that remain hidden from the characters, or help characters understand themselves in ways that remain hidden to readers. These uninterpreted dreams are a truly unfurnished element of characterization; they are an example of what Cather identifies in "The Novel *Démeublé*" as a detail which helps "present [. . .] by suggestion rather than enumeration" (48), which contributes to the "consistent mood, [. . .] the emotional aura of the characters, a detail hardly "killed by tasteless amplitude" (51) and a powerful addition to Cather's treatment of character.

Many of the dreams Cather includes simply provide emphasis for aspects of character known both to the characters themselves and to readers. These emphasizing dreams usually are fairly brief, are used in ways standard to usual literary analysis, and are notable primarily for the sheer number of times Cather uses dreams to emphasize character. The majority of these dreams fall into two categories: those that show a character's reverence for the past or for childhood, and those that show anxieties known both to the character and to readers. The dying Archbishop "sometimes [. . .] sleep[ing], and [sometimes with a] face [that] would assume personality, consciousness, even though his eyes did not open," remembers the youthful scenes in which he urged his friend Father Vaillant to maintain his commitment to the Church (298-9). This nostalgia for his youth and for his native Europe is also shown as he hears Father Vaillant's new bells and is unwilling to awaken fully because he likes "the pleasing delusion he [is] in Rome" and later in Jerusalem (43). Jim feels considerable nostalgia for *Ántonia* and sees her as a

"sustaining ideal" (Stout 72); he sees her so much as a symbol of their childhood (226) that he is unable to have the erotic dreams about her that he has about Lena, although he tries (144). Clement Sebastian wishes Lucy Gayheart will "dream of something very nice," like that the two of them "are both twenty, and are taking a walking trip in the Alps" (86). When Thea Kronborg has become successful, her dreams nostalgically view her early life; in "sleep [. . .] she went back to [memories] and held them to her heart" (427). Her life has become "full of jealousies and disappointments"; she thus returns in her dreams to Moonstone (458) and is able during a period of insomnia to get to sleep by mentally tracing her way through the house (422-3). For two characters, however, remembrance of youth is painful: in "his sleep [Bartley Alexander's] mind went back and tortured itself with something years and years away, an old, long-forgotten sorrow of his childhood" (119); Myra Henshawe tells Nellie she had "been dreaming [she] was young, and the sorrows of youth had set [her] crying" (79). Perhaps because such a consistent reverence for the past is a pervasive part of the temperaments of many characters, these scenes are included in the book without commentary or reflection by the characters.

Cather's characters also have a series of anxiety dreams and nightmares. In each case, these anxieties and terrors are well known to the dreamer in her or his waking life. Inclusion of the dreams provides little additional information about the character, but it does provide additional emphasis for anxieties and preoccupations. Henry Colbert, Sapphira's husband, has been warned of Martin's designs on Nancy, and "sometimes in his sleep that preoccupation with Martin [. . .] came over him like a black spell" (209). Claude Wheeler awakens from a dream in which he is trapped forever as a farmer in Nebraska (349). Lucy is afraid to go to sleep, for she remembers nights when she struggled in her dreams to rescue Sebastian from drowning (157-8); her sister, Pauline, is awakened in the night by a "cry of fright, [. . .] a cry of pleading and terror" coming from Lucy's bedroom. Lucy is emotionally tortured during the day and fears a heightened awareness of her pain in her dreams. Thea early loses a musical competition to Lily Fisher, a bland Moonstone girl, and dreams of holding a shell to her ear and hearing "distant voices calling 'Lily Fisher! Lily Fisher!'" (64). Her most stressful dreams, however, are ones upon which she acts.

Several characters make major changes in their lives as a result of anxiety dreams. These dreams support dominant waking feelings, and neither characters nor readers are surprised by the characters' actions. Although Thea usually thinks of her hometown as mediocre, she briefly believes before going to Germany that the cost of art will be too high and thinks she will return to Moonstone; however, she is dissuaded from doing so in a dream in which a series of nightmarish images appear before her: she beats her pupils, sings at funerals, hears the shrieking of trains coming in and out of town, admires herself in a hand-glass only to have the image change to Ray Kennedy's face and then to Fred Ottenburg's, struggles with the daughter of her enemy —

and wakes up and leaves for Germany. In *Shadows on the Rock*, Blinker, once a torturer, has a horror of the forest because "he had been warned in a dream that he would be taken prisoner and tortured by Indians" (16); he takes his dream seriously and stays away from the forest. Nancy, slave girl of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, is so possessed by her fear of Martin Colbert that she even fakes bad dreams and fakes hearing Sapphira call out to her in order to escape from Martin's attentions. These dreamers dream of emotions that they already feel in their waking hours; the preoccupations and anxieties of conscious life disturb their sleep and result in waking actions. These dreams provide emphasis to characterization, but readers gain little new insight about characters in the dreams just catalogued. They are a dominant device for underscoring known aspects of character, but neither characters nor readers are startled by their content.

Cather also uses dreams as a vehicle for providing readers with information unknown to or unassimilated by the characters. In these dreams, characters are given vital clues, or even direct statements, about their characters and relationships, yet the characters make no interpretations of the dreams at all and remain as clueless about their natures as they were before the dreams. The self-knowledge the dreams might have afforded is completely lost on the characters. While Godfrey St. Peter thinks that "when he [is] not at work, or being actively amused, he [goes] to sleep [. . . and that] he has no twilight stage" (263), two important potential revelations occur as St. Peter lies in bed in exactly this state. St. Peter believes he loves his wife Lillian and that their estrangement is due to her withdrawal rather than to his, and he sincerely tells her at the opera that they "should have been picturesquely shipwrecked together." He shares this thought with her and is "amaze[d]" that she has "often [. . .] thought of that" (78). When he is in bed "still play[ing] with the idea of a picturesque shipwreck, [. . .] he cast about for the particular occasion he would have chosen for such a finale. Before he went to sleep he found the very day, but *his wife was not in it*. Indeed, nobody was in it but himself" (79; emphasis added). Cather jarringly juxtaposes the two scenes only a hundred words from each other: a supposedly desired relationship with Lillian, apparently at the exclusion of all other human contact, to the actual fantasy in which his wife does not appear. The scene offers a great revelation to readers of St. Peter as an isolate, yet the professor contemplates this possible self-knowledge not at all; indeed, he is "woefully imperceptive" (Doane, "In Defense" 302) about himself. Cather leaves the scene entirely unfurnished and makes no comment on it, moving immediately to a dinner party Louie has arranged. Few readers would miss the dream's significance, and few would not realize that St. Peter lacks significant knowledge of himself, even if this is not enumerated for us. The reader's realization is perhaps even heightened by St. Peter's lack of contemplation about so vivid and important a vision.

