Willa Cather
Newsletter & Review

Summer 2004

2004 Spring Festival Focuses on Aging and Dying in Cather's Fiction

Although a few may have blanched at the prospect of discussing "aging" and "dying" at the 49th annual Spring Festival in Red Cloud, there is no record of this reaction. Most came through the experience "inspired" and "uplifted." At least that was the general response of participants throughout the two-day event. This same positive reaction was apparent on the evaluations and response forms submitted throughout the conference.

In "Old Mrs Harris" Cather sees aging and dying as a "long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable," but participants found that somehow Cather is able to make this inevitable journey an acceptable and even tranquil part of the scheme of life for her characters in the featured text, *Obscure Destinies*.

Central to the Festival was the keynote address given on Saturday morning by Marjorie Sirridge, medical humanist from the University of Missouri at the Kansas City School of Medicine. Responses from panelists Mary Sirridge (a psychologist and the daughter of Marjorie) and University of Nebraska scholar Susan Rosowski followed under the able direction of moderator Ann Romines of George Washington University. The panelists' responses to Cather's text reflected deep understanding of Cather's writing coupled with poignant personal reflections, setting the tone for the day.

Ann Romines fields questions as Sue Rosowski looks on. Photograph by Dee Yost.

Concurrent afternoon activities included tours of the Catherton, Cloverton, and Red Cloud cemeteries led by Suzi Schulz and Nancy Sherwood; large discussion groups led by Jo Ann Middleton, medical humanist from Drew University; and a presentation on Cather connections in Webster County Cemeteries by Helen Mathew of the Webster County Museum.

Saturday evening was highlighted by a banquet at the Community Center followed by a concert featuring the compositions of Rick Sowash, which included "Harvest Hymn and Harvest Dance: Homage to Willa Cather."

The Festival began on Friday, April 29, in the Opera House Auditorium with the presentation of an essay by the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship winner and scholarly papers presented by Baylor University graduate students. The paper sessions were followed by a lively roundtable discussion featuring students from Baylor and Fort Hays State University as well as the Norma Ross Walter high school student. Mary Ryder from South Dakota State University served as moderator.

Concurrent with the Friday afternoon Auditorium events was an intergenerational program focusing on children's activities and storytelling. Red Cloud Elementary teacher Suzi Schulz led the group with the help of a number of local volunteers.

Late Friday afternoon, participants were treated to a preview segment of the PBS biography of Willa Cather to be aired on the American Masters Series next year. Co-producers Joel Geyer and Christine Lesiak presented the segment and discussed the 90-minute film.

Readings by Mellanee Kvasnicka, an orientation to the festival theme delivered by Jo Ann Middleton, and music by the Saint Juliana Choir capped off Friday evening.

The 49th annual Spring Festival, chaired by Steve Shively of Northwestern Missouri State University, was, by all accounts, the most diverse Spring Festival yet and was deemed a great success. In the usual tradition, coffee and kolaches were in abundance to initiate the Saturday events; if food represents any indication of success, then the consumption of cookies tells the story. Festival planners were sent scurrying to triple the number of cookies to satisfy the participants' insatiable appetites for these delicacies, which surely sweetened the non-stop discussions.

In This Issue...

Scholarly Contributors

Eric Aronoff recently received his Ph.D in English from Rutgers University and is currently an Assistant Professor of Humanities at SUNY Institute of Technology. He is presently working on a book examining the debates over "culture" in American literature, literary criticism, and anthropology from 1915-1941.

David Porter teaches at Williams College, primarily in the Classics Department. He is currently writing a book on Willa Cather.

Laura Smith is a Ph.D. candidate studying 19th-century American women's literature at the University of New Hampshire.

Three issues of the *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* are published each year by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation. Members of the Foundation are automatically entitled to a yearly subscription. Copies of the *Newsletter and Review* can also be purchased by contacting the Cather Center (see information below). The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is a non-profit organization. For more information about the aims and goals of the Foundation, see page 22.

Willa Cather Newsletter & Review

The Willa Cather Society

Summer 2004
Volume XLVIII, No. 1
ISSN 0197-663X

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Highlights

Fall 2004

Preview of PBS Cather Biography: Darkness and Light
October 16, 2004
Performances at 2:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M.

Willa Cather's Birthday Party
December 7

Spring 2005

50th Anniversary of The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation
"The Cather Foundation: 50 Years of Preservation, Education, and Celebration!"

Celebrated in conjunction with the 2005 Spring Festival

Premiere Performance of "A Singer's Romance"
A Musical Adaptation of Cather's Short Story
Commissioned by the Cather Foundation
Written, Produced, and Directed by Jim Ford
Starring Ariel Bybee

April 29-30, 2005

Summer 2005

10th International Seminar
"Violence, the Arts, and Cather"
June 18-20, 2005—Red Cloud, Nebraska
Repeat Performance of
"A Singer's Romance"
and
June 22-24, 2005—University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Fall 2005

"Exploring the Caspersen Cather Collection at Drew: A Colloquium"
September 30-October 1, 2005
Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

"She loved all great formal, noble things": Stephen Tennant on Willa Cather

David H. Porter

The friendship between Willa Cather and Stephen Tennant is familiar to readers of this journal. Tennant, the son of an English lord, discovered Cather in 1925 through *A Lost Lady*, which he described to a friend as "a deeply beautiful book, so well written that it is like a life experience frozen into a day's reading" (Hoare 57). The next Cather novel he read, *My Mortal Enemy,* inspired him to send novelist Anne Douglas Sedgwick what he called "eight pages of very brilliant criticism" (58)—brilliant enough that she in turn passed them on to Cather. In March 1927 Cather wrote a warm and candid letter directly to Tennant: "She expressed a great deal of pleasure at his astute and sensitive observations about her work, but also pointed out some of the flaws in the novella. . . . She told him, too, that he was sure to like her newest novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*" (Yongue 50-51).[1] When Tennant saw the announcement of *DCA*'s publication in September 1927, he exclaimed, "I could shout for joy! She is my favourite living writer," a comment about which his biographer remarks, "That would remain his opinion for the next sixty years"(Hoare 59).

The exchange of correspondence continued for the rest of Cather's life. Although she never visited Tennant's family estate in England, his several meetings with her in New York in 1935 and 1936 "gave her a kind of stimulus and delight entirely new; for he was the only one among the new generation of writers with whom she could talk about writing on an absolutely equal plane, with complete freedom and—though their views were in so many ways so different—with complete sympathy and accord" (Lewis 178).

Lewis, who continued the friendship with Tennant after Cather's death, is not alone in noting its unexpectedness—the young English dandy, scion of Wilsford Manor, paired with an American woman thirty-plus years his senior, a person he himself identified with the western prairies.[2] That their discussions of writing proved so mutually satisfying—"Cather listened as hard to Stephen as he did to her" (Hoare 213)—is especially remarkable in light of the most striking difference between them: throughout her life, despite family crises, public pressures, and severe challenges to her health, Cather disciplined herself to complete what she began—most notably her novels—while Tennant's one major project, *Lascar*, a novel set in Marseilles that he began in the mid-1930s, remained unfinished at his death in 1987, "a great pile of rainbow-coloured manuscript chapters, written in his inimitable hand . . . more than 500,000 words of text" (Hoare 413). Indeed, although over the years Cather continued to voice keen interest in Lascar, in late 1944 she wrote Tennant that she was "going to talk to him very directly: Why did he begin Lascar if he wasn't going to persevere on it . . . ? It's been ten years now. . . . Quit talking about it and just do it!" (Stout #1685).[3] It is poignant testimony to their friendship that among the handful of writing projects Tennant did complete (and one of the few published not privately but by a commercial press), perhaps the most distinguished is "The Room Beyond," his eloquent Foreword to the posthumous *Willa Cather On Writing*.

In 1973 Tennant wrote another tribute, a poem published on the first page of the Spring issue of *The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter*. Though less substantial than "The Room Beyond," it is even more moving in the way it uses elegiac motifs reminiscent of *A Lost Lady* to express Tennant's complex feelings for his own Lost Lady—Willa Cather herself:

THE OLD PRAIRIES

by Stephen Tennant (after reading Patricia Lee Yongue's article on A LOST LADY.)

I had forgotten tears could be so bright;
Before I shed them.
Staining, glittering tears! —like light!
Can fancy wed them?
Will time ever assuage my loss?
I rather doubt it.
There are Valleys no Bridge can cross.
Sorrow,---no pride can rout it.
Those frontier years recede in time:
And the Old West bows low,
To the callous future, who, with a slick rhyme,
Counsels it to go.
But the Great Heart, the spiritual mind,
The Imagination's faith:
Somewhere in the Soul you will find,
That Glory is more than a wraith—
Those shiftless tears, brighter than Joy!
That you shed for the Pioneers:
They are the crystal Dews for the frontier Boy,
Who so gloriously hears:
A music wrought of faith and hope:
Far away on the Prairie Wind.
High, and sunlit, on that great slope,
Where none have loved, or sinned!
That is frontier country: some long shed tears,
Still sparkle with the Dew:
And long ago; Noble, Timeless fears—
Have become courageous! New!
Sacred,---mysterious as the Dusk,
In that ancient Buffalo land:
There's a fragrance of red grass, and musk,
Too sweet for you to understand.

That same year, 1973, the University of Nebraska Press published its handsome *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir* and sent Tennant a copy in recognition of his long friendship with Cather and Lewis. I recently had the good fortune to acquire

Stephen Tennant on Willa Cather
(Continued)

this copy in a London bookshop. Though discolored and slightly warped from the English dankness, and with a mildewed aroma to match, it remains a fascinating and moving volume. Part of its interest lies in the handwritten inscriptions, beginning with "For Stephen Tennant Affectionately Mildred R. Bennett" inside the front cover. The title page contains three more—from, respectively, one of the volume's photographers, its editor, and its author: "May I see you in England one day! To 'Happy Days!' Lucia Woods"; "To Stephen Tennant whose friendship was valued so greatly by Miss Cather and Miss Lewis, and who requited it so well. Virginia Faulkner"; "To Stephen Tennant—who understood the land and the people of Willa Cather's heart—Bernice Slote."

