Willa Cather REVIEW

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THE WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION

Welcome to the ***Willa Cather Review***. Starting out in 1957 as a mimeographed newsletter, this publication has changed over the years—and as its new title shows, it has changed again. When scholarly essays and commentary became more regular in these pages, we added *Review* to the title. With *News from Catherland* now the Cather Foundation's newsletter, we have decided to become the *Willa Cather Review*. Peer-reviewed, MLA indexed, frequently cited, the *Review* seeks to publish members' best work. Do be in touch, do submit. Let us hear from you.

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On the Cover

". . . I'm trying to cut out all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality, in order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition, without any persuasion or explanation on my part. Just as if I put here on the table a green vase, and beside it a yellow orange. Now, those two things affect each other. Side by side, they produce a reaction which neither of them will produce alone. Why should I try to say anything clever, or by any colorful rhetoric detract attention from those two objects, the relation they have to each other and the effect they have upon each other? . . . I'd like the writing to be so lost in the object, that it doesn't exist for the reader. . . ."

—Willa Cather interviewed in the *Bookman*, May 3, 1921

Painting by Laura Katz

Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

As the year draws to a close, a deep feeling of gratitude has come over me. I'm writing this letter around Thanksgiving and you'll likely be reading it around holiday time. During this season of counting one's blessings, giving gifts and supporting causes, I want to express my deepest thanks to our members near and far.

Because of your steadfast support, 2017 was a pivotal year for the Willa Cather Foundation. You've read about our new home, the National Willa Cather Center (we hope you've visited, too). While this new museum and archive was no doubt our most noticeable achievement, a number of other important and meaningful activities took place this year.

Our annual Spring Conference boasted the largest number of attendees in over a decade; our 16th International Cather Seminar in Pittsburgh combined scholarly presentations with tours and arts programming for an unforgettable event; a contemporary adaptation of Cather's *O Pioneers!* was staged at our Opera House; and many photos, letters, and other objects were added to our collection. Demonstrative of Cather's worldwide appeal, we were pleased to host visitors from more than forty states in the U.S., as well as Nepal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

We have a lot to be grateful for. First and foremost to Cather herself, whose work continues to enlighten and inspire us all. To our founder Mildred Bennett, who alongside our early board members and volunteers had the foresight to assemble and preserve collections and historic sites associated with Cather's life, work, and times. We're thankful to the Cather family whose continued support and enthusiasm is integral to our work. And we're appreciative of the thousands of donors, visitors, students, teachers, and scholars with whom we interact. It's your ongoing interest that affirms the work we do is valued and appreciated. Thank you for making 2017 such a memorable year!

Letter from the President

Lynette Krieger

As my presidency of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors fades into memory, I feel renewed admiration for the many people I encountered in my tenure in this position, and awe at the experiences we've shared. It has been a time of great change for the Foundation, and we know 2018 will provide a lattice of challenges and opportunities.

Perhaps most significantly, 2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of the publication of Willa Cather's well-loved novel *My Ántonia*. Should we, the readers of this fascinating work, ever lose sight of the author's inspiration, her spirit is very present to remind us. Willa Cather's prototype, Anna Pavelka, lived for many years on a Webster County farmstead located not far from the Divide. Here Anna cooked many holiday meals—well-worn floorboards in the kitchen show us where she labored over her goose, potatoes and dressing and baked her family's favorite cookies. A nearby "fruit cave," as Cather called it, stored her preserves and canned vegetables. And one can almost hear the fiddles playing for a Friday evening dance in the cathedral-like barn.

Common sights in the prairie landscape are the small country cemeteries. Anna is buried in Cloverton Cemetery, less than a mile north of her home. She and her husband John rest within a few feet of my own grandparents. Over the years, my cousins and other neighborhood lads have taken turns mowing the brome grasses in this calm, serene, small graveyard. There are several Pavelkas within the gated wire boundary, where our attention is drawn to the commemorative marker in the form of a small metal plow atop a brick column. A grey granite marker adorned with violets denotes a life once lived. Although Anna's grave is marked with only the years of 1869–1955, we do know she died on April 24, eight years to the day after the death of Willa Cather. She lived a long, full life on the Nebraska prairie where she now rests.

In honoring Cather's great novel, the Willa Cather Foundation will also be celebrating the life of Anna Pavelka throughout 2018. We imagine she would be gratified to have you join in the events.

Yet More Cather-Knopf Correspondence

Melissa J. Homestead | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Some years ago many of us were excited by the discovery of a cache of Willa Cather's correspondence with publisher Alfred A. Knopf that had been in the hands of Peter Prescott, one of the succession of would-be biographers of Knopf. He died before he completed it. These letters are now held in the Barbara Dobkin Collection in New York City. Before these materials came to light, researchers, including the editors of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, had relied on a strange and fragmentary "memoir" Knopf wrote of his relationship with Cather based on his correspondence files with her, and on the more narrative essay "Miss Cather" published in *The Art of Willa Cather* (1973), a collection associated with the celebration of the centennial of Cather's birth. The unpublished "memoir" went to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, but Knopf held back the correspondence files when the Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., corporate archive was donated to the Ransom Center and when he subsequently added some of his personal papers.[1] Cather's correspondence with Blanche Knopf was part of the donated corporate archive, but these letters provided relatively scant information about the composition and publication of Cather's works, documenting more of their social interactions, including gift-giving to and personal services provided for a demanding author.

This characterization of the Cather–Blanche Knopf correspondence at the Ransom Center vastly oversimplifies—there *is* correspondence about the composition and publication of Cather's works—but Cather scholars have nevertheless tended to downplay Blanche's importance while promoting Alfred's. For instance, biographer James Woodress states that "Not only was Knopf her publisher, but both Alfred and Blanche Knopf, and later their son Pat, became close friends" (316). He thus categorizes Alfred as *both* her publisher *and* a friend and Blanche merely as a friend. Cather scholars have not been alone in diminishing Blanche's importance to the publishing firm bearing only her husband's name. As Laura P. Claridge argues in *The Lady with the Borzoi: Blanche Knopf, Literary Tastemaker Extraordinaire*, Alfred Knopf himself, who survived Blanche Knopf by nearly two decades, was largely responsible for the diminishment of his first wife's legacy in publishing.[2]

Materials I recently surveyed in the Irving Kolodin Papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts suggest that Cather scholars should rethink Blanche Knopf's role in the dissemination of Cather's works. These materials also remind us that we should be attuned to the notable gaps in materials located thus far and be on the lookout for additional correspondence between Cather and both of the Knopfs. Later in this essay, in the context of some remarks about gaps in the Cather-Knopf archive that may yet be filled, I say more about Kolodin, a man who spent most of his life working as a music critic but late in his life was attempting to write a biography of Alfred Knopf. For now, it is enough to note that he died in 1988 and in 1989 his papers were donated to the Music Division of the Library of Performing Arts. His papers were not processed until 2006, however, and it is not clear precisely when the searchable finding aid was published in the NYPL finding aids database. In any event, when I searched this database in December 2016 in preparation for a visit to the NYPL, Kolodin's collection unexpectedly popped up. Notably Cather's name appears in the body of the finding aid but is not featured among names given prominence as "Key Terms" at the top of the finding aid; thus if one were to search WorldCat, which aggregates research library catalog records, for Cather as an author and restrict the search results to archival material, this collection would not appear in the results.

So what Cather materials have been sitting at the Performing Arts Library in Kolodin's papers unnoticed since 1989? Thirty-two Cather letters, notes, and telegrams to Blanche and Alfred Knopf and to staff members at Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; carbon copies of outgoing letters from Blanche Knopf and her secretary J. Florence Rubin to Cather; and twelve letters from Edith Lewis to Alfred Knopf dating from the period after Cather's death, when she served as literary executor.[3] Thirty-one of the Cather-authored communications are new, while one is the handwritten original of a letter long accessible at the Ransom Center in a typed transcription, namely Cather's June 20, 1932, condolence letter to Alfred Knopf on the death of his father (*Selected Letters* 468–469).

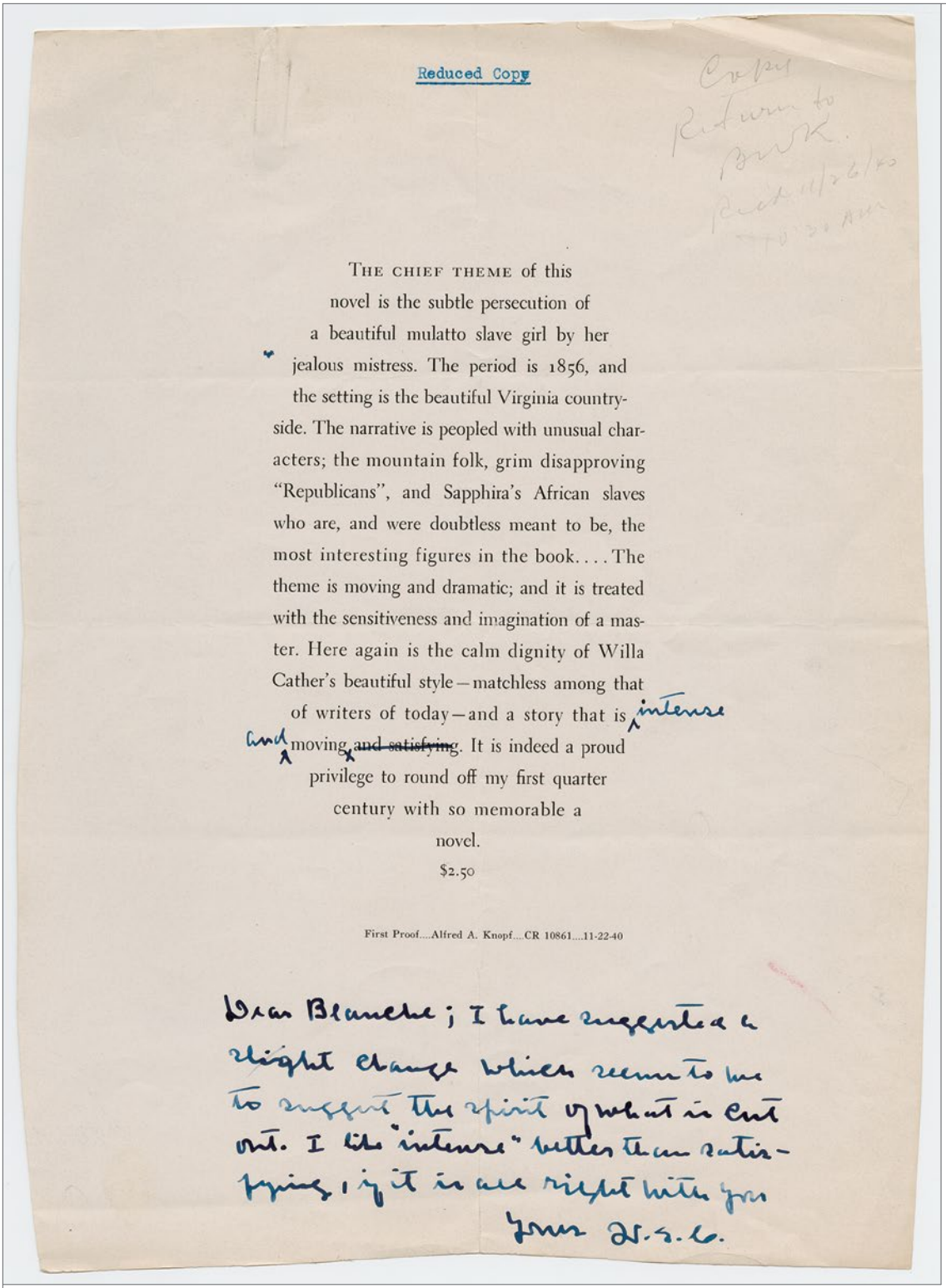
In a paradox to which I shall return, the bulk of the Cather-authored communications are to Blanche Knopf rather than Alfred. How these letters became separated from Blanche Knopf's correspondence files that went to the Ransom Center is not clear. Notably, even though there are more than sixty Cather-authored communications in the Blanche Knopf series in Texas, that series does contain significant chronological gaps