St. Peter's desire for isolation plays a major part in another instance: when he is in bed after being invited to go to Europe with his wife, daughter, and son-in-law, St. Peter contemplates the reasons he will give for refusing. While he actually just needs to be by himself, he attributes his refusal to the limitations of his family. He believes he does not want to visit Paris "in another person's way" and views his family negatively in order to justify his decision. St. Peter thinks that Louie alone will be hurt by the professor's not going; the next day, while Louie is sorry, and Rosie is "incredulous and piqued," it is Lillian who

looks "at him with thoughtful disbelief" and proceeds to talk to him very earnestly and extensively about his isolation (141-3). The chapter closes with the conversation between Lillian and Godfrey, and readers realize St. Peter has again wrongly blamed Lillian for his isolation without realizing his own nature as an isolate. In this waking vision, as with the shipwreck scene, St. Peter's self view is placed next to its actuality, completely without authorial comment—and without even a moment's thought given to the contradictions of the scene by the character.

Claude Wheeler also has a dream whose significance he might valuably contemplate. As with Godfrey St. Peter's dream, readers readily realize self-knowledge could come from the scene, but Claude does not. Claude, an idealist full of illusions who is "ignorant of himself [. . .] and unsure and distrustful of his own feelings" (Rosowski 98), chooses the cold Enid Royce as his fiancée. While he abstractly values the senses, he does not realize he has a "sharp disgust for sensuality" (51). However, in a dream, he discovers he has "no clothes on at all" while he is talking with Enid and tries to cover himself with castor bean leaves, "like Adam in the garden." He "talk[s] commonplaces with Enid through chattering teeth, afraid lest at some moment she might discover his plight" (137). More significant than a possible interpretation of the dream is the fact that Claude makes no interpretation of it at all, and his next thoughts are of his mother's and Mahailey's weight loss during threshing season. Claude sees the dream only as one of a series of "all sorts of incongruous adventures [that] happened to him between the time the alarm clock rang and he roused himself enough to shut it off" (137). While the dream is not as easily interpreted as is St. Peter's, readers are immediately aware that it is the kind of dream that stays with a person and begs for rumination and hypotheses about its importance. Most readers of the scene are perplexed by Claude's lack of contemplation of it and realize—even if he does not—how little he knows himself.

Readers frequently are touched by the scene with Sada and Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, but Cather probably has set up, without commentary, a situation that may imply judgment on Latour's inaction. Latour "lying in his bed, unable to sleep, [has a] sense of failure clutching at his heart" (211). He believes his prayers are "empty words," his soul a "barren field," and his work "superficial." He goes to the church and sees an old captive, Sada, and has a transforming experience as he views the Church through her simple eyes. He experiences "peace in his soul" (219) and even "is able to re-experience religious ecstasy" (Stouck 145). He achieves a "transcendental insight emerging out of the ordinary moment" (Reynolds 12) but apparently does not believe that his "esthetic lif[e] [is . . .] dependent on [his] actions in the everyday world" (Doane, "Bishop" 66) and has no view at all that he should do anything significant to help this woman's earthly life. Cather includes in this section, without comment, that Sada's captors "had no legal title to her" (214), and the section preceding this touching story ends with how greatly Magdalena has changed since fleeing from Buck Scales. Placed abutting each other are Magdalena, the Bishop's sense of failure, the lack of title to Sada, an implied knowledge on the part of readers that the Bishop could act, and the beautiful transformation and sense of peace for the Bishop—a sense of peace purchased by observing someone Latour could help significantly but does not. Cather simply juxtaposes and does not comment, but this scene that begins with a sense of sleepless failure and moves to deep peace for the Bishop leaves readers

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with a conviction that Latour should have done more. That Latour has no such belief marks him as lacking a knowledge readers have that he could change social evils if he chose to do so. The scene with Latour is only peripherally related to sleep and dreams since it simply begins with Latour's sleeplessness, but it is consistent with the presentation of other dreams where characters could gain self-knowledge but do not. Dreams are interpreted by "suggestion rather than enumeration" ("Démeublé" 48), yet most readers reach toward much more insight about the dreams' content than do these three rather obtuse characters.

