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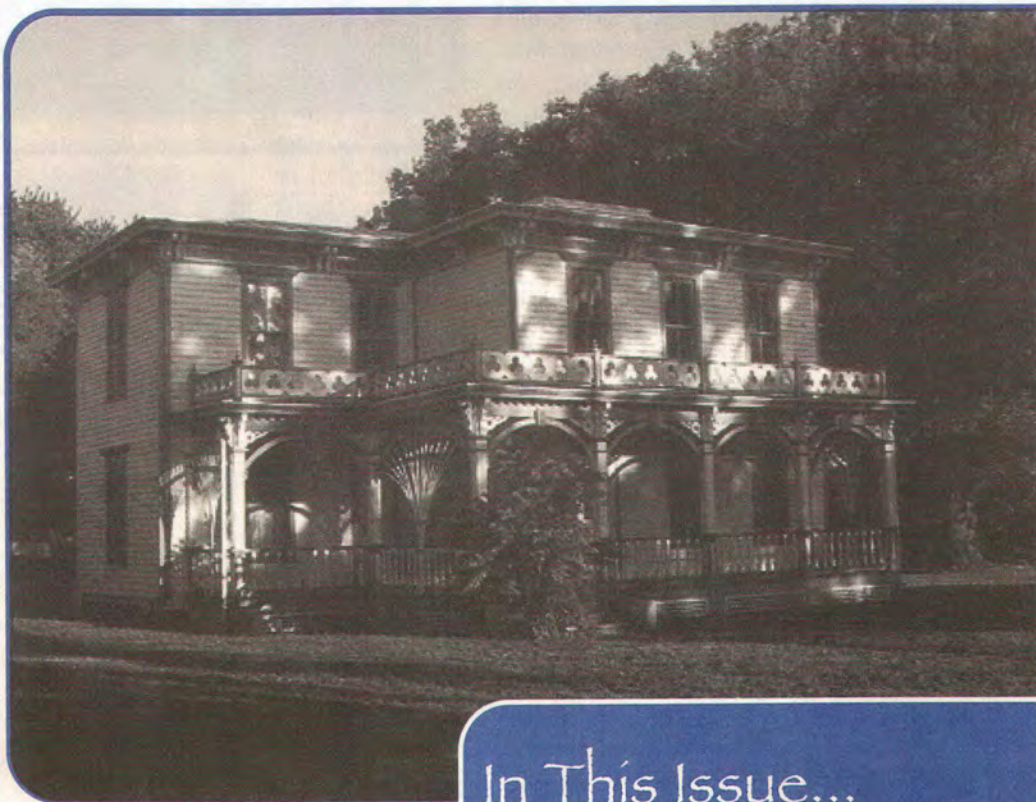
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Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970

The Miner/Harling House: A Letter from Nancy Picchi

In December of 2001, Nancy and Bernard Picchi, owners since 1990 of the Miner house at 241 North Seward in Red Cloud (the "Harling House" of My Ántonia), formally deeded the property to the Foundation. The Picchis had undertaken the renovation of the house's exterior, and Nancy Picchi—an advisory member of the WCPM Board of Governors—will continue to be involved in its interior restoration. In the excerpts that follow, drawn from her letter to the Board announcing the Picchis' decision to donate the house, Nancy describes the beginning of her thirteen-year relationship with the house and Red Cloud.—JS

[Buying the House]

I first visited Red Cloud in July, 1988, when, after decades of dreaming about visiting Willa Cather's Black Hawk, Frankfort, Sweetwater, I was finally able to find the time. My younger sister, Mary Ellen, accompanied me, and as we entered Red Cloud we felt as if we had stepped into *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady*. . . . I had called ahead from New Jersey and arranged a country tour, which was lead by Doreen Sanders, and afterwards had the chance to meet Mildred Bennett, whose book I had used as a reference back in college in 1968. Mildred asked us to accompany her on a guided tour of the buildings the WCPM had restored in Red Cloud.



—Photo by Mike Offner

When I complimented Mildred on the outstanding work she and her small band had accomplished, she answered, "There's more to be done, and I think you're a person who could help." Then, as we walked by the Harling House, Mildred pointed to it and said that Jennie Miner Reiher, the owner, who had been the granddaughter of the original owners, had died that past spring and that her sons, Charles and Robert Reiher, had decided to sell the house. Mildred urged me to buy the house and to restore it. She was very

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concerned that someone without historical respect would purchase it and either tear it down or remodel it beyond recognition. I laughed at her suggestion and pointed out the absurdity of us doing so.

Mildred and I started a lively correspondence that fall, much of it

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News From The Executive Director



I had the privilege of speaking January 14 to the Hastings Cather Club. Dr. Darrel Lloyd and Betty Kort have done a fine job of cultivating new friends for the WCPM. They invited Dr. Steve Shively of Northwest Missouri State University to speak April 14 in St. Mark's Episcopal Pro-Cathedral in Hastings. He spoke on Cather's spiritual journey and her coming to the Episcopal faith.

I was glad for the invitation to meet with the Nebraska Literature Association Board in Lincoln February 20. They do such good work promoting Nebraska writers, and have a keen interest in our activities in Red Cloud.

It was good seeing a number of you at the symposium on Willa Cather and World War I in Lincoln in early April, so well-organized by Dr. Sue Rosowski and Margie Rine. There were a number of fine papers and presentations. A lucky contingent came to Webster County April 7 to enjoy the tour our guide, Nancy Sherwood, planned around sites significant to *One of Ours*.

Renovation continues on schedule at the Opera House. A number of committee meetings have been held to determine programming and policies. We can hardly wait for the return of *The Bohemian Girl* to its stage, when the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music brings it lavish, stirring production to Red Cloud November 30 and December 1. (I saw a performance in the Kimball Hall at UN-L April 6, and it is a spectacle.) We hope to see you there! It will be the beginning of a memorable opening season coordinated by the very capable Stephany Thompson of Hastings.



Scholarly Contributors to this Issue

John P. Anders is the author of *Willa Cather's Sexual Aesthetics and the Male Homosexual Tradition* (1999). In "On Film and Beyond: Willa Cather and Greta Garbo," he goes beyond Cather's famous distaste for film to explore similarities in Cather's and Garbo's aesthetics of performance, summoning a compelling imaginative vision of an artistic "collaboration" that never occurred.

Leona Sevick is currently completing a Ph.D. in English at the University of Maryland. Reading *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in the contexts of American Catholicism's history and early twentieth-century "neurasthenia," she suggests that Bishop Latour's refined aestheticism may simultaneously (and paradoxically) critique and serve the modern American economic culture that Cather explicitly detested.

Merrill Maguire Skaggs teaches at Drew University. She is the author of *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* (1990) and many essays on American literature. Her essay—part of a large research project on Cather and William James—traces the effects of James's psychological writings on Cather's literary theory and practice, particularly as she expounded it in "The Novel D meubl e."

CATHER CALENDAR

2002

November 30 & December 1

1885 Red Cloud Opera House Grand Re-Opening
Red Cloud



2003

May 2 & 3

48th Annual Willa Cather Spring Festival
Theme: Willa Cather and Children/Childhood
Core Texts:
My  ntonia, *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 Leaf, Vermont

On Film and Beyond: Willa Cather & Greta Garbo

John P. Anders, Lincoln, Nebraska

In December, 1935, Cather met for the first time her young English friend Stephen Tennant when he visited her at her Park Avenue apartment. Drawing on Tennant's unpublished journals, his biographer writes that "[t]hey spoke of the West, and how, for Cather, the film industry has spoiled California. Stephen evinced his high opinion of Greta Garbo, but the stern authoress denied Garbo's intelligence. 'She can't be . . . or she wouldn't be a film actress. To waste the best years of one's life on trash like that'" (qtd. in Hoare 212).¹

This offhand remark perhaps says more about Cather and the movies than it does about Cather and Garbo. Still, Cather's hostility is curious, especially remembering her positive comments in the past on the subject of art and artists. "If a man gives good work to the world he should at least be allowed the privilege of choosing his own method," she once declared (*WP* 127). Cather now had only contempt for the art of film, and, sadly, heaped it upon its finest practitioner.

No record, to my knowledge, exists of Cather and Garbo ever meeting, but Garbo's movies played anywhere and everywhere Cather would have been during the twenties and thirties, especially New York City. But did Cather ever go to the movies? Although not a burning question in Cather scholarship, it is, nonetheless, a subject shrouded in myth and misconception—she hated movies, prohibited her books being made into movies, was locked in the past and as reclusive as Garbo herself. While some of this is true, much is false. For instance, Cather wrote respectfully of Charlie Chaplin, leading one to believe that she saw some, if not all, of his films. She claimed also to be especially fond of Rintin-Tin. She willingly sold silent film rights to *A Lost Lady* in 1924 and seemed satisfied with the results. Only later did Cather's attitude change. After an exploitative sound version of *A Lost Lady* in 1934, a film vehicle for Barbara Stanwyck, Cather added a codicil to her will banning film adaptations of her fiction to extend into eternity.

What would Cather have seen had she seen a Garbo film? Garbo's reign as supreme screen goddess, *stella assoluta*, can be divided into two phases: Hollywood and pre-Hollywood. Her early films were in the European cinema of Sweden and Germany, two dominant forces in the silent era. Her movies, *The Saga of Gösta Berling* (1924), adapted from the novel by Selma Lagerlöf, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and *The Street of Sorrows* (1925), directed by G. W. Pabst, were part of the evolution of the silent film into an authentic art form. Garbo brought these experiences, and, one might add, expectations, to an already commercialized Hollywood, one which became the source of her frustrations and, paradoxically, her greatest success. For while her MGM movies were often embarrassingly bad, Garbo was nearly always outstanding; Garbo serious, the movies silly; she *la divina*, they dead and

forgotten.

But had Cather seen any of Garbo's early films, and perhaps she did, she would have recognized semblances to stories and subjects which deeply appealed to her—Daudet, Sappho, Sarah Bernhardt, and opera were all part of Garbo's filmography. More profoundly, Cather may have recognized in Garbo something akin to herself. Garbo brought to the screen the acting styles of Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse, the great stage tragediennes Cather and the rest of the world admired and lavishly praised. This adoration was now being laid at Garbo's deified feet. She was, critics said, "magnificent" and "incomparable," "enveloped by . . . unfathomable mystery," "emotional depth," and "tragic power." Her acting was "glorious" and "enchanting;" more importantly, it was subtle and withheld, creating on screen "an indefinable something" evocative of Cather's "thing not named."

