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Post-Seminar Issue

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A highlight of Seminar '93 was an interview with Cather's biographer James Woodress conducted by Susan J. Rosowski, who skillfully drew out the wit as well as significant wisdom of her subject. — Photo by Beverly Cooper

A Report on "After the World Broke in Two," the Fifth International Cather Seminar (June 19-26, 1993), Hastings College

Evelyn Harris Haller
Doane College

With 1922 as the crucial date in her book-length study of Cather, which provided the 1993 Seminar title, it was fitting that Merrill Maguire Skaggs gave a major address on literary relations between Cather and Faulkner "Thefts and Conversations." Skaggs suggests that

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Willa Cather, J. W. N. Sullivan, and the Creative Process

Richard C. Harris
Maritime College, SUNY

Art and artists — writers, painters, scupltors, composers and performers — occupied Willa Cather's attention and imagination from the outset of her literary career. The artistic personality was the subject of her first published piece of fiction, the short story "Peter" in 1892; was often the focus of Cather's undergraduate literary, dramatic, and music reviews in the *Nebraska State Journal* and the *Lincoln Courier* in the mid 1890s; and continued to be a major source of in-

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Teaching Willa Cather in Japan

Dalma H. Brunauer
Clarkson University

"That is happiness:
To be dissolved into something complete and great"

PREAMBLE TO THE TALE

It all began with *O Pioneers!* The scene was Budapest, Hungary, soon after World War II. I was in my third year at the University, majoring in English and Hungarian. At long last, it was permissible to visit the American Legation and use its library. I picked up a slender volume, designed to fit into the back pocket of a GI's uniform. The

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A REPORT ON "AFTER THE WORLD BROKE IN TWO", (Continued)

the volley had it swiftest moves in Cather's penultimate story, "Before Breakfast," which she had removed her hand brace to write, through allusion after allusion to Faulkner's work, especially "The Old People" and *The Sound and the Fury*. While most presentations addressed the later novels, Ann Romines focussed on how Cather treated old age itself in "Her Mortal Enemy's Daughter: Willa Cather and the Writing of Age." Cather grew old at a time of "unprecedented disesteem for old age," which continues to foreclose our lives, and she had already observed the onset of age in members of her family. Romines opens an untravelled path with her analyses of the characterizations of Myra Henshaw, old Mrs. Harris, who in the West never sees other old women, and Mrs. Ramsay, the old Western woman in *Lucy Gayheart*.

What Cather saw before as well as after the world broke in two in 1922 was concretized for us in several significant buildings, including "the 30-room George

Elizabeth Ammons, Bruce Baker, and Ann Romines enjoy responding to their audience. — Photo by Beverly Cooper

Cather house" where G. P. Cather grew up and which Sarah Cather Wagner continues to restore. Opera houses provided another architectural dimension during the Seminar. Their significance within nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture was addressed in a slide-illustrated lecture by D. Layne Ehlers. The opera house at Bladen was the appropriate site of a paper session on *One of Ours* because the body of G. P. Cather, Willa's cousin and model for Claude Wheeler, was returned there before burial. The 1885 Opera House in Red Cloud, where the young Willa appeared as the Merchant in "Beauty and the Beast" to benefit victims of the Blizzard of 1888 and later spoke on "Superstition Versus Investigation" at her high school graduation in 1890, is WCPM's next restoration project. After climbing the long flight of stairs from the main street to this space above Coast to Coast Hardware, we saw the architect's plans for the future: auditorium seating, archives, and meeting rooms; but we also saw what was past: vestiges of the old auditorium and the provocative apartment within portions of the prefabricated house the space contains.

Two examples of domestic architecture were subjects of informed commentary. Willowshade, Cather's childhood home in Virginia, was discussed by owner Susan Parry, who, with her husband, David, is restoring it. The Pavelka farmhouse, which appears in *My Ántonia* as the end of Jim Burden's pilgrimage, was discussed by David Murphy, architect, architectural historian, and co-author of the Nomination of Cather Sites and Districts in Webster County for the National Register of Historic Places. Seeing the Pavelka farmhouse after Murphy's slide-illustrated presentation, with its emphasis on layered enclosures and nineteenth century Bohemian peasant spirituality epitomized by the centrality of the kitchen into which crops were brought, was a revelation. We also learned why the Pavelka farmhouse "lacks a front door." In rural Bohemia the pattern prevailed of a courtyard with a barn at the rear; in town, the principal room faced front, oriented to the village square. In rural Nebraska, therefore, the front door of the farmhouse faced the farmyard, its ancestral model designed to relate to a courtyard of buildings.

The sixth and seventh buildings of significance were Grace Church in Red Cloud and Saint Mark's Episcopal Pro-Cathedral in Hastings. (Judy Hunneke pointed out during the week that Cather was called in on Milmine's biography of Mary Baker Eddy because she as "a religious person.") While the connection of Cather's family to the Baptist faith was alluded to in several papers, we also heard about Willa's sympathy with liturgy and her 1922 conversion to the Episcopal church. We visited Grace Church, where Cather was confirmed with her parents, and saw its window of the Good Shepherd, dedicated to Charles Cather and recalling Willa's early memories of him and the sheep he raised in Virginia. Members of the Seminar attended a Eucharistic liturgy at the Hastings Cathedral of Cather's friend, George Allen Beecher, Episcopal Bishop of Western Nebraska from 1910 to 1943, who confirmed Cather and with whom she corresponded. Steve Shively spoke from the pulpit on "Cather and the Episcopal Church: The Sacramental Sacrifice." The Gothic structure itself is significant, for it was designed by Ralph Adams Cram of Boston, an associate of Bertram Goodhue, architect of the Nebraska State Capitol.