In three more dreams or dream sequences, characters gain insights conspicuously denied to readers. Undoubtedly the most famous dream in Cather is Alexandra's recurring vision of "being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by someone very strong" (207). The dream carries directions for interpretation that are atypical for Cather's dreams, yet some aspects remain cryptic and unsatisfying. This "fancy" takes place not in sleep but in a pre-sleep state when Alexandra "lay late abed [. . .] luxuriously idle, her eyes closed" (119); presumably, although this vision has "persisted throughout her girlhood," she has some degree of control over its content. When we are first introduced to this fancy, we are given more directions for its interpretation than we get for most other dreams. Some aspects of the fancy are definitely stated or are easily interpreted: the figure is a "man" who "carries her lightly" and is "very strong." Readers are directed away from any Nebraska male to figures of more mythic proportions by direct statements: "he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter." We are further directed to see this figure as the personification of a figure from nature by his identification with "the smell of ripe cornfields" and by his carrying Alexandra "swiftly across the fields." We are further directed towards at least a somewhat sexual interpretation since Alexandra is "angry with herself" for having the dream and "prosecute[s] her bath with vigor, finishing it by pouring buckets of cold well-water over her gleaming white body" (107). When this vision recurs after the deaths of Emil and Marie, Cather both emphasizes its importance to Alexandra and omits transitions and links needed for readers to feel confident in interpreting it. While Alexandra sees the man's face clearly, readers—frustratingly—are never told who he is. *She* knows at once that it was the "arm of the mightiest of all lovers," and *she* knew "at last for whom it was she had waited and where he would carry her," and *she* knows that all of this "[is] very well." Alexandra has knowledge completely denied readers, who are left puzzled or left defending interpretations that do not fully account for all parts of the dream. Yet, the most baffling thing is that she concludes, after several days of rest, that she must go see Frank Shabata. Frank Shabata? How could he possibly be the resolution to such a powerful, life-long vision? Fragments of the dream are offered without interpretation to readers, although the dream in its entirety is known to the character, and its interpretation is also clear to her. Alexandra and Cather later tantalize and confound readers by adding one more piece of information: Alexandra's "illusion" (165), she tells Carl, "will never come true, now, in the way [she] thought it might" (179). In this waking vision, readers are presented with cryptic fragments and

are denied the knowledge the character has and thus the reasons she might interpret the dream as she does. The action fostered by the dream leaves readers incredulous.

A character's interpretation of another dream leaves readers equally puzzled. The Count de Frontenac also has a clarity denied readers about the meaning of a life-changing dream and acts upon it in an enigmatic way. He fears in an "ominous" (Lee 307) dream that death comes for the Count. A giant is outside the house, and the Count—a boy in the dream—knows he must keep the giant from getting in. Even though the boy bolts the door against the giant, he realizes there are other doors and windows to the house (244). Terrified, the Count wakes up and is so shaken that he must lie in bed, "recovering from his dream" (245). In an "opposition between childhood faith and adult disappointment" (Lee 305), he believes the house in his dream to be one from his childhood, he reminisces about the nurse who loved him dearly there, and moves to a belief that this nurse loved him more dearly than any woman has since then (245-6). From a dream about giants chasing him, he moves to thoughts of being loved and of unloving women, and then concludes that a "dream of such peculiar vividness signified a change in himself" (246). He believes he will die in the next few months and resolves to make his will that day (246). It is reasonable for an aging man to interpret a pursuing giant as Death, but it is unclear to readers if the Count actually does this. If we were, the action in writing his will would seem reasonable, but we are guided instead to the Count's childhood house, not the giant. He moves in thought from the house to his nurse, to not being well loved by other women. He decides to write his will because the "peculiar vividness" of the dream signaled a "change." Making a will seems like a more reasonable outcome than seeing Frank Shabata, but the Count's musings and thought processes are known only to him and are at least somewhat puzzling to readers.

When a statement made during sleep is interpreted for readers, it is immediately clear that the interpretation is limited or completely inaccurate. Set apart from the dreams themselves is the stark pronouncement made by Myra Henshawe as she sleeps. Although not actually a dream, this "terrible Judgment" probably could not have been spoken in a fully awake state even by Myra. Nellie hears the indictment Myra utters "upon all one hopes for": "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?" Nellie believes Myra's enemy is Oswald, but it is immediately clear that Myra may well be speaking of herself, of Nellie, or of any or many vicissitudes of life; or, Cather may be passing judgment on all three major characters (Skaggs 110). When something close to a dream is actually interpreted, Nellie's views are far from authoritative. The meaning of the pronouncement remains as enigmatic as if no one interpreted it at all.

Some dreams are understood by characters but enigmatic to readers; in others, readers well understand revealing dreams that characters fail to connect to their perceived views of self; and in others, dreams are a detail emphasizing aspects of character known to readers and known to characters. Dreams are a dominant detail in revealing or emphasizing character, yet they are remarkable for how little explanation and interpretation surrounds them. Dreams—dropped into the novels usually without interpretation—emerge as a truly unfurnished element in characterization, a detail which helps "present [. . .] by suggestion rather than enumeration" ("Démeublé" 48), a detail no one could accuse of being "killed by tasteless amplitude" (51), but a detail which adds greatly to Cather's presentation of character.

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The Goddess Within: Artistic and Spiritual Awakening in Cather's *The Song of the Lark*

By Nancy R. Wurzel

"The story set out to tell of an artist's awakening and struggle; her floundering escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance."

—Willa Cather¹

"It was in his sentimental conception of women that they should be deeply religious, though men were at liberty to doubt and finally to deny. A picture called "The Soul Awakened," popular in Moonstone parlors, pretty well interpreted Ray's idea of woman's spiritual nature."

—Willa Cather²

Readers as diverse as H.L. Mencken and Marilyn Berg Callander have compared *The Song of the Lark* to a fairy tale. The magical transformation of a naive village girl to an international star supports such readings and accounts for much of the novel's appeal.³ Attracting increasing critical regard, *Song* is also regarded as a female *k nstlerroman* and quest novel, breaking new ground on each front. Yet *Song* is more daring in subtle ways that help account for its elusive power. In her preface to *The Kingdom of Art*, Bernice Slotte observes: "There has always been something more [in Willa Cather's art] beyond the pages, something we could not quite put our fingers on, or define. There still is, for that matter" (viii). Indeed, much of Cather's impact rests in her mythic imagination and the layers of symbol, allegory, legend, and myth alluded to and created in each text. Although Cather's use of classic myth has been extensively examined, Cather studies would be enriched by exploring the patterns of regeneration immanent in ancient goddess mythology. These patterns can be observed in Cather's fiction, particularly early novels such as *Song*.

