

Willa Cather

Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

and

Review

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326 N. Webster Street
Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970
Telephone (402) 746-2653

The Patrimony of Blue Mesa: *The Professor's House* and Museum Theory

Charles L. Crow
Bowling Green State University

The Professor's House is a complicated meditation on time and ownership. Appropriately its protagonist, Godfrey St. Peter, is a historian (a professional rememberer), author of an epic cycle of histories about the American past, who is confronting the effects of time on his own life and his family. The novel is, likewise, as David Stouck phrases it, "structured in an elaborate pattern of references around the theme of power and possessions" (99). These issues, time and ownership (or possession), converge in the idea of the museum, which is our culture's institutional way to control time and package the past.

The Professor's House can be considered a book which dramatizes museum theory: what museums do, who validates them, what assumptions they are built on, what goes into them, what audiences they assume and construct. A museum, the Smithsonian Institution, plays a key role in Tom Outland's story, and is indeed mentioned in the first meeting of Tom and Professor St. Peter. Only slightly less obviously, the house of the title, abandoned except for the Professor's study, is a kind of private museum of the scholar's life and of that his favorite student, containing, among its exhibits, Tom's old sweaty horse blanket

and his memoir of Blue Mesa. Meanwhile, a grander, rival institution, Outland, created by Louis and Rosamund Marsellus, recreates Tom's laboratory, among other Outland-ish exhibitions, which are resented in varying degrees by the rest of the St. Peter family.

At the time of this novel's publication, 1925, the theory of museums was stable, well enough understood that it seemed to need little articulation. But if

the questions of what a museum does and for whom it does it were simple then, today they so are difficult that at times they seem nearly insoluble. The practical consequences of museum theory today may be seen in the recent bitter controversy over the exhibit of the *Enola Gay* at the Smithsonian, and the current dispute between scientists and Northwest Coast tribes over the ancient skeleton known as Kenne-

wick Man. At the center of most of these disputes is the question of *patrimony*: in what sense can a museum own a cultural artifact in the name of a nation, and what are its rights in defining it, and fitting it into a national cultural narrative?



Cliff Palace Ruin, Mesa Verde.

— Photo by David Stouck

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PATRIMONY OF BLUE MESA

(Continued)

This paper will argue that patrimony is likewise at the center of *The Professor's House*, and that Cather interrogates this idea in a way similar to recent debates over museum theory. This is not to say that her views exactly agree with today's cultural theorists, for they do not. Nor should we evaluate the novel, or its author, according to their compliance to the orthodoxies of the present. But the work of Donna Haraway, Steven Greenblatt, James Clifford, Carol Duncan, and others, may at least refine our understanding of one of Cather's richest and most challenging novels.

I

The museum, as a modern institution, evolved from the private collections of princes. The earlier collections, of art, war trophies and objects of *vertu* were designed to showcase the wealth and power of the lord or prelate. When the French Revolutionary government turned the Louvre into a national gallery, it transformed as well the theory of museums (Duncan 88). Although the modern museum may appear to be a neutral space for displaying objects of great beauty or cultural significance, the museum, as originally intended by the French Revolutionaries, becomes a way of defining the modern secular state. As Carol Duncan explains, "the work of art, now displayed as public property, becomes the means through which the relationship between the individual as citizen and the state as benefactor is enacted" (94). The objects on display are shorn of whatever original personal or cultural or religious function they might once have had, are redefined as objects of art history produced by original geniuses, and now part of the national patrimony (Duncan 99, Clifford 255).

The visitor to the museum is asked to bring a "certain state of receptivity" (Duncan 91) and to assume a special role as an enlightened citizen. Donna Haraway has shown that the same sort of reinvention of the spectator is implied by the American Museum of Natural History as well. Here, rather than art, the physical environment — a subdued and idealized Nature — is presented as the patrimony. Entering the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial of the museum, one finds that "Youth, paternal solicitude, virile defense of democracy, and intense emotional connection to nature are the unmistakable themes" (Haraway 27). In short, one is asked to become the ideal boy or young man of the Teddy Roosevelt era, something like an Eagle Scout — rather like Tom Outland, in fact. Whether viewing an art museum or a natural history museum, then, one encounters "powerful identity defining machines" which "control the representation of community and some of its highest, most authoritative truths" (Duncan 101, 102).

Or so it seemed until recently. Museum theory in recent years has been immensely complicated by the

refusal of various groups to have their cultural identity folded into a national narrative. Thus various Native American tribal groups in Canada and the United States have sued for the return of what is theirs, not some idealized citizen's, patrimony. The result has been a reexamination of basic premises by museum directors, a heightened consciousness of what it means to display culture, and the development of alternative curatorial practices. A recent essay by James Clifford (who has worked out his ideas on museums in detail in *The Predicament of Culture*) explores how the new museum consciousness motivates "Four Northwest Coast Museums" in British Columbia to approach Native American culture in several ways, none of which pretend to the preemptive national authority of the old practice.

II

On Blue Mesa, in that long ago time before he met the Professor, Tom Outland, tutored by Father Duchene and assisted by Roddy Blake, attempted to train himself in museum practice. He carefully removed specimens and catalogued them in his diary. In choosing artifacts for his visit to Washington, Tom does what museum curators typically do, or did, when selecting objects to exhibit, identifying the most representative and artistically best works, and motivated by "the sense of owning a collection that is a treasure . . . for the national patrimony, and for humanity" (Clifford 225). Less obviously, Tom is also making himself over into the ideal museum *audience*, viewing Blue Mesa and its Anasazi relics with rapt attention, experiencing what Stephen Greenblatt calls "resonance and wonder," wonder being the response to the beauty of a museum object, while resonance is conveyed by the historical and cultural associations of the artifact — here evoked by the speculations of Father Duchene and Tom about the story of Mother Eve, and the fate of the villagers who went out to the plains and never returned.

Thus Tom, on his remote mesa, is enacting cultural rituals which define his relation to the state and bring him to the roles of enlightened citizen and ideal Rooseveltian youth. When he travels to Washington, then, it is not surprising that the national symbols he encounters there evoke in him some of the same emotions he feels among the Anasazi ruins of Blue Mesa:

I got off the train, just behind the Capitol building, one cold bright January morning. I stood for a long while watching the white dome against a flashing blue sky, with a very religious feeling I decided to put off my business for a little and give myself a week to enjoy the city. That was the most sensible thing I did while I was there. For that week I was wonderfully happy. (225)

What he then meets, of course, is the world of real politics: the expediency and compromise of small and selfish hearts, museum directors who seek only

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WILLA CATHER'S NEW YORK

An International Willa Cather Colloquium

June 20-27, 1998

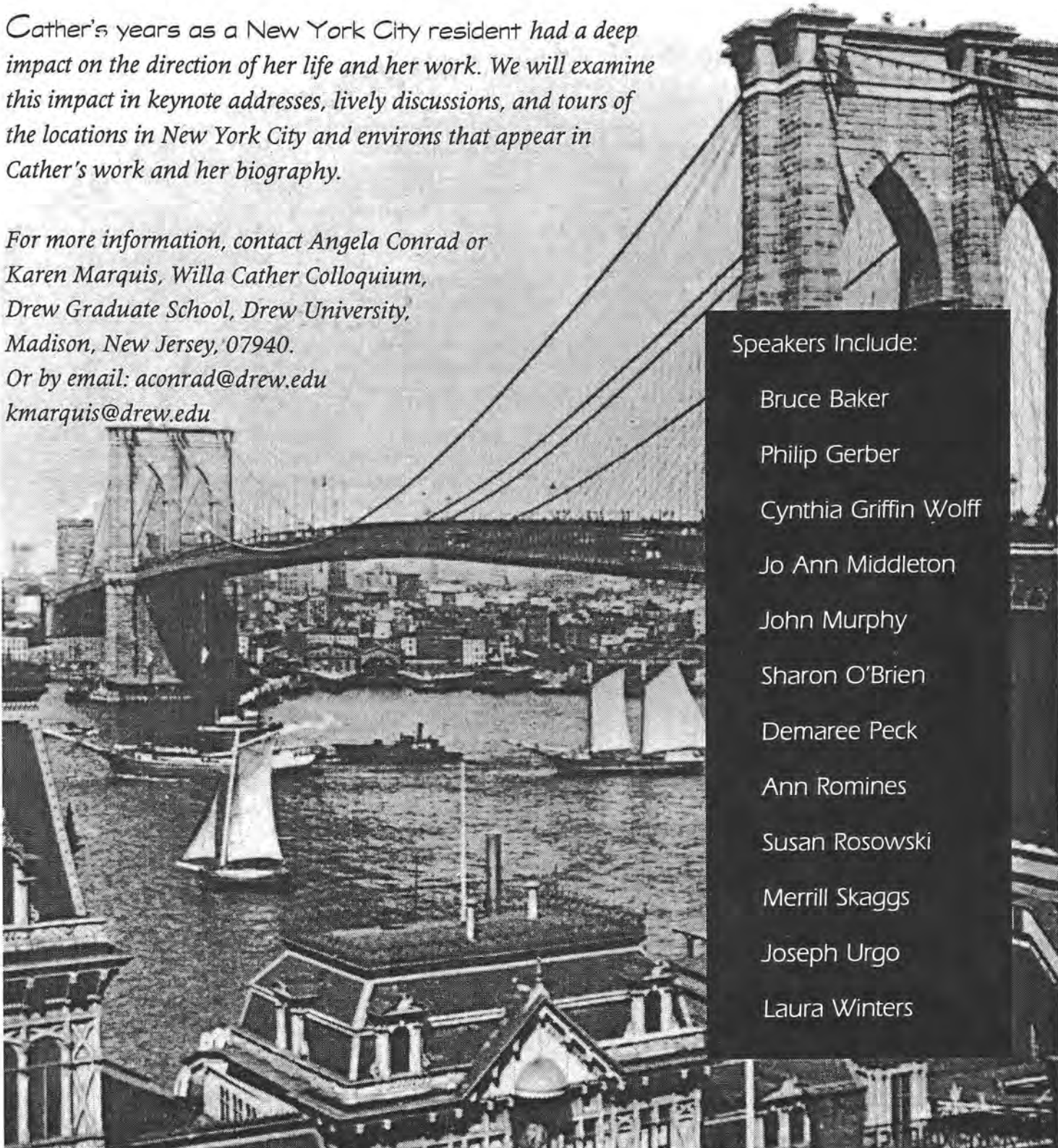
*Presented by Drew University Graduate School and in association with
The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.*

Cather's years as a New York City resident had a deep impact on the direction of her life and her work. We will examine this impact in keynote addresses, lively discussions, and tours of the locations in New York City and environs that appear in Cather's work and her biography.