While these buildings remain to be juxtaposed with what we already know to enlarge our perspective, new readings serve to make the old texts new or at least renew our understanding of them. John Murphy's commentary on "The Modernist Conversion of Cather's Professor" was framed by William James's discussion of "the sick soul" and paralleled with slides of Rene Magritte's paintings to illustrate how Professor St. Peter begins the transformation from petrification

toward the sainthood of his apostle namesake. Another reading of particular acuity was Karl R. Rosenquist's "Seeking the One True Church Because the World Broke in Two." Rosenquist regards Cather as "America's high priest of art" — rather than merely repeat Anglo-Catholic literary traditions (those of Pater and New-man), Cather chooses to indoctrinate aesthetic theories on American terrain. "The result is 'backwards'-looking on two counts: Cather locates in the American past the sort of plain faith she values; as well, her sanctification of same-sex community in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* springs from earlier, non-American traditions."

True to Cather's enjoyment of the pleasures of the table, Mark and Frankie Warner designed and prepared two remarkable meals. The first, a candlelit Victorian banquet in the gymnasium of the elementary school, made a dramatic change after a hot day on the prairie and the streets of Red Cloud. Six courses began with a superb cream of brie and leek soup and continued with cold salmon and cucumber. A raspberry sorbet intervened to cleanse the palate and was followed by beef Wellington. Gingerbread cake layered with verbena mousse served with berries concluded the memorable feast. Another evening we enjoyed the epitome of an outdoor meal at the Burlington Station. Sausages, cheeses, and ratatouille were served with wheat beer and followed by Marshall Christensen singing and leading songs of the first world war. His accompanist, Darin Stringer, had played dinner music during the Victorian banquet and also sang some challenging operatic arias. Darin's musical training will continue at George Washington University in the fall, and he promises to sing for us at the Sixth Cather Seminar in Canada.

Another pleasure for Cather — the theatre — was provided by the Seminar Players assembled by co-director Robert Thacker for the world premiere of "The Westbound Train," which Cather published as "A Thirty Minute Sketch for Two People" in 1899. Our version, deconstructed by co-director Linda Hughson Ross, featured a cast of nine with a post-performance evaluation by Linda as Willa Cather herself in the Steichen portrait middy blouse and a flowered hat. Sybil Johnston, the young bride, apprehensive lest her handsome husband's reputation as a ladies' man was continuing after their marriage, multiplied into Sybils Three: an agitated and addlepated one played by Karen Kebarle, an imperious one played by Evelyn Harris Haller, and a nubile one interpreted by Heidi Raber. The actors' multifaceted talents were plumbed: Bill Christensen, for example, provided both music and a train whistle through his virtuosic harmonica playing in addition to his role as Messenger Boy. Mark Madigan, handsomely attired in black and white with bright metallic accents, took the role of the harassed Station Agent. Helen Levy was the woman in the station whose role lifted lines out of Sybil's monologue worthy of what George Eliot summarized as "The World's Wife," while Donna Kortje and Margaret McFadden provided voices for the letters Sybil reads. Alan Wilkinson from the University of Hull supplied English wit as Reginald Johnston, the befuddled husband of the desperate Sybil. Not to be forgotten was "Bijou," a small stuffed white dog whose transfer signified which Sybil was coming to the fore. ("Bijou" is going to England with Alan in recognition for his having journeyed farthest to act in the Cather production.) Embroidering on Cather's lines, Reggie/Alan, in his joy at being reunited with his wife, offered to kiss "Bijou here," if he "could figure out which end to kiss."

Alan had already been introduced on a panel examining cross cultural connections. He spoke of teaching Cather at the University of Hull, while Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer, author of perhaps the earliest Cather dissertation, spoke of teaching Cather in Japan, and Laxmi Parasuram of the University of Burdwan shared her experiences in West Bengal. Two other panels on teaching included public and private high school experiences as well as highlights from a NEH Seminar on Cather and Edith Wharton led by Janet Sharistanian at the University of Kansas.

Willa Cather's love of music was addressed in several papers. Richard Harris discussed the Sullivan biography of Beethoven Cather had read to illumine the emotional darkness of the artist in "*Lucy Gayheart* and the Question of Suffering." Jerry Dollar examined the influence of "the darker, more tragic and elegiac Wagner" of "The Twilight of the Gods" in insightful commentary on, among others, Captain Forrester and Ivy Peters.

Cather's perspective on her world — why she chose to name and describe its cataclysmic break — was a recurring subject both in plenary as well as panel sessions. Related issues of multi-culturalism were addressed by Elizabeth Ammons, who spoke of Cather's "love of Empire" with its "hegemonic white patriarchal control" and raised an intriguing point about Gabrielle Longstreet, "the old beauty," who, as a young beauty from Barbados, configured Empire: "a colonized subject who loves her colonization." Cynthia Griffin Wolff cast a wide net in "Time and Memory in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl:* Sex, Abuse, and Art," as she commented on the very young Willa cautioning a predatory judge who was stroking her curls: "I'se a dang'ous nigger, I is." To Wolff, Cather observed Sarah Orne Jewett's insight that "the thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper — whether little or great, it belongs to Literature" — by synthesizing the Demeter and Persephone myth with her recollections of the reunion of Nancy with her mother, Till, after a quarter of a century and also the child observer and rebel she was herself. Here are intimations of an "untellable" tale, perhaps of abuse.

The Fifth International Seminar leaves us with much to ponder as we return to Cather's texts.