into which these new materials fit. In the Kolodin papers are a full set of both sides of their correspondence in 1932, a similar set documenting the latter half of 1936, and variable coverage in the years spanning 1937 through 1940. After 1940, coverage in the Kolodin papers leans even more heavily toward outgoing carbons than earlier—Cather spent more time in New York at this period and could easily have responded to brief letters by telephone. As this description of chronology suggests, the publication of *Obscure Destinies* (1932) is well-documented, as are Cather's long and much-interrupted labors on *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940).

All of the Cather-authored communications will be published in due course on the Willa Cather Archive (cather.unl.edu) as part of the *Complete Letters of Willa Cather*, but I review highlights here, including information provided by outgoing carbons that will not be part of that publication. These carbons sometimes provide information that is not reflected in any Cather-authored communications, such as a December 11, 1940, letter in which Blanche describes arrangements for Cather's first in-person meeting with Sigrid Undset. And certainly there are many letters that are largely social. Cather thanks Blanche more than once for flowers, and also for a bright-colored bath robe that is fine enough to "wear to the opera! I wear it, and shall very likely take to working in it because I feel so cocky in it" (letter received December 28, 1926).[4] Responding to a long December 29, 1931, letter from Blanche reporting Myra Hess's U.S. performance itinerary from January through April 1932,[5] Cather explained on January 14, 1932, that she was sorry to miss both Hess and Yehudi Menuhin but would be remaining in Red Cloud until early February to enjoy the "lovely snow storms" and to take her nephew Charles "coasting," which made her feel "just about twelve years old." In a letter directed to both Alfred and Blanche Knopf and received in their offices on December 12, 1938, Cather thanks them for their birthday greetings and reports receiving a "very nice letter" from their son Pat. Again, addressing the two of them jointly in a letter received September 18, 1945, Cather thanks them for their letters of condolence about the death of her brother Roscoe. And in a letter that eludes a firm date (although she locates herself at 570 Park Avenue, so 1932 or later), she gushes over an "exceptional" Knopf Christmas party that featured "a kind of glow over things."

Blanche Knopf and Alfred A. Knopf, 1932, by Carl Van Vechten. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

However, many letters focus more on business, including documenting Cather's close attention to the design and marketing of her books. In a letter received April 13, 1932, she forwarded catalog copy for *Obscure Destinies*, protesting that she wished it "were better, but I think it will do." In response on April 14 Blanche called it "grand, and we shall put it right into the works." Writing to Blanche from Grand Manan on July 24, 1932, Cather praised the design of *Obscure Destinies*, calling it "a very handsome volume" and praising the title page produced by George M. Stimson of the Knopf production department: "I love Mr. Stimson's title page. I hope he will feel like doing one for my next book."[6] The letter also locates the beginning of her composition of *Lucy Gayheart* on Grand Manan during that summer. She tantalizes Blanche with the prospect of "a new book" begun "just as an experiment." "It's about a young thing, this time," she elaborates; "If I finish it, I'll call it simply by her name, 'Lucy Gayheart'." This reference decisively moves back the date that Cather began composition of the novel a year from the previously established date of 1933.[7] Mixing the personal with the professional, in the same letter she expands on her feelings about the death of Alfred Knopf's father, reporting that she is "utterly unreconciled to his death" and that she has "been trying to follow the last advice he gave me, and to live for the present, not the future"—perhaps a surprising statement for an author who has so often been described as living in and for the past. Cather's remarks to Blanche in a letter dated September 22, 1932, are perhaps more characteristic.



Reduced Copy

Copy
Return to
Book.
Rec'd 11/26/40
10:30 AM

THE CHIEF THEME of this novel is the subtle persecution of a beautiful mulatto slave girl by her jealous mistress. The period is 1856, and the setting is the beautiful Virginia countryside. The narrative is peopled with unusual characters; the mountain folk, grim disapproving "Republicans", and Sapphira's African slaves who are, and were doubtless meant to be, the most interesting figures in the book.... The theme is moving and dramatic; and it is treated with the sensitiveness and imagination of a master. Here again is the calm dignity of Willa Cather's beautiful style—matchless among that of writers of today—and a story that is intense and moving ~~and satisfying~~. It is indeed a proud privilege to round off my first quarter century with so memorable a novel.

$2.50

First Proof....Alfred A. Knopf....CR 10861....11-22-40

Dear Blanche; I have suggested a slight change which seems to me to suggest the spirit of what is cut out. I like "intense" better than satisfying, if it is all right with you

Yours W.S.C.

Cather's note to Blanche Knopf on a proof of proposed jacket copy. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Protesting that she does not want to fulfill an engagement in Chicago, which she refers to as "that hen-party,"[8] she combines praise for the success of her publishers in marketing her books with a dismissal of readers not up to her standards: "I am getting such a lot of low-brows and square-heads in my drag-net that I sometimes wonder whether I am any good at all as a writer. I try to think that this wide-spreadness is due to the effective methods of my publisher and the enthusiasm of a few friends, and not to a perfectly commonplace mind and sentimental persuasiveness in me!"

When the correspondence in the Kolodin papers resumes in the summer of 1936, Cather was managing the final stages of production of *Not Under Forty* from Grand Manan Island. Having received a proof of the title page, she hastily handwrote a letter to Blanche Knopf on July 31 that opens, "Mercy upon us! We'll have to ask Mr. Dwiggins to change this splendid title page. The columnists in the New York dailies would have too much room for wit—I'm afraid I'd wince under it. This is one case when the title must come before the author's name, not after." Her missive reached New York soon enough for the change—the book appeared with the title page reading *Not Under Forty by Willa Cather* rather than *Willa Cather Not Under Forty*. On August 9, 1936, she asked Blanche to reprove the manufacturing department for sending proofs of the entire volume by express, with a valuation of $500, rather than by post as commercial papers, explaining the two-week-circuitous journey the proofs took to Grand Manan rather than the three or four days they would have taken by ordinary post.

Her letters to Blanche Knopf from 1937 through 1940 document her work on *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, including periods of writing on Grand Manan and in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. When she was in New York City, she would have had no need to write letters to communicate with the Knopf

offices, and, indeed, several of her letters to Blanche Knopf and many outgoing carbons document attempts to coordinate schedules for lunch or tea. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the letters concerning *Sapphira* is the revelation of Cather's earlier working title. Based on Alfred Knopf's memoir Cather scholars long knew that *Claude* was Cather's early title for *One of Ours*, and the correspondence in the Barbara Dobkin Collection now confirms this (Harris). Who would have expected, however, that Cather originally intended to call her novel of the nineteenth-century South *The Old Folks at Home*? From Grand Manan on August 16, 1939, she wrote Blanche, "As the Virginia story progressed, the first title seems too dull and resigned, so I have discarded 'The Old Folks at Home.' I have a new title which I think more true and interesting, but I will think it over for awhile and then see how it strikes you." Cather's working title evidently had its origins in Stephen Foster's hugely popular "Old Folks at Home, Ethiopian Melody" (1851), which Foster allowed to be credited to Edward P. Christy and which was performed in blackface by his Christy's Minstrels troupe. The relationship of the song to discourses of slavery and abolition in the 1850s, the period of Cather's novel, is complex. The eye-dialect words (nonstandard spellings to suggest colloquial usage or pronunciation) are in the voice of a black man longing for the "old plantation" and the "old folks at home"; however, it is not clear whether he is enslaved or free at the moment he sings the lyrics. The song has a potentially abolitionist meaning. It was sung in many stage versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by the title character when he has been sold South from Kentucky to Louisiana, separating him from his wife and children, and is working on the plantation of the cruel Simon Legree—Harriet Beecher Stowe herself incorporated the song into the authorized version for stage reading of her novel, *The Christian Slave* (1855). However, the song also might seem to imply that a former slave longs to return South to slavery (Railton; Shaftel). In any event, Cather let her original title go. On August 23, 1939, Blanche Knopf wrote to ask whether the firm might announce the novel as forthcoming in 1940, giving no title, to which Cather agreed. "It may not be ready, but announcing it will do no harm," she wrote on August 27, 1939, and she reported "tak[ing] real pleasure" in her work on it that summer.[9]

In the spring of 1940, they discussed the novel over tea, and Blanche Knopf followed up on their in-person conversation and her apparent fear that Cather may have unintentionally duplicated a name from a work by British novelist Elizabeth Bowen. Bowen's first novel published in the U.S. by the Knopf firm was *To the North* in 1933, which had been published the previous year in London. Bowen was likely signed as a Knopf author as a result of Blanche Knopf's trip to Europe in 1931 or 1932, and the two women became close friends as well as author and publisher.[10] In January 1936 Blanche Knopf sent Cather a copy of *The House in Paris* (1935 London, 1936 New York), the second Bowen novel Knopf published, for which Cather promptly thanked her, reporting that it "begins interestingly" and calling the dust jacket "grand!" ([Jan. 1936]).[11] On December 27, 1938, Blanche Knopf sent Cather an advance copy of the third Bowen novel the Knopf firm published firm, *The Death of the Heart* (1938 London, 1939 New York), apologizing for her "temerity" in sending Cather a book and making clear she was not demanding that Cather read it. She nevertheless proclaimed herself "extremely enthusiastic" about Bowen and the novel. On April 3, 1940, Blanche Knopf wrote to Willa Cather with evident relief, "The name of the governess housekeeper in THE DEATH OF THE HEART is Matchett not Matchem as I thought" (in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Mrs. Matchem is the British housekeeper who trains Till, Nancy's mother, to be a housekeeper).