*For more information, contact Angela Conrad or
Karen Marquis, Willa Cather Colloquium,
Drew Graduate School, Drew University,
Madison, New Jersey, 07940.
Or by email: aconrad@drew.edu
kmarquis@drew.edu*

Speakers Include:

Bruce Baker
Philip Gerber
Cynthia Griffin Wolff
Jo Ann Middleton
John Murphy
Sharon O'Brien
Demaree Peck
Ann Romines
Susan Rosowski
Merrill Skaggs
Joseph Uργο
Laura Winters



PATRIMONY OF BLUE MESA

(Continued)

honors and grants and career advancement, and petty clerks who ask for precious relics to use as ashtrays. (These are insects of the same sort as the university administrators and state legislators who bedevil the life of Godfrey St. Peter.)

Only upon his return to Blue Mesa, and his discovery that Roddy has sold the relics, does Tom fully articulate the museum theory which has controlled his actions. I want to look at this moment in detail, because it seems to me that here Cather disrupts and undercuts this theory and shows her own resistance to the idea of cultural patrimony. In his last, bitter argument with Roddy Blake, Tom asserts of the relics that

"I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell — nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. You've gone and sold your country's secrets, like Dreyfus. . . . I'm not so poor that I have to sell the pots and pans that belonged to my poor grandmothers, a thousand years ago." (242-43)

This is the novel's, and Tom's clearest statement of the notion of patrimony upon which traditional museum theory is based. Yet I hope I am not the only reader who finds that Tom's sincere statement of moral outrage trembles on the edge of self-parody. One is reminded of Major General Stanley's boast, in *The Pirates of Penzance*, of the ancestors buried in his estate's private cemetery. When challenged that he has only recently purchased the property, General Stanley indignantly responds that he bought the ancestors too: "I don't know whose ancestors they were, but I know whose ancestors they are . . ." (83). So, too, Tom's claim of the Anasazi as his, and his nation's ancestors, rests upon assumptions which are so unsupportable — so fundamentally *silly* — that they can hardly be spoken aloud. Similarly, Cather, and I think the older Tom, undercuts Outland's moral authority by having him assert an anti-Dreyfus slur in passing, and by his claiming a plan to work and continue lobbying the Smithsonian, which is, as he admits (to us), "a lie" (243).

This scene of crisis, filled with mutual betrayal and unintended revelation, is followed, somewhat strangely, by Tom's summer of intense happiness on Blue Mesa, his "high tide" (251). Upon returning to the Mesa from a futile excursion into Tarpin to look for Roddy, Tom felt that

this was the first night I was ever really on the mesa at all — the first night all of me was there. This was the first time I ever saw it as a whole. 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 to me in that it made it possible for me to coordinate and simplify,

and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession. . . . For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion. I had read of filial piety in the Latin poets, and I knew that was what I felt for this place. It had formerly been mixed up with other motives; but now that they were gone, I had my happiness unalloyed. (250-51)

I read this passage with some discomfort, as I do his account of his impassioned study of Virgil's *Aeneid* with Father Duchene that summer. Part of this unease is generated by Cather's play on possession and surrender, so obviously similar to Robert Frost's later poem "The Gift Outright," which I have come to dislike profoundly for its cultural blindness and imperialistic values. Similarly, one could argue that Tom's study of Virgil, replacing his museum work, is a cultural ritual with exactly the same tainted values. Virgil was, after all, a propagandist for Augustus, and a creator of a myth of origin which grafted the model of Empire on western civilization; a model revealed in the Roman symbolism of modern European capitols, and of the Washington from which Tom has just returned. This imperial model would play itself out in the ghastly climax of World War I, in which Tom would die.

But these are not the reflections that Cather intends. For her, and for Tom, the happiness on Blue Mesa is made possible because of the loss of the patrimony of the museum objects. It was these material things which kept him from seeing the Mesa. Now he can feel that he had "found everything, instead of having lost everything" (251). No longer possessing the things, he has the experience of the place, and is possessed, in the sense that one is possessed by a great love, or by religious awe. His coming to know, or to possess, Virgil, is a very different thing than claiming to own or exhibit an artifact from the past. (Cather once was, of course, a Latin teacher.) Thus when Tom meets Professor St. Peter, he reads aloud from Virgil, demonstrating his membership in the community of the classically literate, and he gives away an Anasazi pot — a gesture of renouncing material things which is characteristic of the mature Outland, and which would be continued in his giving away of his patent rights to Rosamond before he goes to war.

III

Tom Outland's story sends its meanings rippling through the Professor's story, which frames it. The issues of the larger novel are the same — possession, mutability, and patrimony — though greatly complicated, as the Professor's life is more complicated than Tom's.

The great irony of the novel is that Tom Outland, who achieved maturity by abandoning patrimony, has become himself the patrimony of others. The struggle over that patrimony is the action of the present. Not only is the wealth from the Outland patent the source of bitterness among St. Peter's children and with the Cranes, but virtually everyone in the novel has

staked a claim on the narrative of Outland's life. Various memories and physical objects, such as Rosamond's turquoise necklace, are exhibited at intervals as representing the best and most authentic glimpse of the real Tom Outland. For Professor St. Peter, Tom is the perfect student a teacher finds only once in a lifetime; but Tom also represents his teacher's own failure to defeat mutability, to arrest the passage of time which has taken from St. Peter, also, the moment when his girls were little and his family happy, and the heroic time of his labor on his books — epocs in his life corresponding to Tom's perfect summer on Blue Mesa.

Tom's rite of passage into adulthood was achieved by an act of renunciation, of reconciling himself to the loss of the museum objects. The Professor faces another rite of passage as he comes to the knowledge that "he was nearing the end of his life" (267). This transition, also, must be prepared for with acts of renunciation: of his family, and of the life he had built, leaving only the "Kansas boy" who came back to St. Peter in his last summer of solitude: "He was not nearly so cultivated as Tom's old cliff-dwellers must have been — yet he was terribly wise. . . . He seemed to know, among other things, that he was solitary and must always be so; he had never married, never been a father. He was earthy, and would return to earth" (265). Although he does not quite realize it, among the renunciations the Professor must make may be Tom himself: the Kansas boy has no companion.

As we compare the stories of these two lost boys, we find symbolic figures watching over them. Tom has Mother Eve; the Professor has the mannikins in his study. Upon each of these figures meanings can be projected: the mannikins can be dressed, stories told about Mother Eve. But each of these terrible mother figures is unknowable, cold, aloof, and unresponsive. They will not be moved. They show that the past is, ultimately, alien to us; they show the hubris of trying to claim its relics as patrimony.

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See John J. Murphy's "The Modernist Conversion of Willa Cather's Professor" in *The Calvinist Roots of the Modern Era*, edited by Barnstone et al, Univ. Press of New England, Hanover, NH, for another view on Prof. St. Peter. This volume contains essays by Cynthia Wolff, Elsa Nettels and others on a variety of American writers.

Cather Class in Southern Utah

What may be the largest adult education class ever assembled to study the works of Willa Cather is meeting this term in St. George, Utah, a relatively small town in the red rock desert in the southwest corner of the state. Because of limited room space, enrollment for "Willa Cather and the Truths of Great Fiction" was cut off at fifty, but a good many were turned away.

Taught by Professor Marilyn Arnold, a long-time student and teacher of Cather's works, the class is offered by Brigham Young University and taught at Dixie Community College in St. George. The students range in age from thirty to eighty-plus, and they come from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. What they have in common is a love of good literature and a desire to study Willa Cather in depth.

The class runs for ten weeks, and the texts include *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, several essays from *Willa Cather on Writing*, and a good number of stories from *Collected Stories* and *Uncle Valentine and Other Stories*. Willa Cather's own frequent references to her work, in correspondence and interviews, provide stimulating insights for class discussion.

In previous classes, Cather has been one of the authors studied, but the request to study Cather exclusively came from the students. One of the older students, a retired teacher, said, "We just have to have one class devoted entirely to Cather before I die!" And, according to Marilyn Arnold, that is why the class is being offered.

Annual Spring Conference

Red Cloud, Nebraska

Friday & Saturday

MAY 1 AND 2, 1998

New Items from the WCPM Director . . .



Pat Phillips

I believe the highlight for January was when Darrel Lloyd, chairman of the English Department at Hastings College in Nebraska, called and said he and **Ian Frazier** would like to come down to visit Catherland for an afternoon. Frazier's work that I know best, of course, is *Great Plains*. He spent a week at Hastings College teaching four days of a three-week class on "Classics in the Literature of the American West, 1849-1968." It was a pleasure to have him here.

❖ **OUR CHANGES:** In November, we began sending out expiration notices. We will do this monthly now as memberships come due. You may have noticed an expiration date on your newsletter address label. This is our new way of letting you know when your renewal comes due. Previously we have included a membership form in the last newsletter of a volume, but that small piece of paper is easy to lose or not see. If you believe that you have not actually renewed your membership for some time, it will help us if you update your subscription now! Also, as I am sure you have noticed, the newsletter which used to be only four pages long and occasionally six, has been expanded to a twenty to twenty-four page review. John Murphy, who agreed to accept the volunteer editorship of the newsletter after Mildred Bennett died, has worked hard to bring a level of excellence to this publication, insisting that it conform where possible to MLA standards and mature into a publication of prominence. This development has been acknowledged by Philip Gerber in his revised edition of the Twayne *Willa Cather* (1995):

In 1957 the first issue of the *WCPM Newsletter*, a mimeographed sheet, hand-stamped, went out to 100 members and friends. The newsletter has continued to be published, at first on a semi-annual basis and later as a quarterly, growing in size and importance. Today it serves as a major conduit not only for news concerning Willa Cather but for the publication of scholarly articles by many of the leading Cather scholars as well as newcomers to the field.

Last year, the Board of Governors, at the editor's suggestion, deemed it reasonable to decrease the number of issues published per volume from four to three. ALSO, Bruce Baker, who has recently retired from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has agreed to become news editor for the newsletter. Please take him up on his invitation for Cather news going on in your town, school, book club or wherever else some-

Before and After . . .

Emilie Mindrup, Ann Tschetter, and Michelle Elson (left to right), Cather students from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, apply a badly needed coat of paint to the Pavelka (Cuzak in My Ántonia) farmhouse.



thing is happening that relates to the "world of Willa Cather." You may reach him through us or send your information directly to him at 11419 Castelar Circle, Omaha, Nebraska 68144. Thank you! I believe that your help in this area of outreach will help us make the newsletter provide information for a wider variety of Cather readers.

