Willa Cather REVIEW

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I envy all the children who this winter will make their first excursion into Wonderland, and I wish I could go with them. But alas! Though I might drink ever so deeply of the mysterious bottle labeled "Drink me," I should not be small enough to enter the little door, and I fear me that I have lost the golden key to it forever.

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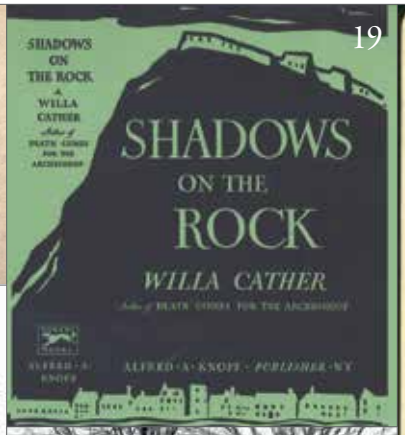

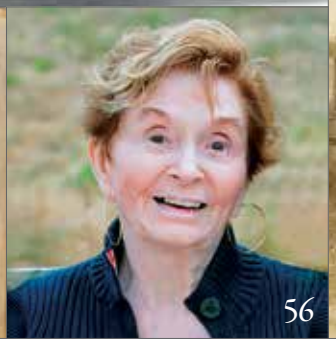

Cather and Children

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On the cover: *Image*: Willa Cather reads to her younger siblings Jack and Elsie Cather, ca. 1897. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center. PHO-4-W689-1129. *Text passage*: "Old Books and New," written under the pseudonym Helen Delay, from the *Home Monthly*, October 1897.

Letter from the Executive Director
Ashley Olson

As I reflect on the year that has flown by, I'm grateful that it has been productive and enriching. The rededication of the restored Willa Cather Childhood Home and the unveiling of a new permanent exhibit about the history of Red Cloud and its intersections with Cather's life and art were heavy lifts and memorable milestones. Many of you joined us for these occasions and supported these projects—thank you! We hope you'll return for a grand celebration in 2025 when the Potter-Wright building rehabilitation into the Hotel Garber is complete. The boutique rooms on the top floor of this historic building quite literally rose from the ashes in a sensitive reconstruction of the 1902 structure that will once again become a cornerstone of downtown Red Cloud.

This seems an opportune time to share some other bright moments that may have been overshadowed by our larger projects. The number of K-12 students who explored sites and landscapes related to Cather's literature on a field trip climbed by a notable sixty-six percent. Our Willa Cather Teacher Institute also welcomed the largest group of educators to date for four days of immersive literature and history study. Writers in the Willa Cather Residency cohort offered rave reviews of the two weeks of solitude in Red Cloud devoted to their writing, and they shared snippets of their work with an appreciative audience.

Historic properties benefited from basic preventive maintenance and substantial construction. A seemingly simple coat of paint at the Cather family's second residence reintroduced what is believed to be an original color palette, while a more complicated rehabilitation of the porch at the J. L. Miner House preserved its ornate architectural details and addressed settling and water infiltration issues. A controlled burn of a large parcel of the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie encouraged a biodiversity of plant species and furthered our conservation goals. Your support also helped us provide funds for property cleanup and the removal of overgrown vegetation that was accelerating deterioration of Cather's birthplace near Gore, Virginia.

Space doesn't permit me to reference dozens of other arts and educational programs that took place here and through partnerships with libraries and cultural organizations across the country. A mission that fuses conservation and preservation initiatives alongside educational and arts programs is a formidable task. Once again, I'm in awe of our collective accomplishments. Sincere thanks to our dedicated board, generous donors, and talented staff.

Letter from the President
Mark Bostock

As I sit down to write this, Christmas is just around the corner. How time flies. When I was young, my older relatives always said that time goes faster as you get older. I didn't believe them then, but now, I find myself saying the same thing. My kids and grandkids look at me like I'm crazy. I guess some things never change.

The Hotel Garber is progressing well. We are hoping to be open for visitors in March, but of course with construction projects of this nature that can always change. We have just hired our second employee, Brandi Hitchler, who will be the sales and event coordinator. We are excited to have her on board. A native of Red Cloud, she has been in the hospitality business for a number of years. Her grandparents and parents were long-time owners of the Palace Lounge.

We are still raising funds for this important project, and please note that naming rights are still available. If you'd like to see your name or a loved one's on something special, there are meaningful opportunities to leave your mark for posterity. Contact Ashley Olson if you're interested or for more information.

I was blessed with an interesting experience while traveling recently. We often hear that it's a small world, and it sure is. I traveled to Portugal this fall with a childhood friend who is also from Red Cloud. We went to a medieval city between Lisbon and Porto, where there was an old church that had been converted into a bookstore. I told my traveling companion that I was going to see if they had any Willa Cather books. He was skeptical. I laugh now as I remember his "no way they'll have a book by Willa Cather in this remote place." I went in the shop and asked if they had anything by Willa Cather. Without hesitation, the proprietor said, "I know we have *My Ántonia*" and quickly produced a copy in Portuguese. My friend was shocked and I was a little surprised myself. I bought the book and have donated it to the Willa Cather Center. If you are ever traveling abroad and see a bookstore, stop in and see if they have any Cather works. Picking one up and donating it back to the Willa Cather Center would be a small but meaningful way to contribute to preserving her legacy.

Now, as winter comes on, I'll wish everyone a nice springtime.

What "Our Young Folks" Need to Know: Cather's 1897 Prize Question Contest in the *National Stockman and Farmer*

Timothy W. Bintrim

As a scholar no longer in my first youth, I appreciate how the *Willa Cather Review* has changed during the thirty-five years of our acquaintance—and how it continues to evolve. Since the *Review* first appeared in my mailbox, it has traded its monochrome garb for ravishing color, altered its name, dropped some departments, and added others. In the Winter 2023 issue, the "Children's Page" debuted and can be found on page 52 of this issue (those "Under Forty" may jump ahead). Yet, like most good ideas, the "Children's Page" is not new. In fact, when Willa Cather came to Pittsburgh in June 1896, she contracted not just to launch the *Home Monthly,* but also to edit the youth department of Axtell, Orr, and Co.'s mainstay publication, the *National Stockman and Farmer* (henceforth the *Stockman*). That little-studied sideline is the subject of this essay.

Her first week on the job, Cather learned that the *Home Monthly* shared staff, offices, and production equipment with the *Stockman.* Having been jack-of-all-trades on the *Hesperian* staff at the University of Nebraska proved useful when she spent at least one late night that July helping the *Stockman*'s foreman cut down the oversized 10 x 14–inch forms to the *Home Monthly*'s smaller, 9 x 12–inch magazine format (*Collected Letters* 0026). Mr. Axtell must have liked the result, for when the firm moved downtown in April 1897, the *Stockman* assumed the *Home Monthly*'s dimensions on its twentieth birthday ("What Others Say of Us").[1]

THE LAST LOAD OF MAIL FROM THE OLD OFFICE.

The Stockman's "old office" at 203 Shady Avenue in East Liberty, 1882–1897.
Axtell, "After Twenty Years."

Founded as a four-page cattle price sheet by Rev. Philip Axtell, by the time Cather arrived, the *Stockman* was managed by Philip's son James Wickliffe Axtell and sons-in-law James Rush and Thomas Orr. The *Stockman* had blossomed into a 24-page weekly with Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Chicago editions and a reputation as one of the best farm papers in America (Axtell 2; Fleming 108). The masthead boasted of "a large corps of editorial assistants distributed through many states" (among them Virginia and Nebraska) reporting agricultural news and commodity prices from each.

Cather told Mariel Gere she had gone to Pittsburgh to prove her mettle outside Lincoln, to impress her friends, and silence her enemies (*Complete Letters* 0028). Launching the *Home Monthly* proved she was game for the big city, but moonlighting for the *Stockman* was a tether back to Red Cloud and Webster County. The paper performed a parallel function for many of its subscribers, serving as a lifeline for families scattered across the country's sparsely settled interior, bringing them news of the larger world and helping relieve privation, isolation, and loneliness, especially during the winters.[2] As a booster publication, the *Stockman* published advertisements and testimonials equating steady work with bumper crops and prosperity, occasionally featuring trophy farms in Nebraska.

At times, however, correspondents broke from the magazine's carefully crafted optimism to admit the pitfalls of weather, mortgages, and taxes. Cather published one such missive, "A Letter from South Dakota" on March 11, 1897. The writer, a girl signing herself Agnes, tells how her family had rented a farm at Odessa [Missouri], "not thinking of hard times," but when the landlords defaulted on a mortgage, the creditors claimed her family's grain: "We had lots of trouble, then afterwards we had a 'trial' and spent all in court." Her family worked their way out of debt on another

This beautiful farm home is owned by Mr. Wm. Stolley, whose address is Grand Island, Neb. He came to Nebraska in 1857 without a dollar. He now owns a valuable farm of 240 acres, which is under a high state of cultivation. He raises forest trees for the market; has a fine fruit orchard, apiary and vineyard, besides grain fields, cattle and horses. A pamphlet, profusely illustrated with similar views and describing the farm lands of Nebraska, will be sent to any address free upon application to

F. S. Eldred, General Passenger Agent C. B. & Q. R. R., Chicago.

A "beautiful farm home" in Grand Island, Nebraska, whose owner "came to Nebraska in 1857 without a dollar." *Stockman*, Nov. 12, 1896.

farm, then moved to Roberts County, South Dakota, "the worst place there ever was. It will do in summer time, but in winter it's awful" (18–19). Counting the remaining weeks until spring, she added, "If we did not get mail every other day, I don't know what we would do." Such exchanges may have hinted to Cather that a vast audience of American readers, still living outside cities and not yet connected by automobiles, could appreciate fiction about the struggles of immigrant farmers—even set in Nebraska.

As I have argued elsewhere, Cather's ten months at the *Stockman* put her before a national audience, albeit anonymously, before her short fiction began appearing regularly in New York and Boston-based magazines ("Gathering by Moonlight").[3] The one-and-a-half folio pages she filled for "Our Young Folks" every Thursday over ten months added up to about 625 column inches of edited material. The formula of "Our Young Folks" was established before her arrival and seems modeled on what was then the flagship of children's publications, the *Youth's Companion* (Cutts xi–xiv). Like the "Household" department it followed, each installment of "Our Young Folks" began with one or two short poems. At least one short story succeeded the poems, sometimes two if the editor did not offer an "Editor's Talk" on a seasonal topic. The remaining space was filled with miscellaneous short subjects, ranging from life advice to contest rules, readers' letters, or brief excerpts from magazines such as *Youth's Companion*, *Golden Days*, *St. Nicholas*, *Dumb Animals*, or *Harper's Round Table*. Before the *Stockman* came to resemble the *Home Monthly*, the pagination of the former remained constant, with "Our Young Folks" appearing on pages 18–19 of each issue (issues were also paginated continuously within each volume). "Our Young Folks" contained no puzzles, but "The Puzzle Box" department immediately followed.

When Cather took the youth editor's chair on August 27, 1896, "Our Young Folks" began using more original material, mirroring the *Home Monthly*'s policy of favoring new writing for each issue. *Home Monthly* had its own children's pages, edited not by Cather but by Mildred Beardslee, a Boston-based journalist who during the same period headed *Home Monthly*'s "Fashion" department, contributed a series on "Whittier's Unpublished Verse," and produced covers for *Vogue* (Taylor). Beardslee's talent was visual, not literary: her fashion plates juxtapose photographs of models' faces on drawn costumes. The poor quality of Beardslee's writing makes it hard to believe that critics for years mistook her for a Cather pseudonym ("Willa Cather at *Home Monthly*"). Cather did occasionally contribute verses or stories to *Home Monthly*'s "With the Young Folks" ("The Strategy of the Were-wolf Dog" and "The Princess Baladina: Her Adventure" are examples), but the editor's voice and bulk of the department's content was penned by Beardslee.

14 THE HOME MONTHLY.

With the Young Folks.

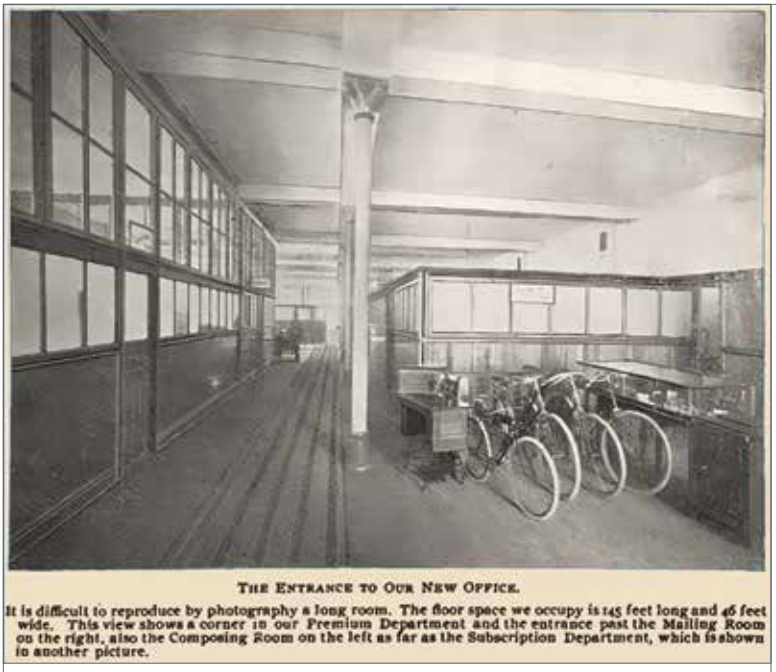
The Real Mother Goose.

Lee Beard Dreadmill.

"Florence."

Frank H. Steel.

"With the Young Folks," the *Home Monthly*'s youth department, was edited by Mildred Beardslee, here signing herself with the near-anagram "Lee Beard Dreadsmill." *Home Monthly,* Jan. 1897, pp. 14–15. Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.



THE ENTRANCE TO OUR NEW OFFICE.

It is difficult to reproduce by photography a long room. The floor space we occupy is 145 feet long and 46 feet wide. This view shows a corner in our Premium Department and the entrance past the Mailing Room on the right, also the Composing Room on the left as far as the Subscription Department, which is shown in another picture.

Pelf from the *Stockman*'s premium case served as contest prizes and incentives for subscription work. Axtell, "After Twenty Years."

Cather may have received a modest stipend for anything she wrote for the *Stockman*, or perhaps not, for she soon initiated short story and letter-writing contests, probably to fill column inches for which she was not well paid. The themes of these three story contests were "An Incident of Summer Vacation"; "A Halloween Story" (fact or fiction); and "Best Story" (open subject, with additional prizes for descriptive letters from children under age twelve). After each contest ended, the winning submissions and runners-up were used to fill several weekly columns. The contests not only enlisted the loyalty of readers, but saved Axtell, Rush & Orr money, gaining them rights to original stories for the cost of the prizes, which typically were inexpensive items from the *Stockman*'s premium case.

Cather's three short story contests deserve further study; however, I wish to focus on her fourth, the Prize Question contest that commenced on New Year's Eve and concluded on February 15, 1897. In this competition, the reader submitting the best set of answers would be awarded "one silver watch, ladies' or gentlemen's as the case may be." Second prize was a Rand McNally *Atlas of the World*. Third prize for a girl would be "one lady's morocco pocket book 4½ x 3½ inches with silver mountings, with the usual compartments for cards, etc.," for a boy, "a handsome penknife of the best material." The neatest manuscript won one of "Miss Alcott's books" ("The Prize Question Contest").

In the easier questions on the list, we see what a highly motivated college graduate thought the young folks should have picked up between the ages of eight and eighteen. In the more difficult questions, we see what farm kids in 1897 could extract from parents, postmasters, or pastors in five weeks, which we, with online access, can now google in five minutes. Beginning on New Year's Eve, 1896, every Thursday for five weeks Cather released a set of ten questions, "chiefly historical" questions that young folks, even those living far from town and college libraries might be able to answer by consulting the Bible (or Herodotus), reference books, parents, and community members. She insisted that young folks wait for the complete set of fifty questions, warning that premature and partial entries, together with manuscripts rolled and tied rather than mailed flat in envelopes, would "be thrown into the wastebasket." "Help and suggestions from parents are legitimate," she added, knowing that in January in the northern hemisphere, farm families read and reread every scrap of mail. In *Adventures in the West: Stories for Young Readers*, Susanne George Bloomfield and Eric Reed attest that "one weekly newspaper . . . was . . . about all that many families at the turn of the century could afford." If families had just one subscription, farm papers like the *Stockman* "that offered something for all ages were the most practical" (xiii).

As you wash up at the pump, sharpen your pencil, and prepare to solve Prize Questions, be forewarned that some questions may have more than one correct answer, and a few are downright flawed—at least according to today's scholarship. Questions about polar exploration, of course, reflect the present of 1897. You may use online resources, but because the style of your answer will be factored in the grade and because Miss Cather would hate it, avoid generative AI. Submissions will be self-graded using Cather's criteria, as detailed following the questions. Today's prizes are nothing so practical as items from the *Stockman*'s premium case but consist of bragging rights at the online forum 5 Bank Street and at scholarly gatherings. So that you may do your best work, there is no time limit. Now show the other kids how well you can do!

The Prize Questions

First set: December 31, 1896

1. What is the Blarney stone, and where is it?
2. What is the Rosetta stone, and who discovered it?
3. How near did Hannibal approach to Rome during the Punic War?
4. In what country does it never rain?
5. What is the nearest fixed star?
6. What great American "went out with the century," that is, died in the very last hour of the eighteenth century?
7. What English general was never defeated?
8. What causes changes of the moon?
9. What is amber?
10. Who was the real Prisoner of Chillon?

Second set: January 7, 1897

11. Who wrote the Koran?
12. What philosopher lived in a tub?
13. What great conqueror was overcome and cruelly put to death by a woman?
14. Who was Zenobia?
15. Where were the two tombs of Napoleon?
16. What boy king of Israel was hidden in the temple six years?
17. Had Julius Caesar a son?
18. Of what great American was it said "He tore the lightning from heaven and the scepter from the hands of tyrants"?
19. Who was the last of the Roman tribunes?
20. What is the exact shape of the earth?

Third set: January 14, 1897

21. What great Roman when exiled from Rome went and sat among the ruins of Carthage?
22. Who invented the science of algebra and what was his nationality?
23. What poet after he was struck by paralysis had himself taken to the Louvre and wept before the Venus de Milo?
24. What part of Shelley's body did not burn when he was cremated?
25. Name Lord Byron's two daughters.
26. What explorer has gone farthest North? Farthest South?
27. What English commander had a wart on his face? What American president?
28. What character in one of Fielding's novels is supposed to be drawn from General Braddock?
29. From what and by whom is the quotation "Love is not love that alters where it alteration finds"?
30. Who killed his best friend while intoxicated at a feast?

Fourth set: January 21, 1897

31. Who was the proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia and from whom did he receive the estate?
32. To what emperor was the Roman Empire sold at auction?
33. Where is the oft-used quotation, "The glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome," found?
34. What were the names of the magicians who opposed Moses before Pharaoh?
35. What American general was known as Mad Anthony?
36. What insect digs a ditch as a trap for its prey?
37. For what practical mechanical invention are we indebted to Leonardo di Vinci?
38. In what famous historical novel is the great Erasmus introduced as a child?
39. Whence is the quotation "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"? The quotation "Love me little, love me long"?
40. What king of England died from overeating?

Final set: January 28, 1897

41. What wicked Roman Empress repented, was converted to Christianity and died at Mount Taurus with her lips upon the cross?
42. What noted French classic was written to amuse and instruct a little Prince and who was the Prince?
43. What Monarch employed an officer to say to him daily "Remember Athens!"?
44. What Eastern Monarch burned himself in his palace rather than be taken by his conqueror?
45. What Roman Emperor murdered his brother who shared the throne with him?
46. Who first introduced coinage into Asia? Into Egypt?
47. What great French philosopher was also a musician? What great French philosopher lived at the Court of Frederick II, of Prussia?
48. What pyramid was built by a woman?
49. What queen said that after death the word "Calais" would be found written on her heart?
50. In the home of what great English scholar did Erasmus write his "Praise of Folly," and of what very noted book was this scholar the author?

The "Correct Answers to Questions," as written by Cather, appeared in the *Stockman*'s March 18, 1897, issue (we have placed the answers on page 8 to help folk of all ages resist peeking).

Cather wrote, "In grading these lists, I simply used the scale of one hundred as perfection and counted each question correctly answered as two, there being in all fifty questions." The cohort of 1897 did well: "We are all more than proud of the exceedingly creditable nature of the answers received. It shows what stuff there is in our young folks. It is really quite remarkable that so many young folks so far away from all library facilities should have answered so many of these questions correctly. Most of the grades ran above 70 percent and very few fell below 50 percent." First prize went to Mr. Roy Casper Stevens of Salem, Indiana, with 97 per cent. Miss Hulda Schwartzwelden of Everett, Pennsylvania, placed a close second with 96½ percent and received a special commendation: "I wish especially to speak of the merit of Miss Schwartzwelden's paper. It was within a small fraction of Mr. Stevens' in the matter of actual correctness and its literary form was uncommonly good. She answered some of the most difficult questions with great clearness and her way of stating the facts was admirable" ("The Awards"). Not for the last time Cather faced the predicament of making fine distinctions between papers of similar merit. Third place went to Miss Delia C. Hayes of Granville, Ohio, scoring 95 per cent. Miss Lottie Moore of New Lexington, Pennsylvania, won the fourth prize for neatest manuscript, a provision that surely saved the editor much trouble scrutinizing dubious handwriting. The names of the four top prize winners were followed by a half-column list of honorable mentions from thirteen states, most from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and West Virginia, but one each from Oregon, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska.

In the fifty Prize Questions, we encounter some of Cather's heroes: Heinrich Heine, Edgar Allan Poe, Julius Caesar, Thomas Lord Fairfax, Lord Byron, and Fridtjof Nansen. The lives and reversals of conquerors dominate, with special focus on the history of Rome (questions 3, 14, 17, 19, 21, 32, 45), Greece (questions 12, 30, 43), and Egypt (questions 2, 4, 34, 46, 48). Astronomy (questions 5, 8, 20) and natural history (questions 4, 9) are given less attention than we might expect. Geographic diversity is evident, with Rome receiving seven mentions, Egypt, the United States, and France five each, and Britain a dozen questions, with glances at ancient Ireland, Ninevah, Israel, and Persia. Two questions treat contributions of the Islamic world in respectful terms. Women, represented in just seven of the fifty questions, are treated ambivalently. Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra, controlled a vast empire, but had it taken by Roman Emperor Aurelian; likewise, Mary Tudor (49) lost Callais to the French. Byron's daughters (25) are worthy of mention only because of their dad. In question 13, the Biblical Jael is represented not as the tent-stake-wielding, godly heroine "extolled above women" that she is the *Book of Judges*, but as an assassin who "[overcame] and cruelly put to death" the "great conqueror" Sisera. An alternate contender for the cruel queen of question 13, the Scythian Tomyris, fares better, beheading her nemesis Cyrus and packing up his head in a bag of blood. The two remaining woman are apocryphal: Queen Nitocris, credited by Manetho's *History of Egypt* with building the third pyramid at Giza, is now thought by Egyptologists to be a legend based on a misreading of a chronology of kings; Faustine, the "wicked Roman Empress" who "died with her lips on the cross," seems to be Cather's conflation of the stories of Faustina the Younger, wife of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, whose enemies said she was unfaithful and poisoned her rivals, and Empress Faustina, who was executed by her husband, Maxentius, after she converted to Christianity under the influence of Saint Catherine. The conflation may point toward a source. We know from her letter to the Rev. James Robert Henry (minister of the Axtells' church

A selection of personages in the Prize Questions and Answers: Top row: Diogenes, Zenobia, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, Heinrich Heine, Percy Shelley, Ada Lovelace, Fridtjof Nansen. Bottom row: William Shakespeare, Alexander the Great, Edgar Allan Poe, Erasmus, John Keats, Mary Tudor, Thomas More.

and prototype of the Cumberland minister in "Paul's Case") that Cather that summer was attempting to read all six volumes of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (*Complete Letters* no. 1996). Gibbon maligns Faustina the Younger with allusions to her infidelities with a gladiator and common soldiers. The other Empress Faustina (of Alexandria) visited Saint Catherine in prison, where appeared angels ministering to Catherine's wounds. These miracles convinced Faustina to convert to Christianity. Refusing her husband's order to sacrifice to pagan idols, she was summarily executed by beheading.

At least six other Prize Questions were flawed. By her own admission, questions 4, 7, 28, and 37 had multiple answers, which must have complicated the grading. Although question 31 asks "from whom did [Thomas Fairfax] receive the estate" of the Northern Neck of Virginia, Cather neglects to answer this portion of the question, which could be either Fairfax's parents (who controlled five-sixths) and his grandmother (who bequeathed the last sixth), or the family's original benefactor, King Charles II. Most surprising of all, question 29 misquotes Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, which should read "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds" (emphasis added). As the volume editors of the Cather Scholarly Edition remind us, she sometimes placed too much faith in her prodigious memory.

At least two readers doubted the accuracy of certain answers and dared question them. Three weeks after the answers were published, on April 8, Cather published a letter from reader Pearl P. Crabill, who asked if the answer to a literary question, number 33, was flawed. Miss Crabill looked for the line "The glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome" in the poem specified, Poe's "To Helen." Not finding the line, she asked for acknowledgement of the error. Cather's response was terse but civil:

> In reply to this letter the Editor would say that Poe wrote two poems with exactly the same title, "To Helen." Miss Crabill must have read only the one which begins, "I saw thee once—once only—years ago." The poem from which the quotation used in the list of prize questions was taken is considered one of the author's most perfect productions, and is quoted in full below.

Cather then reprinted the poem that begins, "Helen, thy beauty is to me" ("Poe's 'To Helen'").