In a letter received June 25, 1940, Cather reported on the progress she was making writing at the Shattuck Inn.[12] By early September, Blanche had read the complete novel and reported on September 9 that she thought it was "magnificent," giving her as a reader an "extraordinary experience" and making her feel "grateful" to Cather. She particular praised Sapphira's death as "perfect" and Till as "tremendously real." She concluded her praise, "I think it is one of the most beautiful of many extraordinary books of yours and I feel no guilt at all at urging you to do it but deep gratitude to you." When did this "urging" take place? Correspondence in Blanche Knopf's files at the Harry Ransom Center makes clear that she and Cather had talked about a "Virginia novel" as far back as 1931. Cather wrote Blanche Knopf on April 28, 1931, suggesting she read "something of mine in the May Atlantic you might like to see, as it's old Virginia in tone." On May 4, 1931, Blanche Knopf wrote back reporting she found Cather's poem "Poor Marty" in the *Atlantic* "delightful. I hope it means," she continued, "that you are seriously thinking about doing the Virginia book."[13] All evidence points to Cather finally beginning composition of the novel in 1936, but many interruptions of the late 1930s, such as the deaths of Douglass Cather and Isabelle McClung Hambourg, nearly derailed the book—perhaps Blanche Knopf urged her on at this later stage as well. Although the details of their many conversations over tea are unrecoverable, the incomplete evidence of the letters nevertheless makes clear that Blanche Knopf was an important audience for and supporter of Cather as she struggled through to the end of her last published novel.

As Amy Root Clements observes in *The Art of Prestige: The Formative Years at Knopf, 1915–1929*, the internal feud between Alfred and Blanche Knopf for control over authors became legendary, but "Willa Cather perhaps represents one of the exceptions to [the] rule" that authors could work only with one Knopf but not both (166). Clements does not reference the letters in the Kolodin papers, but they substantiate this claim and the importance of Blanche Knopf for Cather as an author.[14]

Cather's letters to Blanche Knopf about *Sapphira* once it was in production demonstrate yet again her control over marketing of her novels. Indeed, a missing piece of an exchange between author and publisher partially recovered by David Porter in *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* is in the Kolodin papers, giving a fuller picture of Cather's control over the presentation of her persona to the public that is the subject of Porter's book.[15] Porter acquired for his private collection two typed pages constituting an exchange about the jacket copy for *Sapphira* (*On the Divide*, figures 7 and 8). Two paragraphs of proposed jacket copy provided by the Knopf offices constitute the first page, while the second page consists of Cather's typed paragraph she proposed substituting for the middle section with a handwritten, initialed note identifying it as such. In the Kolodin papers there is a November 25, 1940, letter from Blanche Knopf to Cather enclosing a shortened version of the revised text Cather had supplied and which had been configured into three paragraphs for the jacket copy. Blanche Knopf sent a version in which the first paragraph had been omitted "to fit into the place allotted for advertising," and she was seeking Cather's approval for this change. Cather returned the edited version with a note written on it approving the omission and changing a single word from the third paragraph of the text the Knopfs had originally provided. This third paragraph had described the novel as "moving and satisfying," but she marked it for revision to "intense and moving" (see image on page 4). Notably, the Knopfs did not put this change into effect in the jacket copy, although perhaps the jacket had already been printed.

This exchange about the jacket copy of *Sapphira*, strangely divided between two collections, returns us to the Kolodin papers as the home for part of this exchange and lingering questions about the dispersal of this archive. So how did Irving Kolodin become an aspiring Knopf biographer and how did he come to possess Knopf-Cather files, including significant portions of Blanche Knopf's files? Kolodin was a prominent music critic in mid-twentieth-century New York City. Trained at the Institute of Musical Arts, which merged into the Julliard School, he taught there from 1929 to 1931. From 1931 on he

Irving Kolodin, 1946–1948, by William P. Gottlieb. Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

worked as a music critic at a succession of newspapers—the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, *New York Sun*, and *New York World-Telegram*—before becoming an editor at the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1947. He was also, later in his career, a Knopf author. Cather scholars who have done research on Olive Fremstad as a prototype for Thea Kronborg and *The Song of the Lark* (1915) may recognize his name as the author of the standard history of the Metropolitan Opera. Under the title *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1935*, the book first appeared in 1936 under the imprint of Oxford University Press. Kolodin periodically revised and expanded it, slightly adjusting the title, and the 1953 update, *The Story of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1950: A Candid History*, was Kolodin's first book published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Kolodin's early correspondence with Alfred Knopf, both sides of which are preserved in Kolodin's papers, is formal, but fairly quickly they shifted from addressing each other as "Mr." to a first-name basis.

Unlike Peter Prescott, the failed Alfred Knopf biographer who had possession of the correspondence now in the Barbara Dobkin Collection, Kolodin had the cooperation of his biographical subject while he was still living. In fact, he stepped

into the void left when Susan Sheehan, a writer of nonfiction published by Knopf, decided after several years of working with Alfred Knopf that she did not want to write the planned biography that he was anxious for her to write. In a July 10, 1984, letter to British journalist and novelist Storm Jameson, which Kolodin retained in photocopy, he explains the genesis and nature of his own work on a biography:

> Going back over a year and a half during which I would visit [Alfred Knopf] regularly in early 1983, I produced a compilation of a Knopf Library of Music with two purposes: one was with the idea of recalling its hundred and fifty titles, plus, into a commentary of how it came about. That was hardly for profit, as many were of an intellectual value that transcended such a sale. The other intent was to absorb him in a concentration, in his ninetieth year, on a life-giving, sense-stirring recollection. When I showed him the finished product, his first impulse was to compliment me on the worthiness of the venture, then to say: "Why don't you enlarge this survey to take in what I was doing from the start to establish an identity as a publisher?" What I grasped, as we continued to talk, was the telling of a tale rarely related: how he left college about 1911, served an apprenticeship with Doubleday and Kennerley, then went into business in 1915—but also why. In the early months of 1983 when he was in relatively good health, we covered a good share of the subject conversationally in Purchase. Of great help to me was his loan of a memoir which he had produced years ago (1960, or so). From it I derived a starting point. . . . Our agreed objective was to concentrate on a narrative of about 250 (typed) pages, working up to the death of his father, in 1932. Despite this dismal happening, it was my conviction that it should proceed through the difficulties of the Depression, to the turn around in 1935, through the productivity of Clarence Day's Life with Father and Willa Cather's Lucy Gayheart, following, of course, your input that produced Charles Morgan's The Fountain. Taken all together, they were an outgrowth of associations dating to the early '20s, taking much of what had been started twenty years before 1935, when the firm was founded in 1915.

Kolodin wrote Jameson asking her to confirm Alfred Knopf's account of her role in the firm becoming American publisher for British author Charles Morgan's World War I novel *The Fountain* (1932). Kolodin also claimed to have a complete draft of the biographical narrative, which merely needed recasting, but he also noted that Knopf's health prevented him from continuing as an interview subject.[16]

In fact, Knopf did more than cooperate as an interview subject. In April 1983 Kolodin and Knopf had entered into a sort of contract, drafted in a strange impressionistic style by Kolodin himself and sent to him on April 17, 1983, in which Knopf agreed to pay Kolodin a $5,000 advance in installments and to cover Kolodin's expenses, including travel from New York City to Purchase, New York, to interview Knopf and to read his correspondence files he kept in his home, and travel to the Ransom Center to read the materials there.[17]

Much of this relationship between Kolodin and Alfred Knopf is, of course, of no particular interest to Cather scholars, but it is important to consider the nature of Kolodin's access to Knopf's files and how he gained possession of original Cather letters. Kolodin and Knopf's correspondence about a moment of friction in their collaboration gives a clue. On September 8, 1983, Knopf wrote to Kolodin protesting his treatment of some of his files:

> I remember that, with very few exceptions indeed, I have let you take on loan any document or piece of paper for which you asked. Only last week I remarked that I did this because you would, I knew, return it. Please imagine my shock and amazement when I opened the drawer in which you had dumped all of my 1912 letters! You had not even put each in its own envelope.

Responding on September 14, 1983, Kolodin apologized, explaining that he had been anxious to get the letters back safely to their original location, and that he knew he would return to the drawer of letters for "checking" as he revised the manuscript. He also described his "hardly . . . ideal" working conditions "upstairs" at Knopf's house typing up extracts from letters. During this period of access, it seems that Kolodin also removed Knopf correspondence with Joseph Hergesheimer and H. L. Mencken, both Knopf authors and personal friends, but the quantity of materials Kolodin removed concerning these men is smaller than for Cather.

Alfred Knopf died in August 1984. Irving Kolodin suffered a stroke in 1987 and died in April 1988, his biography of Knopf also uncompleted. In September 1987, as documented by Robert Thacker in his essay about "Finding Cather's Correspondence with Alfred A. Knopf," Alfred Knopf's second wife, Helen, permitted Peter Prescott to carry away from her house in Oregon her late husband's correspondence with Cather.

Precisely how and when these letters associated with Blanche Knopf and her staff were separated from the rest of her Cather files is not clear—although some of the letters are particularly significant, many of them are short and associated with one another only by chronological proximity. Nor is it clear what use Irving Kolodin intended to make of these letters in writing a biography of *Alfred* Knopf, although perhaps the references to concerts and musical figures, including in Blanche Knopf's outgoing carbons, were of interest to him as documenting, by implication, Alfred's interactions with these figures. And, certainly, a close reading of Laura Claridge's footnotes for her biography of Blanche Knopf reveals that both Susan Sheehan and Peter Prescott as Alfred Knopf biographers came into possession of a great deal of Blanche Knopf material. The letters addressed to Blanche and Alfred jointly might have been separated out as more personal and social as they are generally letters of thanks. Similarly, the letters from Edith Lewis to Alfred Knopf are letters in which she thanks and praises Knopf for his work as a publisher. These Lewis letters stand out from many of the 150 others at the Ransom Center, which often have to do with mundane technical matters of administering Cather's literary estate, so it seemly plausible that Alfred Knopf had set them aside from his business files. Certainly the original of Cather's four-page hand-written letter of condolence to Alfred on the death of his father and her telegram preceding it were treasured personal objects. Finally, when Cather mailed a note on June 7, 1939, thanking Alfred Knopf for his praise of her story "The Old Beauty," which remained unpublished during her lifetime, she even wrote "personal" on the outside of the envelope. "Now that Isabelle is no longer here," she wrote, "I would rather please you than anyone else."