As Marija Gimbutas, Anne Baring, Jules Cashford, and oth-

ers have shown, the goddesses of the Greeks, Romans, and Norse derived from the Great Mother Goddess of the Paleolithic age, and repeat the mythic patterns despite variations in attribute over the millenniums.⁴ For example, Aphrodite, Artemis, Athena, Hera, and Demeter all issue from the Great Goddess and partake of her qualities, but in their multiple forms have less power.⁵ In recent decades, archaeologists have uncovered many facts regarding worship of the Great Mother Goddess, but her qualities are reflected in familiar classical sources including the works of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, all of whom Cather studied.

By the Neolithic age, the Great Mother Goddess was not imagined as a person or heroic figure, but the principle of life exemplified in the observable birth/death/rebirth cycle of the seasons and agriculture. The Great Goddess's divinity was immanent in the pattern of regeneration she represented: she was imagined as the earth, the mother from which all life seems to emerge and return, and she was envisioned as female because her powers are repeated in the female body, the ability to nurture and produce life. (Apparently, early people did not recognize the male role in reproduction.⁶) Over the ages, the goddess of regeneration was pictured less abstractly, and by the classical era she was revered as Kore the seed or daughter, Demeter the mother, Persephone the wise crone — a triune goddess, or three aspects of the same immanent female principle. Often the cyclical renewal of the crone Persephone into the daughter Kore was dissolved into one image, and the life-cycle was portrayed simply in terms of the mother Demeter and the daughter, Kore or Persephone.⁷

The myth of Demeter most particularly repeats the pattern of regeneration immanent in the primal myth and offers a theoretic-

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cal context for examining Thea Kronborg's melded artistic and spiritual awakening.⁸ Just as the tales of Odysseus and Oedipus underpin much modernist writing, the Demeter myth resonates in Cather's fiction, and provides new language to explore Thea's creativity, spirituality, and sexuality.⁹ By depicting Thea's awakening in the framework of woman-centered myth, Cather challenges hierarchal dualisms restricting the female principle to body/nature/carnality and reserving mind/spirit/transcendence for the male principle. (Female and male principle in this context are not necessarily limited to woman and man, but bear implications in the way women and men perceive themselves and others.¹⁰) Indeed, the Demeter myth valorizes the female role in pro/creation by exalting mystery, fertility, and process. It offers a heroic paradigm for women, and provides metaphorical language for exploring female power and renewal. Connectedness to the land lifts Thea from her modernist malaise and inspires her spiritual and artistic awakening in a womb-like landscape. In addition, female myth provides Cather the opportunity to encode homoerotic desire in lyrical renderings of nature.¹¹ For example, Cather suggests that Thea experiences greater passion in regard to the erotically female landscape than she does for her steadfast beau. It is through identification with nature as another female self that Thea finds inspiration for her art, and fulfillment for her body and soul. Named as a goddess and appearing as one on stage, Thea represents the pattern of regeneration immanent in the cycle of Kore, Demeter, and Persephone.¹²

As the novel opens, Thea is Kore/Persephone the "seed," nurtured by multiple parents. Enhanced by myth and metaphor, Cather's intense concentration on "Friends of Childhood" confers allegorical import to the simple tale.¹³ Much has been written regarding the contributions of Thea's de facto fairy godparents to her artistic development:¹⁴ the room of her own granted by Thea's mother, faith in humanity's inherent goodness from Dr. Archie, passion for beauty from Wunsch, joy in self-expression from Spanish Johnny, but most significant perhaps is the gift of Ray Kennedy, who teaches Thea about the culture of the Native American cliff dwellers. When he asserts that "their women were their artists" (116), he unknowingly grants her the foremothers who will be so vital to her artistic awakening. In addition, Ray treats Thea to picnics in the neighboring sand hills, the magic of which anticipate Panther Canyon, the site of her artistic birth.

In this mythical tale, Thea thus proceeds from the small town to the big city equipped only with her gifts of love—all directed toward her artistic and spiritual awakening. Like Olive Fremstad, on whose career the novel is loosely based, Thea has grown-up with few opportunities for "artistic stimulus," so it is no surprise that attendance at Dvorak's *From the New World*, with its title suggestive of birth, stirs in Thea memories of her native sand hills and portrays for her "the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands" (199), suggesting as in *O Pioneers!* the sensate quality of the landscape. The music awakens in Thea "first memories, [of] first mornings long ago; the amazement of a new soul in a new world; a soul new and yet old, that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall" (199). The music stimulates an intuition of a

collective inheritance of desire and struggle, of birth and rebirth, and Thea's quest accrues dignity and consequence by participating in a timeless tribal endeavor.

In Cather's novels a pattern emerges: she postulates a state of noncorporeal consciousness (as opposed to a locale—heaven or hell) experienced before birth and after death. In moments of heightened awareness, characters might perceive impressions of that consciousness to lengthen their heritage and strengthen their spirits. For example, in *O Pioneers!* Alexandra Bergson also speaks of "the dark, before you were born" (281), as she meditates on death. Thus Cather's rendition of the cyclical nature of consciousness conforms to the life-cycle pattern immanent in goddess mythology, for consciousness replicates the cycles of the seasons and the moon, and everything that dies enriches the next generation; nothing is ever truly lost.

Like Thea's childhood visits to the sand hills with Ray, the afternoon at the symphony anticipates Thea's awakening in Panther Canyon, but Thea's inspired moment occurs in a crowded city. In nature, Cather's heroes can often extend the joy of their epiphanies, but in returning from the concert, Thea senses "the brutality and power" of the masses (200), and she feels that the men she encounters tarnish her sublime moment by making advances. Yet she determines, "As long as she lived that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it, work for it, die for it, but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height . . ." (201). In this flash of conviction, conversion, revelation, that which Wunsch called the "unconscious and unawakened" in Thea begins to blossom despite her prolonged quest for artistic identity.

