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Willa Cather  
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# Willa Cather REVIEW

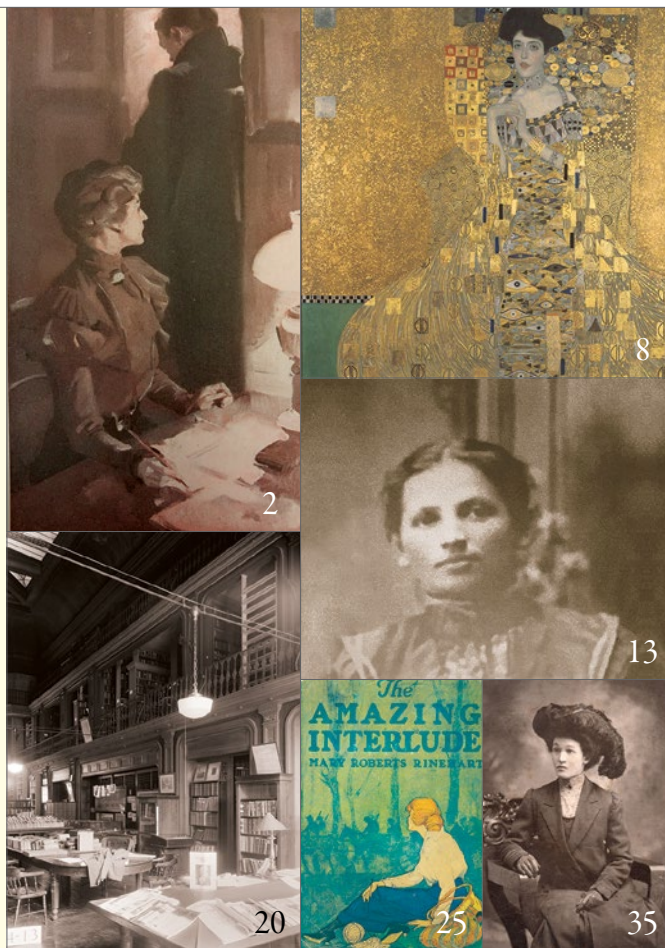
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## In this Issue

Those who appreciate variety should enjoy this issue of the *Willa Cather Review*. Our last three issues, all focused on *My Ántonia*, offered a rich array of creative, scholarly, and personal responses in celebration of the novel's centennial. Now, we expand this range of responses to multiple Cather texts. Don't expect the critical conversation about *My Ántonia* to cool down as the novel enters its second century; ample evidence that it continues to stimulate provocative work is apparent here in Donna Devlin's stunning archival research, in John Swift's rewarding analysis of a key metaphor in the novel and the ways it evolved from Cather's earlier uses, and in Mary Ruth Ryder's study of how *My Ántonia* fared against other novels by women writers of the time. Of course, Cather scholarship is not confined to *My Ántonia*, as illustrated by Richard Giannone's belletristic close reading of Harry Gordon in *Lucy Gayheart* and John Swift's analyses of *The Song of the Lark* and "The Diamond Mine." We also present biographical approaches to Cather studies in Harriet Shapiro's fascinating look at Cather's use of the New York Society Library, which also reveals significant information about Edith Lewis. Twyla Hansen's essay offers her award-winning poetry to tell stories that reveal intersections with her own family, the Charles Cather family, and Cather's hired girls. In addition to the variety of Cather texts featured in this issue, and the range of critical approaches and genres, we are pleased to note that half of the authors whose work appears here grace the pages of the *Willa Cather Review* for the first time, and half of the authors have been decades-long contributors to Cather scholarship.

Steven B. Shively



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*On the cover:* A 1937 "charging card" from the New York Society Library Institutional Archive showing volumes checked out by Willa Cather and Edith Lewis. See story on page 20.



## Letter from the Executive Director Ashley Olson

In a touching letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood, Willa Cather writes of having to “live among writers and musicians to learn my trade,” and subsequently discloses “my heart never got across the Missouri river.” Time after time in her correspondence, Cather recalls childhood memories and inquires about her Red Cloud, Nebraska, friends. She reminisces about the bittersweet vine that grew beside the porch of her childhood home. She provides funds to assist her sister Elsie with upkeep of their late parents’ home, once writing, “When I think that the old place may be getting shabby and miserable, I just sit down and cry.”

This act of being pulled back to one’s past, to the people and places we recall from our childhood is common for many of us. It is Cather’s own words and the propensity of being drawn to our early memories that reinforce the value of the National

Willa Cather Center’s preservation efforts. In several waves of forward-looking action, many places that figured prominently in Cather’s life and writing have been acquired and protected over the last sixty-five years. Our nine nationally designated historic sites have welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors. Very often our guests find a connection to their own past as they tour, while frequently remarking that they’ve gained a better understanding of Cather—the writer and the person.

We are grateful to provide these experiences and be entrusted caretakers of the Cather historic sites. At the beginning of a new decade, it is inspiring to reflect upon past milestones and look ahead to the many opportunities that await us. The historic sites and collections in Red Cloud provide an invaluable window into Cather’s world, and our own. With your help, the sites will soon be restored and the visitor experience will be notably enhanced with modern-day interpretive techniques. I hope you too will be pulled back to Red Cloud to discover—or rediscover—the places that never left Cather’s heart and mind.



## Letter from the President Glenda Pierce

“There are always dreamers on the frontier.” Over our sixty-five-year history, the Willa Cather Foundation has truly shown that we are an organization where dreams come true, thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the talents and dedication of our staff, Board of Governors, and volunteers. I am proud to be a part of such a wonderful organization and appreciate the opportunity to serve as the next president of the Board of Governors. I thank Marion Arneson for his leadership and service as president during the past two years.

The next two years promise more milestones for the Willa Cather Foundation. We look forward to the installation of Willa Cather’s statue in the U.S. Capitol, the continuation of excellent programming at our annual spring conferences and our monthly Opera House events, and our International Seminar in New York City in June 2021.

On the immediate horizon is the completion of our Campaign for the Future. We have raised \$4.7 million of our

\$6.5 million goal. The campaign funds will be used to restore eight Cather historic sites, expand our educational programs, and grow our endowment to support our properties and programs. In addition, we are supporting the development of a boutique hotel in downtown Red Cloud to help serve our educational mission by reaching new audiences, such as tour groups, and providing expanded lodging opportunities for the thousands of visitors to the National Willa Cather Center each year.

We all have memories of how we became devoted readers of Willa Cather. *My Antonia* was required reading when I was in high school, and I reread it with my book club before we attended Spring Conference in 1986. Touring the sites available then and connecting Cather’s beautiful prose with actual places was inspirational, and I embarked on a lifelong quest to read all of Cather’s works and learn more about her life.

We have now entered the public phase of our Campaign for the Future, and we ask for your support. Will you help inspire others to experience the works, life and times of Willa Cather? I hope you will join me, the Board of Governors, and our donors in contributing to our campaign and supporting our mission. Thank you!



# Harry Gordon's Story: A Conversion of Heart

Richard Giannone

Harry Gordon, the handsome banker in *Lucy Gayheart*, is an anomaly among Willa Cather's major figures. This rugged "rich young man" (10) of the farming settlement of Haverford in the Platte River valley of Nebraska is the novel's antagonist who is answerable for the heroine's death. Among Cather's villains and businesspeople, Harry stands alone in examining his guilt. He does so to brave effect. The man known to be "rather hard in business" (10) reflects on a past of tightfisted commercial dealings and deliberate betrayal of the woman he loves and comes to realize that his net human worth is what his love is worth. Off center stage for most of the narrative, Harry—quite intriguingly—determines the structural and moral shape of *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather's meditative penultimate novel.

We can appreciate Cather's strategy in *Lucy Gayheart* if we compare Harry Gordon's story to "Tom Outland's Story" in *The Professor's House*. Both map an adventure that expands the larger meaning of the narrative in which it is set. Like all good stories, Tom's and Harry's are about discovery and conversion. Whereas "Tom Outland's Story" comes in the middle of *The Professor's House*, Harry Gordon's story commands the ending of *Lucy Gayheart*. Remarkably, he does so with a moral authority unexpected from a hitherto blameworthy lesser character. The result is far-reaching. A man who does not readily look within nor forgive easily finds a belief that touches on the mature coordinates of the faith underlying Willa Cather's art.

We first meet Harry, when ice-skating with Lucy, as a bold man certain of his future. Twenty-five years later at the burial of Jacob Gayheart, Lucy's father, Harry is a man who has lost that sure future and is ready to understand what happened in the remote past. Death preoccupies him. The untimely death of Lucy, the woman he loved, especially haunts him. The "winter day long ago" (217) when Lucy was buried—a service that Harry conspicuously did not attend—comes back to him after the gravesite prayers for Jacob Gayheart. Now that the Gayheart story is over, the time has

come to find the repose to anticipate the time that is to come. As other mourners walk back to town by the familiar road, Harry departs from the beaten path for a leave-taking on his own, finally to put Lucy and his grief to rest. Harry advances purposely, stepping tall, "head erect, his shoulders straight" (218). His strongly built figure conveys the felt presence of death marking his stature. At fifty-five, Harry bears his sorrow so well that one might guess that downheartedness has been a way of life for Harry since Lucy's death twenty-five years ago.

Dispirited as he has been, it was Harry's very good fortune to have found companionship with Lucy's lighthearted father Jacob, "probably the happiest man in Haverford" (8). For the last eight years, the late-life friendship has been gratifying for both men. Harry calls at the old man's shop every day. Several times a week they play chess. On the one hand, it is just a game; but the affable competition brings a widower and a lonely banker close together to make their bond a school for feeling that edifies their finest selves. During the matches, the silence between them is the language of physical aging for the old, skilled watchmaker and moral growth for the adept man of commerce. Playing chess, with strategies focused on the future by reading the opponent, is their delight and rejuvenation. They seem tranquilly to share the counsels of the heart over past and imminent losses. Essentially,



John Henry Twachtman. *Winter Landscape with Barn*. Oil on canvas, 1885. Private collection.



they are playing with death. At the chessboard, Harry and Mr. Gayheart are allies against that foe.

The condition of friendship, influentially diffuse throughout Cather's life and writing, is in *Lucy Gayheart* an unmistakable agency for cultivating the spirit. For his part, Jacob Gayheart is a messenger among us who nurtures the rough Scot's dormant capacity for gratitude and male tenderness. If something of "a town character" (8), Jacob is above all a man of hope. The plain way in which a poor, whimsical old man gives himself to life with open hands teaches a wealthy, sober main street businessman a way to live creatively through adversity. Joy and longevity are fruits of a faith in life, worn lightly by old Gayheart because

they run deep in his essential nature—rooted, truly, in the depths of misfortune. He survived the deaths of his wife, two sons in their childhood, cherished daughter Lucy, and elder daughter Pauline.

Deprived of "the last close personal friend he had in the world" (220), Harry is on his own to complete his share in the Gayheart story that has given his life meaning. To see where fortune has taken him, Harry repairs to, of all places, a private office in his bank. A bank may seem an odd place for scrutinizing the past, but for years he has deposited his energy and self-esteem in building the bank's holdings. Now, the silence and seclusion of the back room create a space to reconcile that emotional capital against the psychological losses incurred when, and since, Harry abandoned Lucy on a raw winter day. Those many years impress upon his memory, if only on this one night, how firmly the bonds of dishonor grip his consciousness. Everything during these years has had an incompleteness, even a sadness tinged with remorse about it. Death, the memory of Lucy's drowning recharged by the burial of Mr. Gayheart, has left Harry desolate. So too has love.

Cather's portrait of Harry "settled deep into his chair" (220) by the fireplace is almost photographic. Inner shadows colored by burning coke aglow with comfort set against the outer dark suggest that the moment has arrived for the bustling, roving acquirer of widely scattered tracts of farmland to take rest in feeling "tired and beaten" (220). Harry, now the remorseful seeker, submits to quiescence, sincerely willing to go wherever memory takes him in the terrain of past wrongs. The starting point of the inward venture is his deserting Lucy in time of great distress. That



"For a moment Lucy and Harry Gordon were sitting in a stream of blinding light." This illustration and the one on page 5, by Pruett Carter, accompanied the original serialization of *Lucy Gayheart* in *Woman's Home Companion*, March–July, 1935.

moment remains vivid. Buffeted by freezing winds and with shivers in her voice, Lucy begs him for a lift. With flat affect, Harry refuses. To escape from being stranded in the cold, Lucy puts on her ice skates to race to safety. A submerged tree in the ice snags her skate. As Harry drifts from ethical responsibility, Lucy's arms slip from the cracked ice cake that lets her down gently into the icy dark water—"so young, so lovely . . . so unhappy" (217). So soon. The winter tale of *Lucy Gayheart* ends like a quick curtain of a Verdi opera.

Lucy's last word is piercing. "Harry!" (208), Lucy shouts with mighty contralto lungs as Harry hustles his purebred horses north to disappear behind far-off haystacks. Lucy's trumpeting reproach lays a claim to Harry's self-respect that reverberates in his conscience for twenty-five years. Candor animates Harry's remembering. There had been the expedient marriage to socially prominent Harriet Arkwright that was "barren in every sense" (227). Then, with "other men whose lives were dull or empty" (220), Harry seized on several humane crises caused by the First World War to fill the loveless void left by Lucy's death. Eight months in France with an ambulance and hospital unit that he subsidized are stops in a long period of itinerancy, fueled by inner discontent, and hewn by expectations dashed. Failure imparts self-understanding of his destructive romantic payback. Harry "hurt[s] himself in order to hurt someone else" (225) and he blinds his heart, and this blindness charts the distance he travelled from his genuine desire for love and the joy.





Alexei Savrasov. *Winter Road*. Oil on canvas, ca. 1870. National Art Museum of Belarus, Minsk.

One sign of Harry's finding himself comes in the "shocking scene" with an angry client, Nick Wakefield. Fuming drunk over the bank's foreclosing on his property, Nick publicly accuses Harry of being a "damned coward" in avoiding Lucy's funeral. The truth is brutal and emancipating. The usually stern banker in a "really kind" voice reminds Nick that he will "be sorry . . . tomorrow" for his outburst; and the next day, much to Harry's credit and his cashier's astonishment, the banker sells out his accuser on generous terms (223–24). Regret schools Harry. In benevolently settling with Nick, Harry is the recipient of his own forbearance. Again, the lenience that astounds the starchy clerk is a forthright gesture from the Harry that Lucy loved and made actual. That better part of him is becoming apparent in his late-night thoughts, haunted and serene.

Though less driven at fifty-five by a need to prove himself, Harry still has much to account for. "There was not, in all the world, a living creature who knew of his last meeting with Lucy on the frozen country road beside the telephone post" (230). For twenty-five grueling years, the small-town culture of scandal has held over his daily life the judgment of disrepute. Shame is the tripwire Harry dare not go near. Withholding the facts surrounding Lucy's death has left detractors to shape Lucy's memory through dark scuttlebutt about "the 'tragedy,' as they called it" (230), whispers of suicide, and chatter about "some singer Lucy was in love with" (231) in Chicago. Not speaking may seem Harry's way of jealously guarding contained passion from the prying outside world, but willful silence puts Harry's honor into humiliating hands. There is, moreover, no indication that Harry intends to divulge what he knows. That secret lurks repressed with his

persistent rejection of Lucy's appeals for help when forlorn over the death of the singer she had worked with and loved in Chicago. The "note of pleading" in her voice makes it clear that "she had some desperate need of him" (227). Wakefield's mentioning Lucy's funeral forces Harry to admit his desperate need of her to the point of reimagining "the life he would have lived with Lucy" (227–28). Remorse calls Harry back to a truer self.

Harry answers the summons at the bank at the window in his secluded office. Actually, this window is a palimpsest of a window from the past with one in the present. The former is the wide window in Mrs.

Ramsay's house through which Harry sees Lucy playing the piano in 1902. He wants to go inside to Lucy, but pride traps him in paralyzing ambivalence about the woman he loves. Sadder yet, narcissism makes him a spectator of his own defeat. After all, Harry rationalizes that Lucy "deserved to be punished" (227) for declining his marriage proposal, which, like trivializing her artistic ambition, she found patronizing. Lucy's emotions threaten Harry; her defiant independence "ruined" (228) everything. He walks away. The backward glance at Mrs. Ramsay's window starkly puts Harry's past deficiencies before him. The strapping banker is too weak to love.

Cather uses Mrs. Ramsay's window when Harry was thirty for decisive repurposing at fifty-five. Awareness of his defects becomes the prism coloring this night of remembering in 1927. Midnight is approaching. The outer dark remands Harry to the night when he returned from Harlem and had to join "that little procession of lanterns and wagons" (229) bearing Lucy's corpse to town. Reliving the night of Lucy's death in 1902 thrusts the Harry of 1927 into the murky recesses of self-torment. The memory of the cortege brings Harry to a place where his soul comes to terms with loss. Equanimity marks the occasion. Stricken by the fatal result of his punishing rejection, he puts more coke in the fire, stands up and walks to the window to look up "at the bright winter stars" (231). Standing up physically emphasizes Harry's facing matters fully and boldly:

These things he had been remembering mattered very little when one looked up there at eternity. And even on this earth, time had almost ceased to exist; the future had suddenly telescoped out of the past, so that there was actually no present.

Kingdoms had gone down and the old beliefs of men had been shattered since that day when he refused Lucy Gayheart a courtesy he wouldn't have refused to the most worthless old loafer in town. The world in which he had been cruel to her no longer existed. (231-32)

As Harry gazes out the window, the starscape bestows a grace—at once painful and transformative—that is irresistible even to a man who pays little attention to interstellar spaces. A throb of feeling that he is above time strikes a vibration in his soul that unseals his eyes. Lucidity seeps through his power of observation. Buffers and blinders absent, Harry's friendly blue eyes see the world anew in a visual field going beyond the bunker of his hideaway study. It goes beyond the moment. His view from the window affords a stunning 360-degree vision of the sky that also takes us inside his soul-searching and clemency.

*My Antonia* describes the experience of faith as being “erased, blotted out” (8) to the point of being “dissolved into something complete and great” (18). Faith for Harry Gordon arises from seeing himself in the nightly diurnal movement of the spheres born of the hidden, eternal source of life, traditionally understood as the Logos that orders the universe and is out there to be discovered. An intuition of this mysterious totality dwelling in history brings Harry to the threshold of such faith.

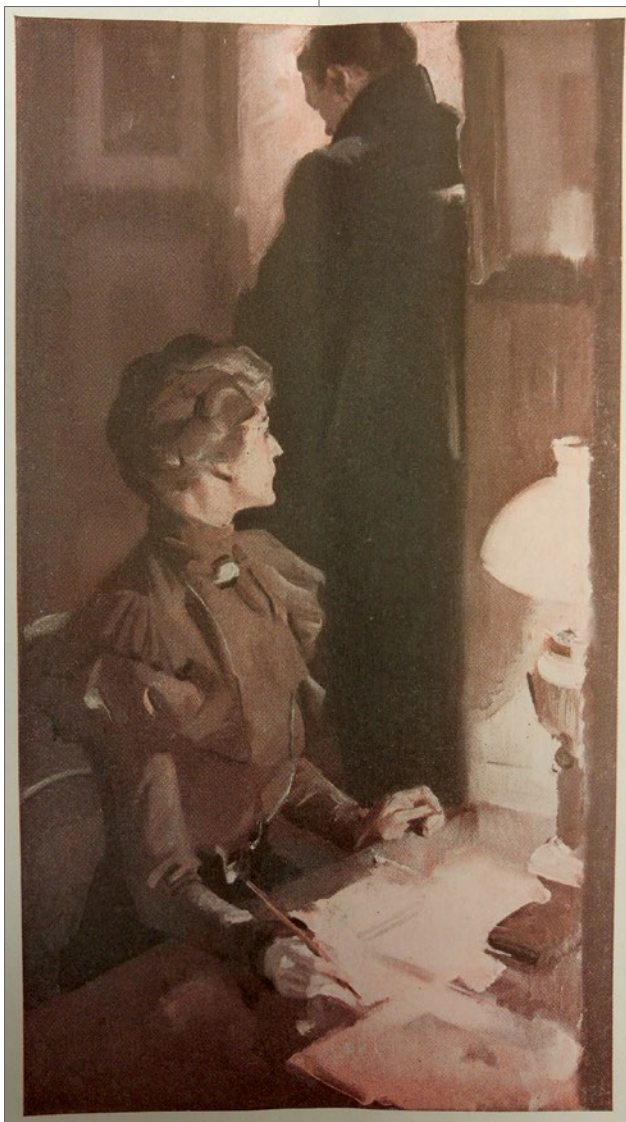
One could go on reading this passage at the window forever, if only to savor the way Harry's voice is finding flower. It never lets one down. His language is even-keeled, as a way to keep mighty emotions from overwhelming him. That stability yields a verbal power that expresses in slow tempo his unmusical character musically. Whereas Lucy's contralto with a bright, clear timbre conveys her quick, ascendant moment of mystical insight, Harry's high point produces a legato with muscular, clarion strength. A self-welcoming rhythm flows with unguarded conviction that builds with a magnetic feeling of timelessness

into a remorse harmonized with a mutability serving a benevolent universe. Without being inured to his cruel share in Lucy's fate, he accepts death, accidental or natural, in youth or old age, as the befitting end to a natural process. Not all will reach the age of old Jacob Gayheart, but all alike must die. With his own death and “complete oblivion” (217) before him, Harry's all-seeing window depicts a trust in life that reconfigures his study into a spiritual observatory. Creation, he perceives from this spacious view, has a providential unity in the common origin, fate, and goal of creatures, their structure and interdependence. Behind and fulfilling this order lies the love, the divine agency, that moves the sun and the stars.

