

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

The Willa Cather Society

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Shadows on the Rock, Maria Chapdelaine, and the Old Nationalism

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Students and scholars of Cather's fiction have gathered in Quebec because Willa Cather celebrated the stubborn French-Canadian presence in North America. Among the reasons Cather wrote *Shadows on the Rock* (some of them very personal) was Quebec nationalism, which she attempted to define in her letter to Governor Cross: Quebec is the stronghold of "a kind of culture, narrow but definite . . . a kind of feeling about life and human fate . . . a kind of thinking, a mental complexion inherited . . ." (*On Writing* 15). She compares Quebec history to that of "an orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently, just as ants begin to rebuild when you kick their house down," and continues, poetically: "Those people brought a kind of French culture . . . and somehow kept it alive . . . , sheltered it and tended it and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire . . . (16). Her concluding comment is significant because it distinguishes the emotion and good sense accomplishing continuity from the typical life of the rest of our continent: "It's very hard for an American to catch that rhythm — it's so unlike us."

That Cather would immediately detect the uniqueness of Quebec culture is a testimony to its existence

(Continued on Next Page)

A New World Symphony: Cultural Pluralism in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*

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As readers and critics of American literature in the 1990s, we face not only the inherent complexities of a given literary text but also personal decisions about the literary theories and approaches that will guide our interpretations. Until recently, most literary criticism began, at least, with the New Critical approach of the earlier 20th century, emphasizing texts rather than their biographical, sociological, and historical contexts. Today, the question is not so much whether a literary text will be viewed in or out of a context, but WHAT context will determine the reading. In other words, the question is, should the work of a particular literary artist, such as Willa Cather, be viewed in the context in which it was written, in the context of today's society, or in a universal human context?

Recently, several Cather critics have chosen to take her work — and especially her presentation of various ethnic cultures — out of its original context and to evaluate it in the context of today's society, forgetting — it seems to me — that any single age, Cather's or ours, suffers from a limited perspective. As a result, some critics, including Elizabeth Ammons and Frances

(Continued on Page 7)

Report from the Quebec Seminar Director . . .

Planning for the Sixth International Willa Cather Seminar in Quebec City has been going well. Over sixty papers have been accepted for presentation, covering topics ranging from Cather's early journalism through *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and her final stories; the Seminar theme, Cather's Canadian and Old World Connections, is well-articulated among them, particularly *Shadows on the Rock*. In addition to sessions, also planned is a welcoming reception and gallery talk at the Bibliothèque Gabrielle-Roy, where Lucia Woods Lindley's Cather photographs will be on exhibit. Tours of Quebec City and the region will be undertaken early in the week. The pre-trip to Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick, has been very popular, with only a few spaces left on it. Those wishing to register or seeking information should contact: Robert Thacker, Canadian Studies Program, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York 13617; voice: 315-379-5970; fax: 315-379-5802; e-mail: rtha@music.stlawu.edu.

THE OLD NATIONALISM (Continued)

and distinct identity. She had not seen the city until 1928, barely two years before she completed the novel it inspired, but as her companion Edith Lewis recalled:

from the first moment [Cather] looked down . . . on the pointed roofs and Norman outlines . . . , [she, an avid Franco-phile] was . . . overwhelmed by the flood of memory, recognition, surmise it called up; by the sense of its extraordinarily French character, isolated and kept intact through hundreds of years, as if by a miracle, on this great un-French continent. (153-54)

What enhances this effect is that Cather hardly sought out Quebec for its French culture; she had merely tried an alternate route to her summer house on Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick. Her "discovery" of Quebec was quite accidental.

Less accidental was the Québec experience of Louis Hemon, born at Brest, in Brittany, in 1880, seven years after Cather's birth in Back Creek Valley, Virginia. Somewhat of a wanderer, Hemon set out for Quebec in 1912, "to learn," according to his translator W. H. Blake, "how it fared with the little band of his fellow-countrymen who crossed the sea centuries before and multiplied a hundredfold" ([5]). He found his way to the Lake St. John region and, as the result of many months there, "sharing the lives and labours of the people" (Blake [5]), finished *Maria Chapdelaine* in Montreal before being run down and killed by a train on July 8, 1913. Both Hemon's and Cather's experiences were brief but productive; both writers recognized a definite culture they felt compelled to express, and both contributed perspectives we should recognize as perhaps more objective than most likely to come out of Canada, either in French or English.

Yet both novelists had agendas in writing about Quebec which must be clarified in order to address issues of accuracy. For example, Blake takes Hemon to task for emphasizing melancholy over the joyous nature of the *habitant*, for diluting the archaic dialect, and for putting the wrong words in the mouths of his characters. There are other "trifling errors" ([10-11]): the pump and sink of the Chapdelaines would be a rarity in a house so deep in the woods; and Maria wouldn't be watching flames through a chink in the door of the outdoor oven while the bread is baking because the fire is swept out of such ovens before the bread is baked by the heated clay. Then too, "the woods are not so empty of life as Hemon represents them . . . [and] the single flower he names — the *bois de charme* (hornbeam) — is not present in the land either in name or fact . . ." ([12]). Yet, Blake acknowledges, Hemon was busy with matters of higher consequence — things of the spirit — and troubled himself not greatly with trivialities outside the intent of his theme" ([11]).

In Cather's novel, set in the seventeenth rather than twentieth century, inaccuracies are a bit more difficult to assess. The French language mistakes she made as a writer in English are the easiest to excuse.

Michael Gervaud points out that while Cather "was so inclined to use French . . . she seems to have taken for granted that all her readers were conversant with the language" and "*Shadows on the Rock* requires now and then . . . even a translator" (70), her French phrases are often "clumsy" and her sentence structures "influenced by English [O]ne is led to suspect that she preferred to thumb through her dictionary rather than look for qualified advice" (69). Cather's use of history is more problematic. Wilbur Jacobs contends that Cather outdid historian Francis Parkman, a major source, in oversimplifying Indians as cannibal-barbarians (259-60), but selectively used Parkman to paint a benign portrait of Frontenac (254). Detecting Parkman's anti-Catholic bias (he characterized the superstitions of one missionary as "he grossest fungus . . . that ever grew under the shadow of Rome" [657]), Cather preferred instead a pious biography by Abbe-Henri Scott for her portrayal of Bishop Laval (Woodress 431-32). Yet Merrill Skaggs finds in Parkman the genesis of Cather's cloistered nun Jeanne LeBer (143-46), Mother Juchereau's flower-making (148-49), the emphasis on Christmas (151-52) and incessant supernaturalism (152), and the association of Quebec with the Middle Ages (150-51). While such selectivity should be evaluated, we cannot dispute that Cather, like Hemon, "was busy with matters of higher consequence." What Jacobs considers "false history . . . used as a political weapon in Quebec's turbulent past and . . . being used in her turbulent present" (255) might well be thematic intent — the definition of a nation, of its "extraordinarily French character, isolated and kept intact through hundreds of years, as if by a miracle, on this great un-French continent."



Spinning tops on the back porch of the Cather Childhood Home during "Pastime & Playthings," May 16-18.

Let me briefly explore aspects of the turbulent present before demonstrating 1) how these novels can inform the current debate on nationalism, and 2) where they part company with contemporary attitudes, defining a traditional rather than new nationalism. In his 1961 watershed polemic on separatism Marcel Chaput bases his arguments (still contemporary ones) for independent political entity on the historical continu-

ity of a people living for over three and a half centuries in a definite territory, a homeland (3). The identity of this people survived the conquest of 1760, subsequent passage to the British crown, and eventual imposition of confederation under the British North American Act of 1867, which, according to Chaput, did "not represent the free choice of the majority of French-Canadians . . . but [was] imposed by London . . ." According to this argument, the underlying national integrity of Quebec is proven in its survival under adverse conditions. Chaput asks "how many peoples would have survived under the same conditions" and answers, "Very few. That is the glory of the French-Canadian people — to have survived where so many other peoples would have disappeared" (89).

Both Hemon and Cather admired this survival but their knowledge of conditions was limited and their responses aesthetic rather than political. Quebec has become what in contemporary discourse we term the "Other." She speaks French, is Catholic, and is a shrinking minority in Canada and on the continent. This minority status is at the heart of her problems, representing increasing loss of control economically and politically as French-Canadians decrease in percentage within the Canadian population. Chaput uses the calculations of Jacques Henripen to gauge the French-speaking population at twenty-nine percent of Canada in 1951 and anticipate it at seventeen percent by 2001 (10). This decrease aggravates an economic control already dramatically outbalanced even within Quebec: "In Quebec," writes Chaput, "we are eighty-three percent of the population, but less than twenty percent of the economy is in our hands" (12). As a result, "workers in Quebec are paid less than in Ontario. If there is an economic recession or unemployment, Quebec always has the longest list of unemployed" (13). Also, "at the higher levels of . . . foreign companies, . . . French-Canadians are no longer found . . . in public office, the higher you go, the fewer French-Canadians you meet."

All this seems distant from Cather and Hemon *only* if we fail to acknowledge the effects of such developments on the cultural endurance that motivated their novels. Because French-Canadians are economically disadvantaged, they are forced to be bilingual, which Chaput considers disastrous for cultural survival. Since "active life, the life of earning enough to keep bread on the table, . . . is carried on in English" (16), he argues, loyalty to French culture is reduced to sentimentality: "A culture which doesn't support its members is a fairy-tale culture doomed to disappear" (29). Also, the inferior status of French culture breeds an inferiority complex among the people. The result is "sloppy speech," "timidity," and touchy "pride" (28-29), conditions which encourage the diaspora (exodus from Quebec), which Chaput sees as an evil invented to accelerate anglicization. When Chaput wrote his polemic there were approximately one million Canadians of French origin living in Canada outside Quebec, thirty percent of which no longer considered them-

selves French-Canadians (72), and at least twice as many in the United States, almost all Anglicized (74). The early twentieth-century exodus to New England from Quebec contributes significantly to the conflict in Hemon's *Maria Chapdelaine*.

I suggest that Cather's novel be read as a celebration of this people's beginning — of founders historical and fictional who managed the transition from Euro- to Canadian French culture — those "many strange figures [which] have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun" (Cather, *On Shadows* 15). These shadows on the rock include: an idealized Frontenac who provides the waif-child Jacques with new shoes, protects the colony from British and Indian attack, and dies in Quebec leaving instructions to return his heart to Paris; his "successor," Quebec-born Pierre Charron, who combines "the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New" (572), emerging from the woods at Frontenac's death with "a power which came from knowledge of the country and its people" (633); an idealized Bishop Laval, also kind to the waif-child, who rings the bell for mass each morning to develop guilt in the population, lives in "naked poverty" for the sake of needy parishes and his seminary, and leaves behind him the anonymous Canadian-born student struggling with the Church Fathers far into the night; North American Martyr Noel Chabanel, who made a vow of perpetual stability to die among the Huron converts he found distasteful, inspiring Father Hector Saint-Cyr to follow his example and sacrifice the comforts of a professorship in France for the Indian missions of Quebec. Among these founders are several important women: the mystic Catherine de Saint-Augustine, who as a teenager in Bayeux scribbled in blood her vow to serve and die in Canada and at forty left her hospital ministry to Jeanne Frac Juschereau, a "Canadian-born . . . religious of the practical type, . . . enthusiastic, without being given to visions or ecstasies" (485), Sister Catherine bequeathing these to Jeanne LeBer, the Montreal recluse visited by angels; and paralleling this feminine religious heritage is the domestic one represented by Cecile and her mother, who died in Canada after bolstering her terrified husband to seek a livelihood as Frontenac's physician, ordering their living space according to French ways, and instilling in her daughter "a feeling about life that had come down to her through so many centuries and that she brought across the waters of obliterating ocean" (479).