The letters in the Kolodin papers also, however, draw attention to continuing gaps in the record of Cather's relationship with her publishers during the second half of her career. Although Peter Prescott believed that no Cather biographer had access to the Alfred Knopf–Willa Cather files that he carried away in 1987, it seems that Doris Grumbach, who failed to complete a biography of Cather, may have read the files now in the Barbara Dobkin Collection and may have read other letters not in that tranche. In an excerpt from her journals published in the *American Scholar* in 2001, Grumbach describes a meeting with Alfred Knopf in 1982 during which she told him, "I had read his letters and telegrams to [Cather] after he received each new ms. Sounded as though he liked everything she ever wrote. Did he?" (134). Grumbach was not very fond of *Sapphira* or *Lucy Gayheart* and was irked at his response that he liked "even" them. She also describes Knopf proffering "the original" of the jacket copy Cather wrote for *Sapphira* as proof that she "very often wrote her own advertising and jacket copy" (133). "Knopf gives me the original copy," she writes. "Nice to have it in my file, typed with purple ribbon and signed with her initials." In a more recently published excerpt from her memoirs-in-progress, Grumbach tells a slightly different version of this story. "When I remarked that he seemed always ready to do everything his star author wanted done, he agreed, hesitantly, and then showed me a file of letters that contained one from her. In it, she complained about the planned copy for the jacket blurb of her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Clipped to the letter was the text she preferred, typed with her customary purple ribbon."[18] As yet, however, there is no sign of the letter from the Knopf offices transmitting the draft jacket copy for *Sapphira* to her in the first instance, nor is there a letter in which Cather complains about it (although there is the hand-written note on the substitute paragraph she sent in typescript). And, indeed, in the letters now in the Barbara Dobkin Collection documenting primarily Alfred Knopf's correspondence with Cather, the 1939–1940 file is notably sparse. There are other notable gaps in Alfred Knopf's correspondence with Cather, most strikingly the beginning of Cather's career as a Knopf author in 1919–1920. In July 1919 Cather wrote Alfred Knopf twice from Toronto, where she was visiting the Hambourgs, and in a December 28, 1919, letter to Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin she mentions her agreement to let Knopf reissue *The Troll Garden* (*Selected Letters* 285–86). However, even if Cather's presence in New York may have somewhat obviated the need for letter writing, there must have been at least *some* correspondence between Cather and the Knopf offices about *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and about her essay "The Art of Fiction" published in *The Borzoi 1920*. But where is it?

I suspect those files may be somewhere, either in private hands or in an unprocessed collection in a library. They are not in Kolodin's papers, but nevertheless more Cather nuggets may be lurking in the chaotic hundreds of pages of Kolodin's notes and drafts for the Knopf biography and his associated research materials. For example, although Alfred Knopf read "Miss Cather" at the centennial celebration in 1973 and published it in *The Art of Willa Cather* in 1974 with a postscript about Lewis as Cather's executor, a carbon of an earlier version of this essay, which corresponds fairly closely to much of the 1974 published text, is in Kolodin's papers. Notably, it is accompanied by Alfred Knopf's cover memo dated November 4, 1964, which explains, "This is a free-wheeling draft. It may be that I have paraphrased

Cather's letters more than our lawyer will permit." He also notes his intention, fulfilled a decade later, to add the postscript about Lewis as executor.[19] I leave it to others, however, to dive into these depths.

NOTES

1. On the complex, multi-staged delivery of the Knopf-related materials to the Harry Ransom Center and the many gaps in the collections (most author files were not retained when the firm moved offices in 1945), see the finding aid and Henderson and Oram's "Preface." On Alfred Knopf's draft memoir materials, see the same and Alfred Knopf, *Those Damned Reminiscences.*

2. Claridge's biography is not without its own problems, including her claims about Cather. She does not seem to have read the Blanche Knopf–Willa Cather correspondence at the Ransom Center and makes a number of clearly erroneous statements without documentation. Nevertheless, her claims about the diminishment of Blanche Knopf by her husband and more broadly by a sexist culture are persuasive.

3. The Cather correspondence is in Box 4, Folders 11–14, and the Lewis in Box 5, Folder 9.

4. Cather often fails to date her handwritten letters, but the Knopf offices date-stamped incoming mail, so for undated letters I provide this receipt date.

5. This carbon is actually at the Ransom Center (Box 689, Folder 4), attesting to the arbitrary nature of the division of these files.

6. The Willa Cather Scholarly Edition volume of *Obscure Destinies*, which was relatively early in the edition, had very little to work with to establish compositional chronology, and there is a great deal of material in the Dobkin letters as well.

7. Based on *Willa Cather Living* and other letters, the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition located Cather's earliest compositional activity in spring 1933, with additional work during the summer on Grand Manan (411–412).

8. There is no reference to this Chicago engagement in L. Brent Bohlke's *Willa Cather in Person* (1986). However, the occasion appears to be the award of a "medallion of herself made by Chicago artist Robert Delson" at a luncheon of the Chicago Women's Club ("Meetings and Lectures"). See also Cather to Weisz.

9. This letter is not dated or receipt-stamped by the Knopf offices but is headed "Sunday" and obviously comes between Blanche Knopf's letters of August 23 and 30, 1939.

10. See "Elizabeth Bowen" in Henderson and Oram (82–101).

11. No carbon transmitting the book to Cather has been located, and Cather's note is undated. However, the note is clearly part of a sequence with a carbon at the Ransom Center, Blanche Knopf to Willa Cather, January 13, 1936 (Box 689, Folder 4), in which Blanche provides contact information for Beveridge Webster, which Cather acknowledges in the undated note in the Kolodin papers.

12. These letters largely confirm the compositional chronology in the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition volume, which was produced before the discovery of the letters now in the Barbara Dobkin Collection and which relies on Cather's correspondence with family and friends and with Ferris Greenslet. However, Cather's correspondence with Alfred Knopf would not have added much in this case.

13. Both letters are in Box 68, Folder 4. Thanks to Robert Thacker for reminding me of this exchange and its significance here.

14. Indeed, Clements says that Cather "request[ed] Alfred from the beginning as her editor but nonetheless correspond[ed] with Blanche profusely" (161)—whatever may be true of the beginning of Cather's time as a Knopf author, the balance in the second half of her career with them would now, based on available evidence, suggest that Blanche took the lead.

15. Although these letters substantiate the Knopf firm's deference to Cather, they do not confirm Porter's claim that Cather and only Cather *wrote* materials such as the drastically revised second paragraph of the *Sapphira* jacket copy. Porter dismisses Alfred Knopf's observation in "Miss Cather" that he had "always suspected the hand of her friend Edith Lewis in much of the copy she supplied about her books from time to time" (Knopf 211, Porter 34). In the Barbara Dobkin Collection correspondence, to which Porter did not have access, Cather explicitly credits Lewis with writing the copy for *One of Ours* (*Selected Letters* 308), and although she does not credit Lewis when she sends later copy, it seems likely that as a professional advertising copywriter, Lewis would have participated in the creation of these materials.

16. Box 5, Folder 7.

17. Box 5, Folder 7—the letters discussed below are also in this folder.

18. Notably, Grumbach did not deposit her journals from the years that she was most actively researching the Cather biography at the New York Public Library, and some of her claims do not match the evidence in other parts of her papers.

Most notably her claim that she gave up the biography after this meeting because she was annoyed at Cather for characterizing herself as a "master" in the jacket copy for *Sapphira* is inaccurate. Although Grumbach did not fulfill her contract with Harpers for the biography, she entered into a new contract with E. P. Dutton in late 1983. See Maxine Groffsky to Doris Grumbach January 5, 1984, Box 23, Folder 16. Nevertheless, Grumbach's account does reinforce my point that there are clearly gaps and omissions in 1940. It is also possible that the document David Porter bought is this document that Grumbach describes Knopf as giving her for her own files—her prescription in her journal does not match precisely the document Porter reproduces, but it is close.

19. The document is in Box 13, Folder 4 of Kolodin's papers. On Knopf's revisions for publication, see Knopf to Faulkner.

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The New National Willa Cather Center

On June 3, 2017, we marked the formal opening of the National Willa Cather Center in a day-long celebration that served as a gala coda to our 62nd annual Cather Spring Conference. After former first lady Laura Bush delivered a dedication address to a packed house, guests had the opportunity to see not just a new era beginning, but a transformation that many in attendance found deeply moving: two fine old buildings, once derelict, were both now fully and sensitively restored. The Red Cloud Opera House reopened in 2003 after a complete restoration, and now its next-door neighbor—the "Moon Block"—was also like new again and full of life. A corridor connected them, as it had in the structures' early years. Together they are the National Willa Cather Center, which is a big name and a tall challenge that we intend to live up to. Here are a few glimpses of our new home.

Except as noted, all photographs in this feature are by Phil Daubman.

At the end of the long second-story corridor in the newly restored "Moon Block" is a doorway that opens into the auditorium of the Red Cloud Opera House, visible in the photograph below. The foreground staircase leads to one of the street entrances to the building. The handsome façade of the building is seen in the bottom photograph, by Tracy Tucker.

The Foundation's growing collection has a spacious, climate-controlled new home (left). The Robert and Joanne Berkshire Family study room (below) offers comfortable surroundings for visiting scholars and researchers.

Archive and Study Room

The new archive and study room in the National Willa Cather Center together make up one of the most important parts of the restoration project—indeed, the dream of having a proper archive was at the very heart of this undertaking. Our growing collection of objects, photographs, letters, textiles, documents and fine art had outgrown our storage spaces and needed this climate-controlled, restricted-access space for long-term preservation. Guests touring the facility during our opening weekend immediately noticed the room's cool atmosphere; we aim for a constant 65 degrees and 40% relative humidity, which aids in preservation and is appropriate for our mixed collection. Energy-saving LED light fixtures not only save as much as 65% on energy costs, but they also protect our collections from ultraviolet and infrared light damage which can accumulate over the years. Mobile, collapsible storage racks allow us to safely and compactly store our permanent art collection. More than 2,000 linear feet of shelf space is home to Cather family book collections, museum pieces not currently on view, our reference library, and decades of Willa Cather Foundation history. Though state-of-the-art, this room also retains its 1887 charm and many of its original details, with beautiful door and window casings, antique knobs, and original pine floor (the archive occupies what was originally and for many years a lodge room in the old Moon Block). The Robert and Joanne Berkshire Family study room next door to the archive provides a quiet, comfortable space for visiting researchers to use our collection materials. We've been pleased to host a steady stream of scholarly guests to the space since our opening.

The Bookstore

When we greatly expanded our shop in the National Willa Cather Center, it was a given that the new Mactier Family Bookstore and Gift Shop would continue to carry all of Willa Cather's currently available titles (many in multiple editions) as well as a wide selection of books about Cather's work and her life and times. We are excited to branch outward from these offerings to carry a broader selection of books by other Great Plains authors, both classic (like John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*) and contemporary (like Ted Kooser's *Lights on a Ground of Darkness* and Roger Welsch's humorous *Why I'm an Only Child and Other Slightly Naughty Plains Folktales*). We carry the "Discover the Great Plains" series published by the Center for Great Plains Studies in cooperation with the University of Nebraska Press, and a selection of field guides to Nebraska prairies. The new *Atlas of Nebraska*, also from the University of Nebraska Press, is one of several titles that explore the history and culture of the Pawnee tribe that inhabited Webster County. The bookstore also offers gifts for readers and travelers, Red Cloud products and souvenirs. Our new shop gives us ample room to grow and expand our offerings.