More on Seminar ☞

Sleeping in Nebraska: Additional Seminar Reflections

Merrill Maguire Skaggs
Drew University

During the Fifth International Cather Seminar, participants were treated to two perfect days of touring the prairie and sites featured in Willa Cather's fiction. As one of the lucky tourists, I saw for the first time the house in Bladen which G. P. Cather, the prototype for Claude Wheeler, built for his wife Myrtle (Enid). On cue, as we stared, one seminarian produced a copy of *One of Ours* and read this description from Cather's novel:

> After the workmen had gone, Claude took the girls upstairs by the ladder. They emerged from a little entry into a large room which extended over both the front and back parlours. The carpenters called it "the pool hall." There were two long windows, like doors, opening upon the porch roof, and in the sloping ceiling were two dormer windows, one looking north to the timber claim and the other south toward Lovely Creek. Gladys at once felt a singular pleasantness about this chamber, empty and unplastered as it was. "What a lovely room!" she exclaimed.
>
> Claude took her up eagerly. "Don't you think so? You see it's my idea to have the second floor for ourselves, instead of cutting it up into little boxes as people usually do. We can come up here and forget the farm and the kitchen and all our troubles. I've made a big closet for each of us, and got everything just right. And now Enid wants to keep this room for preachers!"
>
> Enid laughed. . . . "I don't think we ought to take the best room for ourselves."
>
> "Why not?" Claude argued hotly. "I'm building the whole house for ourselves. Come out on the porch roof, Gladys. Isn't this fine for hot nights? I want to put a railing round and make this into a balcony, where we can have chairs and a hammock." (153)

G. P. Cather House in Bladen. — Photo by Joyce McDonald

On the next page, Claude stresses his sleeping porch:

> "If I make this into a balcony," Claude murmured, "the peak of the roof will always throw a shadow over it in the afternoon, and at night the stars will be right overhead. It will be a fine place to sleep in harvest time."
>
> "Oh, you could always come up here to sleep on a hot night," Enid said quickly.
>
> "It wouldn't be the same."

Because we were hearing Cather's words as we looked at the house, some of us began futilely circling it to find Claude's sleeping porch. The porch, however, did not appear until we stood before the house of George Cather, G. P. Cather's father. There it sat above the front entrance and triggered this note.

I have previously argued (*After the World Broke in Two* 33-44) that Cather's unceasing willingness to experiment led her, in *One of Ours*, to write a Freudian novel. It seems to me that in a Freudian novel transporting a sleeping porch for hot nights from a parents' house to a son's makes an extremely potent symbol. But as Jo Ann Middleton replied when I reported to her on the seminar, "Yes, but *One of Ours* could be read *in toto* as a novel about where Claude sleeps — from the first sentence to the last." I believe almost as articles of faith that Willa Cather made no *un*conscious mistakes in the details of her novel and that she had wonderful eye-hand coordination in describing architecture. Suspecting, therefore, that she *chose* her changes in G. P. Cather's house, I noted other interesting disparities.

George Cather House in the Country. — Photo by Joyce McDonald

First, the house is not located "on the level stretch beside his father's timber claim because, when he was a little boy, he had thought that grove of trees the most beautiful spot in the world" (150). Rather, it is across the street from his bride Myrtle's childhood home, in the middle of Bladen and a block from the opera house to which Lieutenant Cather's body was carried for a hometown funeral. That is, Claude Wheeler tried to find a "natural" setting, where he and his bride could begin housekeeping alone, as G. P. Cather did not. This difference, as others, heightens the novel's ironies about Claude Wheeler's disappointing marriage. Further, according to the present owner who talked to us at length from her front porch, the house is not built on an exceptionally deep cellar to reflect Claude's conviction that "the deeper a cellar was, the better it was" (150). Claude's futile hopes for a "lucky founda-

tion" were his own, not G. P. Cather's. Claude also plans one large and airy room with two dormer windows and large closets for his second floor. That is, with deep basement and large closets, fictional Claude has the space which he, not his prototype, needed to store his discards and secrets. G. P. Cather's house, we were told, has predictably two upstairs bedrooms, each with two dormer windows and normal closets. The resulting lines of G. P. Cather's house with no upstairs sleeping porch, however, provide the most interesting discrepancy between Cather's construction and the house her cousin built. I, at least, thought G. P. Cather's house was architecturally the prettiest and most interesting cottage I saw in Nebraska. The exceptional roof line and four balanced dormers give it a vaguely Asian look, characterized by exceptionally interesting and active lines no matter what angle you view it from. In short, this house is far too visually pleasing and singular for Claude Wheeler, as Cather portrayed him, to imagine. Claude is still a "green country boy" (30) when he goes to his death in France at age 25. G. P. Cather's dates on his gravestone reminded us later that day that he was a mature man of 35 when he died in the war.

I think all Cather scholars have been entirely right in asserting that the correspondences between Cather sites and Cather fictions are profoundly important. When the correspondences seem exact — as the descriptions of the childhood home in "Old Mrs. Harris" seem — their synchronicity tells us that the fiction writer is talking about her own life as she has experienced it. Any discrepancy, however, will tell us as much as exact description. For example, that same childhood home is described *without* the servant's alcove one passes on the way to Thea's attic room, in *The Song of the Lark*, because Cather doesn't need that servant in the house in that novel. Thea's room, in fact, when we saw it, was hotter than Hades and impossible to imagine sleeping in at all. But Cather was, after all, a writer of fictions, who followed, first and foremost, Thoreau's injunction, "Simplify, simplify!" If the simplifications involved splicing father's and son's houses together and moving one back into the country, she did not hesitate.

As this note's last comment, I suggest that when you visit Nebraska some June to check out all this, you'd do well to remember as I did not that her descriptions of the weather have been simplified and fictionalized too. Take a blanket.