Even more interesting are Stephen Tennant's own scrawlings, which cover much of the title page and fill the facing page (see Figure 1), continue over most of the page that dedicates the book to Mildred Bennett, and briefly resurface with the Acknowledgments at the end of the book. Notations of this sort, in Tennant's bold hand and colored inks, are not uncommon in books from his library, but here they hold special interest because they recall his long friendship with Cather, and what it meant to him.

At the top of the pre-title page Tennant has written, "Of the Island of Rhodes I wrote in my Diary: 'It gave to the present, the magic of retrospect—Bride of the Sun—Willa Cather wrote, 'So now you are actually in the Island of Rhodes? A Colossus there once, —wasn't there?' (So like Willa to know this—the Grandiose, the Poetic, the Classic, the Pagan,—all these attributes—drew her fancy. L'Antiquité, C'est la Jeunesse du Monde.—"[4] The next entry, like so much of what Tennant wrote in his diary and elsewhere, focuses on *Lascar*, for so many years his *idée fixe*, but here too he draws in Cather: "From Lascar, my novel 'Is there any romance in life, comparable,—to the beautiful face, —seen once, in a foreign street, —never to be seen again' Marseilles 1933 —(Willa Cather loved this town & spoke of it, in letters)."[5]

A phrase from Tennant's first jotting, "the magic of retrospect," sounds a recurrent theme of his writings—including those about Cather. In "The Room Beyond" Tennant had in 1949 described art as "a method, the only one, of preserving the beauty of transient things, the wonder of youthful happiness," and Cather's own art through the metaphor of "gazing beyond the immediate scene to a timeless sky or a timeless room, in which the future and the past, the unspoken and the unknown, forever beckon the happy reader" (*WCOW* xi, v). His 1973 poem in *WCPMN*, quoted above, plays evocative variations on the same theme by conflating *A Lost Lady*'s nostalgic vision of Marian Forrester with Tennant's own memories of Willa Cather, now dead 26 years. "[T]he magic of retrospect" dominates Tennant's jottings in *A Pictorial Memoir* as well. That Cather was drawn by "the Classic, the Pagan," that she recalled the Colossus, that she too loved Marseilles and had written him about it, are retrospective vignettes that Tennant includes in this, his own "Pictorial Memoir." The theme appears again in a jotting placed immediately above the large bold-faced **Willa Cather** on the title page: "A tribute to a poem. 'So full of unspoken tears— (the touch of tears in mortal things— (from my Diary)," words reminiscent of the familiar Vergil passage on the title page of *My Ántonia*: *Optima dies . . . prima fugit.* In turn, Vergil's words resonate with the mode Tennant always sought for *Lascar*—just as here, writing about "my novel," he compares "Romance in Life" to "the beautiful face, —seen once, in a foreign street, —never to be seen again."

Tennant's jotting on the Acknowledgments page strikes a very different note: "Be wise—& Powerful—Be the master of your Destiny. July 1975." The passage is anchored only by its date, but again one suspects a Cather connection, for the admonition to "be master of your Destiny" is precisely

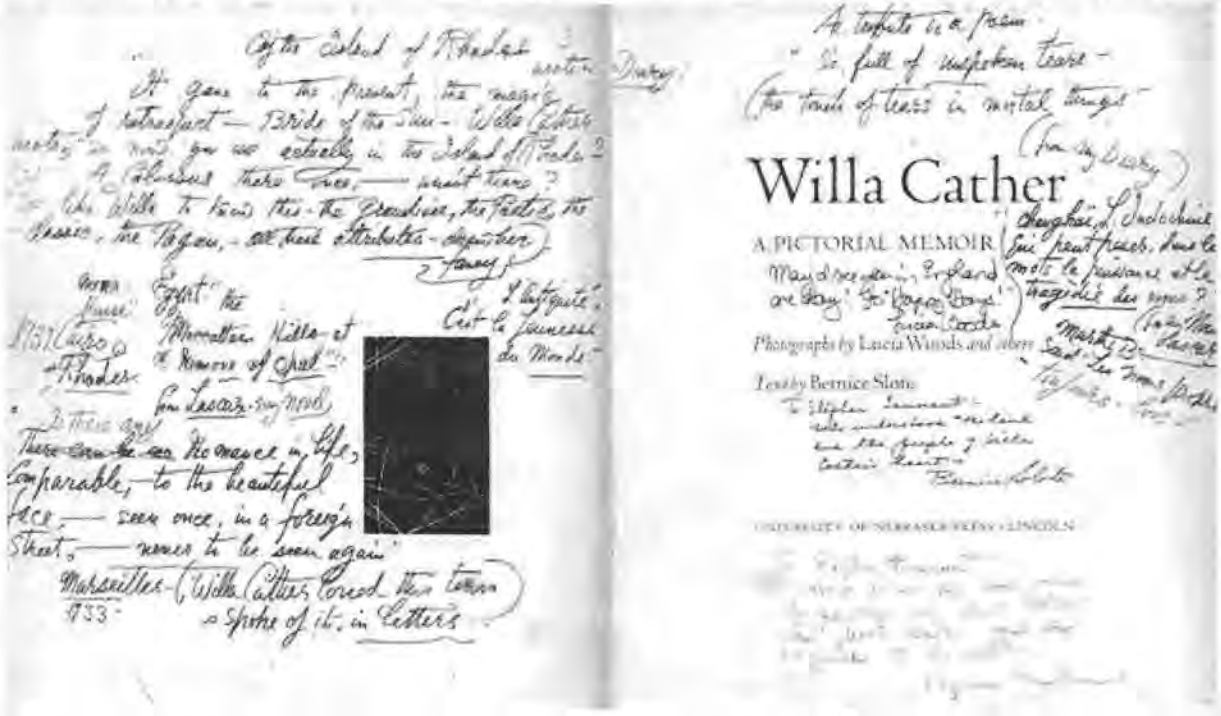

Figure 1: Title and Facing Pages

what in later years Cather had told Stephen vis à vis his own career, and *Lascar* in particular: "Quit talking about it and just do it!"[6] It is as if Tennant, having covered the opening pages of this *Memoir* with nostalgia for the past, wishes to end his jottings in this book with a call to the future—to what may yet be (the Acknowledgements page concludes the book, except for a two-page index).

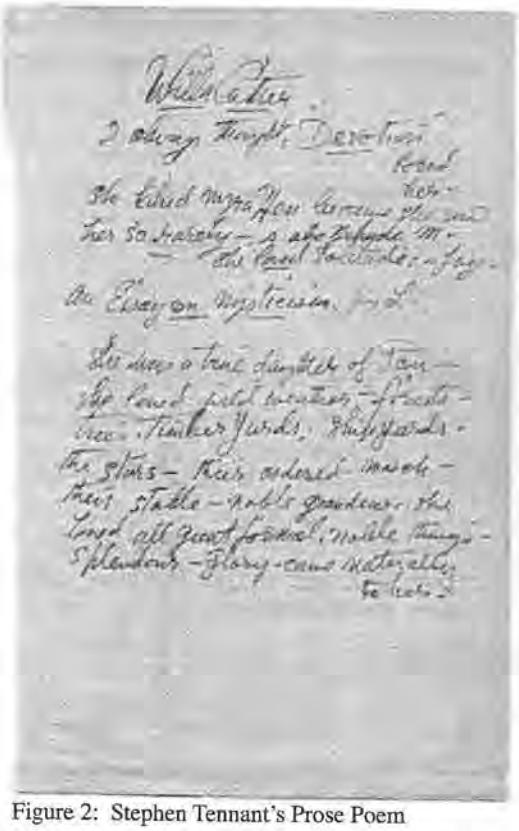

Figure 2: Stephen Tennant's Prose Poem

Tennant's most significant jotting appears not in the book itself but on a separate sheet tucked into it—a slightly browned and foxed leaf quite obviously torn from the endpapers of another volume (see Figure 2). Under a one-line heading, "Willa Cather," Tennant has written a comment that—as so often—recalls past memories of Cather, but in a way that for once carries a hint of criticism: "I always thought, Devotion bored her. She liked Myra Hess because she saw her so rarely—& also Yehudi M.— She loved Solitude, —& Joy." The comment about Hess and Menuhin seems snide, especially given that it was through Cather that Tennant and the Menuhins had become fast friends[7]—and that Cather had surely seen Myra Hess and the Menuhins far more frequently than she had Tennant! Indeed, this very fact may lie behind the jealousy one detects in his remark about them. The succeeding comment about Cather's love of solitude and joy, however, both hits the mark and prepares for what follows, a seven-line prose poem that portrays her solitary but joyful quest.[8] Though introduced by a cryptic heading, "An Essay on mysticism, for L.,"[9] the poem is clearly about Willa Cather. Its opening designation of her as "a true daughter of Pan" may recall Tennant's earlier allusion to Cather's love of "the classic, the Pagan," but here he invokes Pan less as a reminder of the classical past than as an embodiment of energy, zest, the world of nature. What gives such poignancy to these lines is that Tennant evokes a Cather very different from himself. We have seen that elsewhere he focuses on characteristics that align her art with his, or at least with his vision of what his own—and especially *Lascar*—might be. Thus in "The Room Beyond" he highlights her ability to gaze "beyond the immediate scene to a timeless sky or a timeless room," a portrayal which Philip Hoare calls "a wistful piece of allusion; like his own paintings with their distant views of a still sea and mountain peaks, Stephen sees the infinite in Cather's landscape" (303). Of the nostalgic element Tennant finds in Cather—and embodies in his 1973 *WCPMN* poem—Hoare adds, "It is because Stephen's own longing for a lost past . . . is so close to that spirit that he was able to sum it up so well" (303-304). In the seven lines he has written on this scrap of paper, however, he dares instead to recognize in Cather qualities that lie apart from and beyond his own talents, even his own aspirations: never would anyone, least of all Tennant himself, describe *his* art in terms of "wild weather—forests—trees, timber yards, shipyards—the stars—their ordered march," or say that "splendour—glory—came naturally to [him]." One feels a like poignancy when, on the Acknowledgements page of the *Memoir*, he urges himself to be "Master of [his] destiny"—something that, by 1975, he must know will never happen, despite all of his Cather-inspired good intentions. Given Tennant's recognition of what Cather had been and had done—and what he wasn't, and would never do—it is not surprising that his first words on this separate sheet betray a hint of jealousy. What is so moving is that he then creates, in less than forty words, a picture of Cather that so vividly evokes an artistry so different from—and so much greater than—anything to which he might aspire:

> She was a true daughter of Pan—
> She loved wild weather—forests—
> trees, timber yards, shipyards—
> the stars—their ordered march—
> their stable—noble grandeur. She
> loved all great formal, noble things—
> splendour—glory—came naturally to her.[9]

Notes

[1] For her letter, see Stout #883. Yongue (50-51), followed by Hoare (57), dates it to March 1926, but Cather's reference to proofreading *DCA* seems clearly to suggest March 1927, the date accepted by both Woodress (549) and Stout (131). On the friendship, see esp. Yongue 49-54; Hoare 57-59, 211-218, 285, 300-305, 365, 379, 383-384, 414.