Business is brisk as we begin to grow into the new space for the Mactier Family Bookstore and Gift Shop (below). The shop opens into its former quarters in the lobby of the Red Cloud Opera House (bottom photo) and also connects with the new permanent exhibit, *American Bittersweet*.

American Bittersweet

The James Sherwood Exhibit Room is the home for *American Bittersweet: The Life and Writing of Willa Cather*, our new permanent exhibit. Created with support from Mr. Sherwood, a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and other generous donors, its name was inspired by the beautiful vine that grows on the Cather Childhood Home. The exhibit was designed and fabricated by Flint Hills Design of Newton, Kansas, and developed by a committee comprising Cather scholars, the Willa Cather Foundation staff and board, and museum professionals. The new exhibit helps the Cather Foundation to further our mission in a number of ways. First, the exhibit allows us to share many of Cather's personal objects—her clothing, jewelry, family objects, and pieces related to her writing—with our guests every day. The museum cases you see here were designed to protect items from light and environmental damage while on display, so that we can safely show them as we never have before.

The new exhibit is organized along a series of thematic dualities—"home and abroad," "light and shadow," etc.—enabling us to convey details of Cather's life while acknowledging ambiguities in the record and challenging received wisdom. The location panels visible in the photograph above (by Tracy Tucker) ground Cather's life and work in particular physical settings; the "fact & fiction" timeline visible to the left aims to put Cather in cultural context.

Second, *American Bittersweet* features a triple timeline that places Cather's books—both those she wrote and those she read—against a timeline of her life *and* a timeline of world events. The exhibit thus contextualizes Cather's writing for our visitors, situating her firmly among the most important writers of her day. Lastly, the exhibit presents Cather's life as a series of dualities, complicating the ways audiences think they know her life and work. For example, many who visit Red Cloud know Cather for her Nebraska novels, so *American Bittersweet* explores the many locales of Cather's life, from Red Cloud to Quebec, New Mexico to Virginia, and beyond.

American Bittersweet has also been conceived to touch on social, cultural, and historical forces that made Cather who she was. For the many guests who choose to tour Cather historic sites as well as visit the new permanent exhibit, we specifically aimed to address topics that may not receive sustained attention during our very site-focused tours. Exhibit panels explore such topics as the life and career of Cather's partner Edith Lewis, the role of art and opera in Cather's work, and the history of Red Cloud's Kitkehahki band of the Pawnee tribe. Our flexible design will also enable us to broaden and change the presentation with time.

The ADA-friendly exhibit is also good for guests with limited mobility, those with only a short time to explore, and those traveling with children. We wish to thank Virgil and Dolores Albertini, James and Angela Southwick, the Theodore G. Baldwin Foundation, and two anonymous foundations for their support of the exhibit.

Display cases are designed to bring the exhibit's thematic dualities to life and provide lively settings for the Foundation's archival objects.

A Thing to Be Discarded: Culinary Appropriation and Displacement in *My Ántonia*

Stephanie Tsank | University of Iowa

Near the end of *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden nonchalantly states that he has traveled to Bohemia and sent Ántonia some images of her native village. He explains the circumstances then: "I heard of her from time to time; that she married, very soon after I last saw her, a young Bohemian, a cousin of Anton Jelinek; that they were poor, and had a large family. Once when I was abroad I went into Bohemia, and from Prague I sent Ántonia some photographs of her native village" (317). Jim's description of this event elides the fact that Ántonia herself does not have the luxury of travel, and that her freedom to move is limited by her position as a rural lower-class immigrant. Jim does not acknowledge Ántonia's immobility, which itself recalls the limited options for immigrant characters throughout the novel; instead, his commentary illustrates how his visits to Ántonia serve as catalyst for his own emotional development and maturation—the imperative which undergirds the whole of *My Ántonia* and, in the process, often obscures the lived experiences of immigrants.

In this case, as in other instances, the immediacy of Jim's romantic impulses, however well-meaning they may be, serves to ignore a fundamental strain of inequality that lies at the core of his relationship to Ántonia and to other characters in the novel, many of whom are immigrants. Jim's ability to consume and record Ántonia's native village through the medium of photography and, even more tellingly, send snippets of his experiences of Bohemia back to her, is not outwardly acknowledged or addressed by Jim or the narrative, which elsewhere does critique his perceptions and actions. Instead, Ántonia must content herself with fragments of her homeland while Jim more fully ingests her native country first-hand. At the same time, Jim romanticizes Ántonia's family's poverty; she is lodged immovably to the American soil as "archetypal earth woman," ready at any time to serve Jim's desires for nostalgic indulgence, all while he retains his freedom of movement and travel, exemplified even further by his occupation as a lawyer for a major railway company.[1] This contrast—Jim's freedom to move and Ántonia's immovability—exemplifies a hierarchical social structure that determines who, ultimately, has the power to consume and dismiss, and simultaneously highlights the stark differences between narrator and subject, native and immigrant. And the fact that this structural difference is acknowledged but not actively probed within the narrative illustrates the insidious dangers of Jim's seemingly benign romantic impulse to record his life: because his experiences are positioned as memories, readers are often encouraged not to question the narrative structure that in fact works to normalize structurally unequal relationships like Jim and Ántonia's.

Cather's depiction of local and "foreign" foods, as well as scenes of eating, serve as easily recognizable determiners of these differences. Although many of the foods Cather describes throughout *My Ántonia* are typical for the immigrants she depicts, and such foods are shown as integral to their cultural identity, the foods themselves are positioned as exotic by Jim; thus the immigrants are at times made to seem less than human. For example, Mrs. Shimerda and the Russians, Peter and Pavel, are made to appear strange by the foods they consume and how they consume them. At the same time, ingesting these foods and participating in the immigrants' food habits serve as a means of imaginative awakening for Jim as he builds his own identity in relation to his new environment, though often at the expense of humane acknowledgement of his neighbors as whole individuals with discrete pasts and personalities. In these scenarios, specific foods—like the immigrants themselves—are used as a platform for Jim's exploration of self. Mrs. Shimerda's reliance on smell as a sense of discernment, and her characterization via the Bohemian mushrooms, position her as an easy-to-discard foreigner, yet by tasting the mushrooms, Jim experiences the "deep Bohemian forest" (77) as a voyeur from a position of safety and power. Elsewhere, Peter is described as having taken on the physical characteristics of a melon, so fused with the food he consumes that he adopts its non-human shape. Jim's participation in Peter's melon feast allows him to vicariously experience the emotional abandon and danger associated with the tale of the Russians' escape from the pursuing wolves in their home country. All the while, Peter's companion Pavel is laid up in his death bed, and ultimately perishes due to the stress of his own displacement. When Jim finally returns to visit Ántonia after decades of separation he claims ownership of the kolache, the Czech pastry, to help explain his own identity. This is an assertion that solidifies how scenes of appropriation and fetish undergird relationships between characters as well as throughout the novel's narrative structure.

A chromolithograph of edible mushrooms from *Les Champignons Comestibles* by F. Leuba, published by Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchatel, Switzerland, 1890.

As numerous critics have pointed out, Jim's limitations of perspective are not without critique within the narrative, especially in instances where he exhibits narrow-mindedness and blind allegiance to prescribed gender roles.[2] Certainly, many of Jim's actions and attitudes throughout the novel are not meant to be wholly accepted at face value: Jim's childlike concern that Ántonia is acting superior to him, his inability to completely recognize that Mr. Shimerda is in trouble and deeply depressed, Jim's frustration at Ántonia's lack of decorum as she toils away in the fields after her father's suicide, and his own unsuccessful marriage are but some of the instances where readers are encouraged to see Jim's judgment as flawed. Yet, despite the novel's frequent condemnation of Jim when he elevates his own superiority—most often his male superiority—Cather does not condemn moments of cultural appropriation and power wrought via misplaced and subtle claims of culinary ownership, moments that most often undermine the unique contributions of various immigrant groups to American culture.

Throughout the narrative, Mrs. Shimerda is critiqued over what and how she eats. Jim describes Mrs. Shimerda's unusual habits—habits which seem unusual to him, a boy from Virginia—when encountering, preserving, and storing food. Most famously there are the Bohemian mushrooms she offers Mrs. Burden as a reciprocal gift. Of course, Mrs. Shimerda's practices surrounding food, and the prominent use of dried mushrooms in cooking, are typical for her regardless of whether Jim and his grandparents find them odd. In the novel's first section, the Burdens meet the Shimerdas for the first time, bringing various home-cooked and home-grown foods to their sod house in neighborly greeting. Jim describes their gatherings: "Fuchs brought up a sack of potatoes and a piece of cured pork from the cellar, and grandmother packed some loaves of Saturday's bread, a jar of butter, and several pumpkin pies in the straw of the wagon-box" (18). In this case, the foods themselves are not "foreign," but Mrs. Shimerda's response to them—which is to outwardly smell the loaves of bread that the Burdens provide—identifies her as such. Jim recalls the scene, observing: "the Bohemian woman handled the loaves of bread and even smelled them, and examined the pies with lively curiosity" (22). Pointing out Mrs. Shimerda's smelling of the bread loaves—that she "even" smelled them—calls attention to this act as unusual. In this scene, which introduces Mrs. Shimerda to readers, Jim immediately identifies and emphasizes her status as a foreigner; she simply is not aware of, or perhaps chooses to ignore, the rules of Western decorum.

Later, in one of the most frequently examined scenes in the novel, Jim characterizes Mrs. Shimerda via an "exotic" food item native to her homeland. When Mrs. Shimerda gives the Burdens the pouch of treasured dried mushrooms from Bohemia, she explains emphatically to Jim's grandmother that the mushrooms are "Very good. You no have in this country. All things for eat better in my country" (75). Swelling with pride, Mrs. Shimerda presents the mushrooms "ceremoniously" (75), distinguishing

Russian market scene with native melon vendors, ca. 1906.

her culinary traditions from those of the Americans and simultaneously attempting to bridge the cultural divide through food, given that she cannot really speak English yet. Describing the mushrooms with almost anthropological precision, Jim calls them "little brown chips that looked like the shavings of some root" and "light as feathers" (76), noting the dried mushrooms' look, texture, and weight. Even further, he notes several times the mushrooms' strong scent: their pungency, their "salty, earthy smell," and their "penetrating, earthy odor" (75–76). Reminiscent of Mrs. Shimerda's natural inclination to "even" smell the loaves of bread gifted by the Burdens, Jim notes the mushrooms' unusual, surprising odor. Not unlike Mrs. Shimerda's reliance on smell as a valid means of discernment, the mushrooms, too, are identifiable due to their inescapable pungency. Like the mushrooms, the Shimerdas are initially perceived as an oddity—almost animalistic, and unquestionably foreign.

