

WILLA CATHER

PIONEER MEMORIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER AND REVIEW

(THE WILLA CATHER SOCIETY)

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C-SPAN Shines Spotlight on Cather

RED CLOUD—On the way to Red Cloud on Highway 281, a traveler can see the rolling green hillsides, wheat fields and farmhouses Willa Cather once so vividly portrayed in her writings.

Cather's life and the time she wrote about in *O Pioneers!* were the subject of C-SPAN's live broadcast of *American Writers* July 2 in Red Cloud. Traffic coming into the town of about 1,100 was detoured off the brick main street to avoid distractions as filming went on at 326 Webster St. and inside the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial there.

Cather "was an environmental writer of her time," Richard Norton Smith, historian and executive director of the Gerald Ford Foundation, said after the broadcast. "She intellectually loved the land and had a spiritual affinity for it." The featured guest on the show said Red Cloud and the surrounding landscape are core elements and part of the enduring appeal of Cather's writings.

Cather was born on Dec. 7, 1873, in Back Creek Valley, Va., and moved to Webster County in 1883. She left in 1890 and attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Although Cather spent only a few years living in Red Cloud, it was that town and the surrounding prairie she remembers in *O Pioneers!*

Smith said many people today react to Cather because of the spiritual quality of the land she reflected in her work. It also reflects a time both "now and then" and the age-old struggle of living from agriculture, he said. "This place tests people," Smith said.


About 30 people gathered in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church hall to watch the two-and-a-half-hour-long broadcast on its large screen television.

"The anticipation was great, but the event was fantastic," Barbara Sprague of Red Cloud said after watching the broadcast in the church. "It was a very good representation," she said. "We were so lucky to have C-SPAN come and point out things we should know ourselves." After the show ended, the audience applauded.

Steve Ryan, executive director of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial in Red Cloud, also was a guest on the show. Afterward, he said he was glad to have C-SPAN in Red Cloud. "It is gratifying to see the WCPM get this kind of recognition, and it's nice to give the country a chance to see Red Cloud," he said.

Anne Haller, C-SPAN community relations representative, said Cather is among 45 writers narrowed from a list of about 300 to be the focus of "American Writers," which started in March and will continue through December.

"Red Cloud is a supportive community, and they're proud we are here to honor them on an international level," Haller said.

C-SPAN looks for writers whose works are generally available to the public, can create conversation and offer diversity, either culturally or geographically. 

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C-SPAN Broadcast Sparks Nationwide Interest

The July 2 C-SPAN cable television network broadcast on Willa Cather from Red Cloud precipitated a number of messages and letters from friends old and new. Here we share some of them.—SR

Have you recovered from all of the work surrounding the C-SPAN production last week?! The program was very informative and interesting . . . the . . . presenters did a wonderful job. It was certainly a good promotion for your foundation and Red Cloud.

Cindy Worth
RALSTON, NEBRASKA

I was pleasantly surprised to happen upon the C-SPAN production this evening. I was born and raised in Lincoln, moved to Guide Rock in 1962 where my husband was a teacher. I remember visiting Red Cloud often for the five years that we lived in Guide Rock. My two sons were born in the Red Cloud Hospital; Dr. Bennett delivered them both . . . He was an extraordinary man; I will always remember him with much affection. We hope to visit Nebraska in the next few years. And will surely need to visit Red Cloud again.

Marlene Murphy
OTTAWA, ILLINOIS

Dr. Bennett was the spouse of Mildred Bennett, founder of the WCPM&EF. Guide Rock is ten miles east of Red Cloud.—SR

When I met Brian Lamb in April of 2000, I suggested he take C-SPAN to Red Cloud. He told me to send the information to C-SPAN. So, of course, I thought the whole American Writers series was my idea. But now I see Mr. Smith had a lot to do with it, too.

Seriously, I was ecstatic to see Red Cloud on TV and to share Willa Cather with all the rest who love her. What a thrill! I still hope to get to Catherland in person someday but I feel like I've "been" there. Thank you all so much.

KB Weinstein
SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA



Host Brian Lamb, guest Ann Billesbach, and historian Richard Norton Smith on the C-SPAN set in the WCPM bookstore.



Richard Norton Smith and Brian Lamb, attended by a clutch of technicians, field telephone calls from across the country on Red Cloud's Webster Street

I caught a portion of the Willa Cather dialog on Main Street in Red Cloud Friday night . . . It was a fascinating program. Thanks.

Doris Bingham

This morning's C-SPAN program on Cather is outstanding. I have read every one of Cather's books (and of Bess Streeter Aldrich's as well) since my wife and I are Nebraska born, she near Norfolk and I at Hooper-Uehling near Fremont.

I have just completed a manuscript on my immigrant father's life, called *Emil's Eden*. Emil August Kindschuh came to America and to the Hooper-Oakland area (Uehling was not established as a town until 1906) in 1886 with his parents and seven siblings. He married for the first time at age 42 a 17 years younger daughter of Swedish immigrants. This was in 1926 still a significant international marriage occurrence.

Our last pilgrimage to Red Cloud was in the mid-1990's when we drove with my sister Dorothy Berggren of Axtell, Nebraska, for the day. We fully intend to return.

While we have lived in the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii since 1954, our hearts remain resident in the prairie soils of our birth land. Again, thank you for the work that the Foundation is doing to herald and retain the remarkable period of pioneer history in the heartland of America.

The Rev. Dr. E.H. "Kink" Kindschuh
WARREN, OREGON

I recently visited Red Cloud and enjoyed your tour. The C-SPAN program was so informative and interesting too.

Joan Strand
WAYZATA, MINNESOTA

I just completed watching C-SPAN's coverage. . . . I am a native Nebraskan, having been born in Imperial, Nebraska, in Chase County in 1966. My family lived in Chase County until 1981 when we lost our small farming operation and moved to Alaska. I was a freshman in high school.

O Pioneers! is by far my favorite novel as well. . . . it was the first Cather novel I read.

[The character of Emil Bergson] was the country boy in myself—the one I was and wanted to be. I can still picture where I was sitting, the weather outside and the smell in the air upon reading . . . my favorite book of all time.

Just thought I'd write to tell you.

Keep up the work, and write back and let me know where I can send a contribution to help further your good work.

Mike Monasmith
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



Production specialist Matthew McGuire, cameraman Jannie Sides, and WCPM director Steve Ryan prepare to broadcast from the Cather Childhood Home.

Thank you for your contribution to the American Writers series on C-SPAN today. Best wishes for the new century.

Nancy Sosnik
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Congratulations.

The C-SPAN production was marvelous. . . . The wallpaper in the Cather Home came from Secret Furniture. Grandmother Sherwood with Mildred's (Bennett) assistance, helped select the patterns. It took many hours and many books for the correct choices!

It was great to see Annie Billesbach. She's such a neat gal, a very good friend . . . Both Ann and Steve were very good, and questions are not easy.

All in all—a "good show."

Virginia Secrest
FORT COLLINS, COLORADO



The WCPM Board of Governors and staff welcome the C-SPAN crew with a reception on the lawn of the Cather Childhood Home.

from Ocean City, Maryland, all the way to Sacramento, California, and used to go right to San Francisco, bisecting the continent east to west as 281 bisects it north to south. (I realize this is a point of no literary significance, but it's weirdly interesting.)

So, my thanks for your part in the TV program and your work in keeping the world aware of Willa Cather's writing.

William E. O'Connor
DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA

Polly may not want to stay on as a farm wife), there is scarcely any of what we usually think of when we refer to "conflict." And yet, it is a beautifully written story that holds the reader's interest all the way.

After seeing the Twain and Cather programs on C-SPAN, my wife, and I have begun talking about an auto trip that would take us through both Hannibal and Red Cloud, possibly next summer.

Dr. William R. Thurman, Jr.
THOMASTON, GEORGIA

I thoroughly enjoyed the C-SPAN program on Willa Cather which aired from Red Cloud. Dr. Ryan and Ann Billesbach did a wonderful job expressing their love of her writings. I know the Museum will benefit greatly from the coverage. I was surprised at the number of callers who had a connection with Webster County. I know it was a lot of work on your part to be as successful. Thank you for a job well done!

Sue Fintel
DESHLER, NEBRASKA

Long-time friends of the WCPM will remember Sue, who was secretary for many years while Ann Billesbach was curator of the Willa Cather Historical Center.—SR

Just viewed a replay of your C-SPAN visit with Brian Lamb. It was wonderful. I sat with tears in my eyes and a tremendous desire to be in Nebraska again.

Ms. Cather's work evokes the topography of Nebraska and struggle of Nebraska pioneers so very well. Even though I enjoy Mari Sandoz who wrote about my home county, Cather "takes me home" in a sure and certain way. I can feel the dry wind and the buffalo grass when I read Cather.

One of Ours helps us understand the fervor that propelled young men to the recruitment offices, put them on troop trains and landed them in France in a way that helped me finally understand how my peace-loving father could sign up.

I have nearly all of her books in my personal library and keep a poppy in *One of Ours*.

Bravo to you and everyone who keeps Cather's work and life in the limelight.

Millie Clark Zimmerman
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN '69

I have just listened to Brian Lamb's wonderful program and have to tell you that I hope to be a member of a class on Willa Cather at the Harvard Institute of Learning in Retirement—a wonderful program in itself at Harvard. If I get into the class your program is a marvelous intro—even though I have already read many of her books. Thank you.

Barbara Berger
BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Yesterday I saw the TV program. . . about Willa Cather and her life in Red Cloud. Many years ago I visited Red Cloud and saw the museum and her home. I have been a would-be writer all my life and consider her one of the finest.

I once owned the land south of the Gore, Virginia, area and often drove past both her birthplace and Willow Shade. As you probably know, people in the Winchester area are taking a great interest in her after years of neglect, and there are regular symposiums and lectures at the Winchester library and at Shenandoah University.

Well, I just wanted to express my appreciation for your part in the TV program and add a bit of trivia. The program noted that Route US 281 goes through Red Cloud en route from Canada to Mexico. Well, her birthplace and Willow Shade are both on Route US 50 which runs



C-SPAN network set up a production "village" behind the Red Cloud post office.



Mike Brannock operates a C-SPAN jib camera from the roof of the Red Cloud Food Mart at 3rd Avenue and Webster Street.

We enjoyed very much the C-SPAN program today featuring Willa Cather. Thank you.

Jim Schaffer
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO

I was intrigued with C-SPAN presentation . . . and all the pictures of my birthplace. I was born Sept. 1, 1911, on Locust Street to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Means. My father ran a pool hall in Red Cloud at that time. My mother was Ethel Drain and I'm sure her sister, my aunt Inez, went to school with Willa Cather.

There were many Means, Drains, Kellers, Barnes (our relatives) in Red

Cloud for years. I returned often to visit. Last visit in 1976 to be with Aunt Inez and to her farm north of Red Cloud. Her very good friend Mrs. Tupper had twin daughters; their husbands bought Aunt Inez's farm. They are the Wulfs and Hansens who still live north of Red Cloud.

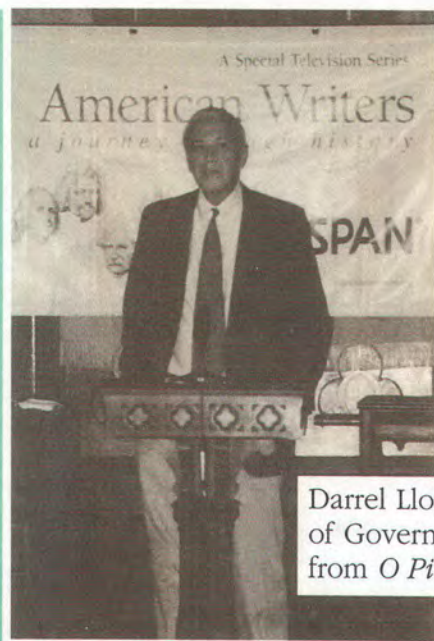
Ms. Hazel E. Evey
LA MESA, CALIFORNIA



A Celebration of Cather

The WCPM and Republican Valley Arts Council welcomed the C-SPAN network to Red Cloud with a special program, "A Celebration of Cather," Sunday afternoon, July 1, at Grace Episcopal Church.

Presenters included WCPM members, Red Cloud residents and students. To read Ann Tschetter's essay (which she delivered at the program), please see page 21.