[2] Cf. Lee, who comments that Tennant's "gushing adulation, decoratively arty life-style and flamboyant pedigree rather unexpectedly attracted Cather" (332). Also Yongue 49-54; Hoare 212-213.

[3] In a letter apparently written not long after, however, Cather quotes back to Tennant a sentence about Marseilles in the spring that he had written her on a postcard eight years before, commenting that his words restore her confidence in *Lascar* (Stout #1705). For other instances of Cather encouraging Tennant either to move forward with *Lascar* or to abandon it, see Hoare 296, 414, who also points out that after Cather's death Edith Lewis reminded Tennant that he owed it to Cather to complete his novel (319).

[4] Cf. Stout #1449, where Cather mentions to Yaltah Menuhin that "Stephen is at Rhodes." The frequent (and often inconsistent) capitalization and underlining of this citation and others, the profusion of dashes, and the quixotic punctuation reproduce Tennant's distinctive style as closely as possible. What cannot be reproduced are the changes in ink color: most of this first jotting is in bright aqua, with "fancy" and "L'Antiquité, C'est la Jeunesse du Monde" added in black (at a later time?). The next jotting (on Cather and Marseilles) features a heady mix of black, aqua, and purplish blue.

Stephen Tennant on Willa Cather
(Continued)

[5] As indeed she does: see, e.g., Stout #1367, #1536, #1705.

[6] Tennant continued to talk about completing *Lascar* well into the 1970s. When Pat Yongue and Lucia Woods visited him at Wilsford in 1974, he sent word that they must leave soon since he was "very busy—writing my novel *Lascar*" (Hoare 383).

[7]References to visits with Myra Hess appear in Cather letters from 1923 to 1939 (Stout #668, 1438) and suggest a considerable measure of closeness; in a letter written shortly before her death, Cather comments on her long friendship with the Menuhins: they have been a joy for sixteen years (Stout #1755). See Hoare 339-340 on Cather's role in introducing Tennant and the Menuhins. Hoare also comments on the degree to which Tennant from the late 1950s on became a recluse: in noting Cather's love of solitude, Tennant is clearly speaking also of himself.

[8]Though not the focus of his essay, Tennant does not neglect this side of Cather in "The Room Beyond," with references to her "spontaneous wit," "rallying bonhomie," "spiritual gaiety" and "*joie de vivre* and jubilation," "boundless zest for life" (*WCOW* x-xi, xiii).

[9]Philip Hoare, who very kindly reviewed a draft of this article, suggests that "L." is probably Laurence Whistler, a friend of Tennant's from childhood on, and a frequent correspondent. With reference to Tennant's "An Essay on mysticism," Hoare comments, "Stephen went through a mystical phase in the mid-60s—a bit like the Beatles!"

[10]Two Cather letters uncannily suggest how well Tennant knew her. In 1936 she writes Edith Lewis that she wakes up in the night to enjoy the mountain air and the moonlight—and that as she writes she is waiting to see a confluence of Venus and Jupiter (cf. "the stars—their ordered march," a phrase which closely echoes *O Pioneers!* 70); in a 1946 letter to Sigrid Undset, she longs to return to the country, the forests and the big tides of the Maine coast (Stout #1328 and 1732).

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A Message from the President

Quinn and Caitlin, my two nieces, recently visited for several days. These visits are always full of talk, shopping, and vintage movies, which all three of us love. Our shopping expeditions always include a trip to the mall (these are, after all, two beautiful teenage girls!). I am always gratified that in addition to trips to Old Navy and American Eagle, one of their favorite stops is the bookstore, where they spend hours perusing shelves and titles. On their most recent visit, they bought Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *Oliver Twist*. I know what you're thinking: why didn't I steer them toward a Cather title? Make no mistake; I was sorely tempted. But I know a thing or two about teenagers. A strong recommendation from their teacher-aunt might put the kiss of death on any such possible choice. But there is another reason why I let them choose for themselves. I want them to have that particular pleasure of selecting and evaluating their own books.

Their visit led me to think about Cather and her own reading. From her childhood, language was central to her educational experience. In Virginia, her grandmother Boak read to Willa from the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Cather was old enough to choose for herself, she did so—with great enthusiasm. Many of the Cather family books may be found in the archives in Red Cloud. We know she eagerly sought out new titles in the Red Cloud drug store where she worked. Her mother, understanding her daughter's intellectual needs, made sure that eventually she had her own space in which to read and no doubt dream of where the words she read might take her. I have a very clear vision of Cather in her tiny upstairs attic room, reading into the night and occasionally looking out across the streets of this little town. She devoured books voraciously, sometimes reading a favorite again and again. In that hunger for words, she read everything and selected those pieces which would remain important to her all her life: *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. She also must have understood the power of language on others, and even though when she entered the University in Lincoln she intended to study medicine, I cannot help but be convinced she was never destined to be a doctor.

Cather understood that the ability to move others with words was a source of enormous power. That's why I believe that readers of Cather often feel such personal affinity with the author. She, I am convinced, had similar feelings towards the authors of the books she had discovered and held as her touchstones. That's why I'm not worried that Quinn and Caitlin have not yet chosen Cather for themselves. They will come to her, as I did, as so many of us have. That discovery will be theirs, and a lifetime of pleasure awaits them.

Mellanee Kvasnicka
President, Cather Foundation Board of Governors

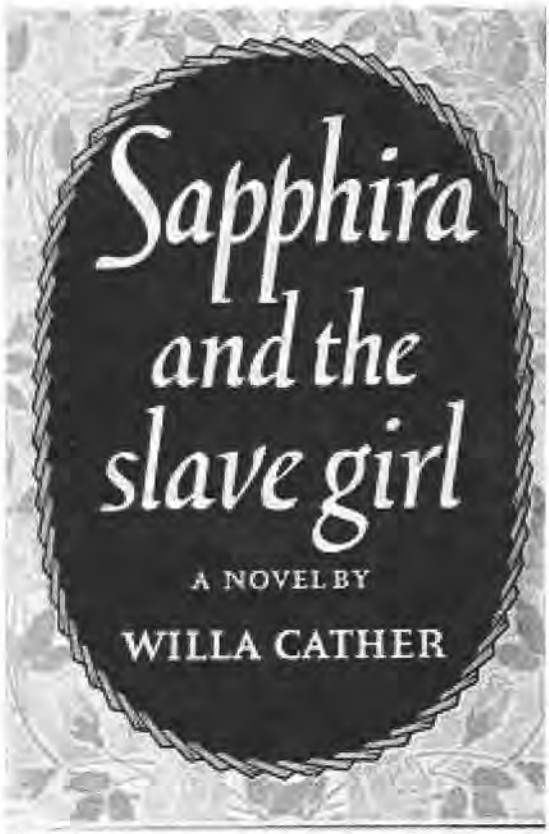
Negotiating Property Rights In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

Laura Smith

"You can't sell her without my name to the deed of sale, and I will never put it there," Henry Colbert announces flatly to his wife Sapphira (Cather 8). Thus begins the conflict of Willa Cather's novel *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, a conflict ostensibly over a slave mistress' feelings toward a slave girl, but also a conflict concerning property rights and the power they wield. Women in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, white or black, married or single, are bound by property laws, and yet they attempt to subvert these laws by negotiating with alternate forms of currency. In fact, Cather seems to be saying, white married women, rendered almost "civilly dead" (Chused 1368) by their legal exclusion from owning or managing property, are a manifestation of the larger, crueler injustices in the system of slavery. Even as early as the 1840s, newspapers were noting the similar circumscription of married women and slaves, at least with regards to property rights (1422). Certainly both white women and slaves relied on unorthodox transactions in order to wrest control of "property," even if they had no legal claim to the term.

In discussing the legal system and its property laws, one must remember their multiplicitous, palimpsestic, shifting nature. States individuate their laws; new laws supersede old ones; custom and practice trump them both. To find a single meaning for property in Cather's work would be impossible; her novel begins in 1856, continues in 1881, was written in the late 1930s, and is still read today. Today, property is defined as "an aggregate of rights which are guaranteed and protected by the government. The term is said to extend to every species of valuable right and interest" (Black 845). Property includes the rights of disposal, possession, use, enjoyment, and exclusion (845-846). Property, too, may be tangible or intangible (such as a right or claim), real (immovable property such as land and that which is affixed to it Black 847) or personal (all other property not "real" Black 846). Using these definitions, we can identify multiple forms of property in Cather's novel. For instance, Sapphira's slaves, including Nancy, are personal property which Sapphira may not sell without her husband's consent. The Mill House and its land are real property deeded by Sapphira's uncle to her when she is unmarried. Cather also shows how other "valuable rights" may act as property, even if they are not legally so. These rights, functioning as property, provide some power to otherwise legally impotent figures—slaves and married women.

One must first understand the property distinctions between white married and unmarried women during the time of Cather's novel. Unmarried women, known as "femes soles," had more property rights than married women. They could own, manage, and dispose of their property, although they could not defend it politically; they could not vote, for example (Salmon



Dust jacket for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1973.

xv). Married women, or "femes coverts," however, had both severely circumscribed property and political rights. In fact, "a married woman's real estate was subject to the management and control of her husband, and her personal property, once in the possession of her spouse, was permanently lost by the wife" (Chused 1367). So, although Henry cannot sell the land or Mill House without Sapphira's "free" consent, he can dispose of her slaves and her other movable goods at will. Henry reminds Sapphira of his legal ownership when she wishes to sell Nancy; he will not sign any deed of sale, and she cannot sell personal property without his consent.