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. . . THE CREATIVE PROCESS
(Continued)

terest throughout her career, most notably in the stories collected in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920) and in her novels *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935). Because of Cather's lifelong fascination with the creative process and the artistic personality, a comment in one of her letters to Dorothy Canfield Fisher (Dorothy Canfield Fisher Collection, Univ. of Vermont-Burlington) is particularly interesting. In this undated letter to Fisher, Cather inquired as to whether Fisher had read J. W. N. Sullivan's *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*. For goodness sake, Cather declared, read it! Sullivan's book, Cather suggests, is the only book she ever read that represents any real, detailed thinking about and analysis of the artistic personality and artistic creativity. She adds that Sullivan evidently was a scientist and that is perhaps the reason he wrote so well about art. (In deference to testamentary prohibitions and the policy of the University of Vermont concerning Cather's letters, I have paraphrased Cather's comments.)

That Cather should have read Sullivan's biography of Beethoven is not surprising in the least. She had early on (despite her refusal to take piano lessons) developed a great love of music, which she came to believe was the most evocative and sublime of all art forms. As Joseph Brennan remarked many years ago, "Cather responded to no other art — not even literature — so deeply as she did to [music]" (175). "More than any other novelist in American literature, possibly more than any other major novelist in English, she brought a deep love and knowledge and understanding of music to bear upon her art" (263-64). Moreover, Cather had long admired the music of Beethoven, having called him, as early as 1895, "the Shakespeare of music" ("Too Much Mendelssohn" 178), and adding in the unpublished fragment "Light on Adobe Walls," which first appeared in 1949, that Beethoven was one of the "very great artists," like Tolstoy and Leonardo, who had "outgrown art," who was "bigger than the game" (125). As she had grown older, Cather's earlier interest in the drama and spectacle of grand opera had given way to the intimacy of the Schubert *lieder* and the Beethoven quartets. Thus while Cather's interest in *a* book on Beethoven is understandable, her high praise for *Sullivan's* book bears some comment. What, exactly, about Sullivan's book caused Cather to see it as the most significant book about "art" that she had ever read? What, in particular, struck her in Sullivan's analysis of the creative spirit and process?

Before I attempt to answer these questions, let me mention a few facts about Sullivan himself. John William Navin Sullivan (1886-1937) was born in London, the son of a Protestant mission official and a woman of notable musical talent. He obtained a very solid education in mathematics and the physical sciences, became a free-lance scientific writer, served

in the ambulance corps in World War I, found a government post under John Middleton Murray, and by the end of the war was contributing to several highly respected British journals. According to the writers of *Twentieth Century Authors*, Sullivan's novel, *An Attempt at Life* (1917), "showed that his vocation was not the writing of fiction" (1371). *Aspects of Science*, a collection of essays on science and mathematics published in 1923, was, however, a great success. Other works included *Atoms and Electrons* (1924), *Three Men Discuss Relativity* (1926), *The Bases of Modern Science* (1928), and *Science: A New Outlook* (1935). Cather's comment to Fisher that she believed Sullivan was a scientist was certainly correct. A measure of his reputation is the frequent mention of Sullivan in connection with Bertrand Russell. The *Literary Review*, for example, commented, at the publication of *Aspects of Science: Second Series* in 1927, "If Bertrand Russell be excepted, I know of no finer interpreter of mathematics and the physical sciences" than J. W. N. Sullivan. None other than Edmund Wilson declared that "with the exception of Bertrand Russell, [Sullivan] is probably, from the literary point of view, the most accomplished and brilliant popularizer of modern scientific theory" (280).

Given his background and previous work, it might seem rather odd that Sullivan would have written a book on the spiritual development of Beethoven. His doing so, however, seems to have been only another of his many attempts to make complex or esoteric ideas understandable for the layperson. *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, published in 1927 in England by Jonathan Cape and in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf, Cather's own publisher, is divided into two major sections, the first titled "The Nature of Music" and the second, "Beethoven's Spiritual Development." In his preface Sullivan argues that in his music Beethoven "was primarily concerned to express his personal vision of life," a vision that was, of course, "the product of his character and experience" (vii). "The highest function of music," according to Sullivan, "is to express the musician's experience and his organization of it" (24). Sullivan strongly believed that scientific ideas were important to general human needs, and his book on Beethoven has been called "an attempt to assert the claim of music — as of the other arts — to have a bearing on reality no less significant than that of science" (*Twentieth Century Authors* 1371-72). "Art must rank with science and philosophy," Sullivan says in *Beethoven*, "as a way of communicating knowledge about reality" (5).

Cather's theories of art, from her earliest reviews in the 1890s, suggest the same emphasis on art as expression. Speaking of the writing process in a *Nebraska State Journal* article in March of 1896, Cather remarked, "Great thoughts are not uncommon things, they are the property of the multitude. Great emotions even are not so rare, they belong to youth and strength the world over. Art is not thought or emotion, but expression, expression, always expression" ("A Mighty Craft" 417). In an often noted passage in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Thea Kronborg, who will go on to triumph on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera, discovers some Indian pottery and realizes in the culture of the Southwestern Cliff Dwellers an important link to her own psychological roots. In her recent interpretation of the passage, Demaree Peck argues that this realization, rather than a discovery of the desire for something beyond the self, indicates Thea's desire, "as always, to locate that 'something within herself' and where it came from" (Peck 30). If the pottery is a metaphor for art — "The stream and the broken pottery: what was art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself" (SL 304) — it is properly seen, Peck argues, as the form "that art provides for the artist's inner stream of vitality" (30). Art, Cather was convinced, had to *begin* with that "something" within oneself. When Thea declares that "no singing teacher can give anybody what I got down there" (463), she ultimately refers, Peck says, "to the depths of her own psyche" (31). Cather's declaration on the subject of artistic passion in her 1924 article on Defoe's *Roxanna* seems to sum up her attitude very well: "When a writer has a strong or revelatory experience with his characters, he unconsciously creates a scene; gets a depth of picture, and writes, as it were, in three dimensions instead of two. The absence of these warm and satisfying moments in any work of fiction is final proof of the author's poverty of emotion and lack of imagination" (80).