Darrel Lloyd, WCPM Board of Governors, reads passages from *O Pioneers!*

Ashley Ploutz; Deanna Schultz; and Eli Svaty, students from Elsworth (Kansas) High School, deliver an audio-visual presentation of photographs of the Great Plains and passages from Cather.



Scholarly Contributors to this Issue

Richard Harris is Professor and Director of Humanities at Webb Institute, Long Island, New York, and the volume editor for the Scholarly Edition of Willa Cather's *One of Ours*. His essay explores Cather's and D. H. Lawrence's parallel literary attempts to find in the American Southwest an antidote to the triviality of "modern" experience.

Mary R. Ryder, the author of *Willa Cather and Classical Myth* (1990) and many articles on Cather and other writers, is Professor of English at South Dakota State University. In "*Ars Scientiae: Willa Cather and the Mission of Science*," she questions the commonly held view that Cather mistrusted modern science, or considered it antithetical to the artistic and spiritual pursuits that she valued.

Satarupa Serengupta is currently completing a Ph.D. in English at the George Washington University; she also holds an M. Phil. in American Literature from Jadavpur University in Calcutta, India. Her article examines the ways in which Kipling and his admirer Cather described the paradoxical nineteenth-century colonizer's project of representing "natives" as at once assimilable and ultimately "foreign."

Letters to the WCPM

Please accept our thanks and appreciation for hosting the Nebraska State Historical Society Board of Trustees during our recent visit to Red Cloud. We are grateful for your willingness to accommodate and make the local arrangements.

Please extend our thanks to Nancy [Sherwood] for the wonderful tour she provided. As always, we enjoyed being in Red Cloud and thank you and your staff for your dedicated support.

Deb McWilliams, Executive Assistant
NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thank you so much for your quick response to my request

I retain fond memories of a visit to Red Cloud, when a very kind man came out in the evening and took me and my friends on a tour of Ms. Cather's childhood home. Afterwards, we watched a big red sun set over the prairie. One of those magic summer midwestern evenings. I hope to return one day.

Rose Houk



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Willa Cather, D.H. Lawrence, and the American Southwest

Richard C. Harris
Webb Institute

During his visits to the United States in the early 1920s, D. H. Lawrence's only meeting with a major American writer was with Willa Cather. The two met in New York in early 1924 and again in the summer of 1925, while Cather was staying in Taos with Mabel Dodge Luhan and the Lawrences were staying at Kiowa, a ranch they had purchased nearby. Despite their very different personalities, Cather and Lawrence apparently liked each other rather well. The two clearly shared a view of a modern world in decline. Moreover, in the decade following the end of the Great War, both, like many others, were trying to find an adequate response to the new world that had emerged in the early years of the twentieth century.

For Cather, of course, the early 1920s were a period of great disillusionment and despair. She declared that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" ("Prefatory Note" v), and often remarked to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant during these years that the world was "ruined" (Sergeant 120). Cather later admitted that in the early twenties she had become "one of the backward," seeing value and meaning in a past that seemed much nobler than the present ("Prefatory

Note" v). For Lawrence, too, the teens and twenties were a particularly difficult period. Writing to Waldo Frank in July 1917, he called Europe "only a mass of ruins from the past" (*Letters* III, 144). His November 1915 letter to Lady Asquith evidences a despair quite similar to Cather's own:

When I drive across this country, with autumn falling and rustling to pieces, I am so sad for my country, for this great wave of civilization, 2000 years, which is now collapsing, that it is hard to live. So much beauty and pathos of old times passing away and no new things coming. . . . the past, the great past, crumbling down, breaking down. . . . no, I can't bear it. For the winter stretches ahead, where all vision is lost and all memory dies out. (*Letters* II, 431-32)



D. H. Lawrence
From the Mary Evans Picture Library, London

The war had been traumatic for both writers, Lawrence calling it a "spear through the side" (*Letters* II, 268), Cather, "a great catastrophe" (*The Professor's House* 260). Moreover, it was clear to both Cather and Lawrence that technological, mechanical, and industrial developments, in addition to a rampant materialism, had been fundamental to great changes that had taken place in the early part of the century. Cather's novel *One of Ours*, published in 1922, contains one of her most striking condemnations of modern American society, fascinated with "ingenious mechanical toys" and obsessed with what

the critic Stuart Sherman called the "all-American game of getting on in the world" (9). In *The Professor's House* (1925), Godfrey St. Peter finds himself living in another version of Sinclair Lewis's

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(continued)

"Zenith," in which Babbitts, both male and female, abound. His wife Lillian, a woman of "clear-cut ambitions" (275), possesses a great admiration for modern conveniences and the "right things." Her shopping trip to Chicago is, in the professor's words, "rather an orgy of acquisition" (154). St. Peter's son-in-law, Louis Marsellus, is a "go-getter," who much to the professor's dismay, "cashes in" on Tom Outland's invention.

Some years before, Outland, visiting the nation's capital, had been terribly depressed by the sight of countless drudges who poured out of government buildings each day, creatures who led a "miserable sort of departmental life" (233). In *The Professor's House* the nation's capital has clearly taken its place among the "unreal cities" of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Lawrence's fiction is similarly filled with descriptions of the negative manifestations of a modern industrial, material civilization composed of men (especially) whose "white consciousness" and "mechanical will" have led to a destructive dissociation from themselves, from others, and from the world around them. *St. Mawr*, published in 1925, the same year as *The Professor's House*, is only one example; *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) is a more famous example of the idea.

Lawrence's lengthy description of what Connie Chatterley sees on her drive through Tevershall is a deeply felt lament for the old England that has given way to a modern industrial civilization: "It was as if dismalness had soaked through and through everything. The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling. . . . What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will-power remained?" (quoted in Hough 162-63).² Lawrence's colliers, "trailing from the pits, grey-black, distorted, one shoulder higher than the other, slurring their heavy ironshod boots . . . whites of eyes rolling, necks cringing from the pit roof" (Hough 163-64), are pitiable industrial counterparts to Cather's bureaucratic drudges, who seem even more depressing to Tom Outland "than workmen coming out a factory" (*The Professor's House* 263).

Both Cather and Lawrence, seeing evidence everywhere of a modern wasteland, turned to the American Southwest as a place that seemed to offer something to put against a world gone wrong. For both, the initial encounter with the Southwestern land-

scape was a profound discovery and finally a mystical experience. Certain aspects of the unorganized and mysterious landscape clearly disturbed Cather, as they do Father Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Upon her first visit to the Southwest, Cather in fact told Elizabeth Sergeant that she feared she might be swallowed up by the vast uncivilized West (Sergeant 79), a feeling perhaps not unlike Jim Burden's sense of being "erased, blotted out" by the "great midland plain of North America" (*My Ántonia* 3, 8). Finally, however, the incomparable beauty of the land transcended its sublime character ("sublime" is used here in its eighteenth-century sense, i.e., that which inspires awe and perhaps fear). In her letters describing her first trip to the Southwest in 1912, Cather repeatedly marvels at the natural beauty of the area, calling the Southwest a "splendid" part of the world, the most beautiful country she had seen anywhere. As James Woodress notes, "Her letters from this trip west revealed an intoxicating sense of discovery. The Southwest became one of the passions of her life" (4-6).

In a sense Lawrence's American journey began in the teens, in the midst of the war. It is clear from his letters of this period that he was developing a theory of history, stated in *Movements in European History* (1921) as a repeated cycle of death and rebirth continuing from one period to another. As James C. Cowan remarks in his study of Lawrence's American odyssey, to Lawrence Europe had become a "static wasteland" and America "the embodiment of unrealized organic potential" (2). In a letter to Harriet Monroe in October of 1915 Lawrence made his position clear:

I must see America: here the autumn of all life has set in, the fall: we are hardly more than the ghosts in the haze, we who stand apart from the flux of death. I must see America. I think one can feel hope there. I think that there the life comes up from the roots, crude but vital. Here the whole tree of life is dying. It is like being dead: the underworld. I must see America. I believe it is the beginning, not ending. (*Letters* II, 416-17)

Indeed, Lawrence's letters from the teens are dominated by thoughts of his coming to America. When he finally arrived in the Southwest in late 1922, the land initially met all his expectations. New Mexico, he declared, "was the greatest experience from the outside world that I have ever had. . . . But for the greatness of beauty I have never experienced anything like New Mexico" ("New Mexico" 142).

While both Cather and Lawrence were awed by

the Southwestern landscape, the encounter with the people and their cultures was often another matter. In many cases, both found these aspects of their Southwestern experience better from a distance. For Cather the great fascination of the Southwest was not to be found in small western towns (she said she found Winslow, Arizona, ugly) or even in contemporary pueblos (she stubbornly resisted Mabel Luhan's repeated attempts to enlist her support in efforts to save them).³

After the land itself, Cather's great interest in the Southwest was in its past, in the stories of early settlers, of nineteenth-century Catholic priests and missionaries, and in the old mission churches they had built. The most compelling loci, however, were the sites of the ancient cliff dwellings, originally in Walnut Canyon, Arizona, and then at Mesa Verde, Colorado. Walnut Canyon, of course, would become the fictional "Panther Canyon" in her 1915 novel *The Song of the Lark*; Cather's visit to Mesa Verde in 1915 would inspire the Tom Outland section of *The Professor's House*.

In the Southwest Cather's fictional characters, in fact, experience that very sense of spiritual regeneration that Lawrence had envisioned for himself and that we see occurring in so many of his characters. For the singer Thea Kronborg, the heroine of *The Song of the Lark*, the Southwestern landscape makes possible a psychic rebirth. In Section IV of that novel, in a passage that might well have been written by Lawrence, Cather says, "The personality of which she was so tired seemed to let go of her. The high sparkling air drank it up like blotting paper. It was lost in the thrilling blue of the new sky and the song of the thin wind in the *piñons*. The old, fretted lines which marked one off, which defined her . . . were all erased. . . . She was getting back to the earliest sources of gladness she could remember" (368-69). Thea reflects toward the end of her stay in Panther Canyon that, when she had gone there, her mind had been "like a ragbag into which she had been frantically thrusting whatever she could grab. And here she [had thrown] this lumber away. The things that were really hers separated themselves from the rest. Her ideas were simplified, became sharper and clearer. She felt united and strong" (380).

Tom Outland of *The Professor's House*, returning to his mesa camp from that frustrating and depressing trip to Washington, remarks of his return:

Once again I had that glorious feeling that I've never had anywhere else, the feeling of being *on the mesa*, in a world above the world. . . . It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you begin to see where they are leading. Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that

process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. . . . Every morning, when the sun's rays first hit the mesa top, while the rest of the world was in shadow, I wakened with the feeling that I had found everything. (240, 250-51)

And through his friendship with Tom and his own discovery of the Southwest, Godfrey St. Peter, who had previously characterized himself as "tremendously tired," rediscovers his "original, unmodified," primitive self, and finds a new strength (265).

Lawrence's comments on the Southwestern landscape clearly echo those of Cather's characters. In an oft-quoted passage from his 1931 essay "New Mexico," he remarked

It [New Mexico] certainly changed me for ever. Curious as it may sound, it was New Mexico that liberated me from the present era of civilization, the great era of material and mechanical development. . . . The moment I saw the brilliant, proud morning shine up high over the deserts of Santa Fe, something stood still in my soul, and I started to attend. . . . In the magnificent fierce morning of New Mexico one sprang awake, a new part of the soul woke up suddenly, and the old world gave way to the new. (142)

However, if Cather's discovery of the Southwest had been an almost unqualified positive experience, Lawrence's, after his initial fascination, was a different matter. In letters written to Thomas Seltzer, E. M. Forster, and Martin Secker shortly after his arrival, Lawrence described himself as "strange here, not orienté" and dubbed himself "a great stranger" in New Mexico (*Letters* IV, 298). Despite his distrust of American materialism and "Uncle Samdom" (*Letters* III, 144), Lawrence had come to New Mexico with a whole set of idealistic conceptions, conceptions that almost immediately ran smack into the realities of the area, forcing him to rethink his original views.

The problem that the real Southwestern landscape presented is nowhere more evident than in *St. Mawr*. In what is surely his most positive and beautifully written fictional description of the area, a long passage toward the end of the story, Lawrence concludes, "Ah it was beauty, beauty absolute, at any hour of the day: whether the perfect clarity of morning, or the mountains beyond the simmering desert at noon, or the purple lumping of northern mounds under a red sun at night. . . . It was always beauty, *always*. It was always great, and splendid" (154).