Married women such as Sapphira also lose rights at law beyond property rights. Marylynn Salmon, in *Women and the Law of Property in Early America*, describes the loss of a woman's property rights in marriage. She explains that married women, individually, were barred from entering contracts or being held liable in civil actions, "for if women could be imprisoned their husbands would be denied sexual and household

Negotiating Property Rights
Continued

services" (42). The law places a property interest in those sexual and household services a wife performs for her husband, and to lose her to the law is to lose her services. In a sense, then, the wife is the property of her husband, for his exclusive use and enjoyment.

Cather's novel has instances in which both white women and slaves are subjugated to their husbands or owners. At the conclusion of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, she seems sympathetic to Sapphira's plight. Sapphira is trapped in an increasingly unwieldy body, and she is bound by property laws which render her legally without control of her feme sole property. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in "Time and Memory in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*: Sex, Abuse, and Art," notes that "Oblivious, perhaps, to historical fact, Cather has created a world in which all the women, both black and white, have more in common with each other than any of them have in common with the men of their color" (225). In fact, although the material conditions of white women and black slaves differed dramatically in the ante-bellum South, their legal statuses intersected significantly: in matters of property, neither a married woman nor a slave had the full power to act before the law.

Slave Auction Block, Green Hill Plantation, Campbell County Virginia. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA, 16-LONI.V, 1J-2)

While women were not literally legal property, slaves were; the novel's grossest miscarriage of property law is slavery. Cather takes an interest in entrenched legal institutions such as slavery, frequently noting property law issues for both women and slaves. Laws, such as the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law Cather mentions, designated slaves as property. Every county had the right to impress federal marshals, military personnel, and "'bystanders or posse comitatus'" for the capture and return of fugitive slaves (Hall, Wiecek, & Finkelman 206). Even the residents of Back Creek are aware of the law, although "[n]o negro slave had ever run away from Back Creek, or from Hayfield, or Round Hill, or even from Winchester" (Cather 222). Cather seems to blunt the edge of the Fugitive Slave Law by showing its apparent lack of necessity. But the paucity of fugitive slaves is deceptive. While slaves may be too happy with their situations to flee, they may also be too frightened or too bound to do so. The law is not as benign as it might seem.

Potential fugitive slave mothers, for example, faced a horrible decision in gauging their freedom and their children's safety. Moreover, slave mothers were deemed property and denied legal rights of self-management or motherhood: "Black women were, additionally, both denied legal and social agency as 'mothers' (insofar as they could not claim their children as their 'own' to prevent them from being bought and sold) and accorded negative authority as the progenitors of offspring who were required to inherit their mothers' slave condition, whatever the status of their paternity" (Wald 92). Slavery perverts the familial bond, rendering a mother's gift of life a curse of slavery. Slave children become their masters' investments, to be turned to profit. Thus, slaves are a valuable property, part of a slave industry fueled by greed for profit. The skipper transporting the rebellious Jezebel from Africa confesses, "he had a third interest in the cargo, and he wasn't anxious to throw any of it overboard" (Cather 93). Slaves, then, are a by-product of, among other things, ill-conceived and unjust property law, perpetuating bondage from mother to child.

And so, denied property rights, slaves and women must resort to theft or other subversive means to gain property in a system already unjust. Property, in turn, yields power. This power may reside in the ability to negotiate a privilege or to exert control over an aspect of life. In either case, property rights (literal or figurative) confer a degree of self-worth and of self-determination. In the novel's central subverting exercise of property rights, for instance, Rachel and Nancy, legally powerless to effect Nancy's safety within the slave system, act outside the strictures of law. Rachel's theft of Nancy and the money for her escape, and Nancy's "theft" of herself and her virtue, show how women and slaves may circumvent property laws.

In this and other ways, women wrest power denied them by restrictive property laws. In particular, sexual virtue becomes a form of property for women; they negotiate with it, and they fear losing it without their consent. Rachel wins her husband Michael with her own chastity and the refusal of a kiss, because "this was in the eighteen-thirties, when . . . [y]oung bachelors who were free in their morals were very exacting that the girl they chose for a wife should be virginal in mind as well as in body" (134). Till, too, negotiates with her sexuality. Sapphira, who has married Till to impotent Jeff so as to benefit from her work without the interruption of pregnancies and the financial burden of more slaves, receives the payment of Till's obedience and loyalty. But when Till encounters the Cuban portrait painter, she trades on her previous loyalty and chastity for a romantic liaison. Sapphira acknowledges the trade with a specific language of property rights and commerce: "'We got the portraits out of him, anyway, and maybe we got a smart yellow girl into the bargain.' Mrs. Colbert laughed discreetly, as if the idea amused and rather pleased her. 'Till was within her rights, seeing she had to live with old Jeff. I never hectored her about it'" (9).

Less fickle than chastity, because of their enduring qualities, are the abilities and skills that women use as a subversive form of currency under restrictive property laws. White married women, stripped of their property rights, and black slave women, deemed property themselves in the eyes of the law, must find skills and abilities with which to negotiate for powers and other forms of property. Till, for instance, has a property—and proprietary—interest in her housekeeping abilities. She is invaluable to Sapphira because "[h]er carriage and deportment and speech were those of a well-trained housekeeper. She knew how to stand when receiving orders, how to meet visitors at the front door, how to make them comfortable in the parlour and see to their wants" (31). Till's abilities lend Mill House the air of an aristocratic manor house. She has style, and it is a transferable knowledge, a property she shares with her daughter Nancy and which Nancy eventually markets upon her flight to Canada. In fact, in Shelley Newman's reading,

> Till teaches Nancy a variation on Jeffersonian proprietorship through caretaking, doubling Sapphira's legal ownership. . . . Till has no material claim to the Mill House, but she has a working ownership, a right that is perhaps more spiritual than natural. (59)

Newman, who contextualizes the novel in terms of the Great Depression, here builds upon John Locke's theory of labor in his chapter "Of Property" in *Concerning Civil Government*. He argues, "Yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person.' This nobody has any right to but himself. The 'labour' of his body and the 'work' of his hands, we may say, are properly his" (Locke 30). Certainly, Till, in her concern for Sapphira's and Henry's portraits and in the maintenance of the fine house, shows that she considers the house her own. And although Till legally has no property rights in herself, she assumes a "working ownership" in her labor because she is able to learn the abilities necessary to make herself invaluable to Sapphira. In fact, Till's "'nice ways'" (Cather 43) are a form of property, a currency she passes to Nancy.

Women use the property of family and kinship as currency too. Sapphira, who legally owns nothing except jointly with her husband, uses his family name as a form of property and a means of coercion. She writes "a letter to a nephew—a letter of invitation," "cordial, but not too cordial" (Cather 30). Aware of Martin's financial difficulties, Sapphira exerts her power as a family member to coerce his attendance upon her. Once there, Sapphira relies on his "bad reputation where women were concerned" (66) to ruin Nancy and thereby to lower Henry's regard for the girl. Unlike Martin or Henry, who have legally recognized property rights, Sapphira must use her family connections in devious ways, to get round the bounds of control. Even after she is married, Sapphira retains on her carriage her father's Dodderidge crest—with its "mysterious stamp of authority" (35); shopkeepers defer to this emblem of wealth and power. Judith Butler explains how a woman's name, always a stamp of patriarchy, is the vehicle of her power in the world:

> For women, then, propriety is achieved through having a changeable name, through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that the identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage. Expropriation is thus the condition of identity for women. (153)

In the exchange of family names and in the property they bring to marriage, women gain power and identity as transactional figures.

Finally, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* draws attention to its own status as figurative property. Stories are intellectual property, with the rights of possession, enjoyment, and exclusion, and Cather demonstrates the power of stories as property by her position in the epilogue and afterword. She confesses the biographical nature of her novel, drawing upon childhood reminiscences of a scene she had witnessed around 1881. Her sudden use of "I" and the abrupt discovery of the factual nature of this fictional novel show Cather's control in the novel; ultimately, the story of Nancy, Sapphira, Till, and Rachel is Cather's "creation and responsibility" (Hoover 240).[1] This "arrogant" assumption of control of the story and the naming of its characters is what Sharon Hoover calls "a radical act" (240), as Cather literally uproots the story from its owners and cultivates it in her own words. This claiming of property produces some anxiety; according to John Randall, "[l]ater she rightly considered this to be an artistic error, and regretted having included the episode" (359) of the epilogue. Marilee Lindemann posits that Cather's ownership of the story is part of her strategy "to fracture the narrative, thereby exposing its duplicitous character, its violent and radical incoherences" (138), especially as revealed by Cather's "casual deployment of slaveowner's discourse in referring to the long-free black woman whom she has never met as 'our Nancy'" (281) (Lindemann 138). While Cather may have been aware of the irony of a legally powerless girl (a minor and a female) claiming ownership of a free black Canadian woman and her story, Cather's use of the phrase "our Nancy" nevertheless carries the possessive pronoun reminiscent of slavery.

Cather's references to her family's former "property," "our Nancy," in the postbellum setting show the lasting effects of property law. Property laws, often unjust, perpetuate attitudes and practices that are themselves unjust. For instance, when Nancy considers escaping to freedom, she cries to Rachel, "'I can't bear it to belong nowheres!'" (237). She wishes to "belong," almost to the point of refusing her freedom and her ownership of herself. She finds comfort and identity in her status as slave property; she also considers the Mill House her own home. Slavery, as it relates to property law, lures Nancy with its spurious comfort. Cather notes the property transactions, both legal and otherwise, as a sign of the parallel (but not equal) injustices rendered against characters such as Sapphira and Nancy. As manifestations of these attitudes and practices, property laws render married women and slaves, in particular, powerless. These groups then form alternate forms of currency in order to gain power or identity. Thus, while the feminine appropriation of property rights through subversive means yields some power and control, it also implicates women in a fundamentally unjust system of ownership whose most pernicious form is slavery. Women become complicit in the unfair commerce between white women and black women.

Note

[1]Cather also uses names to show property's role in identity. Although Cather based many of the fictional characters on her real-life ancestors, she took the

liberty of renaming some, such as her maternal great-grandparents Jacob and Ruhamah Seibert as Henry and Sapphira Colbert (Woodress 482). *Acts* 5 tells the story of Sapphira and her husband Ananias who sneakily withhold part of the money they promised to the apostles. They are immediately struck dead for lying to God, but they are also redeemed in their destruction. Also, Rachel of the Bible, like Cather's namesake, acts in an illegal manner but with some moral compunction.