❖ **VISITORS TO THE ARCHIVES:** Last year twenty-four people read letters from the Archives. Areas of interest as described by researchers included: "Looking beyond biography and into the early years that influenced Willa Cather's writing development," "*O Pioneers!*," "*Virgil's Georgics and Cather*," "*Cather and Communications*," "*My Ántonia*," "*'Old Mrs. Harris'*," "*A Lost Lady*," "*Cather and the Land*," "*Art and music*," "*Chautauquas*," "*General 'life of the mind' kind of study*," "*Cather family genealogy*," "*Cather in Pittsburgh*," and "*Willa Cather's religious beliefs and how they developed, and her reading of the diary*"

associated with *One of Ours*." This year a scholar from Emory and Henry College spent a week here reading letters for information on "modernism and technology regarding Cather." We are very glad to have researchers use our repository, and we encourage even more of you to make the trip to Red Cloud not only to see and read the materials which are housed only in the archives, but to experience Willa Cather's land and town for yourself. The only word of caution is to allow enough time! Nearly everyone who comes to use the archives and to tour feels that he or she did not allow enough time.

◆ **BOARD NEWS:** At the September Board meeting two new governors were added to the Board. We are pleased to welcome Jane Renner Hood, Lincoln, who is Executive Director of the Nebraska Humanities Council, and Doug Kristensen, an attorney from Minden and newly elected Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature. We look forward to their participation and leadership on our Board. We also extend much gratitude to Jo Bass from Omaha who served on the Board for three years. We will miss her wisdom and guidance.

The Board also adopted a Long Range Plan at the September meeting. This has been an ongoing and demanding project. The **Mission Statement** for the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, "to promote and encourage increased understanding and appreciation of the life, times, settings, and work of Willa Cather," has been complemented by a **Vision Statement** which deals with five areas: Sites and Collections, Programming, Promotion and Audience Outreach, Development, and Organization and Governance. The **Major Initiatives** are: the Opera House, Programming, and Development. The plan will be updated and evaluated annually.

◆ **CATHER'S BIRTHDAY:** The two events celebrating Willa Cather's birthday on Sunday, December 7, were very successful. The Prairie Friends Club provided wassail, Christmas cookies and confections for the annual Victorian Christmas Tea in the afternoon; and two members of the Catherland Federated Women's Club served birthday cake in the basement of the Episcopal Church following the Nebraska State Historical Society and Nebraska Public Television's premier showing of the new introductory video for the Willa Cather State Historic Site. Fifty people braved the cold and stormy night to enjoy this first-rate production. You may order a copy of the sixteen minute video for your classroom or personal use. It is available from us for \$9.95 plus shipping and tax.

◆ **UPCOMING ACTIVITIES:**

- May 1 and 2 — Annual Spring Conference, Red Cloud
- May 5 and 6 — Pastime and Playthings, Red Cloud



Pat Phillips, Cather Foundation executive director, was on hand to greet those who came to the Christmas Victorian Tea at the Willa Cather childhood home during "Let the Joy Begin" in Red Cloud. Visiting with Pat are Shirley and Jerry Anderson, Grand Island, and Bonnie Moore, Bloomington.
— Photo Courtesy of Red Cloud Chief, Ron Bartels (Photographer)

- May 28-31 — American Literature Association Conference, San Diego
- June 8-12 — Fourth Prairie Institute, Red Cloud
- June 20-27 — Drew University's International Cather Colloquium, "Willa Cather's New York," Madison, NJ, and New York City
- October 14-17 — Western Literature Association meets in Banff, Canada
- November 11 — Opera Omaha's **WORLD PREMIERE** of Libby Larsen's Opera "Eric Hermannson's Soul," Omaha
- December 6 — We are making special plans to celebrate Willa Cather's 125th birthday on this date.

◆ **NEW IN THE GIFT SHOP!:**

- Simply My Antonia* by Barry Turner, M.D., great grandson of Annie Pavelka, *My Antonia* — Hardback, \$25.00
- The Willa Cather Reader* — Hardback, \$8.98
Includes first edition reprinting of *O Pioneers!*, *My Antonia*, "Paul's Case," "The Sculptor's Funeral," and "The Garden Lodge"
- The Divide* — Michael Bedard, illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully — Hardback, \$16.95 (a juvenile)
- Writer of the Plains* — Tom Streissguth, illustrated by Karen Ritz — Hardback, \$13.95; Paperback, \$5.95 (a juvenile)
- Unbridled Spirits* — Short Fiction about Women in the Old West, edited by Judy Alter and A. R. Row — Paperback, \$17.95
- In stock again:** *Cather's Kitchens* by Roger Welsch — Hardback, \$22.95
- Hard Laminated Bookmarks — these are beautifully made with pristine 8-cent Cather stamps, gold-plated charms on the tassels, and comes with a choice of eight different Cather quotations — \$4.95



New Cather Biographical Data “VALENTINE” SENTIMENTS

Cynthia Griffin Wolff

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Although both “A Death in the Desert” and “Uncle Valentine” have generally been associated with Ethelbert Nevin, the celebrated composer who became Cather’s attentive friend during her Pittsburgh years, another story, “The Garden Lodge,” may be more closely related to their relationship. That there was a mutually affectionate, personal attachment between Cather and Nevin has long been recognized. As Woodress observes: “Nevin found Cather attractive and turned on his charm”;¹ and during this period, Cather’s letters to Mariel Gere, her best friend in Lincoln, are almost adolescent in their excitement. Cather’s professional writing was more restrained, of course; however, the timbre of enthusiasm is there as well. In articles on Nevin she compared him to a youthful picture of Chopin and strained to convey his undefinable magnetism:

He seems to have written nearly all the songs one greatly cares for Though he is but thirty-eight years of age . . . his hair is touched with gray at the temples He is a slight, delicately constructed man, all nerves, with a sort of tenseness in every line of his figure, and the mobile, boyish face of the immortally young. His hands are unmistakably those of a musician, small of palm, with long, supple fingers, and a strong, well-developed thumb His gestures are quick and impulsive, like his manner of speech Gray hair above a face so young, so lyric, so mobile is a strange thing to see. It is as though the kiss of the muse had left its visible mark, and tells that if his wooing of her has been happy it has not been altogether painless.²

Ethelbert Nevin worked in a garden cottage on the grounds of “Vineacre,” his family’s spacious estate in Sewickley, a village that was only a short commuter-rail ride from downtown Pittsburgh. Nevin had named the cottage “Queen Anne’s Lodge”; Willa Cather called it a “House of Song.”³ In fact, she found her hours with the Nevins so enchanting that she “even sacrificed some of her precious Sundays for visits to Vineacre.”⁴

Nevin seems to have been extravagantly devoted to his wife; his letters to her are effusively sentimental. However, sentiment was only one part of their relationship: Anne Nevin was her husband’s *de facto* business manager, and she managed the family’s money as well. This arrangement was necessitated by Ethelbert Nevin’s drinking problems: periodically he was prodigal with their money, and he was given to unannounced expeditions away from Pittsburgh, returning as unexpectedly as he had left, sometimes accompanied by dubious characters. Probably Ethelbert Nevin found his wife attractive as much for her pragmatic reliability as for her other charms. Like Raymond d’Esquerré in “The Garden Lodge,” his life required a kind of stability that he could not achieve alone (perhaps, this was also one of the reasons he was drawn to the young, attractive — and eminently capable — Willa Cather). And also like d’Esquerré, Nevin would prove to be “a man to be reckoned with.”⁵

Nevin was clearly the aggressor with Cather: shortly after they met, he went shopping with her to carry her bundles; in the middle of winter, he presented her with a bunch of violets “as big as the moon”;⁶ he sent her a copy of Shakespeare’s sonnets; he even dedicated one of his songs to her. Biographers have wondered about the nature of this sentimental relationship. Now, a hitherto overlooked cache of four documents in the Music Library of the University of Pittsburgh, two signed by Cather and two attributed to her, sheds additional light on it.

The first is an occasional poem entitled “A Toast,” evidently written after the wedding ceremony of mutual friends. The second is a good deal more personal, a letter dated February 28, 1900, thanking Nevin for having dedicated *La Lune Blanche* to her. Its tone is overtly formal (she addresses him as *Mr. Nevin*); however, the following excerpt (in paraphrase) suggests underlying emotions of a deeper sort. ** I would prefer a meager personal claim to just a single song of yours than any other object in the entire house of art. And just because I yearned for it so intensely, it was given to me! Such things do not often happen.⁷ **

The third is, perhaps, the most intriguing: a Valentine in the form of a personally constructed collage, sent in February of either 1900 or 1901. A playful missive, it also contains overt expressions of affection. Its appearance is charming, artistically pleasing and frankly personal. On a cream-colored background, Cather has drawn a pen and ink sketch of a Paris street — not a boulevard, but one of the smaller streets where American travelers can discover quaint cafes and bistros and *pensiones*. Two or three buildings are outlined on the left-hand side of the page. The principal one has an outdoor cafe on the street floor with chairs and little tables and advertisements for wine, liqueurs, and the like. The next floor of this building evidently contains rooms for rent, and the window frame of one room has been sketched in. Finally, the building has been provided with an

address: 42 Rue Galilee — the address in Paris at which Ethelbert Nevin had recently been staying.

Superimposed on this pen-sketch are three figures that appear to have been cut out of a magazine or some other professionally illustrated publication; moreover, they have been waxed or given some other kind of finish that make them both firm and resistant to tearing. On the upper left-hand corner, leaning out of the window, there is a man in formal dress; one hand is pressed to his head, the other is holding what appears to be money. The hand holding money is folded in such a way that when the card is opened, the hand moves to extend the money. On the right, in the middle of the page, there is the figure of an organ-grinder plying his trade. Dressed in orange with a deep yellow hurdy-gurdy, he is cranking his instrument to send a stream of notes floating up toward the man in the window. Finally, the organ-grinder's brown monkey squats at the bottom left side of the page, secured by a long leash and making a face at the viewer.

Printed by hand in ink and interwoven with the picture is the valentine message that follows (in paraphrased form):

I'm a merry organ-grinder who stands across the
rue

Playing there every morning as I look across at you.
I can see you're interested in my most accom-
plished grinds

So that's the reason why I'm sending you this
Valentine

Sundry people give me sous and even centimes too
But of sympathetic hearers there are really very few
So when you're looking down from your window
over there,

I'm just the happiest organ-grinder playing anywhere

You seem ecstatic at my song and thrilled beyond
compare;

It always animates you and you even pull your hair.
Now and then if it is "Daisy" or some other song you
know

You'll sit right down and play with me upon the
piano

They say that music cheers the heart and chases
cares away

So all my life I'll stand across from quarante deux
Rue Galilee.