Mrs. Shimerda's gift of fungi—an offer to extend and share her own cultural and culinary heritage—is received differently by Jim and by his grandmother. For her, the foreignness of the mushrooms is threatening: her reaction underlies her emotional and intellectual response to Mrs. Shimerda herself. Ántonia tries to point out that the mushrooms can be used for many dishes, exclaiming, "Cook with rabbit, cook with chicken, in the gravy,—oh, so good!" (75) yet, she is unsuccessful in convincing Mrs. Burden of the food's practical value. Mrs. Burden warns her grandson against interacting with the mushrooms, remarking, "They might be dried meat from some queer beast, Jim. They ain't dried fish, and they never grew on stalk or vine. I'm afraid of 'em. Anyhow, I shouldn't want to eat anything that had been shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows" (76). Reading Ántonia's and Mrs. Burden's statements in tandem creates useful connections; interestingly, the statements parallel one another structurally and topically in how they, in turn, swiftly reinforce and undercut the value of the mushrooms. Ántonia, who has learned from her mother, lists several ways in which the mushrooms can be incorporated into basic dishes, thereby neatly placing them in a category of ingredients that, albeit fluid, is endlessly useful. On the other hand, Mrs. Burden diminishes the value of the mushrooms by de-categorizing them. Because Mrs. Burden cannot classify the mushrooms into a specific and determined category, they become both useless and frightening, a perspective which reveals society's ongoing anxiety about immigrants that deigned to cross boundaries set for them by social, racial, and class structures.

Furthermore, by noting that the mushrooms have been "shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows," Mrs. Burden identifies and enforces a division between the foreign and the familiar. The old clothes and goose pillows are intimate objects with which the Shimerda family has had close contact. By ingesting the mushrooms, Mrs. Burden may be fearing that she and her grandson will become too intimate with the Shimerdas. Voicing her disapproval of Mrs. Shimerda's preservation methods and unable to identify the mushrooms as a recognizable earthly substance, Mrs. Burden distances herself from the item by destroying it: she throws the package into the stove. In doing so, Jim's grandmother may be seeking to destroy the very foreignness which she fears, at once discarding a valuable culinary item and cultural object. For Mrs. Burden, the mushrooms express sincere divisions between cultural traditions and approaches to food preparation and preservation, and in general, signal an anxiety about not fully knowing—or perhaps not wanting to fully know—her new foreign neighbors.

Of course, Jim's response to the mushrooms is notably different than his grandmother's. Jim, a young boy newly removed from Virginia and curious about the new place he has come to, inhabits inquisitiveness and openness as he samples the mushrooms, recalling years later in his memoir, "I never forgot the strange taste; though it was many years before I knew that those little brown shavings, which the Shimerdas had brought so far and treasured so jealously, were dried mushrooms.

They had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest . . ." (77).[3] Although Mrs. Burden refuses to classify the mushrooms, Jim finds himself able to do so by imagining them in a far away and exotic Bohemian forest—a location that excites his romantic imagination and thrills his young mind. For him, the Bohemian forest is not a real foraging space, but rather he imagines it as an exciting receptacle for his childlike hopes and aspirations. In other words, Jim can only situate the mushrooms via his own curiosity and desire to experience the pleasure of difference. Although Jim's reaction to the mushrooms is more positive than his grandmother's, for he is willing to sample them and therefore, as Andrew Jewell argues, "trans-nationalize [his] imagination" (75), Jim's glowing moment of self-growth ignores Mrs. Shimerda's contribution to that growth. Despite Jim's positive moment of transculturation, hastened by the strangeness of the treasured mushrooms given to the Burdens by Mrs. Shimerda, there is little effort on Jim's part—or within the narrative he writes—to understand Mrs. Shimerda's struggles, history, or internal life. Rather, she is depicted as jealous, entitled, and difficult.

Despite the stark differences in Jim and his grandmother's reactions to the mushrooms as a culinary item, their shared negative assessment of Mrs. Shimerda herself remains a constant. Early in the narrative, when observing the poor conditions under which Mrs. Shimerda and her family live, Mrs. Burden chastises Mrs. Shimerda openly to Jim, stating, "I've come strange to a new country myself, but I never forgot hens are a good thing to have, no matter what you don't have" (69). In this comparison, Mrs. Burden is referring to her own emigration from Virginia, a move that parallels the Shimerdas' in some respects but not in either extent or acculturation. Mrs. Shimerda and her family have immigrated from Bohemia to the United States, a new and different country, to find better opportunities for herself and especially for her children; they do not speak English and thus are tricked into overpaying for a bad piece of land owned by Peter Krajiek—a decision that contributes significantly to the family's poverty and amplifies the difficulties they face in sustaining themselves. Mrs. Burden, in contrast, is generally depicted positively by Jim throughout the narrative, and although she lends a helping hand to the Shimerdas on many occasions, she does not acknowledge the real, structural differences between herself and Mrs. Shimerda due to circumstance and opportunity. Because Mrs. Burden's opinion is positioned as trustworthy, her chastising comments help set in motion a generally unappealing portrait of Mrs. Shimerda that persists throughout the novel.

When Mrs. Shimerda visits the Burdens' household and complains about her own family's lack of kitchen supplies, Jim parrots his grandmother's disapproval and refers to Mrs. Shimerda as "a conceited, boastful old thing" and admits that "I was so annoyed that I felt coldly even toward Ántonia and listened unsympathetically when she told me her father was not well" (86). Soon after this exchange, which results in Mrs. Burden relinquishing an iron pot to the Shimerdas and the two families parting in discord, Ántonia's father commits suicide, thereby emphasizing the pain and tragedy of displacement experienced by their family. The fact that Mr. Shimerda commits suicide so suddenly suggests that the negative impact of immigration on the Shimerda family is likely much more deep-seated than is outwardly shown. Certainly, Ántonia gestures toward the pain her family is experiencing in her attempts to get Jim's attention when she visits the Burdens with her mother. Ultimately, however, Jim remains more interested in feeding his need for creativity and inspiration via his neighbors than he is of the mundane and inescapable challenges they experience in their daily lives. Echoing and extending the subtle negativity fostered by his grandmother, Jim is willing to accept the mushrooms from Mrs. Shimerda as a culinary, cultural entity enabling him to escape the confines of his own spatial and imaginative boundaries, yet easily condemns the human source of the mushrooms—Mrs. Shimerda—as a thing to be discarded.

Meanwhile, Jim's—and the reader's—first introduction to Peter and Pavel, a pair of local Russian homesteaders, is also through food. Outwardly, the men's homestead is identified by its melon patch and "a garden where squashes and yellow cucumbers lay about on the sod" (34). When the young Jim and Ántonia visit Peter, they find the floor of the men's homestead sumptuously "covered with garden things, drying for winter; corn and beans and fat yellow cucumbers" (35)—making their environment and by proxy, themselves, surreal. Like Mrs. Burden's comment about Mrs. Shimerda's mushrooms being "shut up" in her pillows and things, the Russians' food is enclosed in their home, perhaps even indicative of hoarding. Regardless, the food that covers the ground of their homestead comes into too-close proximity to the Russians themselves, and is thus imbued with their strangeness. Peter and Pavel's back story further positions them as odd, foreign, and not quite human. Peter and Pavel tell their story of exile from Russia: they are with a bridal party that is attacked by wolves, and to save themselves, they throw the bride and groom to the vicious creatures. Like Peter's comparison to food items that render him less human, the Russian homesteaders are paired with the wolves by their own savage act. Thus, in the same way that Mrs. Shimerda is compared to an animal with her "smelling" of the loaves, the Russians are aligned with the wolves themselves—half man, half animal—through their violent actions.

The Russians—Peter especially—are identified primarily through the melon. At one point, Jim states: "I had never seen any one eat so many melons as Peter ate. He assured us that they were good for one—better than medicine; in his country people lived on them at this time of year" (35). Like the impossible depth of the Bohemian forest, Peter's consumption of melons is unquantifiable and extreme, thereby suggesting that he is not quite human. He becomes the melon that he eats in such copious amounts, and embodies the dairy products that he and his companion tirelessly cultivate.[4] Cather writes of Peter that "his rosy face, with its snub nose, set in this fleece, was like a melon among its leaves" and that he is "as fat as butter" (33). Peter's "edible" physical features trouble the boundaries of humanness, just as the Bohemian mushrooms resist classification in Mrs. Burden's eyes. At the same time, the tale of the Russians sacrificing their brethren points to an anxiety about otherness and the fear of immigrants' insatiable appetite for America, suggesting that they will do drastic things to survive and in the process, may impede Americans' progress. Like Mrs. Shimerda's claiming of the Burdens' iron pot as her own, Peter's foreignness, and his desire for stability and normalcy, is positioned as potentially threatening to Jim, as well as to Cather's primarily white, middle-class readership.

The Russians' insatiable appetite and "wildness" is reinforced in other scenes, too; for instance, when Jim and Ántonia visit Peter, the trio commences a melon feast, and Jim narrates, "Peter put the melons in a row on the oilcloth-covered table and stood over them, brandishing a butcher knife. Before the blade got fairly into them, they split of their own ripeness, with a delicious sound. He gave us knives, but no plates, and the top of the table was soon swimming with juice and seeds" (35). Cather's description of Peter in this scene—standing over the melons and "brandishing a butcher knife"—appears violent. In fact, knives are the only utensils present, and Peter's method of food preparation lacks conventional boundaries, much like the melon juice and seeds engulfing the surface of the table, practically consuming it. Given that melons were, and continue to be, a popular food item in Russia with an extensive history, Peter's consumption of the melons can be read as his longing to return, thereby gesturing toward the pain that he must feel at having been ejected from his homeland.[5] Yet, this scene quickly bypasses that reality in favor of communicating the dual sensations of excitement and fear; by pairing the violence of Peter's physical stance over the melons with the "delicious sound" of their splitting, the Russians become both dangerous and inviting, and this is where the narrative focus lies. Jim, without critique from the narrative, uses this experience as an opportunity to live vicariously through Peter and Pavel's story of violent displacement from Russia—which is also somewhat pleasing in how it teases the boundaries of reality—by participating in the precarious, yet enjoyable melon feast, whereas the genuine pain of the Russians' displacement remains conveniently pushed aside.