Two weeks later, on April 22, Cather was compelled to provide "An Explanation" of question 6 that had asked "what great American . . . died in the very last hour of the eighteenth century?" Taking "very last hour" literally, several readers had rejected the expected answer, George Washington, who died at 12 p.m. on December 14, 1799. Cather accepted some responsibility for the confusion:

> The trouble seems to be that the question was not stated with sufficient clearness, and that what was intended as figurative was taken as literal . . . but certainly the month of December 1799 was very nearly the last hour of the eighteenth century. George Washington was the only great American who died at any time so near the end of the century and the answer to the question was quite unmistakable. ("An Explanation" 20–21)

Despite the fact that she botched seven (or eight) prize questions out of fifty, Cather could not resist sharing "some of the laughable answers that are always sure to appear in such a contest" ("Correct Answers to Questions," p. 18). The next week, she published "Some Funny Answers," finding readers' anachronisms especially ludicrous. Attempting to answer question 23, "What poet after he was struck by paralysis had himself taken to the Louvre and wept before the Venus de Milo?" one entrant guessed "Aeschylus." Cather pointed out that the Greek tragedian "died more than fifteen centuries before the Louvre was built" (18–19). While making fun of a child's mistake (in print) may seem mean-spirited today, humiliation was in 1897 an approved educational method. Though occasionally tactless, she was, on the whole, well liked by the young folks, routinely going beyond her prescribed duties to help her readers. In the same issue where she mocks "Some Funny Answers," she assures her correspondents that she will be glad to answer "any of their questions at any time" (19). She was particularly helpful at aiding them in locating poems, songs, stories, and declamations that they had once loved and then lost. For example, the March 25 column concludes with three brief responses to readers' inquiries. The first encourages an Ohio boy to "send in your bicycle story, other boys will do the same. Later in the season we will make announcements as to the contest, so you can be getting your story ready now, or planning your day's ride." The second admits she does not know of "The Black Horse and his Rider," but the reader may find the other recitation he is seeking "under the title of 'Lasca' in almost any recitation book." The third suggests the story a Pennsylvania girl has inquired about is titled "Jack, the Fisherman" by Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward ("Answers to Two Letters" 19).

Cather's willingness to be a children's reference librarian was not continued by her replacement editor on June 3, 1897, who in a testy editorial titled "How to Order Songs," struck a much different tone:

> Several of our correspondents have written to us asking where they can procure certain songs. Now the people about the NATIONAL STOCKMAN AND FARMER office are not musical. We have a mandolin in our premium case, but nobody plays it. . . .We do not even whistle, the elevator boy excepted. So you see you can scarcely expect us to be an authority on vocal gems. No, we don't know a song about the Johnstown Flood, nor are we able to say where you can get "The Gypsy Girl and the Dying Cow-Boy." When you go to town ask your book dealers to let you see a list of songs, and if you don't find what you want ask him to order it from some reliable music house and they will find it for you if it is to be had—that is their business. (23)

Contrasted with her replacement, Cather was a kindhearted, if sometimes fallible, youth editor who in a few years would pursue her inclination for teaching. Though she may have overshot the mark with some of the Prize Questions, she did finally test not just how much Our Young Folks knew, but how much they could find out.

Correct Answers to Questions

1. What is the Blarney stone, and where is it?

   The Blarney stone is found in the upper part of the wall of Blarney Castle, County Cork, Ireland. There is an old tradition that whoever kisses it will become eloquent and persuasive in speech.

2. What is the Rosetta stone, and who discovered it?

   A basalt stone containing a decree of Ptolemy V Epiphanes in hieroglyphics, demotic and Greek, which supplied the key for deciphering the inscription on the ancient monuments of Egypt. It was found in 1799 by Boussard, a French officer.

3. How near did Hannibal approach to Rome during the Punic War?

   Near enough to hurl a javelin against the wall of the city.

4. In what country does it never rain?

   In Upper Egypt. (Several other answers to this question were also considered correct.)

5. What is the nearest fixed star?

   Alpha Centauri.

6. What great American "went out with the century," that is, died in the very last hour of the eighteenth century?

   George Washington, who died in the very last hour of the eighteenth century.

7. What English general was never defeated?

   Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. (Several other answers to this question, such as Marlborough, Churchill, etc., were also considered correct.)

8. What causes changes of the moon?

   The changes of the moon depend upon the position of the moon relative to the earth and the sun, for it is only the half of the moon facing the sun that is illuminated by his rays, and the whole of this illuminated portion can only be seen from the earth when the sun, earth and moon are in a straight line (the line of syzygies) and the earth is between the sun and moon.

9. What is amber?

   Amber is a fossilized vegetable resin. It is a brittle, translucent substance of a pale yellow color, and is found on the shore of the Baltic Sea.

10. Who was the real Prisoner of Chillon?

    Francois de Bonnivard.

11. Who wrote the Koran?

    Zaid [sic], the son of Thabit, the amanuensis of Mohammed, is supposed to have written the Koran at the prophet's dictation.

12. What philosopher lived in a tub?

    Diogenes.

13. What great conqueror was overcome and cruelly put to death by a woman?

    Sisera who was killed by Jael, and Cyrus who was beheaded by Tomyris. (Several answers to this question were considered correct.)

14. Who was Zenobia?

    Zenobia was the wife of Odenatur and queen of Palmyra. She was conquered in battle and taken prisoner by the Emperor Aurelian, and afterward taken to Rome.

15. Where were the two tombs of Napoleon?

    Napoleon was first entombed at Longwood, St. Helena, but during the reign of Louis Phillippe his remains were removed by permission of the English government and placed in a sarcophagus under the stately dome of the Hotel des Invalides, Paris.

16. What boy king of Israel was hidden in the temple six years?

    Joash.

17. Had Julius Caesar a son?

    Caesarion, the son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar.

18. Of what great American was it said "He tore the lightning from heaven and the scepter from the hands of tyrants"?

    Benjamin Franklin.

19. Who was the last of the Roman tribunes?

    Niccolo Gabrini Rienzi.

20. What is the exact shape of the earth?

    An oblate spheroid.

21. What great Roman when exiled from Rome went and sat among the ruins of Carthage?

    Caius Marius.

22. Who invented the science of algebra and what was his nationality?

    Mohammed-ben-Musa [sic], an Arabian mathematician of the ninth century.

23. What poet after he was struck by paralysis had himself taken to the Louvre and wept before the Venus de Milo?

    Heinrich Heine.

24. What part of Shelley's body did not burn when he was cremated?

    Shelley's body was burned where it was found. His ashes were brought to Rome, but his heart, which the fire did not consume, was snatched from the fire by Edward Trelawney and given by him to Leigh Hunt, and was carried to England where it was surrendered to Mrs. Shelley. It is said to be still preserved with other sacred relics of the poet and his wife. It is to this incident that Mrs. Shelley refers in her dedication of her edition of her husband's works when she speaks of Trelawney as having "snatched from the fire that heart of hearts."

25. Name Lord Byron's two daughters.

    Augusta Ada and Allegra.

26. What explorer has gone farthest North? Farthest South?

    Dr. Fridzof [sic] Nansen, a Norwegian, has gone farthest north, having attained a latitude of 86° and 14'. The farthest south is James Clark Ross.

27. What English commander had a wart on his face? What American president?

    Oliver Cromwell. Abraham Lincoln.

28. What character in one of Fielding's novels is supposed to be drawn from General Braddock?

    Captain Booth, who appears in Fielding's novel "Amelia." Also Captain Bilkum, from "The Covent Garden Tragedy."

29. From what and by whom is the quotation "Love is not love that alters where it alteration finds"?

    From Shakespeare's sonnet CXVI.

30. Who killed his best friend while intoxicated at a feast?

    Alexander the Great, while intoxicated at a feast killed Clitus, an old officer and his friend, who had once saved his life in battle.

31. Who was the proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia and from whom did he receive the estate?

    Thomas Lord Fairfax was the proprietor of the section of Virginia lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers.

32. To what emperor was the Roman Empire sold at auction?

    The Roman Empire was sold at auction to Didius Julianus, who paid for it 6,250 drachmae.

33. Where is the oft-used quotation, "The glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome," found?

    In Edgar Allen [sic] Poe's verse "To Helen."

34. What were the names of the magicians who opposed Moses before Pharaoh?

    Janner [sic] and Jambres.

35. What American general was known as Mad Anthony?

    Gen. Anthony Wayne.

36. What insect digs a ditch as a trap for its prey?

    The ant-lion.

37. For what practical mechanical invention are we indebted to Leonardo di Vinci?

    The wheelbarrow, camera obscura, rope making machine and many other practical appliances.

38. In what famous historical novel is the great Erasmus introduced as a child?

    Charles Reade's "The Cloister and the Hearth."

39. Whence is the quotation "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"? The quotation "Love me little, love me long"?

    Endymion, Book I, by John Keats. From "The Jew of Malta," by Christopher Marlowe.

40. What king of England died from overeating?

    King John.

41. What wicked Roman Empress repented, was converted to Christianity and died at Mount Taurus with her lips upon the cross?

    Faustine.

42. What noted French classic was written to amuse and instruct a little Prince and who was the Prince?

    The noted French classic "Telemaque," of which Telemachus was hero, was written by Fenelon for the little Duke of Burgundy, the grandson of Louise [sic] XIV.

43. What Monarch employed an officer to say to him daily "Remember Athens!"?

    Darius of Persia.

44. What Eastern Monarch burned himself in his palace rather than be taken by his conqueror?

    Sardanaplus II [sic], or Seracus, made a vigorous defence against Arbaces, the rebel governor of Media, but finding it impossible to defend Nineveh he set fire to his palace and burnt himself with all his treasures, 610 B.C.

45. What Roman Emperor murdered his brother who shared the throne with him?

    Caracalla, who killed his brother Geta.

46. Who first introduced coinage into Asia? Into Egypt?

    Lydians introduced coinage into Asia 700 B.C. Arians [sic], a Persian satrap, into Egypt.

47. What great French philosopher was also a musician? What great French philosopher lived at the Court of Frederick II, of Prussia?

    Rosseau [sic]. Voltaire.

48. What pyramid was built by a woman?

    Queen Nitocris built the third pyramid of the Gizah [sic] group.

49. What queen said that after death the word "Calais" would be found written on her heart?

    Queen Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII.

50. In the home of what great English scholar did Erasmus write his "Praise of Folly," and of what very noted book was this scholar the author?

    Erasmus wrote "Praise of Folly" in the home of Sir Thomas Moore [sic], author of "Utopia."

NOTES

1. With the April 15, 1897, issue, marking the beginning of its twenty-first year, the *Stockman* improved its "mechanical appearance" by adopting a smaller format with additional pages; this change of format coincided with the removal of its offices from 203 Shady Avenue in East Liberty to the Heeran Building on Eighth Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. Under the new format, "Our Young Folks" moved from its customary place on pages 18 and 19 to pages 20 and 21. Shortly thereafter "The Editor's Talk" was replaced with "Our Young People's Calendar," a selection of quotes of the day. For James W. Axtell's discussion of these and other changes, see the illustrated retrospective "After Twenty Years."

2. Farm papers served different purposes in different regions, as represented in "The Sentimentality of William Tavener" as the thrifty Virginia patriarch loses himself in his farm paper while attempting to ignore the approaching domestic storm. Given William's affection for the circus, we may suspect that he was a surreptitious reader of his paper's young folk pages.

3. Cather did publish one short story in a magazine of national circulation before coming to Pittsburgh: "On the Divide" in the January 1896 *Overland Monthly*. Biographer James Woodress calls the *Overland Monthly* "a magazine of national prominence" (*Willa Cather: A Literary Life*), but I would argue that it was not yet rivaling the circulation and status of the New York and Boston family magazines.

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Willa Cather's Fractured Fairy Tales of 1896

Sallie Ketcham

"When I could believe in the fairies still,
And our elf in the cotton-wood tree,
And the pot of gold at the rainbow's end
And you could believe in me."[1]

1896 was a charmed year for Willa Cather—even a thousand miles from Nebraska, people were beginning to believe. In June, she had accomplished something remarkable for any woman of her era, but especially for a twenty-two-year-old journalist from rural Red Cloud. She was living in Pittsburgh, far from home, determined to make her way. Unmarried, unconventional, and unapologetic, she had "back trailed" east to pursue her career as a professional writer and editor. Among her myriad duties as new editor of the *Home Monthly*, Cather was responsible for the magazine's children's page, "With the Young Folks." Although Cather was accustomed to the frenetic pace of journalism, "where men grind out their brains on paper until they have not one idea left—and still grind on," she quickly realized she needed help ("Burglar's Christmas" 10). In July, she reached out to former University of Nebraska classmate and aspiring writer Annie Prey, generously encouraging Prey to submit children's stories to the *Home Monthly*, noting that the magazine needed "some good children's stories, and of course I should be glad to give the University girls any advantage I may be able" (*Complete Letters* no. 2042). For the time being, however, the task fell to Cather.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as Cather began writing original children's stories for the *Home Monthly*, her thoughts turned to home, to the familiar fairy tales of her prairie childhood where "the straw stacks were the golden mountains of fairy land" ("Clemency" 6), and to the staid, predictable life she had deliberately left behind her. What *is* surprising are the unexpected sources Cather drew upon to create the protagonists of these early short stories. Cather was steeped in traditional fairy tales; her favorite childhood stories included *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Scandinavian fairy tales, and the *Mother Goose* rhymes she read with and to her siblings (Slote 36). The mid-1890s was a banner era for naughty children in children's books. These books were nothing like Cather's beloved *Pilgrim's Progress*, although their authors and wayward protagonists influenced Cather's work. A number of popular titles by authors with lasting ties to Cather were widely read in these years: J. M. Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy: The Story of His Boyhood*, which set the stage for Peter Pan, was a bestseller in 1895; Rudyard Kipling's story "Wee Willie Winkie" was a favorite in several Kipling anthologies throughout the decade; and Hilaire Belloc's insouciant book of verse, *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, was an immediate success upon publication in 1896. Cather met Kipling briefly in Pittsburgh in 1896; by 1908 she was carrying formal letters of introduction to both Kipling and Barrie in London (*Complete Letters* nos. 0028, 2057). Marie Adelaide Belloc Lowndes, Hilaire Belloc's sister, was a Cather correspondent and a *McClure's* contributor during Cather's tenure as managing editor (*Complete Letters* nos. 0475, 1674). In addition, the year before Cather moved to Pittsburgh, Lloyd Sherman—America's sweetheart—the feisty southern heroine with a boy's name, made her grand debut in Annie Fellows Johnston's *The Little Colonel*.

Frontispiece and title page, *Household Stories from the Collection of the Brothers Grimm*. Translated by Lucy Crane and with illustrations by Walter Crane, originally published by Macmillan in 1882. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917.

"Surely we all know that the books we read when we were children shaped our lives; at least they shaped our imaginings, and it is with our imaginings that we live," Cather wrote in 1900 (*The World and the Parish* 852). In *Willa Cather and the Fairy Tale*, Marilyn Berg Callander analyzes Cather's use of fairy-tale conventions in Cather's mature fiction: *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *Shadows on the Rock*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. However, Cather's love and knowledge of the massive fairy-tale canon are on stunning display in her early fiction, particularly her 1896 *Home Monthly* short stories "The Princess Baladina—Her Adventure," "Wee Winkie's Wanderings," "The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog," "Tommy, the Unsentimental," and "The Burglar's Christmas." Her sly delight in undermining fairy-tale conventions is equally apparent. Aside from recognizing the intertextuality of Cather's fairy tale allusions, I also want to explore the ways in which Cather's prototypical protagonist is an imaginative or fairy-tale version of Cather herself. In his groundbreaking book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, seminal fairy-tale critic and child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argued:

> Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity. For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul—its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles. (309)

In her 1896 short stories, which read more like "fractured" or feminist fairy tales, Willa Cather left a trail of personal and literary breadcrumbs for generations of curious readers to follow, as she rethought her heroine's journey toward reformation of self and world.

To fracture a fairy tale is to reimagine or subvert it, to uproot it from its ancient origins. In an entry in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, folklorist Ruth B. Bottigheimer defines fractured fairy tales as "traditional fairy tales, rearranged to create new plots with fundamentally different meanings or messages . . . fractured fairy tales, with a reforming intent, seek to impart updated social and moral messages" (172). According to fairy-tale scholar Marina Warner, "Fairy tales mean far more than the plots they unfold; they resemble dreams, which unfold as enigmas but can be deciphered" (114). Readers may never know the exact nature of the issues of gender, sexuality, creativity, and family that Cather likely wrestled with in 1896; her lifelong insistence on privacy precludes it. And yet, as Marilyn Berg Callander also argues, "Underlying Cather's fairy tale is her own enchantment with the form as well as her awareness that the rigidly stereotypic gender roles upon which fairy tale insists are unnatural and potentially destructive. The legacy they provide is contradictory: she must have admired the elegance of their form and style, the richness of their symbols and metaphors, while at the same time abhorring the lessons they teach for behavior, particularly female behavior" (3). Which is why she fractured them.

In *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, Sharon O'Brien discusses the creative constraints Cather faced as a writer and editor at the *Home Monthly*. She expands on Edith Lewis's perceptive observation that Cather struggled to find her voice at the *Home Monthly*, stating "that in her early stories, Cather could not develop her gifts as an 'original writer' because she was forced to conform to the mechanical requirements of formulaic popular fiction 'which had little relation to her own thinking and feeling'" (Lewis 42; O'Brien 228). O'Brien also notes, "In one sense an emancipated professional woman, in another Cather was speaking the inauthentic female language she had rejected in her childhood rebellion against Southern platitudes" (228). This may be one of the reasons Cather did not permit any of her children's stories to be reprinted after she left Pittsburgh (Romines 15). At the same time, however, Cather was experimenting with ways to undercut ladylike, home-and-hearth platitudes with, of all things, fairy tales. She understood the fairy tale's mercurial nature, she knew how to fracture it, and she was keenly aware of its shimmering ability, like a magic lamp or mirror, to reveal what it concealed. She also seems drawn to fairy tales' penchant for coolly addressing the unacceptable or the unspoken. In her *Home Monthly* stories, Cather fractures fairy-tale themes of marriage, the mother-daughter relationship, and hero-formation, by engaging taboo elements of sexuality and gender that she represents through a fusion of parodic and realistic renditions of fairy-tale prototypes. She often draws upon a secondary, eponymous literary source or character to create (or contrast with) her seemingly autobiographical protagonists: Baladina/Balladyna, Wee Winkie/Wee Willie Winkie, Tommy/Tommy, Willa/William.

In fairy tales, names are imbued with magic and meaning—think Snow White, Cinderella, Peau d'Ane, Rumpelstiltskin.[2] In Willa Cather's fairy tales, character and place names were equally important, as important as "the thing not named": Godfrey St. Peter and the town of Sweetwater are just two examples from her later work. Fairy-tale names often contain secrets regarding the hero or heroine's identity. Princess Baladina of Cather's first children's story, "The Princess Baladina—Her Adventure," is no exception; Cather slips "Aladin" right in the middle of her name.

Although Baladina's adventure is less thrilling than Aladdin's, Cather's little princess resembles the swashbuckling hero of the *Arabian Nights* in other ways. Neither character represents virtue, goodness, and humility, but rather cleverness, willfulness, and independence (with an endearing dose of naivete). Princess Baladina, however, breaks the iron rule of fairy tale; she doesn't get her prince.

Like most fairy tales, Princess Baladina's story is flat, but entertaining. Locked in the castle's nursery for bad behavior (scratching and biting her nurse, losing her "golden ball," and pestering her fairy godmother), she plots her escape from the castle, her "unfeeling parents," and her doltish siblings. She hopes her mother will "relieve her from the obvious necessity of running away," but Mother is busy at the ball. Despite failing to kick down the golden nursery room door, Baladina finally escapes and runs away in search of a wizard to "enchant" her—to transform her—because nothing short of transformation can cause the requisite prince to appear, marry her, and carry her off to his kingdom. Unfortunately, her adventure falls flat. Rude "peasant boys" taunt her, calling her "Silly" and "Miss Stuck Up," then howl with laughter as they launch their nasty geese at her (20).[3] On the road, she meets the kind but barefoot miller's boy, two wizards who refuse to enchant her, and a real prince who calls her a "silly little girl" (just like the evil goose boys) and tells her to go home to her parents. It all ends in tears when the King (who turns out to be an affectionate and indulgent father, much like Charles Cather) finds Baladina and hauls her back to the castle, leaving her to bemoan "the dearth of Princes" (21).

Cather combines multiple fairy-tale symbols and motifs in "Princess Baladina," almost as if she were scanning Grimms' table of contents and cherry-picking it for literary devices. She includes the golden ball from "The Frog Prince" (the frog retrieves the golden ball in exchange for the princess's promise that he may eat off her plate, drink from her cup, and sleep in her bed), and the geese from "The Goose Girl," whose plaintive wail "Ah, Heaven! What will become of me" is answered by the haunting reply, "Alas young Queen, if this your tender mother knew, her heart would surely break in two." Cather also refers to an enchanted "Princess Alice." Taken in context, this is probably a nod to Grimms' "Clever Else" (variously "Clever Elsie" or "Clever Alice").[4] The tale of Clever Elsie may be the least familiar to modern readers. Although Clever Elsie's parents despair of their daughter ever marrying ("if only someone would come who would have her," her mother sighs), Elsie's mother admits her daughter is so clever "she can see the wind blow up the street and hear the flies cough." When boorish Hans finally arrives, Elsie is sent to the cellar for beer, where she happens to see a pick-axe suspended in the ceiling. "Then Clever Elsie began to weep and said: 'If I get Hans, and we have a child, and he grows big, and we send him into the cellar here to draw beer, then the pick-axe will fall on his head and kill him.' Then she sat and wept and screamed with all the strength of her body, over the misfortune which lay before her." First the maid is sent to fetch Clever Elsie from the cellar, then the serving boy, and finally her parents go. When Elsie explains her pick-axe objection to the marriage, they all sit down and sob hysterically in agreement. Undeterred, Hans marries Clever Elsie on the spot. But Clever Elsie eventually confounds everyone by declaring herself Not Elsie and running away from the village never to be seen again. "The Poor Miller's Boy" of the Brothers Grimm also makes his barefoot appearance in Cather's tale, albeit without the three enchanted pussycats who famously steal his socks and take him to bed. Although Cather writes "Princess Baladina" with a comic touch, her fairy-tale message of marriage and young womanhood is far from orthodox. The four fairy tales Cather incorporates in "Princess Baladina" are among the most complicated, sexually charged, and loaded of the old wonder tales. By layering them and emphasizing "Persecuted Heroine" and "False Bride" motifs,[5] Cather highlights Baladina's own "false bride" status, her disenchantment with princes, her bid for independence, and her inglorious return to the parental home—the very outcome Cather was determined to avoid.

The headpiece and tailpiece illustrations to "Clever Else" by Walter Crane. From *Household Stories from the Collection of the Brothers Grimm.*

For "Princess Baladina," Cather quietly directed her readers to a second, eponymous source and heroine. In 1896, the fairy-tale opera *Goplana* debuted, based on "Balladyna," the 1839 tragedy by Polish romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki. Cather would have been aware of the new opera and Słowacki's play, even if she

hadn't yet seen them as stage productions; she includes a reference to a "long German rhyme" in *One of Ours* that may have alluded to Słowacki's "Journey to the East" (340; note 744). Słowacki's explosive play is a particularly dark and subversive fairy tale, with a feminist subtext. It traces the rise to power of a mythic Slavic queen, Balladyna, who sacrifices everything, including her family, for glory, riches, and absolute power. She murders her younger sister in a fit of jealous rage, dispatches her army to kill her husband the prince, poisons her lover, and tortures and executes her mother, all to seize the throne and rule in her own right. Balladyna's mother, a poor cottage widow, refuses to condemn her daughter by naming her and calling out her crimes. When Balladyna dies by lightning strike, in a direct hit from God, her death restores the old patriarchal order Balladyna sought to overthrow.

Cather's second offering was printed in the *Home Monthly*'s sister publication, the *National Stockman and Farmer*. "Wee Winkie's Wanderings" is based on the Scottish nursery rhyme "Wee Willie Winkie." Cather's family nickname was "Willie Winkie" (Romines 10). The rhyme was originally written in Scottish dialect, which intrigued Cather; she would later employ it for "Grandmither, Think Not I Forget" in *April Twilights*. In English, the poem begins: "Wee Willie Winkie runs through the town/Upstairs and downstairs in his night-gown/Rapping at the window, crying through the lock/Are the children all in bed, for now it's eight o'clock?" (*Oxford Dictionary* 424).[6]

Many readers know the first stanza of this rhyme by heart, which is why Wee Willie Winkie is often mistaken for the town's curfew-crier or as the personification of sleep, but in fact the rhyme is the story of a weary mother with a challenging and inexhaustible child named Willie—just like Cather's own mother, Jennie Boak Cather. In the last stanza of the rhyme, the wild child's behavior is indulged because "A kiss from his rosy lips gives strength anew to me." Cather's "Wee Winkie's Wanderings" features a young heroine who, like Baladina, decides to run away. Cather relocates the story to what appears to be Willow Shade, her family's antebellum home near Back Creek Valley, Virginia. When Winkie, sick of playing with her "sullen dolls" and keeping clean, informs her mother that she is going to the meadow to ride the mower with her father, Winkie is told "no" in no uncertain terms. Her mother then gives her two odious options: take a ladies' nap or go hem towels. Winkie vehemently protests. "No, I don't want to hem towels. I don't like anything about this place and I just think I'll run away to the mountains, so I do." Similarly, the first chapter of *The Little Colonel* opens with serial runaway Lloyd Sherman fuming at the thought of being sent to bed (yet again) as punishment.

Kipling's "Wee Willie Winkie" made one of his first appearances in this 1888 edition published by A. H. Wheeler & Co.'s Indian Railway Library.

In classic fairy-tale fashion, Winkie (like Baladina) decides the rewards of freedom outweigh the risks: she chooses the adventure, the journey. Mother "shut the door without even kissing Winkie good-bye."[7] Winkie worries she may drown in the creek but pushes on. Much like clever, impetuous Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Winkie sees "gipsies" and even considers forming her own "gipsy camp." Predictably, but with a touch of genuine poignancy, Victorian reality prevails. Bedraggled and chastened, Winkie trudges home; she is sadder but wiser (and understandably relieved to be home). "But mamma washed her and gave her supper, and tucked her into her little bed and never said a word about her running away, and neither did Winkie." This was a fine fairy-tale ending for most children's page readers and moralizing parents—*Mother Knows Best*, *Home Sweet Home*, *Least Said, Soonest Mended, Look Before You Leap*—but even at the age of twenty-two, this was not the circular journey, nor the ending (despite the odds), that Cather was crafting for herself.