The starlit winter sky brings us full circle back to the first scene in 1901 of the lovers as they ride home in Harry's sleigh after joyfully ice-skating. Lucy is resting on Harry's shoulder. The evening star illumines the winter firmament. Struck by the light, Lucy leans back to salute “an eternal thing” (13) in the sky.

In 1927, the silver points address Harry. Again, we are in a valley and we feel elevated with Harry's recognition of “those splendours” that Lucy praised as “still on earth, to be sought after and fought for” (195). Harry, empirical and naturalistic, has none of Lucy's highly emotional romanticism, but the same living spirit is fully present in his composure. His staid temperament has a refinement, a poetry of its own. It's the verse of the moment by a chastened, levelheaded man who comes to a simple trust of existence and his share in it. As with Lucy, life is the one he truly seeks and loves. To miss this embracing testimony is to under-read Willa Cather's mature witness to the fulfillment of human hope.

Cather, the great describer with an exacting eye, uses her pictorial aesthetic to spiritual effect in both Lucy's and Harry's star-studded night sky. Harry's description of the firmament lacks Lucy's transcendentalism but has a distinct integrity. His affirmation



“It's the first favour I've ever asked of you.” Unable to bring himself to attend Lucy's funeral, Harry asks Mrs. Gordon to go in his place.



comes with nuance and qualification. Inferentially agnostic and caught in the sway of modern detachment from institutional religion, Harry focuses on the processes within life itself. Not systems of belief but the material coordinates of the created world define his observation. Without certainty or ideology to direct him, Harry reads what he sees by a personal need for meaning. Creation addresses that need. In the refuge of the night, the stretched-out sky moves seamlessly into Harry's consciousness to reveal the emotional truth of his life. He loves Lucy Gayheart, always has, now as a solitary passion. He once tried to put her out of his mind. But "for a long while now he had loved to remember her" (233). Such love is more than contrite reminiscence, more than an emotion or a feeling. Harry arrives at an understanding of love as a quality of mind that forms a virtue of being, a habit of being open and grateful toward the world and compassionate with other persons.

Seeing and knowing with the heart instill a certain wisdom. The lost, baffled Harry senses his place in the scheme of events "which do not change," "all the fine things of youth" in "the far horizon" (235) above time. There, in the purposive design of things on the other side of death, Harry finds Lucy. Here, where relationship fails; there, hovering on the cusp of belief, love prospers. This love is not so much an emotion as it is a dimension of Harry's being. For a tricky banker who fought "against reflection" (225), the rugged Scot turns out to be impressive. His capacity to learn and love has never left him; it has just lain in waiting. A softening heart tells us who he really is and still becoming, namely a witness to a faith in life anchored in human relations undiminished by loss and egotism. Compellingly, this picture of Harry at the window that is kept from public view is the one that cleaves to the reader's mind. He loved Lucy and lost her, hoped to reclaim her but succeeds in coming to himself. At midnight, Gordon covers the coke fire—its embers kindling his heart—puts on his overcoat, and goes home to be with his wife. Love, now for Harry, is the responsibility to life by healing his relationship with others. Human love completes the scheme of the unfinished natural order.

The moralist in Cather knows that love and deep change issue into action. The next day is Sunday. On the day when others may go to the Lutheran or Episcopal church, Harry, as he frequently does, takes a Sabbath afternoon walk out to the Gayheart place on the far west edge of town. Still half-living in the calm of the previous night, he takes his cashier Milton Chase with him. Townspeople "looked out of their windows to see them go by" (236). What the naked eye of attentive neighbors perched at

the windows cannot see in Harry's "firm, deliberate tread" (236) is that the reserved banker is on a personal Sunday calling.

The ostensible purpose for their walk is to review Jacob Gayheart's personal papers to settle his estate, for which Harry is executor. The property will bring far less than what the bank advanced on it, but the Gayheart legacy holds value requiring special provision. Harry's first

act as titleholder is to turn over the house to Milton Chase to occupy until Harry dies, at which time Chase will own the house outright. After they survey the seedy grounds, Milton Chase returns home dumbstruck by Harry's uncharacteristic generosity. Finally, Harry is alone. He enters the dark Gayheart house, lets the sunlight glow over the musty furnishings, and goes to Lucy's upstairs bedroom that has remained locked in revered security. Going through a deceased lover's things can be depressing but not for Harry. Even mundane things and a sad article are close to his heart. Once in Lucy's room, he touches only one object, Clement Sebastian's photograph inscribed in German by the famous baritone Lucy served as accompanist. Harry pockets the picture, not so much to appropriate the singer's favor in Lucy's life, as to acknowledge the inclusiveness of her love, a love, unlike bank assets, that increases by sharing.

The essential keepsake, however, is not the photo of Harry's rival. When Harry leaves the house, he reflexively stops to observe "the three light footprints, running away" (242) that grace the sidewalk. For a long moment all is in affecting suspense. Thirty-three years ago, when Lucy was thirteen, she merrily tiptoed in fresh cement one summer afternoon while running barefoot around the flower garden. Her mischievous delight captivated Harry, who was



John Henry Twachtman. *Along the River, Winter*. Oil on canvas, ca. 1887. Private collection.



passing on his bicycle, and strikes him anew in 1927. So age-worn, the traces seem about to crumble and yet convey explosive passions in concrete. This time the footprints in bas-relief bring back “the very feel” of Lucy into the “living world for a moment” (238). The concealed poet in Harry responds to these fragile tokens of Lucy’s humanness by imagining the engraved feet trimmed with tiny wings, “like the herald Mercury” (238), the messenger of the gods. The unheard but felt mercurial message speaks to Harry. It directs him to bear the load of his defects and to walk in the faith born of his deep, intimate reunion with love. As Lucy’s influence on others opens and drives the story, so it sums up Harry’s coming to himself. He has, at long last, something incalculable to put his soul into, a life to build and lead.

Carved in intaglio and synonymous with the future, the final emanation of the Lucy effect in this meticulous novel is pure Cather—measured, spare, luminous, and evocative of interior life. Cather times the scene precisely in her favored, epiphanic twilight, when the light from the sky moves between sunset and night. It is four in the afternoon when Harry Gordon leaves the *Gayheart* place. He pauses at the sidewalk imprint. Little by little, Harry begins to have his life. Gradually, he comes into our view as a fuller person. Daylight wanes. The “last intense light of the winter day” pours over Haverford (242). The sky’s atmospheric scatterings mark a passage through an intermediate state of being. Solitude beckons. Harry is aware of an aloneness in himself and everyone that is inaccessible to others. He returns into human community bound by duties and learning how to shoulder them. The stain of disgrace remains on his conscience. Although shame weighs Harry down and holds him back, openness and outwardness lead him forward, aided by his having felt the healing power of historical time absorbed into cosmic cycles. Set over and against his horizon of trust, we can see him no longer as a jilted, rich businessman but as a human being, a fine, deeply flawed, and giving one.

Finding meaning through an inner strength at fifty-five that he didn’t feel at thirty heartens Gordon to move on. Wise as she is, Cather distinguishes between finding meaning, as Harry does, and happiness, which he does not enjoy. A life filled with meaning, for Willa Cather, may not be an expressly happy one. Consolation may suffice. And there is hope wrought of trust. In negotiating the future that has already begun, Harry Gordon has going for him the lesson heeded to put the needs and desires of others above his own desires. While alone and isolated, Gordon will be accompanied by the unfailing creative force outside oneself—the Lucy effect—that can reach deep into the secret heart to lift one up into its power and mold his destiny.

A new tone has come to suffuse Harry’s life. He is fated to be incomplete. The “joy of life” (225) he ardently sought with Lucy

would remain lost in the past. All he can do is yearn. Yearning deepens the heart to face the coming years. Harry Gordon’s openness to the future in faith becomes the perspective in which his past is interpreted and the present endured. In the end, for the end, Willa Cather offers *Lucy Gayheart* in service of witnessing a lasting, canonical farewell of faith. The final scene returns us to the novel’s first paragraph as it reconfigures the consolation that “life goes on and we live in the present” sustained by the unstoppable force of the Logos, the matrix of infinite creativity.

In the Platte valley of Nebraska, where the story of Lucy *Gayheart* begins and where the Lucy effect was felt, the legend still goes on. Her indelible, high-stepping footprints are there aligned on earth with the eternal traces Harry saw limned in the bright winter stars from his window. In those lines left by people and events that have passed, he has found his footing. In Haverford, Harry has a sense of moral belonging that Willa Cather privileges as the strongest basis for identity and belief. At home, in the twilight of his journey, on his own land, the earth here at his feet, among familiar pastures, he can proceed with satisfaction that comes with being in step with immeasurable verities. The footpath of discovering the heart points beyond the footprints’ starry goal into the deep reaches of our consciousness.



*This essay is a slightly revised excerpt from “Lucy Gayheart: A Window on Willa Cather’s Mature Witness to Faith,” recently published in Literature and Belief. Thank you to the Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature at Brigham Young University for permission. I am dedicating this essay, like the longer one, to John J. Murphy, distinguished editor of Literature and Belief and the Willa Cather Review, and longtime member of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors.*

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# A Silver Mine, a Diamond Mine, and a “Rich Mine of Life”: Encountering the Modern, 1915–18

John Swift

What follows explores a metaphor or comparison used by Cather three times, and in three different ways, in her work of 1915–18: a woman’s body is like a mine. The metaphor and its transformations interest me as reflections of Cather’s ambivalent response to American modernity itself, marking her protean views on several subjects—art, business, women, loss—during these years. She introduced it first implicitly and casually in *The Song of the Lark*, in describing the rising career arcs of Thea Kronborg and Dr. Archie. She returned to it explicitly and skeptically a year later in a short story, “The Diamond Mine,” where instead of success it suggested disturbing stories of exploitation, the brutal underside of capitalism, and sexual betrayal. And she revisited it a third time in *My Ántonia*, projecting it elegiacally into an idealized, “immemorial” (and thus ahistorical) past and transforming Ántonia’s homely, battered reality into a source of cultural meaning: transforming Ántonia into a work of art herself. In this last maneuver, I will argue, Cather aligned herself with one nostalgic mainstream of literary modernism and anticipated the famous conservative idealism, sometimes serene and sometimes combative, that dominated at least the public face of her own late career.

Because the metaphor’s third appearance is the most striking and best known, I’ll begin by recalling it briefly. In *My Ántonia*’s valedictory section, “Cuzak’s Boys,” the narrator Jim Burden returns to Nebraska and the Cuzak farm after twenty years’ absence, and finds Ántonia and her prolific family, poor but happy, reaping the rewards of a life of hard work. Abundant harvest is represented in a series of well-known images: the fruit cave with Ántonia’s children emerging in an “explosion of life” (328), the cherry and apple orchards that she has coaxed into fruition, and Ántonia herself, whose very posture “make[s] you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last” (342). Cather summarizes and seals this verbal cornucopia with a mythopoetic emblem at the close of the first chapter of “Cuzak’s Boys”: “It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races” (342).

I will return to this enigmatic and lovely image, but I want to look first at Cather’s two earlier uses of it, or something resembling it, in the years immediately preceding the publication of *My Ántonia*. The first was almost exactly three years earlier in *The Song of the Lark*, where, in the section entitled “Dr. Archie’s

Venture,” Thea Kronborg’s operatic training is underwritten by a loan from her mentor, the doctor/capitalist Howard Archie, in an implicit parallel to his simultaneous investment in the San Felipe silver mine. As the silver of the San Felipe mine transforms Dr. Archie from poor country doctor to wealthy civic leader and political reformer in Denver, so his investment in Thea’s big voice brings wealth and fame to her—and brings him, not just his loan repaid, but something less tangible yet more valuable: the world of art and culture, which he calls “more interesting than mines and making your daily bread. It’s worth paying out to be in on it” (386–87). In fact Dr. Archie is only one in a succession of “investors” in Thea’s mine of musical talent: the male sponsors, mentors, and handlers from Ray Kennedy to Fred Ottenburg who drive her career forward, several of whom are admiringly present at her climactic, triumphal performance in *Die Walküre*.

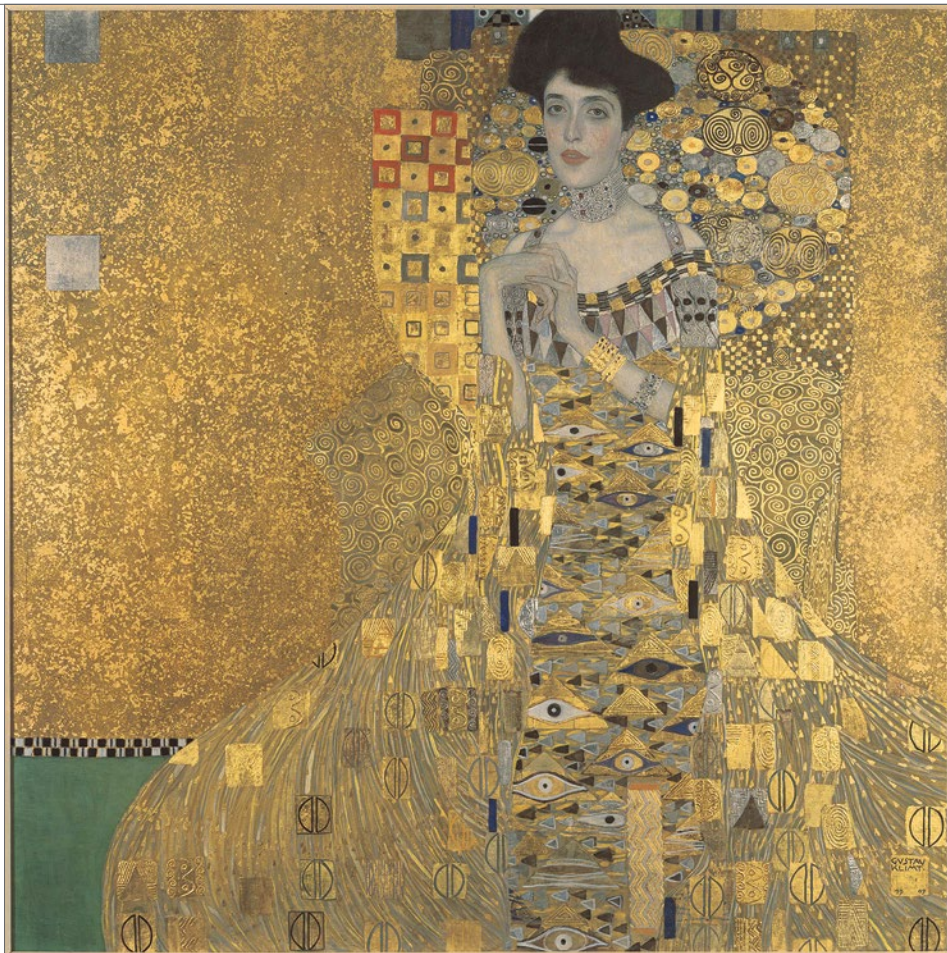
The mine metaphor here and the associated language of investment and return are, I think, mainly byproducts of the novel’s usually comfortable alignment of art, technology, and business, all of them manifestations of human labor and productivity. In *The Song of the Lark*, Cather articulates in great detail a democratic, booming West driven by the material forces of modern progress, where Dr. Archie insists that “the only thing that isn’t fake [is] making men and machines go, and actually turning out a product” (433). Here, art is an unembarrassed commodity, and beer brewers, bankers, and venture capitalists are its custodians and consumers, as are railroad workers and drunken vagrants. Thea moves comfortably in the new commercial techno-world, at once a gifted artist, a good investment—and, as she is typically seen by others, a splendid physical presence and a productive machine herself. In one of Fred Ottenburg’s metaphors, she is a locomotive blowing past the “whistling-posts” of her mentors (416), while her teacher Harsanyi admires her voice as a mechanical production: “The machine was so simple and strong,” he thinks; “[it] seemed to be so easily operated” (209). In short, Cather in *The Song of the Lark* appears in most ways far from the anti-materialism that dominated much of her career, from the ironic aestheticism of her early journalism and stories to the didactic pronouncements of “The Novel Demeublé” (1922), or the dour repudiation of the business world in her well-known 1936 *Commonweal* letter, where she concluded simply that “economics and art are



strangers” (“Escapism” 27). On the contrary, in this novel’s epilogue, Thea and Fred, appearing something like allegorical figures for Art and Business, are married.

*The Song of the Lark* is for the most part a generously optimistic, forward-looking work as it tracks the rising arc of unstoppable Thea’s fortunes, and its friendly, even celebratory juxtaposition of images of art, technology, and industry reflects that optimism. Much of her early journalism indicates that the young Willa Cather was a curious, knowledgeable student of the currents of progressive thought—in which art, like business, industry, and government, had a role to play in building a better future—that energized the American political imagination in the decades preceding the novel’s publication. More particularly, *The Song of the Lark*’s vision of good relations between art and business probably has something to do with Cather’s recent years of editing (1906–1911) at the eclectically progressive *McClure’s Magazine*, a journal best known for its sociopolitical muckraking, but one whose readers during her tenure might encounter work by Conrad, Kipling, or Yeats, or the young Willa Cather, alongside accounts of railroad tycoons, modern inventions, labor actions—and mining operations. Joseph Urgo has argued that the editorial assumptions that Cather encountered and enacted at *McClure’s*, juxtaposing art and politics, were formative of her own career aesthetic, “born of the crossing between high modernism and social realism” (70). *The Song of the Lark*, Cather’s longest and most encyclopedic novel, is also her most journalistic. And although later she would increasingly distance herself from the excesses of what she called its “full-blooded method” of recording detail (“My First Novels” 96), through the end of the 1910s she insisted that its writing had given her more pleasure than her other work (Moseley 594). Its exuberance reflects that pleasure.

In 1916, the year following *The Song of the Lark*’s publication, Cather wrote three short stories about professional singers that seem to me best characterized as satires, each an ironic revisiting of one or more of that novel’s elements: “The Diamond Mine,” “Scandal,” and “A Gold Slipper.” She placed these in magazines over the next three years, revising and republishing them in 1920 in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. “Scandal,” the darkest of the three, explores patronage and artistic reproduction, and arrives at bleak conclusions about both. “A Gold Slipper” brings a vivacious



Gustav Klimt. *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Oil, silver, and gold on canvas, 1907. Neue Galerie New York.

singer and a philistine coal magnate briefly together on a train for an unsatisfying conversation. “The Diamond Mine,” the first in order of composition, brings into the foreground and caustically critiques exactly the mining metaphor—a woman’s body is like a mine—that was implicit in “Dr. Archie’s Venture” in *The Song of the Lark*. In it, a woman narrator named Carrie tells the story of Cressida Garnet, a childhood friend who has become an international opera star. Like Thea Kronborg, Cressida is a straightforward, hardworking Midwesterner with an irresistible drive; unlike Thea, she is the principal financial support of avaricious siblings and an indolent grown son, as well as a series of husbands. The mining metaphor appears in the story’s title and its opening paragraphs, as Carrie learns that Cressida is about to enter a fourth marriage, to a precariously overextended financier who, “some one explained,” will find in her a “diamond mine” (75): “As an old friend of Cressida Garnet,” Carrie muses, “I was sorry to hear that mining operations were to be begun again” (76). The metaphor reappears near the story’s end. Cressida has gone down with the *Titanic*, and her relatives and widower fight in court to overturn a large bequest to her accompanist, presenting her letters as evidence of her intent to support them. Carrie, now executor of Cressida’s estate, describes these letters:



The writing of a tired, overdriven woman; promising money, sending money herewith, asking for an acknowledgment of the draft sent last month, etc. . . . It seemed never to occur to [her family] that this golden stream, whether it rushed or whether it trickled, came out of the industry, out of the mortal body of a woman. They regarded her as a natural source of wealth; a copper vein, a diamond mine. (135–36)

*The Song of the Lark's* celebration of return on investment becomes here a depiction of simple, brutal exploitation. Thea's admiring "investors" have become Cressida's parasites.

"The Diamond Mine," Cather's final publication in *McClure's*, openly acknowledges and confronts some muckraked truths of turn-of-the-century industrial capitalism: that beneath glittering wealth lies body-breaking labor; that even a queen of the opera is subject to the iron rule of money; and that, as Cressida says of the failure of her third marriage, even great passion itself comes down to "nothing but lawyers and accounts in the end—and a hurt" (91). The story reminds us that such hard truths hide in plain sight in *The Song of the Lark* also, although overshadowed by the genial or romantic figures of Dr. Archie and Fred Ottenburg; Ray Kennedy's body mangled in a careless train wreck, the dead tramp decaying in the water tank, the fundamental cruelty of Dr. Archie's enthusiastic social Darwinism. The world, Archie tells Thea, belongs to "the people who forge ahead and do something," while "the failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten" (155). Moreover, if the metaphor's depiction of mining and being mined is darker in "The Diamond Mine," it is also more clearly and sardonically gendered. Carrie's initial, vaguely erotic concern for Cressida's "mining," or her later description of "the mortal body of a woman" giving up a "golden stream" of wealth, are reminiscent of Carolyn Merchant's venerable readings in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* of the scientific and industrial revolutions through historical tropes, literary and pictorial, involving a rapacious masculine dominance of the feminine, maternal earth (20–41). In fact, the main narrative of "The Diamond Mine"—an account of Cressida's third marriage, to a passionate, penniless, immigrant musician—is also a story of masculine sexual betrayal, of a husband's

casual infidelity. This acknowledgement of a specifically feminine vulnerability leads us back to reconsider Thea's string of male "investors" (and particularly to her almost-concealed seduction by the married Fred Ottenburg), and forward to *Ántonia's* near-rape by Wick Cutter and her abandonment by Larry Donovan, and perhaps by Jim Burden himself. To be mined, "The Diamond Mine" suggests, is to be exploited; mining is an act of violation.