That I may feel the mystic tie that binds your soul to
mine

While my organ strains are sending you
encore de

VALENTINES!

If nothing else, this *billet* must surely dispel any doubt that Cather had Nevin in mind when she wrote the later story, "Uncle Valentine." Moreover, she seems to have retained the memory of this particular missive for almost twenty years and then revived it to make a literary reference that only she would understand.

The presentation of the verse is visually witty: the coupling of a lowly organ-grinder with the elegantly

dressed figure at the window is comic, and the tone that dominates the poetry throughout the first half of the poem is lighthearted. However, the sentiments that enter the poem midway through are neither comic nor merely witty. Cather writes of "ecstasy" and "thrill"; she promises life-long devotion to the appreciative listener who must always remain "across" the street; and at the poem's climax, she postulates a "mystic tie" that will forever link their mutually sympathetic "souls." Furthermore, in such a context, one must wonder whether the insistent allusion to the speaker's "organ" suggests a pun, whether Cather is describing some fusion of spiritual and corporal love that can never be fully consummated.

In sum, the Valentine is subtle and complex, flirtatious and cryptic. However, the emotional content of the fourth and final document in this packet is plainly and painfully clear: a wrenching cry of anguish. On February 17, 1901, Ethelbert Nevin died from a stroke at the age of thirty-eight. It was utterly unexpected.

Willa Cather was in Washington when the catastrophe struck. She learned the shocking details of his death from Isabelle McClung, who was also acquainted with the Nevin family, and she began trying to write a letter of sympathy to Ethelbert's wife, Anne Nevin, immediately. For once, however, she could not manage to put the words together. Instead, for a week Willa Cather fell into tears whenever she attempted to compose her message, for like Caroline Noble of "The Garden Lodge," she discovered that once her cherished musical ideal was gone, his absence was all but unendurable. At length she did set some thoughts down on paper, and the fourth document in this collection is Cather's letter of condolence to Anne Nevin. It runs to seven hand-written sheets. And if her Valentine had displayed control and artfulness, this letter — rambling, repetitive, often clumsy — reveals only her own misery. Indeed, perhaps the most distinctive fact about this message of "condolence" is that it pays scant attention to Anne Nevin's feelings, taking notice of her principally as the protector of the genius Cather had so ardently revered, expressing instead the writer's own feelings.

Cather begins by declaring that to a lesser degree she has suffered precisely the same kind of sorrow as Nevin's widow. Her vital energies have been consumed with grief. She feels that nothing is worth doing; that she has lost someone who, above all others, she wished well; that the youthful years of her own life have now vanished; that the very embodiment of art has been banished from her life; that nothing but a dreary domain of dullness and uniformity remains for her. She confesses that she regrets having missed Nevin's funeral services, but her feelings about the composer and his music are so intense that she could never have endured hearing his works played as requiem. In short, she claims that there is no one in the world whose love or grief is more genuine than hers.

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"VALENTINE" SENTIMENTS

(Continued)

After some time had passed, Cather's emotions took a more controlled, artistic form: she dedicated three poems in *April Twilights* to Ethelbert Nevin — "Sleep Minstrel, Sleep"; "Arcadian Winter"; and "Song." However, in the early months of 1901, just after his death, she was unaffectedly suffering. The McClung family had recently moved into a spacious, eight-bedroom home at 1180 Murray Hill Ave., and when Willa Cather returned to Pittsburgh from Washington in March, 191, they invited her to become a member of their household.⁸ It is not unreasonable to suppose that a sympathetic understanding of her grief was one of the factors that had influenced their decision. After all, the McClungs had also been admiring friends of Ethelbert Nevin, who was very much a Pittsburgh luminary. But perhaps they had not esteemed him in quite the way that Willa Cather did.

NOTES

¹ Woodress, p. 132.

² Cather, "Passing Show."

³ Cather, "Narcissus."

⁴ Byrne and Snyder, p. 31.

⁵ Cather, "The Garden Lodge" in *The Troll Garden*, p. 132.

⁶ The phrase is Cather's; it appears in a letter to Mariel Gere. It has been quoted in *Chrysalis*, p. 30, the source of my quotation.

⁷ Willa Cather Letter to Ethelbert Nevin, Feb. 28, 1900.

⁸ See *Chrysalis*, p. 40.

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Third floor, window view,
Willow Shade.

— Photo by J. Murphy



Willa Cather's Southern Connections: A Report on the Seventh International (Virginia) Cather Seminar

Tim Bintrim (Duquesne University) and
Elizabeth Turner (William Rainey Harper College)
with Jennifer Danes (Central University, Iowa)

From June 21st to 28th approximately 160 scholars and readers gathered on the Shenandoah University campus in Winchester, Virginia, for the Seventh International Willa Cather Seminar: "Willa Cather's Southern Connections." John Jacobs, Shenandoah University professor of English and American Studies, first invited the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation to sponsor the international seminar at Shenandoah during the Quebec seminar in 1995. Jacobs served as the Virginia seminar site director, a position that netted him over 300 messages in his e-mail account in this past year. Jacobs expressed his gratitude for e-mail and the ease it provided in responding to so many inquiries: "I can't imagine having to do it all by mail." He added, "Those on the Shenandoah campus were looking forward to the conference, and the people who attended repeatedly commented about how much they enjoyed having the conference on campus." Ann Romines, George Washington University English Professor, was the seminar's program director and, together with Jacobs, sought to create a seminar that would provide participants with a sense of the place in which Cather was born and to which she returned in her last published novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

As the seminar opened, we learned from John Jacobs that Winchester's other famous daughter was country singer Patsy Cline, who had worked for a time in the local drugstore, as Willa Cather had in Red Cloud. While most of us passed on the Patsy Cline Commemorative Matchbox car, we lingered over the treasures that Pat Phillips had brought to the seminar in the WCPM's pickup. The book room was stocked with twenty-six Cather titles, sixty-four books on Cather, and Cather memorabilia. At Saturday's opening reception, sponsored by the University of Nebraska Press and the University Press of Virginia, "A First Taste of Virginia" was offered; seminarians were treated to Virginia's ubiquitous ham biscuit, a sample of the fine and filling food we would enjoy during the week at Shenandoah's Allen Dining Hall.

That evening during the opening plenary session Susan Parry, owner (with husband David Parry) of Willow Shade, described how childhood memories shaped Cather's art. After Parry's slide presentation, which prepared us for the next day's tour, Noel Polk, distinguished scholar at the University of Southern Mississippi, delivered the keynote address, "Of Plows and Such." Polk built upon Blanche Gelfant's



Sapphira House scenes.

—Photos by J. Murphy



important essay on sex in *My Ántonia* by re-considering Jim Burden's southern origins.

The theme for the first full day of the conference, Sunday, June 22nd, was "Shenandoah Valley Cultures," and the morning plenary session included John Vlach's

described in "Nancy's Return," the last chapter of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Later in the afternoon the buses met for a picnic supper at Capon Springs, a resort located on the west side of the Great North Mountain. Known for its 64° year-round, mineral-rich waters, Capon Springs was discovered in 1765 by Henry Frye, whose wife was cured of her rheumatism by its waters. Today a swimming pool has replaced the public baths where Cather's Sapphira sought relief from the gout. After dinner a few of us soaked our travel-weary feet in the swimming pool with remarkable results.

Complementing Sunday's talks on Virginia cultural history and geography, Monday emphasized interpretations of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Joseph Urgo, the first speaker at

the morning plenary session, invited listeners to pay attention to the "dock burs in yo' pants," which he defined as those embarrassing or puzzling moments in the novel that chafe us long after we've finished reading; he suggested that their prickle causes readers to stop and pay attention, to read outside of the text. Following Urgo, Judith Fetterley began her lecture by focusing on what she calls the "official" Cather stories (beliefs about Cather): Cather's Virginia background is insignificant, *Alexander's Bridge* was a false start, sympathy is the key to Cather's work. Cather and her work are characterized by a single atti-

lecture on "Plantation Politics in the Old Dominion" and Woodward S. Bousquet's, on the geographic contexts for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and the Cather family homestead, Willow Shade. Rebecca Ebert, from the Handley Regional Library, discussed the African American community in Back Creek, and was followed by Warren Hofstra, who presented "To and From Cather's Virginia: Mobility and Cultural Stability in Back Creek."

These talks prepared seminarians for tours of Cather-related sites, including the Back Creek Meeting House, Cather family graves, the mill house, the Gore post office, and the Bethel Church. Susan and David Parry provided the highlight of the afternoon, a tour of Willow Shade. Of particular interest were the impressive stairway in the foyer, the cold spring in the basement kitchen, and the third, story window that is



Cather seminarians at the Cather family plot, Gainesboro Cemetery.

—Photo by J. Murphy

tude, and, finally, Cather is the best authority on herself. Asking "what would happen if we refused these official rules," Fetterley wanted us to rethink the assumptions inherent in such Cather stories, and then she presented an "unofficial" reading of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. The challenge to read Cather in new

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SOUTHERN CONNECTIONS

(Continued)

ways was echoed in the afternoon plenary session by Patricia Yaeger in her talk "Willa Cather's Landscapes: A Sense of Being Held by the Object," and Robert Thacker in his paper "Willa Cather's Homecomings." During Monday's breakout sessions the subjects under



The new Roosevelt Monument, the destination of many during the day in Washington.

— Photo by J. Murphy

consideration included Cather and Southern contemporaries, disease and medicine, representation and experiment, race and miscegenation, problems of etiquette, visual arts, and female artists. Early Tuesday morning we boarded buses for The George Washington University's urban campus in the nation's capital. After Edward Caress, Acting Dean of Arts and Sciences welcomed us to GW, Ann Romines' colleague in the GW English Department, Christopher Sten, gave us a synopsis of Cather's three trips to Washington (in 1898, 1901, and 1917), where she collected journalistic impressions for the Pittsburgh and Lincoln papers and material for "Tom Outland's Story." Lilien Filipovitch Robinson, Professor of Art History at GW, prepared listeners for a visit to the Corcoran Gallery, showing us what Cather may have seen of the visual arts in Washington, then a "provincial small town" with mounting public interest in painting and sculpture. Following a brief beverage intermission, Johns Hopkins University Professor Walter Ben Michaels lectured about Cather's preface to *The Best Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*. He said that Cather's doubts that the young (non-native) New York critics could appreciate Jewett's "Yankee standard" speech led him to conclude that Cather's advocacy of a "native language" in American letters embodied "cultural nationalism."