The sense of "our way" motivating all these characters involves political, religious, and educational institutions, fashions, food, and folkways transported and conditioned by a harsh environment. In the early twentieth-century Quebec of Louis Hemon, the alien wilderness Cather images as "interlocking trees strangling . . . each other in a slow agony . . . [of] suffocation" (467) has failed to diminish "the unquenchable joyousness of a people ever filled with laughter and good humour" (*Maria Chapdelaine* 15), and the

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THE OLD NATIONALISM (Continued)

women who emerge from the humble wooden church are "still French to their fingertips in the midst of the boundless lonely forest and the snow, and as tastefully dressed . . . as . . . the middle-class folk in provincial France" (18). But the environment remains hostile, and significant effort must be taken to protect the culture within it. Cather emphasizes that the Auclair house has double wooden walls "with sawdust and ashes filling in the space between the two frames, making a protection nearly four feet thick against the winter cold" (469), and Hemon has the Chapdelaines winterize their house by making "an embankment of



Gate to the Old Seminary, one of the Quebec Seminar locations.

sand at the foot of the walls; . . . nailing up, closing chinks Within, the women forced rags into crevices, pasted upon the wainscoting . . . old newspapers . . . , tested with their hands in every corner for draughts" (83). "The house became the center of the universe[,] . . . the only spot where life could be sustained, and . . . the great cast-iron stove . . . the soul of it" (85). Outside "there sweeps from out the cold north a mighty wind like a final sentence of death" (84), and death in the woods is a reality at the heart of both novels, as if to remind us of the cost of keeping alive a way of life that "on occasion," as Cather observes, people die for "as if it really were a sacred fire." The death in *Shadows* is that of Michael Proulx and told by Antoine Frichette, who travels for three days to the Sault mission to get a priest for this brother-in-law. In *Maria Chapdelaine* the woodsman Maria loves and intends to marry, Francois Paradis, gets lost on his way to her at Christmas, and her vision of his death encapsulates Quebec's "alien unfriendly" environment: "Cold and his ministers of death flung themselves upon him as their prey; they have stilled the strong limbs forever, covered his open handsome face with snow, closed the fearless eyes without gentleness or pity, changed his living body into a thing of ice . . ." (109).

But the emphasis of both novelists is on the culture this "alien unfriendly world" helps define, a family culture celebrated at Christmas, when visitors to the

Auclair home view the new creche figures from France arranged on the two terraces customary back home but recalling Cather's initial description of Quebec as a "rock-set town like . . . one of those little artificial mountains . . . made in the churches at home [for] . . . the Nativity" (466). The extended family includes many levels of society: the twisted-faced Blinker, once an executioner in Rouen and now helper of the local baker, Pigeon; old Madame Pommier and her cobbler son, Noel; Giorgio, the Count's drummer boy; Madame Pigeon and her six children; Cecile and the apothecary; the prostitute's boy, Jacques Gaux, who in contributing his carved beaver to the creche elicits from Madame Pommier that "Our Lord died for Canada as well as for the world over there, and the beaver is our very special animal" (535). At eleven o'clock this gathering joins others at midnight mass: "Across the white ledges . . . black groups were moving, families and friends in little flocks, all going toward the same goal, — the doors of the church, wide open and showing a ruddy vault in the blue darkness" (537). Madame Chapdelaine must rely on memories of midnight mass when a blizzard prevents her journey to the little church at Peribonka. "To go to midnight mass is the natural and strong desire of every French-Canadian peasant," writes Hemon, "even of those living farthest from the settlements" (89). However, Laura Chapdelaine, forced to leave her beloved settled parishes when her pioneering husband began a pattern of selling the farms he carved from the forest to carve again in remoter places, tries to avoid being reproachful. "Is there anyone who hasn't something to grumble about?" she asks her guilt-ridden husband Samuel before Hemon's summary of this people's unique transfiguration of conjugal love:

Life had always been [for them] a simple and a straight-forward thing . . . , a good understanding between man and wife, obedience alike to the laws of nature and of the Church. Everything was drawn into the same woof . . . and . . . so woven together that they could not distinguish the devout emotion possessing them from the mute love of each for each. (94)

Little Alma Rose interrupts her parents' thoughts "of the candles already lit, of the hymns soon to be raised in honour of the Saviour's birth," to be cuddled by her father, who rocks her and sings of the birth of Christ, for this people "ever 'the little Jesus', the curly-headed babe of the sacred picture" (94).

One gathers from such scenes in Hemon that the church for which Cather's Laval had denied himself, an institution generally conceived of as more monolithic than its actuality, was still, over two-centuries later, an major factor in Quebec's destiny. But to Chaput it is an influence toward political inferiority, and he singles out for attack the sheep symbol offered to the people by the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, a benevolent fellowship unofficially church related but devoted to preserving Quebec's religious heritage as well as language and culture: "You cannot with impunity offer

as a symbol to a people, especially to a minority people," he argues, "a gentle sheep, accompanied by a young child of undetermined sex, without the effects being felt in the very character of the people" (31). However, the tradition of self-sacrifice built into Cather's Quebec (from its heroic missionaries and mystics to Jacques's gift of the wooden beaver) and the childlike acquiescence of the Chapdelaines (of Maria when her beloved Francois is lost in spite of her thousand "Hail Marys" to protect him, and of Samuel who sets out for a priest to bring the Sacrament to Laura, suddenly dying from lack of medical care) define the national character from which independence must be argued. Yet Chaput's fears are understandable; using La Fontaine's parable of the wolf and the lamb, he sees the Canadian majority disregarding all rational arguments of a dependent Quebec and carrying off the minority to eat it up (40). What is arguable, however, is that the Christian virtue (or habit, if one prefers the secular) of self-sacrifice might well be a determining factor in the survival of an independent Quebec.

The personal struggles of both young women, Cecile and Maria, intended to represent French-Canadian nationalism at its finest, are dignified by sacrifice of self or, at least, a self-satisfaction closely identified with this people and place. Cecile's struggle involves Quebec's distinction from France. Quebec is home to her but not to her father, who has allowed their menage to collapse as he prepares to return home with Frontenac. Cecile is "almost defiant" at his indifference in leaving behind little Jacques (607), although she confronts her rebellion and struggles with prayer in the cathedral, disappointed at her own weakness when compared to her mother's "courage to leave everything she loved and to come out here with her father" (609). She recognizes her duty to follow this example, "but she could not find it in her heart." Her sobs bring Laval to her side, and accepting his authority as the privilege of self-denial rather than ecclesiastical position and his promise to look after Jacques, she surrenders. Later, sitting alongside Jacques on the top of Cap Diamont during a blood-red sunset, she dwells on the martyrs and her own less ultimate sacrifice. Thinking of these brave missionaries, she says, "makes me feel happy, as if I could never be afraid of anything again" (612), including . . . "com[ing] back to Canada" and journeying "very far up the river in Pierre Charron's canoe . . . and find[ing] the very places where the martyrs died."

Far less adolescent is Maria's struggle as she sits by her mother's corpse and wonders about her own ability "continually to see about her only the wilderness, the great pitiless forest, and to hold in the midst of it all an ordered way of life, the gentleness and the joyousness which are the fruits of many a century sheltered from such rudeness — was it not surely a hard thing and a worthy? And the recompense? After death, a little word of praise" (164-65). With Francois Paradis lost, Maria's future seems limited to Eutrope

Gagnon's offer to share a life carving farms from the forest (a life like her mother's) or Lorenzo Suprenant's to emigrate as he has and share his prosperity in a Massachusetts city of bright shops, electric cars, and moving pictures — in effect, to participate in this people's diaspora. Maria partially convinces herself "to dwell in this land as her mother had dwelt, and, dying thus, to leave behind her a sorrowing husband and a record of the virtues of her race . . ." (165), but like Cecile's, her heart is stubborn: "it was not as yet in her heart to do so." Now Hemon strains his realism, making Maria like Jeanne d'Arc hearing voices of national destiny, basing her decision on a fidelity she senses but cannot articulate. The voices are threefold: the first enumerates the natural charms of the country; the second is of its language, "the happy music of the French names" (169); the third, "mightier than the others," is the voice of Quebec, the voice of a "new land where an ancient race has again found its youth" (170). "We traced the boundaries of a new continent," it chants, and within them "our faith, our tongue, our virtues, our very weaknesses are henceforth hallowed things which . . . shall endure to the end" (171). This voice transfigures defeat, inferiority, weakness into victory, pride, strength:

"Strangers have surrounded us whom it is our pleasure to call foreigners; they have gathered to themselves much of the wealth; but in this land of Quebec nothing has changed. Nor shall anything change, for we are the pledge of it . . . [M]any centuries hence the world will look upon us and say: — These people are of a race that knows not how to perish . . . We are a testimony." (171)

Maria's heart is pierced, like the heart of her virginal namesake in Thoreau MacDonald's woodcut above the introduction of this voice in the illustrated English text. "If you wish I will marry you as you asked me to." Maria tells Gagnon, in "the spring after this spring now — when the men come back from the woods for the sowing" (173).



We should not mistake the proud sacrificial lamb for the lamb carried away by the wolf. Cecile, Maria, and their mothers are tough lambs like the martyrs. When Madame Chapdelaine, refined by death and candlelight, reposes beneath her crucifix, her husband tells this story about her:

"When we took up . . . land above Mistassini . . . It was in September, the time when all the great creatures of the woods become dangerous. A man . . . coming down the river spoke to us . . . 'Look after your sheep; the bears . . . killed a heifer last week . . .'. So your mother and I went off . . . to drive the sheep into the pen . . . It was growing dark, and suddenly I heard Laura cry out: 'Oh, the scoundrels!' . . . Later on . . . your mother told me all about it. She had come across a sheep lying dead, and two bears that were just going to eat it . . . But your mother snatched a stick . . . and made

(Continued on Next Page)

THE OLD NATIONALISM (Continued)

straight for the bears, screaming at them: 'Our beautiful fat sheep! Be off with you, you ugly thieves, or I will do for you!' I got there . . . but by that time the bears had cleared off into the woods without showing fight . . ." (160-61)

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Conference Activities The 40th Annual Cather Spring Conference Red Cloud, May 5-6

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Although the streets of Red Cloud were rain-soaked, the atmosphere at the 40th Annual Cather Spring Conference was anything but bleak. Organized around the theme of "Music and Willa Cather," the Conference drew a large contingent of scholars, writers, and admirers of Cather's artistry and re-affirmed the successful efforts of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, which celebrated its 40th anniversary on March 26, 1995, to acquire and to restore important Cather-related sites in and around Red Cloud.

The conference opened on Friday, May 5, with a panel of four papers moderated by Virgil Albertini of Northwest Missouri State University. The papers treated an interesting range of topics, all centered around Cather's use of music. Debra Cumberland (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) examined nineteenth-century ideas of vocal pedagogy and considered how the character Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark* tested the limits of musical theories that denied women the physical and professional spaces necessary to practice their art. In a survey of Cather's career from her university days to her late works, Phil Coleman-Hull (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) discussed how music became for Cather a symbol of shared hardships and refinements of taste, as well as evidence of the power of memory to bring together varied narratives from folk traditions.



Spring Conference panel: Bruce Baker, Merrill Skaggs, Mary Robert, and Richard Giannone discuss music in Willa Cather's fiction.

John H. Flannigan (Prairie State College, Chicago Heights, Illinois) explored Cather's use of Schubert's songs in *Lucy Gayheart*, the effect of which denies a tragic dimension to the character of Harry Gordon and thereby gives added poignancy to the sentimentality of the earlier sections of the novel. Finally, Pat Malouf (Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah) examined *The Song of the Lark* as a re-working of the theme of the "kingdom of art" espoused in Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn." Malouf provided an intriguing analysis of Thea's journey to artistic success as mirroring Coleridge's description of the artist's "mythic progress."

Friday evening, participants were treated to a showing of the film *Spring Awakening*, based on Cather's short story "A Resurrection" (1897). (The film was repeated on Saturday afternoon.) The CBS/Hallmark production had its genesis nine years ago when actress Julie Harris showed the story to Bill and Sandy Allyn, who were deeply moved by its cinematic potential. Bill Allyn, the executive producer, tried to secure financing for the project during the ensuing nine years, and only last fall did the filming of Sandy Allyn's screenplay begin. Completed in the unbelievably short period of twenty-one days, the movie remains faithful to Cather's original plot while capturing much of the intense drama of this neglected story. After the presentation, the Allyns and actor Philip Abbott (known to television audiences for his appearances in the series *The FBI* and who played the role of Mr.

(Continued on Next Page)

CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

(Continued)

Pierson in the film) fielded questions from the audience.

Saturday morning, May 6, opened with an ecumenical eucharist service at Grace Episcopal Church celebrated by Rev. Dr. Charles Peek (University of Nebraska-Kearney). Dr. Peek was assisted by Steve Shively, Lay Reader, and the St. Juliana Falconieri Choir sang before and during the service, which was punctuated by a pummeling rainstorm. In a deeply moving homily, Dr. Peek discussed Cather's musical interests as fundamental to her art, corroborating the power of music throughout Christian scripture.