From the beginning, the camera fixed upon Garbo's face. As Roland Barthes has noted, "Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre" (56). Nearly always working with a protective core of directors, cameramen, and technicians—she learning from them the reach of her artistry, they from her the range of their craft—Garbo helped perfect the silent film in America; ironically, the same time it was perfected, it was obsolete. Garbo waited until the new technology was equal to her talent before she spoke for the first time on film. When she did, in Eugene O'Neil's *Anna Christie* (1930), the world reveled in a voice as seductive as her face.

Here Cather would have witnessed the equivalent of today's media glare. For soon all of Garbo was being adored, nothing overlooked in audiences' attempts to comprehend her mesmerizing screen presence—her head and hair and face, her eyes, eyebrows, and eyelashes, her mouth, nose, skin and cheekbones, her hands and arms and shoulders, her walk, her legs, her feet, down to her right foot in particular—all were caught in the spotlight of unprecedented fame and fetishism. But while everything about Garbo has been scrupulously studied, Garbo herself remains inscrutable.²

Part of this mystery is Garbo's sexuality. But while biographers and biographies like to dwell on her sexual ambivalence, only heterosexuality is seen on screen. Garbo's specialty, it seems, was driving men crazy, attested to by titles like *The Torrent* (1926), *The Temptress* (1926), *Flesh and the Devil* (1927), and *Woman of Affairs* (1929).³ Later, however, Garbo's screen persona manifests some of the gender explorations of her private self. Interestingly, while Camille Paglia argues that "[a] film of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* should have been made in the Thirties, the one decade that could have caught its sexual mystery and glamour" (416-17),

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(Continued)

Parker Tyler, film critic and co-author of one of America's first openly gay novels, *The Young and Evil* (1933), confesses that Maupin is "the ideal role [he has] always dreamed of for Garbo" (26). But even though Garbo caused a sensation wearing pants in public, no such role was written for her. The closest MGM came to gender transgression was in *Queen Christina* (1933), where Garbo not only wears pants but also impersonates a man. She later asked the scriptwriter of *Conquest* (1937), a film about Napoleon's Polish mistress, to again put her character in pants and have her sneak into Napoleon's tent at night. Later in life Garbo often expressed the desire to appear in "trouser parts," and play Hamlet or Dorian Gray or male-identified women such as George Sand.

As Cynthia Griffin Wolff comments, a young Cather, like many other adolescent female fans, wore military coats, caps and other "mannish costumes" (201). So did some of the actresses they worshipped. An older Cather gave up cross-dressing, and we see her instead in shirtwaists, middy blouses, plumed hats, and ball gowns, and read in her biographies of dazzling dresses and comfortable skirts. No longer a rebel, Cather no longer needed to dress like one; no longer male-identified, Cather now looked like a successful woman. Part of this renunciation included renouncing diva worship as well.⁴

But Cather never lost interest in gender identity as a theme in life and literature, even in the movies, as her praise of Charlie Chaplin suggests. In stating her preference for plays over movies, Cather writes that movies never appeal to the emotions and deep feelings. "Never, that is, excepting Charlie Chaplin at his best—and his best—I have noticed, really gets through to very few people. Not to his enormous audience, but to actors and to people of great experience in the real drama. They admire and marvel" (*WP* 957). Thomas E. Yingling observes that "[w]e cannot ignore, of course, the marvelous suspension of gender that occurs in Chaplin's films. If not gay, their main character often exhibits behaviors that make his gender identification ambiguous (he sews, he flutters his eyelashes, he blushes, is shy and practically defenseless)" (245). This "suspension of gender" supports the possibility of a homosexual reading of Chaplin's films, and may have influenced Cather's sympathetic response to the actor.

Both Cather and Garbo are admired by lesbians and gay men alike, though not always for the same reasons.⁵ E. K. Brown comments that when growing up in Red Cloud, Cather "threw herself impetuously against the way of the majority and sought out the exceptions, the dreamers, the nonconformists, the questioners" (vii), an early bohemianism reinforcing what James Woodress considers her later "tolerance for a variety of lifestyles" (236). But while Cather had homosexual friends in New York, she seems not to have indulged in the gay life around her. No lunching with lesbians from the Left Bank, no mixing with the Village people, no camping it up in Harlem with her friend Carl Van Vechten. And while she held Friday afternoon salons, they seem tame compared to the Parisian soirées of Natalie Barney and Gertrude Stein.

Garbo's connection with contemporary gay life is one of the most fascinating things about her. She not only had gay colleagues at MGM, such as director George Cukor, costume designer Gilbert Adrian, and co-stars Nils Asther and Ramon Novarro, but Mauritz Stiller, her Svengali, had brought not only Garbo to California but his male "secretary" as well. Before their arrival in Hollywood, Stiller and Garbo had visited Berlin, and while there, half a decade or more before Christopher Isherwood, Garbo experienced Berlin's homosexual nightlife. Moving to New York, she enjoyed its lesbian clubs in the 40s, the gay enclave of Fire Island in the 60s and 70s, and Paris's notorious Tuileries into the 80s.

Garbo also had gay boyfriends, such as the nutritionist Gayelord Hauser and the society photographer Cecil Beaton. Interestingly, when Garbo visited Beaton at his home in England, he introduced her to his friend and neighbor Stephen Tennant. The meeting of these two celebrated beauties gives those of us in Cather studies pause for reflection. Tennant, as we know, admired Cather to the point of near obsession. Did he bring her into his conversation with Garbo as he once brought Garbo into his conversation with Cather? If so, Garbo may have been typically evasive, or she may have been persuaded to read Cather aloud as she once read Whitman aloud to her friends (Paris 465).⁶

But some things are easier to ascertain. In 1935, when Cather and Tennant were talking about Garbo, when Cather called the movies "trash," MGM was looking about for new projects for its star. Both *My Ántonia* and *The Song of the Lark* were considered (Paris 316); instead, Garbo filmed *Anna Karenina* (1935). While many feel Garbo's Anna is unsurpassed, I'd like to muse for a moment over those other tantalizing, though unfortunately missed, opportunities, or, to borrow a phrase from Parker Tyler, a "celebration of the might-have-been" (28).⁷

Garbo certainly would have been up to playing Thea Kronborg. She had already done the emergence of an artist theme and had been a diva on screen several times; moreover, she had firmly established herself as an artist and become something of a prima donna in real life too. Just as interesting is what Garbo could have brought to the roles, how she could have interpreted and presented the feel of Cather's novels. In reviewing Jules Breton's painting *The Song of the Lark*, Cather remarks on how viewers at the Chicago Museum of Art return year after year to see it, how the picture remains unchanged while its admirers change and alter. In a sense, this is exactly Garbo's enduring appeal. Retiring from the movies when she did, Garbo never grows old on screen, her image never changes, never fades.⁸

And isn't this also the phenomenon of *My Ántonia*? In fact, Breton's painting is as much a model for Ántonia as it is for Thea—Ántonia is the peasant girl awakening to her domestic artistry. She has her circle of admirers, as does Jim's wife. They leave but always come back, as do the patrons of the Chicago Museum of Art, while Ántonia, for the most part, stays in one place, like Breton's painting. Perhaps no Cather text is more Garboesque and un-Garboesque at the same time than *My Ántonia*; nor does one more nearly anticipate a "Greta Garbo." While Ántonia, "battered but not diminished" (332), would perhaps be the antithesis of Garbo, Lena Lingard would be her apotheosis. In her interpretation

of *My Ántonia* as a lesbian novel, Judith Fetterley feels that although Cather was forced to distance herself emotionally from her narrative, she was unable totally to renounce her love of women. In particular, Cather's sensual description of Lena Lingard shows "the strength of her resistance to renouncing her lesbian sensibility" (Fetterley 159).

In its lesbian subtext, Garbo's *Queen Christina* closely resembles *My Ántonia*. "Garbo," writes Barry Paris, "was the first to touch the erotic depths of men and women everywhere, crossing all national and cultural boundaries" (235). Indeed, it was Garbo's relationship with Mercedes de Acosta which inspired and encouraged her to play the part of Sweden's queen. And like Cather's novel, that movie is subject to radical revisions: "I want a *Queen Christina*," implores Lillian Faderman, "in which Greta Garbo is in love not with a totally implausible Spanish ambassador but with her lady-in-waiting, Ebba Sparre (who really was the great love in the life of the Swedish monarch)" (72).

The real touchstone to similarities between Cather and Garbo is *Camille*. Readers of Cather know that this story by Dumas *fils* runs throughout her fiction, from "Paul's Case" to *My Ántonia* to *A Lost Lady* as well. Cather read the book, saw and reviewed the play, heard the opera. The story of the "lady of the camellias" informs her fiction at many turns, colors her views about luxury and loss, romantic love and renunciation. And for any follower of Marguerite Gautier, Garbo's performance is definitive, what critics call her "gift to film":

The incomparable Greta Garbo has returned to the screen in a breathtakingly beautiful and superbly modulated portrayal of *Camille*. As the tragic Dumas heroine, she floods a romantic museum piece with glamour and artistry, making it a haunting and moving photoplay by the sheer magic of her acting. It was not my good fortune to witness the great Eleanora Duse in the play, but I have seen many other illustrious actresses in French and English versions, and none have remotely matched Miss Garbo . . . (Zierold 184).

How, one wonders, could Cather resist such an acclaimed screen presence, especially when one recalls her youthful enthusiasm for the aging and weighty Clara Morris? Cather herself provides the best answer we have. "[O]nly living people can make us feel," she wrote in 1929. "Pictures of them, no matter how dazzling, do not make us feel anything more than interest or curiosity or astonishment" (WP 956).

But to my mind we missed a rare opportunity in not

having Garbo portray Alexandra Bergson on film. She would have brought something distinctive to that role as she did to Marguerite Gautier. Her similarity to Alexandra is awesome; her Swedish background, her enigmatic sexuality, her father's death when she was a teenager, all would have enhanced her portrayal with sympathetic understanding. And who better than Garbo to embody Alexandra's "exalted serenity" (OP 308)? Even as a child Garbo was pensive and aloof, alone under the kitchen table staring into space (Paris 10). This image is refined in the final shot of *Queen Christina*, called by some "one of the most exquisite images in film history" (Paris 304). Alexandra's leaning against her pitchfork, or sitting on her back steps, or looking into the sunset at the novel's end prefigures not only the cinematic close-up but also Garbo's clairvoyant gaze.