Indeed, the contrast between the splendor Thea glimpses and the quotidian she endures depresses rather than inspires her. She despairs of ever making progress. Her faith in herself and humanity at low ebb, she experiences the dark night of the soul before her pilgrimage to Panther Canyon. However, once she surrenders to the regenerative embrace of nature in the pine forests of the Navajos, her spirit begins to heal. She loves the "inexorable reserve," and feels "[e]ach tree has its exalted power to bear" (295). Her failures and aspirations diminish in the sun and sand, "the earliest sources of gladness that she could remember" (296).

Definitively characterized by Ellen Moers "as the most thoroughly elaborated female landscape in literature" (258), Panther Canyon provides the setting for Thea's mystical revelation:

The dead city lay at the point where the perpendicular outer wall ceased and the V-shaped inner gorge began. There a stratum of rock, softer than those above, had been hollowed out by the action of time until it was like a deep groove running along the sides of the canyon. In this hollow (like a great fold in the rock) the Ancient People had built their houses of yellowish stone and mortar. (297)

Within the giant womb of the cliff dwellers' city, Thea selects a cozy cave of her own, a re-creation of her childhood room, the place she first heard her inner voice. During her marvelously indolent days, she experiences a meditative, sensuous, nonverbal music. Music as heat, as color, as sound, as "an act of remembering" (300) continues the awakening initiated by *From the New World*. Rather than dissociating higher awareness from the body, as would be the case in a logos-centered epistemology (in which spiritual power is associated with the male principle as opposed to the female principle), Cather imagines the body as a conduit for intuition and knowledge. Donna Wilshire terms this

consciousness the “ability to unfocus,” to perceive as much as possible without centering on specifics. The value is that “being temporarily out-of-focus and in-ignorance . . . move[s] one from ‘controlling’ the status-quo to ‘allowing change,’ the ‘allowing’ attitude enabling one to move from an insoluble difficulty onto the edge of discovery” (98). Indeed, in the silences of the canyon and the sounds of its creatures, Thea develops instinctive feelings about the Ancient People, especially the women, intuitions informed by her childhood lessons regarding the sand hills. Henry Biltmer, the caretaker, explains to Thea the centrality of water in the life of the Ancient People. Food was the responsibility of the men and water of the women; the most clever women made the vessels, the “most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself” (303).

By characterizing the stream in which Thea bathes as the “only living thing left of the drama that had been played out in the canyon centuries ago” (551), Cather validates the Ancient People’s reverence for water. In this baptismal, amniotic, living water Thea fulfills her teacher’s admonition that “[e]very artist makes [her/]himself born” (175):

One morning, as she was standing upright in the pool, splashing water between her shoulder-blades . . . something flashed through her mind that made her draw herself up and stand still . . . The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself . . . The Indian women had held it in their jars . . . In singing, one made a vessel of one’s throat and nostrils and held it on one’s breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals. (304)

In this scene that reenacts the birth process and suggests a Western American version of Botticelli’s *Venus*, Thea is born as a female artist, and she is spiritually renewed. Cather’s insistence on the female form of the landscape, repeated in the female symbol of the vessel, allows Thea participation in what Sharon O’Brien calls a “connection to feminine creativity outside the patriarchal artistic tradition” (“Mothers” 284). Adrienne Rich explains in *Of Woman Born* that in tribal cultures pottery was indeed practiced exclusively by women. She reasons that in molding vessels in her own image, the female potter “was expressing, celebrating, and giving concrete form to her experience as a creative being possessed of indispensable powers” (96-97), that is, the magic fertility that animates the life-cycle associated with the mother goddess, the power associated with Demeter.

Appropriately, the setting for Thea’s moment of greatest revelation in her melded artistic and spiritual quest is a landscape envisioned as female. In establishing Cather’s place in the romantic tradition, Susan Rosowski compares Thea’s experience to that of romantics such as Wordsworth, explaining that he could “see his own imagination as a divinely granted intuitive force corresponding in the individual to the creative imagination of God in the universe” (66). At the same time, by likening Thea’s experience in Panther Canyon to Wordsworth’s at Hawkhead, Rosowski provides an important clue for differentiating Thea’s experience from those of the male romantics. Women might not be able to read themselves into an experience of “the creative imagination of God” portrayed within a patristic tradition. Hierarchical dualisms associating the male principle with mind/reason/spirit/transcendence and the female principle with body/intuition/nature/carnality can discourage women from iden-

tifying with the mind of God rendered from a logos-centered viewpoint.¹⁵ Thus Cather’s elaboration of the womb in a female landscape as a corollary to the artistic symbol of the vessel allows a portrayal of great natural forces which could enhance women’s image of themselves. Cather dissolves the dualisms separating the female principle from spirit and foregrounds that which traditionally had been concealed as shameful—references to women’s bodies with images of birth. In discussing the importance of nature in mystical experiences described by women, Carol Christ explains that a mirroring of her own powers in nature can inspire in a woman a cosmic self-confidence, an antidote to her sense of failure (21). Within this context, Thea’s imagining her throat as a vessel symbolically reclaims women’s participation in artistic and cosmic creation.

Cather has granted to the mature Thea a conventionally happy ending in her marriage to Fred, though the flame of their youthful affair has presumably cooled. Thea’s real passion, the passion that fuels her art, is located in the spirituality and sensuousness of the erotically female setting of Panther Canyon. Thus Thea finds more than artistic tradition mirrored in the landscape: she discovers a sacred female presence, another self to extend her identity, to enliven her body and spirit.¹⁶ Given Cather’s avoidance of the direct portrayal of the female love she herself apparently enjoyed, she wrote without restraint in her erotic rendering of the feminine landscape, which offers everything to Thea—inspiration, validation, and pleasure.