An expansive social realism on the one hand; grim social satire on the other. These two perspectives and modes, in fact, intertwine throughout Cather's work, perhaps most clearly in the formative period that I am considering. They are evident in *My Ántonia*, where stories of mines and mining invoke a larger world of labor, business, and wealth at the margins of *Ántonia's* pastoral story. Otto Fuchs tells stories of his days at the Black Tiger Mine, and he and Jake Marpole move on from Black Hawk to seek their fortunes at the Yankee Girl Mine. Tiny Soderball becomes a rich woman through her adventures in the Klondike Gold Rush. Jim Burden himself grows up to be a railroad lawyer and, like Dr. Archie, a venture capitalist and romantic investor in the West's future. "He is always able to raise capital for new enterprises in Wyoming or Montana," says Cather's narrator in the novel's Introduction, "and has helped young men out there to do remarkable things in mines and timber and oil. If a young man with an idea can once get Jim Burden's attention, can manage to accompany him when

he goes off into the wilds hunting for lost parks or exploring new canyons, then the money which means action is usually forthcoming" (xi). These small embedded narratives remind readers that beyond Black Hawk the twentieth century is booming toward its future, as it did in *The Song of the Lark*, filled with promises of individual mobility and success. They also explicitly recognize, like "The Diamond Mine," the physical and spiritual costs of that progress, in the stories of "violent deaths and casual burials" (107) at the Black Tiger Mine that Otto Fuchs tells Jim, or in Tiny Soderball's toes lost to frostbite, or her depressed admission that "nothing interested her much now but making money" (293).

But Jim's adaptation of the metaphor in "Cuzak's Boys" seems to me to be serving purposes very different from those of these allusions or the mining metaphors of *The Song of the*



"She was too much an American not to believe in publicity." Illustration by Gardner Soper from the *McClure's Magazine* publication of "The Diamond Mine" in its October 1916 issue.

*Lark* and “The Diamond Mine.” Here Cather neither celebrates nor satirizes modernity; rather she evades it, and in doing so displaces images of literal working mines, sources of silver and diamonds, with the puzzling “rich mine of life,” itself compared cryptically to “the founders of early races.” To explain these metaphors piled on metaphors, I will need briefly to recapitulate Jim’s typical processes of perception, recollection, and imagination in his encounter with *Ántonia* in the first chapter of “Cuzak’s Boys.”

*Ántonia* first presents herself to Jim in her kitchen as “a stalwart, brown woman, flat-chested, her curly brown hair a little grizzled.” As he looks into her eyes, however, he gradually reassures himself: “the changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger. She was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished” (321–22). The alternation between battered present and vital past, which Jim describes as a quiet “miracle,” recurs across his afternoon with *Ántonia*, as here:

I was thinking, as I watched her, how little it mattered—about her teeth, for instance. I know so many women who have kept all the things that she had lost, but whose inner glow has faded. Whatever else was gone, *Ántonia* had not lost the fire of life. Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away. (325)

And it produces the complex reflection that immediately precedes his identification of *Ántonia* as a “rich mine of life”:

*Ántonia* had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one’s first primer: *Ántonia* kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; *Ántonia* in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father’s grave in the snowstorm; *Ántonia* coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line. She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. . . . She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one’s breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. (342)



“At the end of the number he acknowledged the applause, and Cressida looked at him graciously over her shoulder. He swept her with a brilliant glance and bowed again.” Illustration by Gardner Soper from the *McClure’s Magazine* publication of “The Diamond Mine” in its October 1916 issue.

A two-step process of aesthetic depersonalization or disembodiment is at work throughout “Cuzak’s Boys,” whereby the present battered woman is replaced in Jim’s imagination by the “lovely girl” of twenty years ago, who then vanishes herself as a particularized historical reality, as recollected gestures are framed (“like the old woodcuts of one’s first primer”) as *symbols*, through which shines a universal human truth divined only as partial epiphany. The “rich mine” of *Ántonia*’s body, which has produced the materials of domesticity—children, *kolaches*, preserves—will continue to produce, Jim thinks, through his memories and memorializing words, significant images, strands in the web of meaning that constitutes human culture and life itself.

Taken together, these three uses of the mine metaphor demonstrate substantially different postures or attitudes toward the world in which Cather wrote. I have described the first two, in *The Song of the Lark* and “The Diamond Mine,” as a generally enthusiastic form of detailed social realism and its dark reflection, a satire exposing the vanities and cruelties of modernity. *My Ántonia*’s reworking of the metaphor suggests a third attitude, pastoral nostalgia, which many readers have suggested dominates the entire novel: a retreat from the present—Jim’s busy historical world of politics, profit, and loss, of royalty and opera stars—and a turning toward humbler settings and figures, where things permanent and true might occasionally be glimpsed. The pastoral turn led Cather to structure *My Ántonia* explicitly as a regressive experiment in memory and writing aimed at recovering “the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood” (xii). And because the past was summoned through “images in the mind that did not fade,” pastoral nostalgia encouraged a striking formal technique, the use of intensely described word-pictures, portentous but enigmatic: a singing green insect warmed to life, a black cloud drifting into a clear luminous sky, a plow against the sun. Both of these, regressive quest and bright, mute image, inform Cather’s work after *My Ántonia* in one way or another, in formal counterpart to the dominant “anti-materialism” of her public pronouncements on art as expressed in “The Novel Demeuble” and the *Commonweal* letter.



It is tempting to speculate that Cather turned away from contemporary history in her work because of disappointment, personal and general, in that history. Generations of Cather scholars and biographers have noted significant distressing events of the winter of 1915–16, most having to do with her relations with the McClung family of Pittsburgh: the death of Judge McClung, the sale of the house where she had been welcomed and given room to write, and the loss to marriage (as she termed it) of her beloved Isabelle McClung. These disappointments played out against the developing American intellectual crisis that Guy Reynolds has called “the splintering of progressive idealism during the First World War” (14). For Cather herself, the war was a wholesale collapse of human values that cut her off from her beloved Europe, and, even more importantly, threatened to overwhelm both the high cosmopolitan culture and the democratic freedom of motion that she had celebrated in *The Song of the Lark*. But I think that Cather’s movement across the three metaphors that we have considered was more complicated than a simple recoil from realities that could be betraying, or meretricious, or brutal. As Reynolds and others have convincingly argued, Cather remained throughout her life acutely aware of and interested in the major social and political issues of the times, as is evidenced both in her private letters and in the subject matters of many of her works, and I agree. Nor do her letters or the accounts of friends suggest withdrawal or misanthropy. In fact, I suspect that the choices she made in the mine metaphors that have been my subject are probably best understood, not psychobiographically, but artistically, as specifically literary decisions, tactics in the ongoing invention of her style and public persona.

What interests me finally, regardless of their cause, is the way in which these choices helped propel Cather as an artist into the conservative high modernist mode that typified her major work after *My Antonia*: novels thematically haunted in varying ways by nostalgia, absence, and loss, and characterized formally by rigorous precision, self-conscious experiment, and excision. Later in the twentieth century, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard theorized this kind of literary modernism as arising from the “shattering of belief and . . . discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality” (77), a melancholy art always aware of and nostalgic for the incommunicable, that “allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents, [while] the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure” (81). I am thinking, obviously, of *My Antonia*’s final sentence—“Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past”—but in fact the paradoxical recovery (or missed recovery) of the ineffable and the consoling pleasures of technique itself are everywhere in Cather’s

fiction of the 1920s and after. When Elizabeth Sergeant described her friend in the spring of 1916 renouncing the journalistic excess of *The Song of the Lark* and groping toward “a more frugal, parsimonious form and technique,” or discussing her new novel’s protagonist (presumably Antonia) as “a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides . . . because she *is* the story” (139), she captured Willa Cather in the moment of making her turn into Lyotard’s modernism, and into the company of the other great nostalgic American formalists: Pound, Eliot, Frost, Hemingway, and others who who still sought, in a diminished, futile, and apparently hollow world, to see the flash of “meaning in common things.”

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# A Pioneering Tale of a Different Sort: Annie Sadilek Pavelka and Sexual Assault

Donna Devlin

I was born with Catherland in my backyard. A Kansas farm girl, raised as close to Red Cloud as one could be without actually having lived in Nebraska, I shopped as a child with my mother in the grocery store that was once Miner's General Store. I attended Mass at the "new" Catholic Church many times, and, of course, my mother also took me to the Willa Cather Museum as a young teenager. I even discovered much later, while researching my husband's genealogy, that I had married into a family with strong Webster County roots.

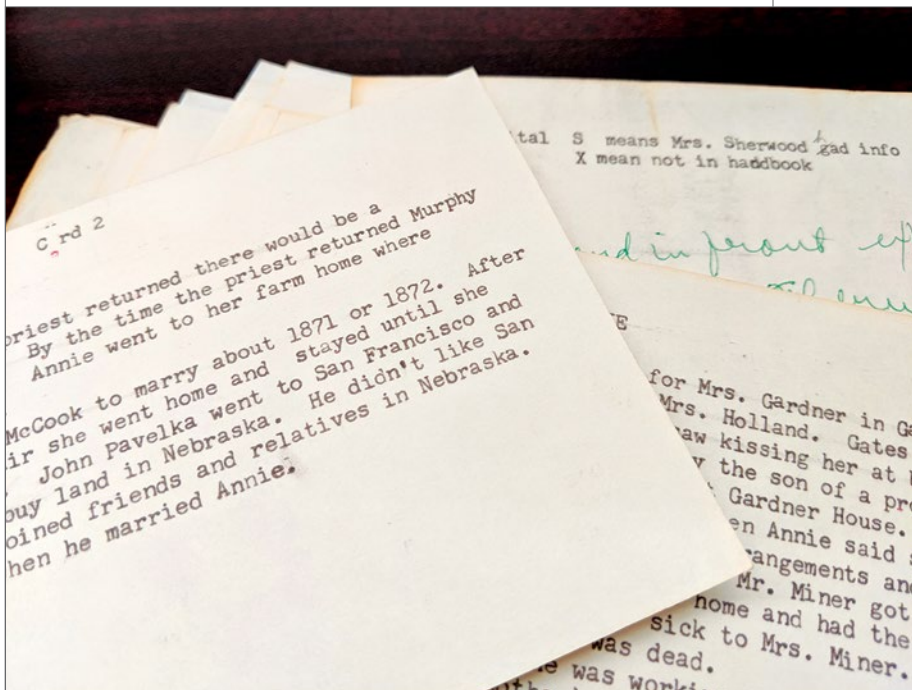
My husband is the great-great grandson of John Devlin and Margaret Murphy McGinnis Devlin, who lived along Walnut Creek from the early 1870s through the early 1890s, and Margaret was the aunt of the infamous James William Murphy, better known to the literary world as Larry Donovan.<sup>1</sup> Brothers-in-law John Devlin and James Murphy (the younger Murphy's father) helped to establish the St. Juliana Falconieri church in 1883. As both Willa Cather and Anna "Annie" Sadilek Pavelka are known to have attended Mass in this early church, it is likely they all knew of one another and perhaps even interacted.

Until 2018, however, I never imagined my career as a historian would bring me to Red Cloud and the archives of the National Willa Cather Center. As a PhD student at the University of

Nebraska–Lincoln, I needed to either pursue coursework in the digital humanities or seek an internship in a public museum/archive. Community education had always intrigued me, so I chose to seek a relationship with the Willa Cather Foundation that also offered me the chance to explore my other passion besides history: as an avid reader all my life, I valued literature. At the University of Nebraska, I had the opportunity to unite these passions through the Nineteenth-Century Studies program and at the Willa Cather Foundation; I now had the chance to explore history and literature in practice.

As an intern, my main task was to map out Annie Pavelka's descendants, a seemingly straightforward genealogical project. Over the summer, I spoke with many family members in person, over the phone, and through email, and I was privileged to spend time with Annie's then 98-year-old granddaughter, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, on several occasions. The detailed family project grew and grew—one can imagine the diaspora of this wonderful family! This project expanded, however, in ways never anticipated or imagined.

In late June of 2018, I began looking through a cardboard box of notecards in the archives that represented much of the early work Cather scholars John March and Mildred Bennett (also founder and long-time director of the Willa Cather Foundation) had conducted in recording the history of Red Cloud and its inhabitants. I found these notecards, serving as a backdrop to understanding the nature of place in Cather's novels, often amusing in their brevity, topics, and transposition. Because some cards were typed, others handwritten, it would be difficult, according to Willa Cather Foundation archivist Tracy Tucker, to discern who contributed which pieces to this collection, excepting the pieces handwritten by Bennett. Based on the time frame of her research, it appears clear that she collected information provided by a Mrs. Sherwood, presumably Carrie Miner Sherwood, one of the Miner sisters to whom Cather dedicated *My Antonia* and one of the founders of the Cather Foundation. This series of cards, particularly those entitled "PAVELKA, ANNIE," caught my eye.<sup>2</sup>



From the National Willa Cather Center archives.



I saw immediately that these cards referenced James William Murphy, a circumstance that intrigued me not only on a personal level because of familial relations, but also on behalf of my genealogy project because I thought they might contain additional information about Lucille, Annie's first-known child. Upon my first reading, however, the chronology and details seemed mixed up. Though they contain much of the information known about Annie, the cards also reference an event of which Tracy Tucker had never heard and one we knew did not exist in *My Ántonia*. After reading the text of the cards multiple times, we were left with more questions than answers. One thing we did know—traditional perceptions of the life of Annie Sadilek, strongly influenced by Cather's character Ántonia Shimerda, were about to change dramatically. According to Mrs. Sherwood, Annie Sadilek had birthed perhaps fourteen children, not thirteen, and the circumstances hinted at yet additional trauma in this remarkable woman's life.

## Archival Discoveries

These notecards first make mention of one of Annie's employers, Mrs. Gardner of the Gardner House, a Red Cloud hotel. The next notation regards the kiss on the back porch witnessed by Mr. Miner (recounted in the novel) and gives the young man a name—Gates. The next paragraph makes mention of a child born to Annie and "the son of a prominent family" with no mention of a family name. Because "Mrs. Gardner was going to dismiss her," Mrs. Miner "made all arrangements and bought [a] ticket to send [Annie] to Denver." But this child was born at "home"—presumably northwest of Red Cloud at the Sadilek family farm. The child was then brought "sick to Mrs. Miner," when it was discovered that the baby was already dead. In addition, the cards note that Mr. Miner sought out a lawyer and received "a settlement" on Annie's behalf.

Only then do the cards lay out the more familiar story of Annie's relationship with James William Murphy and his abandonment of Annie and their child. But even these details



Anna Sadilek Pavelka, ca. 1900, with her son Hugo. From the collection of Antonette Willa Skupa Turner.

are different from their presentation in the novel. An index card claims that Annie was working for Mrs. Sherwood (Sarah Sherwood, Carrie Miner's mother-in-law) when she met Murphy.<sup>3</sup> He proposed and got "a friend to pose as a justice of the peace and perform a fake ceremony." He then abandoned Annie before a priest returned to Red Cloud, and she "went to her farm home where Lucille was born." In a comment that raises several unanswered questions, the index card notes that Annie then "went to McCook to marry" (perhaps to marry Murphy, but no potential spouse is identified) before returning home to stay "until she married Pavelka."<sup>4</sup>

Trying to find a grave for a child we were not even sure existed, Tracy Tucker and I first thought to search for a child buried at the old Murphy Cemetery southwest of Red Cloud. There, we observed an unmarked stone; however, we could not determine if it was a standalone marker or simply the

disjointed part of another as the cemetery had been cleaned up and rearranged years before. Next, we thought of a known grave marker in Bladen's Cloverton Cemetery, where Annie and some of her other children are buried. A stone there does recognize three children, presumably Annie and John's infant children. As it includes no other information other than first names, however, it would prove difficult to identify any one of them without death records, and even more difficult to determine if Annie was posthumously recognizing her first-born child on this gravestone.<sup>5</sup>

After striking out with cemetery records, and with Tucker headed to Ireland for the international Cather conference, I next considered the "settlement" Mr. Miner had received for Annie. Could there possibly be legal records verifying a pregnancy before Lucille's birth in 1892? A trip to the Webster County Courthouse initially proved fruitless. Nonetheless, I left some information with the Deputy Clerk of the District Court, Abbey Harig, who promised to investigate. At first, I provided her only with J. L. Miner's name, as he was the one supposedly seeking a settlement, and we did not know Annie's age at the time to know if she was a minor child. Also, I did



not want to provide Annie's name at first due to the common knowledge of her identity, her connections to Cather's work, and our desire to respect her living descendants. I did, however, share that the case involved a pregnancy, an unwed mother, and an approximate date of 1890. She called me the next week saying that she had found no court cases related to J. L. Miner in this sense, only cases related to his general merchandise store. At this point, I decided to give Harig the last name of Sadilek for the woman involved, and within the hour she called back stating that she had an entire case file for me.

### *Anna Sadilek vs. Charles Kaley*

The case began with Annie seeking out a judge on Saturday, December 10, 1887. Annie laid charges of bastardy upon Charles Kaley under oath and in writing, and, according to the district court file, Kaley was arrested on a same-day warrant and brought before the judge. On December 12, Annie gave her testimony before Samuel West, Justice of the Peace, and the accused had the opportunity to ask questions of Annie while giving her deposition, as was customary under law. After this testimony, Kaley was released on recognizance until the next term of the District Court. The child unborn, a trial could not yet commence.

Annie's deposition, however, is by far the most important information in the file. The most intriguing document I have ever had the opportunity to examine, it provides insight into the difficulties Annie faced—perhaps even insight into a shared danger for young women living on the frontier in the late 1800s. According to Annie's testimony, she was certainly coerced into a sexual encounter—she was raped.<sup>6</sup> Eighteen at the time, she had been at a dance with Kaley, who asked to see where she lived. It was May 30, 1887, "Decoration Day." They left the dance, and, upon arriving at the gate in front of the Stowell home where Annie was living at the time, Charles Kaley used force, "shears or knife," to cut off her "drawers." He covered her mouth, telling her to "shut up" and not make a noise. When he was "perfectly through" with her, he buttoned his trousers and left. Pressed further, Annie stated, "I knew he would harm me . . . he said he did not care if he did he was going to have it anyway."

The shocking violence portrayed in Annie's testimony led me to seek certainty about the identity of the perpetrator. Two men named Charles Kaley lived in Red Cloud at the time. With no middle initial to distinguish him otherwise, could this be the well-known Charles W. Kaley of local and state legend who would have been forty years old and working as a lawyer at the Kaley Bros. law firm in Red Cloud at the time of the incident? Seeking to avoid speculation, I returned to the testimony and

found that Judge West was the only one to refer to the accused as Charles, both with his questions and in the official court documents accompanying Annie's deposition; Annie, as well as Kaley's unidentified defense counsel, continually referred to him as Charley. When asked who the father of her baby was, Annie simply replied, "Charley Kaley."

Born June 14, 1869, the other Charles Kaley, commonly known as Charley, would have been seventeen at the time of the event. He is found in the newspapers fairly often, and, during Annie's testimony she stated that she had known him for "about one year" by December 1887. The *Red Cloud Chief* on April 6, 1883, noted that "Little Charley" Kaley had been sent to Atchison, Kansas, to school ("Local Matters"); in the July 31, 1885, edition of the *Chief*, Charley Kaley was returning home from New Mexico having grown "tired of a cow boy's life" ("Reportorial Matters"); in the March 19, 1886, edition, Charley went hunting with friends, including Charley Garber ("Generalities"); in the August 6, 1886, *Chief*, Charley Kaley was hosting "two prominent young capitalists" from St. Joseph, Missouri ("Generalities"). Later references to Charley revolve around his travels to Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico; his pond; and his icehouse.<sup>7</sup>

Further investigation into the individuals who posted bond for Charley led me to conclude that one of them, Elizabeth Besse, likely offered a key to solving any remaining mystery as to which Charles Kaley Anna Sadilek sued for bastardy. In the Nebraska state census records of 1885, Elizabeth Besse is listed as married to a prominent individual in Red Cloud at the time, Charles Read Besse, and Charles Kaley, age sixteen, and a sister, Cora, age eleven, are listed as children in the household. Elizabeth was Charley's mother, and Charley was most definitely "the son of a prominent family" as Mrs. Sherwood stated in the archival notecards. His father, Elizabeth's first husband, was Henry S. Kaley, Charles W. Kaley's brother. Henry, who had fought in Virginia during the Civil War and was severely wounded in a battle at Winchester, later arrived in Red Cloud only two years before the Charles Cather family. After moving to Red Cloud, he served as one of the county's first lawyers, became a significant landholder, and was a Nebraska legislator before being appointed consul to Chemnitz, Germany, though he died in 1881 prior to taking this post. On December 10, 1887, Elizabeth Kaley Besse, along with two other individuals, posted Charley's \$1,500 bond, a sizable amount for this time period, and Charley/Charles was released from custody. Although it is still possible that either Charles Kaley could be the accused, the preponderance of evidence makes it highly likely that the younger Kaley was the father of Annie's first-born child and her attacker.