The way both women are initially presented draws attention to these similarities. Dressed in a man's long coat, her hair and face veiled, Alexandra stares fixedly ahead, into the future. Removing her veil, she meets a gawking salesman on the street and glares in return; he mutters and drops his cigar in amazement. Likewise, audiences are reported to have gasped out loud when the face of the young Garbo first appeared on screen:

Dressed in a fur coat, her loose, frizzy hair hidden under a hat, suddenly, when she turns her head to Gösta as the lake glistens and the dark firs and mountains flash by, she becomes GARBO—cool, almost philosophic, frightened, yet carried away by love. We see that shimmering face, that ethereal look, that fineness of expression for the first time in all their beauty. One would not have to be a demonic hero or a ravenous wolf to want to pursue her. (Zierold 161)

And in *Love* (1927), a silent version of *Anna Karenina*, lifting her head in church to meet the determined stare of John Gilbert's Vronsky, Garbo is as luminous as the candles and icons around her.⁹ As one critic noted, her "beauty infuses the picture with a cold white glow" (Paris 134), a glow equally capable of rendering Alexandra's radiance.

Garbo's style of acting would have perhaps evoked *O Pioneers!* in even more subtle ways. While Cather's method of writing has been likened to that of farming (Rosowski 47), we can extend this analogy by emphasizing the common ground of literature and film, in this case a collaboration of farming, filming, acting, and writing which could have created a movie as richly textured as Cather's novel or



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(Continued)

Alexandra's fields. Just imagine, film's greatest star paired with the great prairie fact, two profound entities mirroring each other on screen, each reflecting the other's genius:

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. (*OP* 65)

Indeed, how stunning an image would have been projected and preserved had the human face, that first looked upon the land with love, been that of Greta Garbo.¹⁰

This essay was originally presented at the conference on "Willa Cather's New York," held at Drew University in the summer of 1998.

Notes

¹John Bainbridge echoes Cather's criticism of Garbo but in a much more sympathetic light: "She had dignity and nobility, and she had genius. Like so many great actresses, she may never have possessed a particle of intellectual power, but she had genius before the camera because she was guided by a secret, sublime, infallible instinct to do the right thing in the right way. So unerring was her instinct that it produced the illusion of a most subtle intelligence" (238).

²"With Garbo," writes Barry Paris, "the relationship between hypnosis and film viewing was more intense because her personal erotic modality—iconic, ironic, laconic—was so original. But the real secret to Garbo as actress and icon was secrecy itself: What exactly was she holding back? No one quite knew. But they sensed the spirituality within the sexuality—the tragic soul that lifted Garbo above the banal melodrama toward something more immortal" (236).

³Critics, too, were caught in Garbo's vampdom. Reviewing *Flesh and the Devil*, one called Garbo "the personification of passion" (Zierold 165). Of *The Temptress* another wrote: "Her alluring mouth and volcanic, slumberous eyes enfire men to such passion that friendships collapse" (Zierold 164). Of that movie, Paris adds: "arriving in the wilds of Argentina wearing a snazzy Parisian outfit, she gets down to the business of destroying every man in sight. . . . Later in her room, she consults a mirror and—satisfied with her fabulous beauty—goes downstairs for supper. . . . Braless and ravishing beneath their gaze, she nibbles, flirts, and stretches languidly, raising one arm high above her head to display an underarm whose erotic impact is almost palpably olfactory" (104).

⁴Although Olive Fremstad may have been Cather's last diva, diva worship lives on in her fiction—Jim and Antonia, Niel and Mrs. Forrester, Nellie and Myra Henshawe enact its demanding rituals. And in the lives of many gay men today, fandom is still a powerful phenomenon. Consider, for instance, Wayne Koestenbaum, whose

meditation upon Maria Callas ends with the assertion that "for political, ethical, combative, and ineluctable reasons, I consider my interest in Callas to be a piece of my sexual and cultural identity" (135); or Manuel Puig, author of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, who listed the three main influences on his writing as Greta Garbo, Freud, and the films of Ernst Lubitsch (Manrique 47).

⁵In *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1898-1940*, George Chauncey explains that "Gay men, in other words, used gay subcultural codes to place themselves and to see themselves in the dominant culture, to read the culture against the grain in a way that made them more visible than they were supposed to be, and to turn 'straight' spaces into gay spaces. When they . . . watched films starring Greta Garbo or Bette Davis . . . they appropriated them for the gay world and thus extended the boundaries of the gay world far beyond those officially tolerated" (288). Cather, too, is similarly appropriated. In *The Queerest Places: A National Guide to Gay and Lesbian Historic Sites*, Paula Martinac devotes three pages to Red Cloud, Nebraska, drawing attention to the Willa Cather home, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, the titles and dates of Willa Cather's fiction set in or around Red Cloud, and the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, "named for the woman who immortalized the wide-open spaces of her childhood home" (320). See also my "Cather-as-Code," *The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter*, 41 (Fall 1997): 42-43.

⁶Here, a normally reticent Garbo may have been revealing her powers of intuition, for as Robert Richardson explains, "Among the modern forms of literature, poetry often seems to be closer to film than any other, especially in such matters of technique as the use of imagery and the use of associational logic. We have become accustomed to tracing modern poetry back to the nineteenth century; one can also trace certain elements of modern film style to the same sources. Walt Whitman's remarkable achievement, for example, has had at least as great an impact on film form as it has had on modern poetic practice" (24).

⁷As if to underscore Garbo's formidable talent, the *New York Herald-Tribune's* review of the 1934 version of *A Lost Lady* noted that "'Miss Stanwyck plays capably enough in a part that, if it had been properly treated, only Miss Garbo could have played'" (Dickens 96).

⁸The movies that Garbo didn't make or was rumored to be thinking about making, especially during her long retirement, are as fervently discussed as those she actually did make and constitute something like a second canon. Along with *My Antonia* and *The Song of the Lark*, MGM scriptwriters considered Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, and Joseph Conrad's *Arrow of Gold* (Paris 316). Over the years other projects were unsuccessfully negotiated, including Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, to be directed by Luchino Visconti, and Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais*, for which Garbo submitted to a screen test.

⁹Garbo sightings, both in her life and in her films, have always been a lively component of Garbo studies. Characters in the movies often react the same way to Garbo as do members of the audience. Likewise, personal memoirs and biographies abound with Garbo sightings, as do

anecdotes of native New Yorkers. Indeed, no less an icon than Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis once returned to her office at Doubleday excited and breathless after spotting Garbo on the street: "I saw her today again! . . . Just walking by herself. She's so mysterious! This time I followed her for ten blocks before she finally lost me" (Andersen 330).

Cather sightings are less frequent. Truman Capote made much of his meeting Cather outside the New York Society Library in 1942, and a student at Doane College recently told me about seeing Cather in a Nebraska department store in the early 30s. Cather's fiction, however, is more pulse-quickening: Jim Burden sees *Ántonia* after 20 years and describes it as a "miracle" (331); Nellie Birdseye comes face-to-face with a family legend; and Ed Elliot encounters Mrs. Forrester in South America in true Garbo fashion, "the out-of-nowhereness of her cinema entrances" (Swenson 424).

¹⁰Unfortunately, celluloid does not guarantee posterity. For instance, while movie-stills exist of the 1924 silent version of *A Lost Lady*, the film itself is believed to be forever lost; likewise, Garbo's *The Divine Woman* (1928), loosely based on Sarah Bernhardt, is "the only Garbo film that has not survived" (Paris 569). Karen Swenson adds that "*The Divine Woman* has been listed by the American Film Institute as one of the ten most important lost films of the silent era" (613).

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—Photo by Jan Offner

The back porch of the Childhood Home gets put to good use during this activity at Pastimes and Playthings 2002. The concentration on their faces tells all.

William James and the Walls for Unfurnished Fictions

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A glance through the first three chapters of William James's *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (1892) reveals not so much a literary work as the materials out of which literary works are made.¹ "Habit," Chapter 1, provided ideas Mark Twain jotted directly into his notebook in 1896 (Horne 5). When around 1910² the high modernists seized the literary banner in order to make things new,³ James's second chapter, "The Stream of Consciousness," channeled their experimental writing. For those writers who prized clarity over novelty, the third James chapter, "The Self," intensified awareness of the importance of point of view. Whatever he did for psychologists by 1892, James effectually provided for writers a primer for twentieth-century literary art.

Willa Cather, for one, seems to have digested all these first James chapters thoroughly. She would later reproduce in her fiction literally dozens of their images and ideas. For example, James's phrase, "When Paul and Peter wake up in the same bed," later repeated where Peter is warm and Paul is cold (*Psychology* 25, 71), amplifies into the crucial Pavel and Peter episodes of *My Ántonia*. In *The Song of the Lark* Thea bathes in a "stream by the Indian water trail" (299) in Panther Canyon and thinks that "art [is] but an effort to make a sheath . . . in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself" (304), after James says, "A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which [personal adult consciousness] is most naturally described." He adds that the "stream of thought"

is key to "subjective life" (*Psychology* 26). James's psychological rule—" [Each mind] keeps its own thoughts to itself. . . . The breaches between such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature" (20)—transforms into Cather's stunning aphorism, "The heart of another is a dark forest always, no matter how close it has been to one's own" (*Professor's House* 95).

In short, James's *Psychology* releases spores that root and branch out in all Cather's major fictions. For the ideas replicated like topiary in her most important critical statements or in the crucial essay, "The Novel Demeublé," however, we look to two later James chapters, "Association" and "Memory."

It could seem curious that it has taken scholars and readers so long to link *The Principles of Psychology* (first published in two volumes in 1890) to Willa Cather. For one excuse, we were looking too hard at the influence of the other James brother, Henry. After all, that's the brother Cather deliberately deflected our attention to, in plentiful references

scattered over "148 Charles Street." Concomitantly, she burned all the correspondence between herself and Viola Roseboro', the Cather editor and mentor who proselytized for William James.⁴ But we are allowed to suspect that the differences Cather herself recognized between her first two novels ("My First Novels" 91-97), perhaps even obliquely conceded as she associated Boston hospitality and Annie



Fields with Henry, were the differences made by her choice of the James brother she would thereafter follow. It's Emersonian William acknowledged below, riding with whom is like "taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way, on a fine morning when you felt like riding" (92-93).⁵ In the bad old parlour-bound world of clever people, "Henry James and Mrs. Wharton were our most interesting novelists" (93).

Another rationalization for critical myopia is that we have continued to rely for documentation on what we could see and footnote, ignoring thereby Willa's clear valorizing of things felt but not seen on the page. Following standard critical methodology, our sacred ritual, precluded our recognizing a William James influence which Willa herself didn't openly acknowledge.⁶ Furthermore, Willa's work is always so clear, and William's is frequently so viscous, that we didn't automatically suspect any affinity.