After lunch we were turned loose on the city, much like Tom Outland's black-suited bureaucrats, although casual clothing and sunblock were more our style. Favorite destinations during our congressional recess included the F.D.R. monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Holocaust Museum. We reconvened at three for a private tour of the Corcoran

Gallery of Art. Here we glimpsed fantastic chandeliers by Dale Chihuly, then moved on to the main gallery, an exhibition of 18th and 19th-century portraits and still life paintings by the Peale family. Many of the Peales' still lifes included fruit peels as punning signatures; we were reminded of Cather's similar embedding of her initials in her series of "Winter Sketches from the Capital." Although the Hubert Voss "interesting racial studies" that Cather reviewed are no longer at the Corcoran, we did see a painting by W. O. Tanner, an artist Cather knew well.

That evening we returned to The George Washington University to hear a distinguished panel of African Americanist scholars discuss the racial politics of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Marilyn Mobley, Carla Peterson, Claudia Tate, and Gayle Ward cited Cather's casual use of minstrelsy and dialect for comic relief in her depictions of Old Jeff and Bluebell and her emphasis on the willing servitude of Till, Nancy, and Samson. Precisely because of its racial assumptions, the panelists agreed, *Sapphira* is a valuable text because it foregrounds issues of race in the classroom.

Ann Romines explained that Wednesday's talks were selected to help us think about the South in broader ways. The morning plenary session included John Murphy's examination of connections between Cather and Flannery O'Connor entitled "Mystery and Manners: Cather's O'Connor Themes," and Merrill Skaggs' "Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow: A Long-Time Literary Acquaintance," an account of the contest between Cather and Glasgow over literary representation of Virginia. In the afternoon we reconvened for a plenary meeting entitled "South and Other Directions." During this session Ann Fisher-Wirth presented a thematic comparison of Cather and Cormac McCarthy, which was followed by Michael Peterman's pairing of Cather and Robertson Davies "Making Singers Sing: Talent, Training, and Democracy in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and Robertson Davies's *A Mixture of Frailties*." Topics of the breakout sessions on Wednesday included subject and strategy in Cather's career, historicizing *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the language of the South, Cather's Southern relations, class and ethnicity, narrative strategies, and new perspectives on *My Ántonia*.

The plenary session on Thursday opened with Virgil Albertini's report on the Cather syllabus survey. Among the interesting facts compiled from the seventy-two syllabi submitted was a list of the Cather texts that are currently taught (at the top of the list is *My Ántonia*). Following Albertini, Cynthia Griffin Wolff examined how Cather "Dressed for Escape"; she proposed that Cather's use of a masculine haircut, name, and dress was the first major creative act which, sustained over a number of years, led to a career in literature. Thursday afternoon provided participants with opportunities to sightsee in Old Winchester as well as at Cedar Creek Civil War Battleground and Belle Grove Plantation.



Loretta Wasserman and Beverly Cooper
enjoy a break.

— Photo by Jeanne A. Shaffer

In the evening plenary meeting the earlier theme of the day, teaching Cather, was revisited when historian Phyllis Palmer talked about "Race in the Classroom," Betty Kort discussed teaching "Cather's Sense of Place in *My Ántonia*" to Nebraska high school students, and John Jacobs addressed "Teaching Cather in Cather's Virginia." Part of Jacobs' impetus for inviting the seminar to Virginia was to encourage scholarship on *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. "In 1992," he explained, "I led a seminar for high school teachers on 'Cultural Encounters in Works of Willa Cather.' Even in her birthplace, Cather is misconstrued as only a 'prairie writer.' While that seminar, which included many natives of the Frederick County area, pointed up possibilities for interpreting and revaluing *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the members worked without well-developed scholarly and biographical contexts." Among the students in Jacobs' 1992 seminar was Marian O'Rork, who also participated in the international seminar. O'Rork, chair of the Art Department at Winchester's Handy High School, presented her work from the 1992 seminar — her response in oils to the landscapes and narratives of "Tom Outland's Story" and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Romines, like Jacobs, wanted to make teaching a highlight of the seminar because, she said, "We don't talk enough about what happens in our classrooms."

Friday the 27th was the last full day of the seminar, and it opened with a plenary session lead by Susan Rosowski's "The Comic Cather." Rosowski employed Bergsonian principles of humor to read the humor in *O Pioneers!*, which she argues is so deeply embedded within the contexts of the novel that it is difficult to detach. After Rosowski, Bruce Baker read and discussed letters from the Carrie Miner Sherwood letter collection, pointing out that the letters consistently convey themes of deep affection for friends and the importance of human relationships. The seminar attendees attended breakout sessions later that morning and into the early afternoon that covered a variety of topics:

"unSouthern" affinities, gendered economies, the Cather Scholarly Edition, Cather and endings, new readings of the short fiction, botany and memory, and Cather's geographies. Beverly Cooper brought seminar participants together for her slide program, "Willa Cather: The Road Was All," with Mellanee Kvasnicka and Elizabeth Turner as readers. After the presentation, a signed, limited edition poster created by Cooper, "Windows on Willa's World," was given away as a door prize.

On Friday evening the closing banquet was held at the Wayside Inn, an eighteenth century establishment, in nearby Middletown. A local band, "Red and Murphy," provided Virginia bluegrass music, and Demaree Peck, a Virginia native, lead the adventurous through several turns of the Virginia Reel.

The bluegrass enjoyed on the closing night was just one of the many opportunities that Jacobs and Romines provided for seminar attendees to learn about the cultural history of Cather's Virginia. On Sunday night the choir of Willisville Chapel United Methodist Church in Upperville, Virginia, presented an evening of Virginia African American gospel music at the Shenandoah University's Goodson Chapel, creating what Romines called a sense of a living community. Miss Cather would have noted several great voices among this choir which offered praise as individuals and as one.



Sally, Emily and John Murphy (left to right) with Karen and Bruce Baker.

— Photo by Jeanne A. Shaffer

Following a brief but stirring benediction by the Willisville pastor, Catherians and choir members mingled in the chapel lobby, exchanging handshakes and hugs. On Monday evening The Jack Tale Players of the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College, sung songs like "Cripple Creek," "I Saw the Light," and "The Wreck of Old '97" while playing an assortment of "pick-up" instruments such as washboards, spoons, a washtub, and the "medicinal" jug. The troupe dramatized several Blue Ridge folktales. As these rude mechanicals retreated amid laughter and applause, Emily Murphy took the stage for a command performance of traditional Irish dance. Many of those present remem-

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SOUTHERN CONNECTIONS (Continued)

bered Emily stepping to the bagpipe in Quebec, and this night we marvelled at her precision and stamina as she performed two softshoe dances on the carpeted stage and then danced a double-reel in hardshoe on a makeshift stage.



Susan Rosowski in an animated moment with Li Zhu.

— Photo by Jeanne A. Shaffer

Picking up on the arts that are present in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Susie Smith, Curator of Quilting at Belle Grove Plantation, brought numerous examples of both old and new handmade Virginia quilts on Wednesday night. Jennifer Danes explained, "One of the most moving moments for me was listening to Susie Smith describe the woman who quilted while waiting for her two sons to return from the Civil War. After pouring her fear and worry into her work, she folded it up and put it away when she learned that neither son would return to her." Family ties were also apparent earlier during Wednesday's dinner in the campus dining hall when local Cather family descendants attended; they described their relations and discussed what they knew about Willa Cather.

The last gathering of the conference was Saturday morning's panel, when the seminar's faculty and fellows reviewed the discoveries and directions uncovered in the past week. Ann Romines recognized John Swift for his work as the WCPM's Scholarship Director, helping twenty-two students attend the seminar. Ann Fisher-Wirth praised the readings of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* offered by the panel of African-Americanist scholars at The George Washington University. Michael Peterman commented that Cather's work "opens up chasms of interest wherever you go" and that he and Bob Thacker weren't done talking about *Sapphira* but planning to read the novel aloud on their long drive home. Loretta Wasserman succinctly described her experience as "a week of listening," and Mellanee Kvasnicka attested that the week's discussion had re-energized her dissertation work. Bob Thacker called Merrill Skaggs' talk "stunning" and

thanked Cynthia Griffin Wolff for introducing us to "all the Cather's," showing "how all the pieces fit together." Bruce Baker emphasized the need for continued work on Cather's letters, and Sharon Hoover praised the subtle, original research of the graduate student presenters. Sue Rosowski remarked that Catherists "were listening to each other now," especially when addressing such volatile issues as race and gender. Sr. Adele Edwards stated that experiencing Virginia would make her more comfortable teaching *Sapphira*, and John Swift expressed the hope that future seminars continue the "cross-fertilization" of professions and reading communities we saw here, perhaps through alliances with Elderhostel and similar groups.

When asked what she particularly appreciated about the seminar, Ann Romines said that she was pleased with the complexity of the discussion about *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and with the inclusion of African American scholarship in the week's discourse. "I was impressed with the quality and variety of the paper sessions — particularly the many young scholars who are beginning to break new ground in Cather studies," she noted, adding that the seminar "empowers me to read Cather in new ways." Asked the same question, Jacobs said that he was gratified by the focus on Cather's Virginia roots in her birthplace. He explained, "We were reminded that Willa Cather was not just — 'by the way' — born in Back Creek, Virginia, but that her Virginia heritage and the first years of her life here nurtured her throughout her life and in her writing."

Special Edition Auction

A long-time friend, very supportive of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, owns a Riverside Literature Series Edition (hardback) of *My Antonia* with the signature of Carrie Miner Sherwood (Frances Harling in the novel).

In the 1960s during a visit to Red Cloud, this person called on Carrie Miner Sherwood and asked her to sign the book beneath the dedication:

To Carrie and Irene Miner
In memory of affections old and true.

We are confident that fewer than twenty-five of these books signed by Mrs. Sherwood are in existence.

The friend of the Cather Foundation has donated the book for a silent auction to be held at the Saturday banquet of the Cather Spring Conference, May 2, 1998.

The Cather Foundation wants all of its members to be able to join in the bidding, the proceeds of which will be donated to the Opera House Restoration Fund. The first sealed bids will be accepted beginning April 15, 1998. All other bids, of course, will be accepted at the banquet.

Willa Cather, the Virginian

Donna Shafer-Riha
Mt. Jackson, Virginia

Although I consider myself as new to the study of Willa Cather and her works, my marginal perceptions of her have always been that she was the observer of life on the prairie, especially that of the patchwork quilt of societies formed by the different immigrant groups. Although I had a vague knowledge of her birth "near Winchester" because one of my students had mentioned that she passed Willow Shade every day on her way to class, I did not perceive Cather to be a Southern in any way; whatever part of the South that



The Willisville Chapel United Methodist Church Choir.