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Foundation Launches Cather Documentary . . .

After film-maker Joel Geyer's Spring Festival preview of the new documentary on Willa Cather, we have all been looking forward to its airing on PBS's *American Masters* this fall. We also feel a good deal of pride in *Willa Cather: Darkness and Light* because, as Geyer reminded us, the Cather Foundation's gift of $10,000 nearly five years ago was critical to his success in doing the research necessary to write a successful proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities and other donors to fund production of the film.

The Cather Foundation was able to make that critical investment in *Willa Cather: Darkness and Light* because loyal supporters of the Cather Foundation have been making annual gifts to our work for years.

Your support has also enabled the Cather Foundation to oversee the *largest district listed on the National Register of Historic Places devoted to a single author*. These Red Cloud sites include three churches, four houses (including Cather's childhood home), two businesses, an opera house, one farm, a prairie, a railroad depot, and a main street that are all featured in Willa Cather's fiction.

Our most loyal supporters also made extraordinary opportunities into realities. Thanks to your support, the Cather Foundation has a wonderfully restored Red Cloud Opera House in which to offer a national premier of *Willa Cather: Darkness and Light* on October 16, 2004.

We have another extraordinary opportunity that you can help make a reality: a $275,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities which, when matched with three private dollars for every one NEH dollar, will create a permanent $1.1 million endowment to provide programming and archival support at the Red Cloud Opera House.

Please help the Cather Foundation make this opportunity into a reality. Please send your contribution today to help us preserve Willa Cather's extraordinary literary gift to all of us. Cather reminds us in *The Song of the Lark* that "When people—serious people—believe in you, they give you some of their best. So take care of it." Please join us in taking care of our national literary treasure.

Monograph of 2004 Spring Festival Planned

A monograph recording events, papers, and cemetery tours is being planned as a result of the 2004 Spring Festival. The deadline for completion of the monograph is April of 2005, just in time for the 50th Anniversary Spring Festival. Monographs will be on sale at the Festival in Red Cloud.

Dr. Susan Rosowski for some time has been urging the WCPM office to complete monographs recording spring festivals. This year's festival seems to be a perfect time to begin the process.

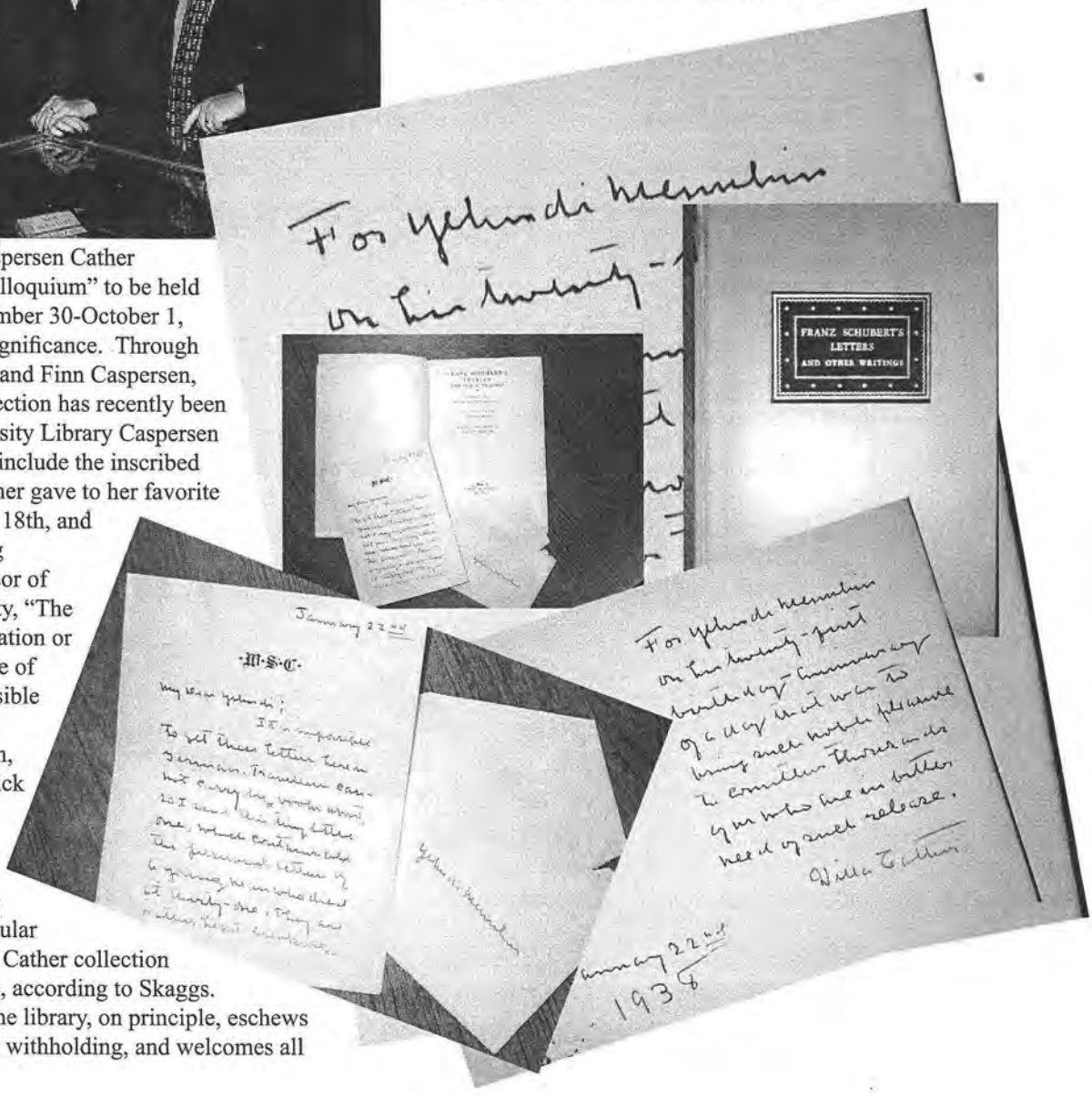
Suzi Schulz and Helen Mathew are constructing maps of various cemeteries in Webster County with directions for the walking tours and annotations connecting Cather, her family, and her writings to particular grave sites. In addition, they will write a piece about cemetery traditions. Major speakers at the 2004 Festival will send their edited texts for inclusion. Photographs of the Festival and sites that connect to the "Aging and Dying" theme will highlight the monograph.

If all goes as planned, this will be the first in a series of monographs that will capture and record future Spring Festival activities.

Yehudi Menuhin Treasures Donated to Caspersen Cather Collection

Left: Finn and Barbara Caspersen, benefactors of the Caspersen Collection, with Drew University librarian, Andrew Scrimgeour, stand before an exhibit of Cather materials at Drew University.

Below: Franz Schubert's *Letters and other Writings*, 1928, which Cather gave to Yehudi Menuhin on his 21st birthday. It is inscribed and was accompanied by a three-page letter signed by "Aunt Willa."



"Exploring the Caspersen Cather Collection at Drew: A Colloquium" to be held at Drew University September 30-October 1, 2005, has taken on new significance. Through the generosity of Barbara and Finn Caspersen, the Yehudi Menuhin Collection has recently been added to the Drew University Library Caspersen Cather Collection. Items include the inscribed volumes which Willa Cather gave to her favorite protégé on his 16th, 17th, 18th, and 21st birthdays. According to Merrill Skaggs, Professor of English at Drew University, "The possibilities of reinterpretation or clarification more than one of these volumes makes possible left me gasping. . . ."

This new collection, when added to the Frederick B. Adams collection, the Earl and Achsah Barlow Brewster collection, and the Caspersen private collection, plus other singular artifacts, makes the Drew Cather collection an undebatably major one, according to Skaggs. Skaggs went on to say, "the library, on principle, eschews hoarding, exclusivity, and withholding, and welcomes all interested scholars."

Remembering Spring Spring Conference 2004

Clockwise from upper left: Nancy Sherwood serves as guide for the bus tour that took participants to two cemeteries and the Pavelka House. Steve Shively, as chair of the Spring Festival Committee, was on the move. There was plenty of time for conversations around the many tables in the Auditorium. Opposite page, pictured at right, upper left, the conversations continue. Suzi Schulz points out a tombstone in the Red Cloud Cemetery. Second row: Mellanee Kvasnicka prepares to read from Cather texts on Friday evening. Bottom left: Marjorie Surridge, keynote speaker at the "Passing Show" contemplates an issue. Rick Sowash, composer and narrator at the Saturday Evening performance, stands with musicians, Cindy Murphy, Debra McKim, and Christa Speed. And central to all activities was food! Here Debra Shuck prepares to serve a plate of kolaches during registrations on Saturday morning. Photographs by Dee Yost.

"Coming Into Possession:" Imperial Movement, Culture and Composition in Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark* and *The Professor's House*

Eric Aronoff

In an interview about *The Professor's House*, Willa Cather says that the novel's experimental, tripartite structure was inspired to by "an exhibition of old and modern Dutch paintings" that she had seen in Paris just before beginning the novel. In these paintings, she says,

> the scene presented was a living room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and coppers. But in most of the interiors . . . there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships, or a stretch of grey sea. The feeling of the sea that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe, to Java, etc. (*On Writing* 31)

Thus amidst the Professor's life "overcrowded and stuffy with new things," Cather inserts the square window of "Tom Outland's Story" to "let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa." Many critics have examined how this analogy illuminates both the novel's structure and themes, but few have noted the precise nature of the "fresh air" that blows in from those Dutch windows. For at least in part the "remarkable" feeling that blows in those windows is the feeling of movement, and more specifically of imperial movement, as the "fleets of Dutch ships" "ply . . . the waters of the globe" in the process of making the Netherlands into one of the richest colonial empires of the 17th and 18th centuries (an empire of which, of course, "Java" was a major component).

