

“Bright and Beautiful and Alive”: Willa Cather’s New York Intersections

18th International Cather Seminar

June 21-23, 2023

The New School | New York, NY

Despite her dominant association with the Great Plains, Willa Cather lived most of her life in New York City (1906-1947), first in Greenwich Village and later, after she had risen to the top of the literary profession, on Park Avenue on the upper east side. Though Cather only occasionally wrote about the city, it was her home for nearly forty years and a key element of her personal and professional life.

In the summer of 2023, for the first time in its history, the Cather Seminar will be in Manhattan at The New School, only blocks from the apartments Cather and her partner Edith Lewis shared between 1906 and 1932. This conference explores the city Willa Cather knew, but also the metropolis that was present around her, though perhaps not always visible to her. The goal of this seminar is to intellectually locate Cather in the broader context of New York in the first half of the twentieth century, and, further, to imagine her work as a product of that urban experience. This event will also be part of celebrations and observances throughout 2023 honoring Cather’s 150th birthday.

The Program Committee of the 2023 Cather Seminar invites proposals for papers on diverse themes, works, and people evoked by Cather’s early twentieth century experience in New York. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Cather and Greenwich Village culture: bohemianism, LGBTQ+ communities, immigrant communities, activist communities, etc.
- Cather and the Harlem Renaissance: gaps and connections
- Race and Racism
- Queer studies approaches to Cather’s life and work
- Public health and urban approaches to wellness and disease
- Labor and class in the city
- Metropolitan studies and the mapping of identity
- Cather, Edith Lewis, and the New York publishing industry
- The urban immigrant experience and Cather’s representations of it
- Arts, performance, and music in New York
- Ecocritical approaches to reading Cather’s depictions of New York City

Graduate students and scholars new to Cather’s work are encouraged to make proposals. Scholarships will be available for select student presenters from the National Willa Cather Center and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Scholars should submit a proposal of no more than 500 words by February 15, 2023. Proposals can be submitted at <https://www.willacather.org/events/nyc>. Decisions about acceptance to the conference will be communicated by March 15, 2023.

The 18th International Willa Cather Seminar is sponsored by The New School, the National Willa Cather Center, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Academic Program Committee:

Charmion Gustke, Belmont University
Andy Jewell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Julie Beth Napolin, The New School
Rachel Olsen, National Willa Cather Center
Tracy Tucker, National Willa Cather Center
Tracyann Williams, Fordham University

“Looking up the Avenue through the Arch, one could see the young poplars with their bright, sticky leaves, and the Brevoort glistening in its spring coat of paint, and shining horses and carriages,—occasionally an automobile, mis-shapen and sullen, like an ugly threat in a stream of things that were bright and beautiful and alive.” – Willa Cather, “Coming, Aphrodite!,” 1920