Following the service, participants attended "The Passing Show," a roundtable discussion moderated by Bruce P. Baker (University of Nebraska at Omaha), and featuring Merrill Skaggs (Drew University, New Jersey), Mary Robert (Director, Opera Omaha), and Richard Giannone (Fordham University, New York). Skaggs is well known in Cather circles for her appearances at previous conferences and for her seminal work *After the World Broke in Two* (1990). Her paper on "key transpositions" from *The Song of the Lark* to *Lucy Gayheart* considered how Thea Kronborg and Clement Sebastian represent diametrically opposed visions of the musical artist. Through an examination of each artist's repertoire, performance styles, and offstage behavior, Skaggs made a compelling argument that *Lucy Gayheart* constitutes a satirical view of the detached, uninvolved artist, sharply contrasted with Thea Kronborg's portrayal as a quasi-religious priestess carrying on the highest traditions in music.

Mary Robert described her coming to an awareness of Cather's uncanny grasp of problems associated with the voice and of issues of dramatic interpretations of various opera roles. Robert expressed her amazement that Cather, who played no instrument and couldn't sing, possessed an understanding of musical art that would be rare even among professional musicians. Robert also shared intriguing stories about her own career and used examples from Cather's works, such as the performance of *The Bohemian Girl* in *Lucy Gayheart*, to explain the tension between mere technical ability and dramatic persuasion as criteria in casting an operatic role.

Admirers of Cather's artistry owe a great debt to Richard Giannone, whose pioneering work *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction* (1968) has proven an indispensable research tool for generations of Cather scholars and shows no signs of losing its position as a central work in Cather studies. Giannone's comments at the conclusion of the roundtable described how each of the three books of *Lucy Gayheart* illustrates contrasting visions of death and how Harry Gordon's discovery in Book III of a serenity absent from the earlier books reinforces Harry's story as central to the novel. At the session's conclusion, the audience participated in an unusually stimulating discussion with the panel.

Following lunch, participants were invited to attend the WCPM's Board Meeting, presided over by Executive Director Pat Phillips. After the meeting, tour buses shuttled participants to the Cather Prairie and to Cather sites in and around Red Cloud. The restored railroad depot south of Red Cloud was the venue for a reception highlighting a fascinating photographic exhibit of before-and-after shots of restoration work at various Cather sites.

The closing banquet was emceed by Ron Hull, associate general manager of Nebraska Public Television. A host of friends of the WCPM were recognized for their years of service, and Elicia Kaplan of Lincoln was presented with the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Award. Philip Abbott treated the audience to a dramatic reading of the opening portion of "A Resurrection," and Bill and Sandy Allyn returned to share insights associated with adapting Cather's story for film. Bill Allyn also announced his ongoing negotiations to bring *The Song of the Lark* to the screen.

The 40th Annual Conference demonstrated that Cather's works continue to attract new audiences and new admirers, while also reaffirming the importance of music in assessing Cather's position among twentieth century writers.

A NEW WORLD SYMPHONY: CULTURAL PLURALISM IN *THE SONG OF THE LARK* AND *MY ÁNTONIA*

(Continued from Page 1)

W. Kaye, have recently called Cather a racist. Kaye, for example, declares that Cather's "racism and anti-Semitism make her politics completely antithetical to the multi-cultural, non-hierarchical ideas that have effectively guided twentieth-century feminism" (187). What these critics fail to recognize, I believe, is that Cather's attitude toward ethnic cultures different to her own was unusually progressive for her time. This paper is an attempt to identify more clearly the context in which Cather created the multi-ethnic characters in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* and from that context to draw a metaphor to explain her own cultural pluralism.

But first, to understand more fully the context in which Cather wrote, it will be helpful to trace the historical development of several theories — and their accompanying metaphors — used to conceptualize the relationship of the diverse cultures and nationalities which exist within the United States. The earliest and most prevalent concept, of course, is that of the "melting pot," first implied by Crèvecoeur in 1782 and later popularized by Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting-Pot* in 1909. According to the melting pot, or amalgamation theory, the American is a totally new being,

(Continued on Next Page)

CULTURAL PLURALISM

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created through the combination of "many different strains" (Handlin 146-50). The second, and more culturally restrictive, theory of assimilation took root late in the nineteenth century when, after the first and second great waves of European migration, many Americans began to be apprehensive about the influx of so many immigrants. This doctrine, advocated by sociologists Richmond Mayo-Smith and Henry Pratt Fairchild, contended that the only true American culture was Anglo Saxon in character and origin, and therefore newcomers should graft themselves upon this native trunk, thus denying their own individual roots.

It is the third and more culturally tolerant theory of cultural pluralism, however, that provides the historical and sociological context for Cather's own work. This theory was developed in the early twentieth century by Horace M. Kallen, who maintained that each ethnic group has an inherent worth and dignity which, if retained, will strengthen and enrich American civilization. Comparing America's varied ethnic groups to the instruments of an orchestra, Kallen argues that America should not be solely based on the Anglo-Saxon heritage but should achieve a "harmony" in which this theme will be only "one among many." Believing that the English language is a practical common denominator, he nevertheless encourages each nationality to maintain its own integrity through language and its resultant artistic and intellectual expressions. In this way, Kallen believes, America can achieve

a perfection of harmonies, a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind. As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, . . . its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization . . . (qtd. in Handlin 155)

Kallen's metaphor of America as a symphony of cultures — as a "new world symphony," so to speak — not only finds expression in sociological theory but also in Cather's fiction. She, too, often employs musical symbols in her writing, and perhaps it is not altogether coincidental that *The Song of the Lark*, her novel about the career of an opera singer whose unequivocal commitment to her art occurs at a rendition of Anton Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, appeared in 1915 — the same year as Kallen's treatise.

Having first heard the *New World Symphony* in Pittsburgh in the fall of 1898 (Woodress 133), Cather was undoubtedly attracted to what music critic Otakar Sourek has called the "powerful effect of the solemn beauty of the American prairies and virgin forests" which the symphony imaginatively portrays (146). In addition, just as Dvorak wanted to "encourage young American composers in the development of their own native [ethnic] sources" (Stefan 203), so did Cather

combine various immigrant nationalities into the symphonies of many of her novels, including *The Song of the Lark*, in which the life of protagonist Thea Kronberg is based partly on that of Swedish opera singer Olive Fremstad. After an interview with Fremstad, Cather wrote her friend Elizabeth Sergeant, "She was just like the immigrant women on the Divide — with suspicious, defiant, far-seeing pioneer eyes" (Woodress 253). Like Cather herself, Thea is moved by hearing a performance of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. Thus, both the symphonic metaphor and the theme of cultural diversity are especially applicable to this novel.

The strongest cultural movement in *The Song of the Lark* is Scandinavian, for Thea's mother is pure Swedish, her father part Swedish and part Norwegian, and the names of Thea and her little brother Thor originate in Nordic mythology. All the Kronberg children but Anna have Scandinavian features, but Thea is the most Scandinavian of them all. While treating her for pneumonia one winter, her friend Dr. Archie muses that the child "was a little Swede, through and through" (12). Moreover, the Norwegian strain is also strong in Thea, though it takes a different direction in her than in her father and aunt. Thus, Thea receives from the Swedes her determination and love of order, and from the Norwegians her passion and imagination, all of which are qualities essential to the development of any artist.

Thea absorbs not only her own culture but also the cultures of those around her. Professor Wunsch, her German piano teacher, introduces her to German art and music, specifically to German opera. These early bonds with European life and art are augmented throughout her musical career. When she goes to Chicago, she studies with Hungarian piano teacher Andor Harsanyi. In Chicago also, she meets and falls in love with rich German Fred Ottenburg, who, in turn, introduces her to the rich and cultivated German Jewish family, the Nathanmeyers. This interest in German culture is eventually climaxed when she actually goes to Germany to study voice, and after several years returns to America as a masterful interpreter of Wagnerian opera.

Thea's music, however, has roots not only in the cultivation and intellectualism of German life but also in the elemental passions of her Mexican friends. Cather's portrayal of the Mexicans in this novel has drawn criticism from both Ammons and Kaye. For example, Ammons asserts that "when it comes to Americans of other races, such as Indians, Asians, Chicanos, or blacks, her [Cather's] racism blinds her" (134). Cather shows, however, that even as a child, Thea — and perhaps by implication Cather herself — identified with the free and intense life of the Mexican quarter of Moonstone, and especially with Spanish Johnny, the young mandolin player who pursues the call of beauty and desire that he hears in the sea shell.

When Thea returns to Moonstone after her first year in Chicago, she refuses to sing for a funeral but dances and sings for the Mexicans because she realizes that they understand and sympathize with her talent and desire. Through this event, Thea experiences for the first time the response that only a musical people can give to her art (292). Not only does Thea observe a "kind of natural harmony" about their dance movements (289), but in singing a Mexican part-song with them, blending her clear soprano accents with the baritones and tenors of the Mexican boys (293-94), she also experiences a sense of both cultural harmony and diversity. Although Thea — like Cather — identifies with the men, who in the early twentieth century were more free than women in Hispanic culture to express themselves, I cannot agree with Kaye's charge that although Thea, and by implication, Cather, "values the beauty of the Mexicans' cultural life, at the same time she expects them to be feudal peasants who pay homage to her as the white lady" (81).



Elementary students participate in gunny sack races in the background of the Cather Childhood Home during "Pastime & Playthings," May 16-18.

In fact, as recognized as early as 1963 by Cecil Robinson in his study of Mexican culture in American literature (172-74), the crucial scene that follows this dance shows not only Thea's acceptance of but also her preference for the Mexican population of Moonstone. The next morning when Thea's brothers and her sister Anna complain about her Mexican friends,

Thea looked across the table at the uncompromising countenances of her older brothers. "Why, what's the matter with the Mexicans?" she asked, flushing. "They don't trouble anybody, and they are kind to their families and have good manners."

"Nice clean people; got some style about them. Do you really like that kind, Thea, or do you just pretend to? That's what I'd like to know." Gus looked at her with pained inquiry. But he at least looked at her.

"They're just as clean as white people, and they have a perfect right to their own ways. Of course I like 'em. I don't pretend things."

"Everybody according to his own taste," remarked Charley bitterly. . . . (297)

While a modern reader might be put off by Thea's phrase "as clean as white people," she clearly supports and admires the Mexican culture and is embarrassed and appalled by the bigotry of her family. With this scene, Cather takes a clearly anti-racist stance.

In addition to the Mexican dance, two other experiences derived from other cultures — one Eastern European and one Native American — contribute significantly to Thea's development as an artist. Shortly after Harsanyi has led Thea to the realization that her true talent lies in her voice rather than in the piano, she attends a performance of Czech composer Anton Dvorak's "Symphony in E minor, called on the programme, 'From the New World'" (251). Her reaction is instantaneous and intense:

The first theme had scarcely been given out when her mind became clear; instant composure fell upon her, and with it came the power of concentration. This was music she could understand, music from the New World indeed! . . .

When the first movement ended, Thea's hands and feet were cold as ice. She was too much excited to know anything except that she wanted something desperately, and when the English horns gave out the theme of the Largo, she knew that what she wanted was exactly that. Here were the sand hills, the grasshoppers and locusts, all the things that wakened and chirped in the early morning; the reaching and reaching of high plains, the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands. There was home in it, too, first memories, first mornings long ago; the amazement of a new soul in a new world; a soul new and yet old, that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall. (251)

Significantly, just as Cather has incorporated into *The Song of the Lark* various cultural elements, including the folk music of Mexican Americans, many music critics consider one of Dvorak's major contributions to the content of American music to be his recognition of the validity of the folk voice in music. Having accepted an invitation to visit America and to direct the National Music Conservatory in New York in 1892, he openly invited blacks to his classes in New York. Moreover, without directly borrowing from either, Dvorak incorporated into his *New World Symphony*, completed in May of 1893, elements of Negro folk music and of Native American legend, especially the legend of Hiawatha as told by Longfellow (Stefan 203). Recognizing folk elements in Thea's music also, Richard Giannone asserts that "The combined passion of the folk artist and the educated intelligence of the professional make up the cultural patrimony to which Thea Kronborg, the heroine, is heir" (86).