Named as a goddess and triumphant in the role of Fricka, Thea is not an actual divinity. Like the other heroines of Cather’s early novels, Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda, she represents the life-cycle pattern of the mother goddess. As a child, she is Kore/Persephone, the daughter blessed by the nurturing of multiple parent-figures; as a mature artist, she is Demeter, the fertile mother, and as a wife or matron, she moves toward Persephone, the wise woman. Central to the affirmative force of the novel is the metaphorical power of regeneration Thea possesses as an artist. Whereas the deaths of her parents, Ray, and presumably Wunsch might otherwise have tragic implications, their spirits enrich Thea, and because she is an artist, their legacies are also bequeathed to her audience. As Thea intuited after hearing *From the New World*, nothing is lost, or, as in the couplet inscribed for Thea by Wunsch: “Some day, O what a miracle, on my grave/ A flower will bloom from the ashes of my heart.”¹⁷

Although in this novel, more than any other, Cather suggests the depth of emotional well-being that can be sustained in a sexual relationship between a man and a woman, Thea’s communion with the land outstrips the passion in her romance with Fred. Thus Cather undermines the conventional ending of the novel. Thea finds more artistic power and spiritual sustenance in reflection of her own being (feminine nature) than in the union of opposites (heterosexual romance), a point also consistent with ancient goddess mythology in which the dynamic pro/creative powers are envisioned as female.

Notes

¹From Cather’s preface to the 1937 Autograph Edition (originally composed for the English Travellers Library Edition published in 1932 by Jonathan Cape). See O’Brien’s notes in *Early Novels* (1329 and 1320).

²From *The Song of the Lark* (137). I have used the first (1915) edition rather than the revised (1937) edition to get a truer sense of Cather’s early portrayals of gender and myth.

³See Mencken (Review 7-8) and Callander (*Fairy* 7-18).

GODDESS WITHIN

(Continued)

⁴See Gimbutas (*Civilization* 221-305), Baring and Cashford (*The Myth of the Goddess*), and Dexter (*Whence the Goddesses*).

⁵See Dexter (*Whence the Goddess* 113, 117, 119, 121, 125, 128).

⁶For example, see Dexter (*Whence the Goddess* 4, 172).

⁷Persephone may have been an earlier name for the goddess of death.

⁸Stewart (*Mythos* 67-69) has looked briefly at the Demeter and Persephone myth in *Song*; Hively (*Sacred Fire* 69-76) has elaborated on the Eleusinian mystery rites in *My Antonia*; and O'Brien has related the mythic reunion of the mother and daughter to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (*Voice* 45). O'Brien has also noted that the myth demonstrates female power (277) and provides the basis for feminist psychoanalysis (56n).

⁹This is not to say that Cather was not also interested in Odysseus, for his story is clearly reflected in *My Antonia* and arguably in *The Professor's House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Additionally, one might contend that Cather was inspired by earth mother figures other than Demeter. However, though Gaia is a goddess of the earth and also derives from the Great Goddess, she probably predates the classical era, by which time she is primarily known as the mother of Rhea. Similarly, the principal story of earth goddess Semele depicts the birth of her son Dionysus.

¹⁰In discussing hierarchal dualisms, Wilshire notes that "maleness and femaleness in this context often have nothing to do with being a woman or a man" (Wilshire's emphasis, 95).

¹¹My thanks to Judith Fetterley for sharing this insight with me at the International Cather Seminar in Winchester, Virginia, in 1997. See also her discussion of Cather's gendered landscape and eroticized space (159-60).

¹²Concerned with the same phenomenon, Slotte describes Cather's technique with a different slant: "She works by telling a story, by translating figures to symbolic positions, with a short-cut of images and allegories" ("Kingdom" 44-45).

¹³See footnote 3 above.

¹⁴See Giannone (*Music* 86-89), Huf ("Song" 84-87), Mencken (Review 7), Peck ("Thea" 23).

¹⁵For discussions of dualistic thinking as problematic for female seekers and theologians see Christ and Plaskow (*Womanspirit* 4-5) and Christ (*Diving* 8). For a more detailed historical and theoretical explanation of the "Roots of Domination," see Ruether (72-85).

¹⁶For more discussion of this theoretical approach to lesbian identity, see Tessier and Zimmerman.

¹⁷Cather allows herself this sentimental line as long as it is attributable to someone else, in this case Friedrich von Matthisson in the poem "Adelaide." See O'Brien (*Early* 1330).

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News From The Executive Director

The invitation to a White House breakfast reception and symposium arrived in mid-August. I had an intimation it might be coming. The office of the White House social secretary had called earlier that month, requesting the names and addresses of Cather family members and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Board of Governors. The September 17 program was to be part of an ongoing White House series celebrating America's authors, and would honor three accomplished women writers—Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Mrs. Bush, an avid reader, has read Cather extensively.

While in the Washington area, I stayed with relatives. My cousins and I rose that morning at 5. My cousin Donna's husband is retired from the D.C. police force; we would rely on his traffic savvy to thread our way through the crush that is the morning commute to the heart of Washington. The White House sits on Pennsylvania Avenue, facing north. I arrived at the White House east gate at 8 a.m. After a quick check of my identification and the guest list, I was admitted. Construction work was underway at the east side of the executive mansion; a large canvas blanketed most of the east portico. Upon entering, the security check was made. It was much like that at an airport. Personal items were sent through a security scanner, and an agent conducted a body scan with an electronic wand. My cell phone tripped the sensor, but I was allowed to keep it.

I had brought a gift from the WCPM for Mrs. Bush—a paperweight with a quote from *O Pioneers!*: “The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.” I would later find that the quote had been selected for the event's program as representative of Cather's writing. A security guard relieved me of the package, and said it would be given to the First Lady. I was allowed to keep a manila envelope containing a certificate conferring Mrs. Bush an honorary membership in the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation and a copy of our latest *Newsletter and Review*, which I hoped to present to her.