William James, like Willa Cather, was dealing with the anxiety produced by Emerson's influence. In both their cases, the stress focused on the Emersonian style. By avoiding the Emersonian voice, what James called "the transcendental sentence" (*Pluralistic Universe* 190), James could permit himself to retain Emersonian ideas and insights. By avoiding the "grand style" (*Pluralistic Universe* 104), James tried to avoid those unproved hypotheses that leave one "at the mercy of any plausible phrase" (*Psychology* 18). Having done so, he stockpiled Emersonian images and themes. James implied that Emerson begged his questions when he shaped his sentences to sound so much like God; that didn't mean, however, that all Emerson's provocative declarations were false, but merely unproved. Willa, too, tried to move out from under the shadow of her first literary hero by writing narrative fiction, a form Emerson considered inferior.

Both James and Cather shared, however, their saturation with Emerson. His untaught sallies of the spirit are recycled in both their works. For example, Emerson repeats in "Experience," "Everything good is on the highway" (263). James says in both first and last books, "Life is in the transitions" (*Essays in Radical Empiricism* 87). And Cather credits to Michelet the aphorism found as yet only in her own work: "The end is nothing, the road is all" ("Old Mrs. Harris" 158). These are three forms of the same thought. At least Cather, perhaps glimpsing a familiar thought in James, also presciently inferred that those who tried to avoid sounding as sonorous as God could sometimes end up writing like the Devil. She is always clear, if not simple. These stylistic differences have obscured the textual evidence of William James's compatibility with and magnetic influence on Willa Cather.

One finds all the important designing concepts, as well as the vocabulary Cather will reshape into her own

extraordinarily pellucid critical prose, in William James's *Psychology*. The penumbra (33, 159), the overtone divined by the ear (34), the juxtapositions (see below), the continuousness (19) of her forms, the zest (105, 326), selectivity (40), and simplifications (40)—all are there, as is also the recognition that "warmth and intimacy"—what I call me and mine (41)—are of paramount importance. James wrote:

If now we pass to the aesthetic department, our law is still more obvious. The artist notoriously selects his items, rejecting all tones, colors, shapes, which do not harmonize with each other and with the main purpose of his work. That unity, harmony, 'convergence of characters,' . . . which gives to works of art their superiority over works of nature, is wholly due to *elimination*. Any natural subject will do, if the artist has wit enough to pounce upon some one feature of it as characteristic, and suppress all merely accidental items which do not harmonize with this. (*Psychology* 40)

It is interesting that in the essay about her first two novels, Cather goes on to mention the failure of her third novel, *The Song of the Lark*, to be properly selective. She accuses herself of relying on "the full blooded method which told everything about everybody" ("My First Novels" 96), in an un-William-Jamesian style.

Even Cather's denigration of Freud in favor of Tolstoy that so shocked Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant is strongly implicit in *Psychology*. James writes:

[U]nfortunately there is little psychological writing about the emotions which is not merely descriptive. As emotions are described in novels, they interest us, for we are made to share them. We have grown acquainted with the concrete objects and emergencies which call them forth, and any knowing touch of introspection which may grace the page meets with a quick and feeling response. . . . But as far as the 'scientific psychology' of the emotions goes, I may have been surfeited by too much reading of classic works on the subject, but I should as lief read verbal descriptions of the shapes of the rocks on a New Hampshire farm as toil through them again. They give one nowhere a central point of view, or a deductive or generative principle. (*Psychology* 241-42)

The curious presence of varyingly described rocks in many of Cather's works thereafter may suggest that Cather set out to show William James that it *could* be done grippingly. The rocky Cos Cob farm of Kronborg's accompanist Landry, the Blue Mesa, the rock on which Quebec is planted, the rock of Ácoma or Shiprock, all illustrate the transformations an

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(Continued)

artist might accomplish, even with rocks.

But the story Sergeant tells of Cather's condescension to Freud has had such important consequences in labeling Cather a reactionary that we might profitably revisit Sergeant's report: "Her intolerance began to trouble me. She was truly skeptical about the post-war world. Take this Viennese Freud: why was everybody reading him? Tolstoy knew as much about psychology—with no isms attached—as any fiction writer needed. I didn't agree" (173-74). Now James himself not only referenced Tolstoy repeatedly in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* but also observed in *Psychology* that "Old-fogeyism is, in short, the inevitable terminus to which life sweeps us on" (195). Even so, one suspects that Cather's rejection of Freud may not have been so much that of a fuddy-duddy as that of an advocate of William James's insistence on verifiable scientific evidence assimilated through an "analytic method" (*Psychology* 18).

What I should like to do hereafter is to trace, as systematically as I can, these borrowed parallels between James's *Psychology* and Cather's esthetics, concentrating on "The Novel D meubl ." I will try to make the comparison as simple as possible as I parallel the relevant texts.

"Association" begins with James declaring exuberantly, "After discrimination, association! It is obvious that all advance in knowledge must consist of both operations" (120). Apparently considering the importance of discrimination self-evident (as James tried to show in his preceding chapter), Cather placed her emphasis from her first interviews on association—what she will call *juxtaposition*: "In this new novel I'm trying to cut out all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality, in order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition, without any persuasion or explanation on my part" (Bohlke 24). The *why* and *how* Cather's juxtaposition might work in fiction are explained in James's two chapters.

James addresses in "Association" the "principles of connection" which trace how thoughts seem to "sprout one out of the other" so that "their peculiar succession or coexistence may be explained" (120). Obviously, if one can understand the principle, one can hothouse the sprouting. One can make a story seem to sprout, feel more real than imagination. The first potting soil for thought which James identifies is "association by contiguity" (121), again synonymous with *juxtaposition*. In this part of his presentation, James stresses in bold print that "**Objects are associated, not ideas**" (122)—that is, things contiguously perceived or juxtaposed may tell a story—such as, one thin

blue curtain laid carefully over another thin red scrim can make a brand new purple drape flash out: though "mere" ideas—such as, blue over red can make purple—will not suggest narratives. In fact, putting it bluntly, Cather remains more "exciting" (a James word) to read than James does because she trusted and then applied his ideas to her prose as he did not. Had he realized, as she did, what it might mean for a reader's quick comprehension and long retention to associate objects together instead of ideas, and had he then provided his texts with juxtaposed things as she did hers, he might still be taught in as wide a variety of classes, to as large a range of age groups, as she is.

But at least James is first to make the crucial point that Cather grasps: one thinks and "realizes" ideas as a matter of "cerebral physiology," basic to which is "neural habit. All the materials of our thought are due to the way in which one elementary process of the cerebral hemispheres tends to excite whatever other elementary process it may have excited at any former time" (123). If when telling a story, for example, one managed somehow to trigger associations formerly engraved in the brain by another art form, one would have activated all the excitement felt while experiencing that first play, or ballet, or concert, or glimpse of a painting, while still in the middle of the unfolding narrative. And that is where the principles of "The Novel D meubl " come in.

What Cather describes in her essay is what she has inferred from reading James's *Psychology*. He articulates what will work to make a verbal creation lasting, challenging, enlightening, and memorable: to make art, not entertainment. In 1990 Jo Ann Middleton asked, "What is it about a writer's style that gives her staying power? When we begin to look at Cather's style, we find that there is no specific, clear definition of it nor is there adequate explanation for the reader's intense emotional reaction to the novels, which is the basis of the works' persistent resonance" (9-10). William James's principles of association begin to provide Middleton and us with some answers.

The first thing Cather learns she must do is to eliminate distractions from the juxtapositions she intends for her story. That is, she must *choose* or *select* only the concrete items essential to, and productive of, the story she wishes to anchor in a reader's brain. James reminds us that association is an *effect* made by "THINGS THOUGHT OF" (123). Selectivity in details is important because the desired effect depends in part on "the absence of any rival point functionally disconnected with the first point, into which the discharges might be diverted" (124). Thus Cather dismisses the catalogs and concrete details of realism because such lists can dissipate energy by diverting it into irrelevant associations. Lists can distract the reader from the one

emotional effect she aims for; hence, the “full blooded method . . . was not natural to me” (“Novel D meubl ” 96). Control is all. James assures her that brain activity intensifies with the frequency of the stimulus, the familiarity of the excitement, and the absence of rival associations. Before the end of the chapter he has assured her that thinkers (as well as scene creators) can *choose* to focus thought in a desired path.

According to James, “emotional interest” in a particular thought can be triggered by special words associated with previous emotionally-fraught feelings. Recalling those previous feelings or thoughts can be triggered by anything within the imaginable “fringe” of a concept—visual, tactile, or other cues: music, for example. When these other fringe ideas reinforce a thought or association, it seems more right, more strong, more true. It gains what James and Cather will later call a penumbra: a glow (*Psychology* 33, 159). One could, however, if one were a novelist, build characterizations on the “law of compound association” (*Psychology* 126) by carefully controlling the “fringe” or other things activated in the brain by such compound associations. Or to put it another way, one could create a sense on the page of a “thing not named” by deliberately provoking the controlled associations which are recent, habitual, vivid, or emotionally congruent (*Psychology* 132-33). Creating such richness of response is creating what Cather calls “the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself” (“Novel D meubl ” 50).

When James promises that one can voluntarily entertain a train of thought (*Psychology* 138), he promises not only success for “the sensitive reader”⁷ but also for that “hand, fastidious and bold, that selected and placed—it was that that made the difference. In Nature there is no selection” (*Professor’s House* 75). A reader could cooperate with or submit to associations in order to get in touch with the thing not named, and could feel, then fill, the gap, the “aching void” James names (*Psychology* 140) that intrudes when one is unsuccessfully trying to remember, to uncover, that same thing. In fact, James’s description of trying to recover a lost memory “felt by us as a gap in the midst of certain other things” is so full of vivid words—“dissatisfied,” “craving,” “tentative guesses,” “surge up,” “clutch at,” “keep before the attention” (140)—that he *does* create on his page the sensation of thought-on-the-verge, and we *do* vividly grasp that “the mode of recalling the thing forgotten” is like “the voluntary quest of the unknown” (*Psychology* 140). We can see and feel and know why Willa Cather would want to order for herself what she

spies James having here. The “subconscious itching” (*Psychology* 141) of association “bursts into the fulness of vivid feeling, [and] the mind finds an inexpressible relief” (*Psychology* 142). When a creative novelist learns how to control “the physiological law of habit among the neural elements” that “runs the train” of our associations (*Psychology* 145), then we can “separate the . . . genius from the prosaic creature of habit and routine thinking” (*Psychology* 145) and the genius can proudly acknowledge, as Cather does: “that, one might say, is created” (“Novel D meubl ” 50).