For both Mr. Shimerda and the Russians, death is the inevitable outcome. Depressed by his circumstances, Mr. Shimerda commits suicide. Pavel perishes in his bed, slowly succumbing to illness, probably tuberculosis. For both men, the pain of displacement is an overwhelming contributor, as their deaths are intimately tied to the uprooting of their former lives. Mr. Shimerda cannot adjust to his family's new conditions and feels as though he has failed in supporting them in the transition. Undoubtedly, the narrative positions Mr. Shimerda's death as a relatively significant plot point—a moment which allows Jim to truly feel the weight of

A Russian watermelon salesman, ca. 1907. "Russian types" were popular collectible photographs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

the immigrant family's struggles, however dismissive he remains of Mrs. Shimerda. Pavel's death, however, functions primarily as narrative fodder. Because of the fantastic nature of the story of the wolves, which he reveals to his captive audience just as he slides toward death, the story of his passing itself is not meaningful on its own, but mainly a source of curiosity and fascination. The pain of Peter and Pavel's displacement isn't fully acknowledged, as Jim—in his narrative—remains more interested in the sensory value of their experiences rather than the experiences themselves, which are, admittedly, somewhat otherworldly to begin with. Jim's participation in the melon feast and the Russians' other culinary offerings allow him to live vicariously through their horrific experiences without experiencing any real personal threat or danger. Like Mrs. Shimerda, Pavel too is something to be discarded: after he and his partner fulfill their duties of stoking the fires of Jim's imagination, they easily vanish into the blurred landscape from which they came.

Following the trend of Jim's utilization of "foreign" foods for his own purposes, in the novel's last section, when Jim visits Ántonia for the first time in years and meets her new family, he has an exchange with two of her sons about the kolache and, characteristically, uses his knowledge of it to establish his own cultural capital:

> "Show him the spiced plums, mother. Americans don't have those," said one of the older boys. "Mother uses them to make *kolaches*," he added.
>
> Leo, in a low voice, tossed off some scornful remark in Bohemian. I turned to him.
>
> "You think I don't know what *kolaches* are, eh? You're mistaken, young man. I've eaten your mother's *kolaches* long before that Easter day when you were born." (328)

In this exchange, Jim tries to establish his authority as older, wiser, and more familiar with Ántonia's homeland's culinary traditions.[6] His comment, "I've eaten your mother's *kolaches* long before . . . you were born," is equivalent to "I have known Bohemian culture much longer than you have." Jim's need to assert that he has "eaten" Ántonia's kolaches suggests ownership over the kolache and by proxy, Ántonia and her cultural traditions. In this exchange, Jim equates his ingestion of the kolaches with Bohemianness; that is, he uses the kolache to claim some sort of hybrid ethnic identity or culinary, and therefore, cultural authority. By responding to Ántonia's sons' claims to Bohemian cultural identity with his own assertion of closeness to that identity as a white American, he effectively attempts to undercut the Cuzaks' bond to their heritage as a means of asserting his own knowledge and experience. Meanwhile, the narrative itself remains unconcerned with the possible tensions produced by this exchange. Thus, at the novel's end, Jim not only claims ownership over Ántonia's homeland by visiting Bohemia and sending back mere photographs; he also asserts his relationship with the kolache as more meaningful, or at least equivalent to, that of Leo's and his brother's.

Jim's continued appropriation and fetishization of immigrant foods—often at the expense of the immigrants who provide them—is a constant throughout the novel. Although, in many ways, Jim's exposure to and consumption of "foreign" foods can be understood as transculturation successfully at work, in fact the novel does not acknowledge the limitations of this ideologically inclusive framework when hierarchies of power remain unchallenged and firmly in place. One critic writes that "Cather's food narrative underlies the meaning of what it is to be human" (Beideck-Porn 223). Indeed, in *My Ántonia*, food helps to record the textures and sensations of the human experience, and even further, scenes of ingestion break away from traditional views of consumption that were popular during the period of the novel's setting and publication.[7] But to be human is also to acknowledge one's inevitable shortcomings, and due to the limitations of the novel's narrative framework at its core, *My Ántonia* is a story told by a white man from Virginia and written by a white woman from Virginia. The characterizations Cather draws via food often function as a means of identification, alerting the reader to a "foreign" presence that is not fully in step with Anglo-American mores and traditions, and in some cases, immigrant characters are ignored or discarded outright while their cultural products remain potent movers of culture, emotion, and experience for "native" characters. Although Jim's perspective is often positioned as flawed, especially in scenes where he attempts to assert his masculinity over Ántonia, moments of cultural appropriation and the elision of certain immigrant realities remain uncontested within the novel. Jim's privilege is rarely undermined; although he has his internal challenges and frustrations, he is nonetheless free to structure his identity however he likes—unlike Ántonia, he is free to test the boundaries of his physical and emotional borders without losing his credibility or his citizenship.

NOTES

1. I borrow this phrase from Mary Paniccia Carden, who argues that Jim attempts to "recoup a position of mastery by claiming Ántonia . . . as his muse" (293).

2. Critics have been especially attuned to the novel's critique of Jim's assumed gender superiority. For instance, Susan J. Rosowski

suggests that Cather was keenly aware of expected gender norms, and that in *My Ántonia*, Cather uses Jim to express "conventionally male attitudes" and alternately, uses Ántonia to actively push against these conventions (88). Carden also argues that Cather actively "confronts and challenges gender-specific narratives of the nation" (278) and that *My Ántonia* is a "failed romance" for Jim (293). Other readings of Jim's shortcomings exist as well. For example, John Selzer describes Jim as being characterized by a series of "moral failures" of which he is self-aware; in other words, his own narrative is reliable but openly self-critical (47).

3. Critics have used this scene to determine the novel's stance on cultural assimilation; for instance, Andrew Jewell argues that Jim's tasting of the mushrooms awakens his imagination or, his "sensitivity to and interest in a foreign land" (75). Jewell rightly identifies the significance of this scene as a moment of transculturation: for Jim, ingesting the dried mushrooms figuratively transports him to another global region, in the process broadening his imaginative capabilities. Even so, Jewell does not mention how Mrs. Shimerda, the source of the mushrooms, fares in this exchange.

4. The Russians keep a cow from which they receive the bulk of their dairy, and they are made fun of by the other homesteaders for treating her with too much care (33).

5. The novel's commentary about melons is in line with the fruit's folkloric tradition: melons have long held a sort of mysticism for Russians, with tales of their nutritive properties passed down through multiple generations and prominent to this day. Currently, Astrakhan, a city in southern Russia near the mouth of the Volga river where melons' magical qualities were documented as early as the 1500s, is home to a watermelon museum, and as recently as 2009, the *New York Times* published an article about Russians' obsession with melons—what reporter Clifford J. Levy dubbed "melon mania." September in Moscow means melon stands galore, Levy explains, as Russians sort through and consume hordes of watermelons and "torpedoes"—white melons from Central Asia that are akin to honeydews. After conducting a series of interviews with residents, Levy suggests reasons for Russians' almost religious consumption of melons—echoing Peter's own assertion. There's a common belief, Levy reports, that melons are cleansing and serve to purify the body, with the kidneys, bowels, and urinary tract as internal systems thought most benefited. Echoing Peter's claims, present-day Russians hold similar beliefs about the nutritional value of consuming large quantities of melons—for instance, many Russians decide to go on a melon diet when the fruit is in season, what Levy dubs "a great national cleansing." Of course, although Cather gestures toward this, she does not dwell on its significance.

6. Jewell's argument, that Cather's insertion of the kolache into American popular culture is part of a "trans-national vision" (73) that sought to reinforce the ideologies of pluralism by introducing new immigrant foods to the average American reader, is a useful reading of the novel's intervention in the broader literary and cultural scene. However, I argue that Jim's need to assert his own hybrid cultural identity over that of Ántonia and her sons' is also present, and that Cather does not present a critique of Jim's impulses in this regard.

7. Here I am referring to restrictive philosophies about food promoted by the domestic scientists and early home economists in the late-nineteenth century and into the twentieth. See Laura Shapiro and Carolyn M. Goldstein.

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From the Art Collection

In this second installment of works from the Foundation's art collection, we are again attempting to convey a sense of the collection's range and scope. A number of our treasures have a direct connection to Cather and her family; many others evoke or comment on her work, or reflect an artist's engagement with Catherian themes.

The Bishop's Apricot. Color wood block print on rag and flax fiber paper. Printed on small handpress, ca. 1920. Gustave Baumann (b. 1881, Magdeburg, Germany; d. 1971, Santa Fe, New Mexico). Signed and titled in pencil by the artist, marked number 99 of 125, with the artist's hand-in-heart inkstamp. Gift of Louise Aldrich Nixon, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1975, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen D. Day and Faith Nixon Day. WCPM/Willa Cather Foundation Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

"Once when he was riding out to visit the Tesuque mission, he had followed a stream and come upon this spot, where he found a little Mexican house and a garden shaded by an apricot tree of such great size as he had never seen before. It had two trunks, each of them thicker than a man's body, and though evidently very old, it was full of fruit. The apricots were large, beautifully coloured, and of superb flavour."

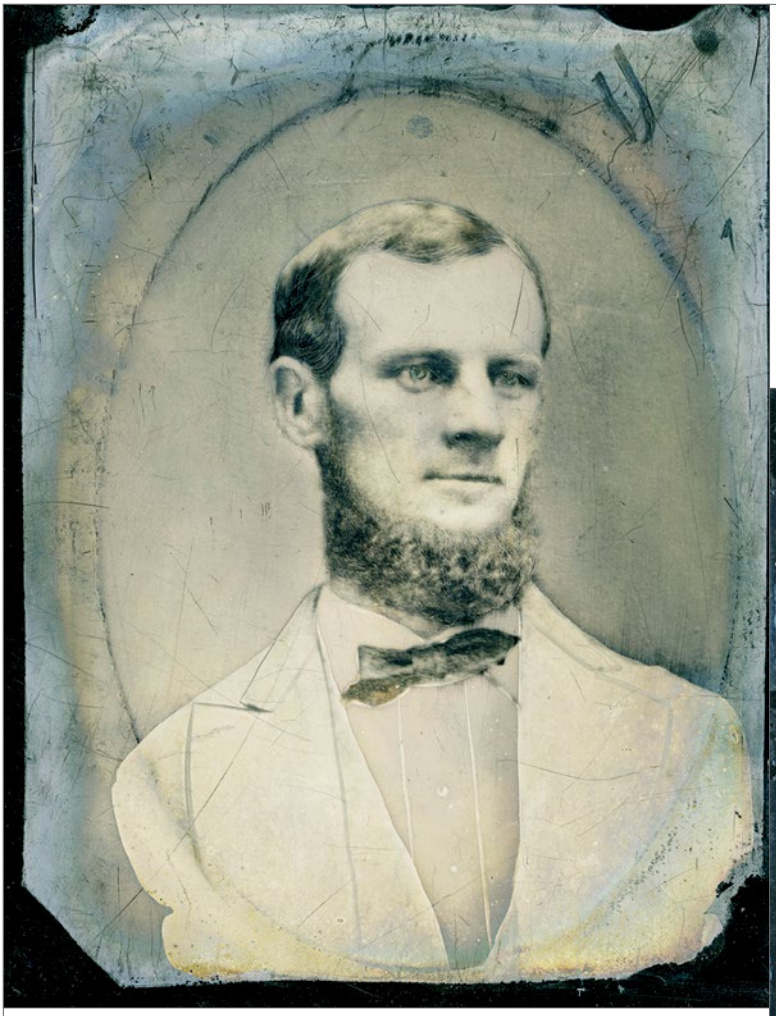
—Death Comes for the Archbishop

The Bishop's Apricot was created in 1920, seven years before the publication of Cather's novel. It is a matter of speculation whether Cather and Gustave Baumann were inspired by the same old apricot tree, or if they met.