I was then directed through ground level corridors—I noticed a portrait of former First Lady Barbara Bush had been given a prominent place on the south wall as I passed—to a wide staircase to the main level. Gentlemen in dress white and navy military uniforms indicated the way. Once upstairs, I was shown to a large room where other guests were gathered. Coffee, orange juice, and small pastries were being served, which the guests enjoyed as they stood and conversed. I immediately found several members of the WCPM Board of Governors, who had also been invited: Dr. John Swift (Occidental College), Dr. Mellanee Kvasnicka (chair of the English Department at Omaha South High School), Dr. John Murphy (Brigham Young University), Dr. Ann Romines (The George Washington University), Dr. Sue Rosowski (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), and Dr. Steve Shively (Northwest Missouri State University). Several Foundation members were also present.

We shared our excitement at being in the White House, chatted amiably and posed for pictures for those who had brought cameras. The conversation and photographs kept us so busy that I almost forgot to eat anything. As it was, I had a goblet of orange juice and one small pastry. Around 8:40 the uniformed aides began directing us into the East Room. The room is decorated in white and gold, with large windows on the north and south, and large portraits of George and Martha Washington on the east wall. Mrs. Washington is on the left, the General is on the right. The chairs in the first row on the right were indicated reserved, so several of us filed into the row behind. It would turn out we would be seated behind Joyce Rumsfeld, wife of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; Alma Powell, wife of the Secretary of State; Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President; and Mrs. Bush. As the other guests took their seats I noticed actor Bruce Boxleitner (of the *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* television series) taking a seat in the same row, across the aisle to the north. His wife, Melissa Gilbert, was to be one of the presenters. In all, I estimate 150 were present. A voice announced the entrance of Mrs. Cheney and Mrs. Bush, whom we stood to greet with applause.

Mrs. Bush approached the podium and invited us to be seated. She opened a padded folder to read welcoming and introductory remarks before turning the program over to a moderator. Presenters spoke from differing perspectives on the contribution to American letters made by Cather, Ferber, and Wilder. Three contemporary authors spoke of the writers' influence on their own careers. The presenters included actress Melissa Gilbert, from the cast of the *Little House on the Prairie* television series, and Patricia MacLachlan, author of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, and an uproariously funny speaker. At one point there was a brief intermission, during which Mrs. Cheney and Mrs. Bush withdrew. The break presented the opportunity to chat with Cather's niece, Catherine Cather Lowell, who had travelled from California.

At the close of the program, Mrs. Bush thanked us for coming, and once again withdrew with Mrs. Cheney. I never had the opportunity to present her with the certificate and WCPM *Newsletter and Review* I had brought. I would later mail them. It was now shortly after eleven o'clock. We lingered for a while, savoring the last moments of a special occasion, then retraced our steps down to the ground level and out the east entrance. As we exited, each guest was given a complimentary copy of *American Women: A Library of Congress Guide for the Study of Women's History and Culture in the United States*.

Outside, I made rendezvous with my cousins. I still had a few hours before my evening flight, and they took me on a driving and walking tour of the capital. I wanted to see Ford's Theatre, but it was closed for renovation. The house across the street—to which the mortally wounded President Lincoln was carried—was open, however. We saw the room where Lincoln died, and the room where Mrs. Lincoln spent an agonizing night in vigil. Later we visited the Vietnam War and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorials. It was a full day, and an unforgettable one.

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(Continued from page 59.)

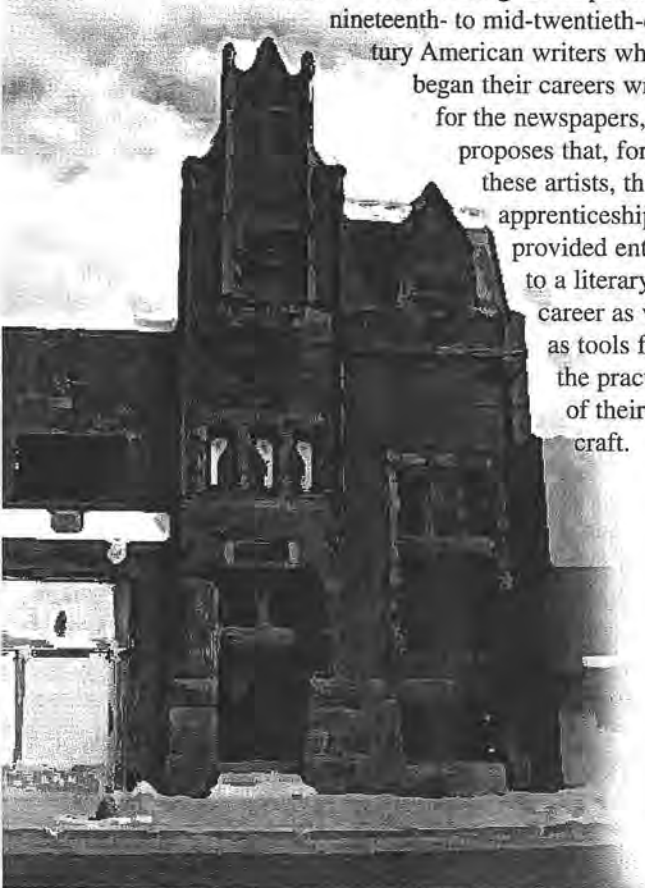
in "There Must be Something Wonderful Coming": Social Purpose and Romantic Idealism in Willa Cather's 'Behind the Singer Tower'" (pp. 110-22).

Two essays deal with the fundamental importance of Cather's experience at *McClure's Magazine*. In "It's Through Myself That I Knew and Felt Her": S.S. McClure's *My Autobiography* and the Development of Willa Cather's Autobiographical Realism" (pp. 123-42), Robert Thacker argues that the writing of *My Autobiography* was a crucial step in the development of Cather's "autobiographical realist aesthetic" which challenged conventional forms of the novel. Amy Ahearn, in "Full-Blooded Writing and Journalistic Fictions: Naturalism, the Female Artist and Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*" (pp. 143-56), proposes that Cather's journalism career put her in touch with the then-emerging school of naturalism; by adopting naturalistic conventions for *The Song of the Lark*, she self-consciously aligns herself with the Great American Novelists.