What James does in “Memory” is in effect to explain the importance of Association to a fledgling artist. He first defines memory as a state of consciousness requiring retention of a past state and recall of it in my present; then he insists that both of these events making up memory themselves depend on neural habit. James explains, as if for Cather scholars, “I enter a friend’s room and see on the wall a painting. At first I have the strange, wondering consciousness, ‘Surely I have seen that before,’ but when or how does not become clear. There only clings to the picture a sort of penumbra of familiarity,—when suddenly I exclaim: ‘I have it! It is a copy of part of one of the Fra Angelicos in the Florentine Academy—I recollect it there’” (*Psychology* 159). This unsettling sense of paintings seen elsewhere or music heard in another country is what Cather learns to activate after she has studied James’s laws of neural habit, or psychology. For James has told her in italics and capitals, “*Memory being thus altogether conditioned on brain-paths, its excellence in a given individual will depend partly on the NUMBER and partly on the PERSISTENCE of these paths*” (*Psychology* 159). By compounding the number as well as the patterned repetition of such associations, Cather can make unforgettable, that is long remembered, stories.

James seems to guarantee surefire fiction when he says, after which Cather then proves the rule true, “In mental terms, *the more other facts a fact is associated with in the mind, the better possession of it our memory retains*. Each of its associates becomes a hook to which it hangs, a means to fish it up by when sunk beneath the surface. Together, they form a network of attachments by which it is woven into the entire tissue of our thought. The ‘secret of a good memory’ is thus the secret of forming diverse and multiple associations with every fact we care to retain” (*Psychology* 161).

What Cather the writer must, and does, learn to do, in short, is to assume she can create a system by which each crucial fact is reinforced by associations she controls. As James says, “In a system, every fact is connected with every other by some thought-relation. The consequence is that every fact is retained by the combined suggestive power of

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all the other facts in the system, and forgetfulness is well-nigh impossible" (*Psychology* 162). How do you create unforgettable fictional scenes? Follow James's rules: "It will now appear clear that *all the improvement of the memory lies in the line of ELABORATING THE ASSOCIATES* of each of the several things to be remembered" (*Psychology* 162). Or one might say, hang the scene on hooks provided by the things not seen on the page, the overtones divined but not heard by the ear. The result, James guarantees, in "such a tingling and trembling of unrecovered associates is the penumbra of recognition that may surround any experience and make it seem familiar, though we know not why" (*Psychology* 166-67). We don't have to identify the associated moments that create the penumbras which glow through the scenes we love. We just have to register their warmth and intimacy, to allow ourselves to possess them as *me* or *mine*: *My Ántonia*; *My Mortal Enemy*. With all that tingling and shimmering, we can see what Cather means when she quotes the elder Dumas: "to make a drama, a man needed one passion and four walls" ("Novel D meubl " 51).

Notes

¹I am of course paraphrasing Jim Burden's famous description of early Nebraska (*My Ántonia* 7).

²The date is convenient for three reasons: Twain and James both died in this year; Virginia Woolf said that "in or about December 1910, human character changed" (quoted in Middleton 44-45); and that "solitary volcano" Ezra Pound was reviewed internationally for his first two (British) books of poetry while he also published in America his first book of criticism, *Spirit of Romance*, and a book of poetry: *Provenca*.

³The phrase is identified especially with Ezra Pound.

⁴For the consequences of this mentoring dependency to Cather, see my "Viola Roseboro': A Prototype for Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*."

⁵The image, central to Cather's essay on her first two novels, is from Emerson's essay "The Poet" (233).

⁶In a forthcoming essay I show that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) is deeply indebted to William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). So it may be worth lingering over the fact that when Cather talks in 1931 of her first two novels, she says,

"I still find people who like . . . [*Alexander's Bridge*] because it follows the most conventional pattern, and because it is more or less laid in London. London is supposed to be more engaging than, let us say, Gopher Prairie. . . . Soon after the book was published I went for six months to

Arizona and New Mexico [*Archbishop* country]. The longer I stayed in a country I really did care about, and among people who were a part of the country, the more unnecessary and superficial a book like *Alexander's Bridge* seemed to me. I did no writing down there, but I recovered from the conventional editorial point of view." ("My First Novels" 91-92)

⁷Cather's phrase from "Miss Jewett," quoted and centrally amplified in Middleton 8, 66-86.

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Nervous Priests and Unlikely Imperialists: Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

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In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, miracles not only renew faith, they function as a means of sharpening aesthetic appreciation. Latour's carefully tended garden, Joseph's onion soup, the crafts and religious objects created by the native peoples, and finally his great yellow cathedral all function as little miracles for Latour—miracles that soothe his senses and urge him to a finer appreciation of both the natural beauty that surrounds him and what he injects into his new environment. But what Latour chooses *not* to see is also important. While he celebrates the end of black slavery and the restoration of Navajo land, he neglects to worry over his own complicity in the Catholic Church's establishment of cultural hegemony in the southwestern provinces and its cooperative role in the swelling American economy. In his enthusiasm for the simple faith embodied by Junipero Serra, Latour fails to reflect either on the church's brutal early "civilizing" of the Southwestern Indians, or on its support for the United States's great nation-building project of the late nineteenth century.

Death Comes for the Archbishop engages us with a kind of *aesthetic mystification*. Dazzled like Latour by the beauty of the land and its myths, and by the hard work and pure intentions of two decent religious men, the novel's readers are urged, it seems, to overlook some of the most unflattering moments of America's cultural history. Still, a variety of critical approaches have shown us that texts *can* and *do* at once occlude and reveal. Although the Marxist critics of the thirties attacked it as escapist and thus sharply disconnected from the historical circumstances that surrounded it (Woodress 465), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* can be read as Cather's proleptic resistance to the damaging effects of modernity and capitalism and her protest against their twentieth-century legacy—and as an anxious, ambivalent commentary on the Catholic Church's role in America's development as a modern nation.

Clearly, not everyone welcomed the advent of modernity. In *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, T. J. Jackson Lears writes that many Americans, including intellectuals and writers like Cather, sought various kinds of therapy and activity to protest the spiritual emptiness of a modern, materialistic society. According to the contemporary social scientists Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, the process of nation building and modernization consists of "only empty exercises unless the attitudes and capacities of the people keep pace with other forms of development" (3). Ann Douglas has observed that in the 1920s (when Cather was writing the novel) "the pace of change had not only accelerated but peaked," and that "the

consequent transformation of American culture was not followed by any cultural change so wide or drastic" (192). Some Americans—perhaps Cather herself—were not prepared to accept either the demands or the offerings of this blinding pace.

In 1922, the sociologist William Osborn coined the term "cultural lag" to identify this "delay, the conflict between a society's means of material production and the modernization of its sensibility, between what is available in a society and what is actually endorsed or consumed by it" (Douglas 191). Such a "lag" had the power to produce devastating social and psychological anxieties, and given the unprecedented pace of America's development as a modern nation, which began in the nineteenth century, these dangerous effects were sure to reveal themselves in the nineteenth—as well as in the twentieth-century psyche. As early as the 1880s, the physician George M. Beard identified the psychological disorder known as "neurasthenia" or "American nervousness." Characterizing it as a depressive illness resulting directly from the anxieties associated with the modern world and industrial capitalism, Beard related neurasthenia to the "five elements" of modern life—"steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women"—and held that "when civilization, plus these five factors, invades any nation, it must carry nervousness and nervous disease along with it" (repeated in Lutz, 4). Intellectuals and artists, who possessed the most sensitive constitutions, were believed to be particularly susceptible to the illness, and everything from exercise to Silas Weir Mitchell's infamous rest cure was prescribed to sufferers. It was neurasthenia that the antimodernist protested and sought to escape, and one stage of protest identified by Lears is an enthusiasm for Catholic art forms and ritual. Perhaps, confronted with her own "American nervousness," Cather portrayed both her affliction and her "antimodern" protest in her development of her novel.

In the 1840s and 1850s, Protestants and Episcopalians began adopting some of the Catholic rituals and interests in art and Gothic architecture that had once been condemned as diabolic and sensual. By the turn of the century, this new brand of religious aestheticism could be described as the "*embourgeoisement*" of Protestantism, "the increasing fondness of affluent congregations for 'sensuous luxury'" (Lears 192). These interests were thought to bring new vigor and stimulation to a mind made dull and depressed by secular materialism. An interest in Catholic forms also worked to ally the privileged American with the interests of the working class and to offer him a more

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(Continued)

“authentic” and meaningful spiritual experience. Pre-industrial ritual and acts of devotion became a kind of self-therapy for those who were otherwise caught up in the spirit of capitalist consumption; they offered the complicit modern a means of mitigating his guilt. However, Lears argues that

The movement toward art and ritual [in the Catholic Church] displayed a Janus face....By generating a cult of taste in churches as well as secular society, it promoted a consumption ethos appropriate to the coming era of corporate capitalism. (184)

Instead of leveling an unqualified protest against modernity and thereby undermining the capitalist structures at work in this system, the “antimodern” interest in Catholic forms “had unintended social results: [it] helped ease the transition to secular and corporate modes of modern culture—new forms of evasiveness for a new social world” (Lears 58).

The American Catholic Church itself was a significant participant in exactly this difficult national transition in the years between the historical setting of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*—the mid-nineteenth century—and the novel’s publication in 1927. Drawing strength from its alignment with immigrants and the working class, the church prospered in the nineteenth century’s second half. In 1891, when the world stood ready to enter a fully modern era and labor strikes threatened almost every industry in America and abroad, Pope Leo XIII issued the *Rerum Novarum*, which set out to clarify the Church’s position on the labor question and class dissent. Contemptuous of any exploitation of the worker, the Church was also quick to condemn the dangerous influences of a rising socialism and its attendant hopes for an atheistic utopia, which threatened to undermine the Church’s power by doing away with private property. The *Rerum Novarum* encouraged employers to be fair and workers to be compliant—a fairly affable stand for the Church to take. But it finally held that “the first and most fundamental principle, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property” (Hales 201). “The real purpose of the *Rerum Novarum*,” writes one historian, “was not so much to introduce new teaching on the social question as to bring the Church Universal, through her authoritative voice, into line with the efforts which were coming here and there to have the generic name of Christian Democracy” (Hales 198). Named officially by Leo and the Church in 1901, “Christian Democracy” identified a large Catholic movement that sanctioned the aims of capitalism while quelling the socialist threat. Catholic workers who otherwise might have been drawn to the comradeship and security of labor unions were now encouraged to come together under the protective

authority of the Church (Hales 206).

But it was in the Southwest in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Cather’s novel is set, that the Church first actively sought to re-establish its authority in America as it underscored its allegiance to capitalism and to democracy. After the American conquest in which the ranches, farms, and communal pueblos of the native peoples were dissolved, an entire workforce of unskilled laborers was created to facilitate the settling and growing modernization of the West. These workers faced the double bind of exploitation and the realization of their own displacement and disempowerment. As Cather’s novel will show us, the Catholic Church’s evolving policy on labor and management resembles the antimodern impulse that drew Americans to Catholic ritual and form. Both create what appears to be an attractive connection between Catholicism and working-class values. But just as the bourgeois retreat into Catholicism as a means of combating modern neurasthenia implicitly promoted the very consumer culture it sought to avoid, so the historical Catholic Church’s seeming alliance with the working man helped to promote the aims of an exploitative capitalist culture. The Church’s therapeutic, spiritual function in this novel nearly masks its (and Latour’s) complicity in the expansionist enterprise. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* can be read as an allegory of Lears’s antimodern protest against—and subsequent accommodation to—American capitalism and modernity.