Like Baladina/Balladyna, Wee Winkie has a literary alter ego. Wee Willie Winkie is the titular hero in an adventure story by Rudyard Kipling; Kipling's Wee Willie Winkie is another defiant runaway, the six-year-old son of a regimental colonel in India. Willie, however, has a bona-fide adventure. He runs away to the mountains, the blue hills, to save lovely Miss Allardyce from dangerous tribesmen, the "Bad Men" Willie equates with "goblins." To Wee Willie, Miss Allardyce is the fairy-tale princess from George MacDonald's highly symbolic children's classic *The Princess and the Goblin*. "Wee Willie Winkie betrayed a special and unusual interest in Miss Allardyce, and, slowly revolving round that embarrassed young lady, was used to regard her gravely with unwinking eye. He was trying to discover why [an officer] should have kissed her. She was not half so nice as his own mother" (242). When Wee Willie Winkie successfully rescues Miss Allardyce, his childhood ends; he is lauded as a hero and "in this manner did Wee Willie Winkie enter into his manhood" (250). And no one makes him hem towels.

The emphasis on twin names, twin plotlines, and conflicted gender roles continues in "Tommy, the Unsentimental," which is not a traditional fairy tale but a tale of two opposing Tommys and a provocative response to J. M Barrie's occasionally maudlin semi-autobiographical novel *Sentimental Tommy, The Story of His Boyhood*, a narrative packed with fairy-tale and "Lost Boy" allusions. Cather's Tommy (Theodosia) Shirley is the counterpoint to Barrie's hero Tommy Sandys, an early prototype for Peter Pan. In Greek, Thomas means twin. Tommy Sandys is an irrepressible, imaginative boy, who wears "sexless garments," dreams of romantic adventures, is selfish and charming, passionately attached to his mother, prone to tears, and unwilling to enter adulthood. Cather's semi-autobiographical Tommy Shirley is equally at odds with Victorian gender roles, but Cather's protagonist is grounded in level-headed realism. Tommy Shirley grows up in a dusty western town, where she manages her father's bank in his absence, scorns women's conversation as nothing but "babies and salads" and spends her evenings playing cards, shooting pool, and drinking cocktails with the "Old Boys." These "old speculators and men of business" are her closest friends and "had rather taken her mother's place, and been her advisers on many points upon which men seldom feel at liberty to address a girl." Only when Tommy returns from school in the East with "a dainty, white languid" girl do the savvy Old Boys take notice, shake their heads, and deem it "the worst sign in the world." Practical Tommy already has a hapless suitor, bank cashier Jay Ellington Harper (who closely resembles Barrie's Tommy Sandys). Tommy bicycles twenty-five miles with a satchel full of cash to save poor Harper from a disastrous bank run, but when Harper renews his suit, Tommy tells him point-blank, "Now see here, Jay Ellington, we have been playing a nice little game, and now it's time to quit" (6–7). As Debra Seivert argues in "Responding to Romance with Realism in Cather's 'Tommy, the Unsentimental'": "In retrospect, one may see throughout Cather's writing that her sensitivity to reality combines with her love of the romantic tradition to produce works that allow readers to experience the wonder and adventure of a romantic tale while concurrently maintaining a firm footing in reality" (108). In "Tommy, the Unsentimental," Cather's romantic tale turns to fairy-tale parody, as the Old Boys' strapping, pragmatic princess saves the helpless, beleaguered prince, rejects his hand, and pursues a young woman instead.

In the December issue of the *Home Monthly*, Cather gave all the good little children of the world a murderous Were-Wolf Dog for Christmas. "The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog," written decades before Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer saved Christmas, virtually prefigures the beloved 1964 Rankin-Bass screenplay—other than Cather's not-very-merry decision to drown the poor, innocent reindeer. In this deliciously chilling story, sensible reindeer Dunder/Donder saves Christmas from the terrifying Were-Wolf Dog/Abominable Snowman and the Frozen North Sea/Christmas Blizzard. Cather introduces the iconic White Bear from the Scandinavian fairy tale "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon," and revels in lyrical descriptions of Santa's blazing hall and his kingdom of ice where "green icebergs float in stately grandeur down the dark currents of the hungry polar sea" (13–14, 24).

The tale opens on December 23 as Santa Claus sits by a roaring fire, chatting with Mamma Santa and the White Bear. The narrator admits that "most boys and girls do not know much about the White Bear" although "he is really a very important personage." In Cather's version, the White Bear is responsible for protecting the impulsive little reindeer from the hideous Were-Wolf

The headpiece illustrating "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon" by John Lawrence. From the 1975 *Blue Fairy Book* edited by Brian Alderson (Kestrel Books, 1975).

Dog who wants to kill them simply because "the Were-Wolf dog hated Christmas." But in Norse fairy tales, the White Bear is a handsome prince, enchanted by his troll stepmother who lives in a secret castle lying "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon." In this Norse tale, the White Bear takes the prettiest daughter of a poor peasant to live at his castle, where he is a White Bear by day, but a man at night when he comes to her bed. He tells the homesick girl she may ride on his back to visit her family: "But you must promise me one thing, not to talk alone with your mother, but only when the rest are by to hear; for she'll take you by the hand and try to lead you into a room alone to talk; but you must mind and not do that, else you'll bring bad luck on both of us." When the girl disobeys and confesses everything to her mother, the prince is forced to return to his stepmother's castle East of the

Sun and West of the Moon to marry a troll. The heartbroken girl flies over the Arctic on the backs of the Four Winds, her heels skimming the icy waves, to find and rescue her lost love. Their reunion breaks the spell. The White Bear Prince and his beloved flee the castle, free its prisoners, and disappear with all its riches (303–20).

This illustration by J. Maynard Williamson accompanied "The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog" in the December 1896 *Home Monthly* with this caption: "By her chair sat the white bear eating his dog sausage." Willa Cather Archive.

The Were-Wolf Dog's "strategy" is to tempt the reindeer into a wild night run right before Christmas. "'Little reindeer,' called the Were-Wolf Dog, softly, and all the little reindeer pricked up their ears. 'Little reindeer, it is a lovely night . . . the North wind is blowing fresh and cold, driving the little clouds across the sky like white sea birds. . . . Come, let us go, you will be back again by dawn and no one will ever know.'" Of course, the reindeer take flight. The wicked Were-Wolf Dog drives them straight over the moonlit snow and onto thin ice, where he gleefully watches "the treacherous ice break and part, and the head of every little reindeer go down under the black water." Only bleeding Dunder survives. He staggers home and carries the White Bear on his back to a secret ice island where the animals celebrate Christmas "under the North Star." When the White Bear tries (and fails!) to recruit new volunteers to pull Santa's sleigh, Cather slips back into parody. Her tongue is so firmly in her cheek, her misfit seal's tipsy, rally-to-the-flag speech, which finally persuades the animals to put down their drinking cups, may have been lost on a few Women's Christian Temperance Union and *Home Monthly* readers:

> Poor Dunder groaned aloud, and even the White Bear had begun to despair, when there spoke up a poor old seal with but one fin, for he had fallen into the seal fishers' hands and been maimed. He had been drinking too much punch, and he spoke thickly, but he had a good heart, that old crippled seal. "It wrings my heart, brothers, that you should be silent to such a call as this, when for the first time since Christmas began it seems that the little children of the world will not get their presents. I am only an old seal who has been twice wounded by hunters, and am a cripple, but lo, I myself will go with the White Bear, and though I can travel but a mile a day at best, yet will I hobble on my tail and my one fin until I have dragged the sleigh full of presents to the World-Children." (24)

"The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog" is a rollicking, reimagined Christmas tale; it probably thrilled Cather's young readers with its touch of horror as it slashed through the cloying sentimentality so common in children's page stories and women's magazines, especially at Christmastime. Homesick, Cather spent Christmas 1896 in Pittsburgh, far from her family and her beloved youngest brother, Jack. The "Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog" may even have its origins in the stories she spun for Jack and her other siblings in their youth (Romines 9).

Cather also produced one other, very different Christmas tale. "The Burglar's Christmas" is probably her least accomplished and most sentimental story of the year, but it becomes more intriguing when read for its echoes of fairy tale. Like "The Burglar's Christmas," several Scandinavian fairy tales including "The Little Match Girl" and "Why the Sea Is Salt" open with young people starving in the midst of plenty at Christmastime. For "The Burglar's Christmas," Cather appears to adapt the plot of "The Trolls Celebrate Christmas," one of many northern European fairy cup legends. When the trolls gather for their wild bacchanal on Christmas Eve, a young servant rides out to investigate. A beautiful woman appears and offers him a drink from the trolls' drinking horn or silver cup "believed to have the property of obliterating from the memory all the past, and rendering the guest who partook of it contented." Despite the trolls shrieking and pleading, the young man steals the cup and flees. He and his horse die within days, but the moral of the tale is that good Christians should treat everyone, even trolls, with charity and justice (Thorpe 89–91).

In Cather's story it is a discouraged, profligate young man named William (the name Cather adopted in adolescence) who is starving on the streets of Chicago on Christmas Eve. William enters a strange house and heads to the bedroom to rob the owners. He stops abruptly when he spots his old silver baby cup next to the jewels on the dressing table.[8] At that very moment, William's beautiful mother bursts into the room, overjoyed to see her son, radiating love, telling him the family has moved to Chicago, and that all has been forgiven and forgotten. William is overcome with shame and recoils from her kiss. "Who is it says I shall not kiss my son? O, my boy, we have waited so long for this!" William insists "there are things I ought to tell you. . . . I wonder if you know how much you pardon?" His mother assures him "I'd rather you

wouldn't, Will," and (like Wee Winkie's mother) "I never asked you where you had been then, nor will I now." This scene is also highly reminiscent of the White Bear's prophetic sexual warning to his love in "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon"—confess nothing to your mother and do not speak to her alone.

Mother and son reconcile when "she leaned over and kissed him, as no woman had kissed him since he left her." William regrets "the whole miserable, futile, swindled world of Bohemia." Cather then ends her story on a religious, oddly discordant, note. As the Christmas bells begin to ring, William muses on God "the Potter," and his "comprehensive justice," on whether he will truly condemn his "Things of Clay" which, the narrator stresses, were all made in his image, "in his own patterns, weak or strong, for his own ends," and whether someday, the things others deem "evil" will pass like a dream (10).

Brought up as a Baptist, Cather knew her bible. She's referring to the Book of Lamentations, Chapter 4, a fire-and-brimstone condemnation, which reads in part:

> For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom . . . O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked . . . He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins. (Lam. 4: 6, 21–22, King James Version)

The reference to Sodom, the bitter cup of punishment, nakedness, and the threat of discovery suggest that Cather was still coming to terms with her sexuality in 1896. She had already broached the subject briefly, but publicly, in "Tommy, the Unsentimental," a tacit admission she would not repeat. However, in "The Burglar's Christmas," William's musings indicate that Cather was processing gender and sexual identity issues, even as she concealed them with fairy tale and wrapped them in scripture.

In 1896, Cather was lost in fairy tale; her fascination with the old stories never really waned, not in her writing and not in her life. In 1942, Cather was excited by the idea of purchasing a copy of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* for her grandniece, Margaret Ickis. Cather wrote to her niece Elizabeth Cather Ickis, "Do you think Margaret is old enough to understand 'Grimm's Fairy Tales'?" Cather hoped to buy Margaret an old edition, a specific copy featuring Walter Crane's "delightful" Pre-Raphaelite illustrations "that were in the book your father and I used to read when we were little."[9] In the same letter she discusses her lingering affection for *Mother Goose* rhymes and her delight at hearing Yehudi Menuhin's daughter Mira recite them (*Complete Letters* no. 2372). When C. S. Lewis dedicated *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* to his beloved goddaughter Lucy Barfield, he addressed her directly on the page, confiding "I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result, you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again." Like C. S. Lewis and Rudyard Kipling and J. M. Barrie and J. R. R. Tolkien, Willa Sibert Cather undoubtedly agreed.

Fairy tale, so charming and placid on its surface, shape-shifts with the reader over time. Tolkien dubbed it the "cauldron of story," the rendering pot of world literature and culture (Warner xxi). The old wonder tales yield their secrets to the curious, to readers and writers who, like Cather, understand, in the words of fantasy writer Terri Windling: "The fairy tale journey may look like an outward trek across plains and mountain, through castles and forest, but the actual movement is inward, into the lands of the soul. The dark path of the fairytale forest lies in the shadows of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel to the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by this experience" (Warner 166). Cather's fractured fairy tales of 1896 emphasize her personal journey toward authentic and independent adulthood, the unusual, intertextual depth of her early fiction, and the surprising, first-wave feminist ideas her stories contain.

NOTES

1. Cather's poem from "The Way of the World," *The Home Monthly*, vol. 6, April 1898, p. 10.

2. Snow White is pure as snow. Cinderella's name describes her circumstances. Peau d'Ane—"Donkeyskin" or "Ass's Skin"—is the name of the princess who flees her incestuous father's castle, disguised in a pelt. Rumpelstiltskin is destroyed by the power of his own name.

3. For letters from Cather's classmates, many of whom recall Cather as courteous and affable but often mention her "superior air," see *Writings from Willa Cather's Campus Years*, edited by James R. Shively, University of Nebraska Press, 1950, pages 119–42.

4. Elsie Cather was Willa's younger sister. Cather used the names "William" and "Elsie" for the siblings in "The Prodigies," her July 1897 *Home Monthly* short story.

5. See the Library Research Guide for Folklore and Mythology at guides.library.harvard.edu/folk_and_myth/indices for information regarding the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU), the essential catalogue of folk-tale types, variations, and motifs.

6. See Timothy W. Bintrim's "Wee Winkie Goes to Washington: Cather's Early Impressions of the Nation's Capital" in the Winter 2021 *Willa Cather Review* for another perspective on "Wee Willie Winkie" and "Wee Winkie's Wanderings."

7. Mother's kiss of farewell, forgiveness, or reconciliation features strongly in Cather's tales.

8. A silver-plated baby cup was a common birth or christening gift in the American south. Cather had one of her own.

9. Elizabeth Cather Ickis was the daughter of Cather's brother Roscoe. The edition Cather recalls from her youth may have been *Household Stories from the Collection of the Brothers Grimm*, translated by Lucy Crane and with illustrations by Walter Crane, originally published by Macmillan in 1882 (see illustration on page 11).

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Pleasing Girlhood: *Shadows on the Rock* and the Great Depression

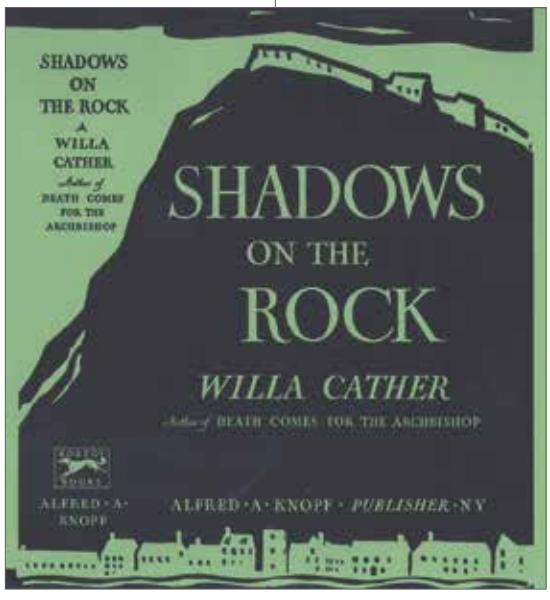
Kelsey Squire

Willa Cather's 1931 novel *Shadows on the Rock* has often lived in the shadow of her other more well-received works. In one of the most foundational scholarly treatments of *Shadows*, "A Good Girl in Her Place," Merrill Maguire Skaggs writes a compelling defense of *Shadows*. In this novel, Skaggs argues, Cather "deliberately chose to flout common sense" in centering the novel around a "good girl" like Cécile Auclair (28). "Stories require action," Skaggs reminds us, and girls do not present writers or readers with the typical prerequisites for a story:

> Girls who are both young and good are unlikely to do much that's very remarkable. Traditionally, good girls are passive, quiet, and don't make trouble or noise. They are unlikely to run away questing, exploring, or engaging in night journeys of any sort. . . . Further, being good, they are unlikely even to think anything much out of the ordinary. Certainly a good girl never risks anything truly important. (27)

Cécile, as Skaggs points out, fulfills these criteria perfectly: on the surface, Cécile is good in the beginning, middle, and end of the novel and does not change. And yet, Skaggs labels the novel "brilliant," one that chooses to "challenge critical rules" of fiction (28).

I propose revisiting Skaggs's 1985 essay and the concept of "the good girl," with a particular focus on how the historical context of the 1930s might shape our understanding of Cécile and her community. Cécile's parents and the broader Quebec community depend on her emotional presence; belief in Cécile's innate goodness allows individuals (like her mother and Count de Frontenac) to navigate an indifferent, precarious world of poverty and deprivation. In particular, Cécile herself absorbs a self-definition of her own goodness in contrast to the Indigenous community around her. Attentiveness to the ways in which Cécile enacts the role of the "good girl," and the emotional tenor that Cécile evokes or counteracts, can help readers to see deeper connections between *Shadows on the Rock* and its historical moment of publication in the 1930s.



Dustjacket to an early printing, 1931.

History, Affect, and Conceptions of the "Good Girl"

Readers were sharply divided on the merits of *Shadows on the Rock* when it was published in 1931. Critics of the novel, like Newton Arvin in the *New Republic*, complained that Cather fails to "come to grips with the real life of her time," and that she "writes as if mass production and technological unemployment and cyclical depressions and the struggle between the classes did not exist" (quoted in O'Connor 370). As Gordon Hunter demonstrates, critics' concerns that novels failed to engage with the present moment were not unusual. Historical novels were published at unprecedented rates in the 1930s, and the popularity of these works "worried guardians of critical taste since the patent success of such books expanded the market for romances or heroic tales of American history" (Hunter 118). In addition to critiquing Cather for her failure to engage with this historical moment, critics expressed particular ire regarding Cather's choice to focus on Cécile's point of view. Writing for the *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Carl Van Doren typifies the critiques of Cécile: "As if [Cather] could not wholly trust her imagination to carry her through the full drama of the age and place, she has chosen to represent the last days of the Count de Frontenac as they appeared to a child, the shadows of events, not the events themselves. Her epic is consequently domesticated" (quoted in O'Connor 360). Cather's supporters tended to agree that the novel was removed from time, but found that a virtue. Fanny Butcher, writing in a mode that typified the views of the novel's fans, states that "it is almost impossible to put into words the kind of mental joy that the writing of *Shadows on the Rock* induces in a sensitive reader. . . . It nourishes one's mind. It restores it to the rhythm of life" (quoted in O'Connor 372).

Readers' emotions—of boredom, of invigoration, of grief—have played an outsized role in interpretations of *Shadows on the Rock*. I am interested in another affective angle: how does *Shadows on the Rock* resonate with the emotions of

the 1930s? In *The Emotional Life of the Great Depression*, John Marsh argues that emotions and affect play an important but overlooked role in understanding our human reactions to social problems. By looking at a historical moment such as the Great Depression through the spectrum of human emotions, Marsh suggests that we can better understand both the daily life of ordinary Americans and the elements that spurred on social action and public policy.

Indeed, the trope of the "good girl" has played an important role in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century culture due to the emotions she elicits. In *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood*, Gail Schmunk Murray notes that the trope of the "good girl" (and likewise, the "bad boy") emerged in North American literature in the 1850s. These two tropes, often didactic in nature, "drew heavily on characteristics increasingly identified with the emerging middle class: an internalized moral code, ingenuity, persistence, practicality, and independence." In literature aimed at both the family and children, the representation of boys tended to emphasize adventure plots, whereas the representation of girls was concentrated in domestic novels focused on character development (Schmunk Murray 52). Schmunck Murray cites Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–69) as domestic novels aimed at family readers (both adults and children) in which the good girl plays a strong central role. Increasingly, as both parents and publishers began to view childhood as a special time for readers, publishers produced books aimed at young readers that emphasized the good girl protagonist, such as Sarah Chauncey Woolsey's *What Katy Did at School* (1873), Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Gene Stratton-Porter's *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909), Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1913) and the Nancy Drew detective series first published in 1930 by the Stratemeyer Syndicate under the name of Carolyn Keene. While these titles were aimed primarily at girl readers, the trope of the "good girl" still flourished in narratives that were consumed more broadly, such as the comic strip *Little Orphan Annie*, which began in 1924 and was followed by popular radio and film adaptations in the 1930s, and the movies of Shirley Temple, who began acting in 1931.

As Gary Cross notes in *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw significant cultural changes in the way that Americans viewed childhood. In particular, the introduction and expansion of child labor laws marks a turn: rather than serving "the economic needs of adults" through working, Cross argues that increasingly, "American children were beginning to serve more the psychological" needs of adults (85). In a review of Cross's monograph, Patricia Crain expands on this idea, suggesting that "In effect, though Cross does not put it quite this way, middle-class childhood had become a kind of profession, with its own duties and privileges. Primary among these was an obligation to maintain for adults a sense of a pastoral child-world in which old festive behaviors were conserved" (Crain 546).

While the "good girl" trope had a long development, her role was particularly powerful during the Great Depression. As Marsh argues, fear was ever-present in the lives of many Americans during the early 1930s. Marsh examines the threats of polio and unemployment, and notes that a "reading of the pulp literature of the day confirms . . . a concern for the purity and autonomy of being, the nature or essence of a person, and the dread that such being might be violated and despoiled by impersonal but nevertheless malevolent forces" (90). Historian John K. Kasson notes that Shirley Temple movies were primed to counter this era of fear. Kasson argues that Temple "played the crucial figure of emotional recovery, the child who bolsters adults, white men especially, with the unqualified love, affection, trust, cheer, and courage they needed" (18). While these stories of the "good girl" overtly speak to that "sense of a pastoral child-world" that was important to adults' conceptions of girlhood, many of these stories contain complexities too. Girls like Nancy Drew, Woolsey's Katy Carr, and Montgomery's Anne Shirley often break rules set down by their fathers or guardians, and younger girls like Katy and Anne are prone to unladylike outbursts of emotion. Yet their status as "good girls" is reinforced by two factors. First, a "good girl" might break a rule, but she will either have a good reason for doing so or she will engage in appropriate self-reflection concerning her choices. Second, and most importantly, is the emotional responses that parents, guardians, or other people in authority have toward these girls. When a "good girl" engages in rule-breaking behavior in these novels, for example, her parents or guardians tend to see those actions as a reflection of the girl's innate goodness or rightness; the girl continues to be a shining light of goodness, happiness, and right within her family and community. This need for the emotional bolstering of adults was particularly acute during the Great Depression.

Due to the seventeenth-century setting of *Shadows on the Rock*, it is easy for readers to focus on Cécile's placid, quiet, and joyful life while missing the larger emotional landscape that her parents and the settlers of Quebec occupy—one that has some fascinating connections to the 1930s. Both fear and violence have a strong presence in the settlers' lives and imaginations. The concerns that Marsh mentions—for purity and autonomy, to avoid malevolent forces—play a strong role in the lives of the Auclair family adults as they attempt to nurture Cécile and help her learn what it means to be "good"—directives that Cécile takes to heart, but that she can't always comply with. Cécile likewise plays an important role in the "emotional recovery" of adults. Like a seventeenth-century Shirley Temple, she graces the lives of her parents and fellow citizens alike with "unqualified love, affection, trust, cheer, and courage."

Order and Disorder, Work and Play

Some of the earliest and most important lessons Cécile learns about what it means to be "good" come from her mother, Madame Auclair. The primary goal of Cécile's mother, once they arrive in Quebec, is "to make the new life as much as possible like the old" (30). Once she realizes that she will not live long enough to return to France, Madame Auclair's "chief care was to train her little daughter so that she would be able to carry on this life and this order after she was gone" (30). Cécile recalls her mother's instructions fondly: "You will see that your father's whole happiness depends on order and regularity, and you will come to feel a pride in it. Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages. At home, in France, we have learned to do all these things in the best way, and we are conscientious, and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe and other nations envy us" (31–32). From her mother, Cécile learns two important lessons. First, that her goal should be to maintain the happiness of the men in her life through strongly controlled household order. And secondly, that as French citizens living in territorial lands, they should strive for a life that is opposite that of the region's Indigenous peoples.


The New York Times Book Review

Section 4

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 1931 TWENTY-FOUR PAGES

WILLA CATHER'S TALE OF CANADA

"Shadows on the Rock" Is a Story of Early Days in Quebec

The New York Times Book Review placed its review of *Shadows on the Rock* on the cover of its August 2, 1931, issue. Despite finding the novel's prose "inordinately beautiful," reviewer John Chamberlain was cool to the work.