The Amerindian element of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* is related to Thea's second awakening, which occurs on a visit to the Southwest as she explores the cliff dwellings in Panther Canyon and

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CULTURAL PLURALISM (Continued)

experiences an artistic epiphany after bathing one morning in the stream at the bottom of the canyon:

The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself — life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals. (378)

The instruments in the orchestra that play Dvorak's symphony, especially the wind instruments, are also vessels for the breaths of the artists who play them. All artists in all cultures, then, share this same need. The Indians expressed it in their pottery, Spanish Johnny in his mandolin, Professors Wunsch and Harsanyi in the piano, and Thea herself in her voice.

In Cather's next novel, *My Ántonia*, the emphasis on cultural pluralism and on the symbolic association of music with specific cultures is most clearly presented through the piano imagery of African American Blind d'Arnault and the violin imagery associated with the Bohemians, Anton Shimerda and Ántonia Shimerda-Cuzak's children. Although Cather has been criticized by Ammons (132) and others for her portrayal of Blind d'Arnault — and I must admit that this scene disturbs me personally — his presence contributes to the novel the musical folk element of African American culture that influenced Dvorak's work. Thus, even if the presentation of this scene is tainted for modern readers by the context in which Cather lived, her inclusion of the African American presence in *My Ántonia* shows that her humane commitment to the New World Symphony of cultural pluralism was serious and thorough.

In an interesting critical coincidence, Toni Morrison has recently connected Dvorak with another literary incident similar to that of Blind d'Arnault. After discussing the disturbing effect a Louis Armstrong concert had on the white writer Marie Cardinal, Morrison asks

Would an Edith Piaf concert or a Dvorak composition have had the same effect? Certainly either could have. What solicited my attention was whether the cultural associations of jazz were as important to Cardinal's "possession" as were its intellectual foundations. I was interested . . . in the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them. (viii)

Morrison's statement here suggests to me two important points about the importance of various ethnic cultures in Cather's work.

First, Morrison's declaration that "black people ignite critical moments of discovery" is significant for at least two of Cather's major works — for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, which is discussed in detail by Morrison

but which is outside the scope of this paper, and for *My Ántonia*. Indeed, Richard Giannone stated many years ago that "The Blind d'Arnault passage is the pulsating center of *My Ántonia*. Occurring as it does in the very middle of the novel, it gives off the emotional — the musical — impulse which reverberates throughout" (120). This concept of discovery becomes increasingly interesting when we use it to connect *My Ántonia* more closely with both *The Song of the Lark* and *Sapphira*, for Thea responds to Dvorak's *New World Symphony* with "the amazement of a new soul in a new world; a soul new and yet old, that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall" (251). Perhaps the true significance of the Blind d'Arnault episode is that for Jim — and for Cather — who recognizes in Blind d'Arnault "the soft, amiable Negro voice, like those I remembered from early childhood [in Virginia], with the note of docile subservience in it" (122), this scene also reflects the feelings of a "new soul in a new world," of a "soul that has dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born," of a "soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall." But eventually, Cather will recall this past and retell it as honestly and forcefully as she can in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. If she is not able to show "all of the past," all that she "did not know" as a child in Virginia or even as a well-educated and cosmopolitan adult writer in the context of 1918, at least, as Morrison herself recognizes, Cather undertook "the journey" to face the "void of racism" (28).

The second application that can be made from Morrison's statement concerns her reference to Dvorak. We have just seen that Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, combining elements of Eastern European culture with folk elements of varied American cultures, did have just the powerful effect — both cultural and intellectual — on Cather and on her protagonist Thea that Morrison questions. Thus, while Morrison's declaration that "a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial" to various writers' "sense of Americanness" (6) is accurate, it is also incomplete. As Cather suggests through her application of the metaphor of a New World Symphony, the presence of Hispanic cultures, Native American cultures, Eastern European cultures, and many others is also "crucial" to a true "sense of Americanness." Thus, *My Ántonia* achieves symphonic unity and wholeness from many cultures. Not only does Cather incorporate images of the "great circle where the Indians used to ride" (42-43), the sunflower-bordered roads of the Mormons, and the legends of the Hispanic adventurers, but she also incorporates the musical expressions of several cultures. As Giannone has observed, the Austrian Otto Fuchs is said to have a "good baritone voice"; Russian Peter plays a "gaudily painted harmonica"; the Italian Vannis family brings music and dancing to the entire town of Black Hawk — especially to the Nor-

wegian, Danish, and Bohemian hired girls (110-11); and piano music is not only brought to the hotel by Blind d'Arnault but also fills the house of the Norwegian Harling family.

Except for the Blind d'Arnault scene, however, the strongest musical and cultural motifs are associated with Antonia Shimerda-Cuzak and her family. The fiddle that Antonia Shimerda's father brings from the Old World symbolizes his Bohemian, or Czech, culture, although, as Antonia recognizes, pioneer life stills (temporarily) the voice of both his fiddle and his culture:

"My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time, for weddings and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for play, he shake his head no. Some days he take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on strings, like this, but never he make the music. He don't like this kawn-tree." (59)

During the middle sections of the book when Antonia subordinates her culture to her desire for popularity as a hired girl and for acceptance by the man who impregnates and then betrays her, Mr. Shimerda's fiddle completely disappears. When Jim visits Antonia — now Mrs. Anton Cuzak — in the last section, however, the violin reappears with full symbolic force:

After supper we went into the parlour. . . . Leo, with a good deal of fussing, got out his violin. It was old Mr. Shimerda's instrument, which Antonia had always kept, and it was too big for him. But he played very well for a self-taught boy. Poor Yulka's efforts were not so successful. While they were playing, little Nina got up from her corner, came out into the middle of the floor, and began to do a pretty little dance on the boards with her feet. . . . (223)

By marrying a fellow Bohemian and by teaching her children to speak their native language and retain Bohemian music and dance, Antonia preserves her own cultural strand in the evolving New World Symphony.

As modern readers, however, we should remember that just as a symphony comes alive only when it is played, so do Cather's books come alive only when they are read, and as Susan Rosowski has recognized, one of the strengths of a masterpiece like *My Antonia* is that it is a "continuously changing work" (74). Thus, I believe that important interpretive insights have been, and will continue to be, gained from modern approaches such as reader response and feminism. However, I share the concern about the "contemporary literary climate" (39) that John Murphy recently expressed in his article "Willa Cather and the Literature of Christian Mystery." In particular, I fear that readings that judge Cather's work out of the context of her own time and place may alienate many modern readers whose lives and understanding of other cultures could otherwise be enriched through novels like *The Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia* that help to make the "precious, the incommunicable past" (240) more "communicable" for all of us.

As modern readers, then, we should remember that the stand that Willa Cather took for cultural pluralism in the early twentieth century was unusual for someone of her ethnic background. Horace Kallen, the originator of the theory of cultural pluralism, was himself Jewish American, but Cather was born to an Anglo family in Frederick County, Virginia. Although her removal at the impressionable age of nine to Nebraska undoubtedly limited her experience with and understanding of African American culture, her experiences on the Divide as well as her own nonconformist, tomboyish personality contributed to her open-minded view of the immigrants she encountered. Further, her attitude toward these immigrants and cultures other than her own was not just that of acceptance and sympathy; rather, it was one of understanding and great admiration. Jules Chametzky, while granting that cultural pluralism is "a way to express the empirical reality of American diversity and how to come to terms with it," has questioned the validity of the "image of the great orchestration of mankind," of "the symphony of civilization," believing that the image contains "more than a hint of American chauvinism" (10). To me, however, the image of a symphony of cultures, of a New World Symphony, is strikingly appropriate, especially for Willa Cather's fiction. Horace M. Kallen, Willa Cather, and Anton Dvorak would agree that, just as each instrument plays its part in a symphony without losing its unique tonal and rhythmic qualities, so should each separate culture be an integral and inseparable facet of American civilization without losing its own inviolable integrity.

NOTE

As Susan Rosowski recently pointed out to me, journalistic portrayals of Blind Tom (Thomas Greene Bethune Wiggins) and Blind Boone (John William Boone), the prototypes for Cather's Blind d'Arnault, were much less sensitive than Cather's own portrait in *My Antonia*. For example, Anna Amalie Tutein describes Blind Tom as "A little pickaninny" when he is a child and as "repulsive in many ways" and "removed only a few degrees from the animal" (91) when he is an adult. Although most biographers describe Thomas Bethune Wiggins as mentally deficient as well as musically talented, Tutein's language suggests an inherent bigotry not reflected in Cather's novel.

Furthermore, an analysis of biographical sketches of Blind Tom and of contemporary reviews and testimonials about Blind Boone's performances suggests that while some of the language in Cather's description which is offensive to modern readers may have been based on reports that she may have read, much of her description was sensitively rewritten. For example, she does not use such words as *darky* or *boy* to refer to either African American pianist as do some of the journalistic reports, choosing instead to write *Negro*, the more respectful word for her historical time.

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(Continued on Next Page)

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Marian Forrester, Cather's Fictional Portrayal of the Modernist Self

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Cao Jinghua and friend.

For Cather, as for many of her contemporaries, "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts." What had seemed to be an orderly world of promise and heroism and potential fulfillment was now replaced by a rapidly changing one of bewildering but exciting complexity. Confronted by the demanding task of reflecting the infinite complexity of human experience in the modern world, Cather, who was not awed by the challenge but felt alienated, began to experiment with new ways of rendering the depths of modern experience. Unfortunately, misconceptions have frequently led some to regard Cather as a writer of "modest fictions which are seriously weakened by her incapacity to face modern reality and by a repetitious inclination to idealize the past"²; indeed her very statement about the world breaking in two has often been cited as an example of escapism. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Cather omitted from the list of those acknowledged as "modernists," although recent reappraisals are distinguishing her with this title.³ While Cather was not a literary artist who consciously sought to align herself with a particular movement, be it symbolism or modernism, her awareness of the complexities of modern reality and her attempts to render a modern consciousness are not to be ignored or denigrated. Among other things, the juxtaposition of openness to experience and formal control and of present and past, and the manipulation of points of view, all display Cather's characteristically modernist approaches to fiction. This paper is aimed at demonstrating Cather's contributions to modernism through one particular portrayal of the modernist self against the changes that took place in the world around the year 1922.

The expression of selfhood haunted Cather from the outset of her literary career, and both personally and professionally she was preoccupied with the representation of selfhood. When in her earlier career she had difficulties in reconciling the traditional idea of what it is to be a woman and what it means to achieve, Cather created a galaxy of female characters confronted with rigid limitations in their growth toward selfhood. Their inability to achieve personal fulfillment, however, stands out in strong relief against the emergence of the author who, after a groping phase, began to master her art and establish an autonomous identity as a woman and as a writer.

Her anxiety replaced by self-confidence, Cather began to create a different set of females. The protagonists in her first three major novels are self-actualizing women who, fully committed to a sense of mission and richly endowed with both "masculine" and "feminine" traits, fulfill their heroic natures and achieve wholeness by identifying themselves with complete and great universals. Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!* (1913) establishes her identity through heroic faith in wild land and struggles against the prejudices of patriarchal society and her own limitations. Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) fulfills herself through the pursuit of a demanding artistic career and subsequent marriage to a man who understands her and reveres her art. This integration of artist and woman is accomplished particularly through Thea's female body, the instrument of her art. In *My Ántonia* (1918) Ántonia Shermida, whose body is "a rich mine of life" paralleling the fecundity of the earth itself, attains traditional female fulfillment but is hardly limited by conventional roles as wife and mother, and her struggle as a pioneer who creates a fruitful farm combines the achievements of Alexandra and Thea. The striving of all three female heroes involves a long and often harsh process of transcending conventional roles for women and overcoming setbacks, but their exertions are not in vain; each succeeds in unfolding an inner-self and bears witness to Cather's own realization of an autonomous, integral and continuous selfhood.

The world breaking in two around 1922, however, shattered the traditional concept of integrated selfhood, which in Cather and other writers of her time began to be replaced by a preoccupation with the fragmentary realities of selfhood. This change in representation of selfhood formed part of the enormous transformations in political, social, cultural, and psychoanalytical thought at the turn of the century which crystallized in the First World War, breaking up many nineteenth-century assumptions, including those about literary form and the means whereby "self" may be expressed. Cather's preoccupation with the complexities of self-experience and the problems of expressing it in fiction constitute an important contribution to the development of modernism.