In the opening scene of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the Church is clearly an elitist one. The Spanish Cardinal’s villa overlooking Rome positively drips with wealth and culture. The splendid scenery, fine food and wine, and the elegant manners of these Europeans belie the missionary Father Ferrand’s purpose. While the business of reining in the Catholics of the Southwest calls for a man with workmanlike resolve and strength, their host asks for one with “intelligence in matters of art” (11). In spite of the Church’s history of interest in the poor, Latour is no working man’s priest. His appearance marks him as “a man of gentle birth—brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished” (19). He is an attractive man who dislikes a variety of unattractive men. From the snake-headed Buck Scales to the big-toothed Padre Martinez and his fat-faced, “irritatingly stupid” (144) secretary, Trinidad, the lower class status and vulgarity of these men is marked by their appearance.

Sensitive, contemplative, and easily depressed, Latour (like his near predecessor in Cather’s fiction, Godfrey St. Peter of *The Professor’s House*) seeks to fill some void with beautiful objects and authentic experiences, gathering these stories and images as part of his private collection. From the “thick clay walls” that “had been finished on the inside by the deft palms of Indian women” (33) to the lovingly decorated altars of the devout peasants, Latour gathers insight. Other examples of commodity fetishism abound in this text, marking a Catholic culture of

excess in decoration; the Spanish Cardinal in search of his El Greco isn't the only one drawn to objects of value. Latour's "few rare and beautiful books" (34) that he risks his life to save after his ship wrecks on the way to Santa Fe, his skins and blankets, and his fine linen and the silver plate form a catalogue of pleasing things that soothe his senses, pique his aesthetic interest, and make him complicit in the capitalist enterprise. Lears writes that

The collecting impulse reflected the contradictory tendencies of American antimodernism. A taste for the exotic, a desire to preserve the old—these sentiments could coexist with a zeal for industrial growth, even with an ability to build financial empires. Acquisition of art of the past could buttress one's prestige in the present, as Veblen pointed out. Without doubt, much late-nineteenth century art collecting was an exercise in conspicuous consumption performed by the beneficiaries of modern capitalism. (187)

Perhaps Latour is the "business man" that he jokingly calls himself in his Christmas letter to his brother (35).

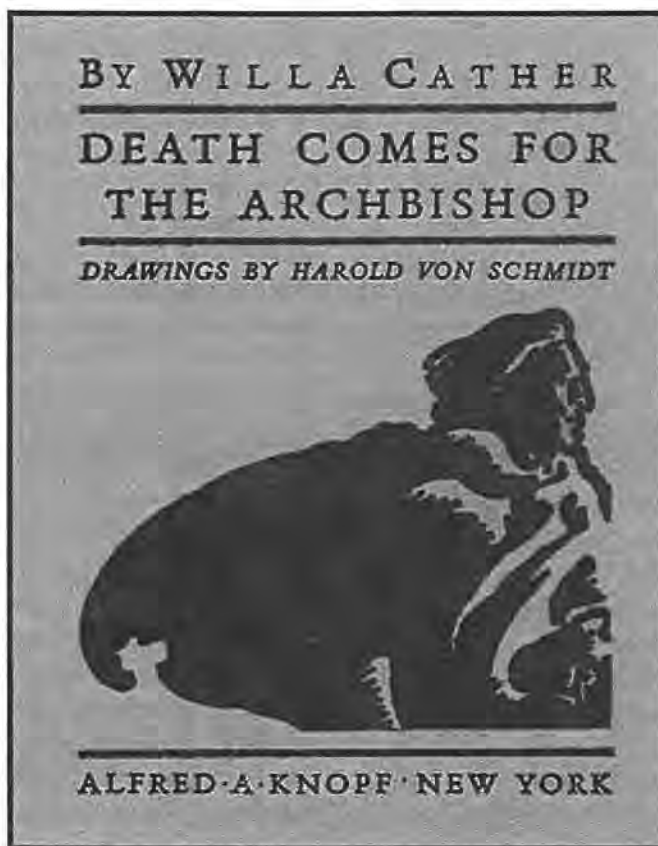
Not all collectors demonstrated the kind of groping and bourgeois acquisitiveness that we associate with the very rich; they often displayed both taste and discernment. Latour gathers not only objects, but also myths and interesting stories. Carson's manly exploits in battle and on the frontier, Serra's Holy Family, the miracle at Guadalupe—all function as a kind of spiritual, discursive therapy for Latour; like the other objects he collects, these tales offer him comfort and anchor. In the introduction to Book III of the novel, "The Mass at Ácoma," the bishop is "eager to be abroad" in his diocese and "to know his people" (81). What he comes to know in this section is not the real life circumstances of the poor, but myths and entertaining fables like the story of the parrot-worshippers of Isleta and the scandalous Baltazar and his rain-making picture of St. Joseph. Even his visit to Jacinto's convincingly "authentic" native home, replete with tightly swaddled baby (a dark reminder of the high infant mortality rate among the Indians and the presence of the

smallpox and measles carried there by whites), is merely a short and interesting interlude. This story is a disruption that gives way to the more compelling episode of Stone Lips and the great snake that the natives worship, an experience that Latour savors in all of its native mysteriousness and suggested diabolism.

Like the collecting impulse, worship in the novel seems to have a regenerative, therapeutic effect on Latour. Poised to accomplish his dream of building a cathedral, Latour's neurasthenia (the domain of the privileged) seems to be worsening. At the start of Book Seven, the bishop is in "one of those periods of coldness and doubt which, from boyhood, had occasionally settled down upon his spirit and made him feel an alien" (210). Tom Lutz writes that "in medical, literary, and popular discourse, neurasthenia had class and racial implications and was closely allied to the discourses justifying dominant American culture, and Anglo-American high culture in particular" (6). Latour is one such "caretaker" of privileged culture as he secures American and Catholic interests in the territory, but without the relief offered by collecting and worship from the depressive, guilty burdens of his position of influence, Latour might abandon his enterprise.

His will is fortified by his encounter with Sada, the Mexican slave of a low-caste Protestant family that has moved West to build its fortunes. Her plight is similar to that of many Mexicans who had been "Dispossessed of their land and displaced from

their traditional pastoral economy... forced into the unskilled labor market of the new, expanding American economy" (Dolan 154), and Latour's unwillingness to intervene on her part also remarks the Church's problematic position on slavery. Although "it was treated as a condition to be improved with a view to its ultimate removal," slavery was not, in the mid-nineteenth century, openly condemned by the Church (Hales 167). Unwilling to threaten its influence among property-holding Americans, the Church failed to intervene, and Latour's inaction provides us with a clear example of this policy. When Sada appears in the doorway of the sacristy, crouching and afraid, she offers him the faith-therapy he needs. He is reminded by this woman's devotion that he is a "servant" in God's house and "Kneeling beside the much enduring bond-woman, he



NERVOUS PRIESTS

(Continued)

experienced those holy mysteries as he had done in his young manhood" (217). Her humble service rendered, she shuffles off, hiding in the folds of her clothes a tiny silver medal that Latour has given her. His hope is that this modest object (not unlike his own collection) will lift her spirits when she is overworked and beaten. Though he fails to intervene on Sada's behalf for fear of jeopardizing Catholic and Protestant relations in the region as well as his own position, Latour is invigorated by his democratic hospitality in the House of God.

The bishop also seeks therapy for his neurasthenia in the homes of his native friends, a move that helps to prepare him for the daunting task of building the first cathedral in the western region. Eusabio offers Latour a Navajo house, set at a distance from the rest of the community. Once again, the bishop does not come here "to know his people." Latour seeks a picturesque, authentic refuge in which to revive his depleted spirit. In this airy, sandswept hogan, he writes long letters to friends and relatives, he meditates, and he plans. When Eusabio accompanies the bishop back home, Latour notes the peculiar character of the native, though he fails to understand it. Navajos "obliterate every trace of their temporary occupation . . . just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a little (at least to leave some mark of memorial of his sojourn)" (233). The words are prophetic. His energy and enthusiasm restored, the bishop returns to Santa Fe, having recalled his Vicar Joseph from his soul-saving abroad in order to show him something *really* remarkable: a yellow hill of rock on a ridge high over the Rio Grande valley that will become the walls of his cathedral. Thus the bishop's withdrawal functions as more than an effort to combat his own depression; it is also the means by which he shores his weakened will and prepares himself for a project of imperial proportions. In an effort to establish for the Church a solid foundation in a modern, capitalist America, the bishop will "leave some mark" on the landscape, employing the help of the native peoples in the process.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the Catholic Church possesses an irresistible power precisely because of its imagined distance from political and economic discourse, as Cather disquietingly suggests throughout the text. In the early "Hidden Water" episode, for example, after Latour has been miraculously saved from death by the cruciform tree, he finds himself in the Mexican settlement of *Agua Secreta*. Here, Benito and his family live a squatter's existence because they have no contract binding them to the land and "were afraid the Americans might take it way from them" (26). The family is relieved to find that Latour is not an American, and José, a grandson, explains why:

"They say at Albuquerque that now we are all

Americans, but that is not true, Padre. I will never be an American. They are infidels. . . . They destroyed our churches when they were fighting us, and stabled their horses in them. And now they will take our religion away from us. We want our own ways and our own religion." (27)

What the family fails to recognize is that Latour, though French and an emissary of the Catholic Church, is also an agent of the kind of American imperialism that Amy Kaplan describes as "not only about foreign diplomacy or international relations, [but] also about consolidating domestic cultures and negotiating intranational relations" (14). In this hidden oasis, the bishop is called on to sanctify marriages, baptize children, and hear confessions, practices that will "legitimize" the various contracts and commitments that have already been made, thereby undermining the authority of the Mexican family that had once performed these rites themselves.¹

In just the same way that Latour reestablishes the legitimate authority of the Catholic Church by offering the sacraments, defeating renegade priests like Martinez, and building a Midi-Romanesque cathedral, Americans will continue to assert their authority over the land, resources, and native people of the Southwest. Though Latour's sympathy with cultural difference appears to align him with those tolerant priests who practiced "indifference," he never betrays his mission to reestablish the Church's control, even as he is easing his neurasthenic conscience. His mission continues the displacement process that began with Junipero Serra and continued during the American conquest, and the result, as the Mexican aristocrat Manuel Chavez foresees in the alliance between Latour and the Americans, is that many families like Benito's will lose their land.