Many relevant questions remain as well as gaps in the historical record. Because there is no counter testimony by Kaley—it was not required by law at the time to prove guilt—the case could be considered incomplete and biased. Since this case never made it to trial, all that we have at this point are the pre-trial documents. Annie filed a motion to dismiss on April 13, 1888, leaving us with only an official ledger entry by Judge West as the final statement in the matter until Carrie Sherwood offered a new history to Mildred Bennett over fifty years later. One of the most important legal questions is why Annie did not press charges for rape.

Though we will probably never be able to prove that events happened as Annie testified, we can reasonably examine some likely motivations for her actions. According to the dates given in her testimony, Annie would have been approximately six months pregnant in December 1887, a significant lapse of time between the event and the report. Annie may have waited to seek help from the court because she understood that rape, a criminal charge, would be much harder to prove in a male-dominated courtroom generally unfavorable to women while a lesser, civil charge of bastardy, mandated by law as within the jurisdiction of the county justice of the peace, would be potentially more promising (“Illegitimate Children” 453–55).<sup>8</sup> We also know that bastardy, successfully determined, might at least help provide some financial help in the near future for her unborn child and herself, a pregnant “hired girl” much less employable surely at that point. Annie did attest in her disposition that she had no “means” of her own.

Annie’s assertion of legal allegations against Charley speaks to her bold indignation against injustice. Though his voice never enters the record, Annie uses her voice to speak out against sexual violence in such a manner that it enters the public record for posterity. Also noteworthy is the fact that nowhere in the documents is her gestation contested, at least not beyond the common bounds of aggressive and shame-filled

questions by a defense attorney trying to determine the time of conception and the possibility of unchaste behavior on the part of the “prosecutrix,” a prejudicial term consistently used in case law to describe the female litigant in such proceedings (see, for example, *Garrison v. The People* pp. 277 and 283). Based on the timeline within her testimony, the due date for Annie’s then unborn child was near the end of February 1888; when she filed to dismiss the charges in April, the baby most likely was already deceased, thus prompting her decision.

Knowing the love Annie held for all her children, expressed in her communications with Cather and affirmed repeatedly by her children and grandchildren, we can only imagine the anguish she must have felt because of this traumatic episode in her life. Likewise, the circumstances which drove her to bring this baby to Mrs. Miner suggest her desperation. A young girl, likely facing judgment at home from her mother and brothers, sought out her trusted allies and previous employers, the Miners, for help. Surely, Carrie Miner Sherwood would have

known about such an occurrence at the time it happened; she was nearly eighteen years old, and, according to Mildred Bennett, “Mr. Miner put unbounded confidence in his daughter Carrie” (46). Notably, in the absence of birth and death records for 1888, our best hope of discovering what happened to Annie’s first-born child, or at least eliminating

an alternative story, might be in learning more about the infant children marked by the single monument at Cloverton Cemetery.

This mystery and a whole host of questions about how to examine accepted understandings of Annie’s life story now confront us—not to mention Kaley/Besse family history and the history of the town of Red Cloud. We are faced with an unusual opportunity—to study the literary decisions of Willa Cather in creating *Black Hawk, Nebraska*, significantly based on the cultural and social milieu of Red Cloud, and, more notably, *Ántonia* Shimerda Cuzak, the fictional representation of the very real Anna Sadilek Pavelka. Cather’s title character—and other



The Miner house as it appeared in the *Red Cloud Chief*, January 19, 1906.

hired girls in the novel—face at least the threat of sexual assault, and Annie’s testimony offers new insight into Cather’s medley of past and present, reality and fiction, personal and communal. Annie’s words, captured in the moment, provide us with a window into the past, revealing that which has remained hidden for over 130 years. Her actions in bringing the bastardy suit illustrate the remarkable determination of a young immigrant girl in ways we had not imagined. With intimate detail and impressive

fortitude, Annie made her case only to end up losing her child, but in leaving her testimony she becomes the unintended author of her own life story, a circumstance historian Arlette Farge notes can occur when we take archival study seriously (6–7). Annie’s voice now joins Cather’s to tell a new tale—not the “quiet drama” of nostalgic reminiscence evoked by Cather in the novel’s introduction (xii), but a more powerful story that resonates in uncomfortable ways more than a century later.

## Implications for Cather Research

These new discoveries demand consideration of Cather’s decision to exclude this information, or at least alter the fictional presentation of Annie’s real-life experience. Cather did include, of course, the birth of Annie’s daughter Lucille, named Martha in the novel, and her betrayer James William Murphy, the Larry Donovan of *My Ántonia*. So why omit this earlier pregnancy, the one that actually occurred before Cather left Red Cloud in 1890? A brief review of their known relationship is helpful here.

Annie and Willa may have known each other before either of them moved to town, both of them living northwest of Red Cloud and sharing roads into town. Then, Annie, her young life interrupted and bruised by her father’s suicide, faced the need to help her family economically by finding employment and comfort in the home of J. L. and Julia Miner, just one block away from Willa Cather, who had moved to town with her family. Though Annie was slightly older, Cather and Annie started a lifelong friendship possibly as early as 1885–86. The June 1885 Nebraska census notes that Annie still lived on the farm, but with new details as to her employment, we now know that she probably worked in at least four different homes in

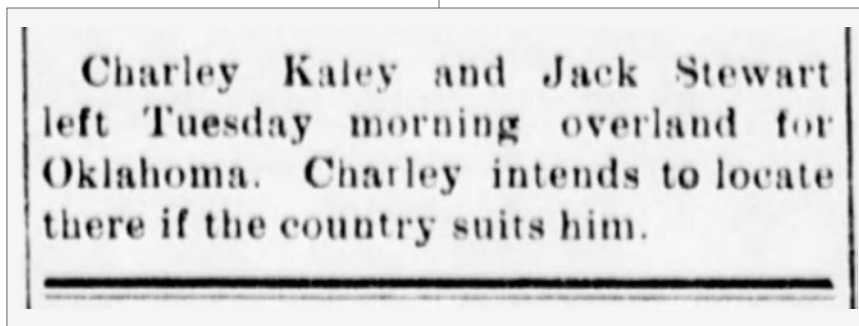
town between mid-1885, the date of the census, and January 1892, when Lucille Pavelka was born.

Annie most likely established a relationship with the Miner family after June 1885, perhaps even late that

summer as portrayed in *My Ántonia*; however, she was dismissed from their employ, presumably because of her active social life (the novel and Bennett’s notecards match up on this point, both highlighting the kiss on the back porch).

According to her testimony, Annie lived with Eugene and Helen Stowell, part-time residents of Red Cloud and friends of the Cather family, at the time of the assault in May 1887. (Helen Stowell was the recipient of the first-known letter by Willa Cather, only a year later in 1888.) Bennett’s archival note, however, states that Annie worked for Mrs. Gardner at least part of the time while pregnant, culminating in the offer from Mrs. Miner to remove her to Denver.<sup>9</sup> Instead, according to Sherwood, she went home to have the baby. After the baby died, Sherwood relates that Annie then worked for Sherwood’s mother-in-law. During this time, she met Murphy, and the elder Mrs. Sherwood helped Annie prepare her trousseau, perhaps filling the role of the fictional Widow Steavens. With Cather living nearby between these same years, it would be most unlikely if she were unaware of Annie’s early pregnancy and of her experience with Kaley.<sup>10</sup>

In a 1921 interview with Eleanor Hinman, Cather said that Annie Sadilek was “one of the people who interested me most as a child” and she “always had it in mind to write a story about her” (44). Cather explains that she wished to avoid the “lurid melodrama” of “the *Saturday Evening Post* sort of stuff.” These statements provide us with strong evidence of her knowledge—and her reason for omitting these details of Annie’s life. Additionally, as Annie was still living when *My Ántonia* was published in 1918, Cather may have sought to exclude such information out of respect for their ongoing personal relationship. Perhaps she also decided that since there was no living child from this event it could more easily be omitted. Years later, Cather was still very aware that Annie lived in a smaller version of the world than she; in a letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood, she expressed her concern that “a lot



A typical item about Charley Kaley in the *Red Cloud Chief*, from May 17, 1901.



of our fellow townsmen would go chasing out to look poor Annie over” (*Complete Letters* no. 1214). Cather did not desire for Annie a life of unwarranted speculation and meddlesome attention, potential byproducts of the publication of the novel. She certainly would not have wished for Annie to be made a victim once again.

Cather understood the nature of the Plains and its settlers to be less than perfect, yet she continually crafted pioneer tales that made her readers consider—and reconsider—its allure. She portrayed the prairie as a place of opportunity for women and time and again turned what *Omaha World-Herald* writer Eva Mahoney labeled “her experience with complex people and complex things” (38) into narratives that depicted outwardly ordinary people forging civilization out of wilderness. Cather’s fiction gave readers pioneering women who continually used their strength, adaptability, and courage to survive a prairie life that could be both daunting and beautiful at the same

time. Of course, we know that such women faced very real dangers from their communities much more sinister than the mythic dangers pioneer narratives typically recount.

It is a mistake, however, to consider that any history is final, anyone’s life a closed book. Anna Pavelka may have found herself in the end fulfilling the domestic role of loving wife and mother, but we now know that she first showed resilience by surviving the loss of her first-born child and the isolating experience of assault. She presented tremendous courage in filing a bastardy suit against one of the town’s foremost sons and faced the scrutiny of her inherited community not once, but twice, as an unwed immigrant mother. From her own testimony, we now have an even better picture of the strength of the woman who inspired Cather’s pen, and our understanding comes from a set of two notecards, long unnoticed among hundreds Mildred Bennett left behind, and a long-unknown file from the dusty, judicial archives of Webster County, Nebraska.

Significant for its legal, social, cultural, and even literary portent, this case offers an opportunity to reexamine the novel—and *both* authors of this powerful life story—as we continue to explore the book Cather declared “the best thing” she had ever done in offering “a contribution to American letters” (Bennett 203). Ultimately, Cather did what she believed artists should do—she found “what conventions of

form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole” that was Annie Sadilek Pavelka (“On the Art of Fiction” 102). Now I look forward to doing what historians do—searching for the voices of other women who, like Annie, have left us with legal records and a new lens through which to view the history of the Great Plains and the unwarranted costs of westward expansion.

## NOTES

1. Though this Murphy family history is important to this essay for validating Mildred Bennett’s archival notes, and it intersects with Annie Pavelka’s story, it is a lengthy tale of Webster County intrigue that awaits a future essay.

2. One index card with Bennett’s handwriting notes her citation style. Any card with the notation of a “Capital S means Mrs. Sherwood gad [had] info.” Bennett further instructs that the card should be put “in front explaining just who

Mrs. Sherwood was & why her opinions and descriptions are of value.”

3. A typed note entitled “Annie” in Bennett’s file folder at the National Willa Cather Center archives tells a slightly different story; this two-page document states that Mrs. Gardner was Annie’s last employer.

4. These cards mention two potential excursions to marry, the first time to Denver and a second time to McCook, so the chronology is confusing when compared to the order of events found in *My Antonia* and what has been traditionally understood about Annie’s early life. Some validation exists, however, regarding McCook as a possible destination for Annie to meet and marry Murphy. From newspaper, census, obituary, and marriage records, we can piece together some Murphy family chronology that could corroborate the McCook storyline. We must also consider, however, that Mrs. Sherwood is probably producing a history from memory, making the information subject to the failings of recall and Bennett’s notetaking.

5. There are three names on the monument—Victor, Helen, and Emma—but no information regarding dates of birth or death. I have found only one reference to a set of twins lost by Annie: a newspaper clipping in the Pavelka family file in the Cather Center archives, entitled “A Famous Nebraska Friendship” from the *Omaha World-Herald Magazine*, dated July 28, 1957, and written by Bess Eileen Day, who explains, “The day I met Anna I was accompanied by Mrs. Carrie Miner Sherwood, life-long friend of both Anna and Willa Cather, and Mrs. Mildred R. Bennett, author of “The World of Willa Cather.”

**IV. It would be dangerous to convict in any case, as a general rule, on the testimony of the prosecutrix without corroboration. *Johnston v. State*, 17 Ohio, 593. *Laughlin v. State*, 18 Ohio, 99. Gen. Stat., sec. 475, Criminal Code.**

An excerpt from *Garrison v. The People*.



Annie blames the death of the twins on “too much handling by curious neighbors.” The plot upon which the headstone rests was not purchased by John and Annie Pavelka, who bought their own plot next to it; the plot was purchased by the Dushek family in 1897. According to cemetery records at the Webster County Museum, several other persons are buried there. Because the vital records of the state of Nebraska starting in 1904 are available, a family member could pursue birth and death records for the infant children, who, based on a chronology of the Pavelka children, were presumably born after 1904; no records have been collected at this time. Baptismal records might also provide clarity; however, those remain under the control of the Catholic Diocese of Lincoln.

6. The Nebraska rape statute at the time hinged upon the use of force by the male perpetrator and a lack of consent by the female victim. The gendered law required that a “woman must oppose the act, and that if she in any manner favor it the party accused cannot be convicted of rape,” with exception made for any woman who “has been reduced to a state of insensibility and violated while in that condition, and cases where consent has been induced by fears of personal violence” (*Garrison v. The People* 282). Judging by prevailing conventions governing publication of case law, the decision rendered in the Garrison case was the first Nebraska Supreme Court decision interpreting rape law.

7. One of the obituaries for Charley Kaley, from the *Weekly Advertiser*, dated April 15, 1927, states, “Blessed with an abundance of means, he traveled extensively and viewed life from all angles,” but he was also one “who never grew old, except as the passing years made him the victim of his own abounding life.” The obituary in *The Red Cloud Argus*, dated April 14, 1927, eulogizes that “notwithstanding his serious failings, he was regarded with considerable affection by the people of this community.”

8. The gender-specific laws related to rape, age of consent, age of prosecution for accused males, and corroboration rules were changing significantly in Nebraska and across the United States during this time. Though this would not have been a statutory rape case, legal challenges related to rape and bastardy were consistently producing changes to precedent at the state level, and it was an extremely difficult environment for successful prosecution of rape. Insofar as what Annie might have known about the law, the archival notecard information that Mr. Miner “got a lawyer and a settlement” suggests that legal advice helped to determine her course of action.

9. If the Stowells only wintered in Red Cloud, as is suspected by Kari Ronning of the Cather Project at the University of Nebraska (shared in an October 2018 email exchange with the author), it would make sense that Annie would have to find other employment; Mrs. Gardner, considering the timeline, might not have known Annie was pregnant upon hiring her, thus prompting a later threat to “dismiss her” as noted by Sherwood.

10. I attempted to find publicized accounts of district court news regarding this case, but many of the newspapers from this period are unavailable. In one microfilm copy of the *Red Cloud Chief* dated April

20, 1888, a portion of the paper where the legal notices are printed has been cut out. The publication date of the previous week’s edition, April 13, coincided with the motion to dismiss the case, so the first opportunity to publish district court news would have been April 20.

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# The Writer and Her Editor: The New York Society Library Membership of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis

Harriet Shapiro

One day in 1928, a lady dressed in an apple-green coat and matching hat climbed the steps to the New York Society Library, then located downtown at University Place. “I’d like to subscribe here if I may,” the visitor said to Marion King, the librarian on duty in the great front hall. “My name is Cather. I’m by way of being a writer” (King 208).

When the American novelist Willa Cather subscribed to the Library that long-ago day in 1928, she joined the ranks of other distinguished writers from Washington Irving to Herman Melville, Stephen Vincent Benét, and W. H. Auden, in their time all Library members. What King does not mention in her history of the Library is that Willa Cather shared the membership with her longtime partner Edith Lewis, a successful editor and advertising executive in New York City.

Yellow charging cards on display in the Society Library’s Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery during an exhibit titled “The New York World of Willa Cather” (October 24, 1917–August 31, 2018) list the more than three hundred books the couple withdrew between March 1937 and February 1947.<sup>1</sup> Cards dated 1928 to 1937 were either lost or destroyed during the Library’s move in 1937 from University Place to its current location at 53 East 79th Street. Subscriber information at the head of a 1937 card (see cover), handwritten in black ink, lists two names, an address, and a telephone number: “Lewis, Miss Edith and Miss Cather, 570 Park Avenue, Apt. 7D. Re-4-8354”. (Lewis’s name is displayed prominently on some of the cards, perhaps because she was most likely the household member who handled payment of the annual subscription fee.) Cather was the public face of the couple, but Lewis, privately, was a crucial presence not always appreciated for the role she played in Cather’s creative life.

In considering the significance of the charging cards, one realizes that the membership Cather and Lewis shared for nearly twenty years was a meaningful expression of a partnership of nearly four decades. An in-depth study of the Cather-Lewis collaboration by Professor Melissa J. Homestead of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will be published in 2021 by Oxford University Press. So strong was the mythology of Willa Cather as an independent creative

force that the importance of her working relationship with Lewis has taken time to be viewed more distinctly. Cather consciously developed a public image of the writer standing on firm but solitary ground; several photographs show her resolutely placing herself in outdoor settings holding a walking stick, the stance reminiscent of the nine-year old Willa in 1882 posing as Hiawatha with her bow and arrow in a Washington, DC, artist’s studio. As Homestead said in a 2017 interview published in *Nebraska Today*, “There’s been this notion of Cather as an autonomous artist, who did everything



The New York Society Library’s University Place home, ca. 1934, from the Historic American Buildings Survey. Library of Congress.



by herself. It's been hard for people to think about her actually collaborating" ("Nebraska Scholar"). Of the Cather-Lewis editorial collaboration, Homestead writes that it "produced the polished and tightly constructed prose long recognized by readers as Cather's hallmark" ("Composing, Editing" 4). Robert Thacker of St. Lawrence University points out that Lewis was deeply involved in what he describes as "Willa Cather Inc."

By 1928, the year the couple joined the Library, Cather was securely established in the pantheon of great American writers. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1923, she had gained renown for her early work—*O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *The Song of the Lark*, novels celebrating the pioneer experience in the Midwest, as well as for *One of Ours*, *My Mortal Enemy*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. But if Cather was enjoying critical success, her domestic life was proving less satisfactory. She and Lewis were camping out in cramped quarters at the Grosvenor Hotel on Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street. She was, in the words of Cather biographer James Woodress, "a ship without moorings" (413). The couple had recently given up their spacious and—essential for Cather—tranquil apartment on the second floor of 5 Bank Street in the West Village, where they had lived from 1912 to 1927. Lewis sums up the Bank Street years as "Willa Cather's best working years" (88). A new subway line was under construction in the neighborhood and the noise so disturbed the couple they had decided to look for another apartment. After five years in the Grosvenor, Cather and Lewis moved in 1932 to 570 Park Avenue, a twenty-minute walk from the building to which the Library would relocate in 1937, where it remains to this day.

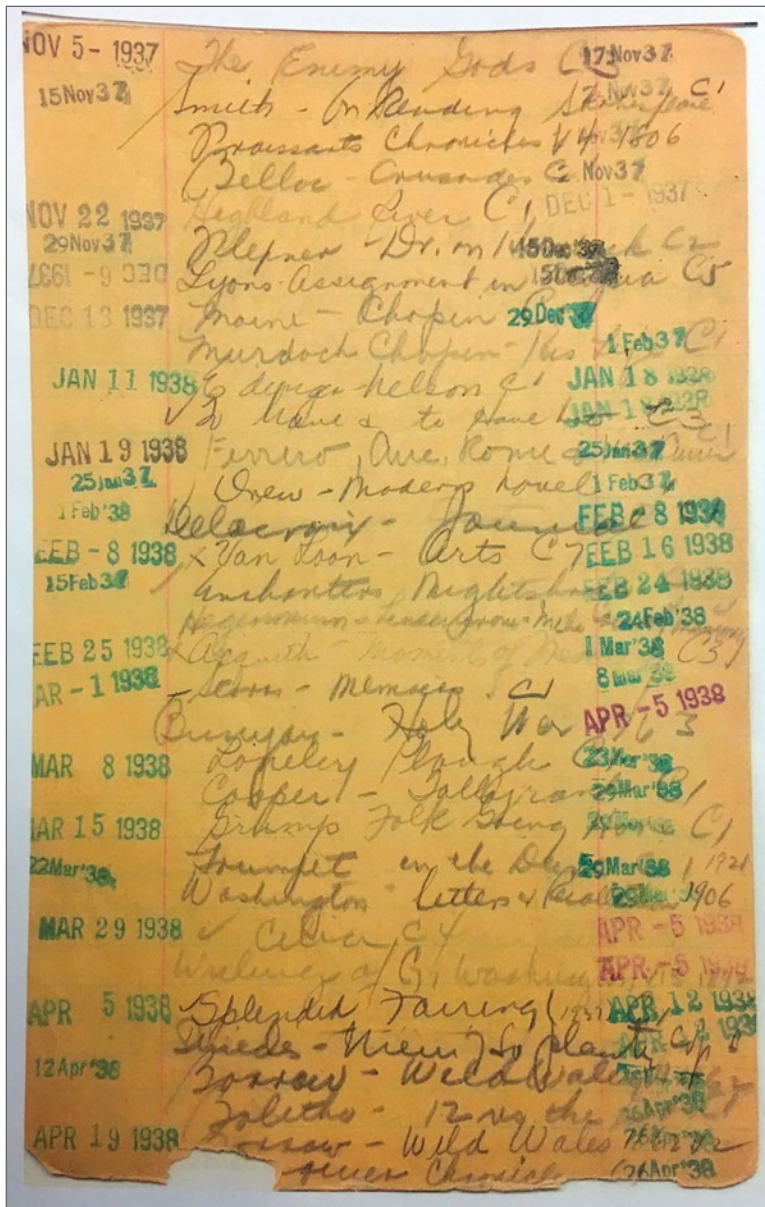
The New York Society Library had been in Cather's sightlines for many years. In the years after her 1906 move to New York City, she had lived on or near Washington Square Park and worked at *McClure's Magazine* on East 23rd Street, both locations just a few blocks from the Library's University Place home. Friends in Cather's *McClure's* circle, including magazine cofounder S. S. McClure, investigative journalist Ida Tarbell, and fiction editor Viola Roseboro', were all Library members. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, with Cather's books in storage and the couple still looking for a new home, the Library proved a much-needed refuge. Furthermore, Cather and Lewis traveled widely—to their cottage on Grand Manan in the Bay of Fundy, to the Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, to the American Southwest, to Quebec, and to Europe where, in 1930, she and Lewis spent four months in France; these travels, of course, curtailed their access to books. A note in the Charles Cather Collection at the University of

Nebraska–Lincoln Archives and Special Collections, typed by Lewis and accompanying a list of books checked out from the Society Library, reads, "Sorry to ask for so much at once, but we have been without any books for a long while."<sup>2</sup>

Books, clearly, were essential to the couple. When back in New York City, they sometimes visited the Society Library an average of once a week, often borrowing four to five books at a time. Cather also turned to other libraries in the city, patronizing a Greenwich Village branch of the New York Public Library, as well as the central branch at 42nd Street. She was friends with Florence Overton, head of the circulation department for the whole NYPL system, and during a visit to the New York Public Library in the winter of 1926 a small back room in the offices of the director E. H. Anderson was set aside for her use. In a letter dated February 15, 1926, now in the New York Public Library Archives, Cather thanked Anderson: "That is a delightful room to work in and I hope to have an opportunity to use it again."