While Madame Auclair insists that the French are "the most civilized people in Europe," there is ample evidence in the text that this is not true. For example, Euclide Auclair recalls both the personal and social stresses he felt in France prior to emigrating:

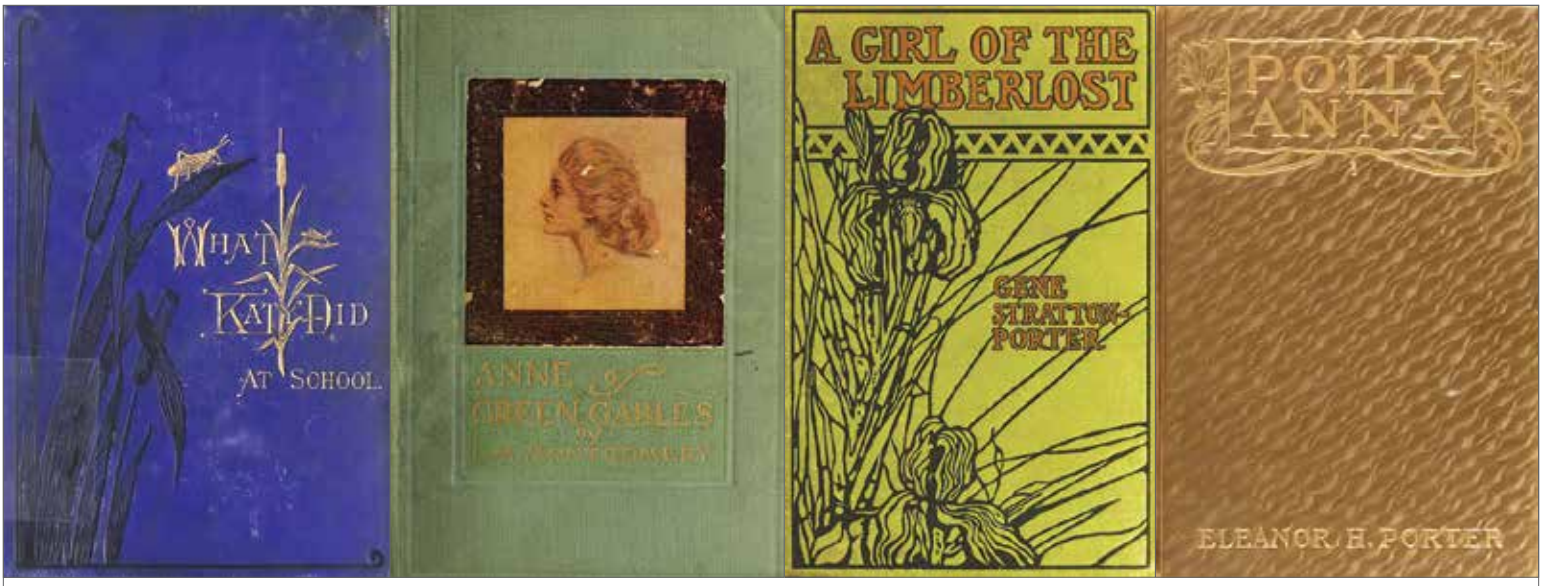
> In his own time he had seen taxes grow more and more ruinous, poverty and hunger always increasing. People died of starvation in the streets of Paris, in his own parish of Saint-Paul, where there was so much wealth. . . . The wealth of the nation, of the grain lands and vineyards and forests of France, was sunk in creating the pleasure palace at Versailles. The richest peers of the realm were ruining themselves on magnificent Court dresses and jewels. And, with so many new abuses, the old ones never grew less; torture and cruel punishments increased as the people became poorer and more desperate. (40)

Auclair goes on to reflect on the prisons, which were in close proximity to his home in France, and the executions that were carried out over minor crimes of poverty.

Perhaps the character that best represents the privations of France is Blinker, a disabled man whom Cécile, following the practices of her mother, continues to provide with charity. Due to a facial disfigurement (old scars and a bone abscess in his jaw), Blinker resides in the community as an outcast. Because of the Auclairs' kindness, however, Blinker eventually reveals his name, Jules, to Euclide, as well as his tragic story: in France, Jules worked as a torturer in the King's prisons in Rouen, and feels haunted by the ghosts of the prisoners. Euclide responds to Jules's story with kindness; he does not view Jules as an evil man, but rather, as a victim of poverty. "The law was wrong," Euclide Auclair reassured Jules (188).

Madame Auclair does not give voice to any of the violence or tragedies that the people of France may have experienced. Her insistence on domestic order, however, may have roots in social disorder. Madame Auclair cannot control what happens outside her home, but she can to a greater extent control what happens inside it. Her ordered household provides a protective shield in a world that is often capricious and cruel. Madame Auclair's domestic practice allows her to offer hospitality and care to those who are more vulnerable such as Blinker, and Cécile very consciously follows in her mother's practices.

Just as Madame Auclair's France intertwines order and disorder, Cécile's childhood intertwines work and play. When Cécile visits the Count de Frontenac to arrange for a new pair of shoes for her friend Jacques, the Count questions Cécile concerning her life: "You are content down there, keeping house for your father? Not much time for play, I take it?" (70). Cécile, in keeping with her character and her age, responds joyfully: "Oh, everything we do, my father and I, is a kind of play" (70). In suggesting that her life—even her chores—are a type of play, Cécile downplays the potential economic roles that she might have in her family life in order to emphasize her emotional role.[1] There are also complexities present here in regard to Cécile's social position. The Count, clearly entertained with Cécile, responds: "Well said! Everything we do is. It gets rather tiresome,—but not at your age, perhaps. I am very well pleased with you, Cécile, because you do so well



Early editions of *What Katy Did at School*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *A Girl of the Limberlost*, and *Pollyanna*.

for your father. We have too many idle girls in Kebec, and I cannot say that Kebec is exceptional" (70). While the Count doesn't identify any of these "idle girls" by name, the context for this conversation—arranging for a new pair of shoes for Jacques—reminds readers that prostitution is one of the unfortunate paths for many girls and women in Quebec. Cécile is able to align play (pleasure) and work due to her rather comfortable social position, and is viewed as both childlike and industrious by others because she is occupying the role of the "good girl." In contrast, women (girls) who may need to work for economic sustenance, like Jacques's mother Antoinette, are chastised as being "idle." The text suggests that this has less to do with the physical number of hours that either Antoinette or Cécile actually "works," but rather, with their status as a "bad woman" or a "good girl."[2]

This is not to say that as a "good girl" Cécile lacks independence. Indeed, showing independence of thought is often a key quality in a good girl character, for it allows her to engage in moments of self-reflection concerning right actions. For some girl characters, such as Woolsey's Katy Carr and Montgomery's Anne Shirley, this reflection may come after an act of defiance; for others, like Cather's Cécile, the reflection often occurs within the moment. In *Shadows on the Rock*, for example, Cécile contemplates the ethics of lighting a candle, which would have required a donation of ten sous per candle. She muses "I wonder, Jacques, if it would be wrong for me to take a candle, and then bring the ten sous down later, when the rain stops" (79). While Jacques readily encourages her, Cécile pauses to consider the morality of their situation, saying, "But it's irregular, Jacques. Perhaps it would not be right" (79). Cécile solves her problem by borrowing a coin from Bishop Laval, so that she leaves in debt to him, rather than to the Church. In this exchange, Cécile is able to maintain her own goodness and live up to the moral and ethical rules of her community; she has also, however, tested a way to work around some of these strictures.

A second important episode involves the Auclairs' Christmas celebration and their traditional display of a nativity crèche. In a touching and humorous scene, Jacques brings his beloved carved wooden beaver as a gift to display in the nativity scene. Cécile is, at first, "a little perplexed"; the animal was so untraditional—"what was she to do with him?" she wonders (131). Here, Cécile's decision is helped by Madame Pommier, who urges for the beaver's inclusion: "Our Lord died for Canada as well as for the world over there, and the beaver is our very special animal" (131). Here, Cécile considers when traditions are best upheld, and when they are best modified. In agreeing to accept the beaver into the crèche, Cécile not only acts with inclusivity to Jacques, but also takes a step toward embracing her own Canadian identity.

Indigeneity, Naivete, and Cécile's Conception of Goodness

While the adults in Cécile's life align conceptions of goodness with order and joyful "play-work," it is also important to consider how Cécile herself has internalized these concepts. Cécile routinely uses images of Quebec's Indigenous people and cultures as a counter-definition of goodness. Speaking of the Africanist presence in American literature, Toni Morrison points out in *Playing in the Dark* that Cather is hardly the only author to align goodness with whiteness; Morrison argues that inquiries into these tropes "are not about a particular author's attitudes toward race" (90). Rather, she suggests that analyzing representations of whiteness and blackness within canonical American literature can shed light on the role that race plays within a text. In particular, Morrison is concerned with the ways in which racial depictions of characters within literary texts offer "a safe route into meditations on morality and ethics," as well as larger tropes in American literature centered on egalitarianism and freedom (64).

Indigenous people and cultures have a curious, overlooked place in *Shadows on the Rock*. Before delving into their representation more deeply, it is important to consider just how

Cather's representations of Indigenous people and their cultures in *Shadows* compare to her other novels. *The Song of the Lark* provides a useful contrast due to its focus on Thea Kronborg, who grows from a young girl in obscure Moonstone, Colorado to become a talented opera singer of international renown. As Sarah Clere suggests, Thea's trip to Panther Canyon in the American Southwest plays a revitalizing role in her story: she arrives tired and ill, but is rejuvenated in body and spirit after communing in nature and imagining the lives of Native American women who once inhabited the canyon. As Clere points out, "On the surface, Thea's response to Panther Canyon appears to be entirely emotional and almost intentionally ahistoric" (21). Through a careful analysis of cultural documents, especially the Campfire Girls movement, Clere demonstrates how Thea's experience of "playing Indian" allows her to escape from the pressures of the modern world and recommit herself to individualistic excellence.

For twenty-first century readers, one of the unstated tensions in *Shadows on the Rock* that defines Cécile's girlhood is race, as the goodness and orderliness of her life are defined in opposition to the wilderness and the Indigenous people whose ways of life, Cécile imagines, contrast greatly with her own. Cécile is decidedly not Thea: she finds the wilderness around her to be threatening, and she takes great care to separate her own experience from Indigenous culture. Readers are introduced to this contrast via representations of the environment. Nature in the novel is frightening, and *Shadows* opens with a description of Quebec's bogs and swamps: "the forest was suffocation, annihilation: there European man was quickly swallowed up in silence, distance, mould, black mud, and the stinging swarms of insect life that bred in it" (11). The forest is a threatening place, very much unlike the ordered household that Cécile occupies and attempts to maintain.

Throughout the novel, Cécile associates Indigenous people with physical pain, violence, and torture. Cécile believes (naively, as the notes for the Scholarly Edition indicate) that in Quebec "nobody is tortured here, except by the Indians, in the woods, and they know no better" (110; 457). While Cécile enjoys stories of all kinds, she is especially drawn to tales of Catholic Canadians, whose saintly lives are often defined by surviving "tortures . . . endured at the hands of the Iroquois, in those savage, interminable forests" (120). Cécile creates in her mind a Quebec community that lives in opposition to these forces, one that is peaceful and kind.

Cécile also associates Indigenous culture with elements of disgust around food. As Andrew Jewell writes of *Shadows on the Rock*, "it is through acts of eating that Cather communicates some of the novel's most terrifying narratives, stories of exaggerated repulsion and culinary outrage" (288–89). Cécile is horrified when Pierre Charon tells her about going to "an Indian feast and eat[ing] dogs boiled with blueberries" (216). Father Hector, a local priest, tells Cécile the story of Noël Chabanel, a Jesuit martyr captured by the Hurons. In addition to being offered dog meat, Chabanel was fed a stew made from a human hand, that of an Iroquois prisoner (177). Cécile's mind turns to these stories at a pivotal moment in the novel: after a disastrous visit to the Île d'Orléans to visit the Harnois family with Pierre Charon, Cécile is anxious to return to her own home and kitchen: "Dogs cooked with blueberries," Cécile muses to herself, "poor Madame Harnois' dishes were not much better!" (227).

Historian Wilbur R. Jacobs notes that Cather drew extensively from historical sources in creating the world of *Shadows on the Rock*, and that she drew especially on works by Francis Parkman, such as *France and England in North America*. Jacobs determines that Cather's portrayal of Quebec as an isolated rock surrounded by imposing forests was "adopted from Parkman" (257). However, Jacobs argues that Cather "oversimplifies" the relationships between colonists and Indigenous people, and that "even the biased Parkman was fairer" in his depictions of Indigenous groups (260).

On the one hand, Cather's depiction of Indigenous people and culture in *Shadows* resonates with some of her earlier novels, such as *The Song of the Lark*, in that Native people represent an alternative to "modern" society. Yet the reactions that Cather depicts here (disgust, fear, violence) are significantly different. In part, these depictions of Native people and cultures serve as a foil in order to better highlight Cécile's goodness. To understand Cécile's identity as a "good girl," it is important to take stock of how this image depends on setting up Cécile as a contrast to the Indigenous community around her. If we view Cécile as a representation of the "good girl" from the 1930s, the Indigenous presence in the novel represents a physical and emotional threat, much like the social conditions of the Great Depression did for Cather's readers at the time of the novel's publication in 1931.

Cécile's concern about Indigenous foods, however, foreshadows an important turning point in her transition from childhood to adulthood: she associates them with an unstructured, precarious way of life. Cécile's visit to the Île d'Orléans is often seen as a pivotal moment in her growth from childhood to adulthood.[3] John Swift views the episode as a turning point in Cécile's maturation. Ann Romines presents a comprehensive analysis of this moment in her essay "After the Christmas Tree: Willa Cather and Domestic Ritual." But perhaps the most significant episode of Cécile's path to adulthood involves a confrontation with one of the things she has learned to fear the most: an unordered life. Typically, Euclide Auclair made elaborate preparations for living through the winter: "Careless people got through the winter on smoked eels and frozen fish, but if one were willing to take enough trouble, one could live very well, even in Quebec" (57). As Euclide Auclair assumes that he will accompany the Count de Frontenac back to France in the fall, he does not make his traditional winter preparations. "Nothing had gone right this fall," Cécile thinks to herself, "her father had not put

away any wood doves in fat, or laid in winter vegetables, or bought his supply of wild rice from the Indians" (290). It is one thing for Cécile to delight in her housekeeping and cooking with a well-stocked kitchen and comfortable home; it is another thing for her to imagine an unordered life. "A life without security, without plans, without preparation for the future, had been terrible," she thinks—and yet, she knows that "we will manage" (290).

In *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather may not depict "mass production and technological unemployment and cyclical depressions" that some of her critics, like Carl Van Doren, expected of her. In terms of its emotional tenor, however, *Shadows on the Rock* has a clear resonance with the 1930s. *Shadows on the Rock* may evoke many emotions in readers: peacefulness, boredom, excitement, and grief. By viewing the novel in light of its historical moment, however, readers can become aware that, in some ways, it is Cather's most fearful novel. In *The Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronborg wills her own success through mining her talent and hard work. While Ántonia Shimerda is victimized by Larry Donovan, she comes across as a fiercely independent young woman determined to make the best in her life. But the characters in *Shadows on the Rock* live more precarious lives, ones that depend on the decisions, or even whims, of others beyond their control. The life of Cécile's father, Euclide, depends on the patronage of the Count de Frontenac; the Count's political life, in turn, depends on the variances of French politics that are clearly outside his own control or influence. These portraits become more significant when juxtaposed with the hardships and bad luck that many Americans felt during the Great Depression. In *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather still represents these forces; and yet, her focus on Cécile and the rituals her family develops provides a strong counterbalance to those forces. As readers can see through Cécile's identity paired with representations of Indigenous culture, Cécile herself has only a limited perspective on the world thus far in her life. In order to survive their lives—and even to thrive—it is important that Cécile's parents and the wider community have access to the balm that the "good girl" provides to them all.

NOTES

1. The conflation of "work and play" is important for other "good girls" in the 1930s. As Kasson points out, the New Deal's limits on child labor aimed at providing more jobs for men (18). Studio executives were all too eager to cast Shirley Temple's acting as "play," obscuring both the physical and emotional labor that went into her roles and appearances. Nancy Drew, despite her record of success as a sleuth, is typically rewarded with trinkets or heartfelt thanks—rewards that carry more in emotion than financial value.

2. Later in the novel, during the Christmas scene featuring Jacques's gift of the carved beaver to the nativity scene, Antoinette is called a "bad woman" by Madame Pommier (132).

3. In particular, John Swift views the trip as a "sexual rite of passage" as Cécile contemplates the "prospective reality of conjugal and reproductive heterosexuality" that would result from a relationship with Pierre Charon (177). Ann Romines suggests that the episode offers Cécile her first real choice in adult life, and that through her devotion to domestic ritual, Cécile becomes "a sculptor of time," creating an enduring culture (75).

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"From a baby into a thinking being": Willa Cather's Virginia Childhood

Andrew Jewell

The most important thing about Willa Cather's early childhood is that she was both loved and safe. Her life story is not about overcoming early hardship. Though our culture loves to tell those stories, Willa Cather's narrative is different. Her story is about what is possible when an intelligent, creative young person is supported and encouraged. She was supported by her family, and she was supported by her community. They told her, again and again, that her curiosity should be followed, that her imagination was powerful, that her eccentricity distinguished her. Adults took her seriously, challenged her, taught her, talked with her. As part of a white, long-established family in 1870s Virginia, her culture told her she was entitled to be part of the leadership class. This support, this love, this privilege, enabled Willa Cather to become herself. She built her amazing creative career on a bedrock of stability, independence, and confidence formed in her childhood.

This essay focuses on Cather's childhood until she was nine years old. Though arguably the boundaries of "childhood" stretch beyond that mark, Cather's life was famously disrupted in the spring of 1883 when she moved from Virginia to Nebraska. This is the story, briefly told, of the years before that move, before the "erasure of personality" that Cather felt riding out to her grandfather's Webster County homestead in the bottom of a Studebaker wagon (F.H.).

I.

On January 22, 1874, Charles Cather responded to a Christmas letter from his brother George, who had recently moved to the new state of Nebraska with his wife Frances Amanda Smith Cather, whom everyone called "Franc." Charles wrote to them of the cold snap they had just had and how they were able to cut ice and stock the ice house. He also told them that his wife Mary Virginia, whom most called "Jennie," was finally able to leave her bed and go to town to get a sore tooth pulled. The new baby, born in December, stayed at home with her grandmother Rachel Boak, who told Charles and Jennie that the baby didn't cry once, that she was, Charles reported, "as good as she is pretty" (January 22, 1874).

Charles then shared some funny stories and local gossip his brother had missed since he had left northern Virginia, stories about Governor Anderson, the Seiberts, the Gores, and Mose and Sammy, glimpses of the sprawling community of family and neighbors, both Black and white, that surrounded them. George hadn't been around to share a laugh over these things for months, as he and his new wife had gone west the previous June. That fall and winter, letters from the family to George and Franc made it clear that people were worried about the young couple surviving their first winter on the Nebraska prairie.[1] But Charles's letter didn't reflect the same worry, as Charles was not very prone to worry. He was an easygoing, pleasant-faced, sensitive man, well-liked by most for his kindness and deference. He was smart and wasn't lazy, but he also wasn't terribly ambitious. He was hesitant to make the sort of move his brother did to a country that was not yet settled with farms and towns, even if the land was inexpensive. The idea of going west did appeal to him, and he had real affection for the western prairies and mountains after traveling west in 1870. He had even thought of moving to Colorado, but he decided to stay in Virginia, where his home and family were (October 30, 1870).

Charles F. Cather and Mary Virginia Boak Cather, early 1870s. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS228), University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries, Archives & Special Collections.

Charles Fectigue Cather and Mary Virginia Boak were married on December 5, 1872, almost precisely a year before their first baby was born. They got married in Mary Virginia's mother's house in Back Creek Valley and lived there afterward (Woodress 18). Rachel Boak was very attentive to her daughter and liked having her near. When Mary Virginia felt ill in the spring of 1873, she had the doctor over twice, though Charles's mother and aunt could see right away what the problem was: "I think we understand her case as well as the Dr," Charles's mother Caroline Cather wrote, "and think he was not needed as much [now] as he may be after while, but I did not tel [sic] her so for she is so easy insulted I knew she would fly right up for she thinks She is awfully sick. Her mother and Charley has a happy time waiting on her" (April 17, 1873).

The glimpse Caroline Cather gives into the character of Mary Virginia Boak Cather—sensitive, attentive, concerned, energetic, commanding—is consistent with other portraits of Willa Cather's mother. She was remembered as a "handsome, imperious woman, with a strong will and a strong nature," a woman who "inspired great devotion and great deference" and who had "a great capacity for caring about things—everything—whether the coffee was hot, whether a neighbour's child was ill, whether it was a good day for the picnic—for caring about living, in fact" (Lewis 6–7). She enjoyed attention and was sensitive to criticism, could sometimes be self-involved, but she respected and charmed those around her.[2] Strong-minded and opinionated, she was a good fit for the easygoing Charles, who generally didn't like a fuss and did not seek to dominate those around him. Mary Virginia Boak Cather was a woman who exercised considerable power within her home and family, and that power was respected, even admired, by her husband.

On December 7, 1873, Mary Virginia Boak Cather gave birth to her first baby, a little girl, in the home of Rachel Boak in Back Creek Valley (now Gore), Virginia. The Cathers decided to name their daughter after Charles's little sister, who had died young from diphtheria. That sister was named Wilella, and that is the official name on the record of the baby's birth, but they rarely, if ever, called the baby "Wilella," just as they didn't often call Charles's sister "Wilella."[3] "Willie" was the name her father usually used; "[w]e call her 'Willie' after our little sister," Charles Cather wrote to his brother George (January 22, 1874). But the baby was, from her earliest days, also called "Willa," her mother's preference.[4] And though "Willie" would stick as an affectionate family nickname, "Willa" was the name used for moments of dignity and permanence, the real name. When William Cather gave his granddaughter a silver baby cup, it was engraved with the name "Willa."[5]

The Cathers and their new daughter continued to live with Rachel Boak through the spring and summer of 1874. In March, a friend of Charles's sister Jennie reported that she had seen the new baby: "it is not quite as wonderful as I had expected from Charlie's letter to Mamma" (he was a proud and doting new father), "but is a little darling and remarkably bright for three months" (Mamie, March 28, 1874). In the fall, Charles's parents William and Caroline Cather decided to go to Nebraska and visit George and Franc. They needed someone to run the Cather family farm and sheep business during their trip, so Charles and Mary Virginia Cather, Rachel Boak, and baby Willa Cather moved to Willow Shade. Willow Shade was the Cather family home, a solid and comfortable red brick house built by William and Caroline Cather in 1851. It was in a rural part of northern Virginia, in Frederick County, near the village of Back Creek Valley. The house sat on the Northwestern Turnpike, a major road in the Shenandoah Valley region, and Willa Cather's family had been in that area since the beginning of European settlement. Willow Shade was the house where Willa Cather's remembered childhood began.

Willa Cather, mid-1870s. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS228), University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries, Archives & Special Collections.

II.

Most of what we know about Cather's early years comes in fleeting anecdotes, stories that have survived in the family memory or that can be deduced by the bits of evidence that remain. The details available about these years are irregular and impressionistic. Stories remembered and repeated later in life give an imperfect vision of the reality of her childhood, but the very fact of their retelling teaches us

about how Cather and her family understood that early life. Tellingly, the family stories often speak to Cather's personal power and determination even as a child, a choice undoubtedly influenced by the person Willa Cather became in later life. Cather's own occasional representation of her early childhood, though offering glimpses of complexities, was largely consistent with Edith Lewis's description. Lewis, Cather's domestic partner for near forty years, wrote that Cather's "Virginia life was one of great richness, tranquil and ordered and serene. With its freedom from all tension and nervous strain, it may have helped to give her that deep store of vitality which underlay her work" (12). Though her community had only recently struggled through the Civil War and all the trauma it produced, and was still struggling with the conflicts and controversies of Reconstruction, Cather remembered a relatively untroubled childhood, one with personal security, a large household of people who were respectful and attentive to her, and a verdant environment of farmland surrounded by forest.

A few stories survive about Willa Cather as a very young person, from which we are able to gather some sense of who she was in her first years. As a toddler, she loved her cousin Kyd Clutter, who was just a year older and lived with them at Willow Shade. When he left one winter with his mother, Vernie Cather Clutter, to visit other family, the fourteen-month-old Cather looked for him daily, crying "Tid-did Tid-did" (Mary Virginia Boak Cather, February 16, 1875). Another time, when nearby Back Creek was frozen solid after a cold snap in the winter of 1876, Charles and Mary Virginia Cather decided to go ice-skating, and they took their two-year-old daughter Willa with them. She watched as her parents glided confidently along the ice, but she was not content to simply be a spectator. She protested, and Cather's father, who was typically more indulgent than her mother, cut an evergreen bough and set her on it. He skated and pulled her behind him on the ice, and she reveled in the closeness she felt with her parents in the open air (Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 6).[6]

Throughout her childhood, Cather loved to be outdoors and to explore the woods of Frederick County. The tall oaks reached over one hundred feet into the air and dropped their acorns all over the forest floor below. The flowering dogwood shone white among the gray woods in the spring when the oak leaves were no bigger than a squirrel's ear.[7] Cather would often wander in the woods with Marjorie Anderson, a young woman who worked at Willow Shade. Marjorie would listen to her talk and play along when she wanted to imagine that the woods were magical and held mysterious creatures. And Marjorie would help her find flowers in the woods, flowers with a shape and name that seemed to tell a story: bleeding-heart, lady's-slipper, jack-in-the-pulpit.[8]

Sometimes in the woods she would check her rabbit traps to see if the little boxes her father made had snared something for Willow Shade's stew pot (Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 9). Other times, she and Marjorie would walk up Hollow Road, lined on either side with slender pines, to Timber Ridge and visit Marjorie's mother, Mary Ann Anderson. Mary Ann Anderson was a thin, active woman with wavy auburn hair, tanned skin, and pale eyes that were full of fire. She lived in a small home in the mountains quite near Willow Shade. (When Cather was ill, she would sit looking out the third-floor window of her home, eagerly hoping to see Mary Ann Anderson walking up the road, since her family often called on the considerate and sympathetic Mrs. Anderson to care for the sick child.) Cather felt that Mrs. Anderson could talk better than anyone. She loved to see her and to listen to her stories of the people of Timber Ridge. Mary Ann Anderson's conversation was worth hearing because she was so interested in everything and everyone. She'd wake up excited to look at her garden or to observe the peculiarities of the day's weather. She thought it a great pleasure to hear a little gossip or to meet somebody new. She rejoiced in the good fortune of others and was deeply sympathetic when a neighbor had hard times. She couldn't read or write, but she understood everything important, like the way the woods changed in the spring, or what people really meant when they spoke to her (*Complete Letters* no. 1542; Lewis 11).[9]

Mary Ann Anderson. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives, National Willa Cather Center. PHO-4-W689-1694.