If Cather means in her novel to mitigate the Church's grasping interest in material concerns, then she has accomplished this feat in Latour's connection to the beloved Joseph. Like the very different ways that each man admires the tamarisk tree, Jean for its unusual tints and textures, and Joseph because it was "the tree of the people, and was like one of the family in every Mexican household" (202), Latour's ambitions and aesthetic sensibilities are balanced by Joseph's simple desire to build faith among the poor and his lack of interest in matters of beauty and taste. Unpardonably ugly, tirelessly occupied in service to the poor, and "scarcely acquisitive to the point of decency" (226), Joseph, "in order to communicate with peons [was] willing to speak like a peon" (225). Cather's admiration of the Catholic Church and her sympathy for those who find themselves tangled in the process of modernization reveal themselves in Father Vaillant's sympathetic, benevolent, and troubled human form. Like Jean, Joseph's temperament is described as "nervous," but his neurasthenia is of a different character. Infused with energy, a life-long restlessness and a desire to move and accomplish good works, Joseph's peripatetic nature is the perfect complement to Latour's

desire to build and mark. When the bishop shares his cathedral scheme, Joseph is made visibly uncomfortable, shifting his shoulders uneasily. Latour speaks Joseph's mind when he says, "I hope you do not think me very worldly" (243). Still, Cather may not have meant for Joseph to serve simply as a conscientious corrective to Latour's ambitious nature. Joseph may have the plight of the native poor at heart, but he also ministers to the gold-rushers in Colorado who are depleting the land of its resources. For Joseph, these men may present the most challenging spiritual cases, but his willingness to minister to them may also function as a means of reconciling religion and wealth; Joseph may be unwittingly complicit in the American capitalist enterprise. Like the novel itself, each character embodies the contradictory impulses of Catholicism and the "Janus face" of antimodernism.

Death Comes for the Archbishop's protest against modern America and its accommodation to it are simultaneously completed in the bishop's cathedral. In spite of Joseph's gentle but pointed reminder that "everything about us is so poor—and we ourselves are so poor" (241), the bishop will have his fine building, and, like the white men who come before and after him, will make his mark in history. Though Latour insists that the cathedral is for the "future" (241), that future does not include the simple peasants whose religious, decorative needs do not stretch beyond their hand-made altar ornaments. The cathedral is built to satisfy the growing population of the region and its establishment as a center of American commerce and trade. Like the arrival of the railroad, it marks the Southwest's entrance into the modern era. However, what is conspicuously missing from the novel is the story of how the cathedral actually gets built. Was it, like the church at Acoma, built on the "backs of men and boys and women" by those "who built for their own satisfaction, perhaps, rather than according to the needs of the Indians" (101)? Ironically, the observation is Latour's own. Like the other "Powerful men" who "draft[ed] Indian labor for this great work without military support" (101), Latour gets his yellow rocks to Santa Fe. It is, as Latour notes, an accomplishment of "an historic period" (271) in which the Catholic Church has chiseled out its place. By simultaneously ministering to the poor and indebting itself to the wealthy, facilitating conquest and assuaging guilty consciences, the Church was able to establish itself securely in modern, capitalist America. And like the precious miracle stories that are told but once or twice, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* continues to mystify, though its silences speak.

Notes

¹The practice of self-sanctification was common among Mexican families in the mid-nineteenth century who were visited infrequently by priests, and what resulted, according to Jay Dolan, was a civic and faith organization

that blended Catholic and folk traditions:

For them the most important religious organization was not the parish, but the religious confraternity, the *cofradía* The vital center of religion, they could be found in every pueblo in New Mexico and throughout the Southwest. Together with the celebration of religious festivals, they nurtured the religion of the people and helped them to maintain their identity as a people once they became part of the United States. (176)

Latour's appearance and ritual sanctifications, along with the building of the cathedral, mark the dissolution of the *cofradías* and an end to an era of self-determination for the Mexican people. The Church, irritated by the growing practice in America of tolerating folk traditions and embracing all religions as "different roads to God," condemned this practice of "indifferentism" as heretical in the 1864 Syllabus of Errors (Hales 171).

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Ninth International Willa Cather Seminar in Vermont in 2003

The 9th International Seminar on Willa Cather will be held May 28-June 2, 2003 at Bread Leaf, Vermont. The seminar will address questions of Cather as a cultural icon. This focus acknowledges that Cather has been elevated from marginal to canonical status, and with this “elevation” has come an outpouring of work related to her—biographies, criticism, personal essays, adaptations to film, theatre, opera, and radio. This outpouring invites us to engage in conversations about art and culture. How is a writer inscribed into a culture? What are the implications of celebrity or iconic status?

As a writer fiercely protective of the privacy necessary to work, Cather provides a forum to consider what we expect of art and artists today. Ethical considerations of integrity and authenticity enter into the conversation: what are the responsibilities of readers, teachers, scholars, performers, and film makers to the work and its creator?

The Call for Papers will be available in the near future on both the WCPM and Cather Electronic Archive (www.unl.edu/Cather) websites. The seminar is co-sponsored by the WCPM and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.




Cather at the American Literature Association Conference

The annual meeting of the American Literature Association, an organization of author societies devoted to American writers, brought Cather scholars from across the country to Long Beach, California, from May 30-June 2, 2002.

The WCPM hosted two panels, “Willa Cather and the American Mind” on May 30 and “Willa Cather and American Mythologies” on May 31. In the first, Merrill Skaggs of Drew University presented “Willa Cather’s Radical Empiricism,” arguing that *My Ántonia* reflects Cather’s debt to William James’s empirical philosophy. (Another portion of Professor Skaggs’s Cather/James project is printed in this issue of the *Newsletter and Review*.) She was followed by David Puente of the University of California at Irvine, whose “Cather as Educator: Lessons of *The Professor’s House*” looked at Professor St. Peter in the context of developing ideas of “merit” in American higher education. The two papers sparked lively discussion with members of a large audience.

The “American Mythologies” panel opened with “Cather’s Family Farm and Other Ambiguous American Epics” by Charles Vandersee of the University of Virginia, who spoke on *O Pioneers!* and its connections to several typical historical “discourses” or perspectives on the American family farm, concluding that Cather created in the Kronborgs new images of a “composite American farmer” for the late nineteenth century. In “‘An Orgy of Acquisition’: The Female Consumer, Infidelity, and Commodity Culture in *A Lost Lady* and *The Professor’s House*,” Honor Wallace of the University of Tennessee discussed the ways in which modern technology and advertising shaped new, disturbing images of the female consumer in the 1920s, and sketched these images’ effects on Marian Forrester and Rosamond St. Peter. Finally, Traci Abbott of the University of Maryland read her paper “Good Girl, Tragic Mulatta, or . . . Flapper? *Sapphira*’s Nancy in the Twentieth Century,” drawing on shifting stereotypes of gender and race in the 1920s and 30s to present the slave girl Nancy as more empowered than readers have typically seen her.

The panels and conference were well attended by Cather scholars, readers, and enthusiasts, including Willa Cather’s niece, Catherine Cather Lowell of Long Beach, WCPM Board of Governors President John Swift, and Board member Don Connors. 

NEH Challenge Grant



—Photo by Bev Cooper

Dr. Mellanee Kvasnica and her raffle quilt at the Spring Festival Banquet.

WCPM board member Mellanee Kvasnicka found a creative way to make a gift to the Cather Foundation's endowment drive to meet its NEH Challenge grant: she made a special quilt for auction at the Spring Festival with its theme of "Under the quilting frames": Memory, Storytelling, and Art." Before she brought the quilt to Red Cloud, she gave her colleagues at Omaha South High School an opportunity to purchase auction tickets, and they generously responded by buying \$150.00 worth. Festival participants bought another \$249.00 in tickets. Emily Scheuer, a presenter in "The Passing Show" panel from Washington, D.C., held the winning ticket for Mellanee's beautiful quilt.

You may not have Mellanee's quilt-making talent but there are creative ways that you, too, can help the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Foundation raise the necessary funds to meet the \$250,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment.

If you are having trouble deciding on a gift for an elderly aunt who "doesn't need anything," why not a gift in her honor to help keep Willa Cather's literary legacy alive for all?

A gift in loving memory of a friend or relative who treasured books would be particularly valued by the Foundation.

You can make the WCPM a beneficiary of a life insurance policy; you can include the Cather Foundation in your will; you can give stock, property, or gift annuities to the Foundation.

Or, you can take a more traditional approach and send the Cather Foundation a check. You may not think that's as creative as making a quilt, but it will allow the WCPM to preserve the remarkable creativity of one of America's finest writers. You may wish to make a pledge payable over two years.

Please give today. Remember: your gift helps the Foundation earn the matching funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Yes, I want to help the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation meet the National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge. I understand that my gift will be used to match the grant from NEH.

Name _____

Address _____

Amount: \$ _____ [Given in honor memory of _____]

My check is enclosed: _____

Please charge: ___ Visa ___ Mastercard # _____ Exp: _____

Please send me a pledge form.

I would prefer to make my gift through a contribution of stocks or other property.

Please contact me at: _____

*Please make checks payable to the WCPM.
WCPM, 326 North Webster Street, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970-2550*

MINER/HARLING HOUSE

(Continued from front page.)

revolving around Mildred's plan to build a Willa Cather International Study Center in Red Cloud (this is the project that eventually morphed into the Opera House renovation). I urged her to consider applying for an NEH Challenge grant to help with the fundraising for her multimillion dollar project. She finally agreed to consider this, and decided to travel East to meet with NEH officials, the Nebraska senators (then Kerrey & Exon), and the 3 Nebraska members of Congress. She also accepted my invitation to stay at our home in South Orange, New Jersey, and to speak on historic restoration at The Newark Museum, where I was the president of the volunteer organization and later a trustee. Her trip East was a great success, as she made some excellent contacts in Washington. It was also on this trip that we arranged to have "Ántonia's" name placed on the Immigrant Wall of Honor on Ellis Island, which was undergoing major renovation. Mildred spent time during the visit trying to convince my husband and me to purchase the Harling House—but to no avail.

Then, the summer of 1989, Mildred was diagnosed with cancer, which claimed her life in early November of that same year. What a loss it was to all of us. Unfortunately, I could not attend her funeral because I had commitments back in New Jersey. But I kept in touch with Pat Phillips and agreed to continue to help with the fund-raising for the Cather Study Center. In June 1990, I attended the Cather Conference in Santa Fe, where a dear friend of Mildred's and WCPM board member, Marge Van Meter, introduced herself to me and told me that Mildred had told her how much she wanted me to buy and restore the Harling House. I felt like Mildred was reaching out of her grave in an attempt to push me to buy the place!