Much has been written about Cather's early passion for literature. As a child growing up in Frederick County, Virginia, where she was born in 1873, Cather listened to her grandmother Rachel Boak read *The Pilgrim's Progress* aloud to her. In 1883 the family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska. Lewis recalls that Cather reread *The Pilgrim's Progress* eight times during one of those first winters (14). Reading was surely a solace for an impressionable young girl uprooted from the familiar Virginia countryside, her break with the physical past probably accelerating her need for books. James Woodress asserts, "Cather's extracurricular reading during her adolescent years was more important than her formal education" at the local school in Red Cloud (49). One significant resource was the family library, which contained nineteenth-century classics by Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, Hawthorne, Ruskin, and Carlyle, as well as volumes of Shakespeare and anthologies of poetry. "One can assume," Woodress writes, "that she read everything in the collection" (50). Cather scholar Susan Rosowski cites Bernice Slote's research in concluding, "Cather's early reading was remarkable for both its diversity and its consistency" (4). According to Janis P. Stout, markings in the books that have survived of Cather's juvenile library, a separate collection from the family's, "show painstaking study, almost certainly while in college, of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Shakespeare's sonnets, Browning's longer poems, Victor Hugo, Ibsen" (46). As Robert Thacker observed in a discussion with the author, "Cather was not only a writer who valued western tradition in literature, she embraced it." Early habits became lifelong habits, and the New York Society Library helped sustain them.





Cather's and Lewis's charging card spanning the period November 1937 to April 1938. From the New York Society Library Institutional Archive.

Russian literature played a constant and important role in Cather's literary development. She was fourteen years old when she discovered paperback editions of Tolstoy in the local drugstore where she worked after school. Woodress writes, "For three years, she said later with characteristic exaggeration, she read Tolstoy all the time, backward and forward" (51). A passion for Russian writers, including Pushkin, continued throughout her lifetime. On December 5, 1941, Cather/Lewis withdrew Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, six days later *Twenty-Three Tales*, and, on January 24, 1945, *The Invader and Other Stories*. In the last decade of her life it seemed as if Cather was returning once again to the books she had loved as a girl.

Cather's interest in French literature was also highly developed. It emerges as one of the themes of the Society Library cards, like a background motif of a Renaissance tapestry.

Woodress explains that "Cather had been a Francophile from early childhood," impressed by the *joie de vivre* of the French Canadian community on the Divide and a neighbor's tales about France (160). Cather began reading French when she was fifteen, but her oral command of the language was never fluent; Edith Lewis describes their efforts at speaking French as "very lame" (88). The charging cards also reveal that between 1937–1947, Cather/Lewis withdrew a number of biographies by the French writer André Maurois, including *Disraeli: A Picture of the Victorian Age*; *Voltaire*; and *Byron*, all translated into English by Hamish Miles. On January 2, 1940, Saint-Exupéry's *Wind, Sand and Stars*, translated by Lewis Galantière, was checked out. Two titles Cather/Lewis selected in French were Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* and Pascal's *Pensées*.

During the late spring of 1938 Cather turned repeatedly to the Society Library while researching *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, her twelfth and last published novel, which draws heavily on childhood memories and stories of slavery in pre-Civil War Virginia. In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather writes that she had discovered an old map in the Library collection on which she traced the route across the Potomac River the slave girl Nancy, fleeing her mistress Sapphira Colbert, had taken (*Selected Letters* 592). In the Historical Essay for the Scholarly Edition of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Ann Romines, professor emerita of English at The George Washington University, writes of the books listed in the charging cards that were borrowed from the Society Library while Cather was researching the novel. They include *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, edited by F. B. Sanborn; Wilbur Henry Siebert's 1898 edition of *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*; and Théophile Conneau's *Captain Canot, or Twenty Years of an African Slaver* (356, 358). Cather also checked out John R. Spears's *The American Slave-Trade: An Account of Its Origin, Growth and Suppression*. Spears's history allowed Cather to reconstruct the capture of Jezebel and her transportation via a slave ship to the Baltimore slave market. Romines points out that the language Cather uses in her description of the ship is "strikingly similar" to that of Spears (357). On March 1, 1938, Cather withdrew John Bunyan's *The Holy War*, printed in Glasgow in 1763. *The Holy War* reappears in the novel when the miller Henry Colbert, unable to help Nancy escape, finds comfort in the words of Bunyan. The edition Colbert reads is the same one Cather had borrowed from the Library (209).

Immersed as she was in writing *Sapphira*, Cather would find 1938 to be a difficult year; still, Cather/Lewis continued to make many visits to the Library. As Lewis writes, "it was a novel written against circumstance. One catastrophe after



another blocked its path” (184). In June 1938 Cather’s brother Douglass died, followed on October 10 by the death of her beloved friend, Isabelle McClung Hambourg, the person for whom Cather claimed all her books had been written (Woodress 479). Cather wrote to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, “Douglass and Isabelle died when I was in the middle of the book, and I threw it aside for nearly a year” (*Selected Letters* 592). Nevertheless, in 1939, the charging cards record that books were again being borrowed more regularly from the Library, perhaps by Lewis. The outbreak of World War II also darkened Cather’s spirits. After the fall of France in 1940, Lewis notes, “she wrote in her ‘Line-a-day,’ ‘There seems to be no future at all for people of my generation’” (184). Books Cather/Lewis withdrew during the war years—*Allenby: A Study in Greatness*, by Archibald P. Wavell, and *Stalin, Czar of all the Russias*, by Eugene Lyons—reflect a preoccupation with the changing world order and perhaps a growing sense of their own mortality.

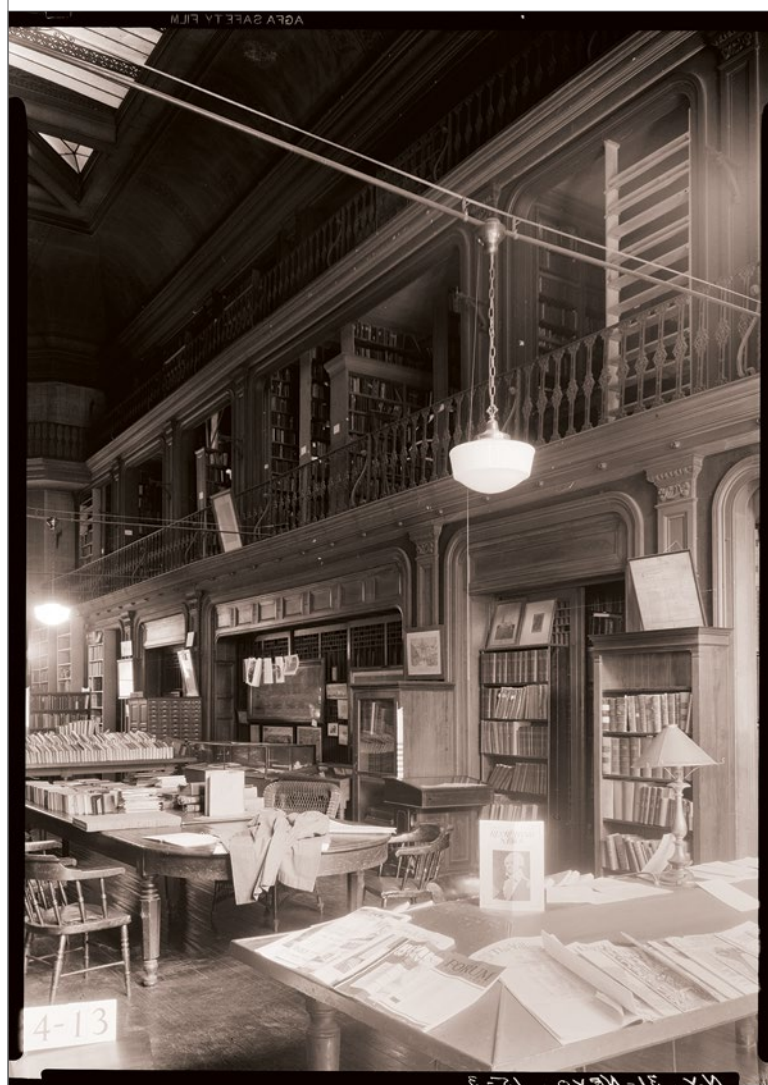
As much as the Library served as a focal point for Cather’s research and literary interests, it also provided the couple with a steady supply of new titles; they paid close attention to who was publishing what. Over the years they regularly withdrew current novels by Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, as well as the latest titles written by John Buchan, the Scottish novelist and governor general of Canada. On June 11, 1941, Cather/Lewis signed out volumes one and two of *The Master of Hestviken* by the Swedish novelist Sigrid Undset, with whom Cather enjoyed a cordial friendship.

The charging cards also reflect Cather’s great interest in the theater. As a young woman she had written articles about the theater for newspapers and *McClure’s*; she pursued her interest in the stage for the rest of her life. From the Society Library she withdrew works by Oliver Goldsmith, Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and J. M. Barrie. Cather followed the career of the young Thornton Wilder, checking out *Our Town*, *The Merchant of Yonkers*, and *The Angel That Troubled the Waters and Other Plays*. “I truly think,” Cather wrote to Wilder on October 9, 1938, “‘Our Town’ is the loveliest thing that has been produced in this country in a long, long time—and the truest. . . . I love everything you have ever written, but you have done nothing so fine as this. I am not only happy about it, but thankful for it” (*Selected Letters* 556–57).

For many years Cather had been thinking about writing a novel set in the Papal Palace in fourteenth-century Avignon, a city she had visited several times during her many sojourns in France. On her first trip to France, she put up in an Avignon hotel where Henry James had once lodged (Woodress 162). Lewis writes, “On her many journeys to the south of France,

it was Avignon that left the deepest impression with her” (190). During the last decade of her life, even as she was completing work on *Sapphira*, Cather turned again to the Society Library for titles about medieval France. On November 5, 1937, she withdrew Hilaire Belloc’s *The Crusades*; on October 25, November 1, and November 15 she checked out four volumes of Froissart’s *Chronicles of England, France, Spain*; and on April 21, 1941, Henry Osborn Taylor’s *The Mediaeval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages*. The books Cather withdrew about late medieval France stand out like an X-ray of her mind, the skeleton of the book already in place but never completed.

Examining the charging cards as a whole textual pattern, one senses how focused Cather and Lewis were about what they read. They were, according to Thacker, “two minds in process.” Indeed, few of the titles were randomly selected; they served a purpose for the couple. They were a reflection of what Cather wanted to learn or revisit, their selection expressing a desire to



An interior room of the New York Society Library's University Place home, ca. 1934, from the Historic American Buildings Survey. Library of Congress.



pursue knowledge and understanding for a creative life that could not be stilled, a need always supported by Lewis and never extinguished even in Cather's darkest days. The charging cards also reveal how methodically the couple read. For instance, between June and July of 1940, Cather/Lewis made four visits to the Library, borrowing in sequence five volumes of Winston Churchill's *Marlborough: His Life and Times*. In a letter to her brother Roscoe in 1942, Cather writes of Churchill: "I have been his devout admirer ever since I read his great life of Marlborough, in five huge volumes. It is certainly the finest biography or historical work that has appeared in my lifetime. I consider him simply the best living English writer" (*Complete Letters* no. 2191).

During those last years Cather was also borrowing books she had read before, perhaps sensing this might be for the last time. The titles almost spring off the pages of the final charging cards. On January 8, 1947, she withdrew for the second time Stefan Zweig's *Balzac*, and on February 10, Cather/Lewis checked out *The Poems, Prose and Plays of Alexander Pushkin*, again rereading one of the Russian writers she loved. Eight days later André Maurois's *Byron*, whose poetry Cather had read as a girl, was signed out.

Two months later on April 24, 1947, Willa Cather died of a cerebral hemorrhage in the apartment she shared with Edith Lewis. Five weeks later *Byron* was returned to the Library, perhaps by Lewis. In the list of book titles borrowed from the Society Library in the Charles Cather Collection, Lewis, now Cather's literary executor, never mentions herself but describes Cather as the sole reader. In a May 2018 email to the author, Cather critic Andrew Jewell notes the couple's pattern: "Lewis was keen to push Cather forward (even at the expense of her own role in Cather's life)."

On March 16, 1953, Edith Lewis wrote to librarian Marion King, thanking her for her letter about *Willa Cather Living*, Lewis's recently published memoir. It was King who had greeted Willa Cather all those years ago at University Place. "I can't tell you how your warm, generous praise of the book pleases me," Lewis writes. "If it seems a true picture to the friends who knew her that is all I have wished or hoped for . . . and when you imply that Miss Cather herself would have been pleased with the book, that pleases me more than anything." Lewis adds that family illness has left her very much occupied but she hopes to return soon to the Library. Then perhaps for the first time, breaking free of her habitual reticence, she concludes, "I have a long list of books I want very much to read." In 1972, Lewis died in the apartment where she and Cather had lived and read books together. She was ninety years old.

1. This essay focuses on use of the New York Society Library by Cather and Lewis, but Marion King's history notes that the Library made current copies of Cather's own books available to its members, beginning with *Alexander's Bridge*, which the Library acquired on April 28, 1912, only eight days after Houghton Mifflin published the novel.

2. The archival document consists of six typed pages of "books taken from the Society Library" during the years 1929 and 1934–1947 plus a page of comments on Cather's use of the Society Library and her reading habits. While it is unsigned, there is no doubt it was prepared by Edith Lewis as the Charles Cather Collection contains several other Lewis items and she is the only person with access to the information. The document is undated but was completed after Cather's death in 1947, probably for E. K. Brown, who was writing a literary biography of Cather.

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# A Singular Life: *Ántonia* Among Her Contemporary Literary Sisters

Mary Ruth Ryder

That *Ántonia* Shimerda Cuzak stands as a literary and cultural icon in American fiction is indisputable, but the reasons for her emergence as such are complex. One can reasonably argue that it was Cather's artistic skill alone that propelled her character into iconic status. But when placed in the context of her competition, that is, other female protagonists whose stories were published contemporaneous to hers, *Ántonia* proves singular and a precursor to later female figures in plains literature.<sup>1</sup> *Ántonia* stands apart from the female heroes of popular fiction published in the years surrounding *My Ántonia*'s publication because she is not a principal in the typical plot lines of the day—the woman's rights novel, the romantic adventure tale, the business success story. Unlike the protagonists of these works, who endeavor to rise socially, better themselves economically, embrace roles as New Women, seek adventure (often through war experiences), or simply strive to be something more than they are, *Ántonia* embraces fully who she is, doing so without apology or regret, and emerges as an individual comfortable in her own skin, real yet timeless.

This claim does not, however, deny her archetypal role. Unlike her archetypal predecessor, Alexandra Bergson, who Cather admitted was an amalgam of various women, *Ántonia* is modeled on one woman. Whereas Alexandra denies herself, particularly her emotional side, to succeed in working the land and to establish her place in a man's world, *Ántonia* embraces her emotions, her natural role as nurturer and mother, and her commitment to work, family, and friends. Alexandra, whose name alone connotes an archetypal conqueror, admits late in her life to having been lonely and having passed up opportunities for personal happiness. This *Ántonia* never needs to do.

In creating *Ántonia*, Cather clearly drew upon the reality of her model, Annie Sadilek Pavelka, but as a writer and editor she was also aware of female figures in the popular literature of the day. The reading public expected and was interested in a particular

kind of heroine. While *Ántonia*'s story is set in the not-too-distant past from the time of the novel's publication, the stories of *Ántonia*'s literary counterparts are generally contemporary. The fiction of the day includes stories about women finding new and fulfilling roles in war work, generally ending in marriage to a fine officer; women leaving the toil of rural upbringings to fashion careers for themselves in the cities, usually marrying the boss's son; women striving to become New Women but often failing and raising children alone, committing suicide, or struggling in a drab and hard life. None of these scenarios applies to *Ántonia*.

Other works contemporary to *My Ántonia* offer portraits of highly adventurous New Women. Isabel Ostrander's *The Single Track* features a character who, like Tiny Soderball, finds success in Alaska. A woman goes West and becomes a movie star in *The Close-Up*, by Margaret Turnbull.<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Hall, the restless, young heroine of Marion Hill's *The Toll of the Road*, chooses a career in theater over wifhood.<sup>3</sup> Other novels feature ambitious girls who become successful in business, like Lena Lingard, though in more unusual careers: running a livery stable (*A Daughter of*



Film still from the lost 1921 Vitagraph film of *The Single Track*, from the novel by Isabelle Ostrander (writing as Douglas Grant).



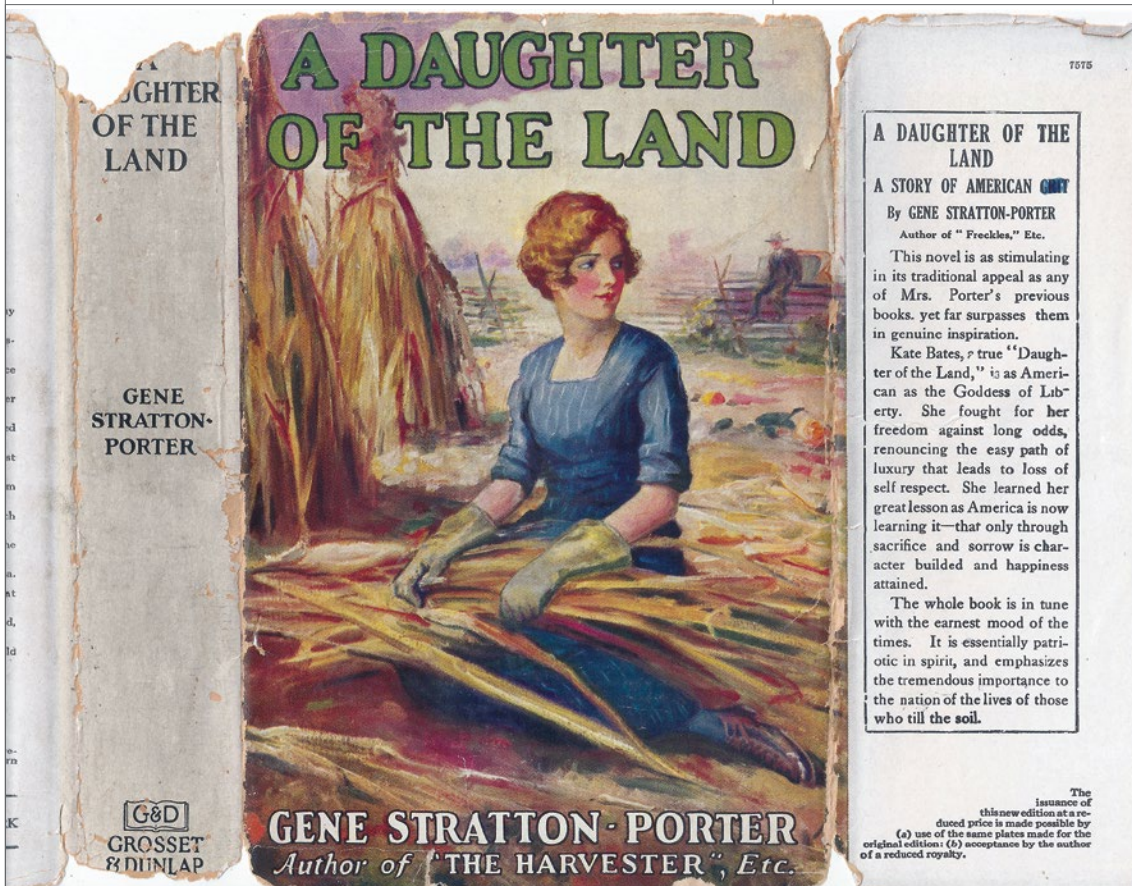
*Jehu*, by Laura E. Richards), developing an apple orchard (*The Apple Woman of the Klickitat*, by Anna Van Rensselaer Morris), or becoming a detective (*The Green Jacket*, by Jennette Lee).<sup>4</sup> Even a work such as popular novelist Gene Stratton-Porter's *A Daughter of the Land* presents a protagonist who agitates for her rights, establishes a business, and attains self-sufficiency. The central character, Kate Bates, like many other farm girls in novels of the time, seeks two things—an education and land ownership. She succeeds in attaining both but marries badly before eventually finding happiness with the right man. *Antonia*, however, requires neither of these attainments to be happy. She is eager to learn as a young girl but does not aspire to be learned or wealthy.