— Photo by Tony Millspaugh

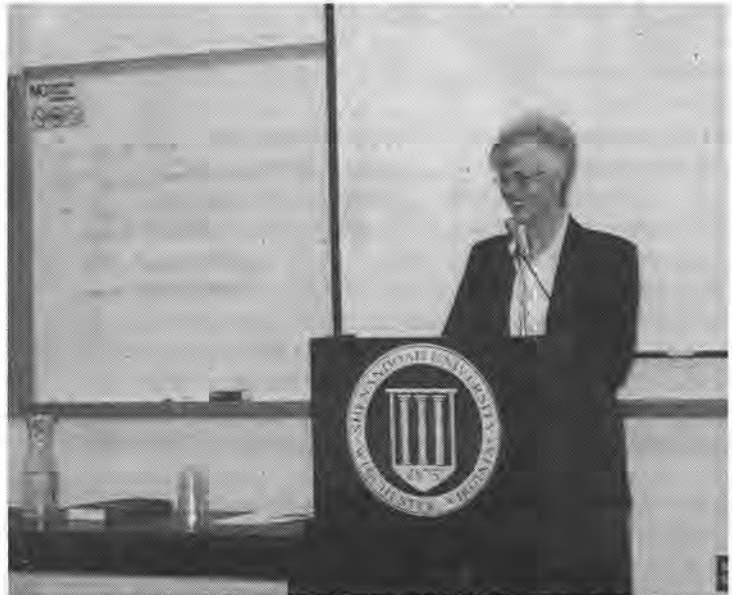
had been planted in her had dissolved and evaporated with her move to the prairie. When I became interested in attending the seminar, I felt that she was being tagged with "Southern connections" in order to place the seminar in Virginia, near her birthplace and D.C. because those places would be good to visit for those out-of-towners used to being burnt by the sun in Nebraska (obviously, they brought that with them to Virginia). To my surprise and delight, what I took away from the seminar was that Cather did have Southern roots and that, whether she was conscious of it or not, she struggled with what it meant to be Southern and from this particular piece of Virginia throughout her life and in her writings. I discovered that Cather and I have a personal bond through being born on the same stretch of real estate, and that has placed the canon of her work in my consciousness in a different way than when I saw her as the cultural escapee from Nebraska.

I was continually confronted by familiar images of Virginia and then labelling them also as being Cather's experiences. At Willow Shade, Woody Bousquet handed me a fuzzy leaf from a sassafras tree. "These grow in abundance in this part of Virginia," he said. "Crush it and smell it." It wasn't new to me. Every time I mow, I cut down countless sassafras seedlings in my yard, and their scent is heavy in the air by the time I'm finished. It was the

same scent that young Willa would have sniffed as she stood on the back porch of Willow Shade after a mowing or as she explored the fields. Willow Shade had the feel of home for me. The moist, cool smell of the spring cellar was the same as that of my grandmother's root cellar. I know how she felt arriving in Nebraska, the land of sheet metal. When I was in college in Fredericksburg, I always grew homesick for a sight of the Blue Ridge, the same stretch that reclines before and behind Willow Shade. Cather and I had absorbed the same textures and scents of this area and missed them when they were absent.

The many presentations and discussions filled in the crevices of my ignorance until I felt I knew Cather. I was the most struck by the practical and the prosaic.

Cynthia Wolff's startling assertion that Cather may have suffered the scourge of head lice, giving her an excuse to cut her hair, was a shift from abstract and inventive discussions of Cather to mundane, sometimes painful realities of her life. Cather struggled through her adolescence to establish herself as an individual. Bruce Baker read from one of her letters that chronicled her sensitivity: "I'm covered with dents on the inside." It made what we did at the seminar almost seem an insensitive intrusion that would have horrified her, and yet Cather the artist invites it by taking the personal and rearranging it into new patterns as the slaves at the mill house spent the winter tearing the old table linens and sheets into strips and sewing them together to be woven into rugs. We at the seminar walk 'round and 'round those rugs, examining the weave of them for clues to the hands,



Pat Phillips introduces WCPM to Virginia.

— Photo by Tony Millspaugh

heart, and mind that crafted them. Cather worked so hard at camouflaging the truly personal because she knew the creations she left behind would invite per-

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CATHER, THE VIRGINIAN

(Continued)

sonal scrutiny. Our pilgrimage to all of these landmarks of her childhood in search of those clues would



The Wayside Inn, Middletown, scene of banquet and dance.

— Photo by Tony Millsbaugh

have made her smile, I believe. When she visited, she stayed a piece down the road and studied the changed homestead. What is there isn't hers; hers is in her mind and imagination, preserved in writing, so it doesn't matter if the "shiftless trash" (as David Parry put it) pulled the historical marker off the birth house and it is falling to ruins about their cracker ears. I wonder how much that would have amused her and perhaps pleased her because it is another story to add to the telling.

In looking at those roots, I am also confronted by the question of race and whether Cather ever satisfactorily dealt with it, even in *Sapphira*. We Virginians are proud that we don't have a problem with race, especially now that we can safely invite Oprah and the O. J. trial right into our living rooms, even though we carry the boogey man of racial conflict and, yes, racial prejudice in all our closets. Opening the seminar with John Vlach's reminder of white domination through spatial means in the South and Rebecca Ebert's narrowing of that perspective to Cather's Frederick County set the stage with a question mark: did Cather escape participation in Virginia's racial politics? She made Mr. Shimerda one of the cultural elite, sadly transplanted to the wastelands of Nebraska, but her slaves in her last novel have no proud heritage, except that of their white masters. I listened to the panel at G.W. discuss the issue and even then the word "racist" was avoided, although they agreed the issue of race itself had to be there. Can someone who writes of blacks only in the context of slavery truly avoid that epithet? Can someone raised in this area ever avoid

being proud of not being a racist because she's managed not to deal with it due to an almost complete lack of African American presence? Can Cather safely pin any negative attitudes of racism in her family on her austere great-grandmother and escape being involved because her grandmother supposedly helped Nancy escape? Race is an issue in Virginia whether you never saw an African American while growing up, or not. The attitudes are there, a miasma that still clings to the South, and you take them in with your mother's milk. When Douglas Wilder became the first black governor of Virginia in 1990, it was the black vote in cities such as Richmond that put him into office; he carried no county west of the Blue Ridge with their low black populations. Cather's personal views of race remain obscured in the mist and may, for all I know, remain so for she skirted them rather effectively, except in *Sapphira* where she deals in ambiguities, if not in stereotypes. All I can positively say as another Virginian is that she had them; somewhere in the weave of those rugs is the thread.



Ann Fisher-Wirth and Mark Madigan Virginia reeling at the Wayside.

— Photo by Tony Millsbaugh

I was also conscious of the Cather that broke free of the South, who stood on the outside looking in, which made her vision clearer than if she had stayed inside the fishbowl. I wonder if she could have broken free of the amber — or the honey? — of slow Southern ways if she hadn't been forced out. The first thing John Jacobs said when we met at the seminar and he learned that I was born, raised, and continue to live here is that I need to get out of Virginia. It's hardly the first time I've heard that. Was that to set the tone for a Cather seminar? Cather was a split personality, but she managed to suppress in herself the slow-moving

part of being Southern that Noel Polk identified as being ultrarooted. In her writings, she allowed the new and the old, the established and the disestablished, to take their places as characters and suffer rejection and acceptance. Her being a split personality, an old world Virginian and a new settlement Nebraskan, lent to her creativity, so the expulsion from Virginia (Eden?) served an artistic purpose.

I also gained a portrait of Cather as an unresolved subject, someone who is herself as seemingly simple as her works appear to be yet neither she nor her works are monochromatic. I heard presentations on, among many things, her sexuality and that of her characters, echoes of mythology and Arthurian legend, and how she dealt with illness and medicine in her writing. I also heard how teachers and students at every level are teaching and being taught her work from every possible angle, and that Cather's abundant creativity is continuing to engender creative effort. My own students were attracted by her story "Neighbour Rosicky" because it was simple to read and they fell in love with the main character, but Cather always deceives us in that way. Her work isn't simple; it's accessible. She deals with the human experience and her characters are not invented outside of it. This makes her work attractive to students on an obvious level that most twentieth century authors miss. For example, after reading T. S. Elliot's poetry, one cannot help feeling highly educated ingesting all the outside references necessary to translate it. With Cather, it is like pulling the old, worn family quilt about oneself and absorbing the stories left there by the hands that have touched it.

I have taken away many memories and experiences from the seminar. I had thought to be weary of Cather after a week in her company, but I am not. I am intrigued by the many issues I heard discussed at the seminar, and I still want to search for clues to her secret membership in the sisterhood of the South in her writing. I hope to make it to Nebraska in 2000 to add an experience with the prairie to my gestalt. My relationship with Cather's work has only begun, not been exhausted by attending the seminar.

Third Graders Hear Cather's Christmas Story

Third graders heard Cather's Christmas story and learned of how a young girl from the green, wooded hills of Virginia came to a relatively barren Nebraska, leaving her dog and a place she loved behind. Bruce Baker, a long-time WCPM Board member, made two hour-long presentations to students at Maxey Elementary School in Lincoln, Nebraska, as part of their study of "Nebraskans Who Made a Difference." Dr. Baker told students of Cather's life and work and finished the session by reading Cather's Christmas story as printed in the *Cobblestone* publication, an invaluable resource for elementary students, available from the Cather bookstore.

Drew's New York Colloquium Is Gearing Up

DEADLINE EXTENDED BY REQUEST

The plans for "Willa Cather's New York," this summer's Colloquium to be held at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, from June 20-27, are switching into high gear. Organizers Karen Marquis and Angela Conrad have lined up a list of top speakers and a highly informative and exciting program of experiences in Cather's New York.

The schedule for the New York City outings will combine all kinds of experiential learning. For example, one day will be devoted to a Cather Walking Tour of Greenwich Village, which will show participants the amazing physical proximity between Cather and other literary greats of the period. Those who think they've considered them all may be surprised. That afternoon's plenary session will be held in Grace Episcopal Church, of *My Mortal Enemy* fame.

Participants will also be taken by ferry to the Ellis Island Museum in New York Harbor for a program on Immigration and Ethnicity. No Cather fan should visit New York without a backstage tour of the Metropolitan Opera House and a targeted tour of the Metropolitan Museum. The Colloquium will include all that and give folks some time to explore on their own.