Once, when Cather and Marjorie Anderson were walking home from Mary Ann Anderson's house, a hard rain started falling. Marjorie had heavy shoes on and could make it through the mud, but little Cather, only about five years old, was wearing slippers that would easily get soaked through. Snowden Anderson, Majorie's brother, rode to them on his gray horse, picked up the little girl, and placed her in front of him on the cavalry saddle. He held the reins with one hand and steadied the child with the other. He was wearing his old, gray Confederate coat. Willa Cather, protected from the Virginia rain by Snowden's arm and his old coat, felt contented and safe on the saddle. "Children know when people are honest and good," she said about Snowden Anderson, "They don't reason about it, they just know" (*Complete Letters* no. 1569).[10]

III.

In the midst of her ordered childhood in Virginia, Cather witnessed something that suggested to her that there was another kind of life going on beneath the surface. It was one of the earliest and strongest memories of her childhood and happened, she said, when she was about five years old.[11] She remembered even the weather on that March day. The sky was blue and bright, and the wind pushed the clouds quickly across it, casting shadows on the pale brown hills outside the window. Gusts wildly tossed branches of the great willow trees in the yard. She had a cold and her mother made her stay in bed, propped up on pillows. But, because it was a special day, she was allowed to be in her mother's room on the third floor of the house, as it had a window that looked out to the road below, and to the willow trees, hills, and sky.

Two others were in the room with her, older women who were not speaking much. Her maternal grandmother, Rachel Boak, sat with her hands in her lap, as if she was at church. Next to her was Matilda Jefferson, whom the little girl called Aunt Till, a Black woman who had long worked for the Seibert family, first as an enslaved person, and then, after the war, as a hired domestic laborer. Several times Cather's mother briskly walked into the room to look out the window. She, too, was looking out for the stagecoach from nearby Winchester, Virginia. Usually they could hear it coming, but the wind was so loud that day that they weren't sure it would be possible to hear it rolling up the Northwestern Turnpike.

Like everyone else, Willa Cather was excited. Her father, Charles Cather, decided not to go cut timber with the other men and was occupying himself in the tool room, likely making a pair of the little yellow leather shoes that kept the stones from roughing up the front paws of his best sheep dog, Vic. It was quiet in the bedroom, but the young Cather detected that there "was as much restlessness inside the house as there was outside in the wind and clouds and trees" (Cather, *Sapphira*, 274). Everyone was eager to witness Nancy's return. She had not been seen by the family for twenty-five years. Nancy[12] lived and worked in Montreal and had left Virginia as a young woman, about five years before the war. She was a young enslaved woman then, Matilda Jefferson's daughter, abused and vulnerable in the house of Jacob and Ruhamah Seibert, Cather's great-grandparents. One night, Rachel Boak took her to the ferry on the Potomac River north of Martinsburg and across the water. From there a free Black minister took her into Pennsylvania and to a network of Quakers who conveyed her from one hiding place to another until she could get a train into Canada, where the slave catchers could not reach her.

The stage was coming up the road. Mary Virginia Cather saw it and rushed into her bedroom, picked up her daughter, and perched her on the lounge near the window so she could see. Grandmother Boak and Matilda Jefferson stood behind them, and the women watched as four horses drew the stage up to the simple bridge over the nearby creek. Charles Cather ran to meet the stage and held his hand for the woman stepping down the steps at the back. Dressed in a long black coat and hat, Nancy walked with Cather's father up the brick walk to the front steps of Willow Shade.

Mary Virginia Cather left the room to welcome Nancy, but Rachel Boak and Matilda Jefferson stayed put. Earlier, the young girl had cried and protested when her mother insisted she stay in bed, thereby making it impossible for her to see Nancy enter the house. Jefferson soothed Cather with the promise that she would stay in the room with her, so that the little girl would see Nancy at the same time she did. The reunion of Nancy and her mother, who had not seen one another for twenty-five years, was arranged to happen in the third-floor bedroom so the young Willa Cather could watch it.

They heard Nancy's voice on the stairs, along with the excited voices of Charles and Mary Virginia Cather. Jefferson stood up, knowing her daughter was nearly there. When Nancy walked in the room, Matilda Jefferson stepped toward her and fell into her arms. Nancy bent her face down over her mother's head. They did not speak. After their embrace, Nancy turned to Rachel Boak, who was in tears. Boak said the family was proud of what Nancy had done for herself, and Nancy acknowledged her gratitude to Boak for helping her escape across the river. Nancy took off her black coat and set it down, and Cather realized it was lined with fur, unlike any coat she had ever seen in Back Creek Valley.

The group then sat down and talked. Nancy pronounced her words with precision instead of sliding easily between syllables the way people typically did in Virginia. The young Cather thought Nancy's voice sounded odd and not as friendly as it should, but it did have a touch of deference in it when she addressed her mother, and she liked that. What she especially liked was Nancy's way of being and moving. She sat confidently as she spoke, and she moved with ease and smoothness when she opened her bag and brought out photographs of her husband and three children back in Canada, a place so cold that coats must be lined with fur. Matilda Jefferson had told her that it got so cold in Canada that one could throw a cup of water into the air and it would hit the ground as ice.

Cather's parents and grandmother went downstairs to eat their segregated dinner, but Nancy and her mother stayed in the bedroom and kept talking. The two women talked as if no one else were there, holding hands, and the little girl quietly watched with interest. Soon they were called to their dinner, which they ate after the white family members had finished, and they left the room. Mary Virginia Cather came in, gave her daughter an eggnog to sip, and pulled the blinds. The little girl soon fell asleep.[13]

Nancy's return to Willow Shade was, Willa Cather remembered, "one of the most moving things that ever happened to me when I was little" (*Complete Letters* no. 1497). It changed her, she reflected sixty years later, "from a baby into a thinking being" (*Complete Letters* no. 2172). Nancy had escaped from slaveholders Jacob and Ruhamah Seibert, Willa Cather's great-grandparents, with the help of their own daughter, Cather's beloved Grandmother Boak. She made it to freedom in Canada, had a job and a family, and could now return confidently to a place that she had left in fear.

We know about this reunion only because Willa Cather wrote about it late in her life, in an extremely rare moment of explicit autobiography, and the details she included suggest why it was moving and transformational for her. Nancy's return exposed the young girl to a wider world. Cather realized that the boundaries of her home could be crossed, that people could leave—escape—and survive on their own. And the character of the returned Nancy, self-possessed and elegant, was a dramatic juxtaposition to the scared, threatened girl of the story who escaped the household a few years before the Civil War. There was great power in Nancy's self-possession, perhaps especially in an environment when she and her mother were not allowed to eat at the same table with their hosts. The response of the household to Nancy also was revelatory. Decades had passed since any of them had seen her, and some, like Charles Cather, likely had no memory of Nancy whatsoever. The *story* of her escape, which must have been well known to the family, was nearly as powerful as memory and relationship. Nancy's story must have, for some, figured grandly in the family history, and there was great excitement when this character from that narrative stepped through the door. It was as if a book or a ballad were made flesh, confirming the reality and power of the imagined world.[14]

Cather identifies this moment of reunion as her intellectual birth, when she became a "thinking being." Tellingly, that birth is a realization of relationships and human complexity: the little girl is thrust into a new awareness of the people around her, what they've done, what they've lost, and what they mean to one another. Though she is just an observer, unable to fully understand the depth and complexity of feeling in Matilda Jefferson and her daughter, she is a sympathetic one. Willa Cather cannot fully empathize with the lives of these Black women, women who were once enslaved by her own ancestors. There is so much they know that she does not know and can never know. Yet the five-year-old Willa Cather senses the importance of the reunion, that there is a profound and complicated depth of meaning, and the little girl sees that such transformational moments can happen quietly, in an upstairs bedroom, among women.

IV.

The story of Nancy's return, one of the only detailed portraits we have of Cather's early life at Willow Shade, and one given to us by Cather herself, offers a glimpse into this atmosphere of Willa Cather's childhood, or perhaps more importantly, the kind of atmosphere that Cather *remembered*. Even as a child, Cather could command attention from those around her. She was not withdrawn, lost in the busy lives of the household, but a dominant presence, attended to by multiple generations of women. Though the young Cather is mostly a silent observer in the narrative, Matilda Jefferson and the rest of the family consent to arrange the homecoming for the child's benefit. The reunion of the Black women was staged for the young white girl. The staging reflects the racist social order of 1870s Virginia, but it also tells us about the power of this particular five-year-old child. She gets what she wants, and her household knows that she has the sensitivity to appreciate something of the meaning and power of Nancy's return.

In this atmosphere, the bright, precocious Willa Cather received an education, but it was somewhat informal or irregular in nature. She likely attended a school of some kind, as her family had the means and valued education. She may have attended a nearby private school with older children or, later, a school run by "Mr. Smith" in Back Creek Valley (Woodress 23). And certainly

she learned a great deal from teachers in her own family, women who took the time to read to her and provoke her mind with stories and language. Cather's grandmother Rachel Boak often read to her when she was little, from books like the Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or *Peter Parley's Universal History*.

From an early age, Cather was transfixed by tales and poems, so imaginatively engaged that she would physically reenact the stories in her home. Sometimes her parents would turn a wooden chair upside down and place it on another. They would lift Cather up and into the overturned chair, and it would become a chariot in ancient Rome, and she would become Scipio triumphantly returning from vanquishing Carthage. In front would be musicians, carts filled with treasure, defeated Carthaginians bound in chains, and elephants as big as barns. The chariot was pulled by four white horses, and she was dressed in a robe of purple and gold. On one side she held an ivory sceptre topped with a golden eagle; on the other side, a servant whispered in her ear, "Remember that thou art but a man!" Scipio must not forget his mortality even in the moment of triumph (Lewis 10; Goodrich, 277–78).[15]

It is telling that among her many childhood experiences, the family remembered Cather's performance as a triumphant conqueror in a chariot: like other stories, it suggests her will toward independence and leadership. She liked to be the child who dominated everyone's attention. And there were lots of people to seek attention from at Willow Shade. The place was full of family—cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents—and the neighbors and friends of the family. But it was also full of people both white and Black who worked for the Cathers. Most didn't live at Willow Shade all the time, but would come and stay overnight while there was work. One of these travelers was William Parks, a broom-maker who the Cathers called "Uncle Billy Parks." Little Willa Cather, who had great affection for Uncle Billy, one time took all the coins out of her bank and gave them to the man, just to express her admiration (Lewis 8).

Undoubtedly, Willa Cather grew up with the comfort of being part of the privileged class, one who gave the money away. She probably didn't think about it too much, but grew unconsciously accustomed to being the one who got pulled on the bough on the frozen creek, or put on Snowden's saddle, or propped up in bed while the reunion of Nancy and Matilda Jefferson was staged in front of her. She got this, in part, because she was white and because she was Charles and Mary Virginia Cather's daughter, and Charles was, while his father was away, the head of Willow Shade. But she also got this attention because she demanded it. She was smart and articulate and willful, and she made sure people felt her power and independence. If she struggled with a task and her parents stepped in to help her, she pushed them away and protested, "Self-alone, self-alone!" (Brown 295).[16] Once, when a local judge visited Willow Shade, the older man stroked her hair and talked to her in condescending baby talk, as he usually talked to little girls. She hated his platitudes and hated being treated like a common girl, and she burst out, "I'se a dang'ous nigger, I is!" (Lewis 13). It was a crude declaration of independence, a juvenile expression of an ugly word from a racist culture, and an exclamation designed to shock the old southern gentleman. She could not abide people trying to change her, trying to make her into the kind of girl who fit easily into their expectations of who she should be, so she declared herself to be the opposite of the dainty little girl the treacly judge expected: she identified herself as the feared, dehumanized specter of the racist society. "I always used to be a little afraid of my grown-up

Willa Cather, about age five. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS228), University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries, Archives & Special Collections.

relatives as a child," she wrote to her aunt in 1913, "I felt as if all of them, even father, wanted to make me over, and I didn't want to be made over—oh, not a bit!" (*Complete Letters* no. 0254).

Willa Cather's childhood in Virginia was comfortable, materially and racially privileged, and rooted in the long family story in that place. She was loved and cared for by her parents, her grandparents, family servants (both white and Black), and the extended community of family and friends that surrounded her. It is hard to overestimate the power of this stability. As a child born into love and comfort, she had a tremendous advantage over children born into stress and poverty; her remarkable intellect developed rapidly because of this atmosphere (Goswami 1). Her childhood home gave her a deep sense of personal power. She was, undoubtedly, chastised like most children when she misbehaved, but she was not, in all of her precocity, ever fundamentally rejected. Her father, who held considerable authority as the male head of the household in nineteenth-century Virginia, was proud of his intelligent daughter.[17] Her mother, though playing a fairly traditional role in the domestic life of the family, was a woman with authority and dignity, and she exercised this authority in her relationship with a conflict-avoiding husband. Though she regularly butted heads with her daughter, it was largely because they were so alike, each so devoted to their own way of thinking, and each empowered in a family dynamic that understood and appreciated their strength.

Willa Cather forthrightly embraced her independence from a young age because she knew, deep within her, that she was loved and safe. This does not mean she always felt "happy" or never had worries. Of course she felt the fears and anxieties and frustrations of all children, alongside the love. But her family and community gave her, at the bottom, a sense of her own worth and a belief in her own ability to self-determine.

V.

By 1877, the year Willa Cather turned four years old, all of her father Charles's immediate family was either dead or in Nebraska. William and Caroline Cather moved west with two of their daughters in the fall of that year, trying to escape the threat of tuberculosis. Though the extended family, and Mary Virginia Boak Cather's family, were still in Virginia, many of those to whom Cather and her parents were most intimately connected—those with whom they lived at Willow Shade—were now gone. For the time being, Charles Cather and his family would continue managing Willow Shade and its sheep operation. He and Jennie had just had their second child, Roscoe Boak Cather, in 1877, and their oldest, Willa, was growing up fine and healthy. All of them had avoided the cough and disease that so plagued others in the family. In 1880, a third child, Charles Douglas Cather, was born, and in 1881, a fourth: Jessica Virginia Cather. Charles, Mary Virginia, and their children were all thriving at Willow Shade with Rachel Boak, Marjorie Anderson, and the others who came and went in the busy house.

William Cather sometimes returned to Willow Shade for business and visiting, as he did in the spring of 1879, and saw Charles and Mary Virginia Cather tending their sheep and their growing family (*Red Cloud Chief*, March 6, 1879). He may well have encouraged his son to join the rest of the family in Nebraska while he was back in Virginia. In the summer of 1882, after his parents had been west for five years, Charles Cather decided to visit them, likely because he contemplated bringing his family to Nebraska to join the others and wanted to see it for himself (*Red Cloud Chief*, June 29, 1882; Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia," 9). He saw that his brother George and his wife Franc were successfully raising their young family on a respectable piece of land, and his father and mother were doing well too. William Cather had built a frame house, with small bedrooms and a good-sized basement kitchen and dining room half dug into a draw.[18] It wasn't as large and stately as Willow Shade, but it was comfortable, and life carried on there with some dignity. William Cather knew he couldn't keep up the heavy farming work much longer, and he hoped that his son Charles would come west to take over his homestead.

In the fall of 1882, the big sheep barn at Willow Shade burned to the ground, probably due to spontaneous combustion.[19] It was a huge, multistory barn with a loft[20] and would be a heavy expense to replace, and running Willow Shade the same way would require such a barn. William Cather, who remained involved in Willow Shade business, did not want to rebuild, but believed it was time to sell the place (Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 10). The burning of the barn provided the final push, and Charles and Mary Virginia Cather agreed that it was time to move. In February 1883 Willow Shade was sold to David A. Fries, and Willa Cather's family prepared to head west.

Shortly before they left for Nebraska, Charles and Mary Virginia Cather decided to go to Winchester and get photographs taken at Wortham's. Leaving Virginia was a major transition in their lives, and they wanted to make an image of each of the children before their lives were disrupted. Willa wore a white dress with her cross necklace and her long brown hair pulled back and tied with a ribbon. The photographer put the smaller ones—Roscoe, Douglass,[21] and Jessica—on the chair with a blanket and a fringed back rest and had them tuck their right foot under their left knee. That helped them sit straight and hold the pose. Roscoe was relaxed in his bow tie and his cap on his knee, and Douglass, still in his skirts, looked directly at the camera. Jessica, just a baby,

Top to bottom, left to right: Willa Cather, Roscoe Cather, Douglass Cather, and Jessica Cather, 1883. Willa, Roscoe, and Douglass: Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS228), University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries, Archives & Special Collections. Jessica: WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives, National Willa Cather Center. PHO-4-W689-28.

was a little unsure, but kept her hands down long enough to show off her dress with its long line of buttons and lace collar.[22]

Charles Cather thought about going to Nebraska without the rest of the family to get everything settled before he sent for them, but his father didn't think that was a good idea. "Dear Son Charles," William Cather wrote from Webster County, Nebraska, in February 1883, "You spoke of leaving your family in Va for a year, my opinion is it would be better for you all to come together this spring coming. I would rather get out of the farming and cattle business I feel that it is taxing my strength too much" (William Cather, February 21, 1883). He offered to let Charles and his family have the homestead he had established, as he was exhausted from all of the work. "[I]t is time we were fixing to take life a little easier," he told his son, and he asked that he make $2000 from the sale of Willow Shade payable to his wife, Caroline: "she has done enough there to merrit at least that much in her own name" (William Cather, February 26, 1883). Despite the supposed health benefits of the Nebraska climate, Charles's sister Vernie, who had gotten married again, to Francis E. Payne in 1881, wasn't well. "Verny seems rather poorly," William wrote, "she is not able to do her work and do herself justice, and it is the next thing to impossible to hire a girl out here" (William Cather, February 21, 1883). Charles likely wrote his father to confirm that they were all coming to Nebraska that spring, and William wrote on March 19 with details of the ploughing and pointing out that farm hands were hard to come by in Nebraska. "I want you to bring hands sufficient to run the herd and farm without my assistance," he wrote, and further pointed out, "You cannot well get hands here George is still without a hand."

Part of leaving for Nebraska, then, meant convincing others to come along, for making a life on the plains was a community effort. Charles and Mary Virginia Cather did find some help to come with them to Nebraska. Marjorie Anderson, who worked at Willow Shade, agreed to come, though it required her to leave her mother. She would travel with another member of her family, her brother, Enoch Anderson. Enoch was a young man, about twenty-two years old, just a few years younger than Marjorie, and he could be a good hand on the homestead in Nebraska. He didn't have many prospects as a poor man in Virginia, especially since he was the youngest boy in the family, so he must have decided to take his chances as a poor man in Nebraska.[23]

Bess Seymour and her half-brother Will Andrews also decided to come to Nebraska (Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 10). Bess was Mary Virginia Cather's niece, the daughter of her sister Sarah. She was about twenty-five years old and lived at Willow Shade with the Cather family ("United States Census, 1880"). She would have to leave her mother in Virginia, but her father had been dead since she was a baby, and she was an established part of her aunt's household.[24] Will was just eighteen and perhaps hoped he could eventually get his own place in Nebraska after helping his aunt and uncle on their place.[25] Rachel Boak, who turned sixty-seven in 1883, was also staying with her daughter's family and moving to Nebraska. The Cather migration from Virginia to Nebraska had been—and continued to be—a large family migration, inclusive of both the very young and the aging.

Charles and Mary Virginia Cather had a group of eleven people to get to Nebraska, and they decided to go in the spring of 1883. Throughout the winter they prepared, packing dishes with old, worthless Confederate money to keep them from shattering, getting their clothes ready, and trying to decide what could stay and what must go (Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 10). Nine-year-old Willa Cather was not happy about the move.[26] In this large group, she had a distinctive place: old enough to have her own opinion, but too young to make her own decision. She had to leave, even though she loved Virginia and Willow Shade, loved the woods and the people and the animals. She liked to see old Vic, that loyal dog, romping about with the sheep in the little leather shoes her father had made to protect her paws from the rocky ground. She liked to see the rabbits when she caught them in her traps. But after the barn burned and the family decided it was time to go, and after she learned that Willow Shade would soon no longer belong to them, Virginia must have seemed different. She had heard of this new place, but only knew of it as a place far away where some of her family had gone and where one, her aunt Jennie Cather Ayre, had died. She must have heard some stories about Nebraska, but she could not really know what it was or what to expect.

In April 1883, Charles, Mary Virginia, Willa, Roscoe, Douglass, and Jessica Cather; Marjorie and Enoch Anderson; Bess Seymour, Will Andrews, and Rachel Boak left Virginia. Willow Shade and the land all around now belonged to someone else. Most of the furniture had been sold at auction, and Vic, their favorite sheep dog, was chained up at a neighbor's who agreed to take care of her. They said their goodbyes and headed for the station and the train that would take them west. Just as they were boarding the train, they heard a dog barking and looked to see old Vic. She was running across the fields toward them, a snapped chain bouncing behind. (Lewis 7–8).

Nine-year-old Willa Cather, whose life had been "bound up in the woods and hills and meadows" of northern Virginia was now "jerked away" from it as her family was pushed west (F. H.). Her identity, so wrapped up in the landscape and community of northern Virginia, was now unmoored. Cather's friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher reflected that Cather "found herself in what from this distance looks rather like social chaos and anarchy. But the sight of chaos is, everybody knows, the most potent stimulus the creative impulse can encounter; and anarchy . . . gives infinitely more elbow room for the strong" (92). And this child, though shaken by the remaking of her life, had a Virginia childhood that made her one of the strong.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Smith.

2. Willa Cather portrayed her mother in the character of Victoria Templeton in her 1932 story "Old Mrs. Harris," and my conclusions about Mary Virginia Cather's personality also draw upon this portrayal.

3. In fact, with exception of the record of birth, no document of Cather's childhood or later life refers to her as "Wilella." See "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584–1917."

4. Mary Virginia Boak Cather uses the name "Willa" to refer to her daughter when she is just fourteen months old. See Mary Virginia Boak Cather, February 16, 1875. Woodress and Bennett, among others, claim that the name "Willa" was an invention of Willa Cather herself, based on the evidence of the family Bible, which they said showed Cather changing her name to read "Willa." I have examined this same Bible, which is part of the National Willa Cather Center collection, and I see no clear evidence of alteration, only smeared ink around the final "la" of "Willa." For there to have been a change from the seven-letter name "Wilella" to the shorter "Willa," deleted letters would need to be present; I can see no evidence for such a deletion. The use of the name "Willa" clearly preceded Cather's ability to write or even speak.

5. Elsie Cather, Willa Cather's sister, told Mildred Bennett that the cup, in the National Willa Cather Center collection, came from Grandfather Cather (Bennett 234).

6. Bennett notes that Cather herself shared the memory of the ice-skating and the evergreen bough when she was in Red Cloud for her parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary on December 5, 1922.

7. This description of the Virginia forest is based on Cather's own in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (117).

8. Details about wandering the woods with Marjorie, "weaving elaborate fantasies" and hunting flowers, are in Bennett, "Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883" (7). The specific flowers named here are native to Frederick County, Virginia, and are flowers Cather specifically mentions in her fiction or letters (though not necessarily in connection with Virginia).

9. The character of Mrs. Ringer in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is based on Cather's memory of Mary Ann Anderson, and my description of Mrs. Anderson comes in large part from Cather's description of Mrs. Ringer in the novel, as well as the other cited sources and photograph.

10. In her letter, Cather assumes the Confederate coat was Snowden's father's, but his father, Asa, died in 1861 and Snowden was the right age to have fought in the war, so the coat was very likely his.

11. Cather describes herself as "something over five years old" in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, but the novel's timeline places the action in March 1881, when Cather was seven. When Cather wrote the novel, she had long claimed her birth year as 1876 (rather than the authentic

1873), and her change from seven to five may reflect this public reliance on the wrong birth year. However, the numbers are hazy, and Cather's description of the event is the only known record of it. Certain details—her mother lifting her and carrying her to the window, for example—suggest a younger child.

12. Though Nancy is the name of the character in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Cather also used the name in letters when she described the historical event she witnessed, suggesting Nancy was the woman's real name. Her surname, however, is not known.

13. This scene is drawn largely from the epilogue to Cather's 1940 novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Though this is an epilogue to the novel, a work of fiction, Cather claimed a special status for it. She repeated several times a claim she made to her brother Roscoe in an October 5, 1940 letter "Every word in the scene of nancy's return is true, my boy, even the weather" (*Complete Letters* no. 2172). I have, however, included historical names as substitute for the fictional ones Cather used (Grandma Boak for Mrs. Blake, for example). Though Till is a character in the novel, Cather uses that name in her references to the real woman in the epilogue, as when she wrote Dorothy Canfield Fisher that the "meeting between Nancy and Aunt Till . . . took place just as I tell it" (*Complete Letters* no. 1497). "Aunt Till" has been identified by Ann Romines as Matilda Jefferson; see the Historical Essay in the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of the novel. Though Nancy's crossing of the Potomac is a dramatic moment in the novel based on Cather's family history, Cather indicated in a letter that the crossing was a historical fact when she told Dorothy Canfield Fisher that she found, on a map made in 1821, "the actual ferry by which my grandmother took Nancy over the Potomac River" (*Complete Letters* no. 1497). Though Cather's claims of historical truth are not sufficient evidence to verify the historical facts of this episode, the claims do speak to Cather's belief in her own memory of the event. The weight and meaning she gives her remembered story are a strong argument for valuing it as a key episode in the biographical retelling of her childhood, even if secondary verification of the details appears to be impossible.

14. When she was a child, Willa Cather's mother would often sing her to sleep with an old song: "Down by de cane-brake, close by de mill, / Dar lived a yaller gal, her name was Nancy Till." "I never doubted," Willa Cather wrote, "the song was made about our Nancy." (Cather, *Sapphira*, 274).

15. Lewis, and sources that follow her, relate the anecdote as Cather playing at being Cato and the servant whispering "Cato, thou art but man!" I have changed it to Scipio after consulting *Peter Parley's Universal History* (Goodrich), one of the volumes Cather knew in her childhood. On pages 277–78 of that book, a popular volume reprinted several times, is the original story that must have inspired the young Cather and the episode of the slave whispering in the conqueror's ear. I believe that the anecdote was misremembered as Cato when it was told in the family and have decided that, during her youth, she would have more accurately imagined herself as Scipio.