Perhaps because the book did not fit the mold of her literary sisters of the day, *My Antonia* did not sell particularly well and did not make the bestseller list for 1918 (Woodress 300). In *Making the List: A Cultural History of the American Bestseller 1900–1999* Michael Korda suggests other factors that may have contributed to readers' lukewarm reception of *My Antonia*. (While there were other bestseller lists, Korda focuses on the most important, the one published by *Publishers Weekly*. The *New York Times Book Review* list began in 1942.) Korda notes that 1918 marked “the sudden appearance of novels written with men in mind as readers” (17). The 1913 bestseller list showed six of ten works both by men and targeted to men, and the 1918 list boasted five of ten. Army life during World War I also led to a new cadre of male readers

who read simply to pass their time. In addition, by 1918 emergent young writers “were rejecting the kind of world about which Gene Stratton-Porter had been writing” (20–21), a world that embraced moral codes of the past and offered heroines the chance to rescue men disillusioned with the world or seeking escape from it. Women readers had been liberated by their war work and, like their male counterparts, “wanted books that mirrored their own hungers and desires and interest in the world” (21). Most would have viewed *My Antonia* as a throwback to their mothers' worlds wherein a woman's role was largely domestic, tying her to children, housekeeping, and support for her husband's work. The bestseller lists in the years immediately preceding and following *My Antonia* show recurring authors' names: Zane Grey, Eleanor H. Porter, Ethel Dell, Gene Stratton-Porter, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Kathleen Norris. Examining their works, however, one does not find radical departures from the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood, despite some modern female protagonists who seem to challenge those parameters. To be on the bestseller list, authors learned quickly that they must “incorporate radical changes in the economic and professional aspects of women's lives in a basically conservative form” and not “reject outright traditional female roles because to do so would compromise the novel's appeal on the mass market” (Dudovitz 6).

A case in point is the work of Cather's contemporary, the wildly successful and popular author Mary Roberts

Rinehart (1876–1958). Rinehart biographer Jan Cohn reports that early in her career Rinehart had met Cather in Pittsburgh, and Cather had offered advice based on her own method: “put away the completed draft of a short story, returning to it after a number of weeks or months in order to revise it thoroughly” (47). Rinehart later admitted that at the outset she had been reluctant to follow Cather's advice but some four years later “did a thorough revision of a story that had been returned by a dozen magazines.” The revised story was then accepted in January 1910 by *Scribner's*. Rinehart claimed that “all her work was



completely rewritten three times or more,” and one wonders if she made such revision to meet the demands of the seller’s market that she came to dominate for years.

While Rinehart admitted that she wanted “to write serious novels,” she would not “follow the path of realism” since she viewed realism as exploiting the violent and the immoral, “especially the sexually immoral” (Cohn 67). As a result, her work “tended to present real social problems, but in their outcomes they almost invariably retreated into romance—the conventionalized happy ending.” And happy endings did sell. Rinehart felt that critics before the war had “pigeonholed” her as a writer of farce or mystery and that “financial success began to tar her writing with the brush of commercialism.” Cohn adds that in an interview for the *Pittsburgh Post* in February 1913 she went on to assert, “literature is more a business than a passion with me” (67). While she later regretted the remark, Rinehart came to epitomize commercial success in writing.

The primary venue for her stories and serialized novels was the *Saturday Evening Post*, which published six of her stories in 1912 alone (Cohn 68). A year later, the year of Cather’s release of *O Pioneers!*, Rinehart sold her first serious novel to the *Post*, a novel reprinted in 1914 by Cather’s own publisher, Houghton Mifflin. In *The Street of Seven Stars*, Rinehart embraced Victorian values that sold, in spite of the New Woman movement. In this novel a talented young woman violinist lives in a bohemian relationship with a poor professional musician, Dr. Byrne (though they are chaperoned by a single woman professor who supports women’s causes). When the heroine must choose between her music career and her love for Dr. Byrne, she chooses his love and career over her own. One wonders how Cather would have reacted to this plot twist just as she herself was beginning to draft a novel of an aspiring and talented musical artist, Thea Kronborg. At the same time, *McClure’s Magazine* serialized Rinehart’s mystery *The After House*, later published in 1914 by Houghton Mifflin. Cather had left *McClure’s* by 1913, perhaps glad that her name was no longer attached to works such as Rinehart’s.

Rinehart’s popular and critical success, along with her sale records—Cohn reports she made \$50,000 in 1912 (40)—earned her an invitation to William Dean Howells’s 75th birthday party, an event Cather also attended, though no record exists of them encountering each other there. But by 1918, the date of *My Ántonia*’s release, Rinehart was the staple provider of stories to the *Saturday Evening Post* and was a regular on the bestseller list. It is her 1918 novel, *The Amazing Interlude*, however, that bears review in light of Houghton Mifflin’s release of *My Ántonia* in October of 1918. George Lorimer, the editor of the *Post*, paid Rinehart \$10,000, prepublication (\$2,000 per installment)

for her novel (Cohn 120). In this story a young American girl, Sara Lee Kennedy, is compelled by altruistic motives and by the national surge of wartime patriotism to leave her fiancé and to go to the front to run a soup kitchen. There she falls in love with a brave, mysterious Belgian aristocrat named Henri. Here was “precisely the kind of story ten million Americans wanted to read”—and they did. Cohn notes that publisher George H. Doran wrote to Rinehart that her book was “the success of the year” and would “sell 100,000 copies” (120). At Doran’s suggestion Rinehart changed the ending of her serialized story so that at the novel’s close Sara Kennedy, who had returned to the United States, breaks her engagement and goes back to Belgium and to Henri. Third on the bestseller list for 1918, *The Amazing Interlude* would be a principal rival to the forthcoming *My Ántonia*. By 1923, when Cather learned that she had won the Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours*, she wrote to Alfred and Blanche Knopf, expressing her hope that the publicity of the prize would “stimulate sales.” She wrote, “Those High-Brows, Heywood Brown & Co.,” who had blasted Cather’s novel in their reviews, “will storm worse than ever and say it’s one step more to Mary Rinehart” (*Complete Letters* no. 2554).

Cather, however, did not write *My Ántonia* to engage in such game-playing or to achieve the notoriety of landing on the bestseller list. In an interview with Eleanor Hinman in 1921, she confirmed that she thought her *Ántonia* “deserved something better than the *Saturday Evening Post* sort of stuff” (44). One might intuit that this barb was directed toward some of Cather’s contemporary women writers, like Rinehart, who continued to feed the reading public’s craving for romance over realism. In *My Ántonia*, however, Cather intentionally continued her venture into writing what she knew, as Sarah Orne Jewett had advised, extending her “home pasture,” writing what was real and true. This approach the critics recognized, and they almost universally praised Cather’s new novel as an unprecedented achievement in American letters. One could argue, though, that in her novel Cather did make some nods to contemporary plots that pleased readers. Tiny Soderball, for example, follows the tale of the adventurous New Woman going off to Alaska and making her fortune.

Within a year of the release of Cather’s novel, Isabel Ostrander, writing under the pseudonym Douglas Grant, also published a story of an Alaska adventuress. Instead of a tale about a former hired girl, *The Single Track* is a novel of a rich young woman who, to save the family fortune, goes into the Klondike. Ostrander describes her protagonist Janetta as living the “butterfly existence” (2) of a wealthy debutante who is clueless about real life. Her brother Ollie is serving with the AEF, so Janetta feels the urge to do something real, like war work, but not the “messy part”



like becoming a nurse (13). The family lawyer soon apprises her that a copper mining company in Alaska, the Unatika, intends to undermine her family's Northern Star Company by constructing a single railroad track to the bay and that she will be penniless if they succeed. Janetta vows that she will go to Alaska to protect the family fortune and believes she knows what life will be like there because she has "been to the movies" (44). Taking her butler Peddar with her in the assumed role of her father, Janetta becomes a clerk at the company store where the miners come to love her and admire her courage. As expected, despite asserting "I'm a working girl" (107), she falls in love with Barney Hoyt, the lead engineer for Northern Star and, without revealing her true identity, begins sleuthing out the criminal activity of the competing company. Now, Ostrander allows coincidence to govern her plot. The arrival of Ronald Winfield, a man who proves to be Hoyt's former college roommate and the son of the man who had ruined the Hoyt family business (leading to Mr. Hoyt's suicide), lends complication to the predictable plot. Janetta becomes chummy with Winfield, ferrets out that the Winfields own the Unatika Mine, and thrusts herself into the midst of clashes between the company crews. Janetta becomes the "plucky and staunch and truehearted" heroine (165), rushing to her man Hoyt when he is injured in a fight and becoming, as Ostrander writes, "the primitive woman seeking to aid and defend her mate" (261). All's well that ends well as Janetta marries Hoyt and decides to remain in Alaska.

Cather, on the other hand, does not compromise the realism of Tiny Soderball's story in this way. Tiny is not a rich, Eastern girl; she has lived a hard life on the Nebraska plains and expects nothing other than what her own work and maybe a little luck will gain for her. Tiny, too, has "very definite plans" (290) when she goes West to Seattle. While running a sailors' boarding house, she catches the gold fever; unafraid of the "messy part" of life, she heads to Alaska, knowing life will be rough there. She is not deluded by Hollywood's portrayal of the last great frontier. During her daring adventure in the Klondike, she uses her skills to feed and care for hungry miners, one of whom leaves her his claim before dying from complications following amputation of frozen limbs. Tiny cleverly buys and trades mines until she amasses "a considerable fortune" (293). Cather, however, keeps her story real. Tiny loses some toes to frostbite, a circumstance she accepts without complaint, and is "satisfied with her success, but not elated" (294). Cather does not marry off her character, as her fellow novelists almost always did; instead, she presents a real woman whose interest in life has waned, her great adventures over, "the thrill of them . . . quite gone" (293).

In *My Antonia's* "scandalous stories" of the three Bohemian Marys, two of whom fall into disgrace and are "forced to retire

# The AMAZING INTERLUDE

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART



from the world for a short time" (196), Cather mimics a common plot line of many sensational novels of the day. But rather than fantasize about the fates of the girls, contriving, as many of her contemporary writers do, destinies of finding love and marrying well, Cather leaves the Marys' fates unexamined for twenty years; even then readers are told "how steady those girls have turned out" with few details. Their stories are not tools of the plot. The story of Lena Lingard, too, could be a concession to the ever-popular plot of the day—the poor girl who becomes a successful businesswoman. Again, Cather does not compromise realism for romance. In 1918, many popular novels show a young woman going to the city, starting out in a lowly position, being recognized for her skills, attracting the attention of her boss or his son, and finally marrying into the employer's family. For example, in Edna Ferber's 1917 novel *Fanny Herself*, the protagonist declares that she will "crush and destroy" the girl she was when she worked hard in her family's store simply to support her older brother's artistic yearnings. In that girl's place, Fanny asserts "she would mold a hard, keen-eyed, resolute woman, whose godhead was to be successful, and to whom success would mean money and position" (107). Lena, on the other hand, embraces her talent,



does not resent sending money to help her family, and accepts success as it comes to her without making it her life's purpose.

Fanny Brandeis's story was, Ferber admitted, the only time she "deliberately" used a "small section" of her own life as the subject of her work, and she was somewhat embarrassed at doing so, as she related in *A Peculiar Treasure*, her 1938 autobiography (20). Similarly, parallels exist, of course, between Jim Burden's experiences and Cather's own in *My Ántonia*, but even though Lena finds a career for herself beyond Black Hawk, as Cather did beyond Red Cloud, one would be amiss in seeing Cather's autobiographical details in Lena's adventures. Lena, is, nonetheless, more "real" than Ferber's Fanny. Fanny starts into business on her own through a chance encounter with a salesman; Lena finds her own way—alone. Fanny finds success in business that hardens her, and she becomes "the stereotypical unfeminine career woman" (Shaughnessy 125), at least for a time. She asserts that she will marry only for financial gain. Lena makes no such claim and makes a comfortable living for herself without losing her feminine appeal or maternal instincts, as Jim learns while living in Lincoln. Nor does Lena deny her ethnic heritage. By contrast, Fanny suppresses all maternal feelings and does not recover them until she recovers the values of the Jewish heritage she has denied in order to achieve her professional goals.

After proving herself as an international businesswoman, Fanny has no goal left in life, but, once again by chance, she becomes involved in the feminist movement. She then reevaluates her priorities, rejoins her estranged family, and seeks out Clarence Heyl, a young Jewish man she had known in her youth. Heyl becomes the vehicle for returning Fanny to her roots, to nature, and to her real self. Caught in a blizzard on a Colorado mountain where she has sought out Heyl, Fanny is rescued by him, both physically and emotionally. Ferber finally resorts to marrying off Fanny to Heyl and to having her realize that all that held meaning in life was service, "living... helpfully, self-effacingly, magnificently" (314). Lena, in contrast, does not need a man to awaken her. She lives well by neither devoting herself exclusively to moneymaking nor to finding self-completion through self-effacement.

Popular fiction of the period offers portrait after portrait of girls like Fanny who rise to success in business. In addition to previously mentioned heroines in novels such as *The Close-Up*, *A Daughter of Jehu*, and *The Apple Woman of the Klickitat*, Betty Marchand, protagonist of Beatrice Barmby's novel of that name, starts as a stenographer and becomes a highly successful businesswoman, and Perdita, a poor girl from a boarding house in Sarah MacConnell's *Many Mansions*, becomes a successful interior decorator.<sup>5</sup> Predictably, each of these stories ends romantically with the marriage of the heroic woman to a man

who understands her. No mention is made of whether she will continue with her chosen work. Lena's story, however, departs from her literary counterparts' in that her life is not filled with toil, hardship, failure, and finally success and marriage. Like Ántonia, Lena is cognizant of her talent, does not see a world made of obstacles purposely set to thwart her dream, and quietly goes about becoming who she knows she is. Tiny says that Lena, as a successful dressmaker in San Francisco, is "just the same as she always was! She's careless, but she's level-headed. She's the only person I know who never gets any older" (294). Again, Cather does not feel obligated to have her character marry, as is the case with most other writers' stories of girls who become successful businesswomen.

It is Ántonia's story, though, that most stands apart from her literary sisters', and readers would have found in her a departure from the romantic heroine they expected to find. They were likely disappointed. She did not fit what June O. Underwood calls the "fantasized types" of contemporary novels (98). Most readers would have been more receptive of a character like Cosma Wakely in the popular 1917 novel *A Daughter of the Morning*, by Zona Gale, a friend and writer whom Cather admired. Like Ántonia, Cosma is a poor country girl who feels that she is different. In a chance encounter, Cosma (Cossy) meets a stranger who encourages her to express her misgivings about her current life and her deep-seated anxieties about becoming who she believes she is. The stranger, John Ember, is a well-read and well-travelled man who stirs up Cosma's longings for a fuller life by recounting his adventures and by sparking her imagination. "I like nice things," she says. "I'd like to act nice. I'd like to be the way I could be" (56). Later she tells her mother, "I'm separate. I'm somebody else" (71). Her goal is to "Get different," to "make me like I ain't" (95, 143). Following the tradition of the revolt-from-the-village theme commonly used by writers of the time to disparage rural life, Gale has Cosma leave the farm, taking with her a neighbor woman who is a victim of domestic abuse and that woman's child. She soon discovers, however, that no matter how intolerable her existence in the village had seemed, city life is worse. She finds a room in a shoddy boarding house and obtains laborious factory work until being taken under the wing of the wealthy Carney family, who literally snatch her from a demonstration of working women.

Gale's biographer Harold P. Simonson acknowledges the common plotline: "Unwilling to let realism sustain the novel, Zona Gale rescues Cossy by the easy trick of having the manager's wife, Mrs. Carney, pluck her from the mob and enroll her in a New York private school" (63). She eventually becomes a secretary to John Ember, the man who inspired her to improve her life, and takes up the cause of the striking factory girls with whom she had once



worked. She asserts, "I'll make myself . . . and then maybe I'll pick out a man who has made himself" (200). She later agrees to marry John but convinces him that she is no mother-woman and wants to work with him as an equal to improve lives of the working class.

Cosma's beginnings are *Ántonia's*, but she, like many of the female protagonists of the fiction of the day, finds her identity in fighting for social causes and rejects conventional female roles. She would remake herself; *Ántonia* would not. Cosma would work side-by-side with her husband, as would *Ántonia*, but Cosma picked her husband on conditions. *Ántonia* did not. Both women find soul mates but not in the same way or for the same reason. Again, *Ántonia* is a departure from the norm. Simonson reports that Gale was reluctant "to replace her tired sentimentality with militant reform and realism" (63) and not until her pivotal 1918 work *Birth* did she strip her work of "all romance" and "employ a prose style as monotonously stark as the lives of the characters she would depict" (78). Cather undoubtedly would have approved of these changes. Cather depicts *Ántonia's* life in its barest essence, unimbued with rosy romance; her female hero's achieved identity is as a real woman, but one undiminished by life.

Women finding new identities, thrusting aside and resenting their former selves, was the focal point of much of the fiction of the late teens. In works like *The Threshold* (1918), by Marjorie Benton Cooke, a working-class girl like Gale's Cosma becomes a housekeeper for a mill owner and similarly involves herself in fighting for workers' rights; the novel was "described by one reviewer as the 'saccharine type of fiction'" (Daims and Grimes 147). In *One of Them: Chapters from a Passionate Autobiography* by Elizabeth Hasanovitz, one of the few immigrant stories published in this period, a Russian Jewish girl leaves behind the prejudice of her native county and comes to New York where she learns dressmaking. There she joins a union, demonstrates against capitalism, loses her health and her job, and becomes disillusioned in the promise of America. Interestingly, Houghton Mifflin published this semiautobiographical work the same year as it published *My Ántonia*. Other characters find selfhood in altruistic activities like war work, a scenario satirized in British writer E. M. Delafield's 1918 novel *The War Workers*. Delafield presents the supposedly selfless endeavors of war workers as merely "an opportunity to inflate their egos" (Daims and Grimes 182). Other characters of the period seek an alternative identity by taking up careers in theater, seeking solace in bohemian communities like Greenwich Village, or becoming movie stars.

*Ántonia* follows none of these popular, often stereotyped, paths. She does not choose a career over wifehood, does not delve into social causes to give her life meaning, does not seek an alternative self. Only a few novels of the day would seem to offer

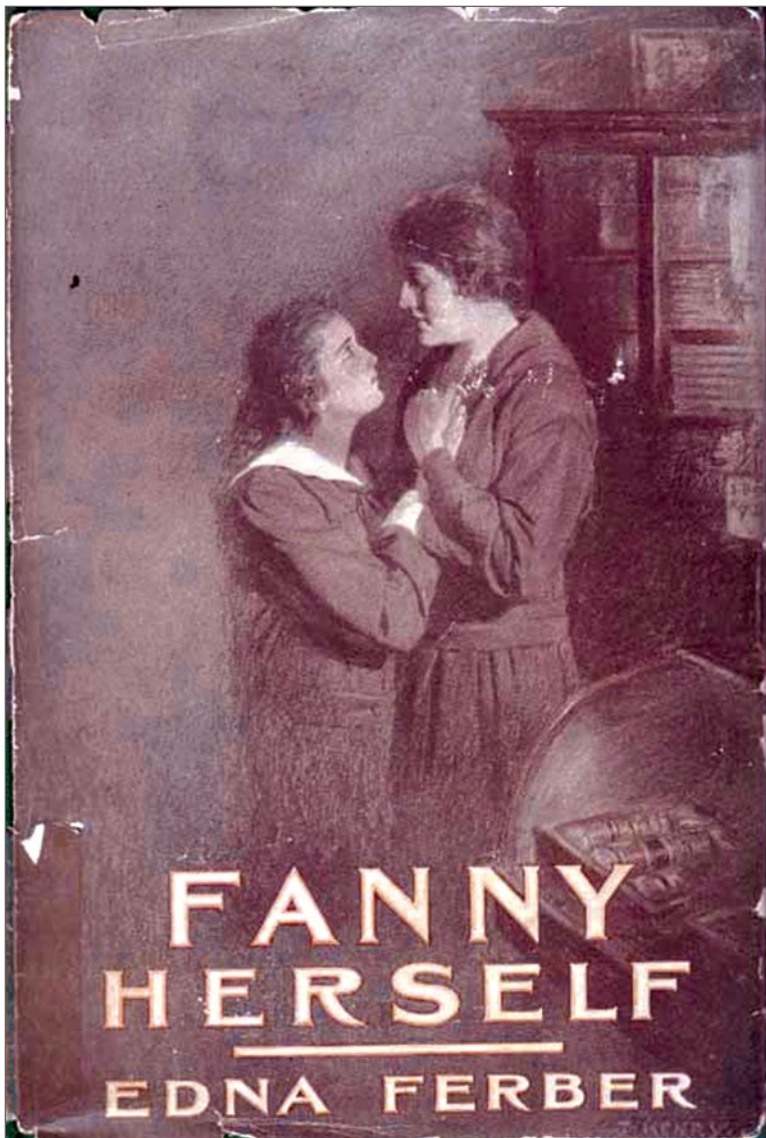
a comparably self-aware woman. When Grace Livingston Hill, in *The Enchanted Barn* (1918), introduces her heroine Shirley Hollister, she presents a realistic young woman who accepts who she is and her place in society:

She was in the world of plenty far beyond her means, and there was no place for such as she. . . . There were no rich old uncles to leave them a fortune; she was not bright and gifted to invent some wonderful toy or write a book or paint a picture that would bring the fortune; and no one would ever come her way with a fortune to marry her. Those things happened only in story-books, and she was not a story-book girl; she was just a practical, every-day, hard-working girl. . . . (11-12)

Hill writes that Shirley's face, like *Ántonia's*, "left an impression of character and struggle"; it left one with the feeling she was strong (41). Sidney Graham, like Jim Burden, recognizes a depth of character in "this slip of a girl [who] discoursed about hardships as if they were necessities to be accepted pleasantly without a murmur" (77). Shirley resolves to provide for her family and rents the Grahams' barn to be her family's home after they are evicted from a city apartment. With Graham's help, she makes the barn into a comfortable home for her siblings and aged mother and resolves not to let "her heart stray out after any impossible society man." She had, after all, "her work in the world, and to it she meant to stick" (176). At this point, Shirley could rival *Ántonia*. She is devoted to family, knows the work she must do, and does that work without regret or resentment. But then, this story, like so many others of the time, lapses into adventure and romance. Overhearing at her office a plot by two men to defraud the Grahams in their business, Shirley tells Sidney Graham, and the plot is thwarted but only after Shirley is kidnapped and subsequently saved in the nick of time by Sidney and the law: "She felt as if she were living a real fairy tale, and would not ever be able to get back to common every-day life again" (295). Indeed, neither Shirley nor her creator could escape the romantic fantasy. Hill, at the last minute, compromises a promising female character and makes her story difficult to take seriously. Shirley Hollister thus cannot reach the status of *Ántonia*. A literary icon she is not, for her creator relegates a potentially strong figure to a romantic heroine in distress.