A second of Sullivan's points with which Cather would have agreed concerns the artist's experience and use of that experience in the process of artistic creation. While Sullivan says that the "life work of a great artist is not some kind of sumptuous diary," he asserts that Beethoven's attitude towards life "was conditioned by certain root experiences" (viii). Sullivan's subsequent description of the relationship of these "root experiences" to artistic creation might apply to many creative artists; however, it certainly must have struck Willa Cather as an especially accurate description of her own creative process. According to Sullivan,

> Numberless experiences extending over several years are gradually co-ordinated in the unconscious mind of the artist, and the total synthetic whole finds expression, it may be, on some particular occasion. Even with poetry, which often professes to have its origin in some particular occasion, the poem is never the effect of the particular occasion acting on some sort of *tabula rasa*. The experience of the particular occasion finds its place within a context, although the impact of the experience may have been necessary to bring this context to the surface. (85)

The particular occasion that prompts the synthetic expression of the whole, or the external occasion that elicits the artistic expression, is, Sullivan says, "never more than what psychologists call a 'tripper' incident,

releasing energies and contexts that have been formed in entire independence of it" (94).

Certainly many of Willa Cather's comments on her own works suggest that this same process was at the heart of her artistic expression. As she remarked in "The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett," if the artist achieves anything noble or enduring, it must be by "giving himself absolutely to his material" through the "gift of sympathy." "The artist spends a lifetime in loving the things that haunt him, in having his mind 'teased' by them . . ." (51). In order for those things that "teased" Cather to become art, some type of catalytic experience or, to use Cather's own term, "explosion" (Sullivan's "tripper") had to take place. These incidents were commonplace in Cather's artistic experience. One only need read Cather's accounts of Olive Fremstad's astonishing 1913 performance as a last-minute replacement at the Metropolitan Opera, which inspired *The Song of the Lark;* her visit with Annie Pavelka, which inspired *My Ántonia*; and her reading the obituary of Lyra Garber, the prototype for Marian Forrester of *A Lost Lady*, to realize the extent to which long-stored memories and feelings, triggered by a particular event, came together in explosive creative experiences for Willa Cather.

A third point on which Cather would have agreed with Sullivan concerns the individual's role in transforming the emotional and experiential into the artistic. She would never deny the primary importance of "soul," passion, or the "gift of sympathy." Cather had, however, come to realize quite early in her career as a writer of fiction that, as Robert Frost would say, the art of fiction involves much more than writing "huge shapeless novels" and pouring "huge gobs of raw sincerity" upon the page (106). According to Sullivan, "The greatest function of a work of art is to present us with a higher organization of experience" (165). In her 1925 essay on Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather remarked, "The artist spends a lifetime in loving the things that haunt him, in having his mind 'teased' by them, in trying to get these conceptions down on paper exactly as they are to him and not in conventional poses supposed to reveal their character; 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" (51). "The shapes and scenes that have 'teased' the mind for years," Cather added, "when they at last do get themselves rightly put down, make a very much higher order of writing, and a much more costly, than the most vivid and vigorous transfer of immediate impressions" (48). Passion, expression, synthesis, and arrangement — these are the characteristics Sullivan sees as essential to artistic creation. A genius, he asserts, may be defined as one "who is exceptionally rich in recoverable contexts" (85), a phrase that seems to apply perfectly to Cather. An artist may experience more, know more, or be sensitive to more than the common man, but ultimately his genius, according to Sullivan, is the result of his "superior organization of his experiences and perceptions" (85). As Cather told Flora Merrill of the *New York World* in 1925, "Your memories are like the colors in paints, but you must arrange them" (77).

Finally, Sullivan contends that Beethoven was "a firm believer" in what I. A. Richards, in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, called the "revelation theory" of art, the idea that art can evoke or convey important intimations or truths. "The highest art," Sullivan contends, thus has "a transcendental function" (16). "The feeling we indisputably have, from a great work of art," is that "a large area of experience has been illuminated and harmonized for us . . ." (10). While there are many passages in Cather's writing that suggest the importance of this idea, Lucy Gayheart's response to hearing Clement Sebastian sing one of the Schubert songs is typical: "That was the feeling. Lucy had never heard anything sung with such elevation of style. In its calmness and serenity there was a kind of enlargement, like daybreak" (29-30).

Willa Cather maintained a lifelong interest in art and artists, the artistic personality and artistic creativity. In her fiction, she wrote almost exclusively about performers and admirers instead of creators. ("The Sculptor's Funeral," first published in *McClure's* in 1905, is, perhaps, the most notable exception.) However, in various essays collected in *The Kingdom of Art, The World and the Parish*, in *Willa Cather on Writing*, and in interviews reprinted in *Willa Cather in Person*, we have a valuable record of Cather's opinions on art and artistic creation. Cather's letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher praising J. W. N. Sullivan's *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* is, I believe, another important document for any Cather scholar, for it points us to a very significant commentary on art, not Cather's own, but a detailed analysis of the artistic process that, as she said, "thinks" — and that invites the reader to think — about art.