Great and splendid and beautiful, yes—at a distance. What follows the glowing description of the landscape is a detailed account of a New England woman's futile attempt to eke out a life amid that

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(continued)

splendid beauty. Father Latour of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is at times appalled, even frightened, by the stark and mysterious landscape that threatens his yearning for civilized order; she, despite her efforts, faces an "invisible attack [which] was being made upon her" (155); "most mysterious but worst of all, [there was] the animosity of the spirit of place: the crude, half-created spirit of place, like some serpent-bird forever attacking man, in a hatred of man's onward-struggle towards further creation" (159). While Cather's Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant finally establish civilization and order in this rough land, Lawrence's New England woman is defeated. The above passage no doubt suggests Lawrence's own ambivalent feeling about the America he found versus the America he had conceived, and no doubt came in part out of his own frustrated attempts to make a go of it at his own New Mexico ranch. Lawrence found the grand landscape of the Southwest splendidly beautiful but too often sublimely overwhelming.

More disturbing was his difficulty in dealing with the people, particularly the Native Americans, and their customs. Neither Cather nor Lawrence particularly liked "real, live Indians." Cather did find Tony Luhan impressive and likeable, but as noted above, her particular interest was in the *ancient* native peoples and their cultures, i.e., the Anasazi, who had flourished c. 1200. To her they represented that nobler past that she, as "one of the backward," compared to the less than noble present. Cather's view of these ancient cultures was obviously influenced by her own visits to ancient sites and, as Guy Reynolds points out, by her reading of Thorsten Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, which had been published in 1899. According to Reynolds, twentieth-century post-Darwinist historians "did not sanction the triumph of the white American over the indigenous American," but rather encouraged the study of primitivism "for its own sake." Veblen's critique of the consumer society "opposed a stale and vacuously avaricious modernity to the creative and spiritually wealthy organic communities of the 'savage'" (134-35).

Cather's appropriation of these ideas is evident. In *The Song of the Lark*, for example, the section describing Thea Kronborg's stay in Panther Canyon, titled "The Ancient People," is preceded by a section titled "Stupid Faces." In *The Professor's House*, against modern Americans living "lives of quiet desperation," Cather juxtaposes the people of the ancient dwellings: "a strong and aspiring people" (202-03), "a

fine people" (213), "a superior people" (219), "a provident and rather thoughtful people" (220).

Lawrence's view of the contemporary Native American was more problematical. On the one hand, as he admitted, his original conception of the Native American had been based on his reading of James Fenimore Cooper. In theory the "Red Man" was the noble savage, and the appreciation and shared experience of the noble savage's "blood consciousness" could be a key to the regeneration of both the individual self and a ruined civilization. For Lawrence, however, it was easier to love America—and the Native American—when he looked "through the wrong end of the telescope, across all the Atlantic, as Cooper did so often, than when [he was] right there" ("Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels" 51).⁴

Cather's view of the Native American derives to a great extent from a *separation in time*; Lawrence's to a great extent derives from a perceived *difference in identity*, from what Edward Said has called the sense of the "Other." While one part of Lawrence's consciousness wanted to believe in the symbolic noble primitive man, the vital, natural man to juxtapose to the pale and ineffective European, another part of him found that Native American always "other," more the primitive than the noble savage. Lawrence finally insists that the European and Native American identities are essentially different: "The Indian way of consciousness is different from and fatal to our way of consciousness. Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never to be united. They are not even to be reconciled. There is no bridge, no canal of connection" ("Indians and Entertainment" 257-58).

Adopting a rhetorical stance, as he did in pieces like "America, Listen to Your Own" (1920) and "Indians and an Englishman" (1922), Lawrence could urge Americans "to embrace the great dusky continent of the Red Man" ("America" 91) and could claim that "every drop of me trembles still alive to the old sound, every thread in my body quivers to the frenzy of the old mystery" ("Indians and an Englishman" 99). The reality, however, was that for Lawrence the Red Men were "other." At this time in his life, at least, in the early 1920s, Lawrence's own conflicted individual and European consciousness made it difficult for him to see them otherwise. While he admitted that he initially found the native dances "profoundly moving" and acknowledged that the Native American had succeeded in getting at "the root meaning of religion" ("New Mexico" 145), Lawrence could not entirely deny his own European mentality. The Apaches, he claims,

"have a cult of water-hatred" ("Indians and an Englishman" 95); Indian singing, despite "the sacred heroic effort" it embodies, to the ordinary white ear, "is a rather disagreeable howling of dogs to a tom-tom" ("Indians and Entertainment" 266). In a particularly telling comment on the Hopi Snake Dance, Lawrence remarks, "It is not in the least like St. Francis preaching to the birds" ("The Hopi Snake Dance" 277).

For both Cather and Lawrence the American Southwest, before anything else, was an incomparably beautiful land. Their attitudes toward the people, especially the Native Americans and their cultures, however, took two distinctly different forms. In *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor's House*, Cather places ancient Native American culture against modern society in order to suggest the loss of a superior cultural mentality. In *St. Mawr*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Mornings in Mexico*, and other writings from the early twenties, Lawrence places Native American culture against European civilization to suggest the loss of a fundamental life force.

Tom Outland's cliff city would remain forever, in "silence and stillness and repose—immortal repose" (*The Professor's House* 201). Lawrence, having arrived in the Southwest with the idea that America presented the possibility for individual and cultural renewal, came to realize that his original notions, his mythic conception of America, required significant defining, redefining, or, as he finally put it, "debunking" ("Indians and Entertainment" 257). For in America even the sacred Indian dances had become "circus performances" watched by tourists "of all sorts" ("The Hopi Snake Dance" 275-76).

For Cather, the discovery of the Southwest was a transforming experience, both personally and artistically. In much of her fictional use of the Southwestern material, she not only drew upon her own experience of the landscape but also imbued the culture of the ancient cliff dwellers with what she saw to be the superior values of a civilized people. While she always returned to the "civilization" of the East, for her the Southwest remained, as Judith Fryer has said, "a felicitous space," the cliff dwellings, like Keats's urn, "a foster child of silence and slow time" (Brown and Edel 241). Unlike Cather's cliff dwellings, Lawrence's Southwest existed in time. While Cather chose not to focus on the modern-day Southwest, Lawrence found that he could not ignore it. After three years, disenchanted with "The Land of Enchantment," he decided that it was time "to get out of American Loci for a while." They had made him "a bit loco" (*Letters* V, 291).

* * *

During his stay in the Southwest, Lawrence never visited Walnut Canyon, Mesa Verde, or other ancient Anasazi sites. One can only speculate as to whether he might have been as moved by the cliff dwellings as Cather had been. After his stay in America, Lawrence returned briefly to England before setting out again on his quest for psychic regeneration and spiritual peace. His next journey took him to Italy, where he observed the ruins of the Etruscan culture. His accounts of his Etruscan venture were published serially in *Travel* magazine in 1927 and 1928 and, after his death, in book form under the title *Etruscan Places* in 1932.

Interestingly, his response to Etruscan sites was strikingly similar to Cather's reaction to Walnut Canyon and Mesa Verde. Like Cather herself and Tom Outland of *The Professor's House*, Lawrence was immediately struck by the "queer stillness and curious peaceful repose about the Etruscan places" and by the "natural beauty of proportion" of the ruins (*Etruscan Places* 23). Like Tom, who imagines the ancient cliff dwellers of the Blue Mesa to have been a superior culture, Lawrence constructs an imaginary picture of a vanished way of life, "a whole confederacy of city-states loosely linked together by a common religion and a more-or-less common interest," which, he believed, evidenced "a profound belief in life, acceptance of life" (70-71). Like Father Duchene, who asserts that the cliff dwellers had created "an orderly and secure life" and had "'developed considerably the arts of peace" (*The Professor's House* 219), Lawrence sees a people who had developed the art of living to a high degree, who had obviously lived lives of "delicate sensitiveness" (*Etruscan Places* 56). And like Father Duchene, Lawrence sees an admirable culture destroyed by others, in this case the Romans, "civilized" in a different sense, but brutal in their adherence to "the supreme law of conquest" (45). For both Cather and Lawrence, then, the two ancient cultures—Anasazi and Etruscan—evidenced a highly developed sense of the art of living, an awareness, to their ways of thinking, largely lost in the disappointing world of the 1920s.

NOTES

- ¹ Lawrence and Cather first met in New York in March 1924. According to Dorothy Brett, she, the Lawrences, Cather, and Edith Lewis attended a concert one evening and then had tea at Cather's Bank Street apartment the next afternoon. Frieda Lawrence was particularly taken with Cather. Although Cather evidently became quite annoyed at Lawrence's sarcastic teasing and refusal to engage in a serious discussion of writing, they agreed to

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(continued)

meet again in New Mexico. A reunion took place sixteen months later when Cather and Lewis, visiting Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos, drove up to the Lawrence ranch at Kiowa. While Lawrence called Cather "heavy-footed," a "steam-roller" type, he did admire her "strength" (*Letters* V, 280, 283). Cather subsequently sent Lawrence a copy of *The Song of the Lark*, and Lawrence asked that copies of *Kangaroo* and *The Captain's Doll* be sent to Cather. One wonders whether Lawrence ever read or heard of Cather's very negative comments about his work in "The Novel Démeublé." Still, Cather seems to have been impressed by *Sea and Sardinia* and *The Woman Who Rode Away* (see Sergeant 200). In a March 1928 letter to Earl Brewster, who had first encouraged Lawrence to meet Cather four years before, Lawrence clearly delighted in suggesting that Cather be sent a copy of the newly published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (*Letters* V, 340). One can imagine Cather and Lawrence regarding each other with a wry amusement, each perhaps seeing in the other something rather fascinating and at the same time quite disturbing.

² There are various editions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, including pirated editions published in 1928; *The First Lady Chatterley*, published in 1944; an expurgated edition; and several paperbound editions. I quote from Hough, whose text was the true first edition, privately printed in Florence in 1928.

³ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant describes Cather's reaction to Mabel Luhan's urgings in some detail (206-08). According to Sergeant, "the tribal side of the Indian meant little to [Cather]." When Cather met John Collier, the great advocate of Indian rights, in Taos in 1926, "Neither made the least connection with the other—so both told me drily." Cather considered Collier a fanatic. Lawrence considered Luhan's and Collier's attempts to save the pueblos doomed to failure and urged Luhan and Collier to allow them to die a "natural death" ("Certain Americans and an Englishman" 9).

⁴ Lawrence wrote to Robert Mountsier in July of 1922 that he would like, "if [he] could, to write a New Mexico novel with Indians in it." By November, however, he had decided that such a project "would be too impossible" (*Letters* IV, 274, 344). However, Lawrence, like Cather, was impressed with Tony Luhan, making him the prototype for Phoenix in *St. Mawr*.

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Ars Scientiae: Willa Cather and the Mission of Science

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While recent anti-disciplinary trends in intellectual history have come to consider literature and science as embracing the same discourse and deriving from "common cultural sources" (Levine 3-4), the accepted view at the turn of the century was that the so-called "hard" sciences would, through sheer power of their rationality, displace the "softer" disciplines and reshape the world by reducing moral and aesthetic issues to objective fact (Limon 1). Willa Cather was caught up in this revolution of thought as the power of Henry Adams' dynamo became the governing force of daily life, "wrenching" the American mind out of old directions into new ones of utmost inhumanity" (Mumford 143). As science extended its influence beyond the laboratory to create giant industrial complexes and even invaded the home, fear of "scientism" developed, even among writers like Cather who were sympathetic to the aims of pure science. The "deeply uncomfortable sense that science [would fail] to keep touch with the full richness and particularity of human experience" (Levine 11) made science seem inimical to art. Literature, however, could not escape the influence of science in its use of images, language, and even the sense of "what it means to be human" (Levine 9).

Cather, like other writers of her day, thus embarked upon a love-hate relationship with science, a relationship which manifested itself in writing and attempted to bridge the disciplinary chasm which C.P. Snow would have us believe was unbridgeable. In her on-again, off-again love affair with science, Cather did not condemn absolutely science and technology as destroyers of a romantic worldview. Rather, throughout her novels, and especially in *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), *The Professor's House* (1925), and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), Cather revealed a continuing interest in scientific endeavor as an art form, as *ars scientiae*. For Cather, science was a boon to humankind and failed only when its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions were exchanged for profit making.