And if that's not enough, they'll be great lectures, too! The list of speakers includes: Bruce P. Baker, Philip L. Gerber, Jo Ann Middleton, John J. Murphy, Sharon O'Brien, Demaree Peck, Ann Romines, Susan Rosowski, Merrill M. Skaggs, Joseph Urgo, Laura Winters and Cynthia Griffin Wolff. In addition, participants will be sharing group sessions reflecting the tremendous output of Cather scholarship from around the world. Scholars will be coming from as far away as Sweden and China. Our evenings will be spent in social gatherings with some surprise entertainment.

For those wishing to submit papers, there's still time because, although we've have great response, it has been requested that the deadline be extended to April 15 for the busiest Catherites. Otherwise, participants should register before May 15. If you haven't yet received a mailing with a registration form, contact the organizers immediately at (973) 408-3377 or e-mail aconrad@drew.edu or kmarquis@drew.edu. You can also check out their web site at <http://daniel.drew.edu/~cather>. Don't miss out on all the fun!

An opportunity to confer where Cather worked, wrote, lived most of her life, and died . . .

The Drew Colloquium



From 1927 to 1932, Willa Cather lived at the Grosvenor Apartments (now demolished), 37 Fifth Avenue, across from the Church of the Ascension, her favorite N.Y. church because, Edith Lewis claims, "she loved the beautiful altar, with John La Farge's great fresco above."



Cather shared an apartment with Lewis just off Washington Square in 1909, on the street where Henry James was born in 1843.



Bank Street, looking southwest from Number Five, Cather's address from 1912 to 1927; here, according to Lewis, Cather "did her happiest writing."



570 Park Avenue, the apartment building at the southwest corner of East 63rd Street where Cather took up residence in 1932 and where she died in 1947.



The trail around Central Park Reservoir, where Cather took long walks with the Menuhin children during her Park Avenue years.

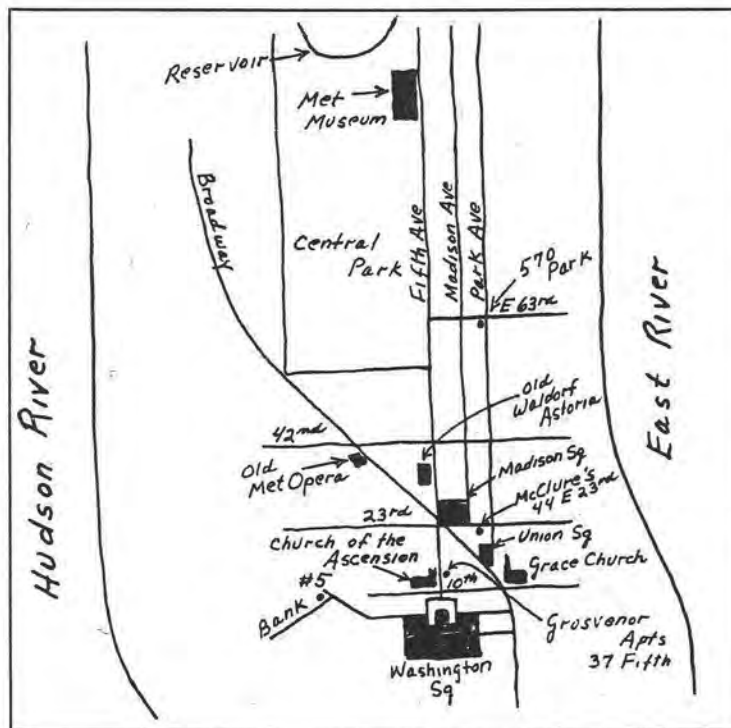


The Flatiron Building on Fifth Avenue and Broadway, as seen from the Madison Square, just north of the McClure's offices.



McClure's Magazine offices, where Cather came to work in 1906, were housed in a building left of the tall narrow one with the awning, at 44 East 23rd Street.

**Cather's
New York**





Willa in Virginia.

Race, Place and Language: The Southern Idiom in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

Li Zhu
Marquette University

In the antebellum South people of different races and social classes spoke different dialects. Planter aristocrats, small farmers, mountaineers and black slaves all had dialects of their own. Although these dialects influenced one another, there was a distinct dialectal hierarchy, corresponding to the rigid social caste system.¹ Born in 1873 into a prominent family in Back Creek, Virginia, little Willa Cather was secure in her social position and complacent about her own genteel Southern speech. Only after she began to go to school in Red Cloud at the age of ten did she realize that her speech was different from that of the other children and hasten to get rid of her slight Southern accent.² But little Willa enjoyed the richness of the Southern talk. She recalled in 1922 that her first teacher in narrative was "an old mountain woman in the hills of Virginia . . . a woman who could neither read nor write, but who knew the life of the mountain, the folk phrases which no one had written nor could write, but which are the product of years and generations."³ Even as a little girl Willa felt something smothering in the polite, rigid social conventions of that Southern society and sometimes tried to rebel by crossing the dialectal boundaries. She told Edith Lewis once "of an old judge who came to call at Willowshade, and who began stroking her curls and talking to her in the playful platitudes one addressed to little girls — and of how she horrified her mother by breaking out suddenly: "I'se a dang'ous nigger, I is!" This linguistic crossing, or racial masquerade, was, according to Lewis, "an attempt to break through the smooth, unreal conventions about little girls — the only way that occurred to her (Cather) at the moment."⁴

In her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Cather tries to represent her childhood memories of

the relationships among race, place and language in the South. Here I define "place" in two ways: the first is locale, particularly the community of Back Creek, Virginia, where the story takes place; and the second refers to one's position within the strict social hierarchy, in which the black slaves are located at the bottom. Like local color writers, Cather tries to preserve in writing the flavors of the various kinds of the Southern idioms, such as those used by planters, farmers, mountaineers, and slaves. She said during an interview that "the speech of the people, white and black, as she had heard it as a child, came back to her as if it had been stored on phonograph records in her brain."⁵ Cather also tries to expose the social and racial relationships in that community, as revealed in the ways people talk to one another. I argue that Cather has two complementary attitudes toward the Southern idioms: one is poetic, preservationist and nostalgic, and the other realistic, sociolinguistic and critical. Using a sociolinguistic approach,⁶ I analyze how, in the novel, one's speech reveals one's race, regional origin, social status, language attitude, and relationship with interlocutors. I demonstrate how the narrator records realistically rather than stereotypically various kinds of Southern idiom, and suggest that the relationships among race, place and language are significant themes in most of Cather's works.

At the beginning of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* the narrator establishes a sociolinguistic frame. Back Creek, situated in the Shenandoah Valley, west of the Blue Ridge, is less cultivated than the Piedmont region (Middle Virginia), and much less so than Tidewater or Eastern Virginia.⁷ The "typical" Back Creek speech is neither that of the most cultivated nor that of the least educated people, but rather that of a middle group.⁸ Speech prejudices are strong and they are usually based on family usage rather than some ideal standard.⁹ Henry Colbert, grandson of an immigrant from Flanders, speaks English "clearly and decidedly," as neighboring English settlers do.¹⁰ Back Creek people believe that Henry's "lack of a Southern accent amounted almost to a foreign accent" and is definitely not "a friendly way of talking" (780). Back Creek residents do not have this sense of superiority over Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert, who also came from outside and "spoke differently from the Back Creek people"; they admit "that a woman and an heiress had a right to." The largest slave-owner in Back Creek, Sapphira speaks with a polite English accent, "never forgetting the fact that her mother had come out from England" (780). Her speech, like her writing, is "more cultivated than was common in this back-country district" (786). In addition to her land, her score of slaves, and the Dodderidge crest on the coach door, Sapphira uses her speech as a "coat of arms," a "stamp of superiority" (797).

Sapphira always speaks properly and correctly, and she knows how to vary her tone when addressing people of different status and of different relations to her. To her husband Henry Colbert, a social inferior

whom she marries not for love but from fear of becoming an old maid, she talks in a "bland, considerate voice." Her voice may take on an "icy quality" when Colbert does not follow her will (781). Sapphira's "manner with inferiors," including the cobbler, the butcher, the weaver, the storekeeper, "was irreproachable," but she adopts a tone of "mocking condescension" when talking to David Fairhead, the Baptist preacher and schoolmaster. She acknowledges Fairhead's gentle upbringing and education and ranks him above the other country schoolteachers who "speak like the mountain people" (824), but still regards him as a social inferior, or rather, as "an equal — of the wrong kind," because he is from Pennsylvania and is against slavery (824). To her slaves, Sapphira speaks either "in sarcastic reprimand" or "in contemptuous indulgence." Jezebel, the oldest slave in her family, and Till, Jezebel's granddaughter and the housekeeper, are the only blacks to whom Sapphira never speaks with that "scornful leniency" (854). Though Sapphira has indulged Nancy, Till's mulatto daughter, for years, her voice communicates "anger with no heat, a cold, sneering contempt" when the girl bothers her (784).

While Sapphira insists that her cultivated speech is of a high variety and a mark of superiority, other white people less rigid about the social conventions frequently adopt pronunciation, grammatical and lexical features of the lower dialects for various reasons. Henry Colbert calls the jonquils (or daffodils) brought in by Nancy not "Easter flowers" as other white Virginians usually do (788) but "smoke-pipes" in the manner of the slaves (814). In this way he may want to show his affection for Nancy and his desire to reduce the social distance. Rachel Blake always speaks properly in front of Sapphira, her mother, but she sometimes adopts non-standard linguistic features when talking to mountain people and slaves, whose difficult situation she sympathizes with. In the company of Mrs. Ringer, a lively mountain woman who tells stories in a highly idiomatic mountain dialect, Rachel sometimes switches to non-standard pronunciation features, substituting "talkin'" for "talking" (847), "'em" for "them," "ain't" for "isn't" (848). To protect Nancy from the harassment of Martin Colbert, Rachel goes with Nancy to "the Double S" to pick laurels. Seeing Martin approach them, Rachel says to Martin that "Nancy and me have got our baskets full" (875). Here she adopts a non-standard grammatical feature in order to demonstrate her alliance with Nancy (875). Martin Colbert also speaks most properly in front of Sapphira, but may switch codes when harassing Nancy or flirting with Bluebell, shortening "ing" into "in'" (882) and using "don't" instead of "doesn't" for a third person singular verb form (881, 882).