Why was Cather so *interested* in Sullivan's book? Perhaps because he expressed many views about art and artistic creation so similar to her own. Why was she so *impressed* with his book? Perhaps because, as a scientist, Sullivan was able to write about art from a different perspective than that of an artist, and probably because he was a master, in both his scientific works and in his book on Beethoven, at explaining complex ideas in the most admirably lucid terms. Cather asked Fisher, Have you read Sullivan's book on Beethoven? For goodness sakes do! One might ask Cather scholars, Have you read Sullivan's book on Beethoven? For goodness sakes, do!

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TEACHING WILLA CATHER IN JAPAN
(Continued)

cover was garish, giving no indication of the treasure that was within. It was love at first sight. I was in an intensely religious period of my life, and I felt that the scenes in which Alexandra was carried in the arms of her strong dream-lover were the closest things in modern literature to the mystical experiences of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross. That explanation, to this day, satisfies me more than any other. When the time came to choose a topic for my Master's thesis, even though I was strongly drawn to Thornton Wilder also, I was enough of a feminist to decide in favor of Cather. As it turned out, I was the first person at a Hungarian university to write a thesis on an American author. (It was not until much later that I heard that I might have been the first person anywhere to write a Master's thesis on Willa Cather.)

It certainly was not easy to find material for my intended thesis. Hungarian publishing houses had always been eager to publish Western works, and some of Cather's books had already appeared in Hungarian translation: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Az aranyszinu dom, tr. K. Pogany), *Shadows on the Rock* (Arnyekok a sziklan, tr. I. Boldizsar), *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (A felver, tr. L. Kery), as well as the short story "Paul's Case" (Pal, tr. L. Cs. Szabo). Diligent searching also led me to the Tauchnitz Editions of *Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock, My Ántonia,* and *Lucy Gayheart.* Anthologies yielded a few short stories in English: "The Sculptor's Funeral," "A Wagner Matinee," and "Paul's Case"; I found the essay "Nebraska" especially helpful and continued with great eagerness searching for more. Where I ran into a blank wall, however, was in the area of secondary sources. It was years before I realized that there was almost nothing yet written about Cather. (In 1946-47 Rapin's slender 1930 volume was unavailable in Hungary.) My appraisal of her work had to be based almost exclusively on my own analysis and insights. Even so, I completed my Master's thesis early in 1947, submitted it to the University, and bravely sent off a copy to Miss Willa Cather, New York City. I don't know whether she ever received it, for she died that spring. The following year, I expanded my work into a Ph.D. dissertation (in Hungarian) and submitted that also. By that time, I was teaching English, Hungarian, and Latin in a secondary school. The political situation was bad, however, and in March of 1949 I made an adventurous escape from Hungary into Austria through the newly erected Iron Curtain. While in Austria I found out that Willa Cather had died and some American agency was sponsoring an essay contest on her work. I submitted an essay (in German) but never heard from the sponsors. Later that year, I was admitted to the United States and began my long career of teaching American and World Literature.

You all know how difficult it is in the United States to get an opportunity to teach a course in a single author. The opportunity was rarer then, and I had to smuggle individual works of Cather into courses such as *Introduction to Fiction, American Literature Survey,* and *Major American Authors.* Cather herself made the situation especially difficult by her testamentary restrictions — no cheap editions, no anthologies. It was years before those difficulties could be overcome and one could require students to buy one or more Cather works in affordable editions. A turning point was reached with the approach of the centennial of her birth. I was very active at the time in the Modern Language Association, giving papers and organizing sessions every year, and it was the most natural thing for me to propose a Special Session on Willa Cather for the 1973 meeting. The organizers wrote back that they had a similar suggestion from a Vancouver scholar by the name of David Stouck and that perhaps the two of us could join forces. And so began a beautiful friendship. Soon after, I heard from Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner, inviting me to the International Centennial Cather Seminar to be held in

November in Nebraska. There I met practically every major Cather scholar, and with some of them I was able to stay in touch and collaborate for years. With them, I felt, I was able "to share the precious, the incommunicable past." Several papers resulted, dealing with aspects of *A Lost Lady*, *My Mortal Enemy*'s Myra Henshawe, and *O Pioneers!* But the most enduring sequel to the Seminar concerned Hiroko Sato of the Tokyo Women's Christian University. Her paper, "Willa Cather in Japan," prompted me to compare certain aspects of Cather's work to those of the great Japanese novelist Murasaki Shikibu in a paper, "The Woman Writer in a Changing Society." In 1977, I was invited to be Visiting Scholar at Tokyo Women's Christian University and presented that paper there; during the same year, I had occasion to present it again in New Delhi and Budapest, and in following years at the University of the Provence as well as in Canada and the United States. It involved an analysis of Murasaki, Cather, and the Hungarian author Margit Kaffka. Among Cather's works, after a sweeping overview, I focused on attitudes toward societal change in the late story "The Old Beauty," pointing out the heroine's astonishing rejuvenation in death as an eternal feminine mystery.