Unfortunately, the bulk of Cather criticism has placed her squarely in the tradition of a "typical romantic revulsion against science and the uses to which it has been put" (Randall 184). Arguing that she saw no hope for an heroic ideal in the age of the machine, John H. Randall, for example, claims that Cather "never saw science as a way of understanding human experience

in abstract terms; to her it is no more than a bundle of gadgets" (372, 228). Biographer James Woodress, too, dismisses science as Cather's *bête noir* (499), while Cecelia Tichi, in her 1987 study *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, and Culture in Modernist America*, simply lumps Cather into a group of writers "overtly hostile" to machine technology (31). Tichi concedes that Cather does show an "inadvertent acceptance of machine technology" in the words and images she chooses but insists that Cather's failure to recognize "the opportunities intrinsic to the gear-and-girder technology" caused her to suffer artistically (31, 16).

But, as Eileen T. Bender has rightfully argued, "it is all too easy to assume that Cather belongs to the American romantic anti-scientific tradition" (130). After all, Cather, since childhood, showed an inordinate interest in science and was indeed "infected with the awakening of scientific optimism" of her time (Bender 133). Not only did she delve into scientific studies as an adolescent—even setting up a laboratory in the shed behind her house and dissecting dead cats, but she also accompanied two local physicians on their rounds and intended to study medicine at the University of Nebraska. Her somewhat shocking valedictory address at Red Cloud High School in June 1890, titled "Superstition vs. Investigation," hailed as heroes the great experimenters in the tradition of Bacon and Newton. Scientific investigation was, she wrote, a "sacred right" and "the hope of our age . . . as it must precede all progress." She championed Harvey's discovery of blood circulation as having "no selfishness" in it and coming "from a higher motive than the desire for personal gain . . ." (qtd. in Woodress 62). Later, in her preparatory year at Lincoln, Cather wrote to her high school principal that she was "chiefly interested in astronomy, botany, and chemistry" (Woodress 71). Coupled with science was imagination, she argued, the power to leap beyond the discernible to the unknowable. In 1894 she scrawled a note to her brother Roscoe in a copy of *McClure's* magazine, directing him to read an article titled "The Search for Absolute Zero" (Slote 9). As a young woman, Cather obviously found reading about scientific investigation as exciting as "slicing toads" had been when she was a youngster.

Cather's keen interest in the vision of science was, however, tempered by reservations about the relationship of science to progress, ideas she had encountered in reading Carlyle and Ruskin, two thinkers whom she greatly admired. Cather virtually canonized Carlyle in her 1891 essay, published without her knowledge by her English instructor at the University. She praised Carlyle as a man of vision whose socio-political concerns and natural sympathies

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(continued)

matched her own. Cather knew well his premise that science fulfilled the allotted purpose of humankind, namely to order untamed elements, but she must have also known his claim that the "corrupted uses of science" (West 7) led to the gigantic and uncontrollable forces of industrialism. Yet, for Carlyle, industrialism would be "essentially a phenomenon of force, needing only to be freed from its bondage to Mammon to fulfill its destiny" (West 6).

Cather, likewise, was acquainted with Ruskin's view of progress through science and in 1896 published a column in the *Nebraska State Journal* in which she called Ruskin "a scientist, yet his creed was not of science." "He is out of sympathy with all our much talked of inventions and directly opposed to what we call the progress of civilization," she wrote ("Ruskin" 401, 403). Like Ruskin, Cather opposed mere gadgetry as the end of scientific investigation because no such discoveries enhanced the "sum of beauty" or the "sum of human happiness" ("Ruskin" 402). While Carlyle complained of utilitarian science and Ruskin decried science that reduced human existence to the unlovely or unpoetic, in Henry Adams Cather encountered a mind that acknowledged the limits of science while respecting its authority. In his *Education*, Adams asserted that industrialism was "science perfected to the finest edge" (West 9), supplying civilization with new energies by which its intellect could be trained. What would haunt Adams and Cather, though, was the philosophic dilemma of new scientific energies multiplying at such a rate that social development could not keep pace. Cather would later ponder, "Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things" (*Death Comes for the Archbishop* 291).

Influenced by Carlyle, Ruskin, Adams, and others, Cather thus embarked upon a stormy "love affair" with science, but her earliest works do not condemn science *per se*. Her focus instead is on applied science (technology) and its blatant disregard for people, all in the name of Progress. "Behind the Singer Tower," a 1912 short story, centers on an accidental fire in a high-rise luxury hotel and the death of over three hundred people, yet nowhere in the story does Cather condemn the science that permitted building "a thirty-five story hotel which made the Plaza look modest . . . [and] out-scaled everything in the known world" (44). Surrounded by other "incredible towers of stone and steel" (44), the Mont Blanc Hotel was a tribute, though admittedly an ostentatious one, to the harnessing of natural forces, the very goal which Carlyle had cited as science's destiny. Yet, Cather personifies the city as

"enveloped in a tragic self-consciousness," protesting "its irresponsibility for its physical conformation, for the direction it had taken" (44).

Of most importance here is the narrative voice of Fred Hallet, the engineer, who becomes Cather's first spokesperson for the relationship of science to art and religion. He describes the Singer Tower as "a great heathen idol," the end result of idealism, and confirms Cather's comment that "Our whole scheme of life and progress and profit was perpendicular" (46). What is most bothersome to Hallet is that the Religion of Progress, propelled by science, has left human beings as mere "waste to clean [the] engines" (49). Hallet recounts the story of "the most successful manipulator of structural steel in New York" (47), Stanley Merryweather, whose maxim was "that men are cheaper than machinery" (51). Merryweather ignores Hallet's concerns about weak cables until six men are crushed when a clamshell's cable snaps.

Hallet, however, is no Merryweather and becomes Cather's prototype for the scientist-engineer that she creates in subsequent works. He is responsive to human concerns, "a soft man for the iron age" (50), who does not allow greed to undermine scientific achievement. In a civilization built on "physics and chemistry and higher mathematics" (49), Hallet sees a ripe seedbed for "a new idea of some sort" (54), an idea that for some, like Merryweather, becomes a god. Such scientists contribute to the unleashed frenzy of Progress "in the service of this unborn Idea" (54), and Hallet notes that "wherever there is the greatest output of energy, wherever the blind human race is exerting itself most furiously, there's bound to be tumult and disaster" (53). But, pure science and all scientists were not responsible. Hallet is a composite of science and humanitarianism; he exposes wrongdoing among the devotees of the god Mammon, extends "a soothing hand" to the downtrodden (49), and yet remains a man of applied science.

Cather's first novel *Alexander's Bridge*, which followed closely on the heels of "Behind the Singer Tower," reinforces Cather's love of science in its potentialities but her condemnation of science in its wrongful execution. Just as the Mont Blanc Hotel and Singer Tower were marvels of engineering skill, so is Bartley Alexander's Moorlock Bridge a structural wonder. While it is indisputable that the bridge collapses, carrying the engineer and his workers to their deaths, the novel is hardly Cather's declaration of war on modern technology, as Tichi asserts (174). Rather, Cather's principal concern is with the cracks in Bartley's character, in his failure to commit himself wholly to any one thing—his wife, his lover, or his bridge. When he abandons the simple, clear-

sightedness of his western roots, he fails as a man and as a bridge-builder, but the sin is in the scientist, not in the science.

That Cather chose an engineer as protagonist for her first novel is not surprising in light of the heroic status the engineer enjoyed in American culture at the time. As Elizabeth Ammons notes, the engineer had become "a celebrated national hero" by 1910, an embodiment of the "masculine ideology" of "dominance and expansion" (746, 748). Essays like Benjamin Brooks's "The Web-Foot Engineer" (*McClure's*, 1909) referred to engineering as a rapidly developing art (not a science), and the American engineering profession had by then redefined engineering as "the science of controlling the forces and utilizing the materials of nature for the benefit of man *and the art of organizing and of directing human activities in connection therewith*" (Beyer 419). Time after time, historians and philosophers tried to link engineering science to art, and Cather, too, considered the linkage possible. Although Tichi would characterize Bartley Alexander as "a machine-age barbarian" and the "antithesis of the artist" (177), the novel does not bear this out. Like Hallet, Bartley Alexander remains sensitive to beauty and responsive to human concerns.

Professor Lucius Wilson prejudices the reader's first impression of Bartley by commenting that the engineer was "never introspective" and "simply the most tremendous response to stimuli I have ever known" (*AB* 7-8). Cather also describes Bartley in scientific terms of force and energy with the "machinery . . . always pounding away" in him (13). Yet, coupled with the natural forces he embodies is emphasis on his "large, smooth hand," Cather's often-used symbol for artistry and humanness. The first suspension bridge Bartley builds is evidence of that artistry, a thing of "ethereal beauty," as Susan Rosowski notes (36). It is "as delicate as a cobweb hanging in the sky" (*AB* 17-18). By contrast, he is dissatisfied with his newest project "the longest cantilever bridge in existence" (37); he is vexed by a limited budget which forces him to use inadequate materials.

Bartley is a man of conscience, both in his professional and private lives, and the bulk of the novel is, interestingly, devoted to his Jamesian introspection, contrary to what Professor Wilson would have us believe. Moreover, Bartley, in the throes of a mid-life crisis, finds "a seductive excitement in renewing old experiences in imagination" (40). He is delighted by the etchings, books, and flowers he finds in Hilda Burgoyne's rooms and responds to the sensory stimuli of a golden sunset on a "sweet, lovely kind of summer evening" (36). In acknowledging this other force within him, Bartley realizes that he will necessarily "spoil" the

life he has made with his wife and his life of resolute accomplishment as an engineer. With a reawakened consciousness, Bartley comes to see the Moorlock Bridge as lacking an essential ingredient that would make science art, namely the passion and spirituality of his youth. Having long suppressed these energies in the drive to succeed—to build the biggest and the best, Bartley finally describes his structurally flawed bridge as merely "a great iron carcass" (127).

But rather than having lost his creative soul, as Rosowski claims (36), Bartley recovers it. Latent within the engineer was another self that was "not he . . . but a part of him" (114). In his renewed understanding of self, Bartley again links art to science. He corrects his errors, albeit too late, but the novel is not "a trenchant statement about the antagonism Cather felt between the literary artist and the engineer" (Tichi 177). Nowhere does the text reveal that Cather took what Tichi calls "a certain resentful satisfaction in the failure of his bridge" (179). On the contrary, Bartley emerges a sympathetic figure who learns that he, like his bridge, is flawed; he has misplaced both his energies and his affections. Bartley Alexander is not the engineer as cultural hero but the engineer as fallible human.

By 1925 and the publication of *The Professor's House*, Cather was still pondering the relationship of science to art but was disillusioned by the direction American life had taken in the Twenties. She at first appears to vent her anger on science through Godfrey St. Peter, a professor of history who suffers from the same malaise that affected his creator. Both Cather and her character were fifty-two years old and suffering general discontent with a world that, as Cather wrote, "broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" (*Not Under Forty* v). Embedded in the Professor's story, though, is the account of a young scientist, Tom Outland, whose chivalric battle against the decline of values and disregard for aesthetics makes him the champion of scientific inquiry, religion, and art.

Most critics focus on the lecture the Professor delivers against science as representing Cather's view, calling the speech an "outright identification of science with technology" or one of Cather's "most stirring indictments of modern materialism" (Randall 228; Rosowski 135). Indeed, the Professor's denunciation of science as having given us "a lot of ingenious toys" that "take our attention away from the real problems" seems to equate science with mere gadgetry, a concept that repelled Cather.¹ "Science hasn't given us any new amazements," the Professor remarks, "except the superficial kind we get from witnessing dexterity and sleight-of-hand" (*PH* 68). Interestingly, though, the Professor's lecture takes a

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(continued)

new twist as he explores the relations between science and religion: "It's the laboratory, not the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. You'll agree there is not much thrill about a physiological sin" (68). In his cynicism about modern science, Professor St. Peter provides the starting point from which Cather explores what I believe is the central concept of the novel, the ordering of life through art and, by inference, through science, which had become a religion for many of Cather's contemporaries. While St. Peter believes that science has made us comfortable, he asserts that art and religion "have given man the only happiness he has ever had" and that art and religion are "the same thing, in the end, of course" (69).