Hill, like Mary Roberts Rinehart, was a prolific and popular writer. Her biographer, Robert Munce (also her grandson), quotes James M. Neville's retrospective interview of Hill in the Philadelphia *Sunday Bulletin*, which concluded that critics overlooked Hill's works "because of her frankly escapist stories and unvarying happy endings" (Munce 169). Unlike Cather, she consistently made the bestseller list, and just before her death in 1947 (also the year of Cather's death), even Zane Grey, Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Dickens trailed Hill in reprint popularity





(169). Neville's interview (quoted by Munce) mentions "her belief that women writers can dominate the best-seller lists because 'women have more time to write than men do . . . many women writers, of course, are not under pressure of having to earn a living'" (172). Cather's goal was not to make the bestseller list, and she would have chafed at Hill's assumption that earning a living from writing was not a major issue for women writers. If this latter claim were to serve as an excuse for popular women writers to continue compromising their art by using expected fairy-tale endings, then Cather could not and would not have played along. Cather's *Ántonia* rises above that horde of characters and, in so doing remains a lasting figure in American literature while Cossy, Perdita, Shirley, Kitty, and others have faded.

One would have hope, then, for a novel whose title alone might set it alongside *Ántonia*'s story—*A Daughter of the Land* by Gene Stratton-Porter and number nine on the bestseller list of 1918. Kate Bates, the protagonist, is the strong-willed, defiant daughter of a dominating and abusive farm father who rules his wife and family of sixteen children with an iron hand

and a horsewhip, and denies his daughter what he guarantees each of his sons—two hundred acres of good Indiana soil. Kate, though, wants her fair share since she has done work on the farm comparable to that of her brothers, and she wants to get an education and become a teacher. Indeed, such a girl appealed to women readers of the day. She would agitate for the rights that many readers felt had long been denied to them. *A Daughter of the Land* was Stratton-Porter's first foray into realistic writing. Her readers were accustomed to novels of home and farm life that oozed with nostalgic accounts of simple goodness, warmth, neighborliness, and kindness (Richards 121). Now, in 1918, emerged a gritty story of a capable woman, deserving of equal status to men and unwilling to drudge all her life as her submissive mother had. William Lyon Phelps, Yale professor and important literary critic, praised the novel as an "admirable story, with a real plot and real characters" (301). An anonymous reviewer for *The Outlook* wrote that the book had "more reality" and "less exuberant sentiment" than had Stratton-Porter's earlier works. If Kate were as believable, real, and unsentimental as *Ántonia*, one might expect a readers' reception similar to that of Cather's novel, and such was the case. *A Daughter of the Land* had lower sales and was less popular than its more cloying predecessors like *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909) and *Laddie* (1913).

But Kate Bates has not become ensconced in American literary history as has *Ántonia*. Why not? While *A Daughter of the Land* alters the formula of Stratton-Porter's earlier novels, it retains a conventional happy ending and embraces at least three of the six basic plot patterns that make up the pedestal myth of womanhood, as defined by Ellen Hoekstra: Kate twice lives out the boy-meets-girl plot, learns her lesson through suffering, and is reunited with her mother after separation and misunderstanding (45). Like *Ántonia*, who endures after being abandoned by her lover, Kate triumphs over the adversity of a bad first marriage to a scoundrel. However, the *New York Times Book Review* labeled her sudden and unlikely marriage a contrivance of plot in a supposedly realistic novel and called Kate's decision to marry "so inexcusably silly . . . that it would be difficult to keep patience with her at all, were it not for the fact that one feels it to be entirely the result of an arbitrary decree on the part of the author."

Still, Kate, like *Ántonia*, does not succumb to her misfortunes but grows in self-understanding, realizing that her true desire is for the land itself. Her connection to the land, however, is not the spiritual one that *Ántonia* has; it is a purely practical one. When asked what her ambitions are, Kate replies, "To own, and to cultivate, and to bring to the highest state of efficiency at least two hundred acres of land, with convenient and attractive buildings and pedigreed stock, and to mother at least twelve perfect physical



and mental boys and girls” (149). Unlike an earth mother, Kate will not bear twelve children. She has only three by her first husband, and her interest in her twin boys is marginal at best. She is not touched by what was then called the “Great Experience” of motherhood (155), seeing it as entrapment in a rural domestic life wherein “women walk on Sunday, to save the horses” (171). Kate recognizes that only by having money of her own can she have her birthright—the land. She becomes both a teacher and owner of a mill, from which she dismisses her husband as partner. (He is conveniently blown up in a mill accident, just as Kate’s father is conveniently killed when he tries to burn his land deeds to keep them out of his daughter’s hands.)

Herein lies the point of departure between Stratton-Porter’s work and Cather’s. Stratton-Porter’s protagonist is aggressive, dissatisfied with her “assigned” role as nurturer and mother, and ambitious only for herself and women like her. Like *Ántonia*, she is a survivor, but she is out to defeat the male hegemony: “Kate threw herself into the dream of her heart with all the zest of her being. Always she had loved and wanted land. Now she had it. She knew how to handle it. She could make it pay as well as any Bates man, for she had man strength” (253). In some ways, Kate is more Alexandra Bergson than *Ántonia* Shimerda. Like Alexandra, she sacrifices human relationships for connection with the land. Kate becomes estranged from her daughter Polly and is reconciled to her only shortly before Polly dies in childbirth. If she were following Cather’s lead at this point, Stratton-Porter might be expected to marry Kate to her best friend without sacrificing her independence. This she does. The novel’s end, though, smacks far more of sentimentality and potboiler fiction than does either *O Pioneers!* or *My Ántonia*. Why does Kate Bates not endure in the American canon alongside *Ántonia*? The answer lies in the degree of believability of her story. Kate stands with *Ántonia* as a strong and resilient character, but her journey to self-actualization is so manipulated by her creator that it lacks verisimilitude, and she does not endure as “real.” *Ántonia* does.

By standing apart from the fantasy of being a woman, *Ántonia* provides an alternative story that is real yet celebratory. Cather emphasizes selfhood—knowing fully and accepting one’s self with all one’s strengths and vulnerabilities—more than womanhood. Sally Peltier Harvey endorses this idea: “*My Ántonia* differs markedly from these earlier ‘success stories’ [*O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark*]. Here Cather seems far more cautious about associating material success with self-fulfillment” (52). *Ántonia* does not succumb to social forces, fads, or romantic expectations that would redefine her. She remains true to who she is and was born to be: “I know what I’ve got to do,” she remarks (312).

She knows what she must do after her father dies. She knows

# The APPLE WOMAN of the KLICKITAT

ANNA VAN RENSSELAER MORRIS

that she must work rather than go to school, no matter how much she longs to learn: She tells Jim, “I ain’t got time to learn. I can work like mans now. . . . I help make this land one good farm” (118). Her stoic endurance is not feigned. No contrivance of plot removes this burden from her, and she accepts her lot with forbearance and understanding, though with some tears. *Ántonia* is fully human; she knows loss. But her sacrifice for family is not like that made by heroines of sentimental fiction who bask in self-approving joy or believe their burden to be a test of their faith. Grandfather Burden knows the truth of *Ántonia*’s commitment and predicts that someday “she will help some fellow get ahead in the world” (121). *Ántonia* is insightful enough to know the reality of her condition and her place: “Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us,” she remarks to Jim (135). Cather does not put tears in *Ántonia*’s eyes when she says this, nor does *Ántonia* cling to Jim’s sleeve or appeal to God’s mercy. Cather presents a girl, not yet out of her teens, who needs no social cause to embrace, no adventure to pursue, no desire to become an urban success. She knows who she is and embraces that self. She makes conscious choices about her life that allow her “more



control over her own destiny than one might think possible in turn-of-the-century Nebraska” (Harvey 52–53). In making those choices, however, she never abandons who she is: “I’m a country girl” (301). Such an assertion is not a statement of inferiority but one of full self-awareness.

When *Ántonia* moves to town and becomes a hired girl, she does not disavow that identity even though her manner of dress changes and she wants to have her “fling” (202). Her rationale for her actions is in keeping with her clear-sighted comprehension of the way of the world: “A girl like me has got to take her good times when she can” (201). “A girl like me” is the key phrase when one argues for *Ántonia* as a realistic, not romanticized, figure. Her self-knowledge is better than Jim’s imagination of her. She is what she seems outwardly—strong and committed, not imitative of others, loving of “children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth” (174). She likes to feed people, help the less fortunate, and pamper youngsters. These characteristics, which Cather attributes to both Mrs. Harling and to *Ántonia*, make her neither a saint nor a simpering heroine of popular fiction. Her “relish of life” as it is (174) with all the accompanying happiness and troubles never diminishes.

When Jim rediscovers his *Ántonia* after many years, he finds her “battered but not diminished” (321–22). He learns from Mrs. Steavens that *Ántonia* bore her disgrace with calm, was “quiet and steady,” and industrious (306). When he meets her by her wheat shocks, Jim sees more than an archetypal earth mother. He sees “a new kind of strength in the gravity of her face” (311) and an understanding of life uncommon in one so young. When she tells him, “I want to live and die here” (312), she is not making a concession to failure but is confirming what she had said years earlier—“I’m a country girl.” He concludes that *Ántonia*’s was the “realest face” he had ever known (314). Cather does not compromise her female protagonist to becoming a damsel in distress or a woman separating from and denying her roots in order to become a New Woman. Instead, Cather gives us a true story of a fully realized woman.

June Underwood, in her 1985 article “Western Women and True Womanhood: Culture and Symbol in History and Literature,” concludes that “while [*Ántonia*] is powerful, she is perhaps scarcely human. . . . We know nothing of the quotidian of her existence, only her place as Mother of the Divide. Magnificent she may be—fully human, not quite” (98). On the contrary, her story is, if anything, the story of the quotidian existence of a believable character. James Miller in his 1958 essay also gets it wrong. In stating that the novel is not about a *real* *Ántonia* but about a “personal and poignant symbol,” he tries to place *Ántonia* solely in a mythic or archetypal role (477). But her character is more than that. It is a departure from

the norm, from literary counterparts who were trying to become self-aware. *Ántonia* is self-aware. Cather did not need to follow a traditional plot to create a believable portrait of an uncommon woman. *Ántonia* is, indeed, an unconventional figure, unlike what other novelists of the day offered: “She never becomes an heiress, she uncovers no spy plot for the government, she never dreams of a life of a Red Cross nurse, and she is no adventuress” (C.L.H. 82). In *Ántonia*, Cather’s purpose is accomplished. *Ántonia* is what Cather told Elizabeth Sergeant she wanted her to be, as Sergeant related in her memoir of Cather: “a rare object . . . which one may examine from all sides” (139). *Ántonia* is simply who she is—a woman, singular, believable, and real.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, works profiling women in Great Plains settings such as Abbie Deal in Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A Lantern in Her Hand* (1928), Mari Sandoz’s *Miss Morissa* (1955), Judith Gare in Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925), and Beret in O. E. Rølvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* (1927).

2. *The Close-Up* (1918) tells the story of a Kate Lawford, a stenographer, who joins a business venture with her boss, a young attorney who has established his own film studio in California. Expecting to marry her boyfriend, Kate reconsiders and heads west. She becomes the studio’s office manager and its biggest star. Turnbull, however, bows to the selling power of romance as Kate gives up her film career to marry her childhood sweetheart and run a ranch. While the novel was praised for its revelation of the new western myth of women’s migration and its exposure of real life in Hollywood, it was, as one critic stated, also a “red-blooded romance” (“Miss Turnbull’s Book” 940).

3. *The Toll of the Road* (1918) depicts another restless young heroine, Gertrude Hall, a schoolteacher who, at age twenty, happens to meet a theater producer who tempts her by offering her the lead in a play. She declines, but after her fiancé forbids her to accept the part, her independent streak propels her to accept. After a year on the road with the company, she must choose between “the sweet certainties of home and motherhood and the stage and the open road” (Review of *The Toll of the Road* 215). She chooses the latter. As excerpted in *Book Review Digest*, reviewers varied widely in their reaction to Hill’s story. *The Independent* found it “true to life” while *Literary Digest* deemed it “unconvincing, superficial, and unsatisfactory” (Review of *The Toll of the Road* 215–16).

4. With *A Daughter of Jehu* (1918) Richards offers the story of a young girl’s return to her native village after the death of her mother with whom she has been living abroad. Kitty Ross finds her family fortune depleted but hopes to remain in her childhood home as an independent woman. Refusing kindly offers of help from the townspeople and resisting their efforts to find her a suitable husband, Kitty buys a horse, sets herself up in business as a cab driver, and earns a living by running



the livery. Richards makes only ancillary the plot of Kitty's love for her childhood sweetheart, who is working in China but remains true to her. With the expected plot contrivance of popular romance, he returns and carries Kitty off to a secure life in marriage. The emphasis on woman's independence devolves into a conventional happy ending. Anna Van Rensselaer Morris in 1918 published *The Apple Woman of the Klickitat*, another popular attempt to craft a New Woman story. Here a young New Yorker uses her savings to buy land in Washington with the intention of growing apples. She becomes a successful businesswoman, but a shallow love story runs throughout her adventures, keeping the novel true to its type. By 1918, Jennette Lee in her stories had already established a new role for women in the character of Millicent Newberry, detective. In *The Green Jacket* the dowdy little gray-haired woman leaves her employer to set up her own detective agency. Appearing uninterested in details—often knitting while on a case—Newberry solves a two-year-old case that had baffled police. Not only her career choice but also her social principles place her among her activist sisters.

5. Barmby's *Betty Marchand* (1918), a traditional *Bildungsroman*, traces a girl's development, taking her from her native London to New York where she rises in business. The protagonist many times receives offers of marriage but rejects them, resolved to live her own life, though she remains in love with her first employer, a married man. By age thirty-five, Betty has acted on her maternal instincts and is raising an adopted daughter when her former employer returns, now available. Barmby assures her readers that their marriage will be all the better because they have not married in the heat of passion but with the sensibility of mature adults. In *Many Mansions* (1918), MacConnell's country girl Perdita goes to New York and finds accommodations in a seedy boarding house, but after the typical start as a clerk, she begins her own business as a home decorator. Working for wealthy clients, Perdita comes to recognize the graciousness that life can offer and marries happily.

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# Kitty Hansen's Story and the Cather Family

Twyla M. Hansen

I am a firm believer in the power of stories, and that our stories should be written down. A story in my family is that my husband's grandmother—"Kitty" Hansen—had worked for Willa Cather's family in Red Cloud, Nebraska, in the 1920s and 30s. From this story, a photograph of the young Kitty wearing a plumed hat, and my creative impulses, I wrote a short poem about Kitty, which I titled "My Husband's Grandmother Worked for Willa Cather."

I'm not certain how I first learned that Kitty had worked for the Cathers, since my husband's father Charles seldom talked about his childhood. Most likely I heard this family legend directly from Kitty herself: Catherine Murphy Hansen (1880–1977). Our first vacation trip in the early 1970s as a young family was to Gunnison, Colorado, where Kitty lived with her son, my husband's Uncle Clayton, and his family.

When I met her, Kitty ("Grandma" to the family) was a small-framed, white-haired woman in her early 90s, whose deep, heavy Irish voice scared our four-year old son. I recall being smitten with her storytelling, even though at times I could barely understand her. By then her eyesight was poor, but she managed to walk through town every day on her way to the rectory to cook for the Catholic priests. Motorists looked out for Grandma when she crossed the streets and highways of Gunnison.

When I became interested in writing in the early 1980s, I had my own family's stories to tell, including those my father told of his parents who had immigrated from Denmark in the late 1800s and their small farm in northeast Nebraska where I grew up. My grandparents' first three children died at the end of the 19th century. Two were only a month old, but the oldest lived to age four. My father was the youngest of their next three children who lived. When he asked his mother about a photograph on the wall of a young boy, it

disappeared overnight and she never spoke of it. Over the years, I have so often thought about my grandmother, grieving in this strange land called Nebraska.

The story of Kitty Hansen and her connection to Willa Cather and Red Cloud was a source of family pride. It was a useful fact to bring up in conversation, especially after I read *My Ántonia* at the University of Nebraska in an undergraduate Plains literature class taught by Dr. Paul Olson in the late 1970s, when he encouraged me to write my family stories. But all I knew then was that Kitty was born in Ireland, came to New York City as an adolescent to live with relatives, and, after some time, took the train to Red Cloud, married farmer-carpenter Henry Hansen, and had children. Henry died in 1920 at the age of 31, leaving Kitty on her own to raise their young family. I had not dug deeper then, but I could imagine how Kitty must have suffered.

Kitty and Henry Hansen had three sons: Clayton, Charles, and Russell. In the 1980s, after Russell, Kitty, and Charles had passed away, Clayton returned to Red Cloud for a high school reunion. He invited my husband and me, along with his children, on a family roots tour. We visited Willa Cather's family home, the Hansen homestead east of town, and the country cemetery where Henry was buried.

The homestead site was accessible only through a field and the small farmhouse was in disrepair, but this was where had Kitty lived with the Hansen family and where their children were born.

At the Martin Cemetery, we learned—to our great surprise—that there was also a daughter, Frances Elizabeth (1920–1921), who was born just a few weeks after her father died and lived only nine months. Charles had not mentioned having a baby sister to my husband, and apparently Kitty and Clayton spoke of her very little. But unlike my grandmother, Kitty had no time to grieve; she had to go to work.

In March, 2018, during the celebration of the 100th anniversary of *My Ántonia*, I was invited to give a reading at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud as part of an Audubon Crane Festival tour. At the luncheon after a walking tour of Cather historical sites, I read a few poems for the group, including "My Husband's Grandmother Worked for Willa Cather." Afterward, Andrew Jewell, editor of the *Willa Cather Archive* at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, announced he wanted to comment on something I had said during my reading. To my great surprise, he said that Kitty Hansen was mentioned in Cather's letters but they had no information on her and he would be following up with me. Thanks to Dr. Jewell, there is now a lovely annotation and photo dignifying Kitty Hansen's life in the *Complete Letters of Willa Cather* at the *Cather Archive*.



## My Husband's Grandmother Worked for Willa Cather

That was the legend, a string  
of stories passed down while she still lived:  
sailed alone at age twelve from Ireland,  
lived with sisters in New York until they quarreled,  
boarded a train for Nebraska, then,

alighted in her elegant threads  
and plumed hat at Red Cloud, all 4'10"  
of her oozing sophistication, the carpenter-farmer  
falling for her at first sight. Copper-haired  
Kitty and hammer-man Henry, marrying.

And this is where the tablet goes fuzzy,  
the classic immigrant tale turns cryptic:  
devout Catholic, four children in four years,  
he dies. Apparently she does what she can:  
cook, wash, scrub, dust, haul ash.

I met her as the white-haired matriarch,  
her brogue thick and intact, her green eyes afire.  
She worked for the Cathers; this much is true.  
Only on that first day it seems when told  
she must remove her plate from the dining room,

Kitty—God I love it!—turned on her heels,  
strode through the swinging kitchen door  
where lunch simmered on the stove, became  
the servant girl who walked from that story  
clean out the back door.