Cather created a number of characters to whom the traditional sense of wholeness was denied. Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours* (1922), Marian Forrester in *A*

Lost Lady (1923), Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor's House* (1925) and Myra Driscoll Henshawe in *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) are more or less characters with a modernist self, pluralist, heterogeneous and discontinuous. Why is it then that critics have constantly regarded Cather as an escapist unable to face modern reality? As I will attempt to show in the following analysis of *A Lost Lady*, Cather has failed to be classified among modernist writers not because of her inability to face complexities of modern life but because her works are haunted, as is typical of the modernist discourse of selfhood, by ghosts of some lost self which was once coherent and self-sufficient. Failing to recognize this, many critics have focused their attention on Cather's depiction of the lost self rather than the modernist self and have wrongly taken the former as a sign of Cather's indulgence in the past.

What is most intriguing about Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* is the ambiguity, contradiction, discontinuity or indeterminacy she embodies. To Niel Herbert, the central male consciousness, she seems to have "inherited the magic of contradictions" (45). Such indeterminacy, however, has led to a variety of interpretations. Some critics have taken her as a lady bewildered, a lady who has lost her way amid the decline of the heroic age and the violent disturbance of socioeconomic transformations; some have regarded her as a woman defined by her attachment to males and unable to establish her identity without male backing; some have compared her to Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina or viewed her as an embodiment of female sexual energy. While each of these and other interpretations may sound reasonable from a particular angle or approach, few critics seem to have pinpointed the essential nature of the lady's character: the very indeterminacy she embodies shows that hers is a modernist self with disparate self-parts.

The parts of Marian Forrester's fragmenting selfhood can be gleaned from the various images she leaves in the minds of other characters. For instance, to Cyrus Dalzell, an old friend of Captain Forrester, she is the enchanting Lady Forrester able to "put fresh life into us all" (56); to Adolph Blum, a poor boy, Mrs. Forrester, though belonging to the privileged class, is an amiable person who always treats him with kindness; to Ivy Peters, a shyster lawyer, she is a common woman to be assailed with obscenities; to ladies' man Frank Ellinger, she is another sex object to be exploited; to her husband, she is, among other things, a patient, practical and capable companion. Mrs. Forrester's disparate self-parts are reflected in her many-coloured laugh. Sometimes it is a soft, inviting, musical laugh that "rose and descended like a suave scale" or "the distant measures of dance music, heard through opening and shutting doors" (23); sometimes her laugh is "full of mischief" (36); sometimes it is "impatient, indulgent, teasing, eager" (49); and once it is naughty, "with something nervous and excited in it" (70). Marian's fragmentation can be best seen, how-

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MARIAN FORRESTER (Continued)

ever, through Niel's perceptions and reactions, for although the author wants the reader to see the heroine from different angles, Niel's perception is by far the most significant. It is through his constant attempts to reduce his lady to a principle of unity, his constant distress at her refusal to conform, his alienation and loss when he discovers her betrayal of her husband and his reappraisal of his long-lost lady that one can best perceive Marian Forrester's modernist self. Of course, other points of view provided by the author help the reader to qualify Niel's conclusions.

The charm of Marian starts to work on Niel from the very outset. He recognizes her the first time he sees her as belonging to a different world from any he has ever known: "Something about her took hold of one in a flash" (19). The more he associates with her, the more he appreciates her distinction. Indeed, no other woman he ever meets is as elegant, attractive or distinguished as Mrs. Forrester, who, in the eyes of the nineteen-year-old Niel, is always "lovely. Just lovely" (21). Niel realizes gradually that Mrs. Forrester's charm arises from many contradictions: Her eyes, dark and full of light, contrast with her crystalline, white complexion; her fragility coexists with effervescent vitality; and the very proprieties she observes she mocks outrageously.

The trouble with Niel, however, is that though he admires Marian's contradictions, he is unwilling or refuses to accept her as she is and instead selects something stable in her on which to base his faith:

Curiously enough, it was as Captain Forrester's wife that she most interested Niel, and it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her. Given her other charming attributes, her comprehension of a man like the railroad builder, her loyalty to him, stamped her more than anything else. That, he felt, was quality; something that could never become worn or shabby; steel of Damascus. His admiration of Mrs. Forrester went back to that, just as, he felt, she herself went back to it. (45)

Captain Forrester, representative of the pioneers of the Old West, stands for the stability of the old order which cherishes tradition and conformity and is characterized by the unitary self. The Captain himself furnishes a typical example of such selfhood; a man of radically unchangeable gestures, he displays a consistent and indivisible personality: "His clumsy dignity covered a deep nature, a conscience that had never been juggled with" (27). This integrity of conscience is most clearly demonstrated during the savings bank failure. While all the other directors — promising young modern businessmen — refuse to pay their depositors like gentlemen, Captain Forrester, at great financial cost, sees to it that not one of the depositors shall lose a dollar.

It is true that Mrs. Forrester understands her husband, as can be seen through her response to the Captain's handling of the bank crisis: "I wouldn't for the world have had him do otherwise for me. He would

never hold up his head again. You see, I know him" (53). Indeed, such integrity is what had first attracted Marian to the Captain. But her appreciative relationship with the pioneer constitutes only a part of her self. Rather than being a woman defined merely in terms of her attachment to a male, Mrs. Forrester reveals the complexities of selfhood which are indispensable to survival in the new social order. The fact that Captain Forrester and men of his time one after another suffer bankruptcy, senility, and even death indicates the impracticability of old order values in the modern age. However, Niel Herbert, whose world view is qualified by romanticism, is unable to cope with the rapidly changing world; to him, Mrs. Forrester's loyalty to the Captain defines her as an aesthetic ideal. He believes that the subtlest thrill of her fascination comes from the disparity between "the life she might have been living ever since he had known her, — and the one she had chosen to live" (45). So long as she remains loyal to the Captain, Niel is rather pleased with "the stories, even the spiteful ones, about the gay life she led in Colorado, and the young men she kept dangling about her every winter" (45). In other words, continuity or unity rather than diversity or fragmentation is what Niel expects of Mrs. Forrester's life.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Niel shocked and deeply puzzled when he is confronted with the truth of what he had formerly assumed to be mere gossip. Just when Niel feels he has come to know Mrs. Forrester "very well," he becomes very, annoyed at hearing her refer to Frank Ellinger, a man with "objectionably broad" shoulders (45); so upon discovering their affair (which the reader already knows), as he is about to place a bouquet of wild roses outside Mrs. Forrester's bedroom window, Niel becomes almost insane with anger. All his admiration for his lovely lady disappears instantly and, he believes, for ever. What Mrs. Forrester has outraged in the eyes of Niel is not a moral scruple but an aesthetic ideal:

He burned to ask her one question, to get the truth out of her and set his mind at rest: What did she do with all her exquisiteness when she was with a man like Ellinger? Where did she put it away? And having put it away, how could she recover herself, and give one — give even him — the sense of tempered steel, a blade that could fence with anyone and never break? (58)

Obviously the notion of disparate self-parts is not yet acceptable to Niel. His "lovely" lady should always be lovely and just lovely; she should not be anything other than this, and her loveliness should depend on the principle of sameness and unity. When Niel goes off to college the burning question of her integrity makes him ill at ease.

There are those who maintain that Niel acts as a spokesman for the author when, through his perceptions and reactions, he condemns modern values and longs for the old order. But it must be noticed that Niel's is not the only point of view in the book. For instance, the first love scene between Marian and

Frank is beyond Niel's knowledge and invites the reader to make his/her own value judgment. Also, changes do occur in Niel's perceptions and reactions, although not until much later.

When Niel comes back from college for a summer vacation after being away for two years, he is fully aware of the decline of the Old West, which "had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers . . . strong in attack but weak in defence who could conquer but could not hold" (63). The trouble with Niel, however, is that although he fully realizes that those heroic pioneers are being replaced by a new generation of shrewd young men like Ivy Peters, "who had never dared anything, never risked anything" but who have been "trained to petty economies by hard times" (63), he refuses to face up to this reality, and his perceptions of and reactions to his lovely lady are coloured by his inability to cope with the complexities of life around him. Niel would have exerted all his efforts to save Lady Forrester, but his idea of rescuing her is to "carry her . . . off the earth of sad, inevitable periods, away from age, weariness, adverse fortune" (64), which reminds us his ineffectual attempt to rescue the blinded woodpecker by putting it out of its misery. However, the bird was willing to disappear into its own hole, and Mrs. Forrester, Niel is shocked to discover, is bent upon using what she has to revive the social life she craves. And "it was what he most held against Mrs. Forrester; that she was not willing to immolate herself, like the widow of all these great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged; that she preferred life on any terms" (99).

Thus Niel feels increasingly alienated from Mrs. Forrester because she is not content to vanish as a symbol of the past. He is surprised that, despite the changes brought about by the harsh times, she is still her old self. Her diversity and multiplicity are still there: she "lay laughing up at him with that gleam of something elegantly wild, something fantastic and tantalizing, — seemingly so artless, really the most finished artifice!" (65). Moreover, Mrs. Forrester, unlike Niel, his uncle and her own husband, whose methods are no longer effective, does not evade the realities of life. She advises, "Money is a very important thing. Realize that in the beginning; face it, and don't be ridiculous in the end" (67). While Niel's innocence of business schemes is one of the things that endear him to her, and while she does not admire people like Ivy Peters, who cheat without scruple, she knows that rascality succeeds faster than anything else and turns to Ivy to invest her money and get out of the trap she is in. As she tells Niel, "Perhaps people think I've settled down to grow old gracefully, but I've not. I feel such a power to live in me . . . It's grown by being held back" (73). Money and vitality are things she feels she cannot do without if she is to emerge again, and her sense of desperation at Frank Ellinger's "playing safe" may be due not so much to her anger at being abandoned as to her fear of being dismissed as a has-been. Niel, unable to comprehend all this, feels

"frightened for her. When women began to talk about still feeling young, didn't it mean that something had broken?" (74).

That the author's portrayal of Marian Forrester is not necessarily an indictment of modern values and a plea for a return to the old ways is reflected in the probability that Mrs. Forrester's husband, the Captain, as Niel firmly believes, "knew . . . all there was to know about Marian Forrester" (69), and "knowing her, he, — to use one of his own expressions, — valued her" (84). Though a man belonging to the pioneer period, the Captain perhaps recognizes the insufficiency of the old values he himself respects and the need for different survival tactics in these times. Niel, on the other hand, still too young and innocently romantic to face the realities of the times, condemns Mrs. Forrester for seemingly flighty and perverse behaviour, regarding her dealings with Peters as scandalous. However, Marian, knowing that "times have changed" (91), is determined not to fall behind them and remains her indomitable self during the party she gives a group of young male locals. Yet Niel still refuses to take her as she is, feeling that "the right man could save her, even now" (98), and he loses her once and for all, he believes, when he witnesses her possessive caress by Ivy Peters, the wrong man.

Eventually, however, once clued into the complexities of modern life, Niel begins to reappraise his long-lost lady and his relationship with her: "He came to be very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him in to life" (101). His former distress at Mrs. Forrester's refusal to preserve a unified identity is now replaced by an appreciation of the very uncertainty of her nature:

He would like to call up the shade of the young Mrs. Forrester, as the witch of Endor called up Samuel's and challenge it, demand the secret of that ardour; ask her whether she had really found some ever-blooming, ever-burning, ever-piercing joy, or whether it was all fine play-acting. Probably she had found no more than another; but she had always the power of suggesting things much lovelier than herself, as the perfume of a single flower may call up the whole sweetness of spring. (101)

Just as Niel develops a different perspective on the nature of his lost lady long after "she had drifted out of his ken" (101), so critics are reappraising the stance of the author. What Cather does in juxtaposing the present and the past in her work is but an employment of a modernist technique. Cather's delineation of Marian Forrester as an inherently fragmentary self might prove distressing when viewed against traditional unitary selfhood, might strike the reader as tormented and desperate. Also, the standards in the contemporary world might leave the reader with a sense of alienation from his/her roots. But, modern reality being what it is, what Cather does in her work ought to be appreciated as an expression of concern rather than escape. It may even be argued that self-fragmentation can be reassessed positively as a form of self-diver-

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MARIAN FORRESTER (Continued)

sification and self-plenitude, that the complexities of modern life give rise to such variety and multiplicity that they in turn enrich experience. The traditional sense of wholeness may now be replaced by a new one made up of balancing, if disparate, self-parts. Hence the positive tone with which Cather ends her work: Marian Forrester, being as good as her word, emerges triumphantly as her own indomitable self, demonstrated, among other things, by her laugh which "hadn't changed a particle" (102).