About a month after that meeting, Pat Phillips called from Red Cloud to say that the Reihers were about to put the house on the market and Marge Van Meter had told her to call me first to see if I had any interest in buying it. I told her that my husband would be convinced that I was crazy if I suggested such a thing! Later that evening, I related all the various conversations about the Harling House to my husband, and he suggested that we stop in Red Cloud and look the place over. At that point, I decided that he was crazier than I! Without too much expense, we were able to add a weekend trip to Red Cloud into a trip we had planned to hike in New Mexico. While in Red Cloud, we met with the Reihers and looked the Harling House over. My husband fell captive to it and to the idea of playing a part in saving a piece of American history (and literature). Before we left Red Cloud for New Mexico, we had signed an agreement to purchase the house and set the closing for November. . . .

[The Miner Home that Willa Cather Knew]

The house was first built in 1878 as a square Italianate Victorian by J.L. Miner, one of the owners of the Miner Brothers Store, and his wife Julia (aka Mr. and Mrs. Harling). In 1885, the Miners added the two-story section that the family has always called "the south ell" and the wrap-around porch, with its distinctive "sun and moon" gingerbread ornamentation. With the building of the addition and porch, this home at 241 North Seward became one of the finest in Red Cloud. The Harling House that Jim Burden describes in *My Ántonia* is the house as it stood in 1885. . . .

[Renovation]

After taking possession of the house, we discovered that the exterior needed immediate attention—and major rebuilding, at that, if we were to preserve the house. So, instead of addressing the inside of the house, we directed our attention and monies to the outside.

Before any of the rebuilding started, following directions from an historic paint specialist, I took scrapings of the paint from the sides, front, window frames, porch ornamentation, etc., and mailed them off to David Arbogast, a well-known historic paint specialist based in Iowa. David performed an analysis on the chips and sent off a report to us with detailed recommendations as to the probable historic colors of the house in 1885. We hired Roger and Pat Crook, Red Cloud teachers who run a house painting business in the summers, to scrape and paint the house, following David Arbogast's recommendations.

The fall that we purchased the house (and also some of the original furnishings, including the dining room table), the Nebraska state preservation architect, Mike Rindone, while on a visit to look over the Opera House, spent the better part of his lunch hour going through the Harling House with me. I had done research on the house and had a long list of questions for him about how we should proceed in the restoration.

Following Mr. Rindone's suggestions as to the types of materials used, we hired builder Bob Schultz, of Red Cloud, to do the restoration work. Bob rebuilt the built-in gutters, replaced the seamed-metal pyramidal roof on the main house section, and replaced the roofs on the other sections and on the wrap-around porch with historically correct materials. In addition, sections of the actual wood siding were replaced, and the entire wrap-around porch was replaced/rebuilt, using the portions that were left as examples, and also using old family photos as "blueprints."

Thanks to the Picchis' vision and generosity, this house that the young Willa Cather knew and cherished will become accessible to the public as one of the properties maintained by the WCPM.—JS



Letters to the WCPM

I'm very glad to know that the WCPM Center 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, with the topic "Feminist Concerns in the Novels of Willa Cather" and was awarded a 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 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 fax

Dear "Red Cloud,"

We are an Adult Education group who are currently studying American Literature. At present, we are reading Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*. We became interested in the area and her life and would be interested in any details you could send us. In particular we see that there are references to the "Great Divide" – we cannot find any explanation of what the Great Divide of Nebraska is! Is it geographical or political or what? Please help us! Details of your Foundation, tourist information, places to stay, etc., would also be most welcome.

Yours faithfully,
Geoffrey Roberts
Loughborough, Leicestershire
England

The Divide is a topographical feature. It is the high land that separates, or divides, two river valleys— which, in this area, would be those of the Republican and Little Blue Rivers A packet of information is on its way to you.—SR

I just wanted to express my congratulations to you for what I hope was a very successful year at WCPM&EF. I happened to catch the C-SPAN rerun this week, and it was outstanding

I was introduced to Cather's work when I was in college at Michigan State. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was required reading in my English class. I fell in love with that book, and have gone on to read all of Cather's novels except *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Cather's short stories are also outstanding. *Five Stories* is a favorite of mine.

It is my great hope one day to visit Red Cloud and WCPM. I just know I would love it. Keep up the good work; I will send in my membership right away.

Steve Whayne
Cincinnati, Ohio
via e-mail



Let Us Hear
From You!



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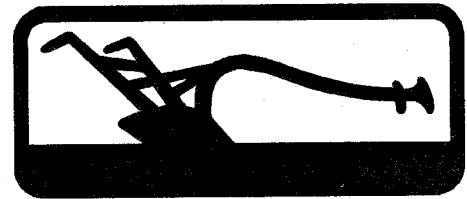
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Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography*.



**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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“A World that Strove After Excellence”: A Message from the President

Dear WCPM Members,

Toward the end of *Lucy Gayheart*, Lucy’s father insists on taking his daughters to see a traveling operatic company at the Haverford Opera House:

Mr. Gayheart set off through the snow flurry, a daughter on either arm. He liked to reach the Opera House early and watch the people come in. (The theatre in every little Western town was then called an opera house.) On the way he told Lucy the manager of the house had put in folding chairs in place of the old straight-back wooden ones; otherwise she would find the hall just the same as when she played on the stage for her own commencement exercises, nearly four years ago.

This scene is on my mind now, of course, because the old dream of the restored Red Cloud Opera House is at last very near reality. Construction is well under way, as many of you saw at the Spring Festival in May. We are picking out furniture, looking for chairs that will be a little more comfortable than those provided for Willa Cather’s commencement exercises (more than one hundred and twelve years ago). Otherwise the interior will be much the same.

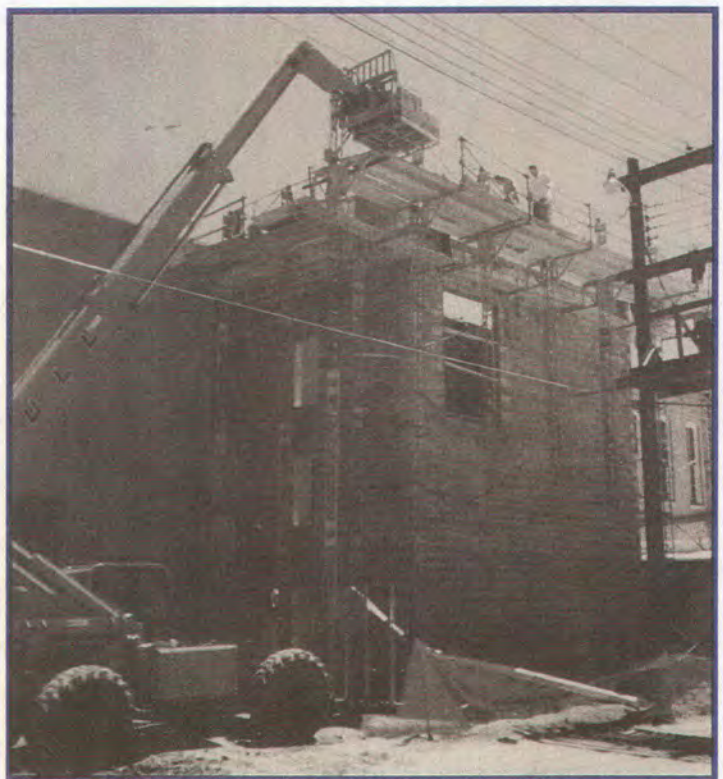
The Opera House’s inaugural production—on Friday, November 30th—will be the opera that the Gayhearts attended: Michael Balfe’s 1843 *The Bohemian Girl*, the popular sentimental melodrama of love and intrigue that recalled to Lucy the passionate world—“a world that strove after excellence”—from which she felt herself exiled. Lucy’s response to the opera reminds us that for all her love of glamour and high urban culture, Willa Cather never gave up her sense of the importance of home and homely things: “[The soprano] gave the old songs, even the most hackneyed, their full value . . . She gave freshness to the foolish old words because she phrased intelligently; she was tender with their sentimentality, as they were pressed flowers which might fall apart if roughly handled.” The singer’s ability to juxtapose (with respectful tenderness) freshness and age, sentiment and intelligence, seems to me also to be at the heart of Willa Cather’s art.

I want finally simply to thank all of the WCPM members and friends whose generosity and enthusiasm have made this remarkable restoration possible, and the group of Board members and WCPM staff who worked at the Opera House project tirelessly for well over a decade. The Opera House is a tangible memorial to the devotion of a great, varied community to a single cause. I hope that in the years to come you will be able to visit Red Cloud to see that devotion’s results.

Best,

John N. Swift

President, WCPM Board of Governors



—Photo by Nancy Sherwood

A crane lifts up more concrete blocks to workers laying the final layers to the back of the Opera House. Modern fire codes mandated construction of a back stairway.

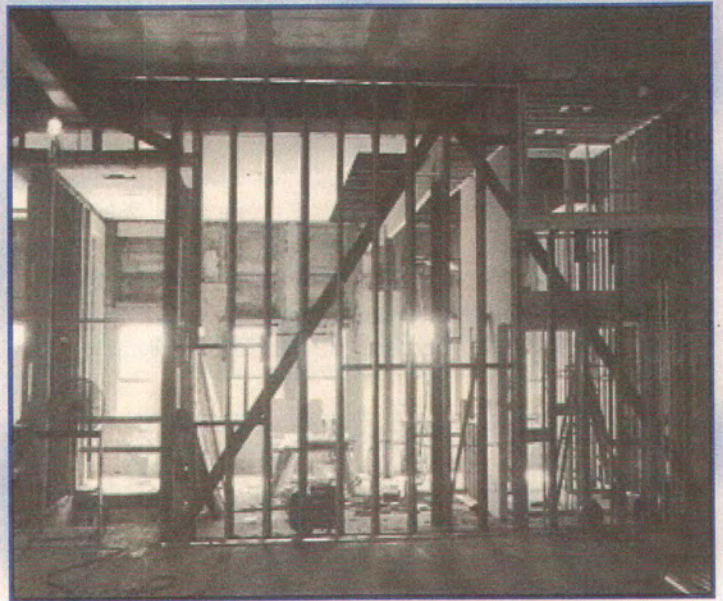


Opera House Restoration



—Photos by Mike Offner

The windows of the second-floor lobby will be restored to their original height and arches. A leading manufacturer will provide custom windows and frames.



Looking east from inside the auditorium, through what will be its back wall, and into what will be the lobby.



**Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial
and Educational Foundation**

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