In this paper I will analyze the role of imperial movement in the two novels, *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor's House*, that comes most directly out of Cather's own travels through what in her own period was widely considered a newly colonized part of the American empire—namely, the American Southwest. Several critics, most notably Guy Reynolds and James Urgo, have demonstrated the centrality of ideologies of migration and empire for Cather's work. Reynolds, however, concentrates his analysis on those novels that explicitly thematize colonization—the Midwestern novels of *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*—and has little to say about a novel like *The Song of the Lark*, which has been read more commonly as a *Bildungsroman* about artistic identity. Urgo on the other hand usefully demonstrates the importance of Cather's "aesthetic of migration" even in such novels as *Song of the Lark*, linking Thea's artistic ambition to the drive of the pioneer. For Urgo, however, the link between the artist and the empire-building pioneer is "ambition"; that Thea, for example, creates art is secondary and incidental.

In contrast, I want to argue that these novels explore the specific relationship between artistic creation and imperial possession, and the kinds of "possession" enacted by each over their respective material—the imperial explorer over the landscape and the objects within it, and the artist over her medium (where that medium is as much her*self* as the objects she creates). Imperial movement is central to Cather's theory of composition, be it the composition of the self, the composition of a whole way of life, or the composition of a work of art. To put it another way, imperial movement is central to her conception of "culture," in the multiple, interlocking meanings that were becoming problematic for Cather and her contemporaries: "cultivation" or self-culture; societal or human culture; and the aesthetic objects of "High Culture." Moreover, the direction of imperial movement, and the relationship between the imperial possessor and the objects possessed, shifts between the two novels. In *The Song of the Lark*, the "desire" that drives the pioneer to take "possession" of the West is linked to the artistic "desire" that allows Thea Kronborg to "come into full possession" of the talent that she has been "refining and perfecting" throughout the novel: imperial possession parallels self-cultivation. In *The Professor's House* imperial possession and culture are also linked, but in crucially different ways: Tom Outland's anthropological excavation and cataloguing of Cliff-Dweller artifacts on the Blue Mesa enable him to take "possession" both of his "American" identity and Cliff-Dweller culture itself. This "possession" is, however, as much an act of composition as discovery, achieved by a dialectical movement both toward and away from the objects to be possessed. In this formulation, imperial movement is linked to Cather's theory of composition as a whole, as articulated in her preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (1925), in which she suggests a complex relationship between an imperial movement that takes physical possession (of artifacts, of nature), and a "return" or relinquishing of these artifacts that enables their (re)possession in the higher form of art.

As is by now well known, Cather traveled to the American Southwest, specifically to the region around Winslow, Arizona, for the first time in 1912, and many critics have detailed the transformative effects that Cather herself ascribes to her encounter with the desert, and especially with the ruins of the Cliff Dweller civilizations. This visit was followed in 1915 with a trip to Mesa Verde—a trip whose experiences critics have argued form much of the material of Tom Outland's Story.[1] What is important for my purposes here is how, in her turn to the Southwest as a space of spiritual meaning and a site for reconstructing definitions of art and culture, Cather traveled a route—both figuratively and literally—that was paradoxically both old and relatively new. Already in the late 19th century the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, both living and extinct, occupied a powerful place in American popular culture: as

Edith Lewis describes, before ever seeing her first cliff-dwellings in Walnut Canyon, Cather and her brothers had "thought and speculated about them since they were children. The cliff-dwellers were one of the native myths of the American West; children knew about them before they were conscious of knowing about them" (Lewis 81). This fascination with Southwest Indian art and life grew through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the development of new routes of transportation that opened these areas to commerce, tourism, and scientific exploration. It was only as recently as 1880 that the railroad came to Albuquerque, New Mexico; and in the years that followed, the railroad penetrated further into the Southwest, easing the way to areas hitherto accessible only with difficulty by horse and wagon. Arizona had only become a state two years before Cather's visit in 1912, and Cather's brother himself worked for the Santa Fe railroad. In the first decades of the 20th century, then, the region was still very much in the process of being integrated into the commercial and industrial grid extending from the East—a process that liberal historians like V.L. Parrington would call, writing just two years after Cather's publication of *The Professor's House*, the consolidation of the United States' "inland empire" (Parrington, 259). As historians like Edwin Wade have demonstrated, economic and industrial expansion was coupled with a rise in tourism, as more Americans sought to experience this "exotic" area and see its native inhabitants—a tourism explicitly promoted by the railroads themselves, who by the late 1890s were producing handbooks describing Indian art, ceremonies and life-ways, and outlining the paid side-trips that could take them there (Wade 169; McLuhan 18). In her physical movement to the Southwest, and her imaginative possession of the Native American material she found there, Cather must be seen then as participating in an ongoing imperial project.

Pre-Puebloan Wall, Mesa Vera. Photograph by John Swift.

Critics have long suggested that Cather's own artistic awakening after her encounter with the Cliff Dweller ruins of Walnut Canyon is reflected in Thea Kronborg's artistic coming-of-age in Panther Canyon in *The Song of the Lark*. Contemplating the ruins of the Cliff Dweller civilization, Thea is particularly inspired by the pottery shards strewn about the site. These broken remnants of artistic effort from "so far back in the night of the past, down here at the beginning," reveal to Thea a basic, universal definition of art which transcends time and binds her firmly to those Indian potters in "a long chain of human endeavor," of which she is the latest link (305, 306). In constructing a model of art in which the Cliff Dweller pottery represents the "beginnings" of a "long chain" that culminates in Thea's performance of Wagnerian opera, Cather draws on a dominant 19th-century tradition of thinking about culture as a process of continual "refinement."[2] The primitive desire represented by the Cliff Dweller pottery—and linked rhetorically throughout the novel with landscape and childhood—is a necessary, but crucially not sufficient condition for the achievement of high culture. As Harsanyi, Thea's music instructor, puts it, Thea comes to him as "a fine young savage," with raw talent but with "no cultivation whatever." Thea's artistic education consists of cultivating, or, as the narrator puts it, "refining" that savage desire: in her most fully realized artistic performance, Thea "came into full possession of things she had been refining and perfecting for so long"(477). This achievement of culture, or self-cultivation, for Cather is characterized by imperial movement: the artist "comes into full possession" of herself through the cultivation of her talent.

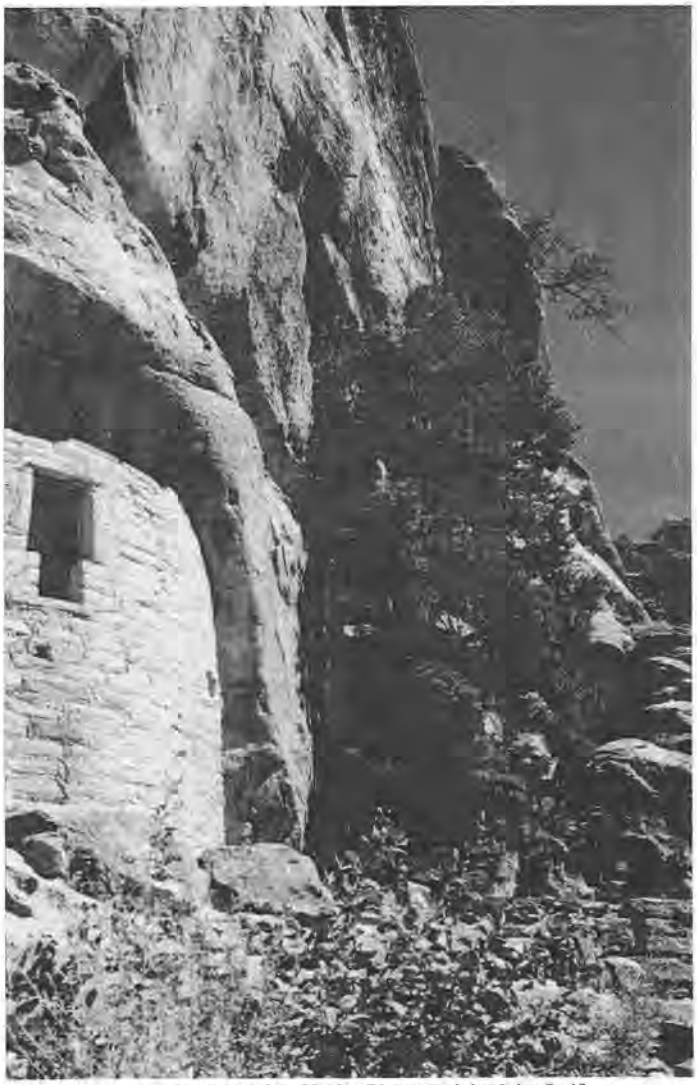
For Cather this inward operation of *self*-possession has a corresponding outward movement, as the processes of "cultivation" are also connected to empire. As Urgo has pointed out, Cather links Thea's artistic ambitions to the imperial movement of the pioneer via the symbol of the eagle. Early in the novel, Thea is moved to tears by finding the signs of the wagon trains that transported "the Forty-niners and the Mormons" westward across the plains. Recalling the first telegraph message sent across the Missouri River—"Westward the course of Empire takes its way"—Thea in turn links this movement of empire with the flight of the eagles: "Thea remembered that message when she sighted down the wagon tracks toward the blue mountains. . . . The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles"(54-55). Thea, basking in the sun in Panther Canyon, is likewise galvanized by the sudden sight of an eagle soaring high above, representing "endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art" (321). The eagle as a symbol for achievement or desire, then, links the pioneer to the "glorious striving for human art."

But while Urgo suggests that it is Thea's *ambition* that is most significantly mirrored in the pioneer (that Thea's ambition is artistic, he suggests, is secondary to the ambition itself), I argue that the parallel goes even deeper, as Cather imagines artistic cultivation as a kind of (self) possession analogous to the pioneer's possession of the continent (and conversely, envisions imperial possession of the land as an aesthetic achievement).[3] Both the pioneer and the artist, it turns out, engage in taking "possession"—the pioneer of the land, the artist of herself. Moreover, in both cases, what one takes possession of is already something that one owns. Like the pioneer who moves into territory owned by the State, but which is not "possessed" until settled, the artist "comes into" territory that is already hers—it is her talent—but is not possessed until "refined and perfected." Both are civilizing processes, or forms of "cultivation."