Next to Sapphira, the person who takes place and proper speech most seriously is Till, Sapphira's personal maid and housekeeper. After years of imitating Mrs. Matchem, the Dodderidge housekeeper from England, "in speech and manner" (817), Till's "carriage

and deportment and speech were those of a well-trained housekeeper" (796). Till leads a double life in Sapphira's household, that of a "well-placed" housekeeper and that of a slave without any real place. Her double identity is revealed in her constant code-switching. Cather explained to her friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher that all well-trained black house servants spoke two languages: one for the house and one for the cabin, and when they got excited they always reverted to the latter idiom.¹¹ Till's speeches in various contexts serve as clear examples of this. Her speech is closer to standard English when she speaks to Sapphira; it becomes less regular when she feels embarrassed that her husband does not wear boots; and the quality of her speech decreases even more when she talks to Nancy or other slaves.

Till has learned to read, probably from Mrs. Matchem rather than Sapphira, who tries to conceal her letters from Till (795). Though Till can teach Nancy domestic skills, she cannot teach her to read, because the laws allowed white masters to teach their black slaves to read but did not allow slaves to teach each other.¹² Under the Southern caste system, it was possible, though very difficult, for the illiterate and impoverished mountain people, such as Casper Flight, to go to school. Nancy, as a slave, however, has neither a right to education nor an opportunity to improve her social status through personal effort. Only her escape to Canada gives her the opportunities to learn to read, write and speak standard English.

Nancy, when the narrator sees her for the first time, is a woman of forty-four years who speaks English with an educated British accent. The child is charmed by Nancy's voice and appreciates "the shade of deference in her voice" when she addresses

(Continued on page 74)

A "New" News Editor

Bruce Baker, now English Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has agreed to serve as News Editor for our publication. He would be grateful if you would send him news of whatever you or those you know are doing in the area of Cather studies: notices and then narrative reports of meetings and conferences, papers and presentations delivered (along with a brief description), discoveries made, correspondence desired or received, inquiries for information, theses or dissertations in progress or completed — any activity Cather-related.

Please send all items to: Bruce Baker, News Editor, W.C.P.M., 11419 Castelar Circle, Omaha, Nebraska 68144. We have been trying to broaden our news coverage beyond Nebraska and the immediate region but need your help. You are encouraged to participate!

SOUTHERN IDIOM

(Continued)

the narrator's mother, Sapphira's granddaughter. But already imbued with the Back Creek prejudices concerning proper speech, the child counts Nancy's speech against her. She regards Nancy's pronunciations as "too precise, rather cutting in their unfailing distinctness," especially when Nancy says "his-to-ry" instead of "his'try" in the manner of Mrs. Blake and the narrator's father (933). Just as the Back Creek people used to look down upon Henry Colbert's speech, the child dismisses Nancy's speech as "not a friendly way to talk" (933). However, Till's standard of proper speech is not that of Back Creek, but that of Winchester. Listening to Nancy talking after twenty-eight years' separation, Till suddenly interrupts her daughter, looking up into her face with idolatrous pride: "Nancy, darlin', you talks just like Mrs. Matchem, down at Chestnut Hill! I loves to hear you" (933). Although Till has known that Nancy can read and write (931) and has seen her in an expensive coat lined with grey fur, Till needs another proof, that of speech, to be convinced that Nancy has successfully liberated herself from slavery and found her rightful place in Montreal.

The author whose voice is heard in the last paragraph of the novel reflects Cather's childhood fascination with the names of unknown persons in Frederick County, Virginia, and wonders whether she has spelt the name "Pertleball" correctly (939). Using a psychoanalytic approach, John Swift has argued that the epilogue is the author's "idealized attempt to recover the mother tongue and thus the certain 'reality' of human experience."¹³ I think Cather also wants to show her desire to preserve and represent appropriately and correctly the Southern idioms — not only personal names, but also place names, flower names¹⁴ and various types of social speech. Her desire to preserve and represent the beauty of these idioms is inseparable from her determination to expose the evils of slavery, which are partially reflected in the sociolinguistic relations within this rigid caste.

Cather's combination of preservationist and realistic treatment of language use in the South is particularly revealed in her use of the "Double S" as a symbol. Merrill Maguire Skaggs points out that "the double-'S' is one of Cather's most effective central symbols."¹⁵ Marilyn Arnold argues that the "Double S" is a religious symbol, since Colbert marks with a large S all passages in his Bible that he deems relevant to the slavery issue,¹⁶ recalls the hymn "God moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform," and wonders whether slavery is one of God's mysterious designs. I add that from a preservationist perspective the "Double S" represents the beauty, serenity and rich quality of the Southern way of life: "When the countrymen mentioned the place in speech, if it were but to say: 'I'd jist got as fur as the Double e-S-S,' their voices took on something slow and dreamy, as if recalling the place itself; the shade, the unstained loveliness, the pleasant

feeling one had there" (873). However, it is to this beautiful "Double S" that Sapphira sends Nancy to be raped by Martin Colbert (871). The "Double S" is also the path connecting the impoverished mountain people, such as Mrs. Ringer, and the people "of some account" living in the valley down below (842). Therefore, the "Double S" strongly suggests racial and social boundaries.

Cather deliberately imbeds this "Double S" in the title of her book, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, she reminded Fisher of the double s's and double r's in her title.¹⁷ The name Sapphira Dodderidge implies the inevitable collapse of slavery. Sapphira, literally meaning "beloved of the planet Saturn," signifies power, love and beauty.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Sapphira, the embodiment of Southern slavery, is destined to "dodder," that is, to "shake and tremble, as from old age." The double s's in the book's title not only create the effect of alliteration but also symbolize that both the slave master and the slave are the products of slavery, and that both embark on a strenuous path of life.

I think that in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* Cather engages in extensive exploration of the relationships among race, place and language for at least two reasons. First, she may want to challenge the convention of stereotyping Southern characters and their speech, especially black characters and their speech, in American novels.¹⁹ She thus carefully records people's language attitudes, speech mannerisms, and stylistic variations in different social contexts, demonstrating especially the stylistic versatility of black slaves. Second, Cather may want to challenge a presumption still popular in the 1930s, that black people could not speak standard English because of mental and physiological deficiencies.²⁰ She exposes how language was used as a means to segregate and suppress people in the slavery system. Nancy as a slave girl is denied many rights, including the right to education, but given opportunities, she learns to read, write and speak as well as Mrs. Matchem or even Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert herself. Loretta Wasserman has correctly pointed out that "in a general way, Cather seems to accept . . . [Booker T.] Washington's program of domestic and trade-oriented education: such is the arduous path of work and self-improvement her immigrants work."²¹ I have shown that Nancy's language improvement is part of this self-improvement.

Cather's early saturation in various kinds of Southern dialects may contribute to her later general interest in the diversity of human languages and cultures. While the caste system in the South restricted social, racial, dialectal or linguistic crossings, the democracy of the great plains made it possible for individuals struggling to improve their socioeconomic status and expand their cultural and linguistic horizon. In most of her novels, Cather proves herself to be "dang'ous" toward cultural segregations and linguistic restrictions by celebrating individual American efforts to cross these boundaries. As immigrants or children of

immigrants, Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronborg and Antonia Shimerda manage to master the English language and participate in American social life. As Yankee Americans, Jim Burden, Claude Wheeler and Tom Outland try to widen their cultural horizons by acquiring elite European languages and demonstrating an interest in immigrant and indigenous languages. As cultivated French intellectuals, Jean Latour and Euclide Auclair not only maintain their linguistic and cultural heritages from the Old World but also adapt to the linguistic and cultural environment of the New World. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is the culmination of a career in which Cather celebrates the multiethnic, multiracial and multicultural aspects of American experience and exemplifies the multilingual and multidialectal nature of the American idiom.

NOTES

¹ See Cleanth Brooks, *The Language of the American South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 16.

² Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 18.

³ Mildred Bennett, *The World of Willa Cather* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 208-9.

⁴ Lewis, pp. 12-13.

⁵ Stephen Vincent and Rosemary Benét, "Willa Cather: Civilized and Very American," *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 15 December 1940, p. 136.

⁶ Sharon O'Brien has briefly mentioned a sociolinguistic approach in *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 306.

⁷ Argus Tresidder, "The Speech of the Shenandoah Valley," *American Speech* 12.4 (December 1937): 284.

⁸ C. M. Wise, "Southern American Dialect," *American Speech* 8.2 (April 1933): 38.

⁹ Katherine E. Wheatley, "Southern Standards," *American Speech* 9.1 (February 1934): 38.

¹⁰ All references to Cather's work are made to the Library of America edition, vol. 2.

¹¹ Cather to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, October 14, 1940.

¹² See Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Lydia Maria Child; ed. Jean Fagan Yelin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 72. Virginia laws of 1831 and 1832 even denied free people of color the right to learn to read and write within the state, or the right to return to Virginia once having acquired these skills elsewhere. See Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 275-77.

¹³ John N. Swift, "Narration and the Maternal 'Real' in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*," *Legacy* 9.1 (1992): 24.

¹⁴ See Francois Palleau-Papin, "The Subversive Language of Flowers in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*," *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter* 39.2-3 (Summer & Fall, 1995): 41-44.

¹⁵ Merrill Maguire Skaggs, "Willa Cather's Experimental Southern Novel," *Mississippi Quarterly* 35.1 (1981-1982 Winter): 13.

¹⁶ Marilyn Arnold, "'Of Human Bondage': Cather's Subnarrative in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 40.3 (1987 Summer): 335.

¹⁷ Cather to Fisher, 14 October 1940.

¹⁸ Robert J. Nelson, in *Willa Cather and France: In Search of the Lost Language*, has traced the etymology of the name "Sapphira" in *Collins Dictionary*: "sapphire, any precious corundum gemstone that is not red, esp. the highly valued transparent blue variety . . . C13 *safir*, from Old French, from Latin *sapphirus*, from Greek *sappheiros*, perhaps from Hebrew *sapphir*, ultimately perhaps from Sanskrit *Sanipryia*, literally: beloved of the planet Saturn, from *sani* Saturn + *prya* beloved," p. 106.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive study of the representation of such speech in American fiction, see Sylvia Wallace Holton, *Down Home and Uptown: The Representation of Black Speech in American Fiction* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press).

²⁰ See Ambrose E. Gonzales, *The Black Border* (Columbia, S.C.: The State Co., 1922), p. 10.

²¹ Wasserman, "Sapphira and the Slave Girl: Willa Cather vs Margaret Mitchell," *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter* 38.1 (Spring 1994): 11.

Red Cloud, Nebraska Annual Spring Conference MAY 1 and 2, 1998

Banquet Speaker:
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Friday Paper Sessions



Dr. Barry Turner, great-grandson of "Antonía," autographs his new book, *Simply My Antonia*, at the Cather bookstore. His mother, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, daughter of Annie's daughter Julia looks on. Barry will be on hand at the Spring Conference to autograph books.

— Photo by Pat Phillips

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Information

on

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- 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.
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