This statement, if excerpted from the novel, would seem to serve as Cather's final word on the science-art-religion controversy of her age. But Professor St. Peter, while the principal character of the novel, is not its hero. The inset narrative, "Tom Outland's Story," introduces a scientist-engineer who is the reconciler of science to art. He, not St. Peter, is Cather's alter ego, albeit "a scientific alter ego whose life and work reflect a Bergsonian credo" (Bender 136). Like Bartley Alexander, Tom has western roots that provide him with innate intelligence, a simple faith, aesthetic sensitivity, and inquisitiveness into the workings of nature. When Tom suddenly appears in Hamilton to attend college, he is more artist than scientist. The Professor is fascinated not by the turquoises he displays but by the hand that holds them, "the muscular, many-lined palm, the long, strong fingers with soft ends. . ." (121). Here, the Professor later concludes, was a hand that "had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas" (260). Outland's hand, like Hallet's and Bartley Alexander's, has the power to reshape the world, sympathetically and scientifically.

In fact, Tom's subsequent work in physics leads to the discovery of a gas and the Outland vacuum, which he patents without regard to its eventual use or to the profit it may reap. Unselfish motives propel him simply to know the unknown, the goal of true science. Yet, Cather still shows the abuse of science in two instances in this novel. Louie Marsellus, the Professor's son-in-law and an electrical engineer, exploits the Outland engine after Tom dies in World War I. Unlike the "impractical" Tom (61), Louie sees the possibilities of revolutionizing aviation and uses Tom's discovery to benefit the Allied cause, to produce a more sophisticated instrument of death.

Cather also attacks the abuse of science through commercialization in the story of Tom's discovery of Indian ruins on the great Blue Mesa. Accidentally stum-

bling upon the remains of the highly developed and pacifistic Cliff Dwellers' world, Tom stands in awe of the artistry that had defined their lives. He approaches the Mesa with "filial piety" (251), noting instinctively a sanctity about the place. He carefully and methodically catalogues his finds but does not disturb them. The few items of pottery he takes away become religious relics to him, items he would sooner break than give over to unappreciative museums (119). He even names one of the mummies "Mother Eve," acknowledging her importance to the human history of Cliff City and reverencing her as a humanizing force in a harsh world. Tom, both scientist and artist, is betrayed twice, however, first by the government's refusal to protect his finds and, second, by his partner who, even though well-intentioned, sells the Indian artifacts to the highest bidder.

For Tom Outland, science, art, and religion all come together on the Blue Mesa, and, as Bender rightfully concludes, "Pernicious distinctions between artist and scientist dissolve into a religious awareness of the whole" (138). What Tom sees in the great astronomical tower of the Cliff Dwellers is an alliance of physics and metaphysics, and his vision is reinforced by the expansionist epic of human progress—Virgil's *Aeneid*—that he reads before it.

If Cather had intended to endorse the Professor's view that science was inimical to progress, art, and consequently religion, she would not likely have included Tom Outland's story as the centerpiece of her book. For Tom Outland well illustrates the *élan vital*, as Bender calls it, that inspired scientific investigation and "was available still, despite the modern corruption of pure discovery which turned pioneer into gadgeteer" (139). Set opposite Tom Outland is Louie Marsellus, scientist turned gadgeteer, and Professor Crane, a scientist devoted only to the theoretical. "He doesn't care about anything but the extent of space," the Professor remarks (87). Neither of these roles satisfies Cather, and her love of science, even in the most pessimistic period of her career, would not allow her to condemn science unequivocally. The artist-scientist could exist; granted, Tom Outlands were rare, but in such as he lay the hope of civilization, the fusion of faith and science. Paul Feyerabend as recently as 1981 has ventured to suggest that *perhaps* science and art are essentially the same (Limon 7). Cather was convinced that they were. What Cather decries in *The Professor's House* is not science itself but the materialism and commercialism that too often result from it.

Cather continued to admire and to fear the impact of science, and in her late novel *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) she has her final word on the place of science in society. Her protagonist Euclide Auclair (the clear-sighted measurer of things) is a French-born apothecary who finds himself the sole medical practitioner in seventeenth-century Quebec City. The manner in which he conducts his life and profession reinforces

Thomas Kuhn's belief that science is the means, and art the end (Limon 7). Fully knowledgeable of the elemental chemistry of his drugs and herbs, Auclair employs his science only to benefit others. He remains aloof from scientific fads, "being strongly opposed to indiscriminate blood-letting," but he is "not afraid of new ideas" (*SOR* 29). He prizes expansion of knowledge for its application to the human condition, not for profit: "All day he was compounding remedies, or visiting the sick, or making notes for a work on the medicinal properties of Canadian plants. . ." (17). Although his trade is good, his pay is meager and "very little of it was in money" (22).

While he is also a keen experimenter, trying successfully a new remedy for snow blindness and burning eucalyptus balls to ward off mosquitoes, Auclair admits that "Medicine is a dark science" (212) and can harm as well as heal. Like Cather, he admires science in the abstract but is skeptical of some so-called scientific methods, especially when they pretend to accomplish miracles. When his daughter Cécile recounts in awe-struck tones the Christian conversion of an ill sailor by feeding him a mixture of gruel and the pulverized bones of a sainted priest's skull, Auclair chuckles and insists that sacred relics do not work miracles through the digestive tract (126). The pharmacist clearly distinguishes between God's work and his own:

The relics of the saints may work cures at the touch, they may be a protection worn about the neck; those things are outside of my knowledge. But I am the guardian of the stomach, and I would not permit a patient to swallow a morsel of any human remains, not those of Saint Peter himself. (127)

The care with which Auclair systematically arranges his herbarium of medicinal plants is reminiscent of Tom Outland's careful cataloging of the Mesa's ruins, and, like Outland, Auclair translates his science into art. From making "little packets of saffron flowers to flavour fish soups" (169) to displaying a cabinet full of West Indian shells and corals, Auclair couples the facts of science with the delights of art. He promotes the progress of civilization not as crass materialism but as quiet appreciation of a sense of order. Cécile had learned early from her dying mother that her father's "whole happiness depends on order and regularity," without which "our lives would be disgusting, like those of poor savages" (24). And, the scientist could bring such order to the world, as long as the human condition remained the primary concern. Auclair thus attains an authority that springs from a genuine interest in the physical, social, and spiritual well being of his patrons. His portrait as ideal scientist is, undoubtedly, tied to Cather's childhood admiration for small-town doctors, the nearest thing to scientists in Red Cloud, men who

"possessed the almost magical power over the environment" (O'Brien 91). Whereas George Levine would argue that science today achieves its authority largely "from the way it persuades us that its practitioners are disinterested [in the human condition]" (12), Cather would reply that the authority of science derives solely from interestedness on the part of its practitioners.

Auclair is not a Louie Marsellus or Stanley Merryweather who envisions progress as change, propelled by science and manifest in bigger, better, and faster. He cannot, like them, "shut his eyes to the wrongs that [go] on about him," and he readily confesses that "Change is not always progress. . ." (119). Amidst the tranquil mood of *Shadows on the Rock*, then, Cather explores the true mission of science—to improve the human lot by slow degrees, to bring together the means (science) and the end (art) in appreciation of tranquillity. "That is the important thing," Auclair decides, "—tranquillity" (157). That was what Tom Outland had found on the Mesa and what Bartley Alexander found too late in the waters beneath Moorlock Bridge.

If Cather was correct that science is art and if Professor St. Peter was right that art is religion, then science is also religion, a way of knowing that necessarily involves both moral and aesthetic issues. Henry Adams' claim that "religion . . . is the projection of the mind into nature in one direction, as science is the projection of the mind into nature in another" (qtd. in Mumford 147) could not satisfy Cather, nor can it satisfy those of us who would deny a segregation of the sciences and humanities into what C.P. Snow labeled "warring camps" (Limon 1). For Cather, science was not the enemy but scientists were, if they failed to consider their responsibilities to humanity. Achievements in science perhaps made the inventor, experimenter, and engineer susceptible to greed and pride, but these were not the inevitable result of scientific inquiry. Science remained for Cather "the hope of our age," and if its potentialities went unfulfilled, the fault lay in the scientists' "failure to live up to science, not [in] a failure of science itself" (Levine 23). Bartley Alexander failed as both a man and an engineer, and Tom Outland could not live on in a world unresponsive to *ars scientiae*. But, in Euclide Auclair, Cather saw that the heroic ideal was possible for a man of science. Auclair's gentleness and compassion, his keen sense of inquiry, his deep spirituality, and his resistance to unnecessary change serve to define the force that would move civilization forward. He uncovers in his seventeenth-century place what Frank Lloyd Wright would later call the "machine-age ethos of 'SIMPLICITY' of materials 'wrought without waste' but in harmony with 'man's spiritual and material needs'" (Tichi

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(continued)

173).

While Willa Cather was certainly concerned about the directions in which science and its offspring technology were taking America, her early love of science could not and did not turn to mistrust or outright rejection of science as the destroyer of artistic and spiritual sensibilities. On the contrary, she would likely concur with Jacob Bronowski's comment in his *Ascent of Man* that "It is not the business of science to inherit the earth, but to inherit the moral imagination; because without that man and beliefs and science will perish together" (432).

NOTES

¹ Cather's rejection of gadgetry surfaced earlier in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *One of Ours* (1922) in her depiction of Ralph Wheeler, a young man who is fascinated with "inventions" and boasts a cellar full of modern "wonders." Ralph's brother Claude is Cather's protagonist and commentator on the intrusion of applied science into everyday life. A youth sensitive to beauty and resistant to "the importance of making money or spending it" (33), Claude surveys the "wreckage" his brother has stored away:

Mysterious objects stood about him in the grey twilight; electric batteries, old bicycles and typewriters, a machine for making cement fence-posts, a vulcanizer, a stereopticon with a broken lens. The mechanical toys Ralph could not operate successfully, as well as those he had got tired of, were stored away here. . . . Nearly every time Claude went into the cellar, he made a desperate resolve to clear the place out some day, reflecting bitterly that the money this wreckage cost would have put a boy through college decently. (19)

Like Tom Outland, Claude was "born with a sense of order" (29), and the chaos of modern gadgets threatened that sense. The Erlich home to which he is introduced when attending the university in Lincoln offers Claude a haven against encroaching technology, and he admires the Erlich boys for knowing how to live, spending money on themselves "instead of on machines to do the work and machines to entertain people." "Machines," Cather writes, "could not make pleasure, whatever else they could do" (38). Tellingly, Cather's commentary on mechanized society in this novel ends with Claude's death in World War I, the first mechanized war.

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Empire-building and Empire-writing: A Reading of Rudyard Kipling and Willa Cather

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In a review of Rudyard Kipling's *The Day's Work* (1898) that she wrote for the *Red Cloud Courier* in 1899, Willa Cather argued that this collection "might be said to cover his [Kipling's] entire literary output" (Curtin 557). Citing Edmund Gosse's assertion that "if the British empire in India should become a thing of the past, those stories [written by Kipling] would be more valuable to the historian of the future than all the tons of government reports ever mailed to England," Cather further praised Kipling as "the first English author who had gone down to find what life was like before the mast" (557-58). Although Cather felt that all the stories in *The Day's Work* portrayed the work of empire-building with great accuracy, she was particularly fond of one of the stories in this volume: "The Bridge-Builders." She appeared to approve of the manner in which Kipling showed Findlayson (an English civil engineer) building "his life" into a bridge over the Ganges, a bridge that also inspired Peroo, the "native" overseer, to say that his "honor is the honor of the bridge" (558). Empire-building, as epitomized by an imperial work such as the bridge which grows "plate by plate, girder by girder, span by span" (Kipling 6), thus coincides with the "assimilation"/ "progress" of the "native" into "modernity" in Kipling's story.

In a 1901 newspaper column written two years after her review of "The Bridge-Builders"—in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion and the Philippine Insurrection—Cather seemed to echo Theodore Roosevelt's argument in *The Winning of the West* (1889-96) that the "civilization" embodied by the U.S. and Western Europe was the state to which the world's unindustrialized regions, the "waste" spaces, should aspire. Describing Rudyard Kipling as the man who was "certainly the genius of the

times," Cather commended him for predicting "the passing of old orders, the expansion of the white races, the passion for machinery and perfected system, the stroke for conquest and the renaissance of the spirit of war" (Curtin 854). Allying U.S. imperialism with its British counterpart through her characterization of Kipling as "the man who most nearly speaks the voice of the people and the spirit of the times," Cather remarked that she would like to know "how many of the men who boarded the transport for the Philippines were repeating 'On the Road to Mandalay' under their breath" (854).