By 1925 and *The Professor's House*, Cather's model for colonizing the kingdom of art has changed. Returning from an unsuccessful fund-raising trip to Washington D.C., Tom finds the collection of artifacts sold; in the argument that follows, Roddy leaves Tom alone on the mesa. Lying on a rock at the bottom of the canyon and gazing up at the Cliff City, the rock walls and the night sky, Tom, for "the first time . . . saw it as a whole. Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and the process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession" (226). Where in *The Song of the Lark* Thea in her climactic moment "comes into possession" of herself as an artist—a producer of high Culture—Tom here comes into possession of *a* culture, i.e., the Cliff Dweller culture that is both an other culture, and "his" by virtue of his American identity.

This new kind of "possession" enacted by Tom is in turn enabled by new versions of "culture" being deployed by American artists and anthropologists alike in the 1920s. Writing *The Professor's House* in precisely the period which historians of American anthropology have marked as the emergence of the "anthropological" view of cultures as relative, whole "ways of life," Cather's transhistorical chain of cultivation and refinement in *The Song of the Lark*, becomes, by 1925, a whole, designed, and meaningful composition. In this version, culture does not just denote a creative process, or the pieces of art themselves, but is *itself* an aesthetic object, "*a* culture," with a "design" composed by the hands of the people who live it—in much the way, it turns out, a writer composes a story.[4]

Most importantly for my purposes here is the new kind of imperial possession—or more specifically, the new version of the relationship between individual artifacts, the imperial explorer/artist, and the thing possessed—that this new version of culture allows. On one level, linking Tom's perception of the cultural whole to both science and writing—and calling the results of both "possession"—Cather dramatizes the utility of the idea of cultural wholes for modernist anthropologists. Conceiving culture as a discrete, spatial whole made it uniquely available to the anthropologist/scientist for study—making it quite literally an object of analysis. As a sculpture, both the city itself and—through Tom's careful collecting, cataloguing and displaying of the artifacts he uncovers—the way of life it represents become available for contemplation, both aesthetic and scientific. Moreover, the anthropologist's analysis of cultural wholes was not simply the cataloguing of cultural elements, but the selecting, from amid the welter of detail of everyday life, the most significant elements for representation and interpretation—specifically in the written form of the ethnography, the textual embodiment of the whole culture it purports to describe.[5] This is precisely the process through which Tom apprehends the whole of Cliff City: it is only after he has collected and catalogued the artifacts of Cliff City, and then *lost* them, that he is able to "co-ordinate and simplify," and thereby perceive the whole culture. As he says of the inspired days that followed, he felt that he "had found everything, instead of having lost everything"(227). This process of selection is in turn for Cather precisely the difference between literary realism and "the novel démeublé." Tom's



Round Tower, Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde. Photograph by John Swift.

collecting and cataloguing of Cliff Dweller artifacts, then, could be seen as an exercise in the "novel démeublé," and his loss of the artifacts and subsequent apprehension of the cultural whole the enactment of Cather's admonition to "throw all the furniture out of the window," and "leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre"(*On Writing* 43).

In the movement through the possession of individual artifacts to the possession of the "whole" culture which they constitute, then, Cather repeats the idea of imperial movement found in *The Song of the Lark*, but with a difference. Where

in *The Song of the Lark* taking possession of the land was mirrored in the inward "self-possession" of the cultivated artist, in *The Professor's House* culture is possessed by a dialectical movement that first draws away from nature (that is, the welter of elements that make up "the real"), only to repossess it by a return to those elements in art (that is, through a process of selection and composition). In both cases, however, "possession" is crucially "*re*-possession." Imagining the Cliff Dwellers as his ancestors, and his ancestors as American, Tom's discovery of Cliff Dweller's culture becomes a re-discovery of the American identity he already had; in *The Song of the Lark* one's identity as an artist both as something one is and one becomes, something that one already has yet of which one must "take possession."[6] The shift from "artist" to "American" parallels the shift in the meaning of culture. The move from Thea's "taking possession" of her artistic inheritance, to Tom Outland taking "possession" of the Blue Mesa and its artifacts, is the shift from personal "cultivation," the individual development and "refinement" of one's original artistic foundation, to "culture," one's comprehension and internalization of a whole and meaningful way of life. Both versions, however, are acts of possession, selection, and composition.

The relationship between Cather's aesthetics of culture, her theory of composition, and imperial movement pointed to in *The Professor's House* is made particularly clear in Cather's introduction to her edited volume of *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett.* Cather praises the "organic design" of Jewett's finest stories (*On Writing* 58). It is the organic design of her composition, it turns out, that enables Jewett to capture ethnographically the organic design of the New England way of life that is on the verge of disappearing. Crucially, however, this "organic living simplicity and directness," is explicitly *not* natural—growing spontaneously from the material—but comes from the designing hand of the artist; that is, it is the hard work of culture. In comparing Jewett's early "first impressions" and her later "almost flawless examples of literary art," Cather argues

> one can . . . watch in process the two kinds of making: the first, which is full of perception and feeling but rather fluid and formless; the second which is tightly built and significant in design. The design is, indeed, so happy, so right, that it seems inevitable; the design is the story, and the story is the design. The "Pointed Fir" sketches are living things . . . they melt into the land and the life of the land until they are not stories at all, but life itself. (48-49)

This process from one kind of making to another, Cather indicates, is one of unrelenting effort over a long period of time: it has to do, she says, with "persistence, survival, recurrence in the writer's mind," and with repeated attempts at "trying to get these conceptions down on paper exactly as they are to him . . . trying this method and that, as a painter tries different lightings and different attitudes with his subject to catch the one that presents it more suggestively than any other"(48, 51). One must, it seems, move away from the immediate impressions of nature into the hard work of design and composition, in order to then capture "life itself"—even if the artist is depicting the way of life she herself has lived.

But, as in the analogy between *The Professor's House* and the Dutch interiors with which I started, Jewett's regional fiction seems to depend for Cather, not on a hermetically sealed provincial culture, but through Jewett's (and her culture's) position within a larger imperial context: Jewett, Cather rhapsodizes, was born "within the scent of the sea, but not the sight of it, in a beautiful old house full of strange and lovely things brought home from all over the globe by seafaring ancestors"(56). This movement of voyage and return (with "possessions") repeats in another register Cather's emphasis on the need to move away from nature in order to return to it in art. On one hand, one must first be part of a culture to depict it. On the other, one must double that initial possession through the hard work of culture. Possessing one's culture (or, in the case of Thea, oneself), it seems, must also be a returning to one's culture (or oneself).

Notes

[1]For the most complete account of Cather's 1912 trip to Arizona, see Woodress. For an extensive analysis of Cather's trip to Panther Canyon, and especially her 1915 trip to Mesa Verde and its effect on the composition of Tom Outland's Story, see Harrell, and Rosowski and Slote. O'Brien and Lee also analyze the effects of Cather's encounters with Native American artifacts on her aesthetic.

[2]The two most influential articulations of the culture concept in the late 19th century were the ethnologist E.B. Tylor, and Matthew Arnold. Tylor in his landmark ethnology *Primitive Culture* (1871) defined "culture or civilization" as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society;"while different societies might have different practices, culture nonetheless was a singular, universal process, with different practices representing "stages of development or evolution," and whose highest stage to date is represented by European civilization (Tylor 1,6). Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* defined culture as the "pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know...the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 5). While significant differences distinguish Tylor's and Arnold's definitions of culture, both establish a universal scale of culture, upon which individual works or whole societies might be ranked "high" or "low," primitive or "refined." For the most influential analysis of the history of the culture concept in the 19th century, see Williams.

[3]See Urgo, 130-143.

[4]For the key features of at least one version of this new definition of culture, see Stocking, "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept." In recent years several critics have explored the interrelationship between American anthropologists, artists and literary critics in the modernist period, including Cather. See Manganaro, *Culture, 1922*; Hegeman.

[5]For an analysis of the debates within American anthropology in the early 20th century over the proper relationship between the individual artifacts of a culture and the "whole" system of meaning of which these artifacts might be seen as a part–or between the "trait list" and "holistic" schools of anthropology–see Hinsley.

[6]This idea of "culture" as something one both already has, and must take possession of (particularly with respect to Tom's relationship to an "American" cultural identity,) owes much to Walter Benn Michael's analysis of culture, race and *The Professor's House* in Michaels, 1990 and 1992. In his argument Michaels is interested in the ways in which "culture" in the 1920s depends on "race" (the cultural identity one acquires must double the racial identity one already has); I extend this argument to show that this doubling is inherent in the multiple, often competing, definitions of culture in this period, and to analyze what kind of "culture" is being possessed.

"Coming into Possession" Continued

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Sarah Beringer Wins Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Award

One of the highlights of the annual Spring Festival is the awarding of the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship. Sarah Beringer of David City High School received the 2004 award this spring. The award was presented by Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Chair, Virgil Albertini, on behalf of the Cather Foundation at the Spring Festival Banquet on Saturday, April 30. Sarah read her paper to a large and appreciative audience in the Opera House Auditorium on Friday afternoon, and it will be published in *Teaching Cather* (Fall 2004). Sarah's proud parents attended the events both days.

Alternates for the award are Kathryn Segrist of Scottsbluff High School and Clare McGuire of Omaha Central High School.

The Norma Ross Walter Scholarship is presented yearly to a young Nebraska woman who will major in English. This year the award is a $1,000 non-renewable college scholarship. Sarah's name has been placed on a permanent plaque, located in the lower-level lobby of the Cather Center, honoring all Norma Ross Walter Scholarship winners.

Virgil Albertini presents award to Sarah Beringer. Photograph by Dee Yost.

News from the Executive Director

On my drive to the Cather Center in Red Cloud, I love to observe the landscape, especially going south from the "fourteen-mile corner" on the Willa Cather Roadway. I have driven that space at sunrise, sunset, and all times between; I never tire of observing and photographing the views. My husband worries that I will become so distracted that I drive right off the road. All of this reminds me of Willa Cather's love of the land, and I continue to be impressed by her ability to so competently describe this landscape in her novels.

Cather's effectiveness in transporting people from just about anywhere onto the Nebraska prairies was made apparent in June when we celebrated "Cather in Washington, D.C.," a fund raising event held at the beautiful home of Jim and Emily Malino Scheuer. When Washington, D.C. Shakespeare Theatre actress Sheila Hennessey read from the opening section of O Pioneers!, she held everyone captive. Afterward I heard several guests enthusiastically saying that they were literally "transported" to the Prairie. This was just one part of a very enjoyable evening at the Scheuer home.