NOTES

¹See Cather's prefatory note to *Not Under Forty* (London: Cassell, 1936).

²George William Greene, "Willa Cather at Mid-century," *Thought* 32 (Winter 1958): 578.

³Among those recent works that address the nature of Cather's modernism are Jo Ann Middleton's *Willa Cather's Modernism: A Study of Style and Technique* (London: Associated University Press, 1990); Phyllis Rose's "Modernism: The Case of Willa Cather," in *Modernism Reconsidered*, ed. Robert Kelly and John Hildebidle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Susan Rosowski's *Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

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Willa Cather's University Days A Centennial Celebration, 1895-1995 April 6-8, 1995

Deb Forssman, UNL

Nineteen hundred ninety-five marks the centennial year of Willa Cather's graduation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. To celebrate Cather's university days, over a hundred participants gathered at the university for a special three day campus and community involvement of recreating the people and the place Cather might have experienced as a student in Lincoln in the 1890s.

Robert Knoll, professor emeritus of English at UNL, gave the celebration's keynote address on "The

Golden Years: Willa Cather's University" and highlighted many outstanding students who were classmates of Cather's and later became experts in the sciences, the arts, the law, and the government. At the university, Cather was not alone in her yearning to learn was surrounded by a "rich mine of life" in her contemporaries.

Throughout the three days, fourteen other speakers described the contexts (cultural, political, agricultural, educational) surrounding Cather's life as a student at UNL. Presenters used their own areas of expertise in contextualizing Cather's world. Lucia Woods Lindley, a professional photographer whose work appears in *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*, included her photographs in "Willa Cather's Journey and Our Own: An Interplay with the Photographer." Beverly Cooper, collector of Cather memorabilia and lecturer on Cather's life and work, used photographs to illustrate her talk on the places important to Cather's life in "Willa Cather: Places of a Literary Memory."

Frederick Luebke, professor emeritus of history at UNL, presented "Willa's World: The Context of Nation, State and City in the 1890s." David Lewis, professor of agronomy at UNL, talked about "The Farm, Once-upon-a-Time." Margaret Bolick, curator of botany at the Nebraska State Museum and associate professor of biological sciences at UNL, spoke on "Critical Mass: Uppity Women at the University."

Thomas Rinkevich, assistant professor of classics at UNL, discussed how the classics that Cather would have studied became allusions in her fiction in his talk, "Hesiod, Publius, and Willa: The Long Trek to the New World." In "Literary Contexts of Gender Identities in the 1890s," Linda Pratt, professor of English at UNL, connected the literature of Oscar Wilde to the decadent movement that might have influenced Cather while she was a student at the university.

Cathy Downs, doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, spoke on Cather's early journalism career in Lincoln in "A Writer's Training Ground." During Cather's career as a journalist for the local paper in Lincoln, Cather wrote reviews of the arts — theatre performances, concerts, and painting exhibitions. To explore Cather's love for the theatre and her admiration for the actress Sarah Bernhardt, Evelyn Funda, lecturer of English at UNL, presented "The Fierce Flame-Like Beauty: Sarah Bernhardt Comes to Nebraska." Karen Janovy, Curator of Education at the Sheldon Art Gallery and co-editor of *The American Painting Collection of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery*, spoke on "Cather and the Art Scene: A Critical Eye." David Breckbill, an expert in music history and theory from Doane College, discussed "European Art Music on the Great Plains." Bruce Baker, professor of English at UN-Omaha, facilitated "Cather and Friends," a storytelling session by community members who shared memories of Cather. Also, Kari Ronning, assistant editor for the Cather Scholarly Edition at UNL, and Elizabeth Turner, lecturer of English at UNL and founder of the Cather Colloquium, presented

slides of Cather and her university friends. Susan Rosowski, professor of English at UNL, general editor of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, and editor-in-chief of *Cather Studies*, concluded the presentations with her talk "In the Wake of Willa," in which she paid special tribute to the current research on Cather that her students are doing at UNL a hundred years after Cather's graduation.

In addition to the talks were many other activities for participants. University honors students gave guided walking tours of Cather-related sites on the campus (the Cather Garden, Andrews Hall, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and Love Library). Jim McKee, Lincoln historian, offered a slide presentation of the city of Lincoln during the 1890s. Ed Zimmer, the historic preservation planner for the Lincoln/Lancaster Planning Department, guided a bus tour entitled "Looking for Cather's Lincoln." And there were pamphlets available for self-guided tours of Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, where some of Cather's friends are buried, including Margaret Miner Gernd, Charles H. and Mariel C. Gere, and Louise Pound. A tree dedication in honor of Willa Cather and Nellie Cochrane Woods took place outside of Architecture Hall on the Nebraska campus. University students did a marathon reading of Cather texts in various languages. And in conjunction with the celebration, a combination of dancers and readers performed "Willa Unbound: Cather and Her Interpreters," based on the voices of Cather and her critics and written by Patricia Behrendt, assistant professor of theatre arts and dance at UNL, and Lisa Fusillo, professor and director of dance in theatre arts and dance at UNL.

In honor and remembrance of the celebration, a commemorative book, *Willa Cather's University Days*, containing a previously unpublished speech by Cather on campus life, was published by the Center for Great Plains Studies. The editors, who are also two of the contributors and co-coordinators of the centennial celebration, are Elizabeth Turner and Kari Ronning. Copies of the book can be purchased through the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Bookstore in Red Cloud, Nebraska, for ten dollars.

Works on Cather: Summer '93-Summer '94: A Bibliographical Essay

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This year's examination of Cather criticism evaluates sixteen essays in four *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletters*, six articles in various periodicals, an introduction, an autobiographical treatise, three chapters, and nine books, including two reference ones. These critical works, written by veteran and relatively new Cather critics, are for the most part

meaningful and substantial and should invite response. They range in subject from specific Cather short stories and novels, to general discussions, comparative studies, source studies, travel, feminist readings, and pedagogy.

The *Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter* remains a leading publication on Cather scholarship under the stable direction of John J. Murphy who has selected five contributive essays, authored by several familiar names in Cather scholarship, for the Autumn-Winter 1993 issue. The first, "Cather, Mérimée, and the Problem of Fanaticism in *Shadows on the Rock*" (29-35) by John H. Flannigan compares the fictional accounts of historical events in this novel with Mérimée's 1829 novel *Chronique du règne de Charles IX*, an evocation of sixteenth-century Paris. Flannigan demonstrates the stylistic and narrative resemblances of the *Chronique* to *Shadows on the Rock*, concluding that Cather's novel can be read as a paean to Mérimée because Cather shared with him concern over problems of stability and irrationality in a chaotic world. Poignant are Flannigan's comments on Cather's devotion to Quebec as a fragile symbol of continuity. The hands in Sidonie Gabrielle Colette's "The Hand" and in Cather's "Neighbour Rosicky" are the images scrutinized by Alex Vardamis in "Two Hands: Colette's 'The Hand' and Cather's 'Neighbour Rosicky'" (35-36), a compelling note showing how contrasting images of hands deeply affect the women in the respective stories. For the young bride in Colette's story, her husband's vile hand symbolizes the dominant authority he has over her, but the young wife, Polly, in Cather's story idealistically sees paternal love in Rosicky's gentle hand. Vardamis discovers striking similarities in technique but finds no evidence that Colette's story influenced Cather's. Christine Kephart in "He Turned Off the Lights: A Study of Darkness in My Mortal Enemy" (36-39), calls *My Mortal Enemy* "defeatist" and observes that the prevailing mood of the novel veils Nellie Birdseye's recollections of the Henshawes, especially her memory of Myra. The darkness mood, Kephart convincingly argues, "carries the tone of death and despair" to its final conclusion. Steve Shively contributes a helpful pedagogical essay entitled "An Interdisciplinary Approach to 'Neighbour Rosicky'" (39-40) to share his own high school teaching experiences with "Neighbour Rosicky" and explains how a teacher can relate to students the story's historical, artistic, and sociological dimensions. For example, some of his students, after reading of the love and trust found in Rosicky's hand, were encouraged to work with that image: one drew a charcoal sketch, another made a photographic portfolio of the hands of residents in a nursing home, etc. Bruce P. Baker shares his many insights on Cather in "Portrait of the Artist by a Young Woman" (40-42), perceptively commenting on "Peter" and "Nanette: An Aside," two of Cather's earliest stories, as her "attempt to define the nature, the role, the function, and the sacrifice of one who devotes

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WORKS ON CATHER (Continued)

herself" to her artistic craft. Baker includes an early Cather essay, letter, and newspaper column to develop Cather's concept of her art and her dedication to it.

My 1992-93 bibliographical essay and a comparative study are the two scholarly pieces in the Spring 1994 *WCPM Newsletter*. The bibliographical essay (1-2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14-15) evaluates seventy-two pieces of Cather criticism, and Loretta Wasserman, known for her keen scholarship on Cather, contributes the comparison, "*Sapphira and the Slave Girl: Willa Cather vs Margaret Mitchell*" (1, 3, 5, 7, 9). Wasserman emphasizes that Cather's novel, unlike that of Mitchell's popular *Gone With the Wind*, "rests on the dynamics of sexual jealousy across racial lines," that Mitchell did not reflect in her novel the South's discomfort by illustrating any sexual exploitation of black female slaves by white men. Cather, Wasserman feels, read enough of Mitchell's 1936 novel and was familiar with the Southern myths to be sufficiently irritated into "pointedly countering the bland picture of slaves and slavery in the novel she was working on." What Cather wrote in her novel, Wasserman argues, was a moral condemnation of both slavery and racism and portrayed the "sexual exploitation and debasement under slavery," an exploitation the institution itself made possible and also accepted. Wasserman adds twenty-one helpful explanatory notations that illustrate and enhance her study.

The Summer 1994 *WCPM Newsletter* contributes five pieces, four on Cather's short stories, and a note on a writer who admired Cather. John N. Swift continues his fine work on Cather with "The Old Beauty and Maternal Purity" (17-18, 20, 22, 24). Swift brings a Freudian reading to "The Old Beauty" and insists that Henry Seabury considers Gabrielle Longstreet as the "maternal object" of his "boyish" desire. Seeing Gabrielle as a "mother," Swift stresses, helps one understand Seabury's adoration of her. Kristy Rimsch explains in "Flux and Friendship: Impressionism in 'Two Friends'" (24, 26, 28) that Cather recaptures in this story a stable moment from her own past and in order to accomplish this follows the techniques of French Impressionists — especially Monet — and Marcel Proust. "Willa Cather's Early Naturalism: 'A Death in the Desert'" (29-31) by Emmy Stark Zitter reiterates critical disagreement on the emphasis of this story but concludes it is naturalistic, since the characters are trapped and cannot escape their dominating environment. Lawrence I. Berkove in "Robin Mallory Daggett's 'My French Friend': A Precursor of 'Paul's Case'?" (31-34) offers that Daggett's story could easily have been a source for "Paul's Case." Berkove, noted for his lucid and insightful work on both Twain and Cather, gives convincing parallels between the protagonists in the two stories and admits that "Paul's Case" is a much better work. Berkove's suggestions are plausible ones and, as he says, "My French Friend" could have "stimulated Cather's imagination and

played a part in the conception of her story" Berkove includes excerpts from Daggett's piece for readers to make their own comparisons. William Holtz discusses in "Willa Cather and Floyd Dell" (34-36) Dell's admiration for Cather and reflects on an early Dell poem Cather apparently accepted when she was still an editor for *McClure's*. Holtz provides evidence from a 1960 letter Dell wrote to a young professor that Cather as editor added a new stanza and recognizes that "such editorial license apparently was not uncommon" in magazines like *McClure's*. Although no version of Dell's manuscript exists, Holtz obviously believes Cather's work can be detected in Dell's poem.