16. Brown quotes Edith Lewis, who in turn was quoting an anecdote Cather herself told.

17. Sharon O'Brien makes the astute observation that Cather's father's support of her was a great gift and one that was not necessarily expected in 19th century patriarchal American culture (14).

18. The character of William and Caroline Cather's house in Webster County is intuited from Cather's depiction of the house in *My Ántonia* (8–9).

19. Though some have referred to the "mysterious" burning of the barn and even hinted that it was intentionally burned by resentful neighbors who didn't appreciate the Cathers' Unionist loyalties, no evidence has been offered for such a dramatic explanation. Bennett, relying largely on family history in her account published in 1981, suggests that most believed it was a case of spontaneous combustion ("Willa Cather's Virginia 1873–1883," 9).

20. See photograph of the sheep barn at Willow Shade (DOI: 8809) at the Nebraska State Historical Society for evidence of this barn's gargantuan size and value.

21. Though named Charles Douglas Cather at birth, at some point he adopted "Douglass," with an additional "s" at the end, as the standard spelling of his name, and this was used by the family throughout his adult life.

22. These descriptions are based on four photographic portraits of the Cather children: Willa Cather (Southwick Collection, UNL, DOI: 263), Roscoe Cather (Southwick Collection, UNL, DOI: 577), Douglass Cather (Southwick Collection, UNL, DOI: 576), and Jessica Cather (National Willa Cather Center, DOI: 16811). The claim that these were all taken at the same time emerges from a couple of pieces of evidence. First, the poses and backgrounds of the young children are identical, which suggests that the photographs were taken as part of the same session (though the Wortham photographer also posed a younger Willa Cather with her legs crossed in similar fashion in about 1878, so it must have been something of a standard pose for them). Second, we know the Cather family left Virginia for Nebraska in April 1883, and since Jessica Cather was born in August 1881 and appears to be around 18 months of age in the photograph, the photographs must have been taken in the winter of 1883, shortly before the family left Virginia.

23. Cather mentions that Enoch and Marjorie both came with them in a 1941 letter (*Complete Letters* no. 1542). Based on the census records, it appears Enoch and Marjorie had three older brothers: Snowden, Morgan, and Howard Anderson. See "United States Census, 1870." A side note: Enoch Anderson is thought to be an inspiration for the character of Jake Marpole in *My Ántonia*; according to the census, the Andersons lived right next to the Marpoles in Frederick County, Virginia.

24. Bess Seymour's father, Joseph Seymour, died in 1861, when Bess was a toddler. She lived at Willow Shade in 1880 rather than with her mother and stepfather (though she did live in the home with her stepfather when she was younger, according to the 1870 census). See "United States Census, 1870," and "United States Census, 1880."

25. Will Andrews later did have land of his own in Webster County.

26. I've inferred this in large part from the interview Cather gave in 1913 where she talked about her homesickness after the move and particularly her comment "I made an agreement with myself that I would not eat much until I got back to Virginia and could get some fresh mutton" (see F. H.).

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Cather, Mansfield, and Childhood: Letting Memory Do Its Work

John H. Flannigan

Recently I had an embarrassing experience rereading Willa Cather's story "Old Mrs. Harris" (1932). After Mrs. Harris's cat, Blue Boy, dies from distemper, Mrs. Harris orders her twin grandsons, Bert and Del Templeton, to give him a dignified burial instead of letting him be picked up with the trash as the boys' mother, Victoria, has planned. When Victoria learns that the twins have buried Blue Boy, she prepares to punish them: "When she whipped them, she did it thoroughly" (121). I had always felt that the boys are "thoroughly" whipped, but no whipping occurs in the text. Had I garbled a much-loved work, becoming like those students whose misreading once exasperated me?

I had. But the experience was a valuable one, for it made me reconsider the act of rereading. In the case of "Old Mrs. Harris," the resemblances between the Templeton family and my own—I have a twin brother, my family once had a beloved cat, and I remember my grandmother's illness and death—are purely coincidental but also impossible for me to forget as I reread the story. I have also found myself mingling memories of my own childhood with accumulated impressions of the story so that even the *differences* between my childhood and the Templeton children's can stimulate my imagination as potently as the resemblances. For example, neither of my parents ever laid a hand on me or my siblings, let alone whipped us, but the contrast between Victoria's punishments and my mother's is vivid enough for me to imagine Bert and Del's other whippings and to actualize the story's latent violence at the very moment Cather suppresses it. In short, I remember events about Bert and Del that I never *witnessed* in Cather's story (although they certainly happened to them on other occasions). Memories of my own childhood, free of such painful experiences, amplify something Cather mentions in passing and make Bert and Del more real to me than even the story's text can. Maybe I hadn't been "misreading" "Old Mrs. Harris" after all. By letting memory do its work and allowing my memories of childhood to inhabit and expand Cather's text, I can see more in it than the words on the page and understand Bert, Del, and their family more deeply and sympathetically than I ever realized.

Katherine Mansfield, 1915. Alfred Hughes, photographer. From the papers of John Middleton Murry. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref.: PAColl-10046-07.

Cather may have had a similar experience with the stories of Katherine Mansfield, for she clearly admired them enough to reread them. In her essay "Katherine Mansfield," Cather writes, "She communicates vastly more than she actually writes. One goes back and runs through the pages to find the text which made one know certain things about Linda or Burnell or Beryl, and the text is not there—but something was there, all the same—is there, though no typesetter will ever set it" (*On Writing* 110). Was Cather remembering things from her past that not only reminded her of details in Mansfield's works but also seemed as vivid as if Mansfield had "communicated" them in her writing? It's impossible to know, but it is not unusual for Mansfield's readers to experience something like what Cather did. Mansfield's recent biographer, Claire Harman, praises her "incredible ability to recreate semblances of life," noting how a Mansfield character's experience can become "something akin to a memory of one's own. It's truly a kind of magic" (5, 6). My own experiences reading Cather and Mansfield have taught me that "a memory of one's own" can mean not only a moment from my past that these authors' texts recall to me but also a memory of

the *texts themselves*, enriched by many readings (and occasional embellishments, such as Bert and Del's "whipping").

In the Mansfield essay, Cather mentions four stories, three of which—*Prelude* (1918),[1] "At the Bay" (1922), and "The Doll's House" (1922)—strongly evoke childhood and that Cather praises in terms echoing Harman's for possessing "a magic that one does not find in the other stories, fine as some of them are" (*On Writing* 110). Cather also admires a fourth story, "one of singular beauty," "Six Years After," left unfinished at Mansfield's death.[2] Cather believes one of the keys to Mansfield's "magic" is her "way to approach the major forces of life through comparatively trivial incidents. She chose a small reflector to throw a luminous streak out into the shadowy realm of personal relationships" (*On Writing* 108). In her essay, Cather also explores the "personal relationships" of Mansfield herself. The latter's ability to recreate and reenergize the commonplace details of these relationships in her fiction may have also helped Cather understand that *writers* as well as readers should let memory do its work and that her own "trivial" childhood experiences are universal and would resonate with readers just as Mansfield's stories of childhood communicate "vastly more" than the pages of the texts. Perhaps relying on Mansfield's example, Cather felt that the people and places of her childhood deserved to be portrayed in her late works, especially her last story, "The Best Years" (1948). Through such portrayals, she could liberate trivial incidents from their obscurity and enable readers to recognize and inhabit them, thus transforming them from the "shadowy" to the illumined and from the everyday to the eternal.

Willa Cather (right) with sister-in-law Meta Schaper Cather and Meta and Roscoe's twin daughters, ca. 1916. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection (MS 0077). Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries.

Cather loved children and always treasured her childhood. Janis Stout notes, "Childhood in itself was of great importance to Cather, both as a set of personal memories and as an idea. She believed that the experiences and impressions one gains in childhood shape one's soul" (482). John J. Murphy and David Stouck note that, as she worked on *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), "the loss of her parents . . . made Cather's text resonate with recollections of childhood, with those best years in Red Cloud, Nebraska" (338). Those "best years" are the subject of and provide the title for her last story, in which she "returns to Nebraska and family memories. She planned it as a gift for [her brother] Roscoe, a reminder of their life together when they were children" (Woodress 500).

Cather recognizes a similar fascination with childhood in Mansfield's stories. In the 1925 version of the Mansfield essay, Cather admires its subject's depictions of families in which "every individual in that household (even the children) is clinging so passionately to his individual soul, is so in terror of losing it in the general family flavor. . . . Always in his mind each member of these social units is escaping, running away, breaking out of the net which circumstances and his own affections have woven about him" (*Borzoi* 48). (In 1936, Cather softened this passage to read, "*trying to break* the net," as if to admit the impossibility of such an escape [*On Writing* 109; my emphasis]). Cather continues, "One realizes that even in harmonious families there is this double life: the group life . . . and, underneath, another—secret and passionate and intense" (*On Writing* 109). Escapes from such tensions are illusory: "One realizes that human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life; that they can never be wholly satisfactory, that every ego is half the time greedily seeking them, and half the time pulling away from them" (109). Cather's biographer Benjamin Taylor observes this dichotomy in Mansfield and Cather, both of whom "shared a desire to capture definitively the way of life of the childhood place . . . that neither could wait to escape" (17). As she matured, however, Cather realized that although

The Beauchamp family. Back row, left to right: Vera, Jeanne, Kathleen (Katherine Mansfield) and Annie Beauchamp. Front row, left to right: Charlotte, Isabella Dyer and Leslie. Taken ca. 1898, possibly by Harold Beauchamp (Mansfield's father). Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref.: 1/2-031204-F.

Nebraska had trapped her as a child, it had shaped her as a writer, perhaps explaining why in her last story she approached her childhood with renewed interest and enthusiasm.

An awareness of Mansfield's life likely increased this interest, too. The 1936 version of Cather's essay includes a long concluding section drawing on Mansfield's letters and journals, editions of which Knopf had brought out in the late 1920s and early 1930s and which Cather apparently found as remarkable as the stories (*On Writing* 111–20). These autobiographical writings lay bare Mansfield's struggles with loneliness, disease, and grief over the death of her brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp, or "Chummie" (1894–1915), who was killed by a grenade accident during training in Belgium shortly after enlisting. The 1936 conclusion of Cather's essay contains little discussion of the author's fiction but suggests that her struggles with illness, loneliness, and homesickness resembled some of Cather's own. When Cather refers to Mansfield as "a girl come back to make her living in London, without health or money or influential friends,—with no assets but talent and pride," she could be remembering her own literary apprenticeship and her move from Nebraska to Pittsburgh in 1896 (*On Writing* 112). The same hunger for a writer's life drove Mansfield to Europe in 1908 although her journals and letters demonstrate that, like Cather, she always prized her childhood's people and places. Cather writes that when Mansfield "began to do her best work but was rapidly sinking in vitality," her thoughts returned to "New Zealand and that same crude Wellington. Unpromising as it was for her purposes, she felt that it was the only territory she could claim, in the deepest sense, as her own" (*On Writing* 114). Familiar as she was with Mansfield's life, Cather perhaps turned her imagination back to Nebraska for the same reason.

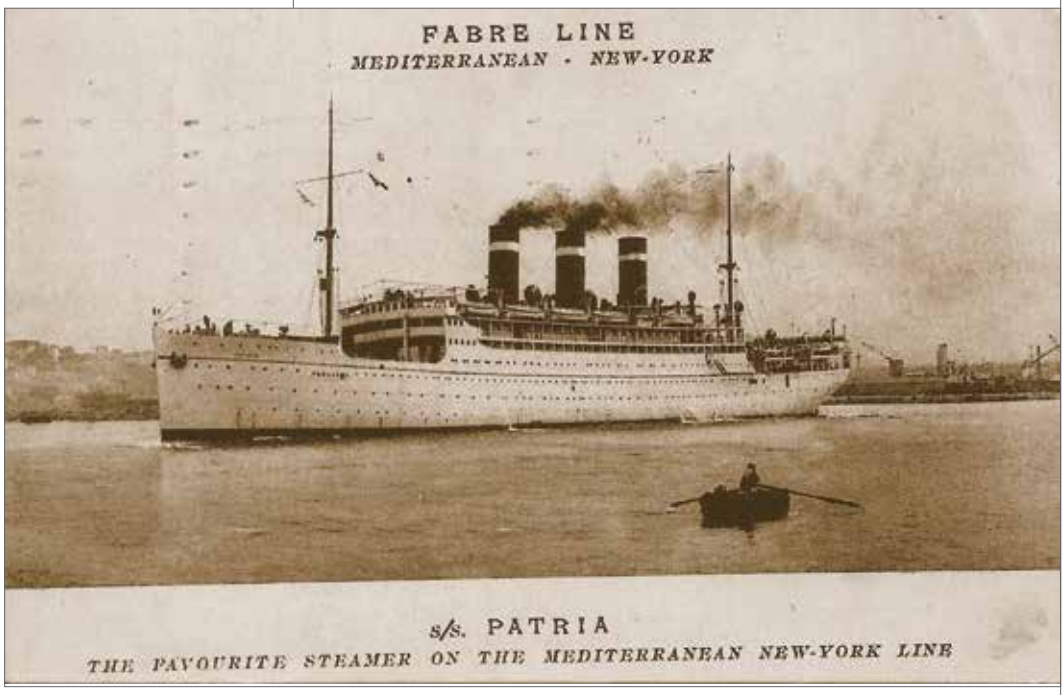
Katherine Mansfield with her brother Leslie Heron Beauchamp (left) and cousin Brian Derry (center), ca. 1908. Donated by Anne Bennett, 1975. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref.: 1/2-C-009023-F.

Born Kathleen Beauchamp in Wellington, Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) was the third of six children (five girls and a boy) of Australian-born parents. She grew up in a comfortable household that, like Cather's, included a strong, often aloof mother, Annie Burnell Beauchamp, née Dyer (1863–1918), and a maternal grandmother, Isabella Dyer, née Mansfield (1839–1906), whom Mansfield warmly recalls in her works. These consist of three collections of mostly autobiographical stories published during Mansfield's lifetime, supplemented by additional volumes of stories and nonfiction, including letters and journals, that her second husband, the essayist and critic John Middleton Murry (1889–1957), published after her death.

Today Mansfield is a peripheral figure, but she was once admired in literary circles. Her biographer Claire Tomalin notes that her life was plagued by poverty, stormy friendships, tormented affairs with women and men, complicated marriages, and chronic illnesses, including untreated gonorrhea and the tuberculosis that killed her at age thirty-four, adding up "to a story whose main theme is undoubtedly a black one" (7). Mansfield was also an inconsistent writer. Harman observes, "There's volatility in her work; stark realism in some stories and mawkishness in others; hit-and-miss results when she adopts an accent or any sort of pose; hurry as well as flight" (11). Yet she has proved herself an influential writer. Virginia Woolf, whose Hogarth Press published *Prelude*, was haunted by Mansfield's memory: "I was jealous of her writing—the only writing I have ever been jealous of" (quoted in Harman 234). And notwithstanding her inconsistency, Harman argues, "It's hard to think of any single writer who contributed more to the sophistication of the short-story form in the twentieth century" than Mansfield did (3).

Cather already knew some of Mansfield's stories by October 1920 when she traveled with Edith Lewis from Marseilles to New York on the French liner SS *Patria* and, during a stormy crossing, met an American who queried her about Mansfield while they shared adjoining deck chairs (Madigan 11).[3] Cather reconstructs their conversations in a long opening section she added to the Mansfield essay when it appeared in the collection *Not Under Forty* (1936). Cather surmises that her fellow passenger is a New Englander and calls him "Mr. J—," for she has forgotten his name, but my research indicates he may have been Harris Gray Burall (1862–1953), of Baltimore, whose appearance, background, and travel history match many (but not all) elements of Cather's description. (I hope to explore Burall's possible connections among Mr. J—, Mansfield, and Cather in a future essay.) Like the other "chance meetings" recorded in *Not Under Forty*, Cather uses the one with Mr. J— to launch a discussion of a literary figure who interests her, but unlike these other figures, the Mansfield who emerges from this meeting is complex, even self-contradictory. By publishing her recollections of this "chance meeting," Cather also follows Mansfield's example and casts her own "luminous streak" into the "shadowy" world of another author's hidden life.

Mr. J— tells Cather he had first met Mansfield when he shared a voyage from New Zealand to Australia with her and her family, remembering her as "a little girl with thin legs and large eyes who wandered away from the family" (*Not Under Forty* 129). Cather writes, "No, he couldn't say exactly what the charm of the child was. She struck him as intensely alert, with a deep curiosity altogether different from the flighty, excited curiosity usual in children. She turned over things in her head and asked him questions which surprised him" (*Not Under Forty* 131). Mr. J— continues his recollections with "chapter two," as he calls it (132). He describes an encounter with Mansfield years later when he observed her and her friends in a London restaurant and "felt a strong inclination to look her up" (133). After reading the story *Je ne parle pas français* (1920), however, "Mr. J— felt there would be no point in meeting the young writer" (133). He asks Cather if she has read the story; she hasn't. He dismisses it as "artificial, and unpleasantly hysterical, full of affectations; she had none as a child" (133–34).



The SS *Patria* of the French Fabre Line, on which Cather and Edith Lewis traveled from Marseilles to New York in October 1920. Lithograph postcard circa 1920. Author's collection.

Neither in her essay nor anywhere else in her writings does Cather say if she ever read *Je ne parle pas français*, let alone what she thought of it. On one hand, this story certainly shows a side of Mansfield's talent different from the one Cather praises

in her essay, and its first-person narrative of a seedy, bisexual male character sexually molested as a child—practically the antithesis of the Mansfield stories Cather admires—may have irritated Cather just as it had her shipmate. On the other hand, she seems so impressed by his recollections of Mansfield that Cather lets her memory of the encounter on the *Patria* do its work and creates a sharp portrait of a precocious child destined to be a writer long before any biographer or critic knew of her existence, one fully capable someday, it seems, of writing *Je ne parle pas français*. Hearing Mr. J— describe this unforgettable child, it is not surprising that, when Cather later explored Mansfield's journals and learned that the earliest ones had been burned by the author, she observes that these were the ones "I should have liked to read" (*On Writing* 113). Certainly, Cather continued to be interested in Mansfield after 1920 and carefully read the latter's correspondence and various biographies, as *Not Under Forty* indicates.

Cather's interest in Mansfield is apparent, too, in an episode in "Old Mrs. Harris," the Methodist lawn party at which Victoria invites the Maudes to sit with her own children, which recalls Mansfield's "The Doll's House" (103). The Maude children, like the Kelvey sisters, Lil and "our Else," are children of the town washerwoman and shunned by other children. In both stories, the children's parentage also causes gossip; the four Maudes are rumored to have four different fathers while the Kelveys' father is believed to be a "gaolbird" (Cather "Old Mrs. Harris" 102, Mansfield "The Doll's House" 321). In Mansfield's story, the Burnell family receives a doll's house from a friend, and they allow carefully managed groups of their children's schoolmates (except the Kelveys) to see it. Defying her family, the child Kezia Burnell invites Lil and our Else for a viewing, and Kezia's horrified aunt Beryl drives the two girls away, "shoo[ing] them out as if they were chickens" (325). Cather reverses the situation in "Old Mrs. Harris" and shows Victoria's generosity toward the town's outcasts. The resemblances between the Maudes and Kelveys, however, plus the fact that, as Kari Ronning notes, no prototype for the Maudes has been discovered in Red Cloud's history, point to Cather's having modeled her characters on Mansfield's (294).

In October 1943, Cather was reminded of Mansfield and Mr. J— when a New Zealand author, Patrick Lawlor, wrote to her asking permission to republish her essay in his own country. Cather replies, "Surely, I would be perfectly willing for you to use the sketch on Katherine Mansfield (partly an actual conversation during an ocean crossing, and partly from my own comment about her work)" (*Complete Letters* no. 1642). Cather forwards Lawlor's request to Alfred Knopf for his consent and tells him, "You will remember that all of poor Mansfield's stories had to do with her memories of New Zealand, and really were the result of the terrible homesickness which consumed her in those last years. Even her poor diary is full of it" (*Complete Letters* no. 2725). Cather also seems proud to contribute to the shaping of Mansfield's legacy: "I think she would have liked anything that made her a 'person' in New Zealand. I expect it is a pretty roughneck audience out there but I think, from her diary, she would have liked just a little bit of appreciation in her own island better than anything else in the world."

In her essay, Cather recognizes the importance of place in Mansfield's works and theorizes that, had the author lived longer, she would have continued to draw on her birthplace for her subjects. (In fact, the "magic" that Cather admires, noted earlier in this essay, springs from Mansfield's ability to evoke her New Zealand past [*On Writing* 110]). Later in the essay Cather also claims, in words describing her own path toward writing about Nebraska, that Mansfield "could not have written that group of New Zealand stories when she first came to London. There had to be a long period of writing for writing's sake" (*On Writing* 117). Notably, the Mansfield stories that Cather mentions in the essay are all set in New Zealand, as if she believes that the stories set in London, Paris, or Germany, "fine as some of them are," are uncharacteristic of their author's artistry.

Cather's estimate of these non–New Zealand stories was probably influenced by Mansfield herself, who expressed her dissatisfaction in a January 1916 journal entry, a month after she learned of her brother's death: "The plots of my stories leave me perfectly cold. Granted that these people exist and all the differences, complexities and resolutions are true to them—why should I write about them? They are not near me. All the false threads that bound me to them are cut away quite" (*Journal* 43). Instead, Mansfield turns to her past: "Now—now I want to write recollections of my own country. . . . Not only because it is 'a sacred debt' that I pay to my country because my brother and I were born there, but also because in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. I am never far away from them. I long to renew them in writing" (*Journal* 44). In another entry from a few weeks later, Mansfield comes to an important realization about her brother: "But now I do not doubt. It is the idea (it as always been there, but never as it is with me to-night) that I do not write alone. That in every word I write and every place I visit I carry you with me" (*Journal* 48). A few days later, as she is about to recommence work on the story "The Aloe"

that became *Prelude* about the Beauchamp family's move to a house in Wellington's suburbs in 1893, Mansfield writes, "Now I will come quite close to you, take your hand, and we shall tell this story to each other" (*Journal* 49).

Cather makes a similar confession about her own career's false start and rediscovery of her vocation by recalling her childhood in the essay "My First Novels [There Were Two]") (1931), published four years after Knopf's edition of Mansfield's *Journal* appeared. Cather explains her lack of regard for her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912): "The impressions I tried to communicate on paper were genuine, but they were very shallow" (*On Writing* 91). By contrast, *O Pioneers!* (1913), her second novel, "interested me tremendously, because it had to do with a kind of country I loved, because it was about old neighbours, once very dear, whom I had almost forgotten in the hurry and excitement of growing up" (*On Writing* 93). She may have felt, too, that her and Mansfield's love for remote, "roughneck" Nebraska and New Zealand had played an important role in shaping the two authors' literary sensibilities as well as invigorating their careers.

In "The Best Years," written less than two years after Lawlor's letter had refreshed her recollections of Mansfield, Cather is not only still thinking of New Zealand but also linking it to Nebraska in a story that, like Mansfield's best works, draws on connections to a beloved brother and the "remembered places" of their childhood. Near the beginning of "The Best Years," the character of the school superintendent Evangeline Knightly is described as "an intelligent young woman, but plain—distinctly plain. The standard of female beauty seems to be the same in all newly settled countries: Australia, New Zealand, the farming country along the Platte" (76–77). The allusion to Australia and New Zealand suggests that, as she was remembering her youth in Red Cloud, she was also "remembering" the places loved by Mansfield and Chummie and the childhood experiences recorded in Mansfield's fiction, journal, and letters. Interestingly, too, Cather assigns a variant of Chummie Beauchamp's name, "Leslie," to her story's main character, Lesley Ferguesson.

Recollections of Red Cloud abound throughout Cather's fiction, but in her last story, Cather seems to take renewed interest in the bond she shared with her brother Roscoe and the domestic spaces of their childhood, an interest perhaps stimulated by her familiarity with Mansfield. The closeness between Lesley Ferguesson and her brother Hector is a leitmotif in the story and echoes Willa and Roscoe's closeness. It is poignantly depicted in the Christmas Eve scene in which Hector wears the coat Lesley has given him as he thinks of the first Christmas and remembers the "beautiful coloured picture" of two angels "tacked up in Lesley's bedroom" (116–18). Near the story's end, the reader also learns Hector is a successful rancher in Wyoming, where Roscoe relocated following his marriage (133).

Mansfield's description of a child's space in "At the Bay" foreshadows Cather's description of the Ferguesson children's attic in the family's first home in "The Best Years." The depiction of the room Kezia Burnell shares with her grandmother at the family's summer home employs the "trivial" elements Cather admired in Mansfield:

> The furniture was of the shabbiest, the simplest. The dressing-table, for instance, was a packing-case in a sprigged muslin petticoat, and the mirror above was very strange; it was as though a little piece of forked lightning was imprisoned in it. On the table there stood a jar of sea-pinks, pressed so tightly together they looked more like a velvet pincushion, and a special shell which Kezia had given her grandma for a pin-tray, and another even more special which she had thought would make a very nice place for a watch to curl up in. (181)

Although trivial, these details possess strange, Lewis-Carroll-like qualities: the packing-case dressed in a petticoat and masquerading as a dressing table, a mirror's flaw recalling a lightning bolt, flowers morphing into a pincushion, and a lady's watch seeking a comfortable spot perhaps to take a nap. Mansfield invites adult readers to forget their adulthood, to reimagine an ugly room, and to luxuriate in an exuberant space full of possibilities.

Similarly, Cather's account of the children's attic bedroom in the Ferguesson home includes mundane features that, transformed by a narrator who is not a blasé adult but a wide-eyed child, become charged with magic and mystery, from the chimneys that seem to march step-by-step to the stars and the arrangement of the beds like a "hospital ward" to the pattern of the roof's rafters and their hangings and the "single end window" that admits "the white light from the snow and the half-strangled moon" (107–109). In this attic, as Cather tells us, "Each child had his own dream-adventure. They did not exchange confidences; every 'fellow' had a right to his own" (109). I would add that "every fellow" includes Cather's readers, who will find themselves remembering their own "dream-adventures" if they allow memory to do its work and to recall their own attics and childhood spaces as they read.