In "Compromising Realism to Idealize a War: Wharton's *The Marne* and Cather's *One of Ours*" (pp. 157-67), John J. Murphy addresses issues of character and the "unfortunate mixing of kinds" in both novels, as Wharton highlights the coincidences of comedy and Cather slips into romance. Lastly, Janis P. Stout identifies two complementary definitions of realism gleaned from Cather's letters and more formal nonfiction writing that derive from seeing: visual acuity in details in writing and "true reporting of human experience" in "Seeing and Believing: Willa Cather's Realism" (pp. 168-80).

Echoing a major theme of the Special Issue, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., in "The Newsroom and the National Letters" (*SR* 109:2, 243-53), includes Cather among the important

nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century American writers who began their careers writing for the newspapers, and proposes that, for these artists, this apprenticeship provided entrée to a literary career as well as tools for the practice of their craft.



Message from the President



Dear WCPM Members,

I recently met a young student/teacher from the Ukraine, in Omaha with other Ukrainian educators as a part of an exchange program. I was fortunate enough to meet Natalye because of her abiding interest in Willa Cather. She hopes to do post-graduate work comparing Cather to several Ukrainian writers. As we talked, I was

struck again, as I often am in unexpected ways, by the power of Cather's work. One of Natalye's favorite scenes in Cather is from *My Ántonia* when Jim visits the garden and leans against the pumpkins and is "entirely happy." "It might as well have been in the Ukraine," Natalye told me. "Cather writes about my country." And that, of course, is the point. Cather crosses boundaries of time and class and geography to portray us as human beings, making connections far deeper than ideology or language or ethnicity.

I've been thinking about Natalye as I assume the presidency of the WCPM. The WCPM is also in the business of crossing boundaries and making connections. The Opera House is near completion and as we work to fund an endowment to assure that the world will continue to know Cather as Natalye does, I feel both humility and pride. Much has been done in partnership with the Red Cloud community and our Cather network all over the world, and I am proud of the work we have done. But I also feel keenly the charge to continue the work so ably done by others. There is, I think, a responsibility to all those like Natalye who read Cather and see themselves and their own places. In a world which allows us to communicate in seconds, we are sometimes still alone in the dark. We need Cather to remind us how much we are alike, how much we share the same planet, how much we need to feel connected to our respective communities. I look forward to the exciting work which continues, and I invite you to join us or maintain your partnership with the WCPM.

Mellanee Kvasnicka
WCPM President

Letters to the WCPM

I'm very glad to know that WCPM has been contributing so much to bring light on Willa Cather and her works.

As I carried out Ph.D. research work on Willa Cather from Banaras Hindu University, India (1994-99), with the topic "Feminist Concerns in the Novels of Willa Cather" and was awarded Ph.D. degree by the University in 1999, I'm very much interested in Willa Cather and the works relevant to her. During my research period, I could study many reports and publications of your Center that really helped me to complete my study. I could get these materials from the then American Studies Research Center (ASRC), Hyderabad, India. I am a lecturer in English in one of the Women's Colleges of Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

I'm very happy to say that many of our M.A. English students are carrying out dissertation works on Willa Cather. I am also planning to translate *My Ántonia* in Nepali so that many Nepali readers can read it.

With best regards,
Gajab Kumari Sharma (Timilsina)
Maitidevi, Kathmandu
Nepal
via e-mail

Hello, Nebraska!

I'm really enjoying your webpage. It has been a tremendous help for me so far! I'm a German student working on the thesis for my Master's Degree in American Studies at the Bonn University. My title is "Modernism and New Mexico Culture Indian Hispanic culture in the work of Marsden Hartley, Willa Cather, and Georgia O'Keeffe."

Greetings from Germany
Sabine Bussemas
Bonn, Germany
via e-mail



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May 25 |
| Robin Harrell & Peter Lainson
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April 13 | Gina Brazell
<i>Cabaret show</i>
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April 25 | Children's Art
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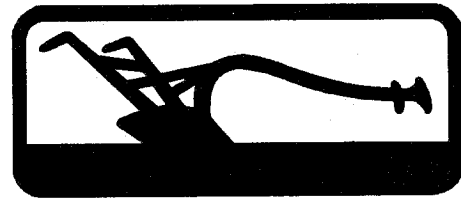
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Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography*.



**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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Those of us who care about the literary legacy of Willa Cather have been looking forward to the re-opening of the restored Red Cloud Opera House because of its formative influence in Cather's early life and because it will be instrumental in continuing public understanding of and scholarly work on Cather. Three donors were particularly important in making possible the historic restoration of the Red Cloud Opera House.

This project would not have been possible without the generosity of the Frisbie estate. The Peter Kiewit Foundation of Omaha gave the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation a \$200,000 challenge grant in 1997. Lucia Woods Lindley's generous \$250,000 contribution was a leading gift toward the beautiful restoration designed by Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects of Omaha.

Another important contribution came from Bob Gottsch who chal-

lenged Red Cloud and surrounding Webster County to match his gift of \$45,000. Webster County and Red Cloud have responded by buying Opera House chairs at \$150 each. As of this printing, 75 chairs have been sold. If you would like to help furnish the Red Cloud Opera House, please send your contribution today to: WCPM, 413 North Webster Street, Red Cloud, NE 68970. *(The chair donors are reflected in this listing, not names as are to appear on our chair recognition plaque.)*

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is enormously grateful to the donors to the Red Cloud Opera House renovation. We also appreciate those who donated \$99 or less to support the renovation of the Red Cloud Opera House. Every gift is important. *(The following donor listing is through January 15, 2003.)*

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