Twyla M. Hansen



Catherine Murphy Hansen, 1904



After learning that day about Frances and more about Kitty's life in Red Cloud, I was anxious to ask Clayton about Kitty having worked for the Cathers, the story I had known about for years. When we were about to leave the cemetery, I asked Clayton, "I heard that Grandma worked for Willa Cather's family?" To my great surprise, his immediate reply was, "Well, yes, but only for one day."

Right then, I'm pretty sure a look of crushing disappointment crossed my face. Only *one* day? He went on to say that on her first day at the Cather home, when Kitty was readying things for the noon meal she was asked, "What's that?" as a finger pointed to her extra plate on the dining room table. She was promptly told to remove it. Apparently, it was not proper in the Cather home for the hired help to eat with the family. Kitty, however, did not like this sort of unequal treatment, and her Irish got the better of her. She quit working for the Cathers after just one day, even though it was not in her family's best interest during this time of hardship.

While it is unlikely that Willa Cather was present on the day Kitty worked for the Cather family, we know that Willa was aware of Kitty's circumstances and admired her. It seems likely that Willa knew of Kitty through her regular visits to Red Cloud and frequent correspondence with family and friends. In a July 25, 1929, letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood, Cather, writing from her home on Grand Manan, asked, "Will you please send me . . . a box or can of that excellent furniture wax that Kitty Hansen uses?" (*Complete Letters* no. 0975). A few years later, on September 5, 1934, Cather wrote to her sister Elsie, who was now responsible for maintaining the family home in Red Cloud, "Give Kitty all the work you can, she needs the money and the more you save yourself the better pleased we will

all be" (no. 1856). Such comments reflect a different notion of domestic help than the one Cather wrote about in *My Ántonia*, with its hired girls, often still teenagers who enjoyed music and dancing. Cather admired their spirit, work ethic, and potential, but she also admired Kitty Hansen, no doubt for her dedication to caring for her young family, her endurance in the face of

suffering, and her skill; perhaps she also admired Kitty's spirit and strong will. Kitty was likely well-known in the Red Cloud area and worked for many families as much as she was able.

Kitty and her young family lived in Red Cloud during the difficult economic times of the Great Depression and the severe drought of the Dust Bowl years. From a 1975 newspaper interview when Kitty was nearly 95, we learned that Kitty moved her family into town after the farm was sold. *Gunnison Country Times* reporter Joanne Williams quoted Kitty in an interview: "It was during the Depression, of course, and we lost about everything. The farm sold, but we didn't get much

at that time." Williams added, "Her husband had been ill two years before his death, and she cared for a son [Charles] who was in and out of the hospital from the time he was four months old until he was eight. Earning a living was primary." In 1925, when Charles was eight years old, his leg was amputated in an Omaha hospital because of disease. The Omaha Rotary Club learned of the family's plight and voted to pay for a new artificial leg (Lamb, September 6, 2018).

Kitty's oldest son Clayton recalled to his daughter Catharine Lamb "wonderful memories" of growing up with his brothers on the Hansen farm outside of Red Cloud, swimming in the creek, playing with their dog, and spending time at their uncle's farm near Inavale, Nebraska. After the family moved into



Kitty Hansen, 1912 (top); Henry and Kitty Hansen, 1913.



town, Kitty took in people's clothing to wash and iron, and did domestic work. While in school, Clayton worked at the theater running the projector to earn money, and the family enjoyed going to the movies. Later in his life, Clayton remembered having only tea and toast for breakfast during those lean years. Besides the leg amputation, there were other childhood sicknesses, accidents, and surgeries. But Kitty was too proud to let anyone know about the struggles she was going through (Lamb, August 19, 2018).



Kitty Hansen and her sons Russell, Clayton, and Charles.

During the 1920s and 30s, my father was a bachelor who farmed the home place after his father died. He often told how his mother put up tea towels in the open windows to try to keep out the dust. Swarms of grasshoppers ate up the garden, even the onions clear down to the root, and the continuous days of searing heat and drought killed young corn plants in the field, turning them white overnight. The family survived by trading cream, eggs and livestock. I have used many of these stories in my poems and essays (see my poem on the next page).

Neither Kitty nor my grandmother dwelled on those hard years. I admire Kitty for standing up to indignity, especially after she had suffered so much, just as I admire my grandmother for not giving up in the face of grief.

Willa Cather knew firsthand of immigrant families who lived in the Red Cloud area and their stories when she was growing up. At the age of nine, she came to Nebraska from Virginia with her family. In *My Ántonia*, Cather drew on the life of Anna Sadilek Pavelka to create her character Ántonia Shimerda, a young Bohemian immigrant who traveled with her family to Nebraska during the westward expansion of the 19th century. My grandmother, born in Denmark, immigrated to the United States and Nebraska as a teenage bride in 1888 and settled with her husband on a farm purchased from a homesteader. Kitty Hansen, born in Ireland, came alone as a teenager to New York City in 1893 to live with her sisters, traveled to Nebraska to visit a relative in the early 20th century, and married a Danish farmer. All of these women suffered grief, loss, and hardship,

yet managed to survive. To me, their stories set on the plains of Nebraska are remarkably similar and important.

*My Ántonia* is one of America's best-loved novels. Its endurance in the literary canon is a testimony to the power of stories. Stories help us better understand ourselves, others, and the world around us. Stories of early Nebraska life often centered on farmers, businessmen, and leaders in their communities. But the stories of women—in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—provide us with

a sense of the fabric and heart of those communities. It is a great honor for me to pass along stories of the strong immigrant women in my family. Their legacies will live on, as can those of any family, through stories that are written down.

— ~ —

*This essay is dedicated to the memory of my husband, Thomas Murphy Hansen, son of Charles Hansen, 1948–2018. Many thanks to Catharine T. Lamb, daughter of Clayton Hansen, for her contributions. Both Tom and Cathy delighted in sharing memories of their grandmother, Kitty Hansen.*

Thanks to Twyla Hansen and Catherine T. Lamb for the family photographs accompanying this essay.

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## Full Moon, Early September

—for grandmother Anna Christina Pedersen Paulsen

A plump moon rises due east above a landscape laden  
with the heat of late summer.

Everywhere I travel this evening  
it pops out like a superball  
through trees, buildings, houses,  
becomes an orange sponge between the pavement  
and the stars.

Going home, I hum along air-conditioned,  
contemplating that moon and how often  
it must have risen before on nights like this,  
when there was nothing anyone could do  
but hope for a break.

How surely all the women who came before me  
saw it too, like my father's mother, rising  
damp from a sleepless sheet to wipe the fevers  
of her babies, how there was nothing back then  
the doctor could do and so she lost them,  
all three of them one at a time,  
her new family in a new country.  
How she might have wandered outside then  
to see this moon over the prairie on a night  
when the heat rises up to close in on your throat,  
only the wide-open dark and dirt roads going nowhere,  
even years later with three more living children,  
she still couldn't speak of it.

And so it must be that I now must tell it,  
flying low and fast against my petty inconveniences,  
my life but a purple breeze.

By the time I came along  
farm life was easier, yet mother's day  
was filled with chores—milking, egg-gathering,  
gardening, fully three square meals.  
She chopped chicken heads, baked bread,  
put up for days in our sweltering kitchen  
the steaming jars of food we would eat all winter.  
Surely there was a sleep-still night  
when she looked out a window above the clabber  
of crickets to see a moon rising over the alfalfa field,  
the magic of its fullness making her forget,  
if only for a moment, the humidity and her sore feet,  
how she must have had hopes even then  
for her young daughter.

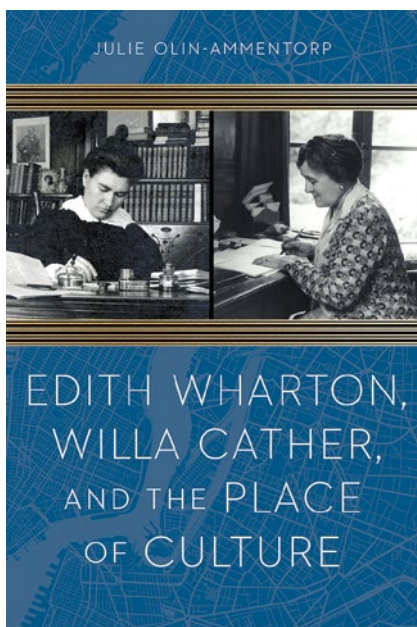
And so I arrive at my city home  
with its paved lane and its ultra-appliances,  
its garden with nothing to do but look beautiful.  
And tonight as the moon washes through the locust tree,  
making wavy patterns across my writing table,  
I know now that path,  
know the long road leading home,  
the freedom of the moonlight entering this life,  
this room of my own.

Twyla M. Hansen



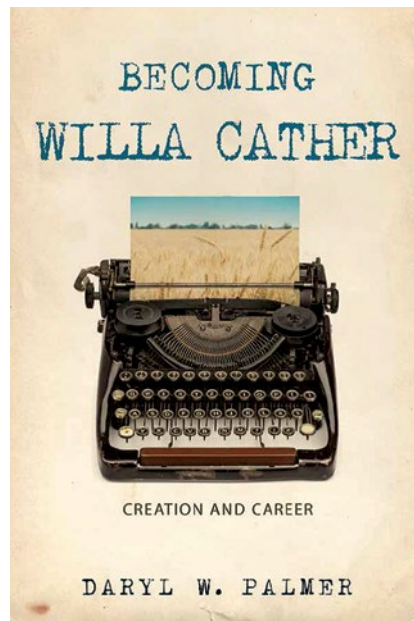
# New Titles for the Cather Bookshelf

The National Willa Cather Center is pleased to recognize the recent publication of three new books on Cather by accomplished scholars who have long been active in the work of the Center: Julie Olin-Ammentorp, Daryl W. Palmer, and Janis P. Stout. Our readers will recall their previous work published in this journal as well as their presentations at Cather seminars and conferences; others will discover in these works shining examples of careful analysis, imaginative insight, and impeccable scholarship. These books are available from the National Willa Cather Center, online at [www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org) or at the Center's shop in Red Cloud, Nebraska. When you purchase from the Cather Center, you directly support our mission.



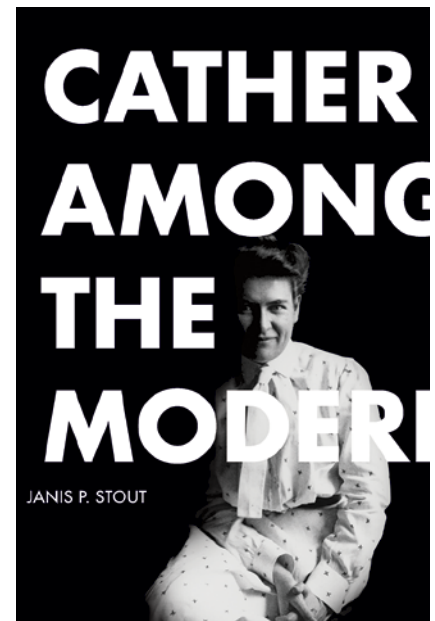
University of Nebraska Press

In *Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and the Place of Culture*, Julie Olin-Ammentorp moves beyond common notions of differences between Cather and Wharton to discover striking and important intersections. The first comparative study of these authors in thirty years, this book combines biographical, historical, and literary analyses in a provocative new reading of two of America's most enduring novelists.



University of Nevada Press

Daryl W. Palmer's *Becoming Willa Cather: Creation and Career*, a new look at Cather's evolution as a writer, focuses on Cather's experiences in and relationship with Nebraska. Using original archival research and giving special attention to Cather's early short stories, Palmer demonstrates that Nebraska served as a laboratory for her future work, a site for embracing experimentation in life and art.



University of Alabama Press

In *Cather Among the Moderns*, Janis P. Stout brings new vigor and careful analysis to her study of Cather as a visionary practitioner of literary modernism. Debunking characterizations of Cather as a regionalist or a social realist, Stout presents Cather as fully engaged with commonly recognized concerns of modernism: fractured or ambiguous identity, shifting gender roles, the devastation of World War I, and strains in race relations.



# Angela Conrad (1966–2019)

There were two contradictory impulses warring in my head as I tried to compose my thoughts about Angela. One compelled me to write a glowing tribute to the life and work of the person most of us knew as a friend and scholar. The other was to rail against the arbitrary nature of a world that would wrest a devoted and loving mother and wife from her family. For a moment every day in the weeks following her passing in March 2019, I gave in to the anger and the incredulity that accompanied the loss of Angela from our world. But I spend more time remembering her remarkable talents, her kindness, and her wickedly dry and spontaneous sense of humor.

I met Angela in 2013, during the 14th International Cather Seminar in Flagstaff, Arizona. We sat next to each other on the bus trip to Walnut Canyon—a ride I remember fondly as we seemed to have known each other forever: we talked about literature, our families, our professional experiences, our educational philosophies. She shared with me that she had been diagnosed with cancer a couple of years earlier—a shocking revelation that seemed incongruous with her incredible vitality and energy. The fact that she was battling this terrifying disease somehow contributed so very little to my understanding of the person she was.

It became clear on that trip that Angela was a courageous warrior, professionally and personally, and what I came to know of her after that day only reinforced my initial impression. Angela spoke of her husband, Roberto Osti, in a way that suggested a profound respect for the person he was and is, and a bracing, deep-seated sorrow for the requirement

of fate that forced him to be in the awful battle by her side. She spoke of her daughter and her successful dealings with the vicissitudes of female adolescence. She spoke of her son (who is just a few months older than my son) with the scope of wisdom that suggested she had raised a dozen sons.

I was amazed to hear her talk of having been chair of her English department at Bloomfield College as a recently promoted full professor—an experience from which she emerged barely scathed at a time in my career when I was wondering how English departments with memberships of more than two could be managed, much less led. She had taken on challenges that I have watched dozens of other academics back away from and arduously avoid. Though she was not a fan of online instruction (nor of the increasingly dehumanized implications it promised for future educational practices), she chose to lead the team which managed and codified online instruction practices at

Bloomfield College precisely because she wanted a hand in determining that future—and maintaining some level of integrity for it. Likewise, rather than give in to the sometimes debilitating, often humiliating, always excruciating torments of cancer in the eight years that it attacked her body and her spirit, Angela chose to manage it. She and Roberto regrouped at every setback, strategized a new plan with the emergence of every new contingency, and recommitted themselves each time to being good parents, good citizens of the world, and good partners to each other.

While I have tried to articulate the qualities that made Angela such a valuable friend, remarkable colleague/mentor/



Roberto Osti

professor, and fantastic mother and wife, I would be remiss if I failed to mention her professional accomplishments. In addition to essays on Willa Cather published in both *Cather Studies* and the *Willa Cather Review* (when it was still the *Newsletter & Review*), Angela was the author of numerous other scholarly works, including a book on Emily Dickinson, *The Wayward Nun of Amherst: Emily Dickinson and Medieval Mystical Women*. Angela's essay "Emblems of the Soul: Nature and Science in the Imagery of the American Renaissance" appears in *Science, Technology and the Humanities, A New Synthesis* edited by Lisa M. Dolling.

With Merrill Maguire Skaggs, she organized "Willa Cather's New York: An International Colloquium" at Drew University in 1998. In more recent years she was a member of the New Jersey Council for the Arts.

Perhaps most inspiring is that Angela had a transformational influence on so many of her students, which was evident to all of us who saw her interact with them or discuss their potential. No one who knew her will ever forget her. To her husband Roberto, she was always Angie, his soul mate; to her daughter Emilia and son Massimo (Max), an excellent model of strength; to her friends she was brilliant and funny, supportive and kind. I will remember her as a force to be reckoned with, an indefatigable soldier for justice, lovely to her core—and utterly unvanquished.

Kimberly Vanderlaan

**Kimberly Vanderlaan** is associate professor of English at California University of Pennsylvania. She has published essays in *American Literary Realism*, *Western American Literature*, *Journal of American Studies*, the *Willa Cather Review*, and other journals. *Why We Read, Why We Write: An Anthology of Short Fiction*, which she edited, was published in 2015.

## Beverly Jean Cooper (1934–2019)



We at the Willa Cather Foundation and many of our longtime friends were saddened at the news of the passing, on April 16, 2019, of Beverly Jean Cooper in her native Iowa. As a longtime resident of Hastings, Nebraska, Bev was a regular presence at Red Cloud events,

inevitably with her camera in hand (she has many photo credits in this publication in its early years, and a number of her images are held in our archives). Her obituary noted, "Her passion for photography was invested in the other great interest in her life, Nebraska author Willa Cather." Bev is remembered by many for her dedication to Cather's books, her dependable presence at Spring Conferences and International Seminars, her enthusiastic support of Doug and Charlene Hoschouer's restoration of the Cather Second Home, and her weekly column in the *Red Cloud Chief*.

Steven B. Shively



Lucia Woods Lindley and Catherine Cather Lowell are seen in this 1977 photograph by Beverly Jean Cooper. From the Cather Foundation archives.



## Contributors to this Issue

**Donna Devlin** is a PhD student at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln specializing in nineteenth-century American studies and American legal history. She is a graduate fellow of the Center for Great Plains Studies and a James Madison Memorial Fellow. Her dissertation research examines how women worked within the law to address sexual violence on the late nineteenth-century Plains, thus expanding our understanding of the developing legal systems of the West while giving a voice to women forced to reckon with the violence often omitted in the traditional narrative of westward expansionism. Before joining UNL's graduate program, Donna served for eleven years as a social science educator and community college adjunct in north-central Kansas.

**Twyla M. Hansen** served as Nebraska State Poet from 2013 to 2018. Her newest book of poetry, *Rock Tree Bird*, won the 2018 WILLA Literary Award for Poetry from Women Writing the West and the 2018 Nebraska Book Award for Poetry from the Nebraska Center for the Book. Twyla presents poetry readings and creative writing workshops through Humanities Nebraska, and her writing appears in the Academy of American Poets (poets.org), *Poetry Out Loud Anthology*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Organization & Environment*, *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, and many more.

**Richard Giannone** is emeritus professor at Fordham University. His books include *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*; *Flannery O'Connor and the Mystery of Love*; *Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist*; and *Hidden: Reflections on Gay Life, AIDS, and Spiritual Desire*.

**Mary Ruth Ryder** is distinguished professor emerita from South Dakota State University and author of *Willa Cather and Classical Myth*, as well as of numerous articles on Cather in the *Willa Cather Review*, collections of essays on Cather, and a variety of professional journals. Her essay "Growing Pains: The City Behind Cather's Pittsburgh Classroom" is forthcoming in *Cather Studies* 13.

**Harriet Shapiro** is head of exhibitions at the New York Society Library. Recent exhibitions include *Women Get the Vote: A Historic Look at the Nineteenth Amendment*; *The New York World of Willa Cather*; and *Broken Beauty: Ruins of the Ancient World*.

**John Swift** has authored many articles and chapters on Willa Cather and other American writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With Joe Urgo, he edited *Willa Cather and the American Southwest* (2002). His more recent Cather work focuses on the national political context in which her literary voice and aesthetic developed. He recently retired to coastal Maine after thirty-eight years as a faculty member and academic administrator at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

## Willa Cather REVIEW

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The *Willa Cather Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should generally not exceed 5,000 words, although longer essays may be considered; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as email attachments and should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the *MLA Handbook*.

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# UN/TETHERED

Cather on the Cusp of the 1920s  
June 4–6, 2020 • Red Cloud, Nebraska

65th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference | National Willa Cather Center



For Cather and for the nation, the dawn of the 1920s was a tumultuous time, marked by new freedoms and new entanglements. The Great War had ended and women had won the right to vote, but 1919's Red Summer and Palmer Raids signalled lingering social discord. Into this unsettled world, Willa Cather brought out *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, her collection of short stories that marked her departure from Houghton Mifflin and launched her long and successful partnership with a new publisher, Alfred Knopf. In the stories of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, Cather's artists move through a world that is by turns inspiring and enervating.

*Un/Tethered* explores the themes of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and the tensions of this time through broad conference offerings, including:

- keynote lecture by *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross
- Michael Burton's innovative animation installation based on Cather's "A Gold Slipper"
- insightful historical and scholarly panels and lectures
- *Flicker of Flame*, a collection of short plays drawn from *Youth and the Bright Medusa* that explores the notions of fame—its privileges and burdens, its allure and its darkness. Nebraska native Julia Hinson returns with an ensemble of Nebraska writers and actors for this new stage production



Strobridge & Co. Lith. Coney Island beach and boardwalk scenes. Cin'ti ; New York: Strobridge Lith. Co. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.



“There are always dreamers on the frontier.”

— O Pioneers!



Willa Cather Childhood Home



Architect's rendering of boutique hotel  
Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture



Pavelka (Antonia) Farmstead

## Help Us Reach Our Goal

*Our Campaign for the Future* is an integrated effort to restore eight Cather-related historic properties, expand educational outreach, build endowment, and develop visitor amenities in Red Cloud by investing in adaptive reuse of a historic downtown building into a boutique hotel.

To date, we've raised \$4.7 million toward our \$6.5 million goal.  
Please join us as we write our next chapter.

Your pledge is payable over a five-year period and can be satisfied through payments by cash, check, automated bank withdrawal, or credit card. Gifts of securities, charitable IRA rollovers, or planned gifts by bequest are also graciously accepted.

*“Through Willa Cather’s writing, we have a better understanding of one of the most remarkable and compelling periods in American history. The sites and collections that make up the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud are cultural treasures. Your generosity ensures that our children and grandchildren will be able to travel back in time to hear the ‘nimble air,’ and learn from Willa Cather’s example for many generations to come.”*

— Mrs. Laura Bush, Honorary National Chair  
First Lady of the United States (2001–2009)



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