Four papers from the May 1994 Cather Spring Conference held annually in Red Cloud make up the Fall *WCPM Newsletter*. The papers, three from "Passing Show" presentations during the day and one the keynote address by Blanche Gelfant at the evening banquet, center on six short stories. Gelfant's "The Magical Art of Willa Cather's 'Old Mrs. Harris'" (37-38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50) draws a lengthy analogy between Cather's artistry in telling the story of "Old Mrs. Harris" and the wizardry of a magician in producing magic acts. Gelfant refers to Cather's art as "misdirection" and uses Mrs. Rosen and her cake to illustrate the ambiguity of a "magical transformation of an old woman in a brown calico dress into someone interesting and important." Gelfant's discussion reads like a conceit, an extended metaphor explaining Cather's writing technique. Kevin A. Synnott interprets in "Defining Community in 'Jack-a-Boy' and 'The Best Years'" (41, 43, 45) Cather's quest to find the writer's "place" in the world, a theme, Synnott says, "that teased Cather's mind across the lifetime she gave to the higher processes of art." These stories, says Synnott, praise her brothers Jack and Roscoe, respectively: "Jack-a-Boy" revealing a younger Cather yearning for home and family, while "The Best Years" an older Cather reflecting on them. John J. Murphy's "An American Tradition in 'The Enchanted Bluff' and 'Before Breakfast'" (47, 49) is one of the briefest of Murphy's voluminous works on Cather but does not lack insight. Murphy focuses on both stories as Cather statements about "poetic or imaginative possession," and he considers their humanizing similarities. The river setting in "The Enchanted Bluff" connects to the mystery of a culturally superior tribe and the bluff to an ideal associated with human history. Henry Grenfell physically possesses his ideal in the island Fairweather unsuccessfully attempts to dehumanize. Thus, as Murphy succinctly explains, the "visions" in the two stories are "human" ones because "the source of all meaning is within humanity, within intelligence, within spirit, or soul." Susan J. Rosowski's "Cather's Manifesto for Art — 'Coming, Aphrodite!'" (51-55) anchors this fall issue, explaining "to what effect Cather deployed [the story's recognized] eroticism." Rosowski interprets this work as Cather's "most explicit exploration of art as a dance of seduction between performer and audience, writer and reader . . ." For Rosowski, this story represents

Cather's own Manifesto of Art and what she calls a "redirection" in Cather's treatment of future subjects. Rosowski also draws an interesting parallel between Eden and Marilyn Monroe, finding Eden's story echoed in Marilyn's life.

Six articles in various periodicals, an introduction to a novel, and an autobiographical piece by a Cather biographer were also published in 1993-94, the two first in 1993 and the others in 1994. Marilyn Arnold continues to discover new material on Cather, and in "Willa Cather's Other Story of the Southwest" (*Southwestern American Literature* 19:27-34) uses to correspondence to examine Cather's intentions to set a book in the Southwest after *The Song of the Lark*. Although Cather never wrote that specific book, Arnold suggests that Cather may have substituted "Coming, Aphrodite!" with its Aztec legend. Dennis Halac in "Ever so true: Willa Cather & T. G. Masaryk" (*The New Criterion* 12:36-40) mentions an extensive correspondence between Cather and Masaryk, a man of letters and President of the first Czech Republic. Their correspondence might have been extensive, but only one 1932 letter from Masaryk to Cather has ever been seen. Halac does disclose, however, the recent discovery in a Prague archive of five Cather letters to Masaryk between 1923 and 1935. Two of the letters reveal refreshing information, the second of them, written in 1925, is friendly and probably the more interesting. Cather talks about Annie Pavelka and Cather's desire for Masaryk to meet Annie and her family and then mentions accompanying six of Annie's children to the premiere of the movie *A Lost Lady*. The fourth letter, dated September 23, 1932, appeals to Masaryk to read the recently published "Old Mrs. Harris," a story she says "rings more true" than *Shadows on the Rock* and comes from "lived experience." Halac's conclusion that the dramatic increase in academic interest in Cather is "a by-product of graduate-school feminism" and is not apt to delight certain Cather scholars and readers. He adds to this generality by saying that being "championed by today's tenure-track feminists" could be "a fate worse than obscurity."

Two of the essays and the introduction center on *My Ántonia*. "Jejich Antonie Czechs, the Land Cather, and the Pavelka Farmstead" (*Great Plains Quarterly* 14:85-106) is a long architectural piece by David Murphy which clearly explains how the Pavelka farmstead resembles the spatial characteristics traditionally found in Czech villages. He shows through text, illustrations, and seventy-five explanatory notes the significance of the Pavelka homestead for Cather in writing not only *My Ántonia* but "Neighbour Rosicky." Evelyn I. Funda in "The Breath Vibrating Behind It: Intimacy in the Storytelling of Ántonia Shimerda" (*Western American Literature* 29:195-216) cogently displays how Ántonia's own stories become evident within Jim Burden's first-person account. While critics tend to center on Jim Burden as narrator, Funda explores the importance of Ántonia as narrator. Her

storytelling is "a basic human responsibility that offers sympathy and understanding . . . and expresses the hope that someone will comprehend what it is to live and breathe and perceive as only the storyteller can"; consequently her narrations focus on the necessity of people connecting, establishing bonds, and helping each other to survive. Penguin Books has issued an edition of *My Ántonia* with illustrations by W. T. Benda and introduction and notes by John J. Murphy, who in 1989 published *My Ántonia: The Road Home*, the first and only full-length study to a single Cather novel. Murphy's "Introduction" (vii-xxiii) charts the relationship between Jim and Ántonia, one he sees as complementary and one he perceives "as a reconciliation of Cather's art and life." Jim's story, according to Murphy, is Cather's own story, but, as he explains, readers need to differentiate between Cather and Jim "in order to separate the concerns and themes of his story from the autobiographical subtext recent critics are exploring." Murphy then describes the aesthetic traditions *My Ántonia* shares with Virgil's *Georgics* and genre and landscape painting which transfigure Cather's own background and life.

Ian F. A. Bell's "Origin and Gender in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*" (*Yearbook of English Studies* 24:12-43) is definitely not easy-chair reading. Bell's concern, of course, is origin and gender, and origin and the dream of origin, contends Bell, are what preoccupies *The Professor's House*, along with schisms of gender found throughout. After solidifying his thesis, Bell gives an extensive albeit rather obfuscatory and lengthy analysis of Cather's use of origin and gender. "*Lucy Gayheart: A Realistic Novel of Youth's Longings*" (*Illinois English Bulletin* 81:31-33) by Laura L. Koenig is a bit of unpersuasive pedagogy asking high school American literature teachers to use *Lucy Gayheart* as an "alternative" novel in their classes because it "reveals some of the full range of American realism in fiction." To further her case that Lucy is a "sensitively drawn but realistic portrait of a youth caught between two worlds," she feels that Illinois students would be attracted to the novel for its "Illinois connections" and that they cannot identify with the frequently anthologized "Paul's Case," "The Sentimentality of William Tavener," or the story she calls "The Death of a Sculptor." I recall that Mellanee Kvasnicka's excellent "'Paul's Case' in the High School Classroom" (*WCPM Newsletter* 31:37-39) argues that students do identify with Paul's school, family problems, and his feelings of isolation and unhappiness. Paul is not, as Koenig says, just a young man with a "top-hat and red carnation." For Koenig, Lucy is the bridge of understanding between adolescence and adulthood. Sharon O'Brien in "My Willa Cather: How Writing Her Story Shaped My Own" (*The New York Times Book Review*, 20 Feb., sec. 20, pp. 3, 24-25) discusses what her title says. In writing Cather's biography *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, "telling the story of Cather's escape from limiting circum-

(Continued on Next Page)

WORKS ON CATHER (Continued)

stances into a freer world of self-expression," O'Brien wrote her own *Bildungsroman*, one that "redefined" herself "as a writer." She, in addition, offers a viable discussion of *Notable Gay Men and Lesbians: Willa Cather*, her second biography for a younger audience (discussed below).

Three chapters about Cather appeared in books in 1993. *Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) by Jessica R. Feldman contains a wearisome chapter called "On the Divide: Cather's Dandy" (143-179) that attempts to detect the dandy in the works of Cather. Feldman says Cather took the literary type from French writers like Gautier, Barbey, and Baudelaire and draws parallels between the nineteenth-century French dandies and several of Cather's characters. Cather's dandies, according to Feldman, include Aunt Georgiana and Clark, Godfrey St. Peter, and both Jim Burden and Antonia, and Cather herself is called the "dandy-artist." Paul from "Paul's Case," an obvious qualifier for a dandy, is left wanting. "Cather's Nebraska" (44-61), a chapter in Fred Setterberg's *The Roads Taken: Travels Through America's Literary Landscapes* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press), is a chatty piece of travel literature, an account of a trip he and his wife Ann took to Nebraska in the summer, including a visit to Red Cloud and Cather country. The account is a general one and certainly not a revelation. Tom Quirk's "Huckleberry Finn's Heirs" (126-151) in his book *Coming to Grips with Huckleberry Finn* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press) examines the relations Cather, Langston Hughes, and Ring Lardner have to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Chapter IV (126-134), Quirk succinctly and clearly explains Cather's admiration of Twain's novel and says her "kinship with Twain is detectable almost entirely in her eventual discovery that the land and people of her youth were worthy of literary treatment."

Nine full-length studies on Cather were published this bibliographical year. Frances W. Kaye's and Laura Winters's books arrived too late for consideration in last year's essay. Kaye's *Isolation and Masquerade: Willa Cather's Women* (New York: Peter Lang) offers, as so many critical pieces on Cather now do, a contradictory and controversial explanation of Cather's fiction in the context of lesbian literature. Cather, Kaye says, transferred her own problems and even her own persona to her male characters. This fictional action served as her masquerade, since she was a lesbian following a homophobic life in a homophobic society. Other theories abound, but Kaye's is that Cather struggled with her lesbianism in all of her works from the beginning. Kaye's inference that Cather's nuances are missed unless readers read her fiction "as being by and about a lesbian consciousness" is a restricting one. Winters meaningfully argues in *Willa Cather: Landscape and Exile* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press) that landscape is not a backdrop in

Cather's fiction but a major character and dynamic presence, and she shows how Cather transforms secular spaces into sacred places in her fiction. Exile, according to Winters, is a pervasive image in Cather's fiction. Her characters, she says, are intricately connected to the places where they live; thus, landscape allows characters to understand their authentic selves in *Alexander's Bridge*, *The Professor's House*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *Shadows on the Rock*.

Biographies of Cather prevail, and Ann T. Keene and Edward Wagenknecht have added to the genre. Keene, in *Willa Cather* (New York: Julian Messner), writes for the young adult audience and offers a review, comparable to Jamie Ambrose's 1989 biography, of Cather's life and work. Keene's book serves as an introductory and readable piece for young people interested in but lacking knowledge of Cather. Keene cites seven "interesting" biographies but offers no documentation for any of her statements. She obviously leans rather heavily on James Woodress's, Mildred Bennett's, and Edith Lewis's studies. Slighted is Philip Gerber's fine 1975 study, *Willa Cather*, a valuable but almost forgotten piece that introduces and explains Cather's life and writings. Wagenknecht's *Willa Cather* (New York: Continuum) is his fifth book, including ones on Hawthorne and Longfellow and two on James, for *Literature and Life: American Writers*. Wagenknecht, a respected scholar and prolific writer for the past sixty-eight years who first corresponded with Cather in 1938, sees his biography as one "that makes her over into what she was not." It is a study that complements Gerber's and Susie Thomas's and generally and accurately discusses all of Cather's works. Valuable for Cather scholars is the appendix on Cather's "Uncollected Stories," a section where Wagenknecht briefly describes and evaluates all the short stories not reprinted by Cather from the periodicals where they originally appeared.

Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians: Willa Cather (New York: Chelsea House) by Sharon O'Brien does not, due to its title, surprise with its contents. Martin B. Duberman, the editor of this series of biographies of exceptional men and women, decided on which "notable people" to include by confining his "choices to those figures who by any definition (same-gender emotional commitment, erotic fantasy, sexual behavior, and self-definition) do clearly qualify for inclusion." O'Brien certainly regards Cather as worthy of inclusion, for she has no problems viewing Cather as lesbian. O'Brien offers in her latest and relatively short book (143 pp.) a clear and crisply-written biography that complements young adults' readings of works like "Paul's Case" and *My Antonia*. O'Brien attempts to reach out to this group of readers to let them know that Cather's close connections were with women and that her emotional life centered upon them. Although O'Brien admits there can be no "proof" of Cather's sexual desires, she states emphatically, "In my view

Cather was a lesbian, and that identity is important for us to consider because it had a great impact on her fiction, particularly on the creative process."