Homi Bhabha points out that if colonial discourse is "an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences," then it is the task of this apparatus to produce the "colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha 70-71). By this argument, the representation of the assimilation of the "native" into Western, industrialized "modernity" (that Cather commends in Kipling) is also necessarily the representation of the impossibility of assimilation. As Bhabha has put it:

On the one hand, [colonial discourse] proposes a teleology—under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation,' makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power. (83)



Rudyard Kipling in 1895
From the Mary Evans Picture Library, London

Imperial work (such as the bridge building described in Kipling's story) thus functions in conjunction with imperial discourse to project an assimilation of the "native" while at the same time representing the "foreignness" of the "native" to Western civilization.

Cather's praise for Kipling's story would seem to indicate that she is an active advocate of the imperial project. But it is important to note that in her review of *The Day's Work*, Cather also voices her dissatisfaction with

Kipling for departing from the "original theme" of "The Bridge-Builders." She says that the "opium dream and

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(continued)

the conversation of the Hindu Gods" in Kipling's story have "nothing whatever to do with the fate of Findlayson's bridge" (Curtin 561). Her criticism of Kipling's story offers a window on her own location in colonial discourse.

The subject of much scholarly interest because it is considered "characteristic" of the stories "he [Kipling] wrote about men of his own kind, the white professional middle classes, at work" (Laski 30), "The Bridge-Builders" centers on the English engineer Findlayson who is building a "lattice-girder bridge" over the Ganges. The engineer makes a strenuous effort to identify the bridge as the work of two men – Findlayson and his assistant, Hitchcock. A couple of months before the Viceroy is scheduled to open the bridge, Findlayson recounts the manner in which he and his assistant have supervised the construction of the bridge despite "storm, sudden freshets, death in every manner and shape, violent and awful rage against red tape [. . .]; drought, sanitation, finance; birth, wedding, burial, and riot in the village of twenty warring castes" (Kipling 5). Yet the bridge can be dubbed "two men's work," only when the overseer Peroo is not taken into account. While the two white professionals take pride in the technological marvel that they have conceived to "hold the river in place," it is Peroo who has been called upon to protect the imperial work by risking his life. The ex-*serang* of the British India boats is also credited with a "knowledge of tackle and the handling of heavy weights" that make him "worth almost any price that he might have chosen to put upon his services" (6). Peroo, it seems, wants to take as much pride in the bridge as the two Englishmen, but is not sure that his enthusiasm for the work will receive divine approval. He asks Findlayson: "What think you Mother Gunga will say when the rail runs over?" (9) and remarks nervously: "She is not like the sea, that can beat against a soft beach. She is Mother Gunga – in irons" (10).

Soon afterwards, Findlayson receives a telegram warning him of an impending flood and he orders his workmen to "begin a night's work" of trying to ward off the destruction of the project that has occupied them for so many years. As critics like Zohreh T. Sullivan have argued, Kipling's text sets up an opposition between the day's work of "modernizing" India and the "chaos" of the old order represented by the flood that threatens to destroy the bridge at night. Faced with the flood, Findlayson refuses to leave and enters a dreamworld when he takes a toddy and opium offered to him by Peroo. He imagines that he is watching Hindu Gods debating the

fate of the bridge. This insertion of the British imperial project (as represented by the bridge) into the "playground of the Indian gods" could be said to allow a "carnavalesque subversion of imperial hierarchy" (Sullivan 120), until Findlayson wakes up and finds that the flood has abated and that the bridge still stands in confirmation of the power of the "new" imperial order.

The debate of the Gods points to the anxieties shaping the British imperial project in the wake of the rising tide of the nationalist movement in India in the late nineteenth century. Nearly a decade after leaving India, and living in the U.S. at a time when U.S. imperial discourse was preoccupied with the problem of locating the nation with respect to other imperial powers, Kipling is concerned, in "The Bridge-Builders," not only with the question of the legitimacy of expanding Western European "modernity" into the world's "waste spaces," but also with the position of the colonized in the new order. If the bridge embodies the "modernity" into which "natives" like Peroo have to assimilate, it also reinscribes Peroo's separation from "modernity."

The decades after the War of 1857 were marked by a nationalist struggle led by the British-educated Indian elite. When Kipling returned to India as an adult in 1882, the British viceroy, Lord Ripon, had introduced some measures aimed at letting educated Indians—the "intelligent class of public spirited men who it is not only bad policy, but sheer waste of power to fail to utilize"—participate in municipal government so as to quell anti-British sentiments on their part (Tinker 44). Ripon also supported Sir Courtney Ilbert's bill that was intended to remove restrictions which prevented Indians in the British Judicial Services from trying cases involving Europeans. The Ilbert Bill raised the prospect of a 'white mutiny' on the part of the European community in India (Keay 456). The Bill was amended to address the concerns of Europeans and this served to strengthen the nationalists' cause. By the time Kipling left India in 1889, the Indian National Congress had been established by the members of the Indian elite who wanted "opportunities to serve in various government councils" (Wolpert 259). As the Congress grew in strength in the next decade, the British administration was faced with increased demands for elective representation of Indians in the government. "The Bridge-Builders" negotiates these tensions apparent in the British imperial project at the turn of the twentieth century. For instance, Findlayson's desire to see the bridge as the handiwork of the English is contested by Peroo's claim to it. While Peroo could ostensibly be seen as the "native" who proves the righteousness of the imperial project by assimilating with it, he is also therefore a threat to white

authority. As Homi Bhabha has argued, the assimilated native, or the "mimic man," is "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English" (87).

The opium dream in which Findlayson finds the fate of the bridge being debated by the Hindu Gods serves simultaneously as a racist parody of the Ilbert Bill controversy as well as an argument for assimilation into (Western) industrialized "modernity." The Gods pronounce that they cannot destroy the work of the bridge-builders because "the nature of the dream changes, but still Brahm [the Hindu God of creation] dreams" (Kipling 42). Western "modernity" thus becomes the latest stage in a universalized version of history. But this colonial attempt to justify the imperial project is wracked by ambiguity; Peroo uses the dream to validate his faith in his Gods by saying, "When Brahm ceases to dream, the Gods go" (46). Colonization, the imperialist may argue, is the "natural" culmination of the colonized peoples' histories, but colonial history "after" colonization is itself unable to achieve coherence because the colonized inevitably displace the dominant colonial narrative.

What could Willa Cather have found objectionable in a text which shows that "the question of the representation of difference" is "also a problem of authority" (Bhabha 89)? Her fictions may deal with the representation of difference in a different context—that of the Americanization of immigrants and newly conquered peoples in *My Ántonia* (1918) and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), for instance—but they also traverse a terrain that bears some similarities to that of Kipling's "The Bridge-Builders." The question of assimilation to a "modern" American civilization is as crucial to her fictional characters as the question of entering a colonial "modernity" is to Kipling's fiction.

Guy Reynolds has suggested that in *My Ántonia*, Willa Cather argues in favor of "a liberal form of Americanization [that] could encompass a kaleidoscopic cultural variety" (73). He cites some speeches and interviews of hers in which she condemned "overzealous patriots" who were intent on "Americanizing everything and everybody" (79). How can this be read in the context of her enthusiasm for the "expansion of the white races" and the "passing of old orders" that she celebrated in Kipling? The novel's protagonist, Ántonia Shimerda, belongs to an immigrant Bohemian family who cannot, at first, "speak enough English to ask for advice, or even to make their most pressing wants known" (*My Ántonia* 20). Given that the English language was considered the "logical and all-powerful key to the situation of converting the foreigner from an alien to an American" (Dixon 31) by many participants in the

Americanization debates of the early twentieth century, Ántonia's attempts to learn the English language also represent the process by which she is constituted as an American citizen. Like Kipling's Peroo, Ántonia learns the skills that enable her to assimilate, but Cather's text also insists that the Bohemians should not forget their "native" culture. The Shimerdas hold on to their "native" language even after they acquire the linguistic key to Americanization. It would seem that Cather shows a process of Americanization that allows assimilation without destroying the hope of building a pluralist community. When Jim Burden sees Ántonia after twenty years, he finds that she and her husband Cuzak have ensured that their children speak Bohemian at home. However, Americanization has also permanently "domesticated" the Shimerdas' "native" cultural practices, relegating them to the home and thus rendering them invisible in public life.

Anne McClintock has argued that domesticity "denotes both a *space* (a geographic and architectural alignment) and a *social relation to power*." As a part of the imperial schema, "animals, women and colonized peoples were wrested from their putatively 'natural' yet, ironically, 'unreasonable' state of 'savagery' and inducted through the domestic progress narrative into a hierarchical relation to white men" (35). Thus the racial and gendered separation of the public and the private spheres, which took shape around the idea of the home, was essential to imperial "modernity." In *My Ántonia*, the central characters are promised an access to U.S. "modernity" that pivots on the supposed distinction that the "foreign native" can maintain between the public and the private spheres. The "separation" of the public and private spheres along the axes of race, national "origin," and gender, can be seen at the end of the novel in the construction of Ántonia as the "domesticated" and "separated" Other, and her husband Cuzak as the "assimilated" and "public" Other. For instance, Cuzak enjoys "city life" as an apparent "American"—albeit the text does make it clear that he has not realized the American dream—while Ántonia enacts the role of the domesticated female crucial to imperial "modernity."

The Shimerdas succeed at Americanization because they learn how to pass as normative (Anglo-) American citizens. But what of those who ostensibly bear "visible" markers of "difference" from the dominant American norm? The question of Blind d'Arnault complicates the Americanization debate in *My Ántonia*—the blind, black musician's body becomes the site of the construction of the ideal body of the American citizen. He is described as a "heavy, bulky mulatto, on short legs" whose "yellow face" would have been "repulsive" if it had not been "so

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(continued)

kindly and happy," and who plays like an African "god of pleasure, full of strong, savage blood" (90-93). Toni Morrison has argued that a "writer's response to American Africanism often provides a subtext that either sabotages the surface text's expressed intentions or escapes them through a language that mystifies what it cannot bring itself to articulate but still attempts to register" (66). Blind d'Arnault's "visible" racialized and embodied marks of "difference" from the norm make it impossible, by the normative standards of Americanization, to assimilate him into a white, able-bodied "modernity" which declares that he "could never learn like other [i.e. 'normal'] people" and thus could never acquire "any finish" (92). Blythe Tellefsen has also pointed out the manner in which *My Ántonia* cannot erase the violence of Indian removal which "supports the myth of Americans as the rightful owners of the land of plenty" (239). The stereotype of the savage "Red Indian" functions like that of the savage "African" to define the rules that govern admission to an imperial American "modernity." Thus, Cather is able to focus attention on the problem of the "representation of difference" in imperial "national" narratives without resorting, in the manner of Kipling, to the carnivalesque space of a dreamworld.

Willa Cather addresses the question of assimilating newly conquered "natives" in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in a manner that has prompted some critics to categorize the book as her "own idiosyncratic reading of the progress of civilization" (Reynolds 164). The narrative action is situated in the period following the Mexican War that enabled the U.S. to bring California and New Mexico into its territorial fold, and is concerned with the efforts of Father Latour to bring "modern" Catholicism to an area that has drifted away from the Papal authority of Rome. Latour also works as an ally of the U.S. government in the Americanization process of the "natives" (Bishop Lamy, the historical figure on whom Latour's character is based, was also associated with the Americanization of the Southwest). He says, "The [Catholic] Church can do more than the Fort [housing American soldiers] to make these poor Mexicans 'good Americans.' And it is for the people's good; there is no other way in which they can better their condition" (*Death Comes for the Archbishop* 37).

Thus the Catholic Church becomes a means for the dissemination of U.S. ideology in a move that locates the U.S. spatially and temporally within and at the 'end' of a European imperial history. Joseph Urgo has phrased Cather's imperial argument in the following words: "Any idea that will carry people far from home, [. . .] and then

to share the idea with others (or impose it on them), possesses the quality of imperial force. Once the idea was Christianity. Now the idea is America" (133). The Catholic Church becomes at once a prototype of the "new" order, which the expanding U.S. has brought to New Mexico, as well as the exemplification of the nature of this order. The Church is represented as an institution that has successfully incorporated "differences"—Father Latour specifies that the "first bells" to be rung in the Church came from Asia and that the Angelus has its origins in "a Moslem custom" (48). By functioning in alliance with a predominantly Protestant state in the newly annexed territories, the Church may also be said to outline the supposed cultural pluralism of the new order of the U.S.