THE TALE

In 1989, I was awarded a Fulbright Professorship to Japan. I arrived in Tokyo in March of 1990 and spent the academic year 1990-91 in Fukuoka. The Japan-U.S. Educational Commission assigned me to a state (formerly Imperial) university, Kyushu University, and a private institution, Seinan Gakuin University. A year later, I was invited to be Visiting Professor of Literature at a municipal institution, Kitakyushu University, or Kitakyudai. I started teaching in Kitakyushu in September of 1991 and returned home in September 1992. Altogether I spent four semesters in Japan at three different universities. After a teaching career of four decades, for the first time in my life I was completely free to choose what aspect of American (and, at Kitakyudai also British) literature I wanted to teach! At long last, I taught not one but *four* complete courses on Willa Cather (and some others on Wilder, Fitzgerald, Mark Twain and Oscar Wilde). Of course, there had to be a fly in the ointment. After I submitted my first, very ambitious course outlines to be put into the catalog, I was very courteously and apologetically requested to reduce the amount of reading matter because Japanese students were not accustomed to much assigned outside reading. It was established that about thirty pages each time would the limit — thirty pages *a week!* Also, I was informed that Japanese students are used to being lectured at, and not in the habit of either asking or answering questions. Will they understand English? I asked. I was told that some of them will. What will the others get out of attending the class? Well, they will be *exposed* to the English language and *may* learn something about American teaching methods. I was assured, however, that they were used to following instructions conscientiously and would be a pleasure to be around. During the months of preparation for the trip I had to re-think and re-plan everything many times, and now, once I was there, I had to re-think and re-plan again — and again.

What was I able to cover in the Cather courses? During the first semester of the first year I had to give an overview of Cather's work, but I didn't start with that. I used the teaching system I was taught at the University of Budapest — the way literature was taught in every school in Hungary in my day. I started by handing out copies of a selected story, "Peter," explaining terms and concepts the students may not have been familiar with, such as *homesteading* and *dugouts*. I warned them that I would be asking for an *emotional response*: "How did it make you *feel?*" Then I read the story out loud. To the question "How did it make you feel?", there was at first no answer. In contrast to Hungarian students, who are trained to look for an emotional response in themselves, no American or Japanese student of mine could ever answer that question *the first time*. They need help: "Did it make you feel happy? Sad? Angry? Surprised?" And then, the big question: "Why? Show me the passage which made you feel that way!" We went through the standard analysis: What is Peter like — sensitive, sincerely pious, considerate toward women and children, but an impractical dreamer, an inefficient farmer? What about Antone — bully, disrespectful towards his father, without religious sensibilities, but a hard worker? Are they the only people in the story? This led them to the sinister force in the background: the "people," the "they" who say that Antone is "a better man than his father." What are their criteria? Do you agree? Naturally, there are no two classes in which these questions come in the same order, but before the class is over the students ought to be aware that the authorial voice plays tricks with them and that Antone is wicked whereas Peter is just human. This leads us to the important concept of *irony* — when the author says one thing but means another. There is the neat touch of anticlimax: Peter fears the devil, but he fears Antone even more.

There is more to the story, of course, and we went through the concepts of plot and theme as well as atmosphere, but not all at once. The one thing I always tried to fit in during the first class was the bombshell announcement that this really very clever story was written by a girl of eighteen — a girl *their* age! And this always gave me a chance to talk about Cather, who she was, where she lived, and how the publication of this story (behind her back, by a sneaky professor) led her to become a writer. A brief demonstration on the American map showed her odyssey from verdant Virginia to the shockingly different Nebraskan prairie. A week or two later, I showed them the educational film *Willa Cather's America*, which, even with its flaws (not many, just a few), helped fix lasting images in their minds. And then I told them my

theory of the genesis of stories. I developed this on the basis of some of my own writing, but "Peter" is as clear a proof as one could wish for. The theory is that plants, animals, people usually are conceived by the coming together of two separate forces, let's call them male and female. One, the ovum, waits in readiness; the other, the sperm, arrives swiftly, decisively. When they get together, something starts to grow. In the case of "Peter," there was the Czech immigrant's suicide, one of Cather's first memories of her new life on the prairie. For nine years, it lay dormant in her mind. Then, one night she saw Sarah Bernhard in Sardou's play *Tosca*, and was stirred to the depths. In the mysterious fashion which we are pleased to call genius, the two factors merged, and the young woman began to fantasize. What kind of an impression would a performance like this have on a musician sitting in the orchestra? What kind of a memory would survive in the mind of that musician in that bleakest of environments, a cruel Nebraska winter? What would that musician's reaction be to the merciless taunts of his unfeeling son? What kind of a resolution could there be to that kind of a conflict?

If possible, the teacher, the educator tries to educate, that is, to draw out all this by questions. In Japan, where the Socratic method is all but unknown, teaching by questions and answers must be fought for patiently and at times despairingly, but it must be done; otherwise the students are no better off than with their normal by-rote methods. Again and again, one must insist that students learn to answer questions. As for that higher aim, that they must also question the answers, we must wait for Utopia. There was a little puzzlement in my mind that these students did not seem as shocked by the suicide as I had expected them to be. When we finished discussing "Peter" according to the above method, I read it aloud a second time, to tie it all together and bring out the full impact. And then, seeing that something was still lacking in the area of "emotional response," I began to probe until I finally understood that suicide has a completely different aura in the Japanese mind than in the Western tradition. Suicide is tied up with honor; *seppuku*, known by its vulgar name *hara-kiri*, is not the coward's way in Japan but the *hero's*. Its other face is romantic, and the story of Romeo and Juliet, to the Japanese mind, is not tragic but tender and noble. So, by the time I got to the suicide of Papa Shimerda in *My Ántonia*, I made a special effort to explain the ignorant cruelty of Mama Shimerda's insistence that he should be buried under the (still unbuilt) crossroads — not out of some vague sympathy, as the makers of the film *Willa Cather's America* mistakenly surmised, but a perverse acknowledgement of the punishment built into her culture: suicide is an unforgivable sin because the sinner has no opportunity for repentance.