Of Giacomelli, the French writer and bibliographer Henri Beraldi wrote, "Giacomelli is the Van Huysum [Jan Van Huysum, 1682–1749, Dutch flower painter] of tiny birds, tender and ravishing, which give the impression of being pensive. The bird is to Giacomelli what the cat is to Lambert [Louis-Eugène Lambert, 1825–1900, French painter who specialized in cat subjects]. A respectable bird must be a Giacomelli bird; A non-Giacomelli bird is a false bird," (*Les Graveurs du XIXe Siècle*, Paris, 1885–92).

Untitled prints ca. 1880 by Hector Giacomelli (1822–1904), a well-known engraver, watercolorist, and illustrator, best known for his lifelike depictions of birds. Several of the prints in this set bear the name of Fred Maurer, who attended Red Cloud High School at the same time as Cather. Gifts of Cheryl Reiher Keiser.

April Twilight. Oil on masonite, 2012. Linda Welsch, Dannebrog, Nebraska. Gift of the artist. This work was featured in an invitational exhibit of works inspired by Cather's 1903 volume of poetry, *April Twilights*.



Large-format tintypes ca. 1873 of Cather's aunt Ann Virginia (Jennie) Cather Ayre and her husband John. Their tragic story—losing an infant son, John succumbing to tuberculosis in 1877, and Jennie soon after, just weeks after making the difficult journey with her parents to Nebraska—exemplifies the Cather family's perennial worry about the healthfulness of the Virginia climate. Gifts of Cheryl Reiher Keiser.

The last photograph of Jennie Cather (left) leaves little doubt about her health (WCPM/Willa Cather Foundation Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society).

Sentinel. Pastel on museum board, 1996. Mark Moseman, David City, Nebraska. The model is Carol Moseman, the artist's wife. Gift of the artist.

Nebraska One-Bottom. Acrylic on canvas, 2001. Wes Holbrook, Greeley, Colorado. Gift of the artist. This exuberant folk art piece was included in a 2001 exhibit supporting the restoration of the Red Cloud Opera House.

In the years that Doug and Charlene Hoschouer owned the Cather Second Home, these Egyptian-inspired wall hangings hung in what had been Cather's mother's room. Featuring traditional Egyptian imagery in layered appliqué, they had been a gift to the Hoschouers from Cather's niece Helen Cather Southwick, who reported that Cather originally purchased them for her mother on one of her European trips. After her parents' deaths and the sale of the house, they hung in the Park Avenue apartment Cather shared with Edith Lewis. The Hoschouers donated them to the Willa Cather Foundation.

"Just beyond the gully was old Uncle Billy Beemer's cottonwood grove,—twelve town lots set out in fine, well-grown cottonwood trees, delightful to look upon, or to listen to, as they swayed and rippled in the wind."

—The Song of the Lark

Cottonwood. Oil on canvas, 2015. Carol Thompson, Lincoln, Nebraska; included in the 2015 invitational exhibit marking the publication centenary of *The Song of the Lark*. Gift of the artist.

The Pavelka Farm. Photograph, 2016. Shane Booth, Benson, North Carolina. Gift of the artist, following a 2016 artist's residency at the Willa Cather Foundation.

The photographer states: "This was taken with an antique studio camera I found in a junk store in Alma, Nebraska, and an 1867 Voigtländer barrel lens. The vignette around the edges is due to the lens being made for portraits that are usually shot much closer to the subject. I use 8x10 film, rubberbanded to a plastic plate, develop it, and then scan it for digital output. It's a great marriage between vintage and modern technology."

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413 North Webster Street
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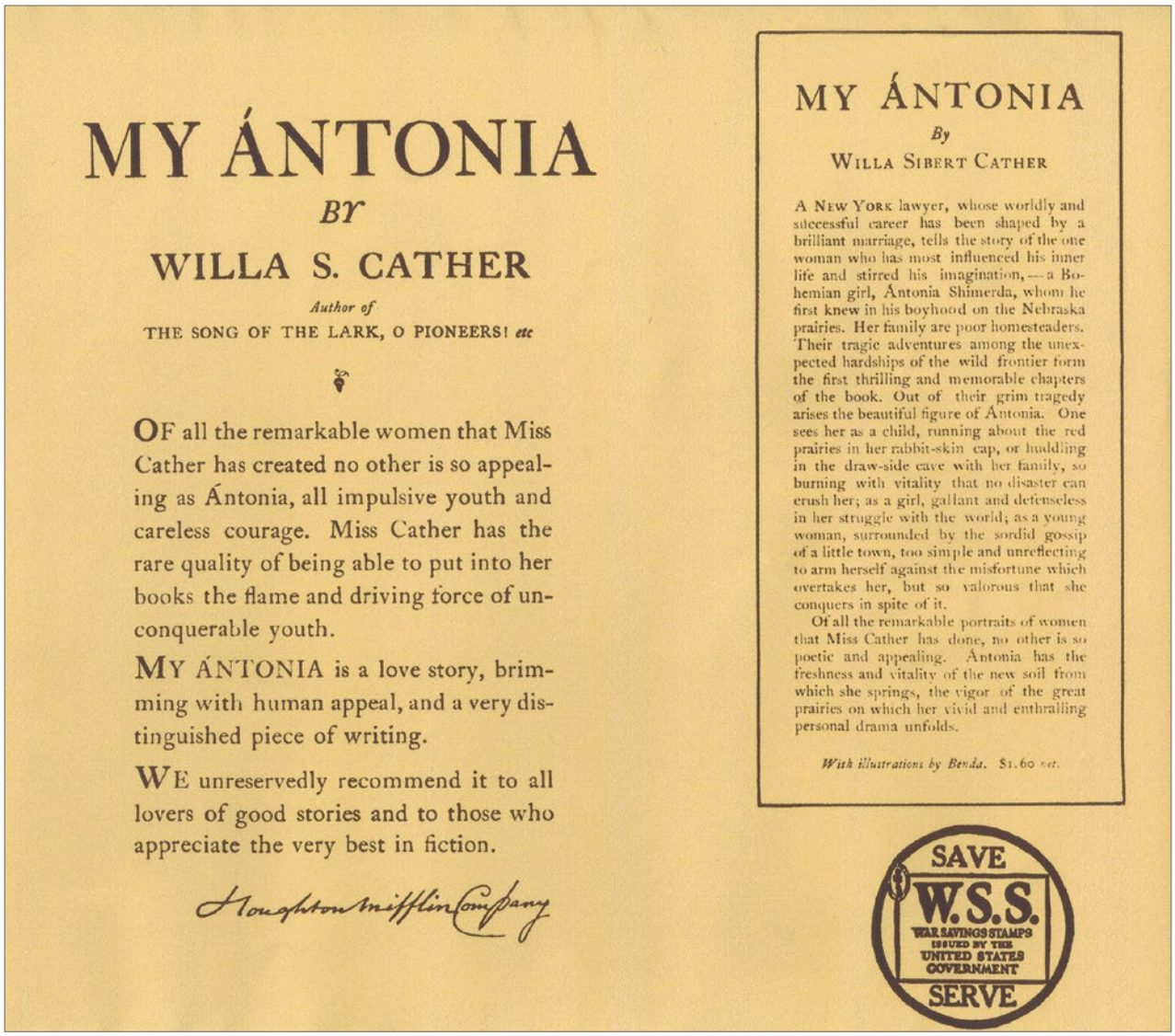
402-746-2653
866-731-7304
Email: info@willacather.org

Contributors to this Issue

Melissa J. Homestead is professor of English and program faculty in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Her essays on Willa Cather have appeared in *Cather Studies, Studies in the Novel, American Literary Realism*, and *Studies in American Fiction*, and her study of Willa Cather's creative partnership with Edith Lewis is under contract with Oxford University Press. She also serves as associate editor of *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather: A Digital Edition*, which begins publication in 2018.

Stephanie Tsank is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa, where she teaches a course titled "Consumption in Literature" in the general education literature program. Her ongoing dissertation focuses on representations of immigrant characters via food in works of American realism, and traces the parallel histories of culinary and literary narrative at the turn of the twentieth century. One of her chapters focuses on *My Ántonia*.

"More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood. To speak her name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain."



MY ÁNTONIA

BY

WILLA S. CATHER

Author of

THE SONG OF THE LARK, O PIONEERS! *etc*

OF all the remarkable women that Miss Cather has created no other is so appealing as Ántonia, all impulsive youth and careless courage. Miss Cather has the rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth.

MY ÁNTONIA is a love story, brimming with human appeal, and a very distinguished piece of writing.

WE unreservedly recommend it to all lovers of good stories and to those who appreciate the very best in fiction.

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MY ÁNTONIA

By

WILLA SIBERT CATHER

A NEW YORK lawyer, whose worldly and successful career has been shaped by a brilliant marriage, tells the story of the one woman who has most influenced his inner life and stirred his imagination,—a Bohemian girl, Ántonia Shimerda, whom he first knew in his boyhood on the Nebraska prairies. Her family are poor homesteaders. Their tragic adventures among the unexpected hardships of the wild frontier form the first thrilling and memorable chapters of the book. Out of their grim tragedy arises the beautiful figure of Ántonia. One sees her as a child, running about the red prairies in her rabbit-skin cap, or huddling in the draw-side cave with her family, so burning with vitality that no disaster can crush her; as a girl, gallant and defenseless in her struggle with the world; as a young woman, surrounded by the sordid gossip of a little town, too simple and unreflecting to arm herself against the misfortune which overtakes her, but so valorous that she conquers in spite of it.

Of all the remarkable portraits of women that Miss Cather has done, no other is so poetic and appealing. Ántonia has the freshness and vitality of the new soil from which she springs, the vigor of the great prairies on which her vivid and enthralling personal drama unfolds.

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My Ántonia at 100

The official publication date was September 21, 1918. It had a first printing of 3,500 copies, which, as you can see in the original dust jacket shown above, sold for $1.60 each. Well reviewed, the novel was an indifferent seller early on, gathering momentum only after several years. "It lifts me to all my superlatives," Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote of *My Ántonia* in a 1930 letter to Cather's editor Ferris Greenslet. Throughout 2018, the Willa Cather Foundation and readers the world over will celebrate the centenary of *My Ántonia*. We will be pleased to be in close proximity to all our superlatives. The 2018 issues of the *Willa Cather Review* will focus exclusively on the novel.

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