With Roscoe's death in September 1945, just as Cather was preparing to send him "The Best Years," she lost not only her

most important connection to childhood but also the major impetus for her writing. A month later, she wrote to her old friend Irene Miner Weisz, "Roscoe's death broke the last spring in me. . . . Now I don't care about writing any more books" (*Complete Letters* no. 1718). She had foreseen this pain, too, in the concluding lines of "Old Mrs. Harris," predicting how Victoria and Vickie Templeton "will look into the eager, unseeing eyes of young people and feel themselves alone" (157).

There is also a cruel irony in Mansfield and Cather's brothers' deaths. Leslie Beauchamp's 1915 death had devastated his sister but had also spurred her to rededicate herself to her writing: "in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. . . . I long to renew them in writing." Roscoe's death, on the other hand, "broke the last spring" in Cather's creative machinery. In the lonely months after Roscoe's death, Cather may have found herself remembering the Mansfield story "Six Years After," whose "singular beauty" had once impressed her and whose writing suggests that Mansfield, as illness and loneliness overwhelmed her, also experienced a "broken spring" as Cather had. The story recounts the desolation of a woman resembling Mansfield's mother who, accompanied by her husband during a dreary sea voyage, imagines she hears her dead son calling to her from "between the sky and the water" (*Collected Stories* 381). She cries, "'I can't bear it!' She sits up breathing the words and tosses the dark rug away. It is colder than ever, and now the dusk is falling, like ash upon the pallid water" (382). Near the end of their lives, Cather and Mansfield seem to have learned, as Dante's Francesca da Rimini also discovers, that remembering past joys can later be the cause of immense heartache and that letting memory do its work, although it provides solace, also entails formidable risks.

NOTES

1. This work's title is often italicized because the story was first published in a volume devoted solely to it.

2. Cather added the reference to "Six Years After," missing from the 1925 *Borzoi* version of her essay, for the revised version of the essay in *Not Under Forty*.

3. Woodress suggests that these conversations may be apocryphal because Cather claims she sailed from Italy on this trip and that "the only time she ever did that was in 1908" (546–47). After departing Marseilles in October 1920, however, SS *Patria* made stops in Naples and Palermo before continuing to New York; thus, Cather indeed sailed from Italy on this trip as she claims in the Mansfield essay.

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Child's Play in *My Ántonia*: The Lost Paradise of Childhood

Stéphanie Durrans

In a short piece published in her "One Way of Putting It" column of December 17, 1893 in the *Nebraska State Journal*, Willa Cather captured a moment of transition in U.S. society, as she underlined that the world of art had started paying more attention to the education of young minds with a view to nourishing the flame of hope in a better world:

> The world has something to be proud of yet. It has perverted all other truth than that of childhood; it has killed all other faith, but the faith of childhood defies it; it has tainted all other love, but the one of the children is still pure enough to give to God. We have begun to realize this in these days. We write great books for children and paint great pictures for them, and great men have given their greatest work to make those first few years of life realize all the happiness of which poets dream. In this age when time means money, civilization unbends business, puts on its best clothes and eats plum pudding and reads story books to the children and pats itself on the back, for after all it can say that all its men are good and all its women noble—till they are ten years old. ("One Way of Putting It")

From the depths of disillusion that underlie Cather's view of mankind in this passage, there emerges an idealized view of children, to whom she attributed extraordinary qualities of truthfulness, purity, and nobility. In one of her very first stories, "Lou, the Prophet" (1892), Cather had already struck a similar note when she wrote: "no one in the world will hoot at insincere and affected piety sooner than a child, but no one feels the true prophetic flame quicker, no one is more readily touched by simple goodness. A very young child can tell a sincere man better than any phrenologist" (10).

Cather's correspondence further attests to her love of children, be they her own siblings, her beloved nieces and nephews, or the Menuhin children whom she doted on and whose friendship formed the core of what she regarded as a very special chapter in her life, from the time she met them in 1930 to her death in 1947: "You know I always could forget my troubles if I could play with nice children, and these three [Yehudi, Hepzibah and Yaltah Menuhin] are surely the children of the gods," she wrote in 1934 to her sister Elsie (*Complete Letters* no. 1919).[1] In a letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher several months later, she expressed delight at being once more in the company of her "three magic-making children": "they heal every wound, banish every vexation. They make the world as fresh and dazzling to me as it was when I was twenty. But the magic is not their genius; it's their noble natures and their loyal loving hearts" (*Complete Letter*s no. 1747). She found great pleasure in sledding in the park with all three of them, as she described in a February 12 [1935] letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood (*Complete Letters* no. 1215). In a December 12, 1937, letter to her nieces Elizabeth and Margaret Cather (the "twinnies"), she wrote of "having lots of fun" with the Menuhins: "They are living in an hotel only four short blocks from me. I can see their tower from my bedroom window. We play there is a rainbow bridge over the roofs, and we can send thought messages. Though we are so near, the girls write me many notes" (*Complete Letters* no. 1251). That Cather retained a playful streak even as she was getting on in years is evidenced by the many letters to family and friends written in the 1930s and 40s: "I'd love to have them. I love to play with young people, you know," she wrote to her brother Roscoe as she was expecting a visit from her twenty-one-year old nieces Margaret and Elizabeth to her summer retreat on Grand Manan (Willa Cather to Roscoe Cather, May 16, 1936, *Complete Letters* no. 2122).

Spanning the arc of Cather's career, one finds many a variation on play that testifies to her continued fascination with the world of childhood and the creative possibilities of play. "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902) tells the story of a playwright, Douglass Burnham, who returns to spend a few weeks in the small Nebraska town where he grew up, and on this occasion reunites with the girl who was once his playmate, the girl he used to take with him on all his adventures along the river, all the way to a place that their imaginations had transformed into a treasure island. Douglass finds it hard to detach himself from the world of childhood, as Margie points out when she says: "Oh, I stopped playing long ago. I have grown up and you have not. Someone has said that is wherein geniuses are different; they go on playing and never grow up. So you see you're only a case of arrested development, after all" (273). But the short story that offers a paradigmatic reading of the relationship between the world of adults and that of children is probably "The Way of the

World," published in 1898. The protagonist, Speckle Burnham (an early prototype of the hero of "The Treasure of Far Island," as suggested by their identical last names[2]), is gifted with such a vivid imagination that he manages to draw into his fantasy world a whole gang of neighborhood boys with whom he has created a ragtag town in the backyard of his parents' house:

> But certainly Speckle had a right to be autocratic, for it was Speckle's fecund fancy more than his back yard that was the real site of that town, and his imagination was the coin current of the realm, and made those store boxes seem temples of trade to more eyes than his own. A really creative imagination was Speckle's—one that could invent occupations for half-a-dozen boys, metamorphize an express wagon into a street car line, a rubber hose into city water works, devise feast days and circuses and public rejoicings, railway accidents and universal disasters, even invent a Fourth of July in the middle of June and cause the hearts of his fellow townsmen to beat high with patriotism. For Speckle, by a species of innocent hypnotism, colored the mental visions of his fellow townsmen until his fancies seemed weighty realities to them, just as a clever play actor makes you tremble and catch your breath when he draws his harmless rapier. (397)

The arrival of a girl (albeit such a tomboy as Mary Eliza) causes unrest in the small community but they eventually come to terms with it—until Mary Eliza takes it upon herself to accept a stranger into their circle and goes so far as to betray the spirit of the game by accepting his coins in exchange for the trinkets she has "sold" him, instead of the simple pins that are usually used to negotiate transactions within the game. In many ways, the story delineates a pattern which Cather would develop on a larger scale in *My Ántonia*: Jim reigning supreme over the Divide that serves as his playground; the arrival of a girl who disrupts his symbolic system but nonetheless adopts the rules of the game; the intrusion of a stranger (Larry Donovan) to whose advances the young girl finally gives in; and the sad end of an imaginary world on which the children can now only cast a nostalgic gaze.

While Cather consistently gave the world of childhood pride of place in both her fictional and nonfictional output, none of her works expresses the ineffable happiness of childhood lost and regained better than *My Ántonia*, a novel which also showcases the function of play in helping Jim Burden come to terms with the experience of loss and separation. Although the novel's apparent circularity seems to negate any possibility for transformation and progression, I would like to bring together work and play (two notions that modern societies tend to perceive in relations of conflict) to show how the latter allows us to perceive the workings of the unconscious as Jim finds it hard to come to terms with the experience of loss and separation.

"Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays," stated Schiller in one of his letters on the aesthetic education of man (107). While Schiller sees in play the quintessential expression of freedom in a perspective imbued with staunch idealism, we should also bear in mind that play can be subjected to a set of rules which man must abide by in his quest for identity. Any reflection on the nature of play consequently involves an assessment of men's and women's place in the world and their mastery of their environment. These are questions that determine Jim's search for connections at the beginning of *My Ántonia*, when the narrator remembers his first confrontation with the immensity of a territory with which he can only familiarize himself through play. Immersed as he is in the world of childhood, Jim brings many variations on play throughout the narrative, up to his final rediscovery of this world thanks to the children of the Cuzak family. We can wonder, however, whether he ever really left it.

First and foremost, the Divide can be regarded as a vast play area in which Jim can give free rein to his imagination, first as a child and then as an adult seeking to recover the idealized golden age of childhood. Play has been seen as an activity that abides by certain rules or conventions that are a substitute for ordinary laws, an activity that can even establish new laws of its own. We should keep this in mind when reading about Jim's foray into an outlaw universe—a universe situated "outside man's jurisdiction" (7) that he significantly associates with his reading of Jesse James. As a matter of fact, we soon realize that this universe complies with laws of its own with which Jim will have to become acquainted. At such a point in his initiation, the little boy lets chance direct the course of his destiny: "I did not say my prayers that night: here, I felt, what would be would be" (8). His first contacts with his natural environment recall German philosopher Eugen Fink's description of the relationship between man and play:

> Play temporarily frees us from the history of our actions . . . and gives us back an irresponsibility that we experience with pleasure. We feel the openness of life, the limitlessness, the vibration in the abundance of possibilities, we feel what we "lose" in the action that decides, we feel what is playful in the depths of freedom, what is irresponsible at the origin of all responsibility. And so, we touch the depths of being linked to the world within us, we touch the depths that play out in the being of all things, of all beings. (229, my translation)[3]

The prairie itself appears as a vast universe of play for all

of nature: the narrator focuses on the "acrobatic feats" of the grasshoppers (17), reminisces "watching the heat lightning play softly along the horizon" (133), and compares spring to something "impulsive and playful like a big puppy that pawed you and then lay down to be petted" (115). This is a world in which Jim's imagination transforms reality by means of recurrent comparisons, a world built on "as ifs" and "seems."

However, the Shimerda family soon threatens to disrupt the harmony of this imaginary world: significantly, the father refuses to play the violin like he used to (86); even worse, Ambrosch flouts the rules of the game when he starts quarreling with Jake ("This was not the sort of thing country boys did when they played at fisticuffs, and Jake was furious. He landed Ambrosch a blow on the head" 124); Ántonia herself, Jim's playmate, soon has to leave the world of play to start working and behaving "like a man" (120, 133, 143). As a reaction, Jim feels the need to stick to certain rules in order to fend off the threat of deregulation that could perturb the functioning of the game: for instance, the episodes in which Ántonia wishes to give away her silver ring and Mr. Shimerda contemplates giving his gun away to Jim when he is older are potentially disruptive because these are free gifts that disrupt the rules of symbolic exchange in Jim's world of play.

In Book V, "Cuzak's Boys," Jim's return to the Divide and his reunion with Ántonia allow him to recover the lost paradise of child's play. The house, the farm, and even the orchard become a vast play area in the continuity of the one Jim had created after settling on the Divide: little Nina plays with a "rag baby" (321) and thus reproduces her mother's behavior while Leo impersonates a number of animals: "He ran up to her and butted her playfully with his curly head, like a little ram" (323); "Leo accompanied us at some distance, running ahead and starting up at us out of clumps of ironweed, calling, 'I'm a jack rabbit,' or, 'I'm a big bull-snake'" (334).[4] That Leo should have inherited his grandfather's violin and should manage to play it so well is highly significant, especially since one of his sisters starts dancing (like their mother used to do), which consequently brings us back full circle. The only thing Jim contemplates at this point is setting off on a series of adventures with Cuzak's boys and recovering the golden age of bygone days thanks to his new connections: "There were enough Cuzaks to play with for a long while yet," Jim rejoices in the last chapter (358).

Should we then take it to imply that the final situation introduces no new element, which would consequently be seen as a telltale sign of the unproductive nature of the world of play in which Jim is immersed from the beginning? A number of clues actually guide the reader toward an altogether different type of interpretation. The fact that the schoolroom is occasionally transferred to Ántonia's orchard blurs the boundaries between work and leisure and Ántonia's children even come to think that school is like play all year long—some kind of extended picnic—which would seem to indicate that the place thus allows for the convergence of work and play. Besides, when he goes back to Black Hawk, Jim notices some "*strange* children . . . playing in the Harlings' big yard" (357, my emphasis). The adjective reveals his own feelings of alienation, something which somehow disturbs the harmony of his reunion with Ántonia and could be taken as some confused awareness of the discrepancy between the child he used to be and the man he has become.

Ántonia and Jim, in one of W. T. Benda's illustrations for the first edition of *My Ántonia.*

To understand what leads Jim to such a coming to awareness, it is important to examine the metamorphoses of play between Jim's departure from and return to the Divide. The disruptive force represented by the Shimerdas brings to the fore the dialectic of freedom and constraint that is intrinsic to the passage from play to games—a dialectic that is most evident in the small town of Black Hawk (where the game of seduction replaces the innocent child's play of the Divide) and in Lincoln (where play tends to become synonymous with theatrical illusion). The small town stands out as a space for both freedom and restraint, as exemplified by the Harlings' house. There, Ántonia can turn back into the playmate she used to be on the Divide. "Her greatest fault, Mrs. Harling found, was that she so often stopped her

work and fell to playing with the children. She would race about the orchard with us" (150). Musical play there can fully express itself, as when Mrs. Harling and the girls play the piano in the evenings. But the shadow of Mr. Harling occasionally returns to assert its authority and ward off the threat of deregulation. The Vannis' dancing pavilion constitutes another play area for the young people of Black Hawk, but such an activity poses a threat to the social order that had so far prevailed.

Of course, the picnic by the riverside allows Jim to rediscover the innocent pleasures of child's play: "In the afternoon, when the heat was less oppressive, we had a lively game of 'Pussy Wants a Corner,' on the flat bluff-top, with the little trees for bases" (235). Meanwhile, the river appears as both a recreational and creative space that allows the young people to create worlds of their own, like the one which fuels the imagination of Douglass and Margie in "The Treasure of Far Island": "The sandbars . . . were a sort of No Man's Land, little newly-created worlds that belonged to the Black Hawk boys" (226). And yet, at the same time, the episode serves as a transition in paving the way for the more dangerous games of adulthood, as suggested both by Jim's erotically charged dream of Lena and by the young women's conversation as they evoke the financial independence granted them by their status as "hired girls." After Tiny confesses to her weakness for playthings (which she is often tempted to buy for her many siblings instead of more useful things such as winter wear), Anna remembers how a boy once broke a doll that had been given to her just before her family left Norway and how she "still hate[s] him for it," thereby prompting Lena to observe "I guess after you got here you had plenty of live dolls to nurse, like me!" (233), which makes the potential threat of sex that was only hinted at earlier even more explicit. That the broken doll episode should have taken place onboard the ship taking Anna's family to America reinforces the value of the toy as a symbol of innocence soon to be lost as the children would have to confront the harsh realities of exile.

The intrusion of reality into the world of childhood which Lena's cynical remark brings into relief later brings Jim to confront the arch trickster, Wick Cutter, the evil money-lender who delights in manipulating people around him and betting on the farmers' potential bankruptcy. His association with the world of gambling is made clear when we learn that "When a farmer once got into the habit of going to Cutter, it was like gambling or the lottery" (202). This is an altogether different, more disturbing form of playing, one that relies on chance only. Interestingly enough, Lena once considers in a bantering tone the possibility of marrying a rich gambler if she cannot save enough money to set up her own business (234). As we know, she will have no need for such base devices, and Book III, "Lena Lingard," places her in the idealized world of play. In chapter 11, Cutter is also associated with poker games (203) which stand in sharp contrast with the domino game favored by Jim and Jake (82) and also Anton Cuzak (355). Cutter's unhealthy relationship with his wife reaches a climax in a sort of game when the money-lender puts his wife on board a train leaving for Kansas City while he takes another train to go back home and pay Ántonia a surprise visit in the middle of the night. "[Mrs. Cutter] saw at once that her husband had played this trick in order to get back to Black Hawk without her" (244).

In light of this scene, Jim's confrontation with the snake can be seen to foreshadow the move from the world of childhood and imagination ("play") to a world in which you have to learn the rules of the "game." From Jim's point of view, defeating the snake allows him to restore the balance of power that Ántonia was beginning to upset by her lack of respect for his authority. Gender roles are then reinforced in an almost caricatural manner as the children make their way back to the farm, there to be met by the embodiment of manhood in the person of the cowboy Otto Fuchs. At the same time, though, the narrator's suggestion that "the game was fixed for me by chance" (48) introduces confusion and simultaneously exposes the performance of gender that characterizes the whole scene. Such duplicity is made even more striking in Book III, in which playacting becomes a central metaphor. Indeed, the game of love and seduction that develops in Books II and III culminates in a process of performance that highlights the ambivalence of Jim's status—both "actor" and "acted upon," "player" and "plaything."

Jim's difficulty in relinquishing the world of play shows right from the moment he settles into his student's room in Lincoln: "I considered [the dresser and the wardrobe] non-existent, as children eliminate incongruous objects when they are playing house" (251). Interestingly enough, Jim will later marry a woman who "finds it worth while to play the patroness to a group of young poets" (x) and who produces her own plays, very much in the continuity of his life in Lincoln. This is also a life in which he will strive to "eliminate incongruous objects" and reminders of reality to recreate the world of childhood that he yearns for. Lena's unexpected arrival in chapter 2 allows Jim to build a world of pretense in which play is given pride of place: "I played with Lena and Prince, I played with the Pole" (280). Jim is nevertheless forced to make a final decision by his mentor, Gaston Cleric, who speaks frankly: "You won't recover yourself while you are playing about with this handsome Norwegian" (280). Jim's short-lived romance with Lena is brought to a halt with the spurious claim that "if she had not me to play with, she would probably marry and secure her future" (281). Once more, however, the dialogic

interplay introduced by the older narrator's comments allows us to perceive the young man's precarious liminal position, both inside and outside the play. The performance of Dumas's *Camille* that stands at the heart of Book III consequently acquires a paradigmatic value by blurring the boundaries between playacting on the stage and the role-play imposed on Jim and Lena by the society they live in. Jim finds himself lured into the trap of theatrical illusion—"I wanted to cross the footlights" (266)—and his comments upon the play are eventually brought to a climax by the abolition of time frames as he reflects that "wherever and whenever that piece is put on, it is April" (269).

However, the power of play possibly consists not so much in defeating the passing of time as in helping human beings come to terms with the inevitability of death. This function is brought to the fore from the beginning of *My Ántonia*, when the spectacle of nature establishes a close association between play and some sort of death ritual: "The rabbits were unusually spry that afternoon. They kept starting up all about us, and dashing off down the draw as if they were playing a game of some kind. But the little buzzing things that lived in the grass were all dead—all but one" (37). Although Jim appears to be watching the scene from the outside, wary not to get involved, this "all but one" somehow resonates like an echo of his own status as the only surviving member of his family, which points to the vital function of this scene in helping the little boy process his own grief. The only surviving insect happens to be intimately connected with Ántonia through the power of memories, both those of the old country that the fragile grasshopper conjures up in the little girl and those that Ántonia herself will come to crystallize for Jim. Unlike Jim, Ántonia has no trouble expressing both the joy and the pain associated with her own loss as she is almost simultaneously moved to tears and laughter while listening to the grasshopper's song. Making a home for the insect in her own hair clinches her willingness to accept these memories—be they happy or sad—as an integral part of herself, and as such she stands out as a point of reference in showing Jim how to cope with loss. It is significant, then, that Jim's return to the Divide should be similarly marked by the coexistence of death and play (the children who are preparing to bury their dog in the orchard that traditionally serves as recreational playground). Whether Ántonia stands for the whole experience of childhood or for the lost mother figure that Jim seems to have shoved out of his consciousness maybe a bit too hastily (like the cumbersome furniture in his student's room), how to come to terms with the experience of loss undoubtedly appears to be what is truly at stake for Jim in the world of play.

Such considerations can also shed new light on the function of Blind d'Arnault, a character who probably stands out as the best embodiment of the spirit of free play in *My Ántonia* despite the memories of a slave-owning past attached to him—not to mention the actual exploitation of one of his prototypes, Thomas Greene Bethune—"Blind Tom"—at the hands of unscrupulous white managers. One may argue, along with John T. Matthews, that "D'Arnault is an unwanted reminder of a plantation society past that has no place in Jim's fantasy of the great modern country whose origins lie in the burgeoning of the West at century's end" (140), which can account for what Matthews considers to be a schizophrenic reaction on the part of Jim: "irrational repugnance overwhelms his acknowledgment of the pianist's genius" (140). And yet for all that, the prodigy whom the narrator had initially compared to a "rocking toy" (178) becomes the master of the game, imposes himself and his *joie de vivre* onto the scene, and directs Ántonia and her friends onto the dance floor like a puppet master. Jim's mixed feelings might be motivated not only by racism and his personal connection to the plantation past conjured up by d'Arnault, but also by his unwillingness to acknowledge his own loss—something which the power of play might actually help him achieve. Despite the *burden* of his own shackles, d'Arnault reveals himself to be a freer man than Jim Burden—another "blind" man[5]—because he has managed to harness the wild energy of music and consequently put play in the service of personal expression.

Cather's variations on play help us identify the workings of the text itself, allowing the experience of loss, separation, and grieving to emerge from under its limpid surface. Whether writing the manuscript of *My Ántonia* enabled Jim to fully articulate this new awareness is a moot point but the novel undoubtedly stands out as a turning point in Cather's own fascination with the world of play. From then on, the more serious games of war, monetary concerns, and imperialism would replace the free spirit of play in the novels she would go on to write in the 1920s. Most significant in that respect is the fact that Cather's next novel, *One of Ours*, should open on a denial of the possibility of play, when Mr. Wheeler orders Claude, who had been looking forward to a nice day at the circus, to take some greasy, stinking cowhides into town, thus compelling the young man to take the wagon and the mules instead of the car that he had just washed in joyful anticipation of his holiday.[6] "The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts," wrote Cather in her Prefatory Note to *Not Under Forty* (v), and one might safely assume that the world of play and that of games stand on either side of this divide.[7] In her personal life, though, holding on to the simple pleasures of play with the children of her entourage probably helped her cope with the awareness of a world on the brink of disaster while nourishing her enduring faith in a better world.

NOTES

1. In one of her last letters, Cather evokes her close ties with the Menuhin family with a mixture of unconditional love, devotion and gratitude: "For sixteen years ever since they first came to me with letters of introduction from old friends in France and England, the Menuhin children have been one of the chief interests and joys of my life. There is just an inherent beauty in their natures that goes far beyond any 'giftedness' - - - and yet natural beauty of mind and heart is a very great part of the 'giftedness'. I would rather have almost any other chapter of my life left out than the Menuhin chapter which has gone on so happily over so many years" (Sarah J. Bloom on behalf of Willa Cather to E. K. Brown, March 23, 1947, *Complete Letters* no. 1755).

2. Daryl W. Palmer has recently shown how echoes between names and recurring narrative patterns linking "The Way of the World," "The Treasure of Far Island," "The Enchanted Bluff," and *A Lost Lady* could lead us to identify what he calls a multiverse; i.e., the creation of parallel fictional worlds featuring multiple variations of the same prototypes.

3. "Le jeu nous dégage temporairement de l'histoire de nos actions . . . nous rend une irresponsabilité que nous vivons avec plaisir. Nous sentons une ouverture de la vie, un illimité, une vibration dans une foison de possibilités, nous sentons ce que nous 'perdons' dans l'action qui décide, nous sentons ce qu'il y a de ludique dans le fond de la liberté, ce qu'il y a d'irresponsable à l'origine de toute responsabilité. Et ainsi nous touchons en nous-mêmes à la profondeur de l'être lié au monde en nous, nous touchons au fond qui joue de l'être de toutes les choses, de tous les étants."

4. Beside echoing Jim's previous encounters with such animals (the rabbits playing on the prairie; the giant snake he killed with a spade), this double reference also emphasizes the power of play not only in blurring the lines between humans and animals, but also in the performance of gender roles. As underlined by Palmer when commenting upon the tomboyish character of Margie in "The Treasure of Far Island," "gender is not destiny, more like possibility, in a world where humans can imagine other worlds" (27).

5. Worthy of note is the fact that the adjective "blind" has already been used three times in connection with Jim before the Blind d'Arnault episode.

6. The contrast between the two novels is made even stronger when one considers that, in Book V of *My Ántonia*, Anton Cuzak and his eldest son Rudolph are returning from the street fair in Wilber, their hands full of presents for the family and their heads full of stories about the dancing bear, an amazing rope-dancer, and the Ferris wheel. I wish to thank Ann Romines for drawing my attention to this fascinating connection between the two novels, but also all the readers whose insights helped me expand earlier drafts of this essay.

7. One should be wary, however, of using this statement as the marker of a neat fracture in Cather's own works. In this respect, I concur with Ann Fisher-Wirth's assessment that a sense of loss runs through all of Cather's fiction and is most powerfully expressed in *My Ántonia* (51).

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Willa Cather's Birthplace in Literature and Memory

The Boak house with unknown subjects, likely from the very early years of the 20th century. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud. PHO-W689-380.