Gary Brienzo reminds readers in the opening chapter of his *Willa Cather's Transforming Vision: New France and the American Northeast* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press) of Cather possessing a "powerful affinity" and a "sense of belonging" to the American Northeast and adjacent New France. Brienzo accomplishes much in his brief study (120 pp.) and clearly explains the basis of Cather's personal feelings of dislocation, showing how she endeavored, specifically in *Shadows on the Rock*, to find a spiritual center for her art and life. Additionally, Brienzo studies the role of the Northeastern culture in Cather's quest for belonging. *Shadows on the Rock*, to be sure, is the fulcrum for his study because of Cather's treatment of the French culture and the adaptation of that same culture to the New World. Important, too, according to Brienzo, are Cather's interpretations in this novel of seventeenth-century French-Canadian figures and their contributions to both the spiritual and domestic identity of the frontier. Brienzo relies on Cather texts, criticism, histories, and biographies and discovers and incorporates little-known historical sources.

Evelyn Helmick Hively in her book *Sacred Fire: Willa Cather's Novel Cycle* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America) explains how perceptively Cather responded to the works of historians, philosophers, writers, artists, and mythographers. Hively, who published her first critical piece on Cather's novels in 1968, carefully examines *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, *My Antonia*, *One of Ours*, *A Lost Lady*, *The Professor's House*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *Shadows on the Rock* in three stages. First, she sees what she calls a "cyclical design" and traces a rise, maturity, and fall of the American West civilization. Hively then focuses on Vico's theory of language following and adapting to the cycle of civilization. She concludes with religion, emphasizing religions prevalent in the Roman world during the early years of civilization. Cather's work, Hively reasons, demands much from those who want to understand its meanings, and understanding of Cather's writings grows and is illuminated "by an awareness of the sacred fire that burned intensely in her imagination and in her art." Cather, Hively demonstrates, gathered an extraordinary amount of art, myth, history, literature, and philosophy in composing her cycle of nine novels.

The following two books are reference tools for both scholars and readers interested in Cather. Sheryl Meyering's *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Willa Cather* (New York: G. K. Hall) is exactly what the title says it is. Covering the sixty-one published stories, the guide is a tremendous effort with a format that is easy to follow. Meyering arranges the stories alphabetically and then divides each one into five parts and covers its publication history; circumstances of composition, sources, and influences; relationship to

other Cather works; interpretations and criticism; and works cited. With Marilyn Arnold's 1984 benchmark *Willa Cather's Short Fiction* and Meyering's 1994 reference source, Cather's short stories are not slighted.

A Reader's Companion to the Fiction of Willa Cather (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press) exceeds the normal "full length" book. It is what Cather scholars and readers have anticipated for years and deserves special mention. Marilyn Arnold, along with Debra Lynn Thornton, spent six painstaking but profitable years preparing and editing the so-called John March Handbook, the manuscript March began over forty-five years ago, into what Arnold calls "a companion and a beginning place for study and search." A valuable tool tracing allusions in Cather's work, this reference volume contains thousands of entries revealing meanings or providing backgrounds for understanding Cather's works and life. Arnold, herself a longtime Cather scholar and critic, explains in her introduction how she and her associates worked with and made ready March's manuscript for publication. Extolling March's diligent and arduous work, almost a lifetime task, and despite her own years of effort to make his manuscript useful and meaningful, Arnold proclaims the book to be essentially March's own.

The "Annual Bibliography" in the 1995 February issue of the scholarly journal *Western American Literature* again reveals Cather with more entries than any other Western American author.

On Being Geographically Correct About Catherland

Neil Gustafson
University of Hawaii

Years ago I taught a high school humanities course in Iowa; each year I began the course by having the students draw a map of the world without looking at one. It was during this exercise that I discovered that India is located just north and east of England, and that Moscow is not in Russia (nor even in Idaho, for that matter) but in Japan, which itself is a squarish island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. What they say about American youth and geography — well, it's true.

But it doesn't stop there. I recently discovered, while doing some work on Willa Cather, that Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather's birthplace, is located in the American Southwest. There is, in fact, a considerable fogginess about precisely where Red Cloud is. But this confusion about the home sites of Cather begins about a thousand miles east, in her birth state of Virginia.

(Continued on Next Page)

GEOGRAPHICALLY CORRECT (Continued)

Phyllis C. Robinson, in *Willa: The Life of Willa Cather*, states that Cather was born near Winchester in "western Virginia" (6). Actually, Winchester is in extreme northern Virginia and is, in fact, some 150 miles closer to the east end of Virginia than it is to the west end. The state is admittedly oddly shaped; it looks very much like a triangle with Winchester being located at the top of that triangle and the far greater portion of that triangle lying west, not east, of Winchester's longitude. It would be more accurate, though not completely satisfactory, to place Winchester in eastern, rather than western, Virginia. What Cather's birthplace *is* west of is Washington, D.C.; New York City; Boston; and other Eastern cultural, educational, and political centers.

Nearly 1,000 miles almost straight west of Winchester is Red Cloud, Nebraska. Philip L. Gerber in *Willa Cather* writes, "The Southwest had always held an attraction for her, for its proximity to Nebraska made it and its history a part of her general awareness . . ." (59-60). It must be pointed out that Flagstaff, Arizona, where she first became aware of the wonders of the cliff dwellings (Robinson 174), is nearly 800 miles, as the crow flies, west-southwest of Red Cloud. This is not close. For example, the Canadian border is some 200 miles closer; also closer is Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Using the distance to Flagstaff as the length of a radius, placing the compass needle on Red Cloud, and then drawing a circle around Red Cloud illustrates that all or parts of twenty-six states (and two foreign countries) are within an equal or lesser distance. Gerber's statement that "its proximity to Nebraska made it and its history a part of her general awareness" suggests that she might have had an equal general awareness of the areas around Salt Lake City; San Antonio; Baton Rouge; Nashville; Cincinnati; Detroit; Regina, Saskatchewan; and the northern reaches of Lake Superior.

Cather was also intrigued by the countryside near another southwestern city, Santa Fe, which is over 500 miles from Red Cloud. Santa Fe is a high desert city and is surrounded by mountains on three sides; its terrain is totally unlike that of Red Cloud, which lies among rolling hills, or that of the divide several miles north, which is as flat as a table top. Santa Fe's history since the arrival of the Europeans has been dominated by Spaniards and Mexicans; the post-Columbian history of southern and western Nebraska, on the other hand, has been dominated by northern and eastern Europeans, by Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Czechs, and others. Red Cloud, contrary to Gerber's assertion, is neither proximate in terms of topography or location nor historically related to Cather's Red Cloud milieu.

Gerber also refers to Nebraska as part of "that considerable southwestern portion of the United States" in which some of her most famous characters

"lived" (161). Listed are Alexandra Bergson, Antonia Shimerda, and Anton Rosicky, all of whom "lived" near Red Cloud. It should perhaps be noted that Red Cloud is in fact both north and east of the geographical center of the country (the forty-eight continuous states, that is), which is located near Lebanon, Kansas. This point is some twenty miles south and a couple of miles west of Red Cloud. By "quartering" the country from this point, technically Red Cloud should be located in the northeastern quarter of the United States, not the southwestern. True, some of Nebraska (though not Red Cloud) is west of center, but all of it is north of center. Nebraska is more accurately labeled a Great Plains state; even a Midwestern state is a better descriptor.

Sharon O'Brien seems, however, to concur with Gerber's connection between the Southwest and Nebraska, saying that "the Southwest's topography does resemble that of Nebraska" (408). I recently drove from San Diego to Des Moines and took a side trip south from Interstate 80 to visit Red Cloud. I had driven through Flagstaff and Santa Fe en route and was, a day after passing through Santa Fe, in Red Cloud. The topography around Red Cloud resembles that of northern Kansas — even that of western Iowa and Missouri — as it should; but it does not resemble, as mentioned above, that of the Southwest — at least in any way that I can perceive.

Hermione Lee, in *Willa Cather: Double Lives*, locates Cather's home in Nebraska in "recently settled territory halfway across Nebraska" (30). She may have taken her lead from E. K. Brown who notes that Red Cloud is in "Webster County . . . in the southern tier, and about halfway across the state" (23). Using Lee's more precise "halfway" as my lead, and then looking at a map of Nebraska, I discovered that hers is troublesome description.

Nebraska, too, is an oddly shaped state. We may blame the Missouri River (which marks Nebraska's eastern border) and the state of Colorado (which, so that it may be square, takes a big bite out of the southern portion of Nebraska's western end). The Missouri River also marks about one hundred miles of Nebraska's northern border with South Dakota, beginning at a point almost directly (and nearly 210 miles) north of Red Cloud. A consequence of having a river form this border, rather than the more commonplace straight line, is that the eastern "profile" of Nebraska is somewhat curved; in fact, it is shaped very like a whale, like a whale that is headed toward Chicago and points east.

Because of this uneven eastern border, it is convenient to measure the east-west length of the state on a somewhat middle latitude. Using the Omaha latitude as the east-west line, I discovered that the state is approximately 435 miles wide (or long). By dropping a vertical line from this horizontal one down to Red Cloud and then measuring the distances to the eastern and western borders from this axis, I further discovered that Red Cloud is 135 miles west of the

eastern border and 300 miles east of the western border, which means that the town is certainly not halfway across the state; it is clearly less than one-third of the way across. Even if the additional thirty-seven miles that Red Cloud is from the eastern border on its own latitude is added into the formula, the town is still only slightly more than one-third of the distance across Nebraska.

Red Cloud is in reality more than eighty miles east of "halfway across the state." Eighty miles is no mean distance; in fact, if one were to omit everything eighty-some miles west of London, Hermione Lee's hometown, on the London latitude, one would leave out the entirety of Merry Old England west of London, except for the extreme southwest section and a thin strip of land north of the London latitude bordering Wales and the Irish Sea.

Consider also how much of the land area of the state is necessarily omitted by the assertion that Red Cloud is "halfway across Nebraska": Approximately 20,000 square miles of western Nebraska, some twenty-six percent of the whole, must be erased from the atlas. This is a land mass larger than the combined areas of New Hampshire and Vermont; it is an area approximately the same size as the combined states of Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. In fact, it is larger than ten individual states and a number of countries, including Denmark, Netherlands, and Switzerland. It clearly must be insisted upon that Red Cloud is not "halfway across Nebraska."

Other geographical sites in the state are also poorly characterized. Robinson states that Lincoln's "central location helped it to win out over Omaha as the seat of government, when the Nebraska territory became a state in 1867" (40). Another cursory look at a map indicates that Lincoln is actually nearly as far south as it is west of Omaha; and since Omaha is clearly in the southern half of Nebraska, Lincoln is only slightly more centrally located. Consider further that Lincoln is about forty-five miles from the Missouri River and that it is about 400 miles from Pine Bluff, Wyoming, on Nebraska's western border. It is, in fact, more than 170 miles east of center, about the same distance — as the crow flies — as from New York to Boston. Lincoln clearly does not have a "central location"; it is, rather, in nearly extreme southeast Nebraska; it is an almost perfectly placed eye of the whale. Perhaps Lincoln was more centrally located in terms of the most populated area of the state than was Omaha at that time.

There are other less glaring, but no less incorrect, geographical mistakes by Cather scholars. Lee locates Red Cloud (as well as "halfway across Nebraska") as being "130 miles west of Lincoln" (2). Actually, following those directions would result in a visit to Kearney, a very pleasant little city. But, it would be necessary to make a U-turn at Kearney, drive about thirty miles back east, take a right, and drive some fifty to fifty-five miles south to get to Red Cloud, which is distinctly west-southwest rather than west of Lincoln.

Edith Lewis, Cather's companion of forty years — and a Nebraska native herself — locates Catherton, where Willa and her family once farmed, "in Webster County, Nebraska, about twenty miles west of Red Cloud" (13). Exactly where that spot is, I do not know, but it is most certainly outside of Webster County and well into Franklin County. One needs, to arrive in Catherton from Lewis's location, to burn a U there in Franklin County, drive back east about fifteen miles, turn left, and drive north another ten or so — as Catherton is, in reality, centered about five miles west and ten miles north of Red Cloud.

The West is a vast area, certainly, which probably leads to some of this confusion. Even today, more than a century after Frederick Jackson Turner officially closed the frontier (in a speech presented in the then western city of Chicago), the West seems to begin somewhere around Omaha, which, as has been noted, is well east of the geographic center of the country. But even though the West is huge, it is nevertheless subject to measurement and direction; the odometer and the compass are and have always been viable tools there. But I am somewhat used to this confusion, as I was born and raised in southwestern Iowa, just across the Missouri River from the Old West. Iowa, incidentally, is specifically that state which is interchangeable with either Ohio or Idaho — particularly, I've noticed, to anyone born east of Winchester, that western Virginia town.

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