Father Latour is intent on recuperating the influence of Papal authority on the "natives" of New Mexico. During this process, he encounters the "strange" reproduction of Catholic practices. When he enters the church in Los Ranchos de Taos, for instance, Indian and Mexican worshippers throw their shawls for him to walk upon and try to snatch his hand so as to kiss the Episcopal ring. Latour tells himself that "in his own country all this would have been highly distasteful" but in New Mexico, "these demonstrations seemed a part of the high color that was in landscape and gardens, . . . in the agonized Christs and dolorous Virgins and the very human figures of the saints." Latour reasons to himself that this is just another illustration of the fact that "with this people religion was necessarily theatrical" (148-49). That such reassurance is necessary shows what Bhabha has described as the process of colonial "mimicry," where "the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (86).

Such moments of "displacement" complicate the simple narrative of progress that imperial "modernity" seeks. In the "Stone Lips" section of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Latour, like Kipling's Findlayson, seems to slip into a dream of the colonized. But unlike Kipling's narrative, this section resists being read as a carnivalesque space. Although Latour never mentions the Indian cave to anyone, he cannot "cease from wondering about it. It flashed into his mind from time to time . . . [the cave] had been a hospitable shelter to him in his extremity. . . . But the cave, which had probably saved his life, he remembered with horror. No tales of wonder, he told himself, would ever tempt him into a cavern hereafter" (141). Thus, unlike Findlayson's opium dream (which he promptly erases, although Peroo reminds him), Latour's dream is an *unforgettable* part of his colonial subjectivity.

Although Latour leaves behind the impressive monument of the cathedral—in the manner of the bridge

built by Findlayson—he says at the end of his life that he does not believe “that the Indian will perish. . . . God will preserve him” (313). It is here that Cather’s criticism of Kipling’s “The Bridge-Builders” explains itself. The colonial subject and the colonial text, she argues, are self-consciously aware of the ambiguity at the heart of the “representation of difference,” and of the impossible fantasy of a universal narrative. In this argument, a “separate” carnivalesque space, where the imperial hierarchy may be subverted, is rendered unnecessary.

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“Dissolved into Something Complete and Great”: The Cathers and the Beginnings of Webster County

Ann Tschetter
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

(Ms. Tschetter is a Ph.D. candidate in American history, currently writing her dissertation on the early history of Webster County and *Red Cloud*; the following is excerpted from her remarks at the “Celebration of Cather” in *Red Cloud* on July 1, 2001. Her recent research has taken her into the George Cather Ray Collection in the Archives and Special Collections of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, the source of the letters to George Cather quoted below.)

Thinking about his first encounter with the prairie in *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden decides that “that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great.” Willa Cather later chose these words for her own epitaph. For Cather, perhaps nothing ever equaled the greatness of being part of the Nebraska landscape. Though she spent her first nine years in Virginia, her writing career most reflected the time she spent on the plains. The history of the state is integrally linked with Willa Cather, though it is not just Willa who should be discussed, but the whole Cather family. Today, I’d like to talk a little about the history of the state, why the Cathers came to Nebraska, what they gave to Webster County and what Webster County gave to them.

Why did the Cathers choose to leave the relative comfort of Virginia and move to the uncharted West? The many letters written to Willa’s uncle George Cather during the early 1870s suggest that they did it simply for the opportunity of settling a new part of the country. Twenty-six year old George and his new bride Franc were the first Cathers to move West, and it is obvious from their courtship letters (written in May of 1873) that the two planned to go West as quickly as they could. They married in June of that year and, after spending a few months in New England with Franc’s family, the couple headed West.

George had written to his uncle, Joseph Smith, his mother’s brother, who was living in Granville, Iowa, asking what business was like, whether sheep could be raised, and just what it took to be successful. His uncle wrote back that “A great deal depends on the way business is carried out whether it is a success or a failure” (Joseph Smith to George Cather, 7 August 1873). This letter was enough to make newlyweds



WEBSTER COUNTY

(continued)

George and Franc travel to Iowa in hopes of staking a claim. When they arrived in the early fall of 1873 they found Joseph Smith and his family already well established in the Iowa community. The Smiths certainly hoped that George and his new bride would settle somewhere nearby them, but the Cathers determined that land speculators and the railroad had driven land prices beyond their reach. By October of 1873, the young couple had traveled west across Iowa and staked their homestead claim in Nebraska.

The early history of the state is full of stories of adventurous pioneers. No matter what material one reads—letters, diaries, novels, essays—the one prevalent idea that comes across is that life was often difficult for people settling the plains. George and Franc arrived in their new home shortly before the winter set in, and several of the letters they received spoke of the hardships of winter on the plains. The Iowa relatives were very concerned about the new Nebraskans, and wrote warnings about getting lost in the snow, how confusing the land could be in a winter landscape with no landmarks, and the unbearable loneliness the Cathers might face. "I am fearful you and Franc will have a lonely time this winter," wrote Joseph Smith in November. "If it is too bad, pull up and come and spend the winter with us. Your Aunt Ella is afraid to send the Sweet Taters for fear they will freeze. So you will have to come here if you get them.

Don't venture too far from home so as to be caught out in the storm this winter, it is very difficult finding your way on the Prairie when there is snow on the ground and no roads broke" (Joseph Smith to George Cather, 13 November 1873). Virginia family members expressed concern about the cold and also asked what the couple would do so far away from friends and family. George and Franc seemed to use the time to write letters and although the two must have been lonely for far-away friends and family, they seemed ready and able to adjust to their new home. In letters written to George from an Uncle Giles, who was living in Virginia, it is clear that his nephew was excited and pleased with his new home. Giles responded to a letter in December of 1873 and told George he must "give [him] the dark side of the picture as well as the fair." He

closed the letter, after asking many questions by telling George again, "Tell me all you know about the country. But don't stretch the blanket" (Giles to George Cather, 2 December 1873).

The Cathers survived their first winter in good shape despite rough conditions, but the spring and summer brought new challenges. Virginia relatives did their part in attempting to send seeds, plants, and even trees for the barren landscape. A letter in March of 1874 from James Shuler, a recently immigrated Virginian to Nebraska, told George that "I do not know when I will get to see you. I have some things in my care that was sent to you. A pair of gloves some willows and a little garden seed" (James Shuler to George Cather, 31 March 1874). Later correspondence from James made it clear that the two men had trouble finding a time and place to meet. He eventually sent the seeds through the mail but planted the willow trees and told George if he ever made it to Cozad, Nebraska, they would try and get them out of the ground for him. After citing difficulties with shipping them, Shuler also kept the gloves (Shuler to George Cather, 24 April 1874).

Animals of all sorts were of great interest and often took up a great deal of letter-writing space. Horses were highly prized and those planning on making their way to Nebraska usually wanted to know the price of horses. Should they try to buy a horse when they got to the West, or could a Virginia horse make it out there? George must have mentioned buying oxen in several of his letters to Virginia, as there are a number

of responses asking what the animals cost and did George think they could beat out horses. Judging from the concern for horses shown by young Claude in *One of Ours* (George's son G. P. was his prototype), it does not seem that oxen ever did beat out the horse, and the animals were usually an important part of the Nebraska homestead experience.

The March 12, 1874, *Red Cloud Chief* reported that Red Cloud was "fast growing," that the hotels were "crowded," and that the legal and medical professions were well represented. George and Franc also seemed happy in Catherton, and responses to their letters often mention how good it is that the Cathers are faring so well.

Webster County was happily thriving. But the summer of 1874 was one of the hardest in Nebraska's history because of a grasshopper plague. Crops were



Ann Tschetter, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, delivers her essay, "Being Dissolved into Something Complete and Great," Grace Episcopal Church, Red Cloud, 1 July 2001.

destroyed and many settlers wanted to give up. The letters to George and Franc in the summer and fall of 1874 express grave concerns: "I see by the papers that there is a great deficiency in crops this year in Nebraska . . . How is it with you. Have you plenty and are you in comfortable circumstances. You know I never was partial to the West and if you don't succeed to your liking you better sell out and come to Boston" (J. H. Smith to George Cather, 8 November 1874). Another uncle, A. W. Smith in Missouri, wrote, "The paper give distressing accounts from Neb of it suffering people and the Christian Church here, of which my wife is a member, has been making up quite a package to sent out I donated a very nice cloth coat and a yellow striped vest, presume they will about git gone so look out for them, it is indeed very discouraging to settlers out there and I often think of there and of you and wonder how you are meeting all those dreadful courses and how much longer will they continue" (A.W. Smith to George Cather, 25 November 1874). George and Franc stayed and fought the grasshoppers throughout the summers of 1874 and 1875.

I'd like to end by talking about William and Caroline Cather, Willa's grandparents. They came West to visit in 1874 and settled permanently in Nebraska in 1877. William was 54 and Caroline 50 when they made Nebraska their home. William wrote to George from Virginia in June of 1877 to finalize their Western plans. They wanted to bring their daughter, Jennie (Virginia) with them, but she was ill, and William lamented the time they were waiting to start for her to get better. He told George that he had high hopes that they could leave soon because Jennie had new medicine and he thought she was getting better. It is obvious from the tone of the letter that William was determined to get back and homestead in the new country. "We are trying to turn everything we can in to money so as to be able to make a start in a new country, guess I will to leave considerable paper with Charley to collect and forward. Moneyed matters is very hard up here now. Jenny is taking medicine from Dr. Love she thinks the medicine she got yesterday made her sick. She threw it up this morning she now seems better she's sleeping now" (William Cather to George Cather, 28 June 1877). Sadly, Jennie died in Nebraska in the fall of 1877.

Ann Cather, William's mother (Willa's great-grandmother) wrote to George in July of 1875, and it is this letter which perhaps best sums up the Cather family attitude towards new adventures: "It is a matter of great interest to us to know that our absent grandchildren are engaged now Just as we were half a century ago in preparing homes for their future abodes, and that whilst we are quietly awaiting our exit from this world of care and trouble they are looking forward to a

long life of prosperity and happiness. God grant that your dreams of happiness may be fully realized" (Ann Cather to George Cather, 18 July, 1875). Ann was well into her 70s, and yet a great spirit exuded from the letter as she explained why she couldn't come visit them in their new Nebraska home, but would certainly have loved to.

In *O Pioneers!* Cather wrote, "Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth." Truly, the Cathers and others like them were the ones who gave their hearts to a new country, and it is we who reap the benefits as, generations later, we watch the wheat grow, hear the corn rustle, and continue to listen to and tell the stories of those that have gone before us.



Call for Scholarly Papers

Willa Cather Spring Festival: The WCPM will host a panel of 20-minute papers on Cather's life and work at its annual Spring Festival in Red Cloud, Nebraska, on May 3rd, 2002. Theme of the Festival will be "Under the Quilting Frame: Memory, Storytelling, and Art." Featured texts will be "Old Mrs. Harris," *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, and *O Pioneers!* Papers on these and other aspects of Cather's writing welcomed. Send to Dr. Steven Shively, Northwest Missouri State University, Department of English, 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64468-6001.

American Literature Association Annual Meeting: The Willa Cather Society is seeking 20-minute papers on any aspect of Cather's work, particularly in its connection to large issues in American literary history, for two panels at the 2002 ALA Meeting, to be held in late May 2002 in Long Beach, CA. Please send inquiries and proposals (in the form of a 200-word abstract) to John N. Swift, ECLS, Occidental College, Los Angeles CA 90041 (swiftj@oxy.edu), by December 1, 2001. E-mail proposals are encouraged.

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The *Newsletter and Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 2500-3000 words; they should be submitted on disk in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect (8 and up) and should follow *The MLA Style Manual*.

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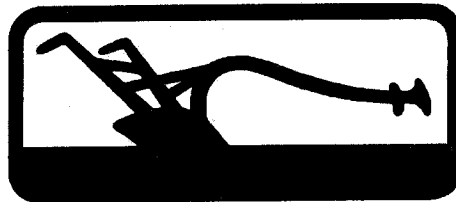
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Essays and notes are listed in the annual MLA Bibliography.



WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

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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Object Lessons

by Ann Billesbach, Nebraska State Historical Society

"It was the high season for summer flowers.... Across the wire fence, in the long grass, I saw a clump of flaming orange-colored milkweed, rare in that part of the State." *My Antonia*

Descriptions of wildflowers dot the landscape of Willa Cather's prairie fiction. Her accuracy in noting plant characteristics and environment is today recognized as evidence of her attention to detail. But soon after the publication of *My Antonia*, she found her knowledge of wildflowers gently challenged by a Red Cloud friend and expert in botany: the Reverend John Bates.