Throughout her life, Willa Cather identified herself as a Virginian, the daughter of Virginians. She was born in the house of her maternal grandmother, Rachel Seibert Boak, in the small community of Back Creek Valley (now Gore) in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. Her influential first eight years were spent in the nearby Cather family house, Willow Shade. Visitors to her birthplace will see sites that young Willa knew well and will learn about the complex, fractured culture she encountered there.

Grandmother Boak—the birthplace owner—exemplifies the complications of that culture. She grew up in her Seibert parents' enslaving household. Cather writes that in her youth she came to believe that slavery was wrong, and as an adult she facilitated the Underground Railroad escape to Canada of Nancy, a young woman who was owned and abused by her mother. Despite this abolitionist act, she continued to love that enslaving mother—and to support her own three sons, all of whom enlisted as Confederate soldiers, and one of whom died. She also provided food and shelter for local Union soldiers.

Throughout her lifetime, as she grew into one of our greatest American writers, Willa Cather thought about the Virginia culture she was born into. Finally, after the deaths of her parents and many other Virginia ancestors, she wrote her great and complex final novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, based on her unforgettable lifelong Virginia memories. The "moral center" of that book, the character Rachel Blake, is based on her grandmother Rachel Boak. When the novel was finished and soon to be published, Cather wrote to her brother Roscoe that its Epilogue, in which Cather herself—aged between five and six—appears as a central character, confirms the novel's authenticity. In it, young Willa witnesses Nancy's arrival for her first return visit to her Virginia home after twenty-five years, during which she has established a successful and happy free life in Montreal. Grandmother Rachel and Nancy's mother Till, who was enslaved until Emancipation by Rachel's mother, lovingly welcome Nancy, as little Willa silently watches. Smiling "her lovely smile," Nancy says to Rachel, who has tears in her eyes, "'I never forget who took me across the river that night," to connect with the Underground Railroad—and freedom (*Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, 276). Cather continues in her letter to her brother, "Every word in the scene . . . is true. . . . For years I had wanted to write that actual scene" (*Complete Letters* no. 2172). Grandmother Boak was at the center of that true scene, and, as Cather wrote to a close writer friend, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a few days later, "she was a lover of justice" (*Complete Letters* no. 1497). Visitors to the restored birthplace will understand more fully what shaped Cather's art and how the history of this region epitomizes issues of race, class, white supremacy, and freedom that still confront Americans today. The novel was published on Cather's seventieth birthday. Visitors to the birthplace will come to understand more fully what shaped Cather's art and how the history of this region epitomizes issues of class, race, white supremacy, and freedom that still confront Americans today.

We have invited several board members and friends of "Willa Cather's Virginia," the new nonprofit which will be restoring Cather's birthplace, to report on their progress and on why they think this project is so important and will expand the scope of Cather studies. Their voices follow.

Ann Romines

For Further Reading

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The house in 1958. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud. PHO-W689-365.

This is an exciting time for the family and friends of Willa Cather. Over the last eighteen months, a new nonprofit organization was created to prepare for the restoration of Willa Cather's birthplace in Gore, Virginia. Through the generosity of Katherine Solenberger, a local Winchester community leader and Shenandoah Valley historian, the property was purchased in May 2023 with the understanding that once the nonprofit was formed, the property would be donated for the rehabilitation project. We have a committed board of key leaders consisting of Cather family members, local community leaders, historians, educators, and representatives from the Willa Cather Foundation. A collaboration with this Nebraska-based organization has not only been pivotal in our progress but will continue to provide guidance and support for Willa Cather's Virginia as we move forward.

Much of the work establishing our new nonprofit is behind us. Collaboration has begun with historic preservationists at the local, state, and federal levels; historic construction companies; and attorneys. Plans are in place to secure the early 19th-century home of Rachel Seibert Boak, where her grandchild Willa Cather was born in 1873, as well as other structures on the 5.87-acre property, while planning and fundraising efforts continue.

After restoration of Willa's birthplace, it is the organization's long-term goal to provide an onsite experience for visiting scholars. Early programming at off-site locations is already underway and will continue through the restoration process. We also foresee working with colleges and universities in identifying the next generation of Willa Cather enthusiasts. In addition, there is significant history in the Shenandoah Valley, especially the Winchester region, to create programming as well as tourist opportunities.

The significance of this project is immense. We feel strongly that Willa Cather's Virginia history be preserved to tell the story of the young Virginia girl who became one of America's greatest writers.

Sherry Cather Hudson

Willa Cather's importance as a great American writer was instilled in me from the time I was a child growing up in Winchester, Virginia. Her books were proudly displayed in our home. My grandfather, Charles Irvine Cather Sr., excitedly purchased sheets of the Willa Cather postage stamp produced in 1973. In 1981, he gifted family members with the beautiful Willa Cather gold coin made by the U.S. Mint, which I wear as a necklace on special occasions. Not only did Willa hail from our little corner of Virginia, she was a relative! (We all descend from Jasper Cather, an early Frederick County settler who immigrated from Ireland in the 1700s.) Perhaps knowing this influenced my interest in becoming a journalist. I can't say for certain, but what I am certain of is the immense pride that my family feels about Willa and her literary accomplishments. While it's not polite to brag, I have bragged on more occasions than I can count that I am related to Willa Cather. I've instructed my children to do the same! For me, being involved in the effort to save her birthplace in Gore, Virginia, is incredibly meaningful. It's a Herculean undertaking, given the state of the home's disrepair, but one that we hope helps preserve her legacy and her Virginia roots for generations to come.

About two decades ago, Cather family members in Virginia made an unsuccessful attempt to buy the birthplace. Now, we are fortunate to have a second chance, thanks to the generosity of local real estate agent and preservation enthusiast Katherine Solenberger, who swooped in to buy the property on our behalf when time was running out to strike a deal with the seller.

Our first event to celebrate Willa Cather and raise awareness about the birthplace project was held on her 151st birthday, December 7, at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester. We welcomed Andrew Jewell, a Cather scholar from the University of Nebraska, who shared with us the many ways that Cather's Virginia childhood shaped her confident, creative, and independent personality.

Cynthia Cather Burton

When I began Handley Library book discussion programs in the early 1980s—many devoted to Willa Cather—there was no

The house in 1985. Courtesy of Sherry Cather Hudson.

This marker was erected by the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission in 1970. Willa Cather Foundation

public physical memorial to her Virginia birth. While the Back Creek area was in many ways unchanged since Cather lived there from 1873–83, the Boak house (birthplace), Willow Shade, and the Mill House were private homes. Abandoned in the later 1980s to time, weather, and human neglect, the birthplace now stands ready for restoration as a public site for remembering and perpetuating Willa Cather's local roots and worldwide reputation. No finer memorial to Willa Cather can be found in Virginia and there is no more opportune time than now to support that restoration endeavor.

John Jacobs

I am humbled to be able to assist in rightly spotlighting the deep impact on Cather's work that her first eight years in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia had on her. To have the opportunity to restore Grandma Boak's home, and to one day use it as a center for Cather studies and for creating new literature and new art, is long overdue as a part of Virginia's history and its future. With assistance from the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud regarding historic preservation, joint educational programming, writers' residencies, fundraising, promoting Cather's legacy, etc.—and now all on a truly national scale—we will help to ensure a growing appreciation of Cather's life and work.

Jay Yost

In discussing Willa Cather's works, most think of Nebraska. Yes, her later youth and early adulthood were spent there, but she was born here, in Gore, Virginia. Her final novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl,* was based on stories she heard as a child in Virginia. Reading this book, those born in Frederick County, Virginia, where many Cathers still live, can visualize the referenced locations. It is a record of ourselves, our heritage, our communities. For twenty years, the Cather family has tried to purchase and preserve Willa's birthplace. Now local preservationist Katherine Solenberger has finally made this purchase possible and, with the restoration of the birthplace, we can pass this history on to future Virginia generations. It will also be a place that Cather readers and scholars from all over will want to visit and explore.

Linda Cather

My heart ached when I first visited Willa Cather's birth home in 2018. The overgrowth of trees and shrubs were not only shielding it from view, but also significantly accelerating the house's deterioration. When historic sites like the birthplace crumble, society loses a valuable connection to our past. I'm grateful a preservationist stepped forward to rescue this house, and I look forward to the day the home is rehabilitated. Saving and interpreting this site will provide a deeper understanding of Cather's early life in post–Civil War Virginia and of how those impressionable years in the Shenandoah Valley shaped her work.

Ashley Olson

With this restoration, generations will stay connected to both the past and the legacy of one of America's great writers.

Maral Kalbian

The house in 2015. Willa Cather Foundation.

Cynthia Cather Burton lives in Winchester, Virginia, and is a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia. She is editor of the *Winchester Star*.

Linda Cather is president of the Cather Family Organization and a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia.

Sherry Cather Hudson is president of the board of directors of Willa Cather's Virginia.

John Jacobs is professor of English emeritus at Shenandoah University, Winchester, Virginia, and a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia.

Maral Kalbian is an architectural historian and preservation consultant whose works include *Frederick County, Virginia: History through Architecture.*

Ashley Olson is executive director of the National Willa Cather Center and a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia.

Ann Romines is a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia and the Willa Cather Foundation and a coeditor of the *Willa Cather Review*.

Jay Yost is a board member of Willa Cather's Virginia and board member and past president of the Willa Cather Foundation.

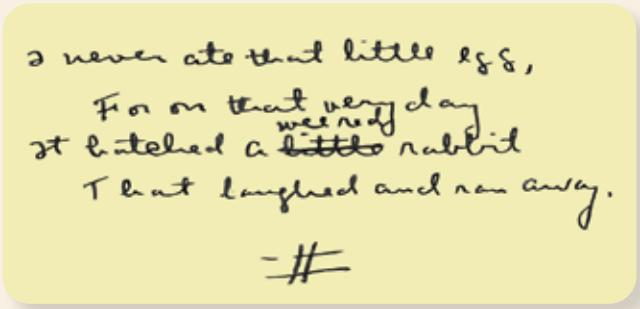
Children's Page:

When You're Missing Your Besties

Willa Cather was the oldest of seven Cather children. She had four younger brothers and two younger sisters. As she grew up, she had fun playing with them and telling them stories. When she went to college at the University of Nebraska, she was still close enough that she went home often to be with her family, especially for special holidays, like Christmas. But soon after she graduated from college, Willa made a big change in her life: she moved across the country to the big city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to begin her career as a professional writer and editor. And she found herself very homesick, especially for her younger siblings back home in Nebraska. She wrote to a Nebraska friend: "I will not be away from Nebraska another year. . . . I can not be happy so far away from home." She adds that her heart ached to see her youngest brother, Jack, "who is asleep in his bed a thousand miles away."

A few months before moving to Pittsburgh, when she was still near her family, Willa had celebrated Easter by writing a poem about the Easter bunny for her younger sister Elsie, who was then six. Here is the last stanza of the poem, in Willa's handwriting—you can see how Willa made revisions as she wrote. Elsie was so fond of this poem, a special gift to her, that she kept it for all her long life.

As December approached in Willa's first year in Pittsburgh, her homesickness increased, and she began to publish poems about her siblings in the


I never ate that little egg,
For on that very weird day
It hatched a ~~little~~ rabbit
That laughed and ran away.
-#

Home Monthly, the magazine she was editing. One of these poems, "Bobby Shafto," is based on a funny incident in sister Elsie's childhood. The Cather children had nicknames based on Mother Goose rhymes or songs. Willa's nickname was "Willie Winkie," and family members and close friends sometimes called her "Willie" for the rest of her life. Elsie's lifelong nickname was "Bobby Shafto," the name of a rich and handsome young man; the refrain in the song, which Willa used in her poem, is "Pretty Bobby Shafto." Here is a verse:

Bobby Shafto fat and fair
Said she'd cut her yellow hair,
But one morning while she cried
Mamma found a mouse inside,
Found a mousie pink and bare,
Who had crept for warmth in there,
Right in Bobby Shafto's hair!
Pretty Bobby Shafto!

We may wonder what young Elsie thought about an embarrassing incident from her childhood—when her mother found a baby mouse hidden in her blonde curls—being read in a magazine by thousands of people! But obviously the poem's author is thinking about her little sister and a memorable family story.

When Willa realized that, a for the first time in her life, she would not be at home with her family to celebrate Christmas, three poems about youngest brother Jack were published, all missing the little

boy intensely. In the first poem, "My Little Boy," she describes what is lovable and memorable for her about this boy. In the last stanza, she fantasizes about the joy of seeing him again:

And here in my room, where there is no boy,
Stands a bed by the empty chair,
Oh, what would I give just now for the joy
Of finding that little boy there!

In her November published poem, "My Horseman," Willa is thinking again about Jack. She speaks to a "little boy in the West Countree" (Nebraska), telling him to tend to his well-worn (toy) horse, now with only three legs, and to "feed him well with hay, / And brush him down and groom him well," for the boy "must ride far to-day." Between him and the poem's author lie "a thousand miles . . . Of wood and waving plain." Here is how the poem ends:

Then never mind the rivers wide,
Or miles between that be,
But jump upon your steed and ride
Across the hills to me.

Riding a toy horse probably disabled by the six older Cather children who rode him in past years, horseman Jack arrives triumphantly for an imaginary visit with his loving and lonesome sister Willa, in Pittsburgh.

In earlier years, celebrating Christmas in person with her family, Willa probably told stories to her younger brothers and sisters. For her first Pittsburgh Christmas, she published an amazing story in the December *Home Monthly* about Santa Claus and his helpers and an enemy, a story she had perhaps told at home in Nebraska. (Go to page 16 in this issue to see a picture from that story.) If you would like to read this exciting and scary Santa story, it can be found at **cather.unl.edu/writings/shortfiction/ss032.**

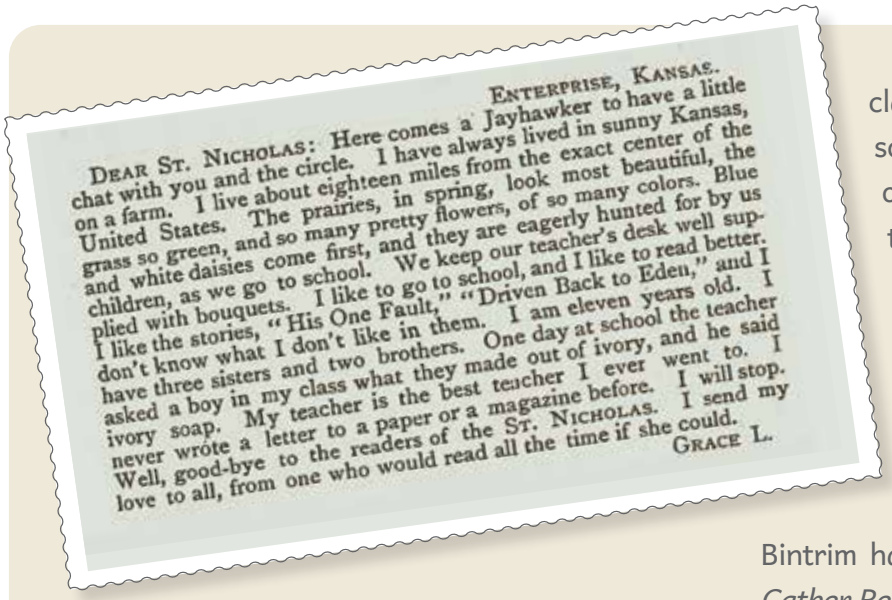
Think of someone special to you—a brother or sister, or a best friend. Or more than one! How would you like to share your feelings and thoughts about them...

- Draw a picture showing what makes them special
- Write a little poem about them
- Tell a story about a fun thing you did together

In the picture on this page, Willa is reading to her little brother and sister. What do you like to do with your siblings and friends?

Willa Cather reading to her siblings Jack and Elsie Cather. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud. PHO-4-W689-776.

"Dear St. Nicholas"

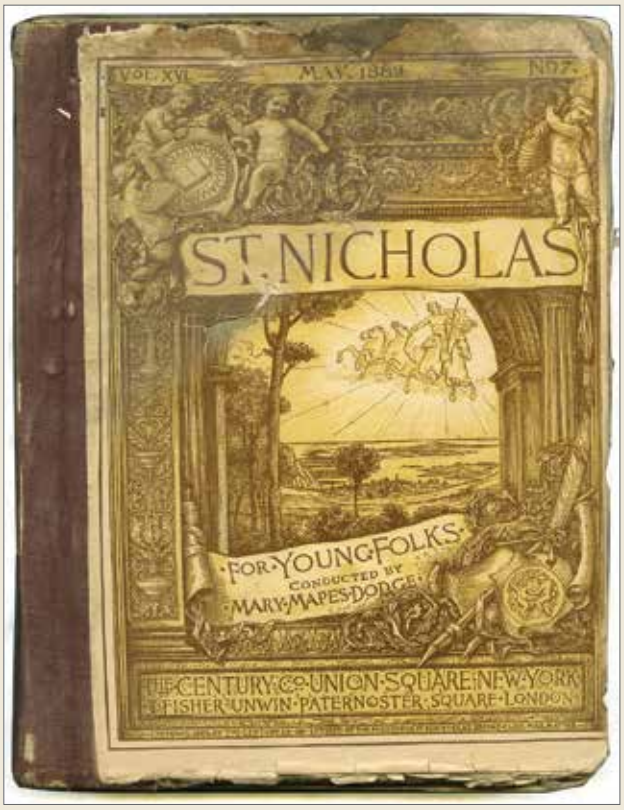


ENTERPRISE, KANSAS.

DEAR ST. NICHOLAS: Here comes a Jayhawker to have a little chat with you and the circle. I have always lived in sunny Kansas, on a farm. I live about eighteen miles from the exact center of the United States. The prairies, in spring, look most beautiful, the grass so green, and so many pretty flowers, of so many colors. Blue and white daisies come first, and they are eagerly hunted for by us children, as we go to school. We keep our teacher's desk well supplied with bouquets. I like to go to school, and I like to read better. I like the stories, "His One Fault," "Driven Back to Eden," and I don't know what I don't like in them. I am eleven years old. I have three sisters and two brothers. One day at school the teacher asked a boy in my class what they made out of ivory, and he said ivory soap. My teacher is the best teacher I ever went to. I never wrote a letter to a paper or a magazine before. I will stop. Well, good-bye to the readers of the ST. NICHOLAS. I send my love to all, from one who would read all the time if she could.

GRACE L.

The above letter was written to *St. Nicholas*, a popular magazine for children that Willa Cather read as a child. In fact, on this page there is a picture of an issue of *St. Nicholas,* very like one owned by the Cather family, now in our collection. Like Willa Cather, Grace L. (*St. Nicholas* did not print letter writers' last names) was eleven in 1885 when she wrote this letter. She lived near Enterprise, Kansas, a small town very similar to Red Cloud, and not so very far away. Like Willa, Grace loved the prairie near her home. She probably uses the plural "prairies" instead of the singular "prairie" because by 1885 plowed farmland had so broken up the expanse of the prairie that Grace experienced it in pieces as individual prairies. Grace enjoyed school, loved to read, and had multiple siblings. Although she is writing to the magazine, the primary audience for her letter is the other children who read *St. Nicholas*, with whom she feels a strong connection. Grace obviously has a sense of humor, since in her letter she shares a funny moment from school. It is possible that eleven-year-old Willa herself read the letter and laughed at the funny comment from Grace's classmate. Ivory soap is still made and sold today. You can look for it with the other bar soaps the next time you go to the grocery store. Grace's letter to *St. Nicholas* shows how much the magazine meant to American children, particularly those like Grace L. and Willa Cather who lived in isolated rural places without book stores and large public libraries. Timothy Bintrim has an essay in this issue of the *Willa Cather Review* about a children's page that Willa Cather wrote as an adult for a magazine called the *National Stockman*. She probably remembered how much *St. Nicholas* meant to children like her and like Grace who grew up in the country.



A digital restoration of the St. Nicholas issue in the Cather family library. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collection & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud.

From the Collections

Our museum collection gives us a unique window into the pastimes of the late-Victorian child. For most, imaginative play was a scaled-down version of adult hobbies and chores—embroidery and sewing, child-rearing, entertaining, woodworking, and the like. The Cather family gave special attention to reading and writing, music and drama, and the decorative arts. Though many of the Cather children's toys were store-bought, like these dolls, they have homemade dresses and accessories likely made from scraps of family clothing. The scrapbook was created by collecting advertising "trade cards" that could be arranged and displayed to tell stories; these cards were also the most widespread form of advertising of the 19th century and say a great deal about the goods that the Cather household purchased.

This German doll has a leather body stuffed with sawdust. Her head is made of china bisque, and she has glass eyes that open and close. She even has milk glass teeth. But so sad about her arm!

She has a bisque body and head and real human hair that could be styled! Her homemade muslin dress is hand-decorated with embroidery. She rests on a simple quilt tied with wool yarn.

This scrapbook is believed to have been created by Willa Cather as a child, and it features an original poem for children—perhaps her younger siblings—in the front (we'll have more about that in a future issue). The book is covered with a blue circus print, and the cotton pages inside are lined with advertising cards, some which Cather has labeled with names of her friends and family members.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff

Photograph by Diana Schneider, courtesy of Tobias Wolff

Cynthia Griffin Wolff was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 20, 1934, and passed away on July 25, 2024, in Canton, Massachusetts. She was educated at Radcliffe College, Harvard Medical School, and Harvard University, where she earned her Ph.D. in English. She is survived by her sons Patrick and Tobias, Patrick's wife, Diana; and two grandchildren, Samuel and Athena.

At her retirement from teaching in 2003, Cynthia was the Class of 1922 Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her biographies *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977) and *Emily Dickinson* (1986) are hallmarks of her throughgoing scholarship, interpretive acumen, and lucid writing. Cynthia contributed to *Cather Studies 3* (1996), *Willa Cather's Southern Connections* (2000), *Willa Cather's New York* (2000), and this publication. She presented at International Seminars and other Cather conferences.

Cynthia and I were introduced by Ann Romines in the summer of 1996, a year before the Seventh International Willa Cather Seminar convened at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. Cynthia was at the beginning of her research for a biography of Willa Cather and I helped to arrange lodging for her in Winchester as she explored the archives of the Handley Library and the Back Creek area where Cather spent her first eight years. We quickly became friends and we would spend the next twenty years or so talking, often weekly, about her work-in-progress and her chapter manuscripts, which she sent me as she finished them.

As a New Historicist, Cynthia was dedicated to contextualizing Cather within her times, rather than presenting her as an icon of contemporary theories. Her goal was neither to repudiate or recapitulate her predecessors but to discover the complexity of Cather's life through close examination of her personal, social, artistic, and historical circumstances and her transformations of those circumstances in her life and writing. A brief paradigm of Cynthia's approach can be found in her "Dressing for the Part: [What's] the Matter with Clothes," in *Willa Cather's Southern Connections* (edited by Ann Romines, University Press of Virginia, 2000).

Sometime after 2015, Cynthia moved from her Cape Cod home to a retirement community in Canton, Massachusetts. During the move, Cynthia reported, key parts of her research on Cather and completed manuscript chapters were lost. Her son, Tobias, has preserved what materials remained and hopes to find some of the lost research among them. I had the most complete manuscript, including variant drafts and a chapter not yet sent to her publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. I copied the manuscript in my possession for Cynthia, but the other losses were irrecoverable. In the meantime, Knopf wanted changes made. Additionally, Cather's letters were by this time being quoted verbatim, rather than paraphrased—a change Cynthia welcomed and could easily accommodate. But the task of revising in the face of the losses of supporting materials proved daunting and ultimately insurmountable. What remains is a manuscript of eight hundred pages. While Cynthia discovers in her life of Cather an imperfect person anchored by devotion to those she loved and dedication to her craft, no monolithic theme emerges. Instead, she presents an evolving portrait of Willa Cather, sometimes triumphant, sometimes defeated, but meeting the shifting circumstances of her life and momentous times—a world broken in two—as best she can.

That Cynthia's biography was never completed severely disappointed her, but it was clear that offering anything less than her best work would have disappointed her even more. Perpetuating Willa Cather's legacy remained in her thoughts. Her sons Patrick and Tobias Wolff have suggested that donations in her memory be made to the National Willa Cather Center.

—John Jacobs

Contributors to this Issue

Timothy W. Bintrim teaches writing and American literature at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania. He is no longer one of the young folks in Cather studies, but neither is he the oldest. Recently he was named one of the coeditors of the *Willa Cather Review* to keep him from contributing to every issue.

Stéphanie Durrans is professor of American literature at Université Bordeaux Montaigne in Pessac, France. She is the author of *The Influence of French Culture on Willa Cather: Intertextual References and Resonances* (2007) and of *Willa Cather's My Ántonia: A Winter's Journey* (2016). She has published widely on nineteenth- and twentieth-century women writers, with a special focus on questions of intertextuality and transatlantic literary relationships.

John H. Flannigan is a retired professor of English at Prairie State College, Chicago Heights, Illinois, where he was president of the faculty federation from 2004 to 2013 and taught composition and American, British, and African American literatures. His essays on Cather's interest in music and opera and other topics have appeared in *Modern Fiction Studies, Cather Studies*, and the *Willa Cather Review*.

Andrew Jewell is the chair of Digital Strategies in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries and codirector of the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at UNL. The former editor of the *Willa Cather Archive,* Andy is the coeditor of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (2013) and *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather*. Andy's long-term goal is to finish writing the biography he's started, tentatively titled *Willa Cather: The Courage to Be Honest and Free.*

Sallie Ketcham is the author of *Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie* (Routledge) and several essays on Wilder and her globetrotting daughter, the writer Rose Wilder Lane. She is a former instructor at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. Her work has appeared in the *Willa Cather Review, South Dakota History*, and *Cather Studies 14*, among others, and her third children's book is forthcoming from the South Dakota Historical Society Press.

Kelsey Squire is a professor of English at Ohio Dominican University, where she teaches courses in writing and American literature. She has published previously in *Great Plains Quarterly*, the *Willa Cather Review, Cather Studies*, and *Reception*. Her book *Willa Cather: The Critical Conversation* was published in 2020 by Boydell and Brewer as part of their Literary Criticism in Perspective series.

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