Spring has been a busy time in Red Cloud, and I have traveled to a number of other places in Nebraska to talk about Willa Cather and her writings. What follows is a sampling:
[March] Lincoln, Nebraska: "The Landing," a beautiful home for seniors, was the location where Dr. James Weesner kindly hosted a reception for over one hundred guests from The Landing and Lincoln in general. My role was to show slides and discuss the Cather prairie. What enthusiastic participants!

Cozad Book Club meets on the deck of Jane Rohman's "Barn." (Photograph from Betty Kort's collection)

Cozad, Nebraska: At Jane Rohman's "Barn," a classic barn made into a country home, Foundation board member Dee Yost and I met with a Cozad book club to discuss The Professor's House. Jane provided a grand luncheon in the "barn," following a serious, in-depth discussion of the novel.

[April] Lincoln, Nebraska: Sally Desmond, a member of the Cather Foundation Board of Goveners, invited me to speak with her "Discussion Group" about the book selected for the Spring Festival, *Obscure Destinies*. What delightful food and conversation ensued while we debated the "end vs. the road"!
[May[Red Cloud: A group of "Red Hat Ladies" from Hastings and the surrounding region visited Red Cloud and learned about Willa Cather's time in Red Cloud and the history of the Cather Foundation. There are a number of "Red Hat Ladies" groups in Nebraska. They all seem to have so much fun!

Red Cloud: Alumni weekend brought extraordinary entertainment to the Opera House. A number of Alumni agreed to perform mostly vocal and instrumental pieces. Alumni came from near and far to participate. The quality and professionalism of the performances was astounding to me—so much professional talent has come out of this community. Of course, it was a sell-out crowd, and Master of Ceremonies, Mike Offner, had a great time playing to the graduates of Red Cloud High School, including his own father. Sponsored by the Republican Valley Arts Council, the program's profits were donated to the Opera House Endowment fund. The audience is demanding a repeat performance in 2005! I certainly will not miss the next show.
[June] Red Cloud: June brought a party at the Cather Center to celebrate Dorothy Madison's eightieth birthday. Dorothy has by far the longest tenure on the staff. Scholars from near and far know Dorothy. She monitors the archive and serves as a tour guide. She is our final resource for all unanswered questions about Cather and the history of the WCPM.

Red Cloud: In late June, seventeen members of St. Mark's Pro Cathedral in Hastings, Nebraska, toured the Cather sites and invited my husband and me to participate with them in a church service at Grace Episcopal Church led by Rev. Richard J. Martindale. It was a pleasure to be able to thank these Episcopal church members personally for the funds from the Sower Award. (Yes, we now have repaired the masonry on the historic Grace Episcopal Church and the chimney has been rebuilt. Bricks are no longer falling off the building.) The group ended by having a light supper at the Cather Second Home. The bed and breakfast is now under the new ownership of Dee McCurdy.

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Looking ahead on the calendar to October 16th, the long awaited PBS Cather biography will be screened at the Red Cloud Opera House. Two performances are scheduled. The 90-minute production, produced by Joel Geyer and Christine Lesiak, both of Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, promises to be a large-screen extravaganza. New high-definition technology will make this a visual treat, and it promises to be intellectually delectable as well. Cather scholars from across the country participated in the making of the production to which the Cather Foundation proudly contributed the initial funding during the planning stage.

The PBS special is just one of the many attractions coming to the Red Cloud Opera House this fall. I hope many readers of the Newsletter will be enticed to join me on the road to Red Cloud to participate in some of these upcoming events.

The Opera House Endowment Fund

In recognition of the need for the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial & Educational Foundation (WCPM) to establish an Endowment Fund for the 1885 Opera House in Red Cloud, Nebraska, and to assist the WCPM in raising $825,000 before July 31, 2005 so as to enable the WCPM to obtain $275,000 in challenge-grant funds for such purpose from the National Endowment for the Humanities, I/we hereby state my/our intention to contribute to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial & Education Foundation's Opera House Endowment Fund the sum of $_____

I/We expect to make this gift payable over a period of one year, with the initial payment to be made as follows:

1. $_____hereby: [ ] Check enclosed [ ] Visa [ ] MasterCard

Account #_____Expiration Date_____; and/or

2. $_____on or before July, 2005. 3. Other_____.

I/we also understand that all contributions are deductible for federal and state income-tax purposes.

_____ _____

Date Signature

Please complete as you wish to be listed.

Name_____ Title_____

Address_____ Zip_____

Day Telephone_____Evening Telephone_____ E-Mail_____

Marilyn Arnold Wins Mayhaven's Award

Mayhaven Publishing is pleased to announce that Marilyn Arnold has won Mayhaven's Award for Fiction for her hilarious and insightful manuscript, *Minding Mama*. Publication of the work will follow within a year. Mayhaven established Mayhaven's Awards for Adults and Children's Fiction in 1997.

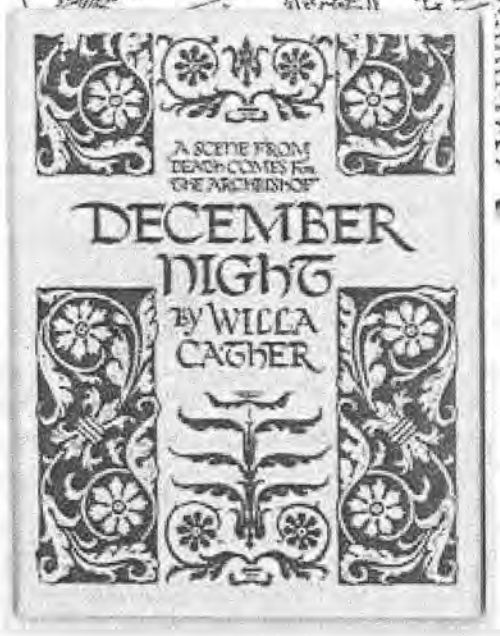
An emeritus professsor of English, Marilyn Arnold retired early from Brigham Young University. Her publications since "retirement" include five novels, an extensive commentary on a major sacred text, an anthology of writings on charity, and numerous essays and chapters for books. She has also edited a major encyclopedia of allusions in Willa Cather's fiction and co-edited a collection of women's poetry on war and peace. Arnold is widely recognized as an authority on the work of Willa Cather. In 2003 she received a "Woman of Achievement" award from the Utah governor's office.

Marilyn Arnold now makes her home at Kayenta in the desert canyon country of southwest Utah.

Mary Vaughan will be visiting artist.

Artist-in-Residence

Visitors to the Cather Center in August will have an additional treat. Mary Vaughan will become the first artist-in-residence at the Cather Center. She plans to spend one month completing paintings of the prairie, with Cather's writings as inspiration. Mary is an ardent Cather fan. Many of the *Newsletter & Review* readers have met her as she has attended all of the International Seminars, accompanied by her mother, Evadne Vaughan, of Hastings, Nebraska. The Cather Foundation looks forward to the exhibition of Mary's paintings in the Gallery of the Cather Center.



Special Offer to Cather Foundation Members!

Recently Cather Foundation Members received a letter in the mail introducing a limited edition printing of Cather's ***December Night***. As indicated in the letter, this beautiful, slim edition of a section from *Death Comes to the Archbishop* will go on sale to the general public on September 15, 2004.

Handbound and lavishly illustrated, this book is offered to Cather Foundation Members exclusively for a limited time. Originally produced for the Christmas market in 1933, these reproductions will make lovely gifts for your friends and loved ones. Don't miss this opportunity. Copies are limited.

***December Night* is available for $24.95 plus $5.00 for shipping and handling.**

Order copies by calling toll free 1-866-731-7304.

Numbered Copies of the first 300 books are available as follows:

Numbers 20-99 will sell for $100.00 each, plus shipping and handling ($5.00 each)
Numbers 100-199 will sell for $75.00 each, plus shipping and handling ($5.00 each)
Numbers 200-300 will sell for $50.00 each, plus shipping and handling ($5.00 each)

WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER AND REVIEW

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The *Newsletter and Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 2500-3000 words; they should be submitted on disk in Microsoft Word and should follow *The MLA Style Manual.*

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Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography.*

WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL & EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION (The Willa Cather Society)

Founded 1955 by Mildred Bennett

Mrs. Bennett and seven other founding members of the Board of Govenors defined the Foundation's mission, which has evolved into these

AIMS OF THE WCPM

To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with The Nebraska State Historical Society.

To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.

To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

Red Cloud Opera House Schedule

Cather Book Club ~ O Pioneers!
September 8th & October 13th at 4:30pm

PBS American Master Series ~ Cather Documentary Sneak Preview
October 16th ~ 2:00pm & 7:00pm

Nebraska Theatre Caravan's "Spitfire Grill"
October 23rd ~ 7:30pm

"The Fantastiks"
Sponsored by the Republican Valley Arts Council
November 5, 6, 12, & 13th at 7:30pm ~ 7th & 14th at 2:30pm

Thalken, Tesdall, & Thalken ~ Jazz Band
December 3rd ~ 7:30pm

"A Child's Christmas in Wales" ~ Theater of the American West
December 17th & 18th at 7:30pm ~ 19th at 2:30pm

In the Gallery . . .
Mads Anderson ~ Abstract Painting & Art Pierce ~ Scripsit
September 1st ~ October 24th

"The Prairie Palatte" ~ Featuring area artists
October 25th ~ November 30th

John Blake Bergers ~ Reception December 3rd
December 1st ~ January 15th

Summer Performances in Review

Pictured at left, Dale Clark presents a program from the Nebraska Humanities Council program Resource Center entitled "Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery Through the Eyes of a Crew Member." The program was performed in late June. The dog is unidentified.

The stage backdrop in this photograph is an original backdrop from the Red Cloud Opera House dated sometime before 1921. Photograph by Steph Thompson.

Preserving the Treasures

We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it—for a little while.

—O Pioneers!

Like the land itself, the Opera House in Red Cloud is a cherished possession. And the hundreds of people, who love the Opera House and understand it and have contributed to its restoration and endowment, now "own" it for a little while.

We have only a few precious months left to complete the National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge grant. Please send your contributions to the Cather Foundation now. Join with others in "owning" a bit of the past that will be enjoyed by future generations through your generosity.

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation
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