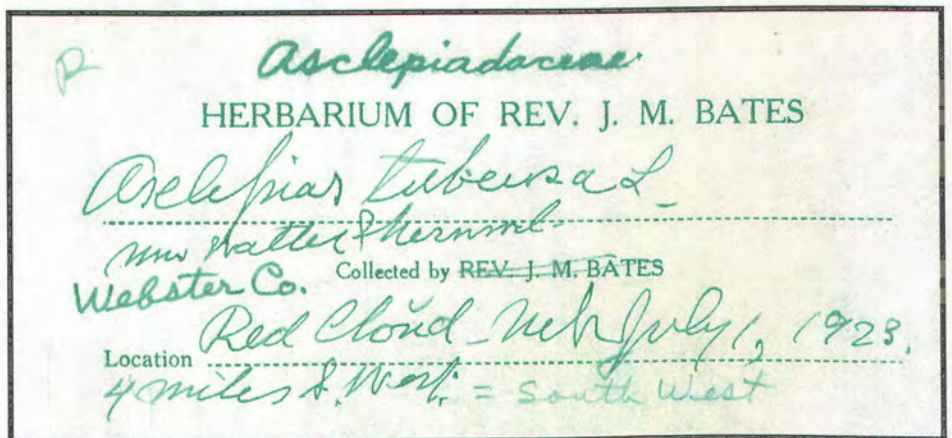
Reverend Bates, Rector of the Grace Episcopal Church in Red Cloud, wrote to Cather suggesting that her mention of butterfly milkweed blooming on the Nebraska prairie near Red Cloud was incorrect. Hoping to prove him wrong, she asked her friends Carrie Miner Sherwood and Mary Miner Creighton to watch for it on their country drives. "You'll think you see a basket of oranges," she told them. Several years later, the sisters came upon a clump of this plant south of the Republican River. They rushed a sample back to Reverend Bates in Red Cloud, who, according to Mildred Bennett, "excused himself saying he must immediately write Willa a letter of apology and then prepare the specimen for his herbarium—an excellent collection which was sold after his death to the University of Nebraska for \$1000.00."

This herbarium sheet from Reverend Bates is preserved as part of the Bessey Herbarium collection of the University of Nebraska State Museum. The label, in Bates's careful hand, notes that the specimen was collected by Mrs. Walter Sherwood, on July 1, 1923, four miles southwest of Red Cloud. It makes no mention of Willa Cather's role in its collection.

Today, butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is readily available in garden centers and has found a place in many home gardens in the prairie states.

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Conversations that Open Doors: A Message from the President

Dear WCPM Members,

A central element in the Foundation's plan for expanding its activities was the national Membership Drive, launched in May and described in the last issue of the *Newsletter and Review*. That effort to bring new members into the WCPM has been and continues to be successful, and as a result many of you are reading the *Newsletter and Review* for the first time. I want to welcome all of you who are newcomers to this unusual (and for me deeply satisfying) organization—and to recall for our long-standing members some of the things that make us unusual.

Most important, we are the meeting place for an extraordinarily diverse group of individuals: we bring together undergraduates and retirees, Webster County residents and coastal urbanites like me, businesspeople, teachers at all levels, scholars, artists, professionals, housewives and househusbands. We are local, national, and international. When I joined the WCPM in 1987, after attending a National Seminar in Hastings and Red Cloud, I felt delighted puzzlement at an organization that simply didn't look like any literary society I'd encountered before. Nor was it obviously a regional preservationist or historical society. It turned out to be both of these things, and a good deal more, and I'm still delighted though less puzzled. The WCPM embodies in its membership some of the

resistance to categorization, the magic of contradictions" (in

Niel's phrase for Marian Forrester's unfathomable charm) that draws us to Cather's work and life. Like us, Willa Cather was at once intensely rooted and migrant, rural and cosmopolitan, earthy and spiritual, equally at home in farmhouses and literary salons.

And her art was concerned from beginning to end

with bringing heterogeneities—people, cultures, ideas—into creative contact with one another.

Significant conversational moments are

everywhere in Cather's work, moments from which characters and readers turn with suddenly, subtly changed perspectives. I think of the WCPM as a place for such unpredictable, illuminating conversations—a literal place in Red Cloud, at the annual Festival, and at our widespread symposia and Seminars. What binds us together is not a single view of Willa Cather (she and her work resist singleness and simplicity pretty powerfully) but the excitement of our repeated engagements with her words and landscapes, and the sharing of that excitement with one another.

I will end this letter with an anecdote. In February at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of American Women Authors in San Antonio, Texas, I was honored to join a discussion panel with Sue Rosowski of the University of Nebraska and Marilee Lindemann of the University of Maryland: two distinguished and passionate Cather scholars with very different perspectives. All three of us were a little anxious at the panel's title and assigned topic, "Contested Cather," with its implications of rivalry and adversarial struggle. But in our conversation, and in the larger one that developed energetically among members of our audience, we found again that Willa Cather is too strong an author to be "contested" in any narrow sense. Talking about her and her work opens doors rather than closing them, builds bridges rather than erecting walls. At the end of her remarks on current debates over the relation of politics to literary criticism, Professor Lindemann imagined a varied but devoted group of critics and readers, of various tastes and political persuasions, who nonetheless all "stay up late savoring the last lines of *My Antonia* one more time. I am proud," she concluded, "to count myself among that hardy band of souls."

I am proud also to count myself in that band, and to share membership with you. My association with the WCPM has been in every way a continuing pleasure and education, and I hope that yours is also.

Best wishes,

John Swift, President



Spring Festival 2002

by Mellanee Kvasnicka

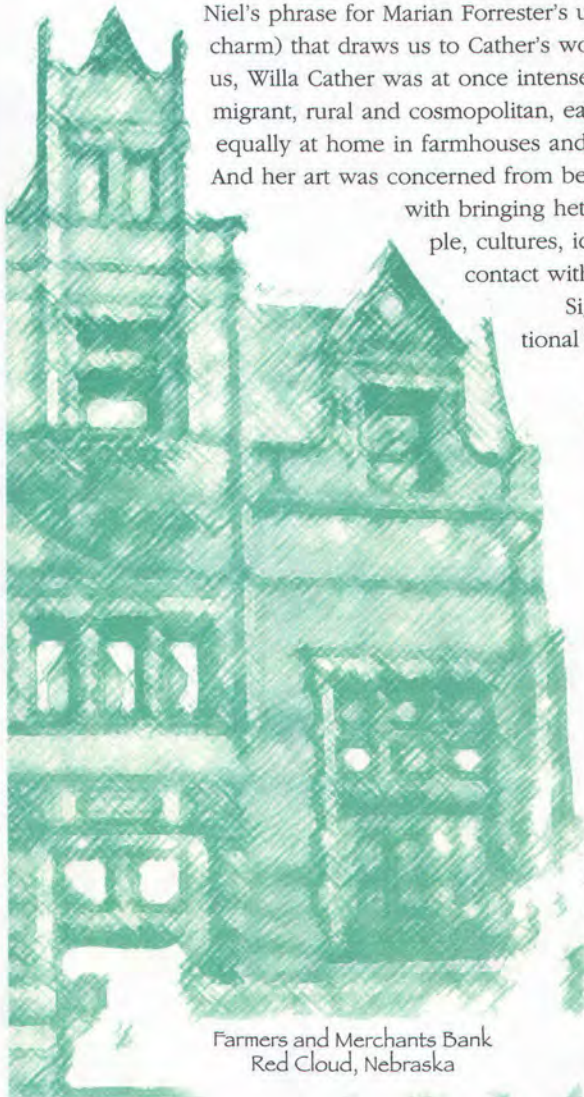
Planning for Spring Festival 2002 is well underway. Dates for the festival are May 3-4, 2002. The theme for next year's festival is "Under the Quilting Frame: Memory, Storytelling, and Art." The central text for the festival will be "Old Mrs. Harris." Other suggested reading will include *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and *O Pioneers!* Ideas to be explored include the similar structural principles in Cather's work and the quilting process, specific images of quilting,

and the idea of quilting as an important component of the immigrant experience.

The WCPM will seek co-sponsors for next year's festival, including the Nebraska Quilters' Guild and the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Quilt displays will be a featured part of Spring Festival 2002 with special emphasis on the 1850s Cather-Robinson quilt which will be a gift to the foundation.



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Join the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation!

Your Membership

Your membership in the WCPM supports **historic preservation** of artifacts and historic sites closely associated with the life and work of Willa Cather; **the Cather Archives**, a collection of the personal property of the Cather family and the real-life individuals behind her characters; **education and scholarly research** about the works of Willa Cather; **promotion of Cather's work** to expand the readership of an American literary treasure; **a variety of educational events**, tours, presentations, and exhibits on American history, literature, and culture.

Benefits of Membership

With your basic membership in the Foundation, you will receive the following:

- a **membership card**;
- **the WCPM Newsletter and Review**, a scholarly journal and informational newsletter which combines scholarship and historical study with the modern day news of Cather's home town, Red Cloud, Nebraska;
- a **free tour of Catherland**, including Cather's home, the Red Cloud Opera House and other historical buildings;
- a **special gift** as a token of our appreciation.

Members joining at the \$125 level and above also receive discounts at participating businesses throughout central Nebraska, including the WCPM Bookstore and Art Gallery.

WCPM Membership Change

The WCPM Board of Governors has approved a change in membership policy. All memberships will now extend from May 1 to the following April 30. Renewal reminders will be sent each spring.

Membership Information/ Registration Card

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Cather, Cable and "The Real America"

by Andy Raun, Region/Farm Editor for the Hastings Tribune



"This is the real America."

Those were just a few of the kind words spoken July 2 in Red Cloud by historian Richard Norton Smith, a New Englander in town to participate in the C-SPAN cable network's discussion of author Willa Cather and her hometown.

Through the course of the 2 1/2-hour live telecast, which began at 8 a.m., Smith and other speakers found numerous opportunities to praise the way of life and the kind of people found in our little corner of the Midwest. "I think the word that comes to mind is integrity," Smith said. "You only have to spend a couple of days here: people are real. There's an authenticity here, a helpfulness, a neighborliness that is probably missing in some parts of the country. It's character with a capital 'C.'"

In the midst of that ode, Smith checked himself slightly, saying he did not want to romanticize or idealize life in the region. He noted, quite correctly, that Cather never did in the many novels and short stories she set in communities patterned after Red Cloud.

Certainly, this part of the country has its problems, Smith said. Most communities in southern Nebraska and northern Kansas are losing population. Changes in agriculture have moved many farmers and ranchers off the land, and our area's economy has not diversified to the extent we might like to see. All these things are well known.

Still, it was evident that Smith was feeling affection, or something akin to it, for Red Cloud, where a C-SPAN production crew had spent the weekend preparing for the installment in the network's ongoing American Writers series. Other participants in the program included Brian Lamb, the C-SPAN moderator; Ann Billesbach, a Nebraska State Historical Society official and former curator of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation board of governors; and Steve Ryan, WCPM executive director.


After a walking tour of downtown Red Cloud and a peek inside the Cather Childhood Home, the group settled down

in chairs to take calls from viewers about everything from Nebraska's weather extremes to character development in Cather's novels. Almost all the calls, which came from around the country and beyond, were positive in tone. Many came from Cather enthusiasts, former Nebraska residents and past Red Cloud visitors.

Red Cloud rolled out the red carpet for its C-SPAN visitors—something that didn't go unnoticed or unmentioned by Smith and Lamb, who have traveled far and wide with the network's big yellow "school bus"—a rolling production studio—for other on-site broadcasts. That early Monday morning, with cars, pickups and colorful flags lining the main street, Red Cloud looked like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

It was the kind of All-American visual image Cather, a Pulitzer Prize winner, could have conjured in readers' minds with her vividly descriptive prose.

Anyone familiar with Cather's "Red Cloud novels"—*O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, most particularly—can sense in them a love for our prairie landscape and an admiration for the pioneer immigrants who set the plow to it. Although Cather was eager to move East after college and pursue her artistry, her youthful experiences here contributed vitally to the work that has charmed and inspired readers around the globe.

The recent C-SPAN telecast showed us that even today, more than 54 years after her death, she is helping people to appreciate a region strangers often consider the end of the earth. Many of our area's residents enjoy reading Cather; others don't care for the style or substance of her work. But no matter which camp you fall into, it's hard not to be impressed by the enduring power of the author's words—and the good they can achieve for the future of the place we call "Catherland." 

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