There was only a single instance when some students in one of my classes "questioned the answers." Let me tell you about that. This happened at Kyushu University in a class of English-major seniors and graduate students. We were studying *A Lost Lady*, which happens to be my favorite of all of Cather's novels. We were going over the text page by page, line by line, and I introduced, among other critical essays, my own "The Blindness He Had Cherished: The Problem of the Point of View in *A Lost Lady*" (*Renascence* shortened the title to "The Point of View in *A Lost Lady*"). I was making the point, developed at some length in my essay, that Niel Herbert does not represent the point of view of the author; Marian Forrester is not a "lost" lady but a survivor and Niel has misjudged her; the truth is represented by her husband Captain Forrester, who "values her." I immediately sensed an icy silence in the classroom. I stopped and asked what the problem was. After much prodding, the truth came out: there was no way these Japanese students were going to consent to the suggestion that Marian's adulterous relationship was accepted by her husband. I tried everything I could think of: the difference in their ages, Captain Forrester's seeming lack of sexual interest in a woman whom he chose to be "an ornament of his house," his appreciation of her devotion to him in his final illness — nothing worked. Then I quoted Tolstoy's epigraph to that story of another famous adulteress, *Anna Karerina*: "Vengeance is *mine*; I shall repay," saith the Lord. No effect. I tried the argument, also used in my essay, that the Captain's first name is Daniel, which is Hebrew for *God is my judge*, whereas Niel's name means *scorn*. I knew that the student who first brought the question out into the open, a graduate student who in the following year became my colleague, was a Christian Fundamentalist, but a similar roadblock experienced while teaching *The Great Gatsby* finally convinced me that I was not dealing with one student's inflexibly judgmental attitude but something much more broadly based in Japanese culture. I had asked for some basic adjectives to characterize the heroine, Daisy, and pointed to a student. After the customary evasions (pretending not to hear; pretending I was asking someone else; rolling his eyes; moving his lips without any sound coming out; looking around for help at his neighbors who were similarly deaf, dumb, and blind), he finally uttered a single Japanese word. I asked my long-suffering colleague and translator what the word was, and he answered, "He says that she is inhuman." I was overjoyed. *Inhuman* is truly an excellent word to characterize Daisy who engages in an affair with Gatsby, runs down her husband's mistress, killing her, and then allows Gatsby to be killed by the mistress's grief-stricken husband who mistakenly believes that Gatsby was driving the car. "This is great!" I exclaimed. "Please explain why you have said that!" "Because she seduced Gatsby." I could not believe my ears. "*She* seduced Gatsby? *Gatsby* was sitting in his fabulous mansion, like a spider in its web, waiting for her to wander in . . . And *she* seduced *him*?" The student dug in his heels. "She was a married woman, and she had an affair with another man." "And what about her husband? Tom was openly

carrying on an affair with Myrtle!" The student looked at me pityingly and shook his head. He muttered something to the effect, "That's different." And I had the impression that the whole class agreed with him. "What's sauce for the goose . . ." is obviously not a Japanese proverb.

Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer (Hungary/Austria) helped make Hastings '93 international. In the picture — Front Row (left to right): Laxmi Parasuram (India), Hui Li (China). Second Row: Dalma Brunauer (Hungary/Austria), Helene Perriguey (France). Back Row: Alan Wilkinson (England), Katya Kontor (Russia).

As far as I can remember, that was the only issue on which I ever experienced a disagreement with my Japanese students. As advertised, they were hard-working and docile. When teaching *My Ántonia*, I gave them lengthy homework assignments in writing; they did them without fail or demur. They were used to that. When I tried small discussion groups, they launched into the assignments excitedly, though I suspect that they often strayed from the topic because they invariably lapsed into Japanese and I could not follow them. To bring the study of literature closer to their immediate concerns, for a final examination I chose the famous Cather quote which also appears on her headstone: "That is happiness: To be dissolved into something complete and great." I gave them the take-home topic: "What does the word *happiness* mean to *you*? Describe *your* perfect day." I wish I could have brought those papers along with me. They, more than anything else, showed the typical mentality of the average young Japanese. The young men wrote something like this: "I wake up, eat breakfast, and get on my motorcycle. With my friend, we go for a ride. We enjoy the ride. We go to the beach, sit down and listen to rock music. In the evening, we go back home, eat dinner, and then I visit my friend's home. We watch some videos." Usually the favorite musicians' names were mentioned. The girls' papers were longer: "I get up in the morning, make breakfast: miso soup, steamed rice, fish, and green tea. I get dressed in my favorite outfit, either miniskirt or shorts." At this point, one of two patterns would emerge: either "My girlfriend and I go shopping, then to lunch in a nice restaurant"; or "My boyfriend takes me to the beach on his motorcycle. We eat the picnic lunch which I prepared" — the lunch sounds depressingly like the breakfast. "After a nice afternoon in the shopping mall/on the beach/at the movies, I go home to my parents; we eat dinner [I spare you the details], and I listen to music/watch a movie on TV. Then I **take a nice long bath**!" How could you help loving boys and girls like these? Oh, there were one or two exceptions. Yes, I think exactly two. One was a boy who wanted to buy a farm in Scotland and settle down there. The other was a girl who wanted to marry a farmer in France and settle down there. I do hope they found each other somehow and worked out a compromise. England, maybe.

What was it like, teaching Willa Cather in Japan? I had the satisfaction of feeling that I introduced my students to some new ideas, some new teaching methods. It was a challenge; it was rewarding; it was a pleasure; it was different . . . it was fun. It came close to my idea of — happiness!

A Highschooler Responds to My Ántonia

Rebecca Pinker, a teacher at Olathe, Kansas, North High School, kindly shares with us the work (and sense of humor) of her American literature student Jason Manley.

Jim Burden kills the big snake with Ántonia looking on.

— Manley

Russian Peter eats his melons before he moves.

— Manley

Wick Cutter surprises Jim — and himself.

— Manley

WